

Ukraine's Strategic Response to the Displacement Crisis

Return, Reintegrate, Reconnect



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RETURN, REINTEGRATE, RECONNECT

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Foreword

The OECD has worked with Ukraine since Ukraine's independence three decades ago to support its reform agenda, and this partnership has strengthened considerably since 2014. Following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, and despite the daily pressures of wartime conditions, the OECD has continued to expand and intensify its co-operation with the country.

It is within this context that the OECD Return and Reintegration Policy Review of Ukraine has been conducted under the OECD-Ukraine Country Programme, a four-year partnership launched in June 2023 to assist Ukraine in advancing reforms and preparing for recovery. The country programme is financed by OECD donors, including Bulgaria, Croatia, Czechia, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, New Zealand, Norway, Poland, Romania, the Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, the United States, as well as the European Union. The country programme enables Ukraine to draw on OECD expertise and international good practices to strengthen institutions, enhance economic resilience, and ensure that reconstruction and reform efforts contribute to Ukraine's long-term well-being.

This report is structured around four thematic chapters. Chapter 2 provides an overview of Ukraine's migration and displacement trends before and after 2022, examining the evolution of Ukrainian communities abroad, displaced populations within Ukraine, and patterns of return. Chapter 3 reviews the legal, political and social architecture for internal displacement, return, reintegration and engagement with the Ukrainian global community. It outlines the measures adopted by the state and non-state actors to address the challenges posed by Russia's war of aggression and highlights international co-operation to support these efforts. Chapter 4 explores the factors shaping displaced persons' intentions to return and the conditions under which these intentions translate into actual return, using both existing survey data and new analytical simulations. Special attention is given to the role of housing, employment and access to public services as decisive factors for reintegration. Chapter 5 draws lessons from international experience, analysing how other countries have addressed return, reintegration and diaspora engagement following conflict, disaster or large-scale emigration, and identifying relevant practices for Ukraine.

The review forms part of the OECD's wider commitment to supporting Ukraine's recovery, reconstruction and institutional reform. By offering an evidence-based assessment and internationally grounded policy insights, this review aims to assist the Government of Ukraine and its partners in building a coherent, inclusive and forward-looking framework for the return and reintegration of displaced persons, and in harnessing the potential of Ukrainians abroad as vital contributors to the country's recovery and reconstruction.

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To collect examples of international practices, the OECD organised a seminar series entitled Return and Reintegration of Ukrainians: Innovative Approaches of OECD and Other Countries to Support the Long Way Home. The series brought together Ukrainian and international policymakers, experts and practitioners to exchange lessons on return and reintegration from the OECD and beyond. We sincerely thank, without implicating, participants of these events, as well as attendees, for fruitful exchanges and feedback, which greatly helped inform the review.

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Table of contents

Foreword	3
Acknowledgements	4
Abbreviations and acronyms	9
Executive summary	11
1 Assessment and recommendations	13
Assessment of the situation	14
Assessment and recommendations: Governance	19
Assessment and recommendations: Policy action	26
Summary of the recommendations	37
References	41
Notes	41
2 Ukrainian migration and displacement crisis in numbers	42
Ukraine's migration experience and mobility patterns before 2022	43
Mass displacement induced by Russia's full-scale aggression against Ukraine	58
References	68
Annex 2.A. Supplementary tables and figures	73
Notes	74
3 Relevant legal, institutional and policy landscape in Ukraine	75
Legal frameworks	76
Institutional responsibilities and key actors	81
Policy measures since 2022	92
Strategic frameworks	111
References	116
Annex 3.A. Bilateral agreements on mutual recognition of educational documents	120
Annex 3.B. Examples of return support measures open to Ukrainians	121
Notes	123
4 Understanding intentions to return and actual returns: Space for further policy action	125
Intentions to return are shaped by a complex set of factors	126
Do intentions to return truly diminish over time?	131
From intention to decision: What factors actually make individuals return?	136

What can be learnt from returns that already took place?	142
How are returnees doing compared to the non-displaced population and those still displaced?	152
Anticipating returns: How many more Ukrainians might come back from abroad?	168
References	182
Annex 4.A. Data description	186
Annex 4.B. Supplementary tables and figures	188
Annex 4.C. Overview of selected surveys on specific factors influencing return decisions	191
Notes	207
5 International practices in return, reintegration, and diaspora engagement	209
How can international experiences serve Ukraine?	210
International standards, frameworks and principles relevant to voluntary return and reintegration of displaced persons	211
Measures and policies to support the return and reintegration of displaced persons	214
Measures and policies for working with the diaspora communities	254
References	270
Annex 5.A. Dual residency and transitional towns in Japan	285
Annex 5.B. Go-and-see and come-and-tell visits in Somalia and Syria	287
Annex 5.C. Regional Housing Programme in the Western Balkans	290
Annex 5.D. PROSPECTS Programme in the Middle East and East Africa region	293
Annex 5.E. Diaspora bonds in India, Israel, and Nigeria	298
Annex 5.F. Diaspora returns in Israel	301
Glossary	304

FIGURES

Figure 2.1. First residence permits granted to Ukrainian citizens in the EU, by reasons, 2010-2021	45
Figure 2.2. Acquisitions of host country nationality by Ukraine-born immigrants, OECD total, 2000-2021	47
Figure 2.3. Acquisitions of nationality by Ukraine-born immigrants, by country, total over 2000-2021	48
Figure 2.4. Asylum requests from Ukrainian citizens in OECD countries, 2000-2021	49
Figure 2.5. Asylum requests from Ukrainian citizens, by country, total over 2000-2021	50
Figure 2.6. Total number of Ukraine-born immigrants in selected OECD countries, 2000, 2010, 2020/21	51
Figure 2.7. Share of women among Ukraine-born immigrants in selected OECD countries, 2020/21	53
Figure 2.8. Age groups of Ukraine-born immigrants persons in selected OECD countries, 2020/21	54
Figure 2.9. Education levels of Ukraine-born immigrants in selected OECD countries, 2020/21	55
Figure 2.10. Labour force status of Ukraine-born immigrants aged 15+ in OECD countries, 2020/21	55
Figure 2.11. Duration of stay of Ukraine-born immigrants in OECD countries, 2020/21	56
Figure 2.12. Total number of IDPs prior to Russia's full-scale invasion, 2015-2022	57
Figure 2.13. Distribution of IDPs across the oblasts of Ukraine prior to Russia's full-scale invasion, 1 January 2022	57
Figure 2.14. Evolution of the total number of externally displaced Ukrainians in OECD countries	60
Figure 2.15. Number of externally displaced Ukrainians recorded in OECD countries, June 2025	61
Figure 2.16. Number of applications for asylum by Ukrainian citizens in the EU+ countries	62
Figure 2.17. Stocks of IDPs since the beginning of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine	64
Figure 2.18. Evolution of the number of IDPs, by oblast	65
Figure 2.19. Estimated number of returnees, April 2022-April 2025	67
Figure 2.20. Share of Ukrainians displaced in Europe who visited Ukraine since their displacement	68
Figure 4.1. The evolution of individual intentions to stay	132
Figure 4.2. The evolution of intentions to stay in a host country by arrival cohort; percentage of individuals	134
Figure 4.3. Factors influencing individual return decision by level	137
Figure 4.4. Reasons for moving back, per cent of Ukrainian returnees, July-August 2024	139
Figure 4.5. Days since return, for returnees by different location of displacement, summer 2024	143

Figure 4.6. Estimated survival probabilities (the probabilities of remaining displaced) for groups with different characteristics, varying one characteristic at a time	147
Figure 4.7. Estimated survival probabilities (the probabilities of remaining displaced) for individual profiles most prone to returning and most prone to staying	151
Figure 4.8. Ownership and occupancy status of IDPs, returnees and non-displaced population, spring 2024	153
Figure 4.9. Conditions of dwelling of IDPs, returnees and non-displaced population, spring 2024	154
Figure 4.10. Legally recognised documents for current housing arrangement among returnees, IDPs, and non-displaced population, spring 2024	155
Figure 4.11. To what extent do the following factors limit your ability to stay in your current home as long as you wish? spring 2024	156
Figure 4.12. Application to the eRecovery (eVidnovlennya) programme, by IDPs, returnees and non-displaced population, spring 2024	157
Figure 4.13. Probability of employment, for returnees and IDPs, as compared to non-displaced population, summer 2024	158
Figure 4.14. Status in employment of returnees, non-displaced population, and IDPs, summer 2024	161
Figure 4.15. Type of employment of IDPs, returnees and non-displaced population, summer 2024	162
Figure 4.16. Distributions and medians of household monthly income for IDPs, returnees and non-displaced population, summer 2024, UAH	164
Figure 4.17. Intentions to leave the current location beyond the next three months	166
Figure 4.18. Estimated scale of returns to Ukraine from abroad by 2029 across three scenarios	171
Figure 4.19. Projected monthly and cumulative returns to Ukraine under alternative post-war scenarios	172
Figure 4.20. Age and gender profiles of returnees and refugees under alternative post-war scenarios	173
Figure 4.21. Household profiles of returnees and refugees under alternative post-war scenarios	174
Figure 4.22. Household employment outcomes of returnees and refugees under alternative post-war scenarios	175
Figure 4.23. Individual employment outcomes of returnees and refugees under alternative post-war scenarios	175
Figure 4.24. Projected returns to Ukraine over time by macro-region under alternative post-war scenarios	177
Figure 4.25. Distribution of projected returns over time by macro-region under alternative post-war scenarios	178
Figure 4.26. Projected returns to Ukraine over time by property status under alternative post-war scenarios	179
Figure 4.27. Distribution of projected returns over time by property status under alternative post-war scenarios	179
Figure 4.28. Projected returns over time by household profile under alternative post-war scenarios	180
Figure 4.29. Distribution of projected returns over time by household profile under alternative post-war scenarios	180
Figure 4.30. Distribution of returnees by host country under alternative post-war scenarios	181
Figure 5.1. Number of housing units built through the Regional Housing Programme (2012-2023)	223
Figure 5.2. Results of the first phase of the PROSPECTS programme (2019-2024)	235
 Annex Figure 2.A.1. First residence permits issued to Ukrainian citizens in the EU countries, by reasons, 2010-2021	 73
Annex Figure 4.B.1. Intentions to stay in the current place of living depending on occupancy status	188
Annex Figure 4.B.2. Intentions to stay in the current place of living depending on conditions of dwelling	189
Annex Figure 4.B.3. Intentions to stay in the current place of living depending on conditions of dwelling	190

TABLES

Table 2.1. Employment rates of externally displaced Ukrainians in selected OECD countries	63
Table 3.1. Laws regulating IDP support, return, reintegration, and diaspora engagement	77
Table 3.2. Who is responsible for what? Mandates of various central executive authorities, 2025	86
Table 3.3. Number of citizens of other countries and stateless persons who received the status of a “foreign Ukrainian”	111
Table 3.4. National strategic documents with a focus on displaced populations, return, reintegration, and Ukrainian global community (UGC), as of 2025	112
Table 4.1. Determinants of intentions of stay in a host country over the coming 6 months: Probit regression results	135
Table 4.2. Determinants of return: Probit regression results	140
Table 4.3. Cox model of return from internal displacement	145
Table 4.4. Marginal effects from probit regressions examining determinants of employment	160

Table 4.5. Marginal effects from probit regressions examining determinants of employment type	163
Table 4.6. Coefficients from a regression examining determinants of household monthly income	165
Table 5.1. Main international legal standards, frameworks and principles relevant to voluntary return and reintegration of displaced persons	213
Table 5.2. Outcomes of the Regional Housing Programme (2012-2023)	222
Table 5.3. Allocation of diaspora experts and duration of return assignments under TRQN III by country (December 2012 – November 2015)	263
 Annex Table 4.C.1. Insights from selected surveys of displaced Ukrainians on the relationship between housing and return decisions	 192
Annex Table 4.C.2. Insights from selected surveys of displaced Ukrainians on the relationship between employment and return decisions	196
Annex Table 4.C.3. Insights from selected surveys of displaced Ukrainians on the relationship between access to public services, social assistance and return decisions	203
Annex Table 5.C.1. Programme overview	291

Abbreviations and acronyms

ABM	Agent-based model
ALMP	Active labour market policies
AVRR	Assisted voluntary return and reintegration
BiH	Bosnia and Herzegovina
BTP	Beneficiary of temporary protection
CDD	Community-driven development
CEB	Council of Europe Development Bank
CMU	Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine
CRS	Catholic Relief Services
CUAET	Canada-Ukraine Authorization for Emergency Travel
DIOC	Database on Immigrants in OECD and non-OECD Countries
DRC	Danish Refugee Council
DTM	Displacement Tracking Matrix
EDP	Externally displaced person
EIIP	Employment-Intensive Investment Programme (ILO)
ENIC	European Network of Information Centres
EU	European Union
EUAA	European Union Agency for Asylum
GPS	General Population Survey (IOM)
HLP	Housing, land and property
IASC	Inter-Agency Standing Committee
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
IDP	Internally displaced person
IFRC	International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies
ILO	International Labour Organization
IO	International organisation
IOM	International Organisation for Migration
IRIS	International Recommendations on Internally Displaced Persons Statistics
IRRS	International Recommendations on Refugee Statistics
NEET	Not in education, employment, or training
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
NRC	Norwegian Refugee Council
OCHA	United Nations Office for Co-ordination of Humanitarian Affairs
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OSCE	Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe
PROSPECTS	Partnership for improving prospects for forcibly displaced persons and host communities (ILO)
RHP	Regional Housing Programme (BiH, Croatia, Montenegro and Serbia)
SAM-UKR	Surveys of Arriving Migrants from Ukraine (EUAA and OECD)
SES	State Employment Service (Ukraine)
SME	Small and medium-sized enterprise
TRQN	Temporary Return of Qualified Nationals programme (IOM)
TsNAP	Administrative Services Centres (Ukraine)

TVET	Technical and vocational education and training
U4U	United for Ukraine Parole programme (United States)
UCC	Ukrainian Canadian Congress
UCCA	Ukrainian Congress Committee of America
UDHR	Universal Declaration of Human Rights
UGC	Ukrainian global community
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNITAR	United Nations Institute for Training and Research
UWC	Ukrainian World Congress
WFUWO	World Federation of Ukrainian Women's Organizations at the United Nations

Executive summary

On the eve of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, nearly 6 million first-generation Ukrainians were already residing abroad, representing roughly 14% of Ukraine's total population. Nine OECD countries featured among the top 11 destination countries. The majority of Ukrainians in OECD countries were women of working age, with high educational attainment, and employed. Between 2000 and 2021, over 535 000 Ukrainians obtained citizenship of OECD countries, and over 16 000 received refugee status following a positive decision on an asylum application. In addition, several OECD countries had sizeable populations with Ukrainian ancestry.

Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine has triggered one of the fastest and largest displacement crises in recent history. About a quarter of Ukrainians living in the country were forced to flee their homes. While many sought refuge abroad, others were displaced within Ukraine. Over 2022-2025, mass movements of Ukrainians took place across the OECD and neighbouring countries. By mid-2025, Germany had become the largest host country, with 1.22 million displaced Ukrainians, followed by Poland, Czechia, Canada and the United States. Together, these five countries accounted for more than 60% of all displaced Ukrainians in the OECD. In per capita terms, Czechia hosted the largest share of displaced Ukrainians in 2025. More than 4.6 million remained internally displaced.

The Ukrainian state, host countries and many other stakeholders undertook numerous actions to support displaced populations. Most actions within Ukraine were directed towards supporting internally displaced persons (IDPs). In addition, the return and reintegration of Ukrainians displaced abroad, and engagement with the Ukrainian global community, were identified as key priorities for the Ukrainian Government. This priority manifested itself in several State Strategies – legal documents providing a framework for action – and in modifications to mandates of several executive bodies. Many actions built on Ukraine's earlier pre-war experience in these areas.

While the necessary conditions for promoting safe returns are not yet in place, by 2025, between 4.1 and 5.8 million Ukrainians had already returned, including a quarter from displacement abroad. The wide variation in estimates stems from differing definitions used by various survey organisations to measure the number of returnees. Most of the returns took place in mid-2022, in a voluntary and spontaneous manner, largely independent of any specific return policies of the Ukrainian state. Since then, returns have declined and shown a certain seasonality.

Moreover, intentions to return are also declining. The security situation and family reunification remain the key factors affecting return intentions. In addition, housing, employment, and access to public services in Ukraine are progressively emerging as other significant considerations shaping both intentions and actual decisions to return. For those who returned from abroad, key enablers of return were being employed in Ukraine on the eve of the aggression and having accommodation in good condition in Ukraine. Conversely, for many of those who have not yet returned, these enabling factors are more likely to be absent. For those who returned from internal displacement, returns were most likely to happen to safer areas, from displacement within the same oblast, among older individuals and those with higher educational attainment, as well as among the self-employed.

The socio-economic situation of early returnees is quite heterogeneous. Returnees are typically homeowners, particularly in contrast to IDPs, who are more likely to rent their current dwellings. Meanwhile, returnees from internal displacement are more likely to live in damaged housing compared to returnees from abroad, current IDPs, and the non-displaced. Some returnees, similarly to IDPs, face difficulties in proving their current housing arrangements with legally recognised documents. While there is generally good awareness of state programmes to address housing issues, applications can be difficult, especially for women returning from abroad.

Returnees are faring better than the non-displaced and IDPs in terms of employment, though this is likely due to the early returnees' ability to resume their previous jobs. Despite this, returnees are at a higher risk of informal or temporary employment compared to the non-displaced, and similarly to IDPs.

The majority of returnees do not intend to leave again in the near future. However, their precarious employment outcomes and uneven access to services may undermine their situation.

Future additional returns will depend on numerous factors, including first and foremost the long-term outcomes and terms of settlement of the war of aggression, and the security situation in Ukraine. The overall scale of returns will likely remain limited. If not addressed early, compounding socio-economic challenges are likely to become additional barriers to further returns.

While Ukraine's displacement crisis is unprecedented in both scale and character, and no single international example can provide a comprehensive model for managing return at this magnitude, valuable insights can nevertheless be drawn from diverse experiences. These include contexts shaped by armed conflict and natural disasters, as well as experiences of countries of emigration that have sought to foster return, reintegration, or meaningful engagement with their nationals abroad.

These examples show that, first, the basis for large sustainable returns is safety and security. In their absence, it is possible to implement policies that support voluntary and spontaneous returnees in the present and prepare for further repatriation in the future. However, larger repatriation schemes and policies to proactively encourage returns are usually envisaged once a war or conflict has been settled and security guarantees are in place. In addition to multilateral security guarantees, affected countries may also set additional safety and security benchmarks, as a foundation for trustworthy and secure returns. Moreover, safety is not defined solely by the absence of hostilities. The longer the displacement situation continues, the more returnees will need to feel socially accepted, and society must therefore be prepared to reintegrate them.

Second, large-scale displacements often profoundly reshape the housing landscape. To turn housing into a true enabler of returns, in addition to reconstruction, countries often resort to complementary policies regulating rental markets, expanding affordable social housing, linking reconstruction to employment opportunities, and offering integrated housing, employment and social services solutions.

Third, international practice also underlines the importance of equipping returnees with the skills needed to succeed in a changed economic environment, while ensuring that public services are prepared to absorb those returning and can provide timely access to education, healthcare and other essential services.

To ensure that these efforts are effective and responsive, monitoring and evaluation should closely accompany return and reintegration policies, serving as tools to build trust and strengthen accountability.

Finally, experience from other settings shows that diaspora engagement can make a decisive contribution to recovery when supported by transparent and reliable mechanisms for investment, knowledge transfer and civic participation.

Applying these and other considerations to Ukraine requires careful recognition of the different circumstances and aspirations of displaced populations, placing their interests at the heart of policies. Return and reintegration in Ukraine will be a gradual and uneven process, yet the policy choices made today can lay the foundations for their success, as well as a resilient and inclusive recovery.

1 Assessment and recommendations

This chapter provides an overall assessment of the displacement, return, and reintegration situation in Ukraine, as well as the country's engagement with its global community. It outlines the main findings of the review and presents recommendations to inform policy development, reinforce institutional capacity, and support sustainable return, reintegration, and long-term recovery.

Assessment of the situation

Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine has triggered one of the largest and fastest displacement crises in recent history

Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine¹ in February 2022 has resulted in unprecedented population movements both within and beyond the country's borders. The magnitude, speed, and complexity of this largest displacement crisis in Europe since the Second World War have created immense humanitarian, social, and economic challenges.

Since 24 February 2022, around one-quarter of Ukraine's pre-war population has been forced to leave their homes. As of 2025, more than 4.6 million people remain internally displaced within Ukraine, although at the height of the crisis this figure was higher.

While many displaced persons sought safety within national borders, the invasion also led to large-scale cross-border movements. Between 2022 and 2025, millions of Ukrainians sought international protection across OECD and neighbouring countries. By mid-2025, Germany had become the main host country, sheltering approximately 1.22 million displaced Ukrainians, followed by Poland, Czechia, Canada and the United States. Together, these five destinations accounted for more than 60% of all displaced Ukrainians residing in OECD countries in 2025. In per capita terms, Czechia hosted the largest share of displaced Ukrainians.

This displacement crisis in Ukraine added to a pre-existing internal displacement situation

This new displacement crisis has unfolded against the backdrop of an existing displacement situation that began in 2014 following the illegal annexation of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the City of Sevastopol by the Russian Federation, and the Russia-instigated outbreak of a military crisis in the eastern part of Ukraine. Before the full-scale invasion in 2022, nearly 1.5 million Ukrainians were already registered as internally displaced. The full-scale invasion compounded these earlier movements, creating overlapping layers of vulnerability among both newly and previously displaced populations.

External displacement movements built upon Ukraine's extensive emigration history

In early 2022, nearly 6 million first-generation Ukrainians were already living abroad, representing around 14% of the country's total population. The long history of emigration had resulted in a well-established Ukrainian global community across many parts of the world. Nine OECD countries ranked among the top 11 destinations, reflecting Ukraine's deep migration links with OECD Members.

Prior to 2022, most Ukrainians residing in OECD countries were women of working age, often with high levels of education and employment. Between 2000 and 2021, more than 535 000 Ukrainians obtained citizenship of OECD countries, while over 16 000 were granted refugee status. Many OECD countries also had sizeable populations with Ukrainian ancestry.

This pre-existing presence played a significant role in shaping both the destination choices and the reception of Ukrainians displaced by the invasion. Many relied on family and community networks already established abroad, which facilitated initial settlement and access to support. These connections continue to influence integration outcomes in host countries, intentions regarding return to Ukraine, and the evolving character of Ukraine's diverse global community.

Host countries took unprecedented measures to support externally displaced Ukrainians abroad, and many individuals are gradually integrating into host societies

OECD and neighbouring countries responded rapidly to the large-scale arrival of displaced Ukrainians by granting immediate protection and access to employment, education, healthcare, and social services. Temporary protection mechanisms were activated in many countries on an exceptional scale, supported by financial and logistical measures at both national and local levels. Host governments, in close co-operation with civil society and diaspora organisations, facilitated the reception and inclusion of Ukrainians displaced abroad.

Restoring security in Ukraine is the key pre-condition for sustainable returns and for successful implementation of policies related to return and reintegration

The direct threat to physical safety has been the main reason for the displacement of Ukrainians since 2014, and especially since February 2022. As of 2025, security risks remain significant across Ukraine. While frontline areas are particularly dangerous and face the risk of a broader military offensive, regular missile and drone strikes throughout the country mean that no region can be considered completely safe. Restoring security is integral to resolving the displacement crisis and is a fundamental precondition for voluntary and sustainable return.

The scale and dynamics of future returns will depend on the evolution of the security situation. In addition, if not addressed appropriately, compounding socio-economic challenges are likely to become additional barriers to further returns, though the success of policies to address these challenges is also likely to be affected by the security situation.

Among the displaced Ukrainian population, several distinct groups are now clearly present

By 2025, in Ukraine, persons with a displacement history included:

- internally displaced persons (IDPs);
- returnees from internal displacement;
- externally displaced persons (EDPs) who intend to return but who, for a variety of reasons, have not been able to do so yet;
- returnees from external displacement;
- externally displaced persons (EDPs) who do not intend to return but have become part of the Ukrainian global community.²

These groups differ in their profiles and needs, including in terms of housing, employment, and access to services.

IDPs are among the most vulnerable, though their heterogeneous situation requires particular attention to the most disadvantaged

IDPs are among the most vulnerable groups in need of support, especially in the early stages of displacement. Over time, disparities among IDPs become increasingly pronounced, with some individuals integrating swiftly and successfully into host communities, eventually requiring minimal or no state support, while others remaining trapped in vulnerability and accumulating difficulties (such as facing an unaffordable, unstable housing situation, unemployment and poverty).

IDPs often face particularly acute barriers to securing decent housing compared with non-displaced persons in the areas to which they arrive and compared to those who have returned to their original

settlements. Beyond destroyed and damaged housing stock, other housing-related challenges include limited rental options, a largely unregulated rental market that weakens tenants' rights, discrimination, limited protection against eviction, and insufficient affordable housing. These issues not only prevent many displaced families from integrating into their new communities but also push them to return to insecure areas or leave Ukraine.

IDPs, especially women and those displaced in rural areas, also face severe challenges in terms of access to employment, and to good-quality employment in particular.

For IDPs, issues of integration in their current areas of residence (especially for those displaced outside of their region) are particularly high on the agenda. In view of the security situation, returns are not promoted, and questions of reintegration, often coupled with the rebuilding of livelihoods and entire areas of origin, are relegated to the time when the security situation stabilises.

Returns from internal displacement often take place out of necessity rather than choice

For those who have already returned from internal displacement, returns were most likely to happen to safer areas, from displacement within the same (typically non-frontline) oblast, among older individuals, among those with higher educational attainment, and among the self-employed. For other situations and profiles, returns remain limited. In some cases, returns were possible because enabling factors such as housing and employment were present. Too often, however, returns from internal displacement were also driven by the lack of housing and employment options in the regions of displacement, or by the need to care for family members or other individuals who could not move. As a result, returnees from internal displacement are more likely to live in damaged housing compared with returnees from abroad, current IDPs, and the non-displaced. Some returnees, similarly to IDPs, face difficulties in proving their current housing arrangements with legally recognised documents, which can be a barrier to accessing housing compensation schemes and other public services.

The majority of these returnees do not intend to leave again in the near future. However, precarious employment outcomes and uneven access to services, especially for those who returned closer to the frontline, may undermine their socio-economic situation. Future returnees from internal displacement, especially to heavily damaged areas, will require greater reintegration support, primarily linked to sustaining and rebuilding their livelihoods.

Return intentions among those abroad have weakened over time but remain sensitive to key conditions

Most externally displaced Ukrainians continue to express an intention to return to Ukraine in the future, although the share of such individuals has declined over time. This trend should be interpreted with caution, as survey samples vary and many who initially planned to return may already have done so.

Return intentions differ considerably across profiles, circumstances, and places of origin. They tend to be stronger among older persons, single-parent or female-headed households, those with dependants, and individuals maintaining strong links with Ukraine.

Security and family unity remain the strongest determinants of both intentions and actually taken decisions to return. In addition, housing, employment, and access to quality public services such as healthcare and education are the most significant factors. The right to housing, employment, and access to health and education are constitutionally guaranteed in Ukraine, and are the areas within the remit of policymakers. Policymakers, therefore, need to prioritise improvements in these areas, which are directly actionable.

Spontaneous returns are taking place amidst an unfavourable security situation

While the necessary conditions for promoting safe returns are not yet in place, by 2025, between 4.1 and 5.8 million Ukrainians had already returned,³ including a quarter from displacement abroad. Most of the returns took place in mid-2022, in a voluntary and spontaneous manner. Subsequent returns were smaller in scale. A certain seasonal pattern of returns, linked to the academic year, can be discerned. Some individual profiles (older individuals, those previously employed in Ukraine, and those with good housing options in Ukraine), as well as conditions in the areas of origin (not under occupation, without active hostilities) are associated with a greater likelihood of return.

While early returnees from abroad are reintegrating, those still displaced face rising barriers to return

Early waves of returns from external displacement could be largely described as driven by personal reasons and attachment, a wish to reunite with family in Ukraine and a strong sense of longing for home. Importantly, early returnees often had key enabling conditions favouring their return: ownership of undamaged accommodation and the possibility of resuming previous employment. As a result, early returnees from external displacement tend to fare relatively well compared with the non-displaced and IDPs. However, they still face challenges, including precarious employment, low awareness about and self-reported difficulties navigating applications for housing support and compensation schemes.

As the displacement continues over a longer period of time, earlier enablers of return such as pre-war housing and employment arrangements in Ukraine progressively disappear for those still displaced. War-related changes in Ukraine's housing market have led to very high rents, which not only preclude returns by those who rely on rented accommodation but also create incentives for externally displaced persons to rent out their housing in Ukraine and remain abroad. War-driven economic and labour market changes mean that many previous positions no longer exist, and new skill sets are required that the displaced persons may not possess.

Moreover, those contemplating return progressively face additional hurdles, for instance, updating travel documents, renouncing temporary or another protection status and its associated social benefits, terminating employment in the host country, completing the academic year for children, ending rental agreements, fulfilling tax and other obligations, and organising the actual move. At the same time, prospective returnees need to make preparations for returning to Ukraine, including readapting to the security situation, finding or repairing housing, finding employment that may require recognition of experience, skills or qualifications gained abroad, enrolling children in the educational system, and regaining access to social and health services. In addition, many wish to ensure that the decision to return will not be accompanied by unforeseen obstacles, administrative complications, difficulties reintegrating into a society that has lived through a different shared experience, challenges of social acceptance, or a need to migrate again.

As a result, over time, return to Ukraine becomes akin to making a new migration decision. There is therefore a growing need for distinct policies for those who wish to return but cannot do so. Given their profiles and needs, they should not be considered as IDPs upon return but should be supported through approaches that reflect their distinct circumstances, preferably prior to return.

Displacement status alone does not determine socio-economic vulnerability

Despite differences across population groups with different displacement histories, which require specific approaches, displacement status alone does not accurately reflect the socio-economic vulnerability of households and individuals in Ukraine. Equally vulnerable, or at times even more vulnerable, families can also be found among the non-displaced population, especially among those unable to leave high-risk

areas. Factors such as security conditions in the area of residence, employment status, or education level also play a significant role in determining socio-economic outcomes, justifying development of needs-based approaches to support measures in the longer term.

The sustainability of returns depends on local conditions and determines the risk of secondary displacement

The sustainability of returns is closely linked to the security environment, economic and housing opportunities, and levels of social cohesion in the areas to which people return. Returnees who arrive in locations facing damaged or unaffordable housing, limited employment options, or strained community relations often encounter significant obstacles to rebuilding stable lives. Such conditions, alongside security risks, can lead to renewed mobility pressures, increasing the likelihood of secondary displacement or decisions to re-migrate. These challenges underscore that return is a gradual process shaped by the pace of local recovery and the ability of individuals and communities to re-establish livelihoods and social ties.

The scale and dynamics of future returns from abroad remain uncertain

Future returns from abroad can be expected, but their magnitude, timing and geographical distribution are uncertain. Modelling efforts by the UNHCR and Brunel University London, featured in this report, highlight this uncertainty, indicating that future return dynamics can differ significantly under various security scenarios. Under the “Ukraine’s Victory” scenario, the number of refugees returning by 2029 could reach approximately 3.5 million, accounting for 68% of the current refugee population in Europe. Under a “Fragile Peace with Concessions” scenario, however, projected returns fall to around 2.3 million (44%). In a “Prolonged Status Quo” scenario, only minimal net returns are projected, estimated at 40 000 people (1%) by 2029. These diverging projections demonstrate the sensitivity of return intentions to security developments and highlight the importance of systematically monitoring return dynamics in order to anticipate reintegration needs, population movements and the resulting pressure on local capacities.

Externally displaced persons who do not intend to return remain a valuable, although often underexplored, resource for Ukraine

Not all externally displaced persons will return to Ukraine. Return decisions are highly personal and shaped by a multitude of complex factors, including safety, stability, and family circumstances. Some do not return not because they do not want to, but because they cannot. Some reasons deterring people from return may include the destruction or occupation of their place of origin, traumatic security-related experiences in Ukraine, previous prolonged internal displacement, or family reunification abroad.

Nevertheless, these individuals remain a valuable source of support to Ukraine, joining a well-established and proactive Ukrainian global community (UGC). The UGC, including newly arrived displaced individuals, is large, diverse, and strongly engaged, with significant skills, resources, and networks. It has demonstrated exceptional solidarity through humanitarian support, advocacy for Ukraine’s cause internationally, and investment in defence and reconstruction efforts since the start of the war.

However, existing engagement channels with the UGC remain fragmented and underdeveloped, limiting the impact of diaspora efforts. While many initiatives exist, what is lacking is the representation in Ukraine, stronger bridges between the UGC and Ukrainians in Ukraine, and channels for transparent and more efficient investment. Growing stigmatisation of externally displaced non-returnees by those who remain in Ukraine risks alienating them from constructive engagement to support Ukraine from abroad. A more systematic and inclusive approach by the Ukrainian Government to its global community could better unlock the UGC’s full potential for recovery, long-term development, and possibly future returns from the diaspora.

Assessment and recommendations: Governance

Strengthening governance and monitoring

Ukrainian authorities, communities, and civil society mobilised in unprecedented ways to support displaced populations

Since the first hours of Russia's full-scale invasion, Ukrainian authorities, local communities, and civil society organisations have undertaken extensive and unprecedented efforts to protect civilians and respond to the needs of those forced to leave their homes. These measures have focussed on organising evacuations, facilitating the reception of internally displaced persons, and ensuring access to essential humanitarian and social assistance.

The majority of actions within Ukraine have been directed towards supporting internally displaced persons. At the same time, the return and reintegration of Ukrainians displaced abroad, and engagement with the UGC, have also been identified as priorities for the Ukrainian Government.

Pre-invasion frameworks have been adapted to reflect post-2022 realities, but co-ordination and implementation challenges persist

Ukraine's early state-led responses to displacement built upon institutional and legal frameworks developed over three decades of independence. These pre-existing structures provided a foundation for the initial responses to full-scale invasion in 2022, particularly in addressing internal displacement, but the war created new and complex demands that required rapid institutional and legislative adaptation.

Between 2022 and 2025, mandates for managing internal displacement, supporting return and reintegration, and engaging with Ukrainians abroad have shifted among multiple ministries and agencies. As of 2025, these responsibilities remain distributed across different institutions and levels of government. While this reflects the inherently cross-cutting nature of return and reintegration policy, it has also led in some instances to fragmented responsibilities, overlapping objectives, and weakened institutional memory.

The pre-war legal framework had to be adapted, too. The existing laws regulating questions of IDPs, voluntary return and reintegration, and diaspora engagement reflect international standards and are consistent with Ukraine's international obligations in this area. In addition, the use of state strategies is a distinctive feature of Ukraine's policy landscape. Several strategies launched or updated since 2022 address different aspects of displacement, return, and reintegration. These include, among others, the Strategy of State Policy on Internal Displacement for the Period up to 2025, the Strategy of the State Migration Policy of Ukraine for the Period up to 2025, and the Strategy of Demographic Development of Ukraine for the Period up to 2040.

The successful implementation of these state strategies will largely depend on the extent to which Ukraine's own past lessons from implementing the earlier generation of state strategies (adopted between the late 1990s and early 2020s in similar areas) can be taken into account. The limited impact of the earlier generation of strategies was due to a number of persistent common structural challenges, including the absence or short duration of accompanying action plans, insufficient monitoring mechanisms, inadequate funding, and limited institutional capacity for implementation.

To strengthen current governance and ensure continuity of policy implementation, Ukraine will need to reinforce co-ordination and implementation mechanisms. Greater interministerial co-operation and co-ordination across levels of government would be essential, particularly where mandates intersect. Establishing or designating a durable co-ordinating institution with the authority and capacity to plan, implement, and monitor long-term action on return and reintegration would help consolidate efforts,

enhance accountability, and ensure that the objectives set out in state strategies translate into tangible results. Such an institution should also hold a clear mandate to oversee accountability mechanisms, ensuring that responsibilities are well defined and that progress can be systematically tracked across all relevant authorities.

The long-term success of the current generation of strategies will also depend on Ukraine's ability to link institutional responsibilities with policy implementation in a consistent and predictable manner. Sustained efforts to build institutional capacity and strengthen mechanisms for follow-up and evaluation will be critical for translating strategic commitments into measurable progress on recovery, return, and reintegration.

Alongside crisis management, greater emphasis can be placed on implementing a long-term strategic vision

There is a growing understanding in Ukraine that urgent crisis response needs to be complemented by forward-looking planning and longer-term solutions. The mandates of many ministries and the objectives of existing state strategies continue to evolve, yet one of the main challenges lies in translating these into long-term, sustained and broad-based policy implementation. Ongoing security threats, instability, and the need for constant emergency responses make it difficult to allocate resources for planning ahead.

Despite these constraints, it is increasingly important to complement crisis-driven measures, which remain necessary in the current context, with activities that also incorporate long-term objectives. The mandates of responsible institutions and the objectives of national strategies should explicitly recognise that return, reintegration, and engagement with Ukraine's global community are long-term, generational processes. These cannot be addressed effectively through temporary or short-term interventions.

Establishing predictable, multi-year implementation processes is essential for sustaining reform momentum and supporting a long-term vision (OECD, forthcoming^[11]). Developing durable, forward-looking multi-year implementation plans could help move beyond pilot initiatives, ensure continuity, and build predictability. Over time, such predictability would strengthen institutions, foster trust among displaced persons and the wider public, and reinforce confidence among Ukraine's international partners.

Policies for return and reintegration need to distinguish between different displaced populations and between immediate versus long-term support measures

Effective longer-term planning for return and reintegration requires distinguishing between displaced populations with different experiences and needs, and consequently between policies requiring immediate implementation and those that can be introduced gradually.

Current policies place greater emphasis on supporting and integrating internally displaced persons, while the specific needs of prospective returnees, whether from internal or external displacement, are less systematically addressed. In many cases, it is assumed that returnees can access the same support measures as internally displaced or non-displaced populations. Yet the experiences and profiles differ considerably across IDPs, returnees from internal and external displacement, and those who envisage return but face increasing barriers and seek ways to overcome them. As such, these groups increasingly require differentiated policy approaches.

Although the security situation does not permit the promotion of large-scale returns at present, spontaneous returns are already taking place, and policies are needed to support these returnees in their reintegration. At the same time, authorities in Ukraine and abroad are beginning to consider how best to prepare for the moment when broader return and reintegration become possible, once the war of aggression ends and security guarantees are in place; and how to address other socio-economic barriers to return. At least some future returns can be anticipated and therefore prepared for.

Laying the groundwork for these returns, including through future dedicated repatriation programmes, can begin now in co-operation with international partners, host countries, and key institutions already supporting displaced Ukrainians within Ukraine and abroad. Their engagement will be essential for co-ordinating international mobility, facilitating voluntary return, and ensuring that reintegration policies align with Ukraine's reform agenda and the EU accession process. Aligning return and reintegration within these broader frameworks will ensure coherence with international standards and support Ukraine's path towards sustainable recovery and European integration.

Additionally, understanding the needs, aspirations, and return prospects of Ukrainians in different global locations is crucial, as these vary significantly by host region. Ukrainians in neighbouring European countries, who maintain closer proximity to Ukraine, are more likely to consider actual return, particularly as security conditions improve, requiring concrete return and reintegration planning. Conversely, Ukrainians in North America and other overseas destinations face greater barriers that make permanent return less likely. There are also different degrees of institutionalisation of diaspora organisations across regions, requiring different diaspora engagement strategies. Return programmes and engagement with Ukrainian communities should reflect these variations.

Predictable and sustainable financing is essential for delivery at scale

Many of the current measures aimed at displaced persons, including those embedded within state strategies and their corresponding action plans, have been made possible through donor funding. However, prolonged dependence on external financial support risks making these measures vulnerable to disruption. Short-term and fragmented financing reduces predictability and constrains the capacity of national and local authorities to plan strategically and expand effective initiatives. Similar challenges were already evident before the war of aggression, when the absence of dedicated, stable funding streams prevented several earlier generations of state strategies from being fully implemented.

Going forward, it will be important to underpin current and future strategies with realistic and transparent budgeting frameworks. Establishing a dedicated and stable budget line within the national budget, complemented by predictable support from donors and international financial institutions, would strengthen planning and delivery. Prioritising the scaling up and institutionalisation of successful initiatives and proven practices, rather than launching new and potentially duplicative efforts, could further enhance efficiency and sustainability, and save on the costs of administering multiple programmes. Encouraging partners, including initiatives such as the Skills Alliance for Ukraine, to align with national priorities and contribute to long-term financing instruments would help ensure continuity and maximise impact.

Action plans for state strategies can be enhanced by including clear measurable indicators of outcomes

Some current action plans that accompany state strategies contain measurable targets. Too often, however, they focus on institutional processes or activities but not the actual situation of individuals with different displacement histories. They can be strengthened by including indicators that allow gauging progress towards desirable outcomes, such as the number of IDPs and returnees supported with various measures, number of housing units delivered, number of IDP and returnees supported through SES, etc. Having such measures would also improve accountability and ensure transparency.

Developing a monitoring system to track progress and inform policy change is desirable

Statistics on displacement, return and reintegration are essential to monitor both short-term and long-term outcomes and assess the effectiveness of policies supporting displacement-affected populations. Monitoring systems should focus not only on institutional processes or activities but on the actual number, needs, and socio-economic outcomes of individuals with different displacement histories.

Ukraine has a well-developed administrative system for registering IDPs (the Unified Information Database on IDPs). It allows tracking the number of persons with legal IDP status, provides information on their main demographic characteristics, and information on some of their vulnerabilities. This system, however, currently does not allow tracking individuals who have returned to their habitual place of residence or settled elsewhere; progress towards integration or reintegration; or the identification of IDPs who have overcome their displacement-related vulnerabilities. In addition, there is no equivalent administrative system for registering returnees from external displacement, and no systematic monitoring framework to capture their evolving socio-economic needs and outcomes.

There are several surveys covering IDPs and returnees, their characteristics, needs and outcomes. These surveys are largely managed by international organisations or private initiatives rather than by the State of Ukraine and often rely on differing definitions and methodologies.

As a result, information remains limited and fragmented. There are significant data gaps regarding the housing, employment, and social services needs of IDPs; who among internally displaced persons has already locally integrated or has overcome their displacement-related vulnerabilities and no longer requires support; who is returning from both internal and external displacement and how they are reintegrating; and how barriers to return are evolving among those still displaced.

Looking ahead, it will be important for Ukraine to establish its own monitoring system and analytical tools. Both administrative and survey data can serve as a basis for a set of comprehensive and measurable indicators at both national and regional levels for monitoring progress on return and reintegration of externally displaced persons; as well as progress of IDPs towards local integration, settlement and integration elsewhere in the country, or return and reintegration in their habitual places of residence.

Clear and consistent legal and statistical definitions of “returnee” and “reintegration” are essential for effective monitoring, policy design and service delivery

While status should not determine access to support, clear legal and statistical definitions remain essential for effective support and monitoring. Although Ukraine has a legal definition of an internally displaced person and of a “foreign Ukrainian”, other key terms remain ambiguous. Establishing clear criteria on who qualifies as a “returnee”, including distinctions between those returning from abroad and from internal displacement, is essential for visibility in policy and data systems.

Equally, clear criteria are needed to define when an internally displaced person or returnee can be considered to have reintegrated, or to be someone who has overcome displacement-related vulnerabilities. Establishing such standards would help delineate when government assistance should begin and end, as well as which services individuals should have access to at different stages of the process. Greater definitional clarity would also improve data comparability, enable accurate resource planning, and support the design of targeted and equitable programmes.

Statistics and indicators on IDPs can be further enhanced drawing on international standards

For IDPs, the relevance of existing administrative data can be enhanced by enforcing existing mechanisms to regularly update records. This can include clear guidelines on tracking, at least for statistical purposes, people who have returned to their habitual place of residence, resettled, or moved abroad. It can also include additional guidelines on identifying persons who have overcome displacement-related vulnerabilities and who should no longer be counted as IDPs for statistical purposes.

In addition, Ukraine could draw on the International Recommendations on IDP Statistics (IRIS) (EGRIS, 2020^[2]), compiled by the Expert Group on Refugee and Internally Displaced Persons Statistics, and adopted by the United Nations Statistical Commission (Decision 51/116) in 2020, to collect additional

statistics to monitor IDPs' location and outcomes (Box 1.1). Both the OECD and Ukraine are members of the Expert Group on Refugee and Internally Displaced Persons Statistics that drafted these recommendations.

Population and housing census would be the most desirable source of such data. In the absence of the possibility to conduct a census, sample household surveys, ideally longitudinal, containing dedicated questions, can be a valuable source of such statistics. The survey would ideally be owned and managed by the State of Ukraine, have a clearly defined periodicity (and hence reporting intervals), an assigned responsible body, and a dedicated implementation budget. Dedicated surveys for IDPs could remain complementary, but ideally not the primary mechanism for monitoring the long-term needs and outcomes of IDPs.

Box 1.1. Examples of statistics and indicators to inform policy on IDPs

According to the International Recommendations on IDP Statistics (IRIS) (EGRIS, 2020^[2]), statistics on IDPs that can be useful for policymakers include:

- Total number of IDPs in locations of displacement, in locations of return, and in other settlement locations (stocks); by sex, age, place of habitual residence, current place of usual residence, and years since initial displacement; at a defined moment in time.
- Total number of IDP-related persons (children of at least one IDP parent); disaggregated as above; at a defined moment in time.
- Total number of persons who have overcome key displacement-related vulnerabilities, by sex, age, and current place of usual residence; at a defined moment in time.

In addition, it is desirable to collect statistics that capture progress towards a “durable solution” – a situation when “IDPs no longer have any specific assistance and protection needs that are linked to their displacement and can enjoy their human rights without discrimination on account of their displacement”, as per Inter-Agency Standing Committee’s (IASC) Framework on Durable Solutions for Internally Displaced Persons. IRIS contains a framework of practical indicators and target measures that allow for capturing such progress, based on the IASC Durable Solutions Indicator Library. It covers eight durable solutions dimensions crucial for return to previously affected zones: safety, security and freedom of movement; adequate standard of living; employment and livelihoods; housing, land and property; personal and other documentation; family reunification; participation in public affairs; effective remedies. For details on measurement, sub-criteria, indicators, and suggested sources of data, please refer to (EGRIS, 2020^[2]).

Ukraine can also develop statistics and indicators on return and reintegration on the basis of international standards and examples of OECD countries

For returnees from external displacement, Ukraine could draw on the International Recommendations on Refugee Statistics (IRRS) (EGRIS, 2018^[3]), compiled by the Expert Group on Refugee and Internally Displaced Persons Statistics and adopted by the United Nations Statistical Commission (Decision 49/115) in 2018. These recommendations provide the internationally agreed statistical frameworks for refugees and for persons returned from abroad after having sought or received international protection, including refugees and beneficiaries of temporary protection. These recommendations also provide guidance on the inclusion of these populations in national systems, as well as priority indicators to assess and monitor their situation (Box 1.2). Similarly to the IRIS discussed above, both the OECD and Ukraine are members of the Expert Group on Refugee and Internally Displaced Persons Statistics that drafted these recommendations, mandated by the United Nations Statistical Commission to support implementation.

A population and housing census would be the most desirable source of such data, allowing identification of returnees, IDPs, and non-displaced populations, not only to track the situation of returnees but also to ensure comparability between these population groups. In the absence of the possibility to conduct a census, national sample surveys, ideally longitudinal, containing dedicated questions, can be a valuable source of such statistics. The survey would ideally be owned and managed by the State of Ukraine, have a clearly defined periodicity, an assigned responsible body, and a dedicated implementation budget.

In addition, for returnees, administrative data could be collected. It could build on the existing Unified Information Database on IDPs, to create a single digital registry for IDPs, returnees, and “foreign Ukrainians”, integrated with the Diia platform. Individuals receiving a “foreign Ukrainian” status, as well as those returning through dedicated support programmes, would be registered in this database through a mechanism similar to that used for IDPs. In addition, spontaneous returnees would have an option to register through a voluntary registration mechanism. This could be supported by adopting a “tell-us-once” approach, in which information provided to one public authority is securely shared across relevant government institutions, would simplify administrative procedures, reduce burdens on individuals, and encourage voluntary registration. Co-ordination and data sharing on returnees with host countries, particularly EU Member States, to ensure that persons identified as returnees in Ukraine are not simultaneously kept on temporary protection or asylum registers abroad, would also be desirable.

Additional statistics related to “foreign Ukrainians”, as well as statistics and indicators to inform policies of preparedness for return from abroad, can also be envisaged, using administrative data (Box 1.2).

Box 1.2. Examples of statistics and indicators to inform return and reintegration policy

Statistics on persons returned from abroad after seeking international protection and their reintegration

According to the IRRS (EGRIS, 2018^[3]), statistics on persons returned from abroad after seeking international protection would cover the following four groups:

- Repatriating refugees (persons, likely to be citizens, who have returned to Ukraine after having enjoyed asylum abroad).
- Repatriating asylum seekers (persons returning after having attempted to seek asylum abroad. To the extent possible, this category should include persons who return after their asylum applications have been decided negatively as well as persons who may not have been able to apply for asylum but who stayed abroad under temporary protection for some time).
- Returning after having received international protection other than refugee status abroad (persons who received temporary protection or other types of international protection).
- Others returning from seeking international protection abroad (persons who left Ukraine to seek international protection abroad but were not covered by the other three categories above; for example admitted by another country for purposes such as tourism, study or work).

The basic statistics that may be adopted at the national level include:

- Total number of persons returned to Ukraine after having sought international protection abroad, by sex and age (stocks), possibly disaggregated by the four categories stated above.
- Total number of persons who returned to Ukraine after having sought international protection abroad during a reference period, by sex and age (flows), possibly disaggregated by the four categories stated above.

Indicators on returnees that may be useful include:

- Percentage of persons returned from having sought international protection abroad among all returned citizens.
- Proportion of females among persons returned from having sought international protection abroad.

Ukraine may find it useful to distinguish the returnee population on the basis of the following characteristics: age or date of birth; sex; country of birth; country of citizenship (including stateless, undetermined status, and multiple citizenship; date of leaving Ukraine; date of return to Ukraine; reason for migration; status abroad; country of previous or last residence; date of first displacement/leaving previous country of habitual residence; parents' refugee statuses; whether an unaccompanied child (under the of 18 years and separated from both parents or a legal guardian; legal residential/international protection status as applicable to the national context including repatriated refugee, repatriated asylum seeker, returning from other forms of international protection, returning from international protection other than the previous three categories.

In addition, indicators that can be used to measure satisfaction of needs, access to rights, and reintegration across a number of dimensions can include legal indicators; civil-political; socio-economic; and those related to social inclusion (for specific examples of indicators see Chapter 5 of (EGRISS, 2018^[3]) and also (OECD, 2024^[4]; OECD/European Commission, 2023^[5]).

Finally, Ukraine could also further explore more systematically measures of social cohesion (as per OECD social cohesion indicators (OECD, 2011^[6]) and Social COhesion and REconciliation Index (SCORE) framework, which has already been applied in Ukraine by several international organisations).

Statistics related to “foreign Ukrainians”

- Total number of “foreign Ukrainians” who have benefitted from adaptation and integration services in Ukraine, during a reference period, by sex and age.

Statistics and indicators to inform policies of preparedness for return from abroad

- Number of Unity Hubs providing individual advisory services to prepare safe and voluntary returns.
- Total number of beneficiaries of Unity Hub services, by Hub, during a reference period.
- Total number of individuals who received individual consultations at Unity Hubs, directly related to preparing for return, per hub, during a reference period.
- Total number of Ukrainians abroad accessing state-developed or state-supported digital platforms providing information and counselling on voluntary return, by host country, during a reference period.
- Total number of Ukrainians expressing an intention to return and indicating the need for assistance to do so, by host country, at regular intervals.

Government statistics

- Government expenditure on reintegration measures targeting returnees and “foreign Ukrainians”, total and per beneficiary, annually.
- Government expenditure on Unity Hubs, total and per hub, annually.
- Government expenditure on adaptation and integration measures targeting “foreign Ukrainians”, total and per beneficiary, over a reference period.

Programme evaluation is necessary to inform future policy

Between 2022 and 2025, Ukraine has launched a wide variety of programmes and measures to support IDPs, and, in some instances, returnees. These initiatives have covered diverse areas, ranging from compensation for damaged housing and skills development to psychological and social support. Many programmes differ in scale, duration, eligibility criteria, accessibility, ease of application, level of public awareness, and number of beneficiaries. Some show strong potential for expansion. However, systematic evaluation of their effectiveness is often lacking, preventing a clear assessment of which programmes should be scaled up, what barriers have limited participation, and what lessons can be drawn for future implementation. Moreover, the needs of potential participants continue to evolve, too.

Regular evaluation of key programmes is essential to ensure that interventions remain responsive to evolving conditions and needs and allocate resources effectively. Establishing a robust feedback mechanism to feed evaluation results back into programme design and decision making would strengthen accountability, policy learning, and institutional performance.

Assessment and recommendations: Policy action

Supporting potential returnees before their return

Planned and well-supported returns are more likely to take place

As of 2025, given the security situation, the principle of voluntariness remains the key foundation guiding Ukraine's policy on returns. While larger repatriation schemes and policies to proactively encourage returns can only be envisaged once the war of aggression ends and security guarantees are established, policies to support voluntary and spontaneous returns have already become increasingly relevant.

Returns from abroad are likely to be gradual and carefully planned rather than rushed. Most returnees will make decisions after thorough reflection. When feasible, putting in place a system of support, planning and information that allows displaced Ukrainians abroad to prepare documentation, secure opportunities, and access essential services in advance will make returns more feasible and sustainable.

Ukraine should continue developing digital instruments to provide services that facilitate return

Ukraine already operates the e-government portal Diia, which integrates citizen consultation features, and includes information, services and reporting on conditions of IDPs. Diia can be further leveraged for reaching out to potential returnees (OECD, 2024^[7]).

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs is also currently developing its own digital platform “e-consul”, with the aim of digitalising the provision of consular services. Upon availability of financial and technical support, there may be scope to integrate “e-consul” with Diia and other state registries. This can help Ukrainians located abroad access services available in Ukraine, including special programmes for housing restoration, state employment services, and any other type of support that may also help prepare their return.

There is a strong potential for developing pre-return support abroad, including by mobilising private and non-profit sector in host countries

Current pre-return support systems to help displaced Ukrainians prepare for their return in a structured and informed way remain insufficiently explored. Significant potential exists to equip Unity Hubs abroad, and the UGC organisations with practical toolkits on return options, guidance on security, housing, employment, schooling, and available benefits before departure.

Moreover, whilst the operational models and financing of Unity Hubs are still being established, there is an opportunity to develop partnerships with the private sector and NGOs in host countries, including those run by the UGC, to expand and enhance available services. These services could include information provision, counselling on return options, legal assistance, psychological support, administrative help, security training, emergency medical response training, and other activities relevant to return and reintegration. Unity Hubs that enable service provision by the private sector and NGOs can achieve greater sustainability and improved service quality if such services are sourced through a competitive process, as demonstrated by the operational models of resilience centres already established throughout Ukraine.

Having these services in place now will be useful not only for displaced individuals who are considering spontaneous voluntary return, but also as future-ready platforms for deploying more extensive support measures once the war of aggression ends, large-scale repatriation programmes can be developed, and returns among second- and third-generation diaspora become more attractive. Such preparation will reduce uncertainty, improve confidence in return prospects, and prevent future delays once conditions allow for larger movements.

Existing information platforms could benefit from wider dissemination and better alignment

Between 2023 and 2025, the Government of Ukraine, with the support of several international organisations and NGOs, advanced the development of a number of information platforms specifically focussed on return. They typically include administrative roadmaps for return. However, awareness of these platforms among displaced persons remains low and can be strengthened. In the longer term, it is important to ensure that these platforms are continuously updated to provide reliable and up-to-date information on safety, housing, services, and employment opportunities, potentially linking them to resilience centres, local reintegration centres, future case management systems, and the Diia portal. Over time, they could also be complemented by pre-return counselling and multilingual helplines.

Placing individuals' security at the centre of return and reintegration policies

Ensuring equal protection and safety information for voluntary returnees can help reduce uncertainty and save lives

Ukrainians who remain in the country have developed various coping strategies to live with the threat and its consequences. In contrast, many displaced individuals, particularly those abroad, are not always aware of the most recent developments in safety practices or have not practised them. Knowing how to live with the threat could become an increasingly significant divide between Ukrainians inside and outside the country. In this context, it will become ever more important for Ukraine to support voluntary spontaneous returnees by guaranteeing equal access to protection measures (such as emergency alerts, shelters, civil protection programmes and life-saving options) as the rest of the population, and timely information, both before and after their return.

One way to provide such support is by ensuring that clear information is available to all population groups, with specific targeting of returnees, on available life-saving options; explicitly including returnees and displaced populations in the preparation of security plans and solutions (such as consulting and informing all population groups, including returnees, when designing and implementing civil protection programmes and evacuation plans, updating community safety protocols, ensuring returnees are registered in local emergency systems); and by offering pre-departure training on safety, security, and life-saving emergency techniques.

Safety of returns involves more than the absence of active hostilities

Safety encompasses multiple aspects of physical security. Demining, restoring essential services, and demonstrating a firm commitment to rebuilding are key indicators of readiness for return. Ongoing efforts in these areas should be systematically monitored and clearly communicated, as awareness of progress helps displaced persons make informed and voluntary decisions about safe return, both internally and from abroad. A continued commitment to transparency on progress in these areas will become increasingly important in the longer term, once active hostilities have ceased and larger-scale return to the most affected areas becomes feasible.

Clear recovery benchmarks grounded in trust and transparency will be essential for wider returns

In the immediate aftermath of the end of the war of aggression, it will be necessary to establish well-defined frameworks for return and reintegration. Official assessments of safe return areas (developed in line with IASC Durable Solutions Indicator Library: see also Box 1.1) will have to align with displaced persons' own perceptions of safety. Engaging communities, supporting go-and-see visits, and sharing returnee experiences can help build confidence in the safety of return.

Social cohesion is central to safety, unity, and inclusion for all

Even if physical risks are addressed, returnees may choose not to return or may leave again if they feel excluded, discriminated against, judged, or not accepted in their communities. Social cohesion among returnees and stayers should be assessed and strengthened alongside other security concerns, serving as a foundation for lasting reintegration and recovery. Strengthening legal protections against discrimination, particularly on the basis of displacement history, would help build trust and reinforce social stability. Ensuring non-discriminatory access to housing, employment, education, and health services, as well as non-discrimination regarding military service, is critical to enable returnees and internally displaced persons to reintegrate on fair terms.

Promoting community dialogue, shared initiatives, and public awareness campaigns that explain the importance of reintegration for Ukraine's recovery and reconstruction and highlight the contributions of returnees to rebuilding their communities. In the longer term, it may be necessary to envisage a prohibition of discourse that stigmatises displacement history, and have public campaigns that can foster understanding between returnees, the UGC, and those who remained, helping to reduce stigma and build stronger, more united communities.

In the longer term, it will become increasingly important to monitor public attitudes among non-displaced Ukrainians to identify emerging risks of misunderstanding or resentment and to ensure that policies and communication remain balanced and responsive.

Making decent affordable housing a driver of integration, return and reintegration

Making housing central to integration, return and reintegration requires further action, and current conditions favour necessary reforms

Housing, after security, is one of the key outcomes affecting persons with any type of displacement history. It is the main precondition for integration of IDPs, and a decisive factor affecting return and the success of reintegration.

The Ukrainian state has established several national programmes to assist with the housing situation of the population (eRecovery (eVidnovlennya)/HOME), including programmes that target IDPs (Shelter (Prykhystok); eOselya; housing credits; rental subsidies; direct housing acquisition). No state programme

targets the housing needs of EDPs or returnees, though these groups are eligible to take part in eRecovery (eVidnovlennya)/HOME and qualify for housing programmes for IDPs if they register as such upon return.

Moreover, to address the growing housing challenges, Ukraine has begun developing a nationwide housing strategy as part of the Ukraine Facility and the national reform plan. In July 2025, the Law “On the Main Principles of Housing Policy” was approved in its first parliamentary reading. If adopted, it will launch a comprehensive housing reform. The housing reform presents a key opportunity to improve housing access for internally displaced persons and other vulnerable groups, and align reconstruction efforts with long-term return and reintegration goals.

Strengthening tenants’ rights has the potential to support both integration of IDPs and reintegration of returnees, and help decrease involuntary departures

Ukraine can take advantage of the housing reform to regulate and stabilise rental market prices, as well as strengthen tenants’ rights. Clear and enforceable rules on rent levels, contract duration, and eviction procedures should be established with the aim of improving predictability and reducing discrimination, including against individuals with a displacement history. Secure and affordable rental housing is a basic condition for the integration of internally displaced persons and the sustainable return of those coming from abroad, while also strengthening social cohesion within communities.

Developing a sustainable and inclusive model of affordable social housing is essential

While lack of housing and its affordability is a mounting concern, social housing was underdeveloped in Ukraine even prior to the war. Responding to the needs of IDPs and preparing for future returns can be used as one of the motivations to develop a modern affordable social housing model, built on a strong legal and institutional framework. In this model, social housing would not be treated as a temporary post-crisis response but as a lasting component of Ukraine’s recovery and social policy. The model should embed principles of inclusiveness for Ukrainian non-displaced populations, IDPs, and current and future returnees.

The model of social housing should also embed self-financing mechanisms. For example, introducing a revolving fund scheme that pools initial donor contributions and gradually reduces reliance on external support would sustain the system financially over time and ensure that currently available donor funds are used efficiently. It would also help in moving away from programme-based, one-off approaches to housing more generally. Public-private partnerships can also be considered.

Integrating social housing into broader recovery and urban development strategies would also help stimulate local economies, create jobs, and expand the supply of housing in a sustainable way. A well-designed model could become a permanent social policy instrument that supports reintegration and contributes to more resilient and inclusive communities.

Flexible certification of ownership will facilitate access to housing recovery and compensation

Given the widespread destruction and damage to housing, many displaced persons struggle to provide standard proof of ownership. Instituting alternative forms of certification, such as attestations by local authorities, recognised landlords, sworn affidavits, or certified service provider statements, would make it easier for affected households to claim compensation and begin reconstruction. Such flexibility would accelerate recovery and reduce the risk of exclusion for those without formal documentation. However, flexibility must be accompanied by fair appeal procedures and clear safeguards to prevent misuse or fraud.

There is room for improving accessibility of housing recovery and compensation programmes

While there is generally good awareness about existing housing recovery and compensation programmes, some groups, especially returnees, have awareness and accessibility gaps. Strengthening local information campaigns, deploying mobile or community-based assistance services, and simplifying application procedures can help ensure that vulnerable groups are not left behind in the recovery process. Transparent communication on eligibility and procedures will also increase trust and uptake among potential beneficiaries, while access from abroad can help prepare returns.

Integrate housing reconstruction with livelihood recovery

In light of ongoing insecurity, prioritising housing (re-)construction in safer areas that offer viable employment opportunities and access to essential services can support both long-term (re-)integration and sustainable return.

Looking forward, when the war of aggression is over, and return to currently dangerous and occupied areas becomes possible, strategic alignment of housing investments with local economic development plans will become essential to ensure that rebuilt communities not only provide shelter but also create pathways to sustainable livelihoods and long-term economic stability. Such an integrated approach will reduce the risk of secondary displacement and ensure that public investments in housing contribute to broader recovery objectives.

Making employment a foundation for integration, return and reintegration

Improving awareness and access to existing programmes can be beneficial to those who are most in need, especially IDPs

Just as with housing, decent employment opportunities are a key driver of return and a cornerstone of sustainable integration and reintegration.

Ukraine has introduced many programmes to support the employment of IDPs, including incentives for employers to hire IDPs, employment of IDPs on public works, granting targeted vouchers for retraining, providing direct training, providing targeted grants for self-employment and business creation, and some specific programmes targeting IDP women. Currently, there are no dedicated state programmes targeting the employment of IDPs or returnees, though the latter are eligible to participate in general employment support schemes open to all Ukrainians and register as unemployed with the State Employment Service of Ukraine. If they return to a location other than their pre-displacement home and register as IDPs, they may also access employment programmes specifically tailored for IDPs.

Scaling up successful programmes targeting IDPs' skill acquisition and retraining could be useful as well. Such scaling up should be accompanied by improving awareness about existing support programmes and access to them, with particular attention to women and individuals in small towns and rural areas. Complementing these programmes with other measures, such as transportation, high-quality secure childcare and after-school options, would be of particular relevance to IDP women lacking family support. Ensuring transparent selection of candidates can also help further enhance trust in these programmes.

Continue empowering women to overcome displacement challenges

Given the gendered nature of displacement, future employment and training policies should be designed and implemented in line with the OECD Recommendation on Gender Equality in Education, Employment and Entrepreneurship and the OECD Recommendation on Gender Equality in Public Life, which call for removing gender-specific barriers to labour market participation and applying gender mainstreaming

across all policy areas. Numerous targeted programmes for employment and reskilling of women in Ukraine during the war have already shown their value in allowing women to gain access to employment generally, but also in what was considered as traditionally male-dominated professions. Sustaining diversity of women and men across occupations and sectors even after the war will be a significant driver of inclusive recovery.

Employment support for those returning from abroad should prioritise linking them with job opportunities before return

Returnees from abroad often face distinct challenges that require a different approach. For many, the decision to return depends on whether they can secure a job before departure.

Creating clear employment pathways for those still abroad will be essential to support planned and sustainable returns. The State Employment Service, in co-operation with consulates, Unity Hubs, and the Diia platform, could facilitate access to information on available jobs, training opportunities, and labour market needs for those who contemplate return.

Employers, both public and private, will play an important role in fostering return and reintegration

When conditions allow, encouraging returns with “employment contracts in hand”, where private employers in Ukraine would offer written contracts to potential returnees even before return, could not only enable displaced Ukrainians to come back but also increase the likelihood of their successful and lasting reintegration. Public institutions and public sector enterprises could lead by example, demonstrating how early engagement with potential returnees can strengthen both confidence and outcomes. In most countries around the world, it is standard practice for labour migrants to secure a written employment contract prior to departure. Because return after prolonged displacement is akin to a new migration, this can be used as a model to support migration back to Ukraine.

Promoting recognition of skills, professional qualifications and experience gained abroad is another measure that can facilitate the employment of returnees

Many externally displaced persons have acquired new skills, professional qualifications, and professional experience while abroad. Facilitating the recognition of these credentials and prior learning is essential for enabling their effective reintegration into Ukraine’s labour market. Ukraine has already taken steps to align its National Qualifications Framework with the European Qualifications Framework, which provides a strong foundation for cross-border recognition. However, challenges remain in the recognition of training acquired in non-European countries, skills acquired in the workplace, as well as emerging forms of certification such as micro-credentials. Informal recognition by employers of skills and work experience gained abroad should also be encouraged, supported by awareness-raising among businesses and local authorities and leading by example from publicly owned enterprises. Ensuring that both formal and informal learning are acknowledged will allow Ukraine to benefit fully from the human capital developed during displacement and contribute to a more inclusive and skilled recovery.

Collaboration with host countries on dual intent approaches to support human capital investments aligned with Ukraine’s needs should be further explored

As many Ukrainians remain displaced in OECD countries, host governments continue to play a key role in supporting their integration and preserving their human capital as an expression of solidarity with Ukraine. Stronger co-operation with host countries is therefore needed to ensure that investments in displaced Ukrainians abroad also align with Ukraine’s long-term recovery and labour market needs.

This co-operation should focus on enabling displaced Ukrainians to rebuild livelihoods while large-scale returns remain difficult, without creating barriers to eventual return. Joint efforts could include determining priority areas for skills and training investments that are relevant both for host-country economies and for Ukraine (including sectors that are essential for Ukraine's recovery, such as construction, engineering, energy, health, IT and the green transition), ensuring mutual recognition of qualifications and skills, supporting Ukrainian language acquisition and training in OECD countries for younger learners, safeguarding the portability of social protection, exploring mobility solutions that allow for flexible cross-border movement, and supporting and strengthening Ukrainian Unity Hubs that are hosted abroad. Structured dialogue on these issues should be strengthened, including through existing fora such as the Skills Alliance for Ukraine and other initiatives, which provide an opportunity to co-ordinate and translate a shared vision into actions.

There is scope to expand sustainable workplace upskilling and reskilling opportunities and to strengthen the role of businesses in facilitating returns

Reskilling and upskilling are essential elements of employment support. The Ukrainian Government has launched and supported numerous initiatives in this area, including through the Skills Alliance for Ukraine, initiated at the Ukraine Recovery Conference in 2024.

While these initiatives have enabled many workers to upgrade their skills, the scale of the need and the rapid pace of labour market change mean that ad hoc training programmes are insufficient. The government and training institutions alone cannot meet the full demand for skills development. Mobilising employers to contribute to skills provision remains a challenge, as many perceive it as a financial burden. At the same time, workers often cannot afford training costs or the loss of income that would result from taking time away from even lower-skilled employment.

The forthcoming Employment Strategy that Ukraine is preparing could provide an opportunity to move progressively away from fragmented projects towards a system of self-sustaining, nationwide mechanisms that support continuous skills development and retraining. Such a system could also foster an environment in which reskilling and upskilling are routinely provided at the workplace. Public and private employers should be incentivised to invest in workplace training, including as a pre-hiring mechanism, while workers need to be motivated to participate in such training and recognise its value.

A range of policy tools can be explored to achieve this, including financial incentives such as wage and training subsidies, tax incentives, and loans at preferential rates. Other instruments may include individual learning account schemes that are transferable across jobs and open to all workers, including own-account workers, or payback contract clauses that allow employers to recover part of their investment in training if a trained employee leaves shortly after completing the training. In addition, employers could be encouraged to regard investment in skills, including those of IDPs, and current and future returnees, as part of their corporate responsibility and as a long-term investment in productivity and resilience, in line with the Human Capital Resilience Charter adopted by Ukraine.

Supporting the return of Ukrainians with tertiary education requires longer-term efforts to increase the attractiveness of Ukraine's research and innovation sectors

Given the large number of Ukrainians abroad with tertiary education, including those employed in research and innovation, Ukraine has a strong interest and the potential to capitalise on its global research community. Existing national initiatives such as research grants from the National Research Foundation of Ukraine, collaboration programmes with host countries on grant and mobility schemes for researchers, and emerging research clusters and specialised laboratories that aim to attract returning scientists and foster collaborative innovation have the potential to serve as "magnets" for talent. Strengthening and expanding these mechanisms in line with a broader innovation vision for the future of Ukraine, increasing

investment in research activities, enhancing the recognition of foreign academic and research experience and achievements, and improving the overall economic attractiveness of the research and innovation sector are all avenues to be further pursued.

Enhancing public services to support reintegration

There is an opportunity to build local reintegration hubs and other support structures on the existing structures of other public service provision

As the displacement is prolonged, reintegration support will be increasingly needed upon return. Such support can build on the existing network of in-person Administrative Services Centres (TsNAP), which might need to adapt their capacity to the new population by ensuring they function as accessible one-stop shops for housing, social protection, civil registry, employment, health and legal aid throughout the return and reintegration journey for both IDPs and returnees from abroad. Their services can be complemented with NGO and international partner support, alongside digital self-service options, to maximise reach. In the longer term, investing in developing the capacity and skills of local staff so that these centres can provide consistent, high-quality support for returnees during their reintegration will be increasingly relevant. Existing resilience centres can also be leveraged to provide targeted psychological support to returnees.

The Diia electronic portal and its mobile application have been able to deliver a high number of online services to citizens including during the war, with over 1.5 million users a day in 2023 (OECD, 2024^[7]). It has integrated new features to support displaced populations, such as applying for social benefits for IDPs, and can continue to expand online services to adapt their capacity to the needs of returnees and for those who envisage return.

More generally, service accessibility for returnees and the UGC, as well as for IDPs, should be situated within the broader framework of the 2024 OECD Recommendation on Human-Centred Public Administrative Services, which recognises the right to “access services equitably”, and stresses inclusive design of public administrative services, accessibility and participation (OECD, 2024^[8]).

For returning children, facilitating rapid and inclusive access to education can help families make decisions to return for families, and also help ensure smoother reintegration

In view of the massive displacement of children, Ukraine undertook several measures to preserve their learning, including developing the All-Ukrainian Online School, and a special curriculum for children displaced abroad known as the Ukrainian Studies Component. All children who were forced to relocate and study abroad retain the right to re-enrol in Ukrainian schools upon their return. To determine the appropriate grade level, Ukrainian schools are advised, through the methodological recommendations developed by the Ministry of Education and Science, to consider academic results from host country schools, provided the student presents an official certificate of attendance and achievement. Children who studied abroad but did not take subjects included in the Ukrainian educational curriculum, or who are unable to present documentation confirming their studies, may undergo an annual assessment before the start of the new school year, or in some cases, during the school year.

The implementation of these rules remains sometimes challenging in practice, as return to schools may be accompanied by administrative burdens, delays in assessments, and what can be perceived as excessive demands to meet educational standards. During displacement, most host countries took significant steps to facilitate the rapid enrolment of Ukrainian children in their education systems, often waiving documentation requirements altogether, enrolling children in the corresponding class in the middle of the academic year without additional exams, and providing language support. As families prepare for return, they are likely to expect a comparable level of flexibility and responsiveness in Ukraine. Ensuring

that these expectations are met will help maintain confidence in public institutions, support a positive return experience, and foster long-term reintegration.

This requires enabling returning externally displaced children to enter school quickly at the appropriate level without unnecessary barriers or requirements to repeat years. Allowing temporary presumptions of validity for low-risk documents with follow-up checks can help minimise delays in access to education. In the longer term, schools should also aim at provide bridging support to help returning pupils adapt to curricular differences and language shifts after years abroad.

For returning adults, recognition of foreign educational credentials can enable continuity of academic studies and careers upon re-entry

The recognition of foreign educational qualifications in Ukraine is aligned with the Lisbon Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region (1997) and is administered through the ENIC Ukraine centre. Even prior to the war, Ukraine had concluded bilateral agreements under this framework with seven European countries to ensure recognition or establish equivalence of diplomas.

Recognition of foreign educational documents is a critical instrument for supporting the return and reintegration of students and adults, as it enables continuity of academic studies and careers upon re-entry. There is significant scope to strengthen this mechanism by increasing awareness of recognition procedures among Ukrainians abroad, as well as expanding the network of bilateral agreements. These measures would reduce administrative barriers and facilitate smoother transitions for returnees, thereby reinforcing human capital recovery and labour market integration.

Continuity of healthcare for those returning from abroad can be enhanced

Facilitating the transfer of health records and ensuring uninterrupted access to long-term treatment, medication, and specialised care as soon as returnees re-enrol in the health system can be a pre-condition for return for some groups of returnees. Over time, it will become increasingly necessary for health services in Ukraine to be well equipped to recognise treatment plans and prescriptions issued abroad and ensure that returning patients can continue their care without administrative delays or duplication of tests. Special attention should be paid to individuals with chronic or mental health conditions who may have received new diagnoses while displaced.

Achieving this will rely not only on Ukraine's preparedness but also on constructive co-operation with host countries. The OECD countries are currently working to enhance the cross-border transfer of electronic health records, and Ukraine could explore closer co-operation with host countries within these initiatives to facilitate the secure exchange of health documents with European partners and ensure continuity of care for returnees, in line with the Recommendation of the OECD Council on Health Data Governance.

Progressively switch to needs-based rather than status-based solutions

Because vulnerabilities exist also among non-displaced populations, it is important to progressively shift from status-based to needs-based approaches in the provision of public services, as a way to properly address all vulnerabilities, strengthen social cohesion and prevent tension between different population groups.

In the medium to long term, returnees and internally displaced persons should not be perceived as receiving preferential treatment compared with non-displaced populations who may also face hardship. Targeted assistance should focus on needs specific to displacement, while broader programmes should remain inclusive and equitable.

When conditions permit, consider introducing phased or temporary return options during the recovery to support gradual reintegration

Looking forward, once the security situation allows, a phased approach to return may be more realistic than immediate permanent resettlement in areas heavily affected by destruction or with limited access to services. Allowing displaced persons to maintain connections in both their place of displacement and their community of origin, sometimes referred to as “dual anchoring” or double residency, can help them test conditions before fully resettling. Flexible administrative arrangements, such as temporary residence registration and partial portability of benefits, would make it possible for families to move gradually while retaining access to essential rights and support. This approach would reduce the risk of failed or premature returns and promote more stable and sustainable reintegration over time.

Designing repatriation programmes in co-operation with host countries can strengthen recovery and social cohesion in Ukraine

Once the security situation allows for larger-scale returns from abroad and repatriation programmes can be envisaged, an important question will arise regarding how host countries can support these returns. Unlike assisted voluntary return schemes, which typically provide individual financial assistance to returnees, Ukraine should consider, in co-operation with host countries, developing return support packages aimed at the communities receiving returnees. Such an approach could leverage financial assistance to generate broader community-level recovery benefits, foster stronger engagement from host countries, and promote social cohesion between returnees and those who remained.

To achieve this, careful attention will be required in designing transparent and accountable mechanisms for channelling such support. One possible avenue could be through the DREAM platform, but other channels should also be explored. Preparatory work could already begin to develop appropriate models and programmes jointly with host countries.

Unlocking the full potential of engagement with the Ukrainian global community

Strengthening engagement with the UGC is essential for allowing Ukrainians abroad to remain an integral part of the country’s reconstruction and its future

The Ukrainian state recognises the vital contribution of the Ukrainian global community to the national resistance, as well as its potential to preserve Ukrainian identity, promote and advocate for the Ukrainian cause abroad, and support the rebuilding and development of Ukraine.

Since 2004, Ukraine has had a legal status of “foreign Ukrainians”, which can be granted to persons of Ukrainian origin. It serves as an instrument for fostering return, particularly among those with strong cultural or familial links to Ukraine. However, awareness of this status and its uptake remain limited.

In late 2023, the Ukrainian Government appointed its first Ambassador-at-Large for the Global Ukrainian Community, with the aim of enhancing co-operation with Ukrainian communities abroad and strengthening their support for Ukraine. More recently, it has also begun to use the term “Ukrainian global community” more proactively in political discourse, marking an important shift in communication strategy. This approach seeks to encompass all Ukrainians living abroad, regardless of their migration histories. In 2025, a Law on Multiple Citizenship was adopted with the objective of maintaining and deepening ties with the diaspora.

Several other initiatives, however, including the adoption of the State Strategy on the Ukrainian Global Community, developed throughout 2024, had not yet materialised at the time of writing this report. Moreover, a more systematic and strategic approach from the Ukrainian Government will be necessary to fully harness the UGC’s potential as a long-term partner in national recovery and development.

Institutionalising the UGC's representation and fostering dialogue can send a strong signal recognising the UGC as an integral part of the Ukrainian nation

Sustaining engagement with the UGC requires reciprocity, regular dialogue, and visible inclusion of the UGC's priorities within national strategies. One meaningful way to strengthen bridges between Ukraine and its global community is to establish structured and regular channels for consulting the UGC in national policymaking and recovery planning. As a possible long-term option, contingent on feasibility, political consensus and implications for trust, Ukraine could consider introducing the necessary legal changes to enable formal political representation for the UGC in the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine by allowing candidates to stand for election as a Member of Parliament while maintaining residence abroad; and reserving seats in parliament for elected members from the UGC.

Formal participation in decision making processes would strengthen ownership, build trust, and ensure that UGC perspectives are reflected in national priorities. These measures would also underscore that meaningful contribution to Ukraine's recovery and reconstruction does not necessarily require physical return but can take many forms of engagement from abroad.

The UGC's investment potential remains underutilised

Many UGC members contribute financially and through in-kind support to the military effort, humanitarian aid, and investment. Yet these resources often flow through fragmented channels and may not reach their full potential. Establishing transparent, well-governed financial instruments, such as diaspora bonds, crowd-investment schemes, and SME co-financing facilities, can make these contributions even more productive and sustainable. Opening at least part of the DREAM platform to private and crowdfunding investment from abroad could provide a unified channel for aligning individual and community contributions with national recovery and reconstruction priorities.

Making better use of "foreign Ukrainian" status could help unlock its full potential

The existing status of "foreign Ukrainians" could be used more strategically, serving as a platform for structured engagement or, when safety conditions allow, for facilitating return visits, exchanges, and participation in civic and cultural initiatives in Ukraine. More can be done to raise awareness of the status and the advantages associated with it, while simplifying and digitalising the acquisition process to make it more accessible. In the longer term, the "foreign Ukrainian" status could also provide a formal basis for political representation and deeper institutional co-operation with the diaspora, or facilitate the simplified acquisition of multiple citizenship.

Once conditions allow, UGC skills, expertise and professional networks can be further mobilised

To capitalise on the UGC's skills and expertise, Ukraine could envisage establishing a voluntary "Diaspora Skills for Recovery" registry to match expertise with national and local needs. Expanding short-term fellowships, expert missions, and secondments to Ukraine, complemented by remote mentoring, research collaboration, and advisory opportunities for those unable to return physically, can help channel the UGC's willingness to contribute into tangible recovery and reintegration outcomes, while reinforcing two-way exchanges of knowledge and innovation between Ukraine and its global community.

Summary of the recommendations

Strengthening governance and monitoring

Short-term priorities, when feasible and if resources allow:

- Establish a permanent co-ordination institution with a clear mandate, sufficient capacity and resources to oversee return and reintegration efforts and to oversee accountability mechanisms across the relevant authorities.
- Enhance interministerial collaboration and co-ordination with local authorities, clarifying institutional mandates and responsibilities for IDP support, return, reintegration, and engagement with the Ukrainian global community.
- Better differentiate, in legal strategic documents and policy, distinct needs and pathways of internally and externally displaced persons and returnees, recognising that they need differentiated support related to the specificities of their displacement.
- Adopt long-term planning to support spontaneous voluntary returns and reintegration, acknowledging that return, reintegration, and engagement with the Ukrainian global community are long-term generational processes.
- Enforce existing legal mechanisms to deregister IDPs who no longer require support.
- On the basis of the existing administrative digital registry for IDPs, create a single digital registry including returnees and “foreign Ukrainians”, integrated with Diia platform.
- Adopt standardised statistical definitions of “returnee”, “integration” and “reintegration” to strengthen policy coherence and monitoring.
- Develop a monitoring framework with clear statistical indicators to inform return and reintegration policy, in line with the international statistical standards and practice established in this area.

Medium to long-term priorities:

- Transition from short-cycle donor funding to multi-year, predictable financing mechanisms, including dedicated budgetary allocations for return, reintegration, and engagement with the UGC.
- Encourage donors to align with national priorities and contribute to long-term financing instruments.
- Ensure that future action plans have measurable indicators of progress towards tangible outcomes of different population groups.
- Institute regular review and evaluation processes to ensure that programmes remain effective and responsive to evolving needs.

Supporting potential returnees before their return

Short-term priorities, when feasible and if resources allow:

- Establish comprehensive pre-return counselling services and tailored support through Unity Hubs and diaspora organisations.
- Develop operational models for Unity Hubs abroad, drawing on the experience of resilience centres in Ukraine, to allow for broad partnerships with the private sector and NGOs, including those from the UGC.
- Upon availability of financial and technical support, advance the development of “e-consul” platform, with the view of digitalising the provision of consular services and pre-return counselling; as well as the platform’s integration with Diia and other state registries.

- Increase awareness of existing digital platforms providing information and administrative roadmaps for return, and ensure they are regularly updated.

Medium to long-term priorities, including when security conditions for promoting returns are in place:

- Implement “return readiness” assessment frameworks in collaboration with host countries hosting significant Ukrainian populations.
- Link existing information platforms on return options with resilience centres, local reintegration centres, and future case management systems.
- Develop, jointly with host countries, return “go-and-see” visit programmes, without loss of legal status and financial support abroad, to enable potential returnees make informed decisions about return.
- Collaborate with host countries to design repatriation plans and programmes, including community-based programmes to support returnees, aligned with Ukraine’s recovery and social cohesion needs.
- Develop, in partnership with host countries, future mobility schemes that allow flexibility rather than forcing individuals to choose between permanent settlement in host countries and returning to Ukraine.

Placing individuals’ security at the centre of return and reintegration policies

Short-term priorities, when feasible and if resources allow:

- Ensure that voluntary spontaneous returnees enjoy protection equal to that of stayers, providing information on available life-saving options, pre-departure training on safety and security, and explicit inclusion in local security planning.
- Reinforce anti-discrimination frameworks, by expanding them to include displacement history as prohibited grounds and promote social cohesion through inclusive communication and the prohibition of discourse that stigmatises displaced persons, returnees and non-returnees.

Medium to long-term priorities, including when security conditions for promoting returns are in place:

- Communicate progress on demining and restoring essential services in heavily affected areas.
- Establish clear recovery benchmarks to define what constitutes a safe return.
- Encourage community-based initiatives that foster social cohesion among groups with different displacement histories.

Making decent affordable housing a driver of integration, return and reintegration

Short-term priorities, when feasible and if resources allow:

- Strengthen legal protections for tenants to prevent discrimination, unjustified evictions, and contract insecurity.
- Introduce measures to stabilise the rental market.
- Develop a legal framework for inclusive social housing, embedding self-financing mechanisms.
- Improve accessibility and public awareness of housing recovery and compensation schemes.
- Introduce flexible certification procedures for property ownership with appropriate safeguards and appeals mechanisms to support housing recovery and compensation during reconstruction.

Medium to long-term priorities, including when security conditions for promoting returns are in place:

- Integrate housing reconstruction with livelihood recovery by prioritising rebuilding in areas with viable employment opportunities and economic potential.
- Pay sufficient attention to building affordable social housing stock.

Making employment a foundation for integration, return and reintegration

Short-term priorities, when feasible and if resources allow:

- Scale up successful retraining and reskilling programmes for internally displaced persons.
- Enable remote access to the State Employment Service for Ukrainians abroad through consulates, Unity Hubs, and digital platforms such as Diia.
- Strengthen co-operation with host countries to operationalise dual intent approaches that balance socio-economic integration abroad with maintaining ties to Ukraine, notably supporting skills development in sectors essential for Ukraine's recovery, including construction, engineering, energy, health, IT and the green transition; and exchanging information between SES services in host countries and Ukraine.
- Create an environment for self-operating sustainable skills development in the workplace.
- Strengthen co-operation with host countries and their research communities with regards to Ukrainian researchers, including through grants, stipends, dual affiliations to help displaced Ukrainian researchers continue their activity while maintaining ties with Ukraine to facilitate their return when the security situation allows.

Medium to long-term priorities, including when security conditions for promoting returns are in place:

- Promote employment contracts signed before departure to enable planned and sustainable returns. and encourage private and public employers to lead by example in this area.
- Promote linking job placement and training opportunities with housing support for IDPs and returnees.
- Expand existing retraining and reskilling initiatives to include returning Ukrainians from abroad.
- Together with host countries, leverage the role of private-sector employers of host countries to hire, train, and support intra-company cross-border mobility for Ukrainians displaced abroad.
- Strengthen the attractiveness of Ukraine's research and innovation sectors, by expanding grant opportunities for "foreign Ukrainians" and returnees, including through donor funding, recognising and valuing foreign academic achievements, creating conditions for thriving innovation hubs and research clusters, and developing frameworks for talent mobility.
- Address structural barriers to employment, including access to secure quality childcare, transport, and formal job opportunities.

Enhancing public services to support reintegration

Short-term priorities, when feasible and if resources allow:

- Leverage the Diia portal and improve its integration with other digital services, in order to enable access to services in Ukraine for those who are displaced abroad; information sharing on return; and collecting information on their needs.

- Establish local reintegration hubs using existing structures, such as Administrative Service Centres and resilience hubs, as accessible one-stop service centres for displaced persons and returnees.
- Ensure wide implementation of re-enrolment procedures to facilitate quick access to education for children returning from abroad.
- Increase awareness about possibilities and procedures to recognise tertiary education documents in Ukraine among Ukrainians abroad.
- Continue expanding the network of bilateral agreements for mutual recognition of secondary and tertiary educational documents.
- Complete the alignment of the National Qualifications Framework with the European Qualifications Framework; promote the recognition of professional skills and qualifications acquired abroad, including informal recognition; continue expanding the network of bilateral national, sectoral and occupational agreements for mutual recognition of skills.
- Develop healthcare continuity protocols, including transfer of medical records and recognition of foreign prescriptions.

Medium to long-term priorities, including when security conditions for promoting returns are in place:

- Shift progressively towards needs-based assistance programmes, ensuring equitable and transparent service provision.
- Support phased or temporary return arrangements (“dual anchoring”) in areas with significant damage, ensuring portability of social benefits and services during transitional periods.
- Collaborate with host countries on dual tax and social security systems and portability of social benefits, such as pension contributions.

Unlocking the full potential of engagement with the Ukrainian global community

Short-term priorities, when feasible and if resources allow:

- Adopt a national strategy to strengthen engagement with the Ukrainian global community.
- Establish transparent and well-governed dedicated financial instruments that can facilitate the Ukrainian global community’s investment in Ukraine’s recovery, building on international practices of diaspora-supported investments.

Medium-to long-term priorities:

- Consider the necessary legal changes to enable UGC representation in parliament by allowing members of the Ukrainian global community to stand for election to the Verkhovna Rada, and reserving seats for UGC representatives.
- Simplify and digitalise procedures for accessing “foreign Ukrainian” status and increase public awareness of its benefits.
- Mobilise the UGC’s skills and networks through voluntary registries and knowledge exchange platforms.
- Expand fellowships, facilitate expert missions and professional engagement by UGC members in Ukraine.

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Notes

¹ From the first day of Russia's offensive in February 2022, the OECD has maintained the position that these actions are an illegal act of aggression. According to the OECD Guidelines on Language, the terms to be used as first reference are "Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine" or "Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine". Subsequent usage in the same content can be simplified, to refer to "the war in Ukraine", without prejudice or change of intended meaning. The OECD's established guidelines reflect the position of its member countries and may not fully align with the Ukraine's legal acts, which use the term "the armed aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine". The terms used in this report follow the OECD guidelines.

² There are also Ukrainians forcibly displaced to Russia, including prisoners of war, as well as unlawfully deported civilians and children. The authors of the report acknowledge the urgency of repatriating these individuals to Ukraine. The policies for doing so, however, were beyond the scope of this report.

³ This wide range of estimates reflects the different ways in which various organisations that collect statistics on returnees define what constitutes a return.

2 Ukrainian migration and displacement crisis in numbers

This chapter provides an overview of the scale of Ukraine's emigration and internal displacement on the eve of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine. It brings together descriptive statistics on the migration flows of Ukrainians from the country, their stocks in OECD countries, and maps the presence of displaced persons within Ukraine. The chapter further examines the evolution of the massive displacement crisis triggered by the aggression and presents available information on returns that have already taken place. By doing so, it sets the scene for the rest of the report.

Ukraine's migration experience and mobility patterns before 2022

Ukraine's migration story is one of both continuity and transformation. Since gaining independence in 1991, the country has experienced several waves of emigration to OECD and other destinations, each shaped by evolving economic opportunities, social change and geopolitical circumstances. By early 2022, these movements had given rise to a diverse and well-established Ukrainian presence abroad, comprising both citizens as well as individuals of ethnic Ukrainian descent with varied experiences and connections to the country.

At the same time, Ukraine's migration history has not been one of one-way movement. Over the past three decades, the country has also seen successive periods of return, as citizens and members of the wider Ukrainian diaspora came back for family, professional or personal reasons. On the eve of Russia's full-scale invasion in February 2022, Ukraine was also managing an internal displacement situation within its borders, stemming from the illegal annexation of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol by the Russian Federation and the military conflict in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions.

Understanding this complex pre-existing context is essential. It shaped both the mobility patterns that followed the large-scale aggression and influenced the levels of institutional, community and individual support available to those displaced in Ukraine and abroad. These dynamics continue to influence the integration trajectories of displaced Ukrainians, their perspectives on return, but also the evolving role of Ukraine's global community in recovery and reconstruction.

Ukraine has largely been a country of emigration since its independence

Since the dissolution of the Soviet Union and Ukraine's independence in 1991, the country has undergone several significant and turbulent political, economic and social transformations, which have given rise to several migration episodes both to and from the country (Malynovska, 2018^[1]; Fedyuk and Kindler, 2016^[2]).

With the fall of the Iron Curtain, Ukrainians gained the right to freely leave and return to the country, a right that had previously been denied to citizens of Soviet Ukraine. As a result, between 1991 and 1993, large scale population movements took place between Ukraine and other former Soviet republics. A significant number of individuals of Ukrainian descent returned to Ukraine, including those who had previously been working, studying, or had been forcibly deported to other parts of the Soviet Union. At the same time, emigration to other former Soviet Union republics also occurred.

In addition, emigration driven by ethnic, religious, political, and family reunification factors that had started in the early 1980s continued, particularly to countries such as Israel and Germany. This migration, which had begun a few years before independence, was typically of a permanent nature.

From 1994 to roughly 2004, permanent emigration from Ukraine for political, ethnic, or religious reasons gradually declined, giving way to an era of circular and short-term migration for economic reasons. Border crossings from Ukraine rose from 4.5 million in 1992 to nearly 16 million by the end of the 1990s (State Statistics Service of Ukraine, 1998^[3]). By the early 2000s, labour migration, including irregular, had become the main form of emigration from Ukraine, with nearly 3 million Ukrainians working abroad on a temporary basis (State Statistics Service of Ukraine; Ukrainian Centre of Social Reforms, 2009^[4]). The majority of labour migrants originated from the western parts of the country (Gladun, 2020^[5]). The main destination countries during this period were the Russian Federation, the countries of Southern Europe, Poland and Czechia.

The period from 2005 to 2013 was marked by both a relatively low outflow of Ukrainians and low migration intentions (Vorona and Shulga, 2012^[6]), reflecting a phase of economic growth and relative political stability in Ukraine. Labour migration from Ukraine slowed, especially in the aftermath of the global economic recession in major destination countries, though circular and short-term labour migration remained a key feature of Ukraine's mobility patterns (Libanova, 2010^[7]). At least 1 million labour migrants returned to

Ukraine during this period. Simultaneously, regularisation programmes in several European destination countries enabled earlier migrant waves to transition towards longer-term, quasi-permanent settlement. These programmes also facilitated family reunification, allowing Ukrainian migrants to bring their families to host countries, further shaping the evolving migration landscape.

Late 2013 and 2014 marked the beginning of the deepest political changes since Ukraine's independence, with the Revolution of Dignity resulting in the ousting of the previous president. These events were followed by a Russia-induced military crisis in the eastern part of the country in early 2014 and the illegal annexation of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the City of Sevastopol by the Russian Federation. These developments had profound economic and social consequences, initially resulting in the first major internal displacement crisis, as well as the first outflow of asylum seekers, primarily to European countries. A sizeable outflow of mostly ethnic Russians, along with a non-negligible share of displaced persons, also took place towards the Russian Federation (Malynovska, 2018^[1]). During the same time, several policy and regulatory changes in receiving countries began to further facilitate cross-border movements of Ukrainians.

Between 2014 and 2017, the proportion of Ukrainians considering emigration increased (IOM and GFK, 2017^[8]) and a growing number of Ukrainians obtained permanent residence status abroad. The number of Ukrainian family reunifications in destination countries also rose, as did the number of Ukrainian students pursuing education abroad, whether as international students or as dependents uniting with parents already employed in EU countries. During this period, labour migration flows to the Russian Federation declined, while migration patterns increasingly shifted towards EU countries, particularly Poland, which emerged as a primary destination for Ukrainian workers. This shift was accompanied by a rise in irregular migration from Ukraine and in the number of Ukrainians participating in assisted return programmes.

In 2017, visa-free travel to the EU for Ukrainians came into force. This major development contributed to increased mobility, initially driven by tourism. In subsequent years, the growing interconnectedness between Ukraine and EU countries facilitated better preparation for both study and labour migration, which continued to expand gradually during this period. In 2021, 8.5% of Ukrainians expressed an intention to go abroad for temporary work, 7.4% intended to emigrate permanently, and 7.1% planned to leave for other reasons not related to lack of prospects (Yakymenko et al., 2021^[9]).

Changes in emigration dynamics from Ukraine are also reflected in statistics from OECD countries

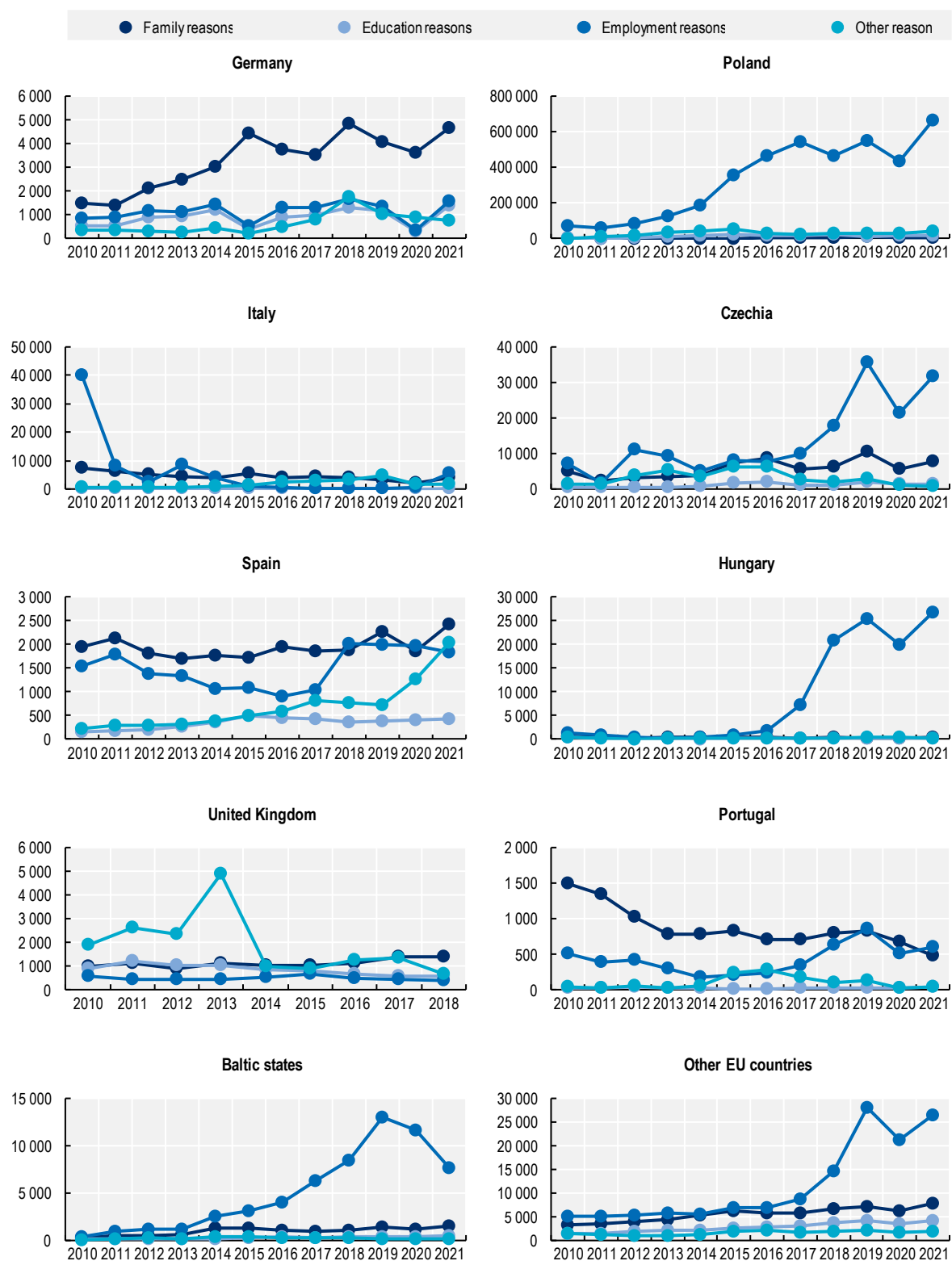
Temporary and long-term residence of Ukrainian citizens in OECD countries

Europe

In the early 2000s, Italy, Spain and Portugal were the main destination countries for Ukrainian labour migrants, most of whom were temporary workers. During the same period, Germany received inflows from Ukraine through ethnic resettlement programmes and family reunification channels. By 2013, Ukrainians ranked as the fourth-largest group of third-country nationals in the European Union, based on the total number of residence permits, with employment-related permits being the main category (Eurostat, 2022^[10]).

Between 2010 and 2021, Ukrainian migration to the EU continued to grow. Figure 2.1 shows the evolution of the number of first residence permits issued to Ukrainian citizens over this period, by country, as an estimate of the size of legal immigration flows of Ukrainians into the EU. At its peak in 2021, the total number of first residence permits issued to Ukrainians in the EU stood at 876 000, the highest number of permits issued to any group of third-country nationals in the EU in 2021 (Eurostat, 2022^[10]).

Figure 2.1. First residence permits granted to Ukrainian citizens in the EU, by reasons, 2010-2021



Source: Eurostat.

During this period, the ranking of destination countries changed compared to earlier periods. Poland, Czechia, Hungary and the Baltic countries have progressively taken over as key European destinations for Ukrainian labour migrants (gauging by flows), particularly starting from 2014.

An important shift also occurred from predominantly temporary, circular, and short-term migration towards longer-term residence. This trend was particularly evident in Poland. Prior to 2014, most Ukrainians, including those coming for work, did not apply for residence permits in Poland. Instead, they entered and stayed on visas, available free of charge since 2012 for periods of between three months and one year. Many Ukrainians benefited from a simplified employment procedure that allowed temporary work without a permit, worked in sectors exempt from additional documentation requirements, or were employed informally (Brunarska et al., 2016^[11]). Furthermore, under the Agreement on Local Border Traffic between Poland and Ukraine, in force since 2009, Ukrainian nationals residing in the border zone did not require visas. As a result, mobility between Ukraine and Poland was very high, while the stock of Ukrainians with longer-term residence in Poland remained relatively low.

Since the escalation of the military conflict initiated by Russia in 2014, and due to significant amendments to Poland's law on foreigners that same year,¹ the number of first residence permits granted to Ukrainian citizens increased sharply, reaching more than 730 000 in 2021 (Figure 2.1). The majority of these permits were issued for employment purposes.

Over the same 2010-2021 period, family reunification intensified in Germany, Spain, the United Kingdom and other EU countries (Figure 2.1). Student migration has also increased significantly, with notable growth observed in Germany and Spain, and a continued upward trend in the United Kingdom. Some other countries, such as Greece and Portugal, recorded a decline in the number of new arrivals from Ukraine.

As a result, by the end of 2021, 1.57 million Ukrainian citizens were legally residing in the EU with residence permits of varying duration, making them the third-largest group of third-country nationals in the EU. Three countries – Poland, Italy and Czechia – hosted the largest numbers of Ukrainians holding valid residence permits. Poland alone accounted for 83.5% of all EU permits issued to Ukrainians in 2021, although two-thirds of these were valid for less than 12 months. In most other Member States, the majority of first residence permits were issued for a duration of at least 12 months (Eurostat, 2022^[10]). The highest share of such permits were recorded in Greece (100%), Estonia (99.5%), Luxembourg (99.5%), Italy (99.4%), Portugal (99.4%), and Czechia (98.2%). In Czechia, Poland, Lithuania, Estonia and the Slovak Republic, Ukrainians were the largest immigrant community, measured by their share of Ukrainians holding a legal residence permit in the total population of these countries (Eurostat, 2022^[10]).

Canada

About 112 000 immigrants from Ukraine arrived in Canada between 1991 and 2016 (Hou and Yan, 2020^[12]), and a further 14 000 arrived between 2017 and 2021 (IRCC, 2022^[13]; Stick and Hou, 2022^[14]). In the first decade following Ukraine's independence, most of these migrants were attracted by better economic prospects in Canada and had long-term settlement objectives. From 2013-2014 onwards, however, Ukrainians moving to Canada were typically young professionals seeking greater opportunities for professional development in an increasingly globalised labour market. Many later returned to Ukraine or maintained strong ties with Ukraine through regular visits (Ukrainian World Congress, 2022^[15]).

Israel

Ukrainian emigration to Israel was typically permanent during the 1990s and 2000s, with the primary objective being long-term settlement. Most migrants arrived under the Law of Return, which enables people of Jewish background and their families to settle in Israel, or through family reunification. Around the late 2000s, many Ukrainians left Israel for other countries such as Canada, while some returned to Ukraine. Between 2014 and 2020, migration from Ukraine to Israel began to rise again, with about 41 000 Ukrainian Jews moving to Israel during this period (Wojnarowicz, 2022^[16]).

Türkiye

Throughout the 1990s-2010s, Türkiye saw a sizeable number of Ukrainian “shuttle traders”² and temporary labour migrants, including those with irregular status and working in the informal economy (Icduygu, 2013^[17]). By early 2022, the number of Ukrainians residing permanently or temporarily in Türkiye had reached around 38 000, with the majority being Ukrainian women married to Turkish citizens (MFA Ukraine, 2023^[18]).

United States

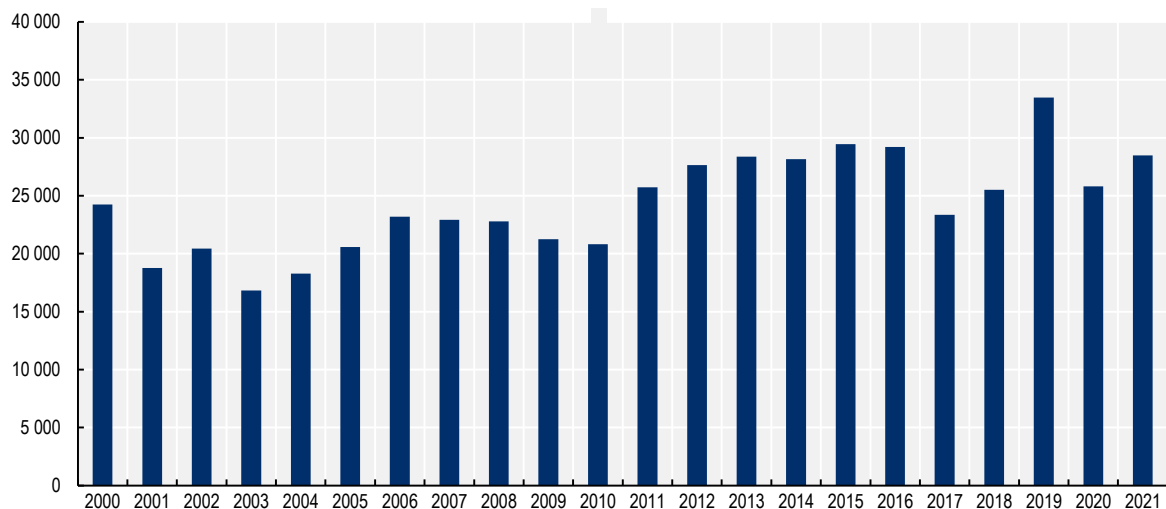
The United States witnessed the arrival of about 108 000 Ukrainians between 1992 and 1997 (Rodriguez and Batalova, 2022^[19]). In the early years following Ukraine’s independence, the main reasons included refugee resettlement on religious grounds and, to a lesser extent, family-sponsored migration. Immigration from Ukraine slowed towards the turn of the century. Nevertheless, by 2020, an additional 275 000 Ukrainians had obtained lawful permanent resident status (Rodriguez and Batalova, 2022^[19]). Since 2015, about half of the new entrants were classified as “immediate family members of U.S. citizens”, while more than 20% entered through the Diversity Visa programme (Wolowyna, 2018^[20]).

Citizenship acquisition by Ukrainian nationals in OECD countries

Reflecting longer-term migration trends, OECD countries have seen a steady increase in the number of Ukrainian nationals acquiring citizenship. Between 2000 and 2021, an average of 24 000 Ukrainians obtained the nationality of an OECD country each year, totalling 535 321 individuals over the period (Figure 2.2). The United States was by far the largest OECD country granting citizenship to Ukrainians, with more than 201 000 Ukrainians becoming American citizens between 2000 and 2021. In Europe, Germany accounted for the largest number, with nearly 75 000 Ukrainians acquiring German citizenship over the same period (Figure 2.3).

Figure 2.2. Acquisitions of host country nationality by Ukraine-born immigrants, OECD total, 2000-2021

Persons



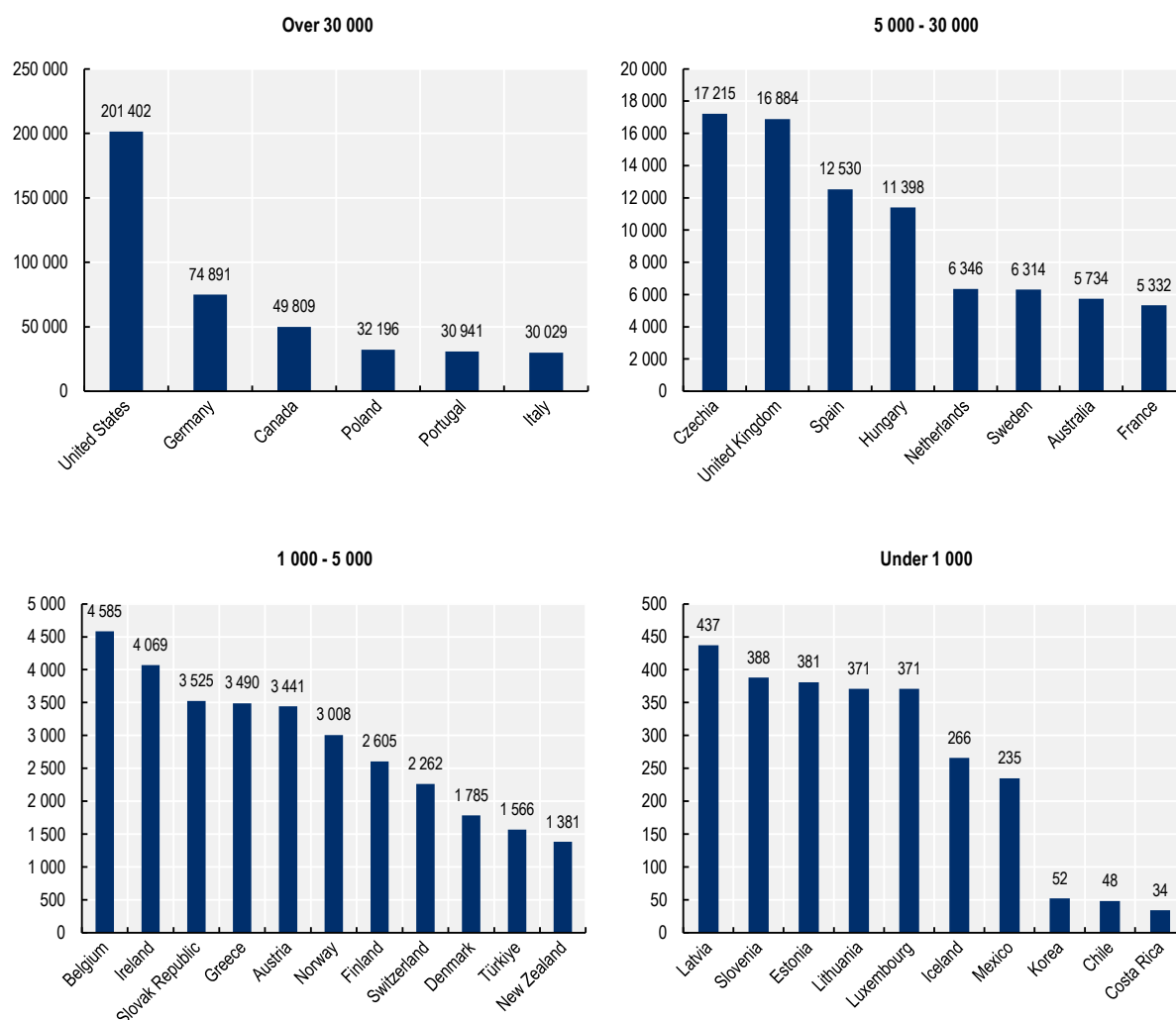
Note: Data available for AUS, AUT, BEL, CAN, CHL, CRI, CZE, DNK, EST, FIN, FRA, DEU, GRC, HUN, ISL, IRL, ITA, KOR, LVA, LTU, LUX, MEX, NLD, NZL, NOR, POL, PRT, SVK, SVN, ESP, SWE, CHE, TUR, GBR, USA.

Source: OECD International Migration Database.

The acquisition of nationality is determined by the specific regulations of each destination country but generally reflects migration inflows from at least five to ten years earlier. For example, in Italy, most citizenship acquisitions took place during the 2010-2021 period. Citizenship acquisition is also typically associated with intentions of long-term or permanent settlement.

Figure 2.3. Acquisitions of nationality by Ukraine-born immigrants, by country, total over 2000-2021

Persons



Source: OECD International Migration Database.

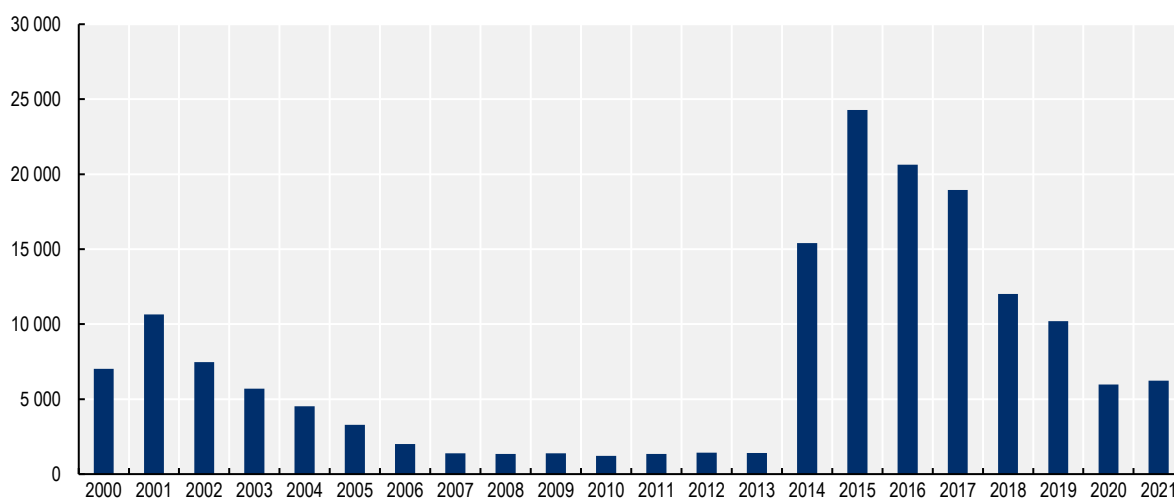
Asylum seeking by Ukrainians in OECD countries

Following the illegal annexation of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the City of Sevastopol by Russia, as well as the beginning of the military conflict in the Donbas and Luhansk regions, a considerable number of Ukrainians sought international protection.

Starting from 2014, the number of asylum applications from Ukrainian citizens has significantly increased across all OECD countries, with a peak of 25 000 recorded in 2015 (Figure 2.4). The vast majority of applications were lodged in EU countries, notably Italy and Germany. Outside the EU, Israel, the United States and Canada also received a sizeable number of applicants (Figure 2.5).

Figure 2.4. Asylum requests from Ukrainian citizens in OECD countries, 2000-2021

Persons



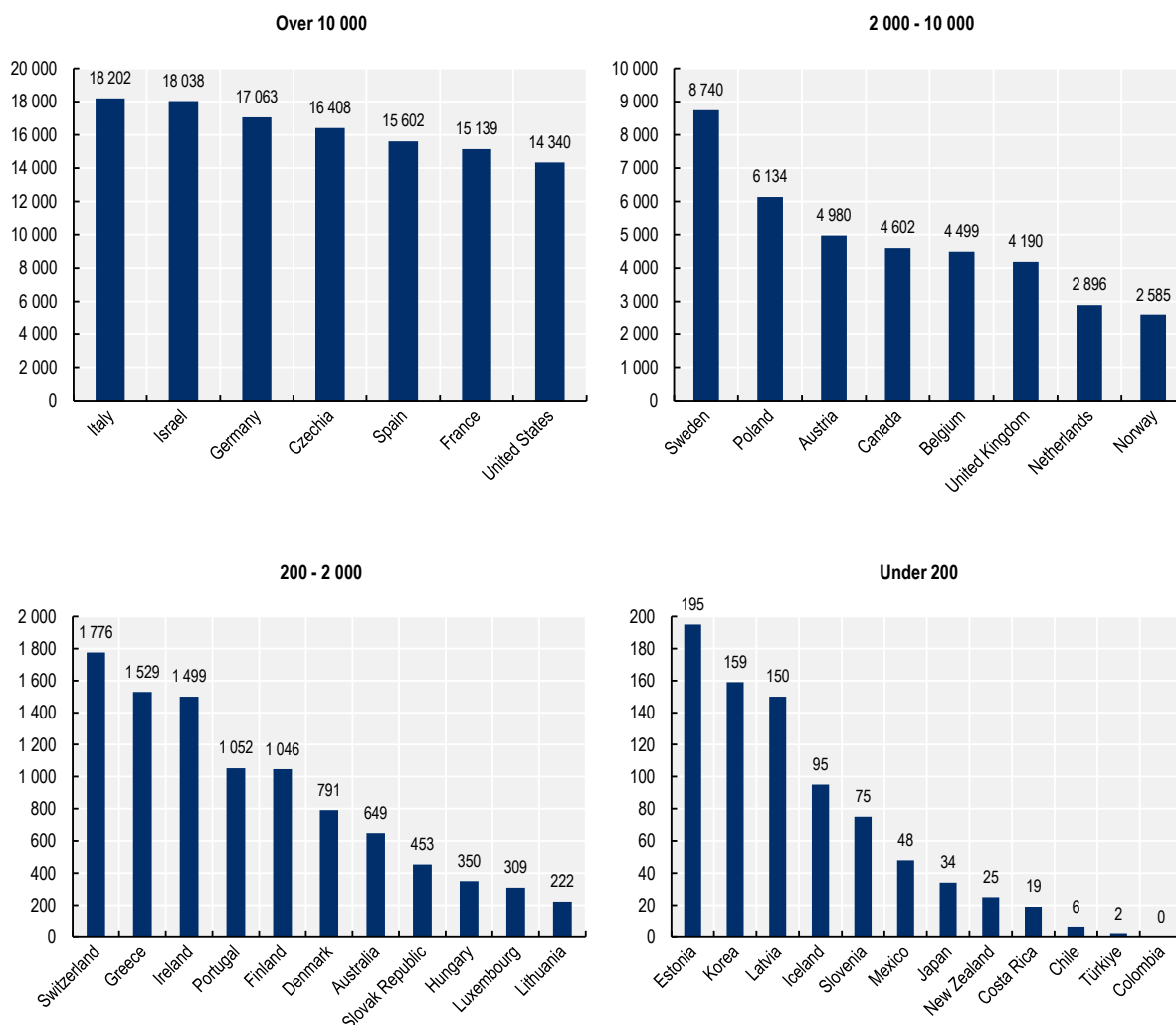
Note: Data available for AUS, AUT, BEL, CAN, CHL, COL, CRI, CZE, DNK, EST, FIN, FRA, DEU, GRC, HUN, ISL, IRL, ISR, ITA, JPN, KOR, LVA, LTU, LUX, MEX, NLD, NZL, NOR, POL, PRT, SVK, SVN, ESP, SWE, CHE, TUR, GBR, USA.

Source: OECD International Migration Database.

Only a relatively small share of asylum applications resulted in positive decisions. For example, in the EU, between 2013 and 2021, the average recognition rate (positive decisions as a share of all decisions) stood at 19.0% at first instance and 9.5% at final instance (Eurostat, 2022^[10]). The highest first-instance recognition rates during 2013-2021 were recorded in Portugal (78.4%), Estonia (61.3%), Malta (54.3%), the Slovak Republic (50.0%) and Italy (46.3%). In total, between 2013 and 2021, 16 100 positive decisions were issued to Ukrainian asylum seekers in the EU (Eurostat, 2022^[10]).

Figure 2.5. Asylum requests from Ukrainian citizens, by country, total over 2000-2021

Persons



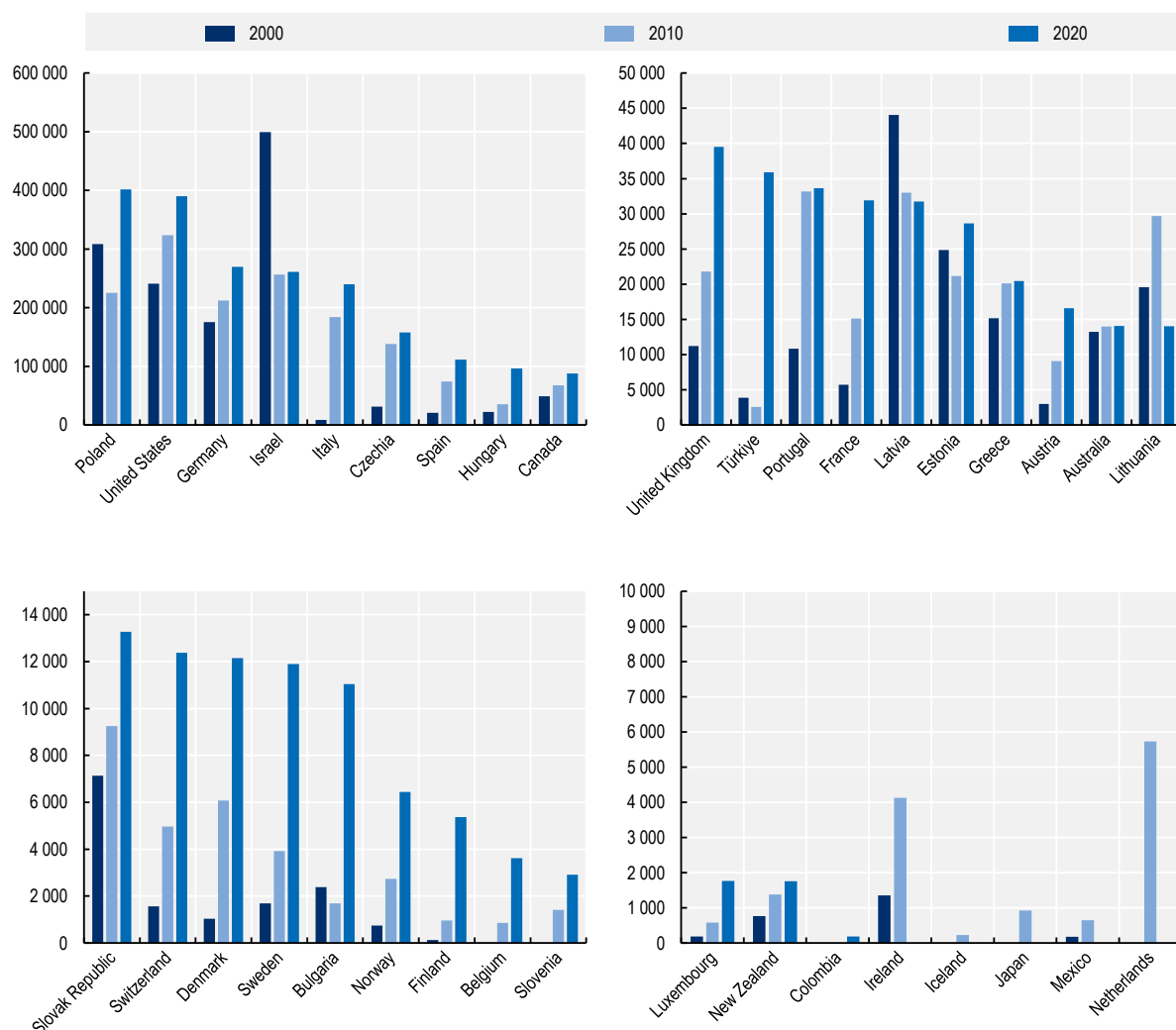
Source: OECD International Migration Database.

Emigration had resulted in a significant Ukrainian presence in OECD countries

As a result of these processes, by 2020, the number of Ukrainian first-generation emigrants³ stood at almost 6 million (State Migration Service of Ukraine, 2021^[21]), which represented roughly 14% of Ukraine's total population. By 2020 and 2021, nine OECD countries were among the world's top 11 destinations for first-generation Ukrainians. These included, in descending order: Poland, the United States, Germany, Israel, Italy, Czechia, Spain, Hungary, and Canada.⁴ Together, these countries hosted nearly 2.24 million Ukrainians in 2020. Poland overtook the United States as the leading OECD host country by 2020 (Figure 2.6).

Figure 2.6. Total number of Ukraine-born immigrants in selected OECD countries, 2000, 2010, 2020/21

Persons



Note: The OECD Database of Immigrants in the OECD Countries (DIOC) is a unique source of data on the stocks of first-generation migrants in the OECD destination countries. It provides valuable information on the number and evolution of the stocks of migrants, as well as their characteristics. One caveat, however, is that the OECD countries do not statistically define immigrants in a standardised way. Some countries have traditionally focussed on producing data on foreign residents (i.e.: Japan, South Korea), whilst others refer to the foreign-born population (settlement countries, i.e. Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the United States). For this reason, great care should be exercised when comparing the stocks of Ukrainians across destination countries (OECD, 2022^[22]). For more details on DIOC methodology, see <https://www.oecd.org/en/data/datasets/database-on-immigrants-in-oecd-and-non-oecd-countries.html>.

Source: DIOC. For Germany, the source is United Nations Population Division.

In addition to these Ukrainian-born individuals, many countries also hosted second-generation Ukrainians and persons of Ukrainian descent. In some countries, such as Canada, Israel and the United States, these diasporas were well-established and long-standing, composed of individuals whose ancestors had migrated as early as the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Box 2.1). In the Baltic countries, many Ukrainians had moved there while these states and Ukraine were still part of the former Soviet Union.

Box 2.1. Understanding some of the oldest Ukrainian diaspora communities

Ukrainian migration has a long history that began well before the country's independence in 1991, with scholars identifying several major pre-independence migration waves (Fedyuk and Kindler, 2016^[2]). The first major migration occurred between the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Before the First World War, it is estimated that over 400 000 Ukrainians moved to the United States, and over 170 000 to Canada. The fall of the Austro-Hungarian Empire led to additional mass movements from Western Ukraine to North America, but also to Argentina and Brazil (Lopukh, 2006^[23]; Bachynsky, 1994^[24]).

The next major wave of emigration took place between the two World Wars, when Ukraine lost the war for independence and faced Sovietisation and collectivisation. During the Second World War and in its aftermath, Ukraine experienced large-scale political emigration, forced deportations, and population displacements (Malynovska, 2018^[1]). An estimated 80 000 emigrated to the United States between 1947 and 1955 (Rodriguez and Batalova, 2022^[19]). The 1950s and 1960s were characterised mainly by the socialist mobilisation projects aimed at constructing infrastructure and developing the territories of Russia, Kazakhstan, and other Soviet republics, which led to many Ukrainians relocating to other parts of the Soviet Union.

From the 1970s onwards, the Soviet Government began authorising Jewish emigration. Nearly 81 000 Jews and their family members left Ukraine during the 1970s, and more than 100 000 departed between the late 1980s and the early 1990s. The main destinations were Israel, the United States and Germany, which operated programmes for Jewish asylum seekers from the countries of the Soviet bloc. Germany also implemented programmes for the repatriation of ethnic Germans (Malynovska, 2018^[1]). As a result, by 1991, Ukraine had developed a significant global diaspora, which continued to evolve following Ukraine's independence, as discussed above.

Canada

According to the 2016 Canadian Census, about 1.36 million people, or close to 4% of the Canadian population, reported at least one of their ethnic or cultural origins as Ukrainian (Stick and Hou, 2022^[14]). This includes about 20% of respondents who reported Ukrainian as their only ethnic or cultural origin (covering both first-generation and second-generation individuals, citizens and non-citizens of Canada), 29% who reported one other ethnic origin in addition to Ukrainian, and 51% who reported two or more other ethnic origins. The most common additional origin being British, Polish, German and other European, as well as Canadian. About 2% of respondents with Ukrainian ethnic origins spoke mainly Ukrainian at home (Stick and Hou, 2022^[14]).

Israel

Ukrainian emigration to Israel was marked by large-scale voluntary resettlement between the 1970s and the 1990s. Over time, many Ukrainians later moved from Israel to other countries, such as Canada, while some returned to Ukraine in the late 2000s. Between 2014 and 2020, migration from Ukraine to Israel began to grow again, with about 41 000 Ukrainian Jews moving to Israel. As a result, by 2022, approximately 5 to 7% of Israel's population had Ukrainian origin, equating to roughly 500 000 to 700 000 individuals, with an additional 200 000 Ukrainian citizens eligible for Israeli citizenship (Wojnarowicz, 2022^[16]).

United States

The total number of Ukrainian-born persons in the United States, including naturalised citizens, lawful permanent residents, temporary migrants such as foreign students, humanitarian migrants such as

refugees and asylees, and unauthorised migrants rose from 240 690 in 2010 to 390 151 in 2020.¹ At the same time, the number of individuals with Ukrainian ancestry (defined as a person's self-identification of their ancestry or ethnic origin and including descent, roots, heritage, or place of birth of the person or their ancestors), whether born abroad or in the United States, with one or several ancestries, stood at 716 780 in the mid-1980s, rising to 1 015 209 in 2020. This growth reflects the long-standing history of Ukrainian immigration to the country (Jenkins et al., 2022^[25]).

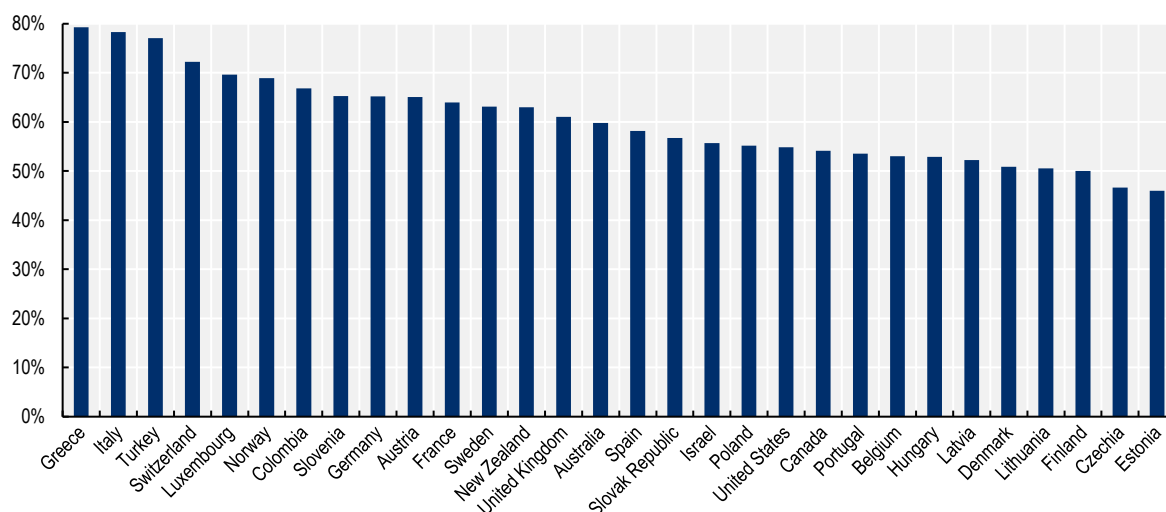
1. Based on Database of Immigrants in the OECD Countries (DIOC), with American Community Survey (ACS) and Current Population Survey (CPS), Census Bureau, as the original source. This does not include children born abroad to US citizen parents.

Prior to 2022, Ukrainians in the OECD were already predominantly female, working-age, highly educated, and employed

On the eve of the large-scale external displacement crisis that began in 2022 as a result of Russia's invasion, the profiles of Ukrainians living in OECD countries were highly heterogeneous. Still, several common patterns can be identified.

In the vast majority of countries, the share of female first-generation Ukrainian immigrants was higher than that of men (Figure 2.7). The share of women exceeded 70% in Switzerland, Greece, Italy and Türkiye. The only two countries where the proportion of women was lower than that of men were Czechia (47%) and Estonia (46%). These differences across countries largely reflect pre-existing patterns of labour migration, particularly the sectoral distribution of employment characterised by gender imbalances. This includes the predominance of women in the care sector in countries such as Greece (Nikolova and Marouf, 2016^[26]) and Italy (Vianello, 2016^[27]), and of men in the construction sector in countries such as Portugal⁵ (Fonseca and Pereira, 2016^[28]).

Figure 2.7. Share of women among Ukraine-born immigrants in selected OECD countries, 2020/21



Source: DIOC.

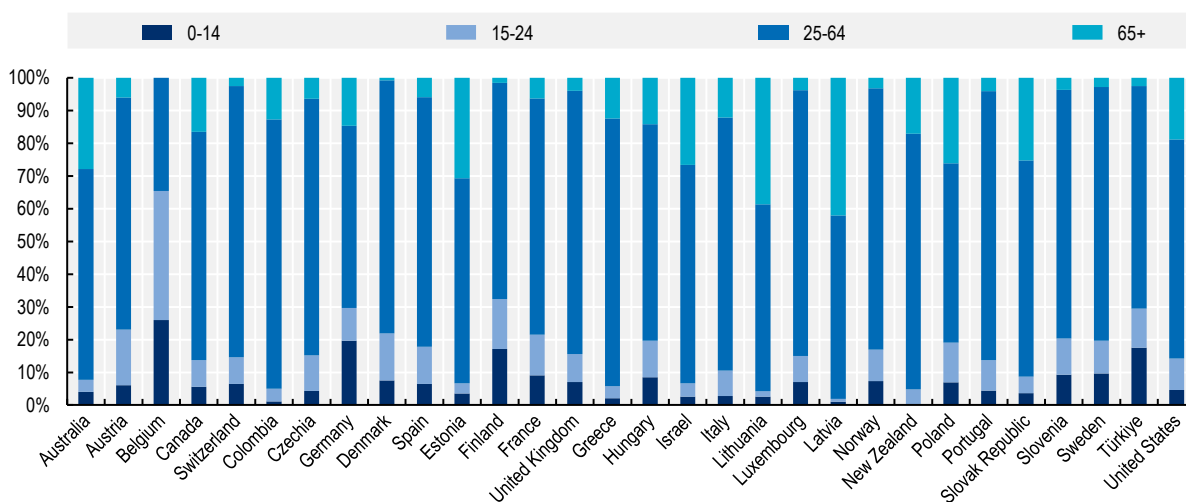
Also reflecting previous labour migration patterns, most first-generation immigrants from Ukraine were of prime working age (25-64) across most OECD countries for which data are available (Figure 2.8). In 2020-2021, the average share of Ukrainians aged 25 to 64 across 30 OECD countries was 65.3%.⁶ This

share exceeded 80% in New Zealand, the United Kingdom, Luxembourg, Greece, Portugal, Colombia and Switzerland.

In 2020-2021, Denmark, Finland, Austria, and particularly Belgium had a higher share of younger Ukrainians aged 15 to 24 compared to other countries. This reflected earlier family reunification processes and an increase in student migration.

The largest shares of Ukrainian children, as a proportion of the total Ukrainian migrant population, were recorded in Belgium (26%) and Germany (19.7%). In some countries, particularly in Europe, the share of children among Ukrainians was relatively small, reflecting earlier labour migration patterns and the prevalence of transnational families, where migrants' relatives remained in Ukraine and worked in other EU countries (Leontiyeva, 2016^[29]; Banfi and Boccagni, 2013^[30]).

Figure 2.8. Age groups of Ukraine-born immigrants persons in selected OECD countries, 2020/21



Source: DIOC.

The proportion of older Ukrainian-born individuals was highest in the three Baltic countries, where nearly one-third of the Ukrainian-born population belonged to this age group. This pattern reflected shared historical ties and long-standing mobility trends dating back to the Soviet era.

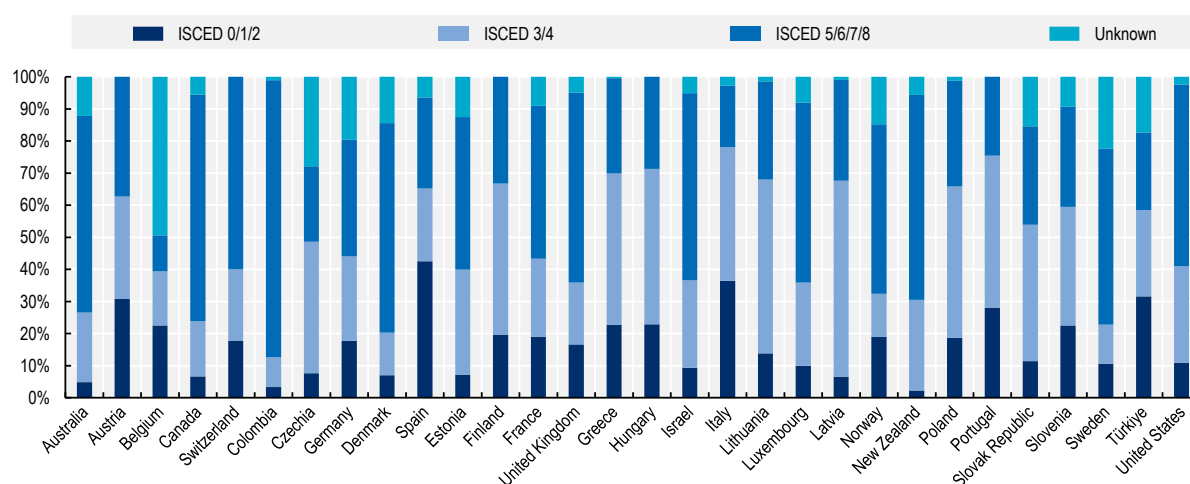
Ukrainian first-generation immigrants showed a wide range of educational attainment levels (Figure 2.9). On average, 33.5% had an upper-secondary or post-secondary non-tertiary level of education, while 39.7% had completed higher education. In 12 countries, including Norway, Sweden, the United Kingdom, Luxembourg, the United States, Israel, Switzerland, Australia, New Zealand and Denmark, the share of Ukrainians with higher education exceeded 50%. In Canada and Colombia, it reached more than 70%.

In most OECD countries with available data, the majority of Ukrainians were economically active. The share of those employed within the Ukrainian immigrant population aged 15 and above stood at over 60% in Germany, New Zealand, Denmark, Norway, Latvia, Lithuania, Italy, Austria and Portugal, reaching a record high of 77.9% in Israel (Figure 2.11). The employment, however, did not always match their educational profiles. In several European countries, a significant share of Ukrainians were overqualified for their jobs and worked in low-skilled or semi-skilled, lower-paid positions despite their generally high levels of education (Fedyuk and Kindler, 2016^[2]). By contrast, in the United States, almost half of Ukrainians were employed in management, business, science, and arts occupations (Rodriguez and Batalova, 2022^[19]).

In terms of duration of stay, two main groups can be distinguished. The first and largest group consisted of Ukrainian-born individuals who had lived in their country of destination for more than ten years. On average, 55% of Ukrainians across 30 OECD countries with available data fell into this group. The highest shares of long-term residents were found in Lithuania (86.2%), Latvia (85.9%), Israel (84.7%), the United States (77.3%), and Australia (76.5%).

The second largest group comprised recent Ukrainian immigrants who had lived in their country of destination for five years or less. On average, 30.9% of Ukrainians were in this group. The largest shares of recent arrivals were observed in Hungary (67.6%), Belgium (56.7%), Switzerland (56.2%), Finland (54.3%), Germany (51.8%), Denmark (50.2%), and Poland (49.1%). The share of Ukrainians with five to ten years of residence was the smallest across most countries.

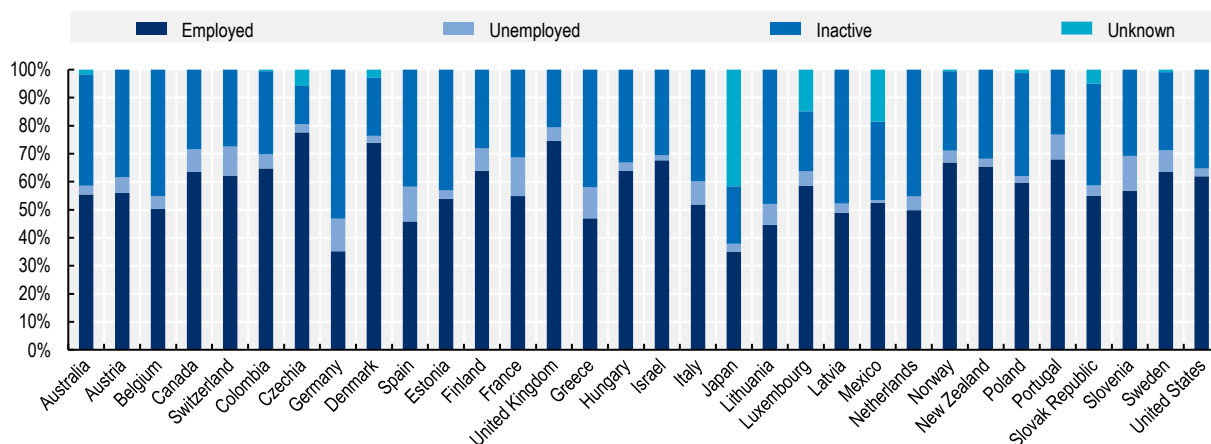
Figure 2.9. Education levels of Ukraine-born immigrants in selected OECD countries, 2020/21



Note: ISCED levels correspond to the following: 0/1/2: less than primary, primary, and lower secondary; 3/4: upper secondary, post-secondary non-tertiary; 5/6/7/8: short-cycle tertiary, bachelor's or equivalent, master's or equivalent, doctoral or equivalent.

Source: DIOC.

Figure 2.10. Labour force status of Ukraine-born immigrants aged 15+ in OECD countries, 2020/21

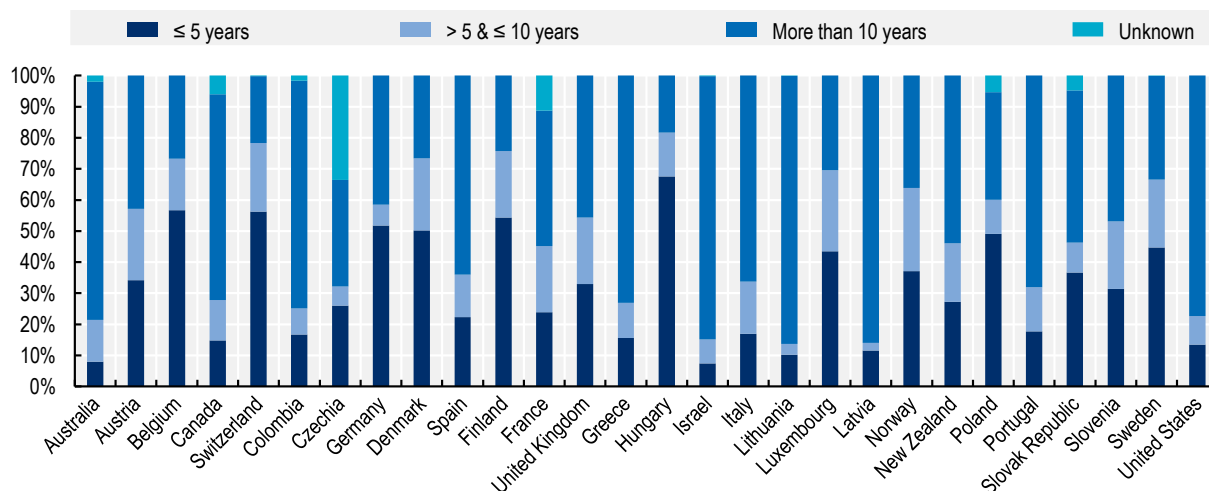


Note: Care should be exercised not to interpret the share of unemployed as unemployment rate; as in this Figure, the base is total population aged 15+ including inactive; rather than total labour force (only economically active population).

Source: DIOC.

This dynamic has created a layered migration landscape in certain countries, where older waves of migration have coexist with more recent arrivals. The situation in Germany illustrates this particularly well: 41.5% of Ukrainian-born population belonged to earlier migration waves, 51.8% represented recent arrivals, and only 6.7% fell into the category of medium-term migrants.

Figure 2.11. Duration of stay of Ukraine-born immigrants in OECD countries, 2020/21



Source: DIOC.

Ukraine was already in the midst of challenging internal displacement situation

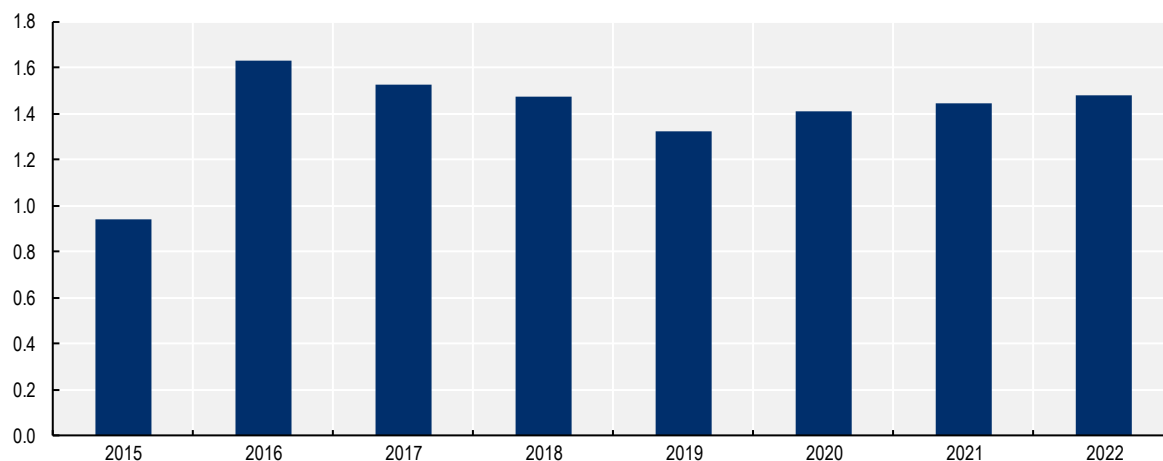
Alongside external migration, Ukraine had been experiencing internal displacement since 2014. This began with the illegal annexation of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol by the Russian Federation, followed by the start of military aggression in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions. Later that year, the Russian Federation occupied parts of Donetsk and Luhansk regions, provoking a new and more intense wave of internal displacement.

The first registrations of internally displaced persons (IDPs) took place in 2014. By 1 January 2015, 940 854 people had registered as IDPs from the temporarily occupied territories of Donetsk and Luhansk regions, the Autonomous Republic of Crimea, and the city of Sevastopol. Seven years after, on the eve of the Russia's full-scale aggression in February 2022, 1 478 135 IDPs were still registered in Ukraine (Figure 2.12). Out of those, 60% of IDPs were women and 52% were elderly. Most IDPs had remained within their oblast of origin or had moved to a neighbouring oblast (Figure 2.13).

The actual number of individuals experiencing displacement, however, was difficult to establish. Some IDPs were reluctant to register due to administrative burdens or fear of stigmatisation, especially because registration was recorded in internal identity documents (Mikheieva and Kuznetsova, 2023^[31]). In this sense, the actual number of IDPs could be significantly higher. At the same time, some people living in areas not controlled by the Government of Ukraine registered as IDPs in government-controlled areas to access benefits, while continuing to move between the two. In such cases, registration figures may have overstated the number of IDPs, at least in some locations (Vološevych and Kostiuchenko, 2017^[32]).

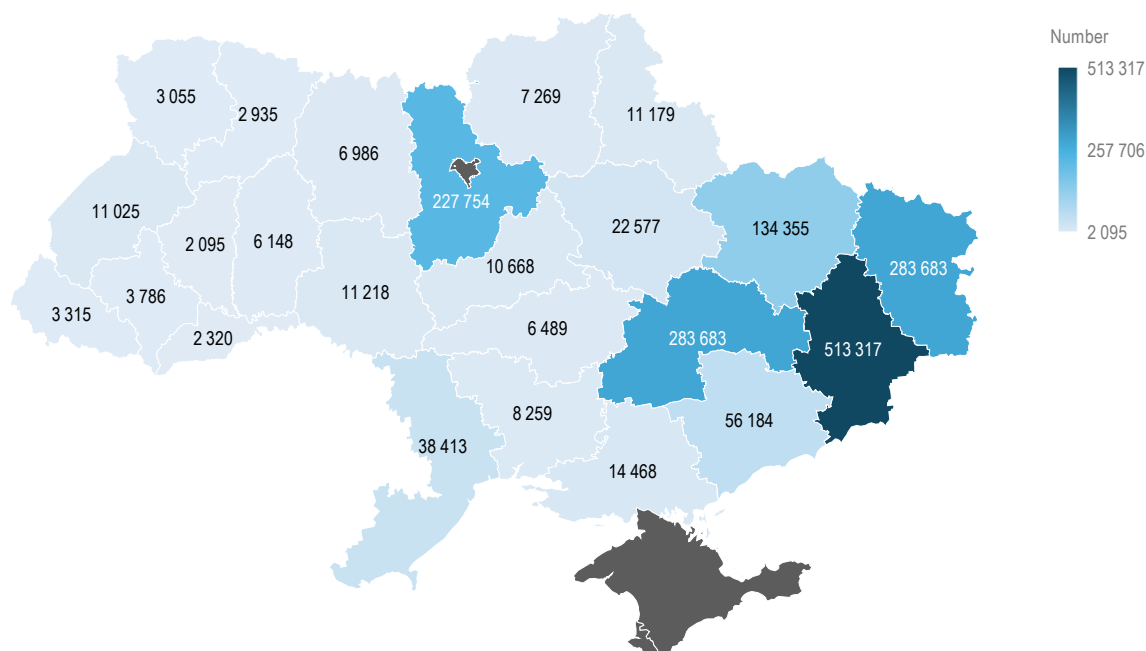
Figure 2.12. Total number of IDPs prior to Russia's full-scale invasion, 2015-2022

Millions, data as of 1 January of respective year



Source: Ministry of Social Policy, Family and Unity of Ukraine.

Figure 2.13. Distribution of IDPs across the oblasts of Ukraine prior to Russia's full-scale invasion, 1 January 2022



Note: The grey colour indicates that no data is available.

Source: Ministry of Social Policy, Family and Unity of Ukraine.

Prior to 2022, Ukraine already had a certain experience of tackling the issues of return

In the three decades since independence, Ukraine has experienced several waves of return migration, involving both its citizens and individuals of Ukrainian descent (whether ethnic or territorial). Three distinct periods and corresponding categories of returnees can be identified.

The first category includes those who returned to Ukraine in the early 1990s following independence and the opening of borders. Between 1991 and 1992 alone, over 1 million individuals returned to Ukraine as permanent residents (Malynovska, 2006^[33]). This flow continued thereafter, though at a sharply declining rate: for example, in 2004, only 38 600 additional individuals resettled in Ukraine. The vast majority of these returns were repatriations from other former Soviet republics, mainly the Russian Federation and Kazakhstan. They comprised individuals and their descendants who had previously been deported or forcibly relocated from Ukraine, as well as those who had left for work or study within the Soviet Union. Among them were ethnic Ukrainians, but also Crimean Tatars, Armenians, Bulgarians, Germans and Greeks. A smaller group also returned from Central European countries, primarily military personnel and their families (Malynovska, 2006^[33]).

The second wave consisted mainly of Ukrainian labour migrants returning in the 2000s. Following a major wave of temporary labour migration in the late 1990s and early 2000s, at least 1 million individuals with recent migration experience were recorded in Ukraine in 2007 (European Training Foundation, 2008^[34]). By 2010, 37.5% of returning Ukrainians had moved back after completing their migration objective, typically related to earning and saving money, or after receiving a more promising opportunity in Ukraine. Around 2.5% returned to start their own business or another project, and about 5% returned upon retirement. For the remaining 55%, the return was prompted by disappointment, limited integration, hardships encountered in host countries, or deportation orders (Kupets, 2011^[35]).

Partly in response to these developments, several pilot initiatives promoting reintegration of Ukrainian labour migrants and their families were launched, in some cases in co-operation with host countries, for instance, Greece (Nikolova and Marouf, 2016^[26]). However, the demand for such services remained limited.

The third category and wave of returnees includes Ukrainian migrants who received an order to leave their host country, typically due to irregular migration status or following a rejected asylum application. Over 2014 and 2021, approximately 197 000 such orders were issued to Ukrainians by EU countries, and around 140 000 individuals returned following an order to leave (Eurostat, 2025^[36]; European Parliament, 2024^[37]).

These return movements have not only influenced Ukraine's overall migration dynamics but have also shaped public discourse, policy development, and societal attitudes towards returnees well before Russia's full-scale invasion. Notably, the question of return and reintegration of Ukrainian labour migrants and forced returnees, as well as building relations with growing Ukrainian communities abroad, began to feature prominently in Ukrainian public debate and policy discussions from the early 2000s, as explored in the next chapter.

Mass displacement induced by Russia's full-scale aggression against Ukraine

The large-scale, unprovoked aggression by the Russian Federation against Ukraine, launched on 24 February 2022, triggered one of the largest and fastest displacement crises in recent history. Approximately one-quarter of Ukraine's population was forced to leave their homes. While many sought refuge abroad, others were displaced within Ukraine, facing severe humanitarian challenges.

Daily outflows from Ukraine were exceptionally high during the first days of the full-scale invasion, peaking at over 200 000 border crossings from Ukraine on 6 March 2022 (OECD, 2022^[22]). The majority of those fleeing initially entered Poland, which recorded more than 6 million border crossings from Ukraine between February and September 2022. Over the same period, 1.3 million people entered Hungary, 1.2 million entered Romania, 780 000 entered the Slovak Republic and 600 000 crossed into Moldova (OECD, 2022^[22]; UNHCR, 2025^[38]). A significant share of displaced Ukrainians later continued onward migration to other destination countries.

Outflows from Ukraine progressively declined from the third quarter of 2022 onwards, and cross-border movements began to occur in both directions. Nevertheless, outflows from Ukraine continued to exceed inflows throughout 2024 and the first half of 2025 (UNHCR, 2025^[39]).

In 2023, 40% of respondents interviewed at border crossings reported departing Ukraine for the first time since the start of the full-scale invasion. This figure fell to 27% in 2024 and 8% in the first quarter of 2025. In 2025, 10% of respondents indicated that they had been internally displaced before leaving Ukraine (UNHCR, 2025^[39]).

The enactment of legislation in August 2025 permitting men aged 18-22 to leave Ukraine has resulted in a noticeable new increase in departures. By late 2025, however, it remains premature to determine whether these movements represent permanent migration or short-term visits. The profile and distribution of externally displaced Ukrainians continue to evolve.

By September 2022, more than 4.5 million displaced Ukrainians (see also Box 2.2) had been recorded across the EU and other OECD countries, with the majority (4 million) registered under temporary protection or similar national protection schemes (OECD, 2022^[22]). By June 2025, this figure had risen to 5.1 million, of whom 4.5 million resided in the EU. According to the Surveys with Arriving Migrants from Ukraine (SAM – UKR), by mid-2025, 20% of displaced Ukrainians in surveyed European countries had left Ukraine after 2022 (EUAA, 2025^[40]).

Box 2.2. Terminology used to describe displacement

In the early period following the onset of full-scale invasion, many international observers referred to Ukrainians leaving their homes as refugees, a term commonly used to describe people who have fled their country to escape conflict, violence or persecution and have sought safety in another state. In international law, however, the 1951 Refugee Convention provides a narrower definition, recognising as refugees only those with a well-founded fear of persecution on specific grounds such as race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion. Regional legal instruments in Africa and Latin America have expanded this definition, but generally refugee status remains a specific and relatively limited form of international protection.

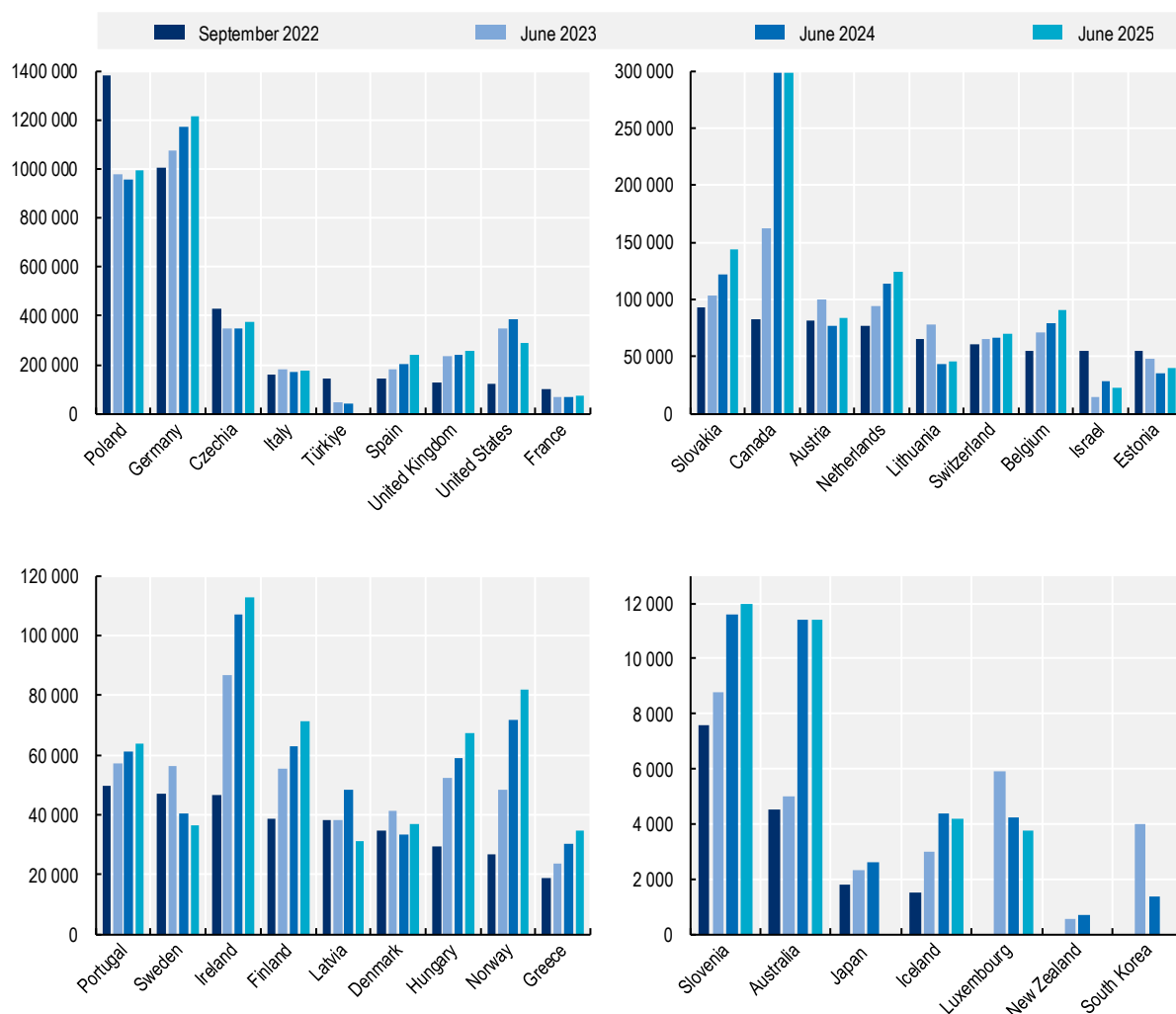
The vast majority of Ukrainians who fled abroad have benefitted from temporary protection or similar national protection schemes in host countries rather than refugee status. Only a small proportion applied for asylum, and not all applicants have received formal recognition as refugees.

To encompass both Ukrainians displaced within the country and those displaced abroad, the broader term displaced persons is used. To distinguish between the two groups, externally displaced refers to those who have fled Ukraine and sought protection abroad, regardless of their legal status (for example, asylum seekers, refugees, or beneficiaries of temporary protection), while internally displaced refers to those displaced within Ukraine's borders.

In this report, the term displaced persons is used as an overarching concept. Where differentiation is required, the report refers to externally displaced persons (EDPs) and internally displaced persons (IDPs).

Between 2022 and 2025, the distribution of Ukrainians displaced by the war of aggression changed substantially across OECD countries (Figure 2.14). Initially, Poland was the main receiving country in absolute terms, with 1.38 million Ukrainians registered for temporary protection by September 2022. It was followed by Germany, with about 1 million, and Czechia, with more than 400 000 beneficiaries of temporary protection at that time. In 2023, Germany overtook Poland as the main host country.

Figure 2.14. Evolution of the total number of externally displaced Ukrainians in OECD countries



Note: These figures reflect individuals displaced from Ukraine, including those who have been granted refugee status, temporary protection or similar statuses, or other forms of stay (from 24 February 2022). The figure for Canada includes only those who have arrived under the CUAET programme. For the United States, these figures combine both U4U (240 000) and Temporary Protected Status (50 000). Countries are ordered by the number of displaced Ukrainians as of September 2022.

Source: OECD (2022^[22]), *International Migration Outlook 2022*, <https://doi.org/10.1787/30fe16d2-en>; OECD (2023^[41]), *International Migration Outlook 2023*, <https://doi.org/10.1787/b0f40584-en>; OECD (2024^[42]), *International Migration Outlook 2024*, <https://doi.org/10.1787/50b0353e-en>; OECD (2025^[43]), *International Migration Outlook 2025*, <https://doi.org/10.1787/ae26c893-en>.

Between 2024 and 2025, the largest absolute increases in the number of Ukrainians displaced by the war of aggression were recorded in Germany (+48 050), Spain (+36 970) and Poland (+36 675). During the same period, other countries, including Israel, Latvia, Türkiye, Sweden and the United States, registered decreases in the number of displaced Ukrainians holding legal statuses linked to displacement. These decreases may, to some extent, reflect transitions to other residence permits and reduced visibility in official statistics, rather than necessarily indicating returns or onward movements.

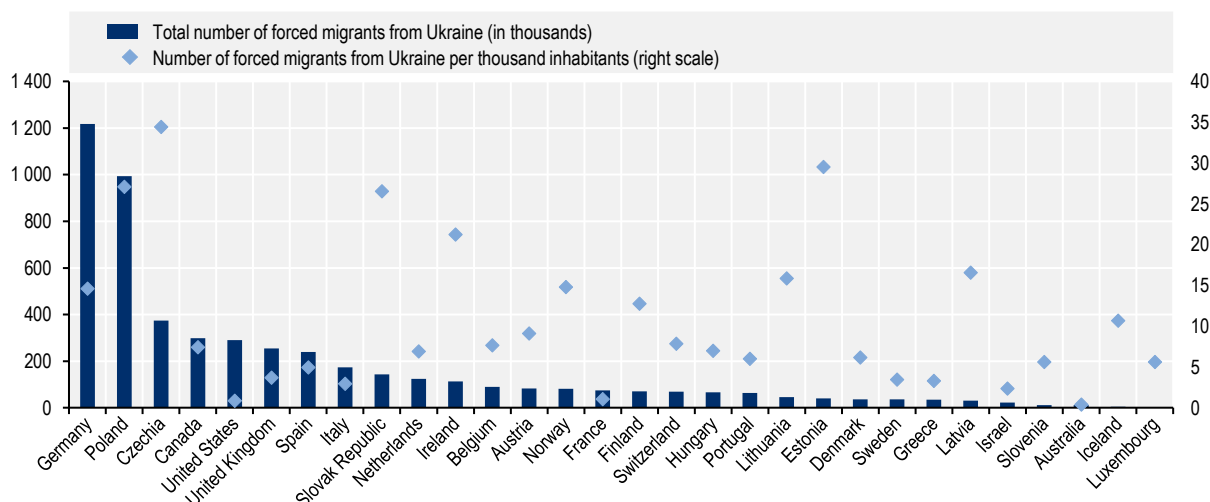
By mid-2025, Germany remained the largest host country, with 1.22 million displaced Ukrainians, followed by Poland (994 000), Czechia (374 000), Canada (298 000) and the United States (290 000). Together,

these five countries accounted for more than 60% of all displaced Ukrainians in the OECD (OECD, 2025^[43]).

In per capita terms, in 2025, Czechia hosted the largest share of displaced Ukrainians (34.5 displaced persons per 1 000 inhabitants), followed by Estonia, Poland and the Slovak Republic. Ireland, Latvia and Lithuania also ranked among the top host countries relative to population size (Figure 2.15).

Figure 2.15. Number of externally displaced Ukrainians recorded in OECD countries, June 2025

Absolute numbers and per thousand of total population

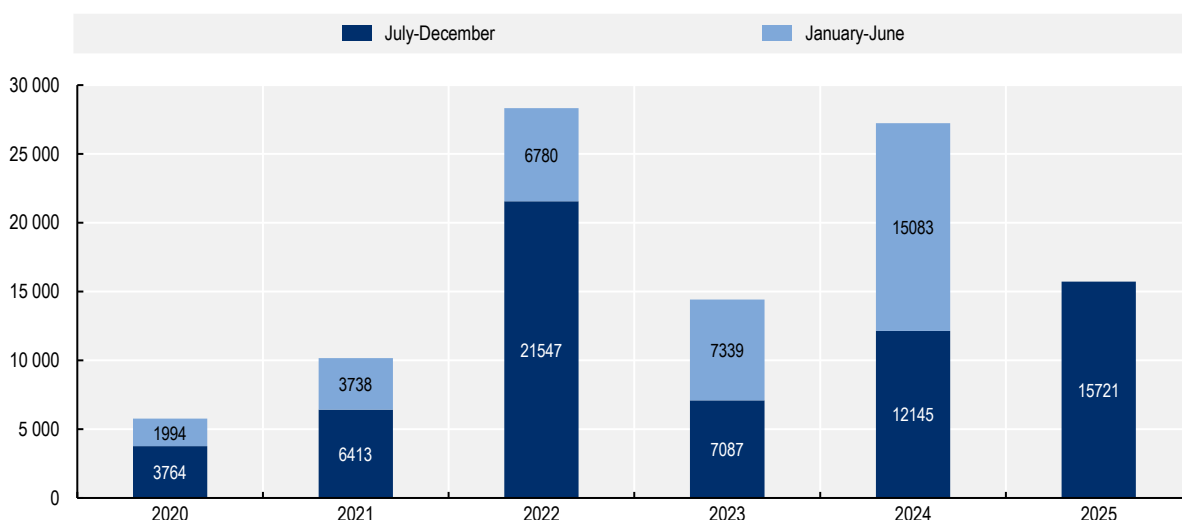


Source: OECD (2025^[43]), *International Migration Outlook 2025*, <https://doi.org/10.1787/ae26c893-en>.

From the onset of the war of aggression, OECD countries acted rapidly by activate various emergency mechanisms and Ukraine-specific protection schemes to facilitate the large inflow of displaced persons (OECD, 2022^[22]). In most countries that introduced such frameworks, the entry and registration of displaced Ukrainians took place under these mechanisms. However, as countries such as Australia, Canada and the United States have closed their programmes, displaced Ukrainians arriving later have had to rely on alternative entry pathways as well.

Many host countries, particularly within the EU, have also observed a rise in the number of Ukrainians lodging asylum applications. Overall, however, the number of asulym applications remains small compared to registrations under temporary and similar protection statuses. Nevertheless, asylum applications reached over 28 000 in the EU+⁷ countries in 2022. While a decline was recorded in 2023, the number of applications has been rising again since (Figure 2.16). In the first half of 2025, almost 80% of all applications were lodged in France and Poland. Across the EU+, the recognition rate for Ukrainian asylum seekers stands at around 73% in 2024 and in the first half of 2025 (EUAA, 2025^[40]) – a significant increase from 19% observed between 2013 and 2021 (Eurostat, 2022^[10]).

Figure 2.16. Number of applications for asylum by Ukrainian citizens in the EU+ countries



Note: EU+ refers to the Member States of the European Union together with four associated Schengen countries, namely Norway, Switzerland, Iceland and Liechtenstein.

Source: Early Warning and Preparedness System data of the European Union Agency for Asylum, as of 6 August 2025.

The profile of externally displaced Ukrainians has shifted over time. The martial law in effect since 24 February 2022 prohibits most adult men aged 18 to 60 from leaving the country. As a result, the initial outflows from Ukraine were comprised mainly of women, children and, to a lesser extent, elderly. In 2022, in virtually all host countries, at least 70% of displaced Ukrainian adults were women, while, on average, about a third were minors, while just around 4-6% were aged 65 and over (OECD, 2023^[44]). The share of adult men, however, has increased over time (EUAA, 2025^[40]), both because some women have returned to Ukraine and some men have since left Ukraine to live abroad.

Approximately two-thirds of those displaced in 2022 had completed tertiary education, with more than 40% of responding adults holding a Master's degree or higher (OECD, 2023^[45]). The educational attainment of displaced Ukrainians therefore considerably exceeds that of other refugee groups in the OECD, as well as that of the general populations of Ukraine and most host countries (OECD, 2024^[46]).

Displaced Ukrainians have integrated relatively well into the labour markets of receiving countries and, overall, perform better than other refugees groups. In 2024, Poland (78%), Lithuania (72%), and the United Kingdom (69%) recorded the highest employment rates, while Czechia, Denmark, Estonia and the Netherlands also reported rates close to or exceeding 60%. Nevertheless, outcomes continue to vary considerably between countries. In Spain (17%), Latvia (33%) and Norway (31%), employment rates remain comparatively low. In Switzerland, despite a significant increase, fewer than one in three displaced Ukrainians were in employment in 2024. In Austria, employment rates more than doubled between 2022 and 2024, albeit from low initial levels. Between 2023 and 2024, the United States recorded the largest year-on-year increase, with a 21 percentage point (p.p.) rise in employment rates among recent Ukrainian arrivals. Numerous factors explain these differences, including different integration policies adopted by host countries (EMN/OECD, 2024^[47]).

Table 2.1. Employment rates of externally displaced Ukrainians in selected OECD countries

Percentages of the labour force

Country	2022	2023	2024	Source
Austria	15	21	41	Austrian Employment Service (AMS)
Czechia*	35	48	63	Public Opinion Research Centre of the Institute of Sociology of the Czech Academy of Sciences
Denmark	41	59	62	Integrationsbarometer
Estonia	42	54	59	Statistics Estonia
Finland	22	22	35	VATT Datahuone
France		32	42	Ministry of the Interior
Germany	19	25	31	Bundesagentur für Arbeit
Ireland	27	35	35	Central Statistics Office of Ireland (CSO)
Japan*		47	54	Nippon Foundation
Latvia	30	30	33	State Revenue Service of Latvia
Lithuania		66	72	Government of Lithuania
Netherlands	44	55	59	Statistics Netherlands
Norway			31	Statistics Norway
Poland*		71	78	National Bank of Poland
Spain	13	15	17	Ministry of Inclusion, Social Security, and Migration
Sweden*		56	66	International Organisation of Migration (IOM), Government of Sweden
Switzerland	13	20	28	State Secretariat for Migration SEM
United Kingdom*		52	69	Office for National Statistics (ONS)
United States*	33*	40	61	US Census Bureau, US Bureau of Labor Statistics

Note: For countries marked with an asterisk (*), survey data rather than administrative data have been used. Employment rates for 2022 and 2023 are in most cases from the September of respective years.

Source: OECD (2025^[43]), *International Migration Outlook 2025*, <https://doi.org/10.1787/ae26c893-en>.

In many countries, however, Ukrainians face skills mismatches and are often employed in low-skilled, low-paid jobs, frequently under less favourable working conditions (IMPACT Initiatives, 2025^[48]). Language barriers and childcare responsibilities remain among the main obstacles to accessing employment, and to securing better-quality jobs in particular. The most recent round of the Socio-Economic Insights Survey (SEIS) in ten European countries⁸ found that, although the employment levels have improved and the financial vulnerability of displaced Ukrainians has decreased over the past year, one in five still lives with an income below the poverty line (UNHCR et al., 2025^[49]). However, experiences vary between countries, with poverty rates among Ukrainian EDPs reaching 51% in Latvia (compared to 15% among Latvians), 41% in Lithuania (compared to 13% among Lithuanians), and 38% in the Slovak Republic (compared to 10% among Slovaks).

Certain household profiles face particularly high risks of poverty (UNHCR et al., 2025^[49]). Almost half of individuals living with an older adult (65+) reported an equivalised disposable income below the poverty threshold. Among those living with household members with disabilities or with mental health and psychosocial support needs, the average shares across the countries stood at 41% and 27% respectively.

The SEIS survey also found that housing expenses were considerably higher for displaced Ukrainians than for host country nationals, with accommodation costs representing an estimated 17% of disposable income for host country nationals (including mortgage payments), compared with 32% for displaced Ukrainians (UNHCR et al., 2025^[49]). This implies that the latter have much less of their income remaining for other needs. The findings further indicate that higher poverty levels among Ukrainians are associated with poorer living conditions, more limited healthcare coverage, skipping meals, and greater frequency of children being out of school.

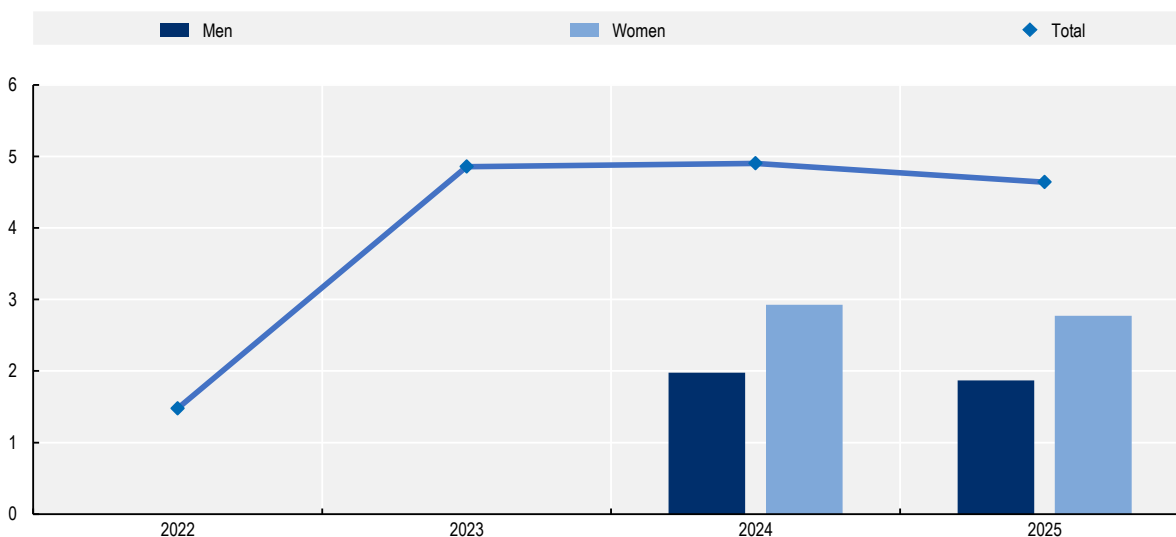
The number of internally displaced persons in Ukraine has surged since 2022

The war of aggression has led to a sharp increase in the number of internally displaced persons (IDPs). During 2022, their number more than tripled, rising from 1.48 million registered IDPs on 1 January 2022 to 4.85 million a year later. Between 2024 and 2025, the number of registered IDPs decreased by 5.8%, reaching 4.64 million (Figure 2.15.). The actual number of IDPs is considered to be lower than the official figure, by some estimates around 950 000 individuals (IOM, 2025^[50]), since many do not deregister after returning home or moving abroad (KSE Institute, 2025^[51]).

The oblasts of Zakarpattia, Chernivtsi, Ternopil and Ivano-Frankivsk in western Ukraine recorded the largest increases in IDP numbers compared with previous years. Nonetheless, as of 2025, 1.3 million IDPs were located in eastern Ukraine. Five oblasts, Donetsk, Kharkiv, Dnipropetrovsk, Luhansk, Kyiv, together with the City of Kyiv, accounted for half of all IDPs in 2025. Women represented almost 60% of the internally displaced population that year.

Figure 2.17. Stocks of IDPs since the beginning of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine

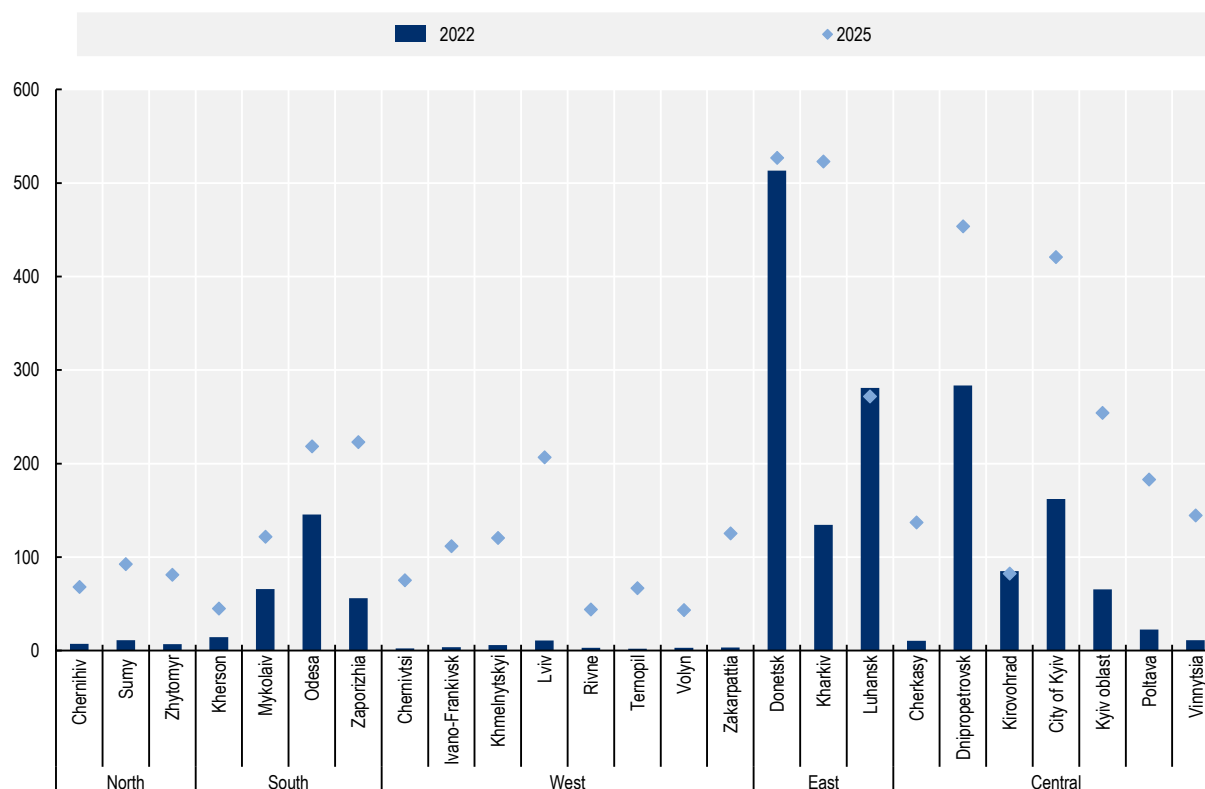
Millions, as of 1 January of each respective year



Source: Ministry of Social Policy, Family and Unity of Ukraine.

Figure 2.18. Evolution of the number of IDPs, by oblast

Thousands, data as of 1 January of respective year



Source: Ministry of Social Policy, Family and Unity of Ukraine.

Some displaced Ukrainians have already returned despite continuing outflows

Amid the mass displacement caused by the invasion, a substantial number of displaced persons had returned to Ukraine by 2025, primarily to their places of habitual residence, either temporarily or permanently, even as new displacements continued to occur. Although estimates vary, often because of different definitions of what constituted return (Box 2.3), evidence suggests that the main wave of returns occurred in late spring and summer 2022, following the Armed Forces of Ukraine pushback of the Russian army and the liberation of parts of Ukrainian territory.

Box 2.3. What is the definition of return?

Ukraine currently has no formal legal or statistical definition of a returnee, whether referring to those returning after internal or external displacement or following voluntary migration. In its absence, various organisations collecting data on returns have adopted their own operational criteria for statistical purposes.

The International Organization for Migration (IOM) defines “returnees” as individuals who have returned to their habitual place of residence after a period of displacement of minimum two weeks since February 2022, whether from abroad or from within Ukraine (IOM, 2025^[52]). The current definition does not specify whether it encompasses both permanent and temporary returns.

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) defines a “refugee returnee” as “a former refugee who has returned from a host country to their country of origin or former habitual residence, spontaneously or in an organised fashion, with the intention of remaining there permanently and who is yet to be fully integrated” (UNHCR, 2024^[53]). In this context, the term “refugee” is used to refer to persons forcibly displaced abroad.

The IMPACT Initiatives definition considers returnees to be individuals who “were refugees from Ukraine for a period longer than one month and have since returned either to their home settlement or elsewhere in Ukraine”. Here too, the term “refugee” is used as a synonym to forcibly displaced abroad (IMPACT, 2024^[54]).

Because of these differing definitions, statistical data from these sources are not directly comparable.

According to the IOM, as of April 2025 an estimated 4.1 million returnees (as defined in Box 2.3) were recorded in Ukraine (Figure 2.19). The majority returned from internal displacement, particularly from another oblast (47.9%), while 25.1% returned from abroad. Around 40% of all returnees came back already in 2022 (IOM, 2025^[52]). Since then, new returns have continued, although at a slower and declining rate. The observed decline in the total number of returnees (Figure 2.19) can be explained by new displacement, including moves abroad, as well as by the fact that some returns have been of temporary nature. For example, in January 2023, only 80% of returnees indicated that they were planning to remain in their homes and 15% have been in their homes for one month or less (IOM, 2023^[55]).

UNHCR estimates the number of returnees to be higher, at 5.8 million as of early 2025 (UNHCR, 2025^[56]). Among those returning from abroad and surveyed in July and August 2024, 51% had returned between May and December 2022, and an additional 40% during the first half of 2023. Nine per cent returned in 2024 (UNHCR, 2024^[53]).

According to IMPACT, as of early 2024, 81% of returnees from abroad had gone back to their home settlements, while 19% had moved to another settlement in Ukraine (IMPACT, 2024^[54]). By August 2024, more than one-quarter of all surveyed returnees were living in frontline areas,⁹ and 5% were residing in frontline areas where active hostilities were still taking place (IMPACT Initiatives, 2024^[57]).

This wide range of estimates underscores the need for Ukraine to have a clearer definition (at least for statistical purposes) of who can be considered a returnee.

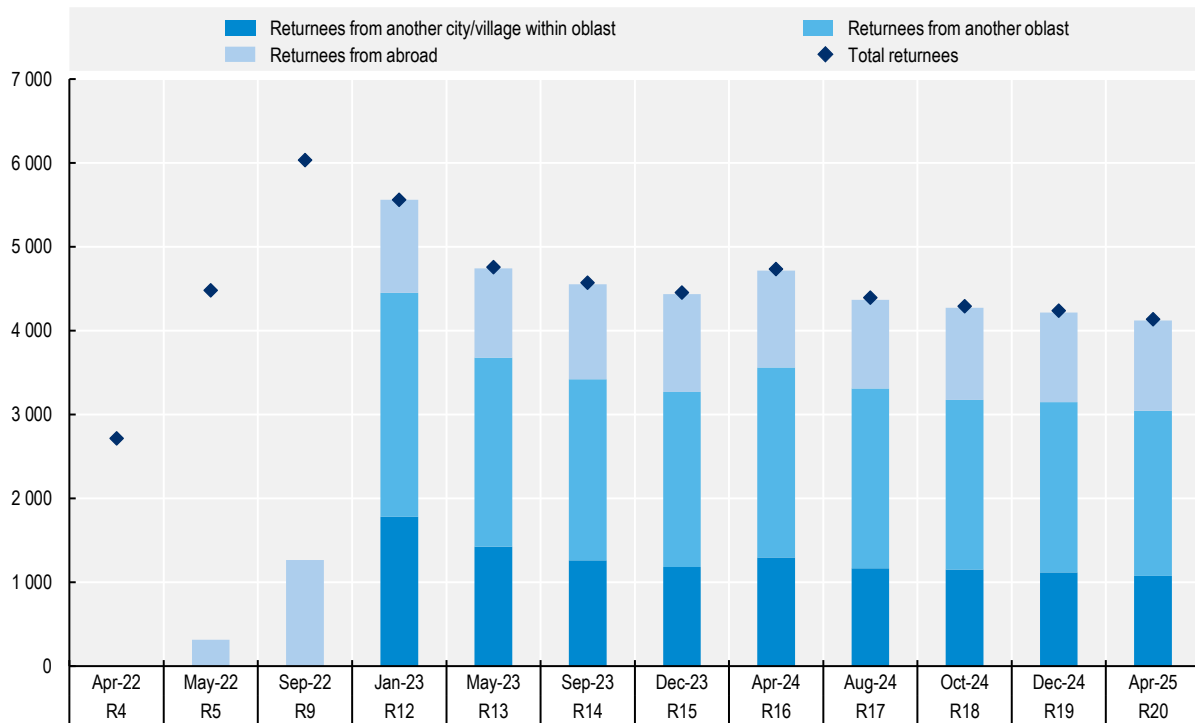
In addition, many displaced persons have undertaken short-term visits back home, both from internal displacement or from abroad (Figure 2.20). The main reasons for these visits include seeing family members, retrieving documents, checking on property and assessing the overall situation (UNHCR, 2023^[58]). According to the UNHCR’s Regional Intentions Surveys conducted in spring 2023 (UNHCR, 2023^[59]), nearly 40% of Ukrainians displaced in Europe had visited Ukraine at least once since their initial

displacement. Such visits can help maintain family and community ties, provide an opportunity to assess the situation on the ground, and may facilitate more sustainable returns in the future when conditions improve.

As of 2025, however, international organisations do not promote returns to Ukraine given the ongoing security concerns caused by Russia's continued aggression. UNHCR has called on host countries not to forcibly return anyone to Ukraine. Individuals who decide to return do so only on their own initiative. Yet it remains the responsibility of the international community to help ensure that these returns are informed, voluntary, and carried out in conditions of safety and dignity. The existence of voluntary returns should not obscure the broader reality that the vast majority of those displaced from Ukraine continue to face conditions warranting international protection (UNHCR, 2023^[60]).

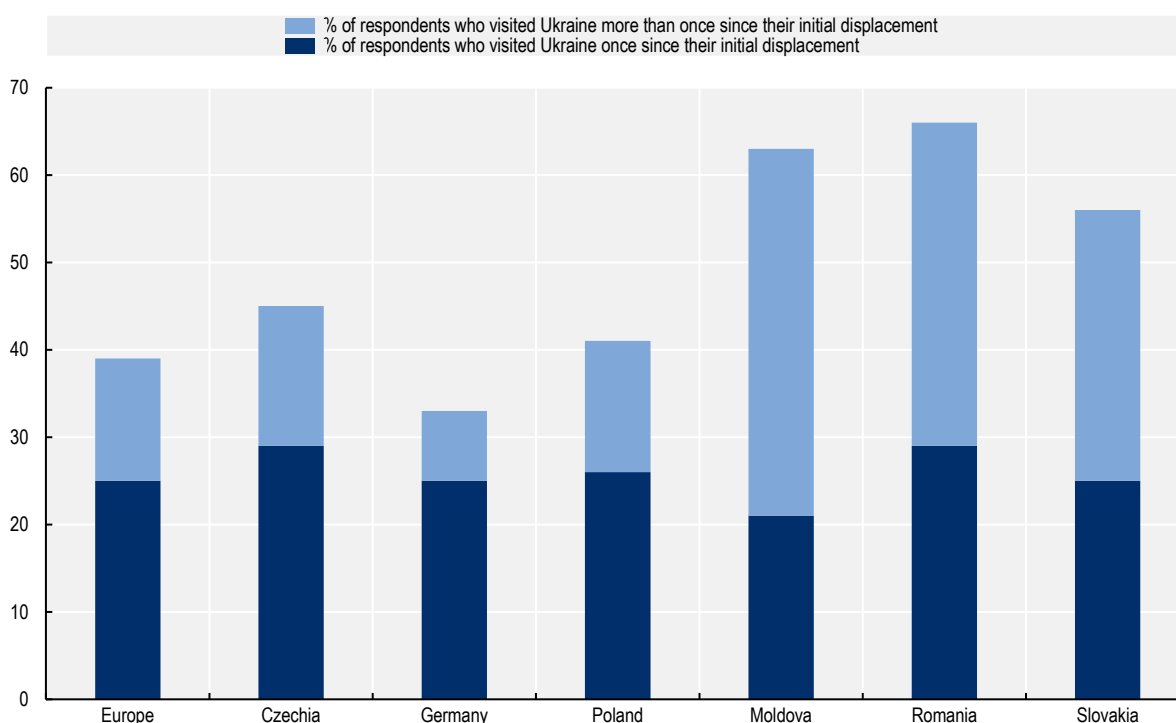
Figure 2.19. Estimated number of returnees, April 2022-April 2025

Thousands



Source: OECD Secretariat computations based on IOM (2025^[61]), General Population Surveys / Ukraine Returns Reports, Rounds 4-20.

Figure 2.20. Share of Ukrainians displaced in Europe who visited Ukraine since their displacement



Source: OECD Secretariat compilation based on the UNHCR (2023^[59]), Regional Intentions Surveys 4th Round, April-May 2023.

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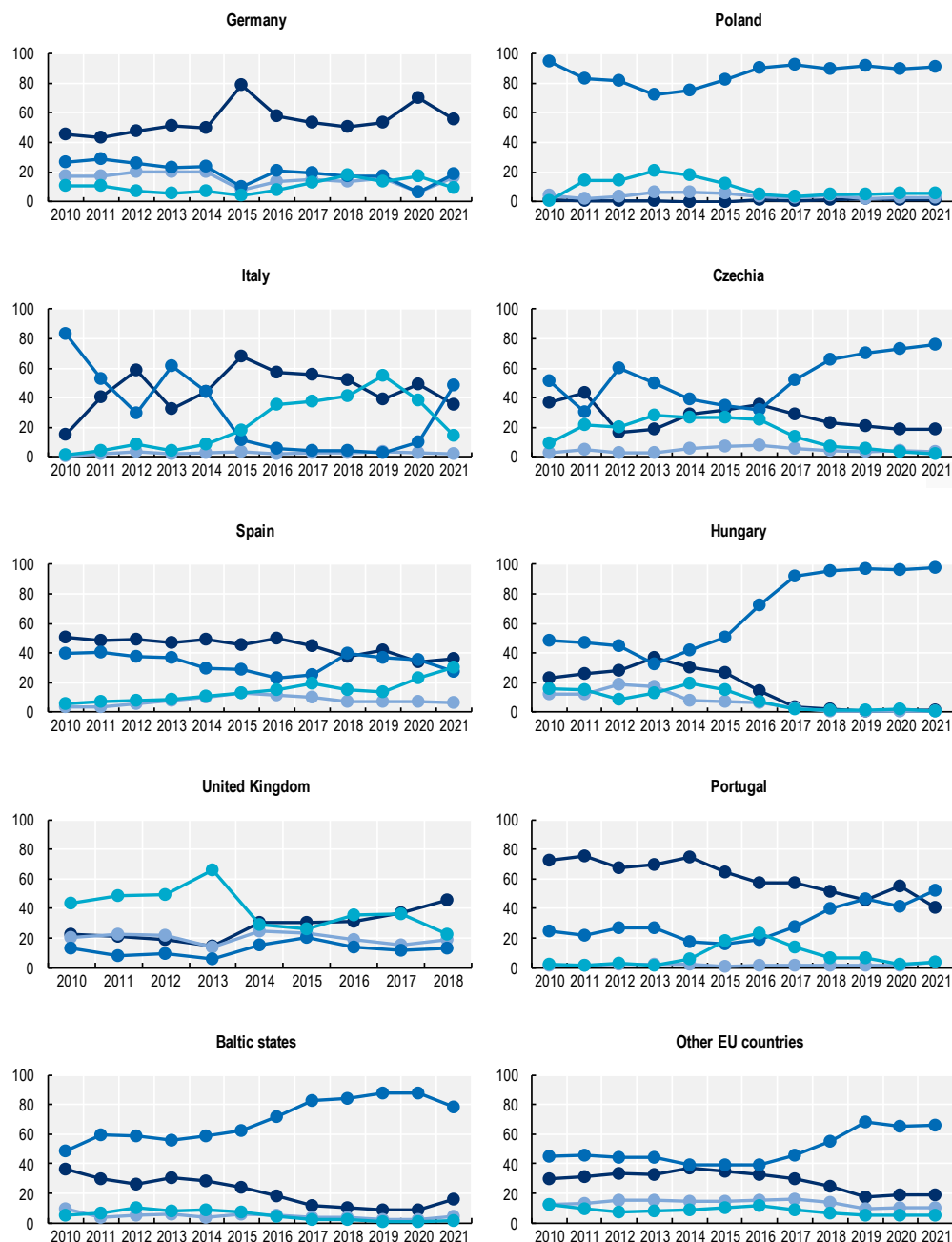
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Annex 2.A. Supplementary tables and figures

Annex Figure 2.A.1. First residence permits issued to Ukrainian citizens in the EU countries, by reasons, 2010-2021

As percentage of all permits granted to Ukrainian citizens



Source: Eurostat.

Notes

¹ In Poland, a new Act on Foreigners of May 2014 introduced a number of significant changes that relaxed the conditions of stay for foreigners, such as extending the duration of temporary residence permits from two to three years; extending the duration of student residence permits, and allowing graduates of Polish high schools to stay for up to one year to seek work in Poland; granting a one-month job search period to foreign workers upon job loss; introducing an entitlement to legalise stay in Poland on humanitarian grounds; and simplifying access to permanent residence permits for persons of Polish descent or a valid Polish Charter (OECD, 2014^[64]). All of these factors were important pull factors for Ukrainians (Brunarska et al., 2016^[11]).

² A “shuttle trader” (known in Ukrainian as *челнок*) refers to individuals who, during the 1990s economic transition, engaged in small-scale cross-border trade, mostly informal, by repeatedly travelling (“shuttling”) between Ukraine and neighbouring countries to purchase consumer goods – such as clothing, electronics, and household items – for resale in local markets.

³ Individuals born in Ukraine but living outside of Ukraine, including those who had moved before Ukraine’s independence and regardless of their status.

⁴ The Russian Federation remained the leading host country throughout 1991-2021, with 3 268 263 first-generation Ukrainians living there in 2020 (UN Population Division, 2025^[62]). Kazakhstan, Belarus and Uzbekistan also featured in the list of top 10 host countries throughout the period.

⁵ In Portugal, Ukrainian migration was much more gender-segregated in the early periods. For example, in 2000, 81% of Ukrainian migrants to Portugal were male (Fonseca and Pereira, 2016^[28]), in contrast to 53% by 2020. This decline in the share of men is attributed to the departure of men (either back to Ukraine or to other countries), notably following the crisis in the construction sector in the aftermath of the global economic recession, as well as the more recent migration of Ukrainian women to Portugal. Similarly, in Spain, Ukrainian migration shifted from being male-dominated in the early 2000s to being female-dominated migration in the 2010s (Stanek, Hosnedlová and Brey, 2016^[63]).

⁶ Here and further in this section: weighted average, accounting for the total size of the Ukrainian-born population in each of the 30 OECD countries with available data.

⁷ In this context, EU+ refers to EU Member States plus four associated Schengen countries: Norway, Switzerland, Iceland, and Liechtenstein.

⁸ The Socio-Economic Insights Survey (SEIS) is conducted in ten countries: Bulgaria, Czechia, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Republic of Moldova, Romania and the Slovak Republic.

⁹ Defined here as temporarily or partly occupied oblasts, and oblasts with past, present, or possible active hostilities, as per the Ministry of Reintegration’s instruction “On Approval of the List of Territories in which Military Operations are (were) Conducted or Temporarily Occupied by the Russian Federation”, first published on 22 December 2022 and updated on 17 August 2024.

3

Relevant legal, institutional and policy landscape in Ukraine

This chapter offers an overview of the legislation, policy frameworks and institutional arrangements related to IDP support, return, reintegration, and engagement with the Ukrainian global community. It highlights Ukraine's strategic response to the challenges in these areas arising from Russia's full-scale invasion, as well as the concrete measures and initiatives implemented to support IDPs, returnees and engagement with Ukrainians abroad. While the focus is primarily on state-led action in Ukraine, the chapter also examines the role of non-state actors and highlights select measures undertaken by host countries in co-operation with Ukraine.

Legal frameworks

On the eve of Russia's full-scale aggression against Ukraine, the concepts of IDP support, return, reintegration, and engagement with the Ukrainian global community were not entirely new to Ukraine. Existing legislation and institutional practices had already incorporated these notions, largely in response to earlier waves of migration and displacement. This foundation provided an important reference point for shaping subsequent policy responses.

However, the unprecedented scale, complexity, and geographical spread of displacement triggered by the 2022 invasion introduced entirely new challenges that existing frameworks were not fully equipped to address. As a result, while the earlier legal architecture served as a starting point, significant adaptation and expansion were required to meet the evolving needs of displaced populations, support sustainable return and reintegration processes, and engage effectively with Ukrainians abroad.

As of 2025, the regulation of relations with individuals of Ukrainian origin (both ethnic and territorial) and their descendants, whether residing within or outside of Ukraine, is grounded in the Constitution of Ukraine, national laws, presidential decrees, resolutions and orders of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine (CMU), other regulatory legal acts, as well as international treaties ratified by the Verkhovna Rada (Parliament) of Ukraine.¹

Historical evolution of relevant legal frameworks

Since gaining independence in 1991, Ukraine has made significant progress in developing a comprehensive legal framework governing migration within, to and from the country, as well as in defining its relationship with individuals of Ukrainian origin, whether ethnic or territorial, and their descendants, residing both within and beyond its borders. This framework was completely novel and drew from no prior provisions, because neither a dedicated migration policy nor institutional structures to manage migration-related matters existed in the former Soviet Republic of Ukraine. Moreover, the guiding principles and objectives of building modern Ukraine's migration framework represented a fundamental departure from the Soviet-era approach.

At its core, the current framework enshrines the principles of freedom of movement within the country and across its borders, a major difference from Soviet-era restrictions on emigration, reflecting broader processes of democratisation of Ukrainian society. It also reflects the adoption of international standards, alignment with European regulations, Ukraine's deeper European integration process, as well as the need to address the new migration challenges that Ukraine has encountered since its independence (Malynovska, 2018^[1]; Fedyuk and Kindler, 2016^[2]).

Already at the dawn of its independence, Ukraine demonstrated its commitment to engaging with its global community. In the Declaration of State Sovereignty of Ukraine (1990), adopted by the parliament, Ukraine proclaimed its concern for meeting the national, cultural, religious and linguistic needs of Ukrainians living outside the country. In doing so, it acknowledged at the state level the existence of this population group and the importance of building relationships with it.

The Constitution of Ukraine includes several provisions relevant to citizenship, Ukrainians abroad, and return to Ukraine. These include: Article 4 and Article 25, which pertain to citizenship; Article 12, which states that Ukraine cares for the national, cultural, and linguistic needs of Ukrainians abroad; and Article 25, which guarantees Ukrainian state protection to its citizens abroad. Article 33 enshrines the right to freedom of movement, the choice of place of residence, the right to leave Ukraine (unless otherwise restricted by law), as well as the right to return. Article 138 refers to the development of programmes aimed at the return of citizens who had been deported during the communist totalitarian regime.

Immediately after its independence in 1991, Ukraine faced the tasks of defining and regulating its citizenship and population movements within and outside its borders, and facilitating the return of ethnic

Ukrainians and their descendants. A series of laws adopted by the Ukrainian Parliament in those early years of the republic continue to form the basis of Ukraine's policy towards its population, regardless of location. They included: the Law on the Rehabilitation of Victims of Repressions of the Communist Totalitarian Regime of 1917-1991 (1991); the Law on the Citizenship of Ukraine (1991; replaced by a new law in 2001); the Law on the Procedure for Leaving Ukraine and Entering Ukraine for Citizens of Ukraine (1994); and the Law on the Right to Freedom of Movement and the Choice of Place of Residence in Ukraine (2003) (Table 3.1).

Table 3.1. Laws regulating IDP support, return, reintegration, and diaspora engagement

Name of the legal act	Status	Main provisions
Law on the Rehabilitation of Victims of Repressions of the Communist Totalitarian Regime of 1917-1991	Adopted on 17.04.1991; active with amendments (last on 19.11.2024)	Guarantees the right of return to Ukraine for its citizens who were victims of forced displacement and deportations outside Ukrainian territory during the totalitarian regime.
Law on Ukrainian Citizenship	Adopted on 18.01.2001; active with amendments (last on 20.08.2024). Replaces the Law on Citizenship of 1991.	Regulates matters of citizenship, including the procedures for acquiring and terminating Ukrainian citizenship. Facilitates citizenship acquisition for Ukrainians with Ukrainian descent or kinship, based on the territorial principle.
Law on the Procedure for Leaving Ukraine and Entering Ukraine for Citizens of Ukraine (1994)	Adopted on 21.01.1994; active with amendments (last on 10.10.2024)	Guarantees the freedom of leaving the country and returning to Ukraine.
Law on the Right to Freedom of Movement and the Choice of Place of Residence in Ukraine	Adopted on 11.12.2003; active with amendments (last on 23.08.2023)	Guarantees the freedom of movement and the right to freely choose a place of residence within the territory of Ukraine.
Law on Foreign Ukrainians	Adopted on 04.03.2004; active with amendments (last on 10.10.2024)	Defines a "foreign Ukrainian" as a person holding citizenship of another country, or a stateless person, who has Ukrainian ethnic origin or territorial origin from Ukraine. Defines terms of obtaining this legal status, and special rights, including for entry, work, and obtaining citizenship of Ukraine for this person and his/her relatives.
Law on Ensuring the Rights and Freedoms of Internally Displaced Persons	Adopted on 20.10.2014; active with amendments (last on 10.10.2024)	Key guiding legal document on IDPs. Provides a definition of IDPs, guarantees protection of their rights, creation of conditions for voluntary return, and integration in a new place of living.
Law on External Labour Migration	Adopted on 05.11.2015; active with amendments (last on 20.03.2023)	Defines the legal and organisational framework for state regulation of external labour migration and social protection of Ukrainian labour migrants and their families abroad. Defines responding to national, cultural, and language needs of Ukrainians abroad, supporting civil organisations of Ukrainians abroad, and creating conditions for return and reintegration as key directions of migration policy.
Law on the Principles of Domestic and Foreign Policy	Adopted on 21.07.2010; active with amendments (last on 13.12.2022). Amendment to include the question of return of Ukrainians: 07.11.2017	Ensuring the protection of the rights of Ukrainian citizens working abroad and the facilitation of their return is proclaimed as one of the main principles of domestic policy in the social sphere.
Law on Amendments to Certain Laws of Ukraine Regarding Ensuring the Exercise of the Right to Acquire and Retain Ukrainian Citizenship	Adopted on 18.06.2025	Introduces the concept of "multiple citizenship"; allows Ukrainians to hold citizenship of other states from a list defined by the Cabinet of Ministers (excluding aggressor states, notably the Russian Federation, and countries that do not recognise Ukraine's territorial integrity); establishes simplified procedures for certain categories (ex.: foreign Ukrainians), specifies mandatory exams for acquiring citizenship

In 2004, the adoption of the Law on Foreign Ukrainians constituted an important landmark in building relations with individuals of Ukrainian descent abroad.² This law provided a definition of a “foreign Ukrainian” as a citizen of another state, or a stateless person, who is either originally from Ukraine, or whose ancestors are from Ukraine, or who recognises Ukraine as his or her home country. This law enshrined co-operation with “foreign Ukrainians” as part of the consolidation of the Ukrainian nation. It proclaimed that the State of Ukraine has an obligation to meet the national, cultural, and linguistic needs of these individuals. It recognised the value of mutual cultural enrichment between Ukrainians in Ukraine and “foreign Ukrainians”. It also defined the possibility of simplified entry to and stay in Ukraine for “foreign Ukrainians”, as well as preferential treatment with regard to work permits and admission to tertiary education compared to citizens of other countries. As such, for a long time, this law has been largely seen as the Ukrainian “diaspora law” (see also Box 3.1).

By the mid-2000s, the question of return for Ukrainian citizens working abroad had emerged in the country’s legal framework and policy space, reflecting the sizeable emigration flows from Ukraine of the previous decade. The legal basis for protecting the rights of Ukrainian labour migrants abroad was established in the 2010 Law on Principles of Domestic and Foreign Policy and the 2015 Law on External Labour Migration. The latter formally enshrined the principle of creating conditions for the return and reintegration of labour migrants and their families as a key pillar of Ukraine’s migration policy (see also Box 3.2). It also encouraged Ukrainian labour migrants and their families to establish civil society organisations abroad and to co-operate with Ukrainian executive authorities through these organisations. The State of Ukraine also undertook an obligation to meet the national, cultural, educational, religious and language needs of these individuals.

The annexation of Crimea by the Russian Federation and the subsequent outbreak of military aggression against Ukraine in the Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts in 2014 resulted in the first major internal displacement crisis. In response to this unprecedented challenge, the Law of Ukraine on Ensuring the Rights and Freedoms of Internally Displaced Persons was adopted in the same year. This law continues to serve as the primary legal framework for regulating matters relating to IDPs to this day. Notably, it stipulates that, in cases of mass displacement affecting over 100 000 people or where the displacement-causing events persist for over six months, the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine must implement comprehensive, targeted state measures to support and facilitate the social integration of IDPs.

In 2025, the Law on Amendments to Certain Laws of Ukraine Regarding Ensuring the Exercise of the Right to Acquire and Retain Ukrainian Citizenship (No. 11 469) introduced the possibility of multiple citizenship. It allows citizens of certain countries to acquire Ukrainian citizenship via a simplified process, without having to renounce their existing citizenship. The law was explicitly adopted with the aim of facilitating the return of Ukrainians and maintaining ties with those who cannot return immediately.

In addition to this national legal framework, Ukraine has also signed several international agreements. Notably, the Agreement between Ukraine and the European Community on Readmission (signed in 2007, ratified in 2008, and in force since 2010) defines the procedures for the return of citizens who are in an irregular situation.

Box 3.1. Who belongs to the Ukrainian diaspora?

There is no single definition of “diaspora”. Historically, the term has been associated with the notion of forced displacement (OECD, 2012^[3]). Today, the term is broadly used from the origin-country perspective to refer to citizens or people of that country’s descent living abroad.

Classical scholars in the field of diaspora studies emphasise the importance of collective memory or sentimental attachment to the country of origin as a defining characteristic of a diaspora (Sheffer, 1986^[4]). Cohen (1997^[5]) includes in his definition a range of reasons for leaving the country of origin, from traumatic events to the search for employment. He also highlights the role of collective memory and the existence of a shared myth about the homeland and an idealised vision of ancestral roots.

As the topic has been gaining more policy attention around the world, the term is no longer used exclusively by academics, which has prompted the need for an operational definition. The definition proposed by the (European Commission, 2005, p. 23^[6]) suggests that: “The diaspora from a given country [...] includes not only the nationals from that country living abroad, but also migrants who, living abroad, have acquired the citizenship of their country of residence (often losing their original citizenship in the process), and migrants’ children born abroad, whatever their citizenship, as long as they retain some form of commitment to and/or interest in their country of origin or that of their parents”.

In the Ukrainian context, the notion of “diaspora” reflects the country’s migration history and the early migration waves of the twentieth century, which were largely permanent and often associated with political exile. This understanding of “diaspora” is reflected in, and was further reinforced by, the 2004 Law on Foreign Ukrainians. The law defines “foreign Ukrainians” as citizens of another state, or stateless persons, who are either originally from Ukraine, have ancestors from Ukraine, or who recognise Ukraine as their home country. The law provides a legal basis for the relationship between the State of Ukraine and “foreign Ukrainians” and is often referred to as the “diaspora law”.

For example, the Strategy of Demographic Development up to 2040 (adopted in 2024), explicitly refers to “diaspora” solely as individuals of Ukrainian origin and their descendants who hold the citizenship of other countries. In this document, the term “diaspora” is understood in the sense defined by the Law on Foreign Ukrainians adopted 20 years earlier and does not encompass Ukrainian citizens living abroad.

Given this narrow definition of “diaspora”, Ukrainian public discourse has faced challenges in defining, and therefore adequately addressing, the needs and roles of Ukrainian citizens living abroad. Several laws, policy processes, and institutional bodies address “labour migrants” and outline how the State should engage with them, distinguishing them from the “diaspora” and, more recently, from those “forcibly displaced abroad”. At the same time, other categories of Ukrainian emigrants, such as spouses of foreign nationals, scientists or athletes, are rarely included in discussions on how Ukraine seeks to maintain relations with its nationals abroad.

The need to consider collectively all individuals of Ukrainian descent abroad became particularly evident after 2022, when they mobilised as an integral part of Ukrainian civil society in response to the invasion. The term “Ukrainian global community”, first introduced by a Presidential Decree as early as 2006, was revived and given a formal definition in the draft strategy “Ukrainian Global Community: New Policies for the Period 2025-2027”. The Ukrainian global community is defined as encompassing Ukrainian citizens abroad, regardless of the duration of stay or reason for migration, as well as “foreign Ukrainians” who identify with the Ukrainian state and nationhood. This concept aligns with the definition of “diaspora” proposed by the European Commission in 2005.

While the draft strategy has not been formally adopted, this terminology offers a useful way to bridge the different groups that make up Ukrainian communities abroad. In this review, the term is used alongside the term “diaspora,” both being applied in their broadest sense to refer to all Ukrainians and individuals of Ukrainian descent living outside Ukraine, regardless of their migration history.

Box 3.2. What are the definitions of “integration” and “reintegration”?

In migration literature, integration is generally used to describe a migrant’s experience. It is defined as a multidimensional, two-way process that enables individuals to participate fully in the economic, social, and cultural life of their host society. This encompasses equitable access to education, employment, healthcare and housing, as well as active engagement in community and civic activities (see, for example, (OECD/European Union, 2015^[7]; Algan et al., 2012^[8]).

Reintegration, in turn, is defined as the process by which a returnee restores the economic, social, cultural, political and psychosocial relationships necessary for maintaining a livelihood and dignity in their country of origin or, for IDP, in their previous habitual place of residence (Cassarino, 2014^[9]; OECD, 2024^[10]).

According to the International Recommendations on IDP Statistics (IRIS) (EGRIS, 2020^[11]), when applied to IDPs, the terms “reintegration” and “integration” “entail that IDPs are not discriminated against and are not facing any specific protection or assistance needs in relation to their displacement. They are expected to be able to exercise their rights in the same way as the usually resident population, regardless of the settlement option (i.e. physical location) chosen. When this occurs, they should no longer be considered to be IDPs.” (p. 42).

Early state programmes to engage with Ukrainians abroad and promote return and reintegration before 2022

Already in the late 1990s and early 2000s, the Ukrainian Government launched several initiatives to build ties with individuals of Ukrainian origin and their descendants living abroad. In 1996, the CMU adopted its first state programme, Ukrainian Diaspora for the Period up to 2000. This was followed in 2001 by a presidential decree establishing the national programme Foreign Ukrainianhood for the Period up to 2005. These early programmes, however, were not adequately supported by financial resources, and Ukraine lacked the institutional capacity to implement them effectively at the time. As a result, they remained largely declarative in nature (Bozhuk, 2010^[12]).

To provide new impetus to earlier policies and to continue building a legal framework for co-operation with “foreign Ukrainians” and Ukrainians abroad, the national concept for Co-operation with Foreign Ukrainians up to 2010 was adopted by presidential decree in 2006. This document aimed to create favourable conditions for preserving and developing the cultural, linguistic, and religious identity of Ukrainians abroad, and to promote co-operation between Ukrainian society, “foreign Ukrainians”, and Ukrainians abroad more broadly. For the first time, this legal act introduced the term “Ukrainian global community” and recognised that “foreign Ukrainians” formed an integral part of it. The decree assigned responsibility for implementing it to the CMU.

In line with this, in 2008, the CMU adopted the Plan for the Priority Measures for Developing Ties with Ukrainians Living Abroad, Preserving, Protecting, and Popularising the Cultural Heritage of Ukraine in the World for 2008-2009. Once again, due to limited budgetary allocations, most of the measures outlined in these documents were not fully implemented.

In 2006, for the first time, the issue of returning labour migrants and supporting their reintegration appeared in the Strategy of Demographic Development up to 2015. To advance this policy, in 2017, the CMU adopted the Action Plan for Ensuring the Reintegration of Labour Migrants and Their Family Members into Society. This action plan, which did not set specific deadlines, was to be implemented on an ongoing basis by several ministries, including the Ministries of Economy, Education and Science, Foreign Affairs, Justice, Social Policy, Internal Affairs, and Health. The plan outlined measures to facilitate employment and ensure

social and health protection for returning labour migrants, to support the inclusion of their children in the education system, to strengthen the capacity of diplomatic missions abroad to assist with returns, and to enhance co-operation with foreign governments and international organisations on reintegration matters.

In 2017, the Government of Ukraine developed the Strategy of the State Migration Policy of Ukraine for the Period up to 2025 (amended in 2024). From its inception, the strategy aimed to encourage the return of Ukrainian labour migrants by creating conditions for voluntary return, facilitating reintegration, and promoting co-operation with civil society organisations representing Ukrainian migrants abroad.

Two legal documents were adopted to provide a further foundation for strengthening national unity, including the Decree of the President of Ukraine of 2016 (No. 534/2016) “On priority measures to promote the strengthening of national unity and consolidation of Ukrainian society, and support for public initiatives in this area”, and the Order of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine of 2018 (No. 179-r) “On approval of the action plan to strengthen national unity, consolidate Ukrainian society, and support for public initiatives in this area”.

Following the start of the internal displacement crisis in 2014, a Strategy of Integration of Internally Displaced Persons and Implementation of Long-term Solutions for Internal Displacement for the Period up to 2020, was adopted in 2017. This was followed, in 2021, by the Strategy of Integration of Internally Displaced Persons and Implementation of Medium-term Solutions for Internal Displacement for the Period up to 2024.

Institutional responsibilities and key actors

As with the legal framework, on the eve of the invasion, a number of key actors and responsible bodies were already active in the areas of displacement management, IDP support, return, reintegration, and diaspora engagement. Following the invasion, the mandates of many institutions were adjusted to address the new challenges, and several new stakeholders emerged.

Considering that the independent State of Ukraine had to establish its migration institutions from the ground up after 1991, the current institutional framework remains relatively recent and continues to evolve. It reflects the early political, administrative and financial challenges associated with state-building, as well as Ukraine’s international obligations and the growing complexity of migration dynamics. These challenges originated before independence but have intensified since the early 2000s and remain evident in 2025.

As of 2025, the formulation and implementation of state policy relating to return, reintegration, and engagement with the Ukrainian global community are carried out within their respective mandates by the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine, central executive authorities, local state administrations, and local self-government bodies.

Central executive authorities

The system of central executive authorities in Ukraine comprises ministries and other national executive bodies.³ The Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine directs and co-ordinates the work of the ministries and, in part determines their mandates.⁴

Issues concerning individuals of Ukrainian origin and their descendants abroad, as well as the facilitation of their return to Ukraine, fall within the mandates of several ministries, including the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Over time, other ministries have also become involved in these areas as part of their evolving mandates. For example, from the 2000s, matters related to the return and reintegration of Ukrainian labour migrants from abroad have increasingly been integrated into the responsibilities of the Ministry of Social Policy, Family and Unity; the Ministry of Economy, Environment and Agriculture; and the Ministry of Education and Science.

The large-scale displacement that began in 2014 and escalated to unprecedented levels after 2022, both within and beyond Ukraine, resulted in further adjustments to the original mandates of several ministries to strengthen their ability to respond to the complex challenges of displacement, return and reintegration. This evolving situation also prompted the establishment of new ministries to manage these issues more effectively.

As of 2025, the **Ministry of Internal Affairs** serves as the central executive authority responsible for formulating state policy on migration, including the prevention of irregular migration, citizenship, the registration of individuals, and the management of refugees and different categories of migrants as defined by law.

The Ministry of Internal Affairs oversees and co-ordinates the work of the **State Migration Service of Ukraine**, which is the central executive agency tasked with implementing national migration policy. It was created in 2010 to consolidate executive functions in the field of migration and ensure a coherent government-wide approach to migration management. The State Migration Service was responsible for developing and implementing Ukraine's first migration strategy, the Strategy of the State Migration Policy of Ukraine for the Period up to 2025, adopted in 2017 and amended in 2024. The State Migration Service also provides documentation to IDPs, certifying their identity and legal status.

The **Ministry of Foreign Affairs** is the principal body within the system of central executive authorities responsible for formulating and implementing state policy in the field of foreign relations. Among its key responsibilities are:

- Developing and maintaining relations with Ukrainians abroad and their public organisations, and co-ordinating the activities of executive authorities to foster these connections;
- Protecting the rights and interests of Ukrainian citizens and legal entities abroad;
- Co-ordinating the work of central executive authorities to ensure effective co-operation with Ukrainians abroad;
- Providing organisational, methodological, technical, and other forms of support to organisations of Ukrainians abroad;
- Implementing state-funded measures to support ties with Ukrainians living outside Ukraine;
- Ensuring the functioning of the National Commission on Ukrainians Abroad;
- Accepting applications for the status of “foreign Ukrainian” and issuing documents confirming this status.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs also has the Department of Ukrainians Worldwide and Humanitarian Co-operation, which is responsible for developing and implementing policies related to the Ukrainian diaspora and humanitarian initiatives abroad, including overseeing diaspora relations, strengthening ties with Ukrainian communities worldwide, promoting cultural and educational exchanges, and advocating for the interests of Ukrainian citizens abroad.

The **Ministry of Economy, Environment and Agriculture** is the main central executive authority responsible for, among other areas, formulating and implementing state policy on employment and labour migration. In this capacity, it:

- Defines the economic foundations of demographic and social development and prepares population forecasts for Ukraine;
- Participates in analysing the economic dimensions of state migration policy;
- Develops and submits policy proposals on employment, including measures to facilitate job creation, match labour supply and demand, enhance social protection against unemployment, ensure professional training opportunities, and regulate the labour migration of Ukrainian citizens;

In 2017, the Ministry of Economy, Environment and Agriculture was designated as the lead ministry responsible for implementing the Action Plan for Ensuring the Reintegration of [Returning] Labour Migrants and Their Family Members into Society.

The ministry also directs and co-ordinates the work of the **State Employment Service**, a specialised centralised body responsible for implementing state policy in the areas of employment and labour migration. To fulfil its mandate, it also co-operates with the Ministry of Social Policy, Family and Unity and other relevant ministries. The State Employment Service plays a prominent role in supporting the employment of IDPs by providing job search and placement assistance, career counselling, information and opportunities for reskilling and upskilling, as well as implementing other state programmes, such as **training** vouchers and employer compensation schemes to encourage the hiring of IDPs.

The Ministry of Social Policy, Family and Unity is a central executive authority responsible for formulating state policy on the social support of IDPs. Its key responsibilities here include:

- Managing the Unified Information Database on IDPs;
- Facilitating the provision of social assistance to IDPs;
- Collecting and analysing information on the social support needs of IDPs;
- Providing methodological guidance and co-ordinating the work of national and local authorities, local self-government bodies, and administrative service centres on social support for IDPs;
- Developing and submitting proposals to the CMU on social assistance measures that take into account the needs of IDPs;
- Designing state programmes related to the social support of IDPs.

This ministry also develops and submits proposals for improving state policy on demographic development, including the regulation of migration flows. It is the lead body responsible for the development and implementation of the Strategy of Demographic Development of Ukraine for the Period up to 2040, adopted in 2024. One of the strategy's objectives is to achieve positive net migration by promoting voluntary return, enhancing co-operation with representatives of foreign Ukrainians, and encouraging the arrival of labour migrants in Ukraine.

Historically, throughout the 2000s and 2010s, this Ministry was also responsible for regulating labour migration, including the reintegration of labour migrants, until this mandate was transferred to the Ministry of Economy, Environment and Agriculture.

Since July 2025, the portfolio of the former Ministry of Unity was transferred to the Ministry of Social Policy, Family and Unity. Given this, in addition to the above, they are also responsible for the development and implementation of state policy on the national unity of Ukraine, the Ukrainian national identity, the information policy on Ukraine's unity and strategic communications (within the scope of powers related to national unity), as well as the state policy concerning Ukrainian citizens who have left their place of residence within the territory of Ukraine, including as a result of, or in order to avoid, the negative consequences of the armed conflict and/or the temporary occupation of part of Ukraine's territory, and have departed abroad. The ministry is tasked with facilitating the exercise of their rights and interests, and with creating conditions for the voluntary return of such persons to their former place of residence or their integration at a new place of residence in Ukraine. Its main tasks pertaining to this mandate include:

- Ensuring the development and implementation of state policy on the national unity of Ukraine and shared development; Ukrainian national self-awareness; the information policy on Ukraine's unity and strategic communications (within the scope of powers related to national unity); the rights and interests of persons who have left Ukraine, as defined by the legislation of Ukraine, and the creation of conditions for their voluntary return to their former place of residence or for their integration at a new place of residence in Ukraine.

- Facilitating, in co-ordination with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the fulfilment of the national, cultural, educational and linguistic needs of persons who have left Ukraine; the exercise of rights and freedoms of Ukrainian citizens who hold multiple citizenships; and the consolidation of Ukrainian national identity and Ukrainian civic identity.

The Ministry for Development of Communities and Territories is the central executive authority responsible for formulating state policy in the areas of transport, infrastructure development, housing, and communal services, as well as reconstruction and regional development. Between January and July 2025, following the dissolution of the Ministry of Reintegration of the Temporarily Occupied Territories, this ministry assumed responsibility for providing financial assistance and developing affordable social housing for IDPs. It is also responsible for implementing regional development projects, including humanitarian assistance and social support for returnees in war-affected communities.

The **Ministry of Education and Science** is the principal authority within the system of central executive authorities responsible for formulating and implementing state policy in the areas of education and science. Since its establishment, one of its mandates has been the integration of Ukrainian education and scientific co-operation with institutions, civil society organisations and private foundations abroad, including those of the Ukrainian diaspora, as well as responding to the cultural needs of Ukrainians outside Ukraine and encouraging the involvement of the diaspora in Ukraine's cultural life.⁵

Notably, in 2007 the ministry supported the establishment of the distance-learning International Ukrainian School for Ukrainians living abroad, which enables students to obtain a state-recognised Ukrainian education diploma while residing outside the country.

As of 2025, the ministry is responsible for approving methodological recommendations on the provision of general secondary education under martial law, including for children who have been forcibly displaced either within or outside Ukraine. It disseminates these recommendations to the heads of general secondary education institutions and oversees their implementation.

In addition, three state institutions play a prominent role in the institutional architecture relevant for the return and reintegration of Ukrainians.

The National Qualifications Agency is a permanent collegiate body, established on a parity basis with six representatives from governmental institutions (Ministry of Education and Science, Ministry of Social Policy, Family and Unity, Ministry of Economy, Environment and Agriculture) and six from the non-governmental sector (Joint Representative Body of Employers of Ukraine, Joint Representative Body of Trade Unions of Ukraine). It implements state policy in the field of qualifications, notably harmonisation of the Ukrainian Qualifications System with the European one. It accredits qualification centres that provide the possibility to validate qualifications on the basis of formal, non-formal or informal education and training acquired in Ukraine or abroad. In addition, it co-ordinates the development of occupational standards that meet modern labour market requirements, maintains a register of occupational standards and a register of qualifications, and also co-ordinates the subjects of the professional improvement process of training, retraining and establishing compliance with occupational standards.

The National Agency for Higher Education Quality Assurance is a permanent collegial body, which co-ordinates its activity with the CMU and the Ministry of Education and Sciences. Its mandate includes conducting accreditation of educational programmes and approves the procedures developed by the Ministry of Education and Science for recognising degrees and academic titles obtained in foreign higher education institutions.

National Research Foundation of Ukraine (NRFU) is a state budgetary institution. Its mission includes creating a favourable environment and attractive conditions for Ukrainian and foreign researchers in Ukraine, including for Ukrainian researchers contemplating return, by means of providing research grants.

Additionally, two ministries that have been dissolved held mandates related to the management of IDPs and returnees: the Ministry of Reintegration of the Temporarily Occupied Territories and the Ministry of National Unity.

The **Ministry of Reintegration of the Temporarily Occupied Territories** was established in 2016 in response to the first displacement crisis that began in 2014. In 2024, it was restructured and renamed, with parts of its mandate transferred to the Ministry of National Unity (defunct) and the Ministry for Development of Communities and Territories of Ukraine.

Before its restructuring, the ministry led the formulation and implementation of state policy to support IDPs between 2016 and 2024. During this period, its responsibilities included:

- Formulating and implementing state policy related to IDPs and citizens who left temporarily occupied territories due to, or to avoid, the consequences of armed conflict or occupation, as well as EDPs.
- Supporting the protection of rights and freedoms of displaced persons and creating conditions for their voluntary return or integration into new communities;
- Facilitating the social protection of IDPs and EDPs;
- Providing methodological guidance and co-ordinating the work of central and local authorities, local self-government bodies, including administrative service centres, on IDP-related issues;
- Supporting, together with the Ministry of Social Policy, Family and Unity the delivery of humanitarian assistance to IDPs;
- Working with the Ministry of Economy, Environment and Agriculture and the State Employment Service to inform IDPs about employment opportunities and assist with job placement;
- Co-ordinating efforts to create conditions that enable displaced persons to return voluntarily or integrate locally, including facilitating their socio-economic adaptation;
- Collecting and analysing data on housing and other social protection needs of IDPs and EDPs;
- Preparing proposals to the CMU on protecting the rights and freedoms of IDPs and EDPs, and developing state programmes to address these issues;
- Ensuring, together with the Ministry of Education and Science and other relevant bodies, access to education for IDPs;
- Supporting socio-economic and cultural development, and protecting the constitutional rights and interests of citizens forced to leave temporarily occupied territories, including IDPs;
- Advocating for the protection of displaced Ukrainians in international judicial institutions.

The **Ministry of National Unity** was created in late 2024 and merged with the Ministry of Social Policy, Family and Unity in July 2025. During its mandate, it was tasked with formulating and implementing state policy on national identity and unity, information policy in the area of national unity, and related strategic communications. The ministry was established in response to the challenges arising from the large-scale displacement of Ukrainians abroad. Its key responsibilities included:

- Formulating and implementing state policy to protect the rights and interests of persons who have moved abroad, particularly as a result of the military conflict, and creating conditions for their voluntary return to their former place of residence or integration into a new community in Ukraine;
- Working in co-ordination with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to meet the national, cultural, educational and linguistic needs of Ukrainians living abroad;
- Strengthening Ukrainian national and civic identity.
- Subordinate to the ministry was the **Agency of National Unity**, which served as the main body responsible for implementing initiatives to engage with Ukrainian communities and civil society organisations abroad.

Finally, the **National Commission for Matters Concerning Foreign Ukrainians** was established in 2006 following the adoption of the Law on Foreign Ukrainians and operates under the authority of the CMU. It comprises representatives from the Office of the President, the Secretariat of the CMU, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Education and Science, the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Culture, the Ministry of Social Policy, Family and Unity, the State Migration Service, the State Border Service, the State Forensic Service, the State Committee for Television and Radio Broadcasting, the National Institute of Strategic Studies, the Ukrainian Bar Association for Foreign Affairs, the Ukrainian World Congress, the Society “Ukraine-World”, and members of the Parliament of Ukraine. Among its responsibilities, the Commission is tasked with reviewing applications and granting the legal status of “foreign Ukrainian” in accordance with the provisions of the law.

Table 3.2 summarises these mandates, by the issue addressed.

Table 3.2. Who is responsible for what? Mandates of various central executive authorities, 2025

IDPs	
Emergency and social support (registration, cash benefits)	Ministry of Social Policy, Family and Unity; Ministry of Internal Affairs
Housing	Ministry for Development of Communities and Territories (since January 2025); Ministry of Economy, Environment and Agriculture; Ministry of Reintegration of the Temporarily Occupied Territories (until September 2024).
Employment	State Employment Service (steered and co-ordinated by the Ministry of Economy); Ministry of Reintegration of the Temporarily Occupied Territories (until September 2024).
EDPs	
Consular and legal support	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Education	Ministry of Education and Science; Ministry of Social Policy, Family and Unity (providing textbooks)
Recognition of prior education, qualifications and skills	Ministry of Education and Science; Ministry of Economy, Environment and Agriculture; National Qualifications Agency
Cultural needs	Ministry of Culture; Ministry of Foreign Affairs; Ministry of National Unity (January – July 2025)
Facilitating returns from abroad	Ministry of Internal Affairs; State Migration Service; Ministry of Social Policy, Family and Unity (National Social Service); Ministry of Economy, Environment and Agriculture; Ministry of Foreign Affairs; Ministry of Digital Transformation; Ministry of National Unity (January – July 2025)
Employment upon return	State Employment Service (overseen and co-ordinated by the Ministry of Economy, Environment and Agriculture)
Housing upon return	Ministry for Development of Communities and Territories Ministry of Economy, Environment and Agriculture
“Foreign Ukrainians” and the broader Ukrainian global community	
Consular and legal support	Ministry of Foreign Affairs; National Commission for Matters Concerning Ukrainians Worldwide
Education	Ministry of Education and Science; Ministry of Social Policy, Family and Unity (providing textbooks)
Cultural needs	Ministry of Culture; Ministry of Foreign Affairs; Ministry of National Unity (January – July 2025)
Cooperation with the representatives of Foreign Ukrainians and the Ukrainian global community	Ministry of Foreign Affairs; Ministry of Social Policy, Family and Unity; Ministry of National Unity (January – July 2025)
Facilitating returns from abroad	Ministry of Internal Affairs: State Migration Service; Ministry of Social Policy, Family and Unity; Ministry of Economy, Environment and Agriculture; Ministry of Health; Ministry of Justice; Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Digital Transformation; National Research Foundation of Ukraine; National Agency for Higher Education Quality Assurance; Ministry of National Unity (January – July 2025)
Reintegration support upon return	Ministry of Economy, Environment and Agriculture; State Employment Service; Ministry of Social Policy, Family and Unity

Source: OECD Secretariat, based on the review of legal acts outlined in Table 3.1 and Table 3.4 (below), and regulations of each ministry (specific documents approved by the Resolutions of the CMU), outlining the mandate, key tasks, functions, rights, and responsibilities. Latest version of the regulations, as of February 2025, unless stated otherwise.

Local executive authorities

Executive power in *oblasts* (administrative divisions) and *raions* (districts, a sub-oblast level), as well as in the cities of Kyiv and Sevastopol, is exercised by local state administrations. These bodies play a key role within their respective territories in implementing laws, decrees and resolutions of the CMU, as well as national strategies related to the reintegration of IDPs and returnees. They are responsible for executing state and regional programmes and managing corresponding budgets and measures. In many instances, they have also contributed to the development of national strategies.

Even before 2022, some local executive authorities had experience in establishing ties with the Ukrainian global community. For example, in 2002, the Kyiv City State Administration launched the project “Ukrainian School Abroad”, which by 2007 had facilitated co-operation between 77 Kyiv schools and partner schools in several countries, including Canada, Germany, France, the United Kingdom and Australia (Bozhuk, 2010^[12]). Several other co-operation programmes between Ukrainian local authorities and administrations in localities hosting Ukrainian migrant communities were also developed during the 2000s and 2010s.

On 24 February 2022, a Presidential Decree established regional and district military administrations based on local state administrations to operate for the duration of martial law.

Local self-governance authorities (*hromadas*)

One of the defining features of the Ukrainian society is the constitutional right of citizens to organise and exercise power through local self-governance bodies. This right, enshrined in the Constitution of Ukraine and strengthened by the 2015 decentralisation reform, guarantees territorial communities (residents of a village or a voluntary association of several villages, settlements, or cities) the ability to form new local governance units known as *hromadas* (municipalities). These entities can independently resolve a wide range of local matters and manage them under their own responsibility. As such, *hromadas* have been granted expanded self-governance powers within their territories (OECD, 2018^[13]). By early 2025, Ukraine counted 1 439 *hromadas*. They also retain a significant share of tax revenues, with 60% of local revenue remaining at the local level (Brik and Brick Murtazashvili, 2022^[14]), which is spent on public services in accordance with the law and the interests of the *hromada* population.

Since the establishment of military administrations on 24 February 2022, under martial law, local self-governance bodies have been required to facilitate the activities of military administrations, resulting in a system of joint community management. Martial law provisions have expanded the powers of local self-governance bodies and at the same time introduced partial subordination to higher-level military administrations.

The role of local self-governance in strengthening Ukraine’s resilience during the full-scale invasion has been fundamental. In just eight years since the decentralisation reform, *hromadas* have fostered a strong local civic identity among citizens, regardless of ethnicity or language, uniting communities and reinforcing their determination to defend the country and build a democratic nation (Myerson, 2022^[15]; Brik and Brick Murtazashvili, 2022^[14]). *Hromadas* have also played a vital role in organising voluntary territorial defence, evacuating and supporting IDPs and returnees, fostering social cohesion, mobilising public assistance and reorganising basic social services from the very first days of the invasion (Keudel and Huss, 2025^[16]).

Civil society in Ukraine

In addition to these public structures, civil society plays a prominent role in Ukraine’s response to displacement, reintegration, and engagement with the diaspora.

Since independence in 1991, and particularly following the 2013-2014 Revolution of Dignity, Ukrainian civil society has undergone a remarkable transformation, becoming one of the most vibrant and active in the world (Zarembko and Martin, 2023^[17]). Numerous non-governmental organisations (NGOs) play a crucial

role in fostering a sense of community and collective identity among Ukrainians. The proliferation of NGOs across diverse regions and sectors, including healthcare, education, veteran inclusion, gender equality, and support for people with disabilities, demonstrates the depth and breadth of civic participation of Ukrainians. This robust civil society infrastructure not only contributes to domestic reform efforts but also strengthens Ukraine's resilience in the face of external challenges (Bahid et al., 2024^[18]).

NGOs assumed a leadership role during the full-scale invasion, responding swiftly and effectively. Drawing on established networks and community-based structures, they were often the first to assist populations affected by the invasion. They also worked in close co-ordination with local and national authorities to address urgent challenges and meet the needs of the population.

While it is not possible to list all organisations, a notable example in maintaining ties with the diaspora and Ukrainians abroad is the Society "Ukraine-World", which serves on the National Commission for Matters Concerning Foreign Ukrainians. This organisation, with a century-long history, has representations in every region of Ukraine.

In the field of displacement management and reintegration, longstanding international organisations active in Ukraine, such as the Ukrainian Red Cross Society (URCS) and Caritas Ukraine, also run a variety of programmes for IDPs and returnees. Numerous additional organisations emerged following the first internal displacement crisis after 2014, and new actors have since mobilised in response to the invasion.

In response to the evolving humanitarian crisis, Ukrainian NGOs have formed numerous alliances to enhance co-ordination and effectiveness. In September 2023, 13 organisations, including the Ukrainian Red Cross Society, Caritas Ukraine, and the Right to Protection Charitable Foundation, established the Alliance of Ukrainian Civil Society Organisations. This coalition seeks to collectively address the consequences of the war and support the reintegration of displaced populations through joint planning and stronger partnerships at regional and national levels. Such collaboration underscores the importance of civil society organisations in developing a cohesive and comprehensive approach to displacement management and reintegration in Ukraine (Interfax-Ukraine, 2023^[19]).

In addition to NGOs, different **social partners**, including workers' and employers' associations, have also been at the forefront of supporting IDPs. Since 2022, and in some cases since 2014, these organisations have assisted in relocating businesses and families and have played a crucial role in maintaining social cohesion in the workplace.

Through these collective efforts, NGOs, social partners, and volunteers have been instrumental in mitigating the impact of displacement in Ukraine. They continue to provide essential services, contribute to recovery efforts, and foster unity among Ukrainians, regardless of their location.

International organisations and donors in Ukraine

Between 2022 and 2025, international organisations, including the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and others, played a major role in addressing the humanitarian displacement crisis in Ukraine. Their co-ordinated efforts ensured the delivery of critical assistance, including food, medical care, and shelter, to millions of IDPs and Ukrainians fleeing the country.

These efforts were conducted in close co-operation with the Ukrainian Government to ensure that services were effectively delivered to those in need. International organisations also consistently advocated that returns should take place only when conditions are safe (UNHCR, 2023^[20]; IOM, 2023^[21]). They further promoted the inclusion of IDPs and returnees in economic activities and social protection systems, with a particular emphasis on the needs of women and children.

Civil society, including diaspora organisations outside Ukraine

Outside Ukraine, the Ukrainian global community consists of a diverse network of civic activists who can be viewed as dual-role actors, functioning both as beneficiaries of and contributors to policy processes that concern Ukrainians abroad.

As shown in Chapter 2, the Ukrainian global community is highly heterogeneous. In many countries, established “old” diasporas coexist with newly arrived migrants and displaced persons. Ukraine’s complex migration history, the diversity of migration motives and the varying needs of people have translated into a wide spectrum of civic participation among Ukrainians abroad (Fedyuk and Kindler, 2016^[2]; OSCE-ODIHR, 2024^[22]).

One of the main channels of civic participation among Ukrainians abroad is channeled through NGOs and associations founded by Ukrainians themselves. Before 2022, there were at least 1000 such organisations worldwide (DEMAC, 2021^[23]). This civil society landscape is very diverse and continuously evolving, and there are several, interrelated ways to categorise them⁶ (see also examples in Box 3.3):

- **By history and legacy:** One way is to consider the period in which these organisations were established and the composition of their contemporary leadership. Given Ukraine’s multiple emigration waves, organisations were founded during the pre-First World War period, after the Second World War, following the independence, after the 2014 Revolution of Dignity, and following the 2022 invasion. Earlier organisations are often led by individuals of Ukrainian descent, sometimes from the second or third generation, while more recent ones are typically led by first-generation migrants, including displaced persons. In countries neighbouring Ukraine, some organisations are also led by representatives of different ethnic minorities from Ukraine. These factors shape each organisation’s interests, mission, objectives, and capacity.
- **By mission and objectives:** Organisations vary widely in their goals, which largely determine their activities. These can include maintaining Ukrainian identity and heritage abroad, preserving and transmitting culture, engaging in political advocacy for Ukraine at national and international levels; other types of advocacy, such as for gender issues; shaping public opinion, and advancing cultural and business diplomacy; philanthropy; mobilising resources; humanitarian assistance; supporting Ukraine’s defence, recovery and reintegration efforts; and practical assistance for new arrivals, including administrative, legal, financial, housing, healthcare, educational, employment and social integration support. Many Ukrainian diaspora organisations shifted their priorities after February 2022 towards fundraising, humanitarian relief, public advocacy and support for displaced populations, leveraging their international networks and resources to provide such multifaceted assistance (ICMPD, 2024^[24]; Keudel et al., 2024^[25]).
- **By location and outreach:** Some organisations operate at the local or community level in host countries, while others function as umbrella bodies that co-ordinate networks of organisations nationally or internationally (OSCE-ODIHR, 2024^[22]).
- **By organisational structure:** The degree of formalisation also varies. Umbrella organisations tend to have structured governance systems with co-ordinating bodies and defined mandates, while others operate more flexibly or informally. The latter include volunteer-led social media channels that provide information and mutual support (DEMAC, 2021^[23]).
- **By interaction with the Ukrainian state:** Traditionally, diaspora communities based in North America tend to co-operate directly with Ukraine’s political leadership, while European-based communities are more inclined towards co-operation with civil society organisations and local authorities in Ukraine (Clarkson, 2017^[26]). Many organisations also maintain close collaboration with Ukrainian embassies (ICMPD, 2024^[24]).

Box 3.3. Examples of Ukrainian global community organisations and associations

The Ukrainian World Congress (UWC), established in 1967, is one of the oldest, transnational umbrella organisations working directly with the Government of Ukraine. It serves as a global co-ordinating body for Ukrainian communities and organisations in over 80 countries. Its headquarters are in Toronto, with missions in Kyiv, New York and Brussels. The UWC is recognised by the United Nations Economic and Social Council as a non-governmental organisation with special consultative status. It also holds participatory status as an international NGO with the Council of Europe. The UWC has established several Memoranda of Co-operation with the Ukrainian authorities, including the Ministry of Culture (2016 and 2021), the Ukrainian Investment Promotion Office UkraineInvest (2020), the CMU (2020), and the Ministry of Defence (2023). In response to the ongoing invasion, the UWC has become a major platform for raising funds, advocating for international support, providing humanitarian aid, and supporting displaced populations and those affected by the war.

A relatively new transnational umbrella organisation is the **Global Ukraine Foundation**, which was established in early 2015. It focusses on developing a global network of Ukrainian public diplomats and mobilising financial and intellectual resources for local development in Ukraine. It unites 350 organisations across more than 80 countries.

The World Federation of Ukrainian Women's Organisations at the UN (WFUWO), established in 1948 in Philadelphia and now based in Toronto, is an umbrella organisation for 35 Ukrainian women's organisations across four continents. WFUWO has had special consultative status with the UN Economic and Social Council since 1993 and was accredited with the UN Department of Public Information in 1994. WFUWO's mission is supporting the dignity and integrity of women in Ukraine and Ukrainian women in migrant communities by "supporting adherence to international standards of human rights, raising public awareness of problems and violations, maintaining Ukrainian language and culture, cultivating awareness of Ukrainian history, family and social traditions, as well as efforts that support modern Ukraine's development into an independent, stable democracy with respect for the rule of law". WFUWO regularly contributes to the UN Human Rights Council, the Council of Europe and the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women, addressing topics like transfers and deportations, and the impact of the war in Ukraine on the rights of women, children, and displaced persons.

An example of one of the oldest national umbrella organisations is the **Ukrainian Canadian Congress (UCC)**, founded in 1940. It is one of the oldest national umbrella organisations representing Ukrainian Canadian communities. It brings together national, provincial and local Ukrainian Canadian organisations. Together with its member organisations, the UCC has been instrumental in leading, co-ordinating and representing the interests of Ukrainians and their descendants in Canada. They have also mobilised the Ukrainian-Canadian community to support both displaced Ukrainians in Canada and returnees to Ukraine through fundraising campaigns and partnering with the Canadian Government to offer resettlement programmes, including on skills training, employment support, and cultural orientation.

Similarly, the **Ukrainian Congress Committee of America (UCCA)**, established in 1940, represents the interests of Ukrainians in the United States. It has been particularly active in addressing the needs of displaced Ukrainians, co-ordinating with various NGOs to deliver humanitarian aid, medical supplies, and psychological support. Additionally, the UCCA has advocated for US policy in favour of aid and for Ukraine's reconstruction and the reintegration of displaced populations.

The **Plast Ukrainian Scouting Organisation**, founded in Lviv in 1911 and banned during the Soviet regime, focusses on youth development, cultivating and upbringing in the spirit of shared cultural,

religious, and nation-building values. Its branches are active in many countries, including Poland, Germany, Austria, France the Slovak Republic, Ireland and the Baltic countries. Plast scouts help create a shared cultural space for youth of Ukrainian descent worldwide.

The **Ukrainian House in Poland**, founded in 2004 and based in Warsaw, is an example of an organisation that facilitates the integration of Ukrainians while preserving their cultural identity. In April 2022, it opened the Ukrainian Warsaw School in collaboration with the Polish Intelligentsia Club. This school follows the Ukrainian national curriculum and offers Ukrainian-state recognised school diplomas. Similarly to many other Ukrainian-led civil society organisations, the Ukrainian House shifted its focus following the start of the invasion, directing its efforts towards crisis response and humanitarian assistance.

Other examples of political advocacy organisations include the **European Congress of Ukrainians**, founded in London in 1949 and currently headquartered in Prague, which co-ordinates efforts to represent the interests of Ukrainians in Europe, and **Promote Ukraine**, a Brussels-based media platform, founded during the Revolution of Dignity in 2014 and relocated to Brussels in 2022. The latter seeks to “voice the interests of Ukrainian civil society in Brussels by sharing news, connecting experts, informing the public, coordinating events, cooperating with activists, and advocating for the Ukrainian cause to EU policymakers”.

Aide Médicale Caritative France-Ukraine (AMCFU) is a specialised humanitarian organisation. Based in France, since its foundation in 2014, it specialises in organising regular humanitarian convoys of medical supplies, including surgical, radiology and resuscitation equipment, medicines and emergency-adapted vehicles. The organisation works directly with local Ukrainian authorities to identify priority needs and ensure efficient and transparent distribution of aid. They also support the modernisation of Ukrainian hospitals, facilitates skills exchange between French and Ukrainian health professionals, and provides direct support to vulnerable populations, including sick children, orphans, and IDPs.

In Germany, there are more than 50 Ukrainian diaspora organisations linked to the Embassy of Ukraine. The **Association of Ukrainian Students in Germany**, for instance, was founded in 1921 and focusses on student networking and support, while the **Kul'tura Agency** is an organisation promoting Ukrainian culture and art abroad.

Source: Based on OSCE-ODIHR (2024^[22]), *Engaging the Ukrainian Diaspora in Reconstruction and Development*. ICMPD (2024^[24]), “The Role of Ukrainian Diaspora in Crisis Response”, https://www.icmpd.org/file/download/60826/file/UA_Diaspora_Report_RRR_Project.pdf; Keudel et al. (2024^[25]), “Why and How Involve the Global Ukrainian Community for the Recovery of Ukraine”, *Joint Policy Note*, web search, and respective webpages of these organisations.

In addition to civil society organisations and associations established by Ukrainians abroad, other channels of civic engagement also exist. For example, Ukrainians abroad participate in civil society structures created by host-country natives and, through these, may act in the interests of Ukraine or the broader Ukrainian global community when such local structures share similar values, objectives, or demonstrate solidarity with the Ukrainian cause. Beyond NGOs, this engagement extends to participation and membership in trade unions, political parties, and other structures.

Another important channel of engagement is non-institutional civic participation, such as joining demonstrations, signing petitions, donating, forming online communities and sharing information through social media platforms, including Telegram and Facebook. While such activities may be more dispersed and less visible to the State of Ukraine, advances in technology now make it possible to reach these individuals and groups more effectively and to strengthen their connection with Ukraine.

Policy measures since 2022

Support for internally displaced persons

In response to Russia's full-scale invasion, the immediate actions of Ukrainian authorities included the evacuation of civilians, facilitating the reception of IDPs in host communities, and ensuring the provision of essential humanitarian and social assistance to meet basic needs. By summer 2022, several Co-ordination Headquarters were established at the level of the Cabinet of Ministers (CMU) to manage evacuation during martial law, support the exit of Ukrainian citizens from temporarily occupied territories, and ensure the protection of the rights and freedoms of IDPs.

The sheer scale of displacement, with over a quarter of Ukraine's population displaced at least once between 2022 and 2024, impacted all areas of socio-economic activity. For this reason, state actors developed specific action plans and policies targeting displaced persons.

Given their proximity to affected populations and their capacity to respond swiftly, local administrations and hromadas played a major role in both the design and implementation of these state policies. While state-led initiatives offered financial aid, employment counselling, and housing support to IDPs, it was largely the hromadas that took responsibility for managing the day-to-day challenges of displacement. Their efforts included securing housing, distributing humanitarian and financial assistance, facilitating employment, and promoting social inclusion (Keudel and Huss, 2025^[16]).

To co-ordinate actions in support of populations affected by the war of aggression, including IDPs, 996 co-ordination centres were created across the country at the level of local administrations or hromadas⁷ in 2023 alone. As their name suggests, these centres aimed to streamline collaboration across executive power bodies, ensure self-governance and order, and co-ordinate with humanitarian organisations and volunteers on matters such as social assistance, housing, employment, psychosocial, medical, and legal support, and the receipt of humanitarian aid.

Numerous localities also created humanitarian hubs, social support centres, and "Partner Spaces of International Aid" (*partnerskyy maydanchyk*) to provide assistance to IDPs evacuated from occupied territories and conflict zones. These hubs co-ordinated and facilitated access to available humanitarian aid from international organisations, donors, and NGOs outside Ukraine. Many of them were actively supported by international organisations and NGOs, including UNHCR, OCHA, UNICEF, IOM, ICRC, AICM France-Ukraine,⁸ Intersos, Caritas, humanitarian mission Proliska, Pravo na Zakhyst, Ljudyna v Bidi, Rokada, Phata, and many others. Establishing such centres fostered close collaboration between civil society, international organisations, and municipal administrations, aligning their efforts with national priorities. Volunteers played a vital role as intermediaries between affected populations and larger organisations, leveraging their local knowledge and networks to address urgent needs. This synergy between local and global actors significantly enhanced the effectiveness and reach of aid efforts.

Humanitarian aid, housing and living support

The immediate challenge following the invasion was the evacuation of civilians and the delivery of humanitarian aid (food, clothing, basic medication) and housing for IDPs. The Ukrainian state responded with several measures,⁹ some initiated in the early days of the war and others rolled out progressively but in a timely manner.

Between 2022 and 2025, national measures included the organisation of centres for the transit and short-term stay of evacuees, the disbursement of financial assistance to them, subsequent living support to IDPs, compensation for communal expenses for individuals hosting IDPs, and various housing programmes, some of which were financed by international organisations and various donors (Box 3.4).

Numerous measures were also initiated by local executive and self-governance authorities. For example, in 2022, the city of Kyiv created a programme “Turbota: Nazustrich kyjanam” (“Care: Supporting Kyivans”), which provides free public transportation for IDPs, targeted financial aid to several distinct categories of IDPs with additional vulnerabilities, and support with elderly care, mental health, and IDP rehabilitation.

Perhaps the most significant source of Ukraine’s resilience and support to displaced populations between 2022 and 2025 has been the mobilisation of volunteers and civil society organisations. They became indispensable actors in managing the country’s humanitarian displacement crisis, offering rapid and adaptive responses to the evolving needs of displaced populations and those affected by war. Their grassroots approach ensured effective humanitarian assistance, housing solutions, and community integration (Hrudka, 2023^[27]). Local volunteers and NGOs, such as Ptaha, Tvoya Opora, or the Global Network of Eco-settlements, organised evacuations, food distribution, medical care, clothing drives, and the reconstruction and adaptation of temporary shelters. They provided housing across the country, including in areas inaccessible to international organisations due to ongoing hostilities, and offered legal and psychosocial support to affected individuals and communities.

However, the need for housing remains immense, and the challenges have only grown over the course of the war. Moreover, additional issues exist, such as an unregulated rental market, increased prices, unaffordability of housing, and lack of protection against eviction and discrimination, with displaced individuals particularly affected. Many temporary housing solutions are evolving into long-term options without any improvement in their quality. In this context, transitioning from programme-based support to a nationwide housing strategy became essential. In July 2025, the Law on the Main Principles of Housing Policy was approved in its first parliamentary reading. If adopted, this law will launch a major housing reform, setting out framework principles for the development of social housing and addressing the housing needs of IDPs and other vulnerable groups.

Box 3.4. Selected national programmes of financial and housing assistance for IDPs

One-off monetary assistance to evacuated populations

A one-off monetary state assistance is provided through UkrPoshta (Ukrainian Post) upon arrival by evacuation trains and buses. In 2023, over 62 000 individuals received this assistance.

Cash assistance to registered IDPs¹

Living assistance is granted for an initial six-month period to all IDPs applying for the first time. The assistance is paid monthly to one family member (referred to as the authorised person) in the following amounts: 3 000 UAH for persons with disabilities and children, and 2 000 UAH for all other individuals. Under certain conditions, the six-month period can be renewed once. In addition, cash assistance is provided to low-income IDP families with no members able to work, to ensure a subsistence minimum.

Shelter (Prykhystok)

The Shelter, created on the first day of the invasion, has been one of the largest state-supported initiatives connecting IDPs with individuals offering temporary housing during the war. It enables IDPs to find free accommodation and allows hosts to offer their space. Hosts may receive state compensation for communal expenses related to housing IDPs, financed by the Red Cross Society Ukraine, at a rate of UAH 14.77 per day per person. In 2023, around 90 000 homeowners were receiving this compensation monthly. See <https://prykhystok.gov.ua/>.

eRecovery (eVidnovlennya) / HOME²

This is a compensation programme for damaged or destroyed housing located in non-occupied territories outside active combat zones. If housing is damaged as a result of military action, the owner can report the damage through Diia. Following an assessment by a commission, monetary compensation may be granted, up to UAH 350 000 for an apartment and UAH 500 000 for a private house. In cases of total housing destruction, the owner may either receive compensation for rebuilding or a voucher to acquire new housing. The certificate is valid for five years. By 2025, 1 800 individuals bought housing using their vouchers. Financial support is provided in part by the Council of Europe Development Bank. See <https://erecovery.diia.gov.ua/>.

eOselya

The eOselya is an affordable housing loan programme supported by the Ministry of Economy, Environment and Agriculture; and the Ministry of Finance. It offers an application process via the Diia app and a fixed interest rate of 3% to purchase an apartment in a residential building, new or not older than ten years. Eligible participants include military personnel, medical and educational professionals, veterans, and IDPs. Loans may be secured with a minimum down payment of 20% and the maximum loan term is 20 years. The programme is implemented through participating banks. See <https://eoselia.diia.gov.ua/>.

Housing credit for IDPs

This programme is dedicated specifically to IDPs, with conditions similar to eOselya. Loans are awarded through a lottery-like procedure organised by the State Fund of Supporting Youth Housing Construction, financed by the Government of Germany. See <https://diia.gov.ua/services/kredit-na-zhitlo-dlya-vpo>.

Rental subsidy for IDPs

From January 2025, IDPs from occupied territories or combat zones, as well as those whose homes have been destroyed and are uninhabitable, may be eligible for a rental subsidy, provided they do not own alternative housing in government-controlled areas. The subsidy is granted if rental costs exceed 20% of the household's total income. Eligibility requires that the tenant and landlord are not relatives, that the tenant is not already receiving any other state housing assistance for IDPs, and that the landlord is not receiving compensation under the "Shelter" programme. The amount of the subsidy is calculated individually based on household income, family size, and regional rental costs. The programme also covers the landlord's taxes. This rental subsidy can be combined with subsidies for communal services available to low-income families.

Housing acquisition for IDPs

Some local administrations have acquired housing and transferred it to IDPs. Between 2023 and 2024, the city of Kyiv purchased 113 apartments for IDPs. The apartments remain the *hromada*'s property and are given to IDP families free of charge. An additional 500 apartments were purchased by the Kyiv city administration for renting to IDPs, who have a preferential right to purchase them over a ten-year period. More generally, in 2023, 352 families across the country were granted priority access to permanent social housing. Almost 3 000 internally displaced families received temporary social housing through the Social Housing Fund. Several regions are currently developing social housing programmes, which include the construction and renovation of social housing. Priority is often given to internally displaced orphans.

1. The legal basis for this assistance is laid down in the following documents: Law of Ukraine "On Ensuring the Rights and Freedoms of Internally Displaced Persons" – Article 1; Presidential Decree No. 64 of 24.02.2022 "On the Imposition of Martial Law in Ukraine" – Subparagraph 2, Paragraph 4; Resolution of the CMU No. 709 of 11.07.2023 "On Certain Issues of Support for Internally Displaced

Persons” – Paragraph 1; Resolution of the CMU No. 509 of 01.10.2014 “On the Registration of Internally Displaced Persons” – Paragraphs 1 and 2; Resolution of the CMU No. 332 of 20.03.2022 “Certain Issues Regarding the Payment of Housing Assistance to Internally Displaced Persons” – Paragraph 1; Resolution of the CMU No. 1 364 of 06.12.2022 “Certain Issues Regarding the Formation of a List of Territories Where Hostilities Are (Were) Taking Place or Temporarily Occupied by the Russian Federation”; Order of the Central Executive Authority (CEA) No. 345 of 19.06.2006 “On Approval of the Instruction on the Procedure for Processing and Maintaining Personal Files of Recipients of All Types of Social Assistance”; Order of the CEA No. 309 of 22.12.2022 “On Approval of the List of Territories Where Hostilities Are (Were) Taking Place or Temporarily Occupied by the Russian Federation”.

2. The legal basis for this is the Resolution of the CMU No. 381 of 21 April 2023 “On Approval of the Procedure for Providing Compensation for the Restoration of Certain Categories of Real Estate Objects Damaged as a Result of Hostilities, Terrorist Acts, Sabotage Caused by the Armed Aggression of the Russian Federation, Using the Electronic Public Service “eRestoration” (eВідновлення)”.

Source: Own compilation based on the Ministry of Reintegration of the Temporarily Occupied Territories internal report on the implementation of the Action Plan of the State Policy on Internal Displacement for the period up to 2025 and its Action Plan for 2023-2025; press releases from the Ministry for Development of Communities and Territories; the Ministry of Social Policy, Family and Unity; and services available via the Diia app.

Relocation of businesses

Relocation measures were not only aimed at individuals and their families but also at businesses. By August 2022, the Ministry of Economy, Environment and Agriculture,¹⁰ in co-operation with regional state administrations, Ukrzaliznytsia (Ukrainian Railways) and UkrPoshta (Ukrainian Post), had supported the relocation of 725 businesses to the western part of the country, out of 1 816 enterprises that had registered applications for relocation on the Prozorro.Sale online platform. By facilitating business relocation to safer regions, the government helped preserve economic activity and jobs for business owners and workers, supporting their economic integration elsewhere and reducing dependence on humanitarian aid.

Employment

The Ukrainian state has made significant efforts to support employment and enhance the human capital of IDPs. These measures, targeting the working-age population, included professional training provided by the State Employment Service (SES), distribution of training vouchers through channels other than the SES, allocation of micro-grants for entrepreneurship and business development, as well as incentives for business to hire IDPs (Box 3.5).

A major shift in the approach to supporting the unemployed, including IDPs, came into effect in September 2022. Previously, up to 75% of the Fund of Compulsory State Social Insurance in Case of Unemployment was allocated to unemployment benefits. Since the change, up to 80% is now directed towards active labour market policies (ALMPs) and business incentives.

Box 3.5. Selected national programmes to support employment of IDPs

Incentives for employers to hire IDPs

Employers are eligible for compensation when hiring an IDP, equivalent to the minimum wage for each employed IDP. This compensation is paid for a maximum of three months, or for six months if the IDP has a disability. Where an IDP is registered as unemployed with the State Employment Service and recruited on the referral of the employment centre, the compensation may be granted for up to six months, provided that the employment is guaranteed for a duration exceeding twice the length of the compensation period. In such cases, the compensation may amount to twice the minimum wage and also include the single social security contribution. In 2022, almost 16 500 IDPs were employed through this scheme, 15 000 in 2023, and a further 11 000 in 2024.

Employment of IDPs in public works

According to CMU Resolution No. 1 119 of 2023, non-working IDPs of working age may be employed in public works. In 2023, 7 100 IDPs participated in such activities through the “Army of Restoration” project. Salaries were financed from the Fund of Compulsory State Social Insurance of Ukraine.

Vouchers

Education and training vouchers worth UAH 30 280 each are available to selected target groups, including IDPs. In 2023, over 18 000 vouchers were disbursed, of which 3 800 went to IDPs. In 2024, over 22 500 were distributed for training in 155 high-demand professions.

Training for unemployed IDPs

Vocational training for registered unemployed persons, including IDPs, is funded by the Fund of Compulsory State Social Insurance of Ukraine. The SES operates a system of licensed TVET centres, offering over 400 programmes across 97 professions. Around 70% of this training is conducted at enterprises. In 2023, over 3 000 unemployed IDPs received training through this measure.

Grants for self-employment and business creation

VlasnaSprava is a state-funded microgrant scheme available to individuals, including IDPs. As of early 2025, the following conditions apply to grants:

- UAH 50 000 to 150 000: subject to creating at least one job and employing a person;
- UAH 75.000: subject to registration as an individual entrepreneur;
- Up to UAH 250 000: subject to the creation of at least two jobs and employing people in these roles.

Young recipients aged 18 to 25 may receive a microgrant of up to UAH 150 000. Additional grant schemes include grants for veterans and their spouses; “Create!” for female entrepreneurs; grants to create or expand enterprises in processing sectors; and “SvijSad” (Own Garden) for developing horticulture, viticulture, or small-scale berry farming.

Programmes for IDP women

Several initiatives have targeted IDP women specifically. These include regional Diia.Business offline centre training programmes such as “Entrepreneurship from Scratch for IDP Women”, “Women in Business”, “Preparing Women for Entrepreneurship in Wartime”, and Zrostaj (“Grow”).

Source: Own compilation based on information received directly from the State Employment Service, the Ministry of Economy, Environment and Agriculture, and the Ministry of Reintegration of the Temporarily Occupied Territories reporting on the implementation of the 2023-2025 Action Plan of the Strategy of State Policy on Internal Displacement for the period up to 2025.

The effectiveness of these initiatives has been greatly enhanced by their integration into the Diia mobile application, a dedicated SES application, and the deployment of mobile SES offices, which allow SES personnel to reach people in remote communities. In 2023, 59 100 IDPs benefited from SES services, with 15 900 securing employment. In 2024, these numbers rose to 86 000 and 21 000, respectively.

However, the SES has faced several challenges in scaling up its service provision, including the high mobility of IDPs, uncertainty about whether they will remain in host communities or relocate, and the need for comprehensive case management of IDPs. The latter requires the involvement of other social partners to support IDPs with documentation, housing, healthcare, childcare, and psychological support, either prior to or alongside retraining and employment support. To address these challenges, several SES centres have introduced one-stop shops where these services can be accessed in one place. Nevertheless, many SES centres lack the capacity and resources to fully implement this holistic approach.

Numerous efforts to enhance the skills and employability of IDPs were also undertaken by international donors and partners, in close co-operation with the Ukrainian Government (Box 3.6).

As with the housing sector, the employment challenges exacerbated by the war have been so significant that a nationwide policy to address the issue has become indispensable. Over 2023-2025, the Ministry of Economy, Environment and Agriculture has been developing an Employment Strategy, aimed at addressing the employment situation in Ukraine in novel ways, with a special focus on vulnerable groups, including displaced individuals. As of the writing of this report, the strategy has not yet been adopted.

In addition to state-led efforts, social partners have played an important role in preserving and facilitating employment, and enhancing the human capital of displaced populations. In partnership with existing TVET institutions, trade unions such as Profbud have created trade union hubs for informal professional training and micro-credentials, offering rapid, free specialised training for those in need of new qualifications. Additionally, they have developed training programmes and certificates tailored to address the most pressing labour market needs. Two employers' organisations have signed co-operation agreements with these hubs (Profbud, 2024^[28]).

Local NGOs have also been active in supporting human capital development, employment, and the integration and reintegration of IDPs. Organisations such as Razom, East SOS, Impact Force, Projector Foundation, and the Free People Employment Centre have launched programmes focussed on social and employment adaptation, reintegration and professional reorientation. They also support entrepreneurship, provided small business grants, conducted skill-building workshops, and promoted corporate social responsibility to empower displaced persons and other vulnerable groups, integrating them into local economies.

Box 3.6. Examples of donor- and IO-backed programmes and initiatives aimed at enhancing the skills and capabilities of IDPs

EU4Business

In 2023, under the EU4Business initiative, the EU funded 46 diverse projects with a total budget exceeding EUR 241 million, benefiting 17 207 small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in Ukraine. The initiative aimed to prevent the interruption of business activities, support business relocation, facilitate business recovery, enhance business skills, and stimulate the creation of new enterprises, particularly those led by IDPs and women. The project is estimated to have generated approximately 13 000 new jobs. Notably, 750 grants were awarded to IDPs to support micro-business development.

Skills4Recovery

This programme, funded by Germany, aims to strengthen the availability of skilled workers in key sectors essential to Ukraine's recovery. It focusses on improving technical and vocational education and training (TVET) conditions through various measures, including training TVET teachers to better support vulnerable groups such as veterans and IDPs. Implemented in co-ordination with the Ukrainian Ministry of Education and Science and the Ministry of Economy, Environment and Agriculture, the programme is active in six regional administrations (Lviv, Vinnytsia, Kyiv, Chernivtsi, Poltava, and Dnipro) and supports 20 educational providers nationwide.

Looking ahead, Germany seeks to collaborate with the European Union and selected member states under the Team Europe Initiative to streamline, synchronise, and scale up the support provided by different partners, with the aim of enhancing Ukraine's human capital more effectively. By early 2025, participating countries included Germany, Poland, Czechia, and Estonia.

UNDP Recovery and Peacebuilding Programme

Funded by the Government of Germany and the European Union, and as part of the UNDP Recovery and Peacebuilding Programme, a network of 30 TVET institutions across 20 cities in six Ukrainian regions has been established. The programme mobilised 57 mentors from 50 enterprises. In 2023, there were 506 participants in the programme, 21% of whom were IDPs. Participants acquired new skills across 23 different professions, and 65% of them secured new employment.

In 2024, the programme expanded to include capacity building for TVET and supplementary educational services (SES) management and staff; equipping regional SES and TVET offices; rehabilitating TVET school infrastructure and providing equipment; and running retraining and apprenticeship campaigns, among other activities.

Dream & Achieve

Dream & Achieve is an intensive training programme for displaced Ukrainian women, led by the Ukrainian NGO Impact Force in collaboration with UN Women and funded by the governments of Austria and Japan. The programme consists of 11 comprehensive modules covering areas such as digital marketing, business strategy, and the development of sustainable, socially responsible business models. In addition to technical training, it provides mentorship and fosters community building among displaced women.

Reskilling Ukraine

This project is run by the Skill Shift Initiative in partnership with Scania and funded by the Swedish Government. Since 2024, it has supported over 300 displaced Ukrainian women through career transition programmes focussed on reskilling for new employment opportunities.

Projector Foundation's initiative

This initiative, launched by the Projector Foundation, a Ukrainian EdTech company, in partnership with the Ministry of Digital Transformation of Ukraine, Diia.Business and the UNDP, began in 2022. Partners initially committed to retraining 5 000 displaced Ukrainian women to pursue new careers in creative and technological fields, particularly in roles that can be performed remotely. By early 2025, over 50 000 applications had been received, with more than 4 000 displaced women (inside and outside Ukraine) already trained and receiving scholarships. The training target with scholarships has since increased to 10 000.

Be-Relieve

This programme is funded by the Belgian Development Agency, in co-operation with the Ministry of Economy, Environment and Agriculture, the Ministry of Education and Science, regional authorities of Kyiv and Chernihiv, and the cities of Kyiv and Chernihiv. It targets IDPs and possible returnees, among other groups, with the aim of addressing skills mismatches by providing reskilling and upskilling in the medical, energy and construction sectors. The implementation period runs from 2024 until 2028, with a total budget of EUR 43 million.

Iron Women

This programme supports women, including IDPs, in acquiring skills for operating construction machinery, specifically excavators and wheel loaders. The initiative is led by the Swedish non-profit Beredskapslyftet in partnership with Volvo Construction Equipment and ETS Group, with informational support from Ukraine's Ministry of Economy, Environment and Agriculture. The programme includes online theoretical training and hands-on practice with Volvo equipment, including Ukraine's first electric wheel loader.

Source: OECD (2024^[29]), "Strengthening the human capital of forcibly displaced persons in and from Ukraine: Background note for the Ukraine Recovery Conference 2024", <https://doi.org/10.1787/9afedf7c-en>; Skills Alliance for Ukraine meetings.

Schooling

Between 2022 and 2024, IDP children had the option to either enrol in a school at their new place of residence or continue their education remotely at their previous school. Under Order No. 850 of 2024, the Ministry of Education and Science announced that, starting from the 2025 academic year, in-person schooling at the place of residence will become mandatory for IDP children. As a result, an estimated 300 000 internally displaced children were expected to return to offline education. While this measure aims to improve learning outcomes and support children's socialisation, it has raised public concerns, particularly in areas where schools lack available places and adequate shelter facilities.

Numerous measures were also initiated by local executive and self-governance authorities to support school attendance. For example, the city of Kyiv provided free meals to IDP children upon request from parents. In 2024, 6 713 IDP children received free meals in pre-school facilities, and 20 830 in secondary schools. IDP children were also granted priority admission to vocational training facilities (648 as of 2024) and to higher tertiary education (872 in 2024) in the city of Kyiv.

Psychosocial support

In response to the growing need for psychosocial services, the Ministry of Social Policy, Family and Unity has been implementing a pilot initiative since November 2023 to build psychological resilience in hromadas. This pilot project entails a partnership between the ministry, the Fund for Social Protection of Persons with Disabilities (FSPPD), the National Social Service Agency of Ukraine, local authorities, civil society and the private sector for the establishment of Resilience Centres.¹¹

Resilience Centres act as public social spaces that offer comprehensive support and services to community members, including IDPs, host populations and returnees. They carry out initial needs assessments, provide psychosocial support, and offer a range of related services, including referrals to relevant institutions and facilities. Designed to help individuals cope with stress, adapt to new living conditions and develop skills that contribute to stronger local communities, Resilience Centres are seen as not only supporting mental health, but also fostering social cohesion and solidarity within the community.

The first Resilience Centres began operating in early 2024. As of mid-2024, there were 195 centres across 23 oblasts of Ukraine, employing more than 900 specialists. Several additional communities have applied to join the initiative. Additionally, seven hromadas currently under temporary occupation by the Russian Federation use premises in safer regions to provide access to resilience services for their displaced residents.

Resilience Centres are established and managed by local governments. They operate on municipal properties or other premises with the owner's consent. Resilience services are delivered by registered social service providers, such as municipal non-profit organisations or NGOs.

Psychological support is also delivered through many other programmes and initiatives. One prominent example is the "How are you?" national mental health programme, launched at the initiative of Ukraine's First Lady and supported by the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Social Policy, Family and Unity, the Ministry of Education and Science, the Ministry of Internal Affairs, and the Ministry of Economy, Environment and Agriculture. This programme aims to help individuals cope with war-induced stress. Its dedicated website offers self-help advice, guidance on supporting others, and a list of trusted psychological support providers in Ukraine.

Another initiative, carried out by the Ukrainian State Labour Service over 2022-2023, involved the training of over 350 labour inspectors and quality-of-work specialists in providing urgent psychological first aid in the workplace, with particular attention to IDP-sensitive issues. It also informed over 32 000 enterprises about the possibilities for implementing psychological support policies at the workplace.

At the local level, psychological support for IDPs, especially children, is also provided by a wide range of international organisations and NGOs.

Information dissemination

Timely, safe, and accurate dissemination of information to the right audiences was critical in the face of massive displacement, particularly in the context of disinformation risks. The government actively communicated on safe evacuation routes, suggested steps and procedures to follow for safe evacuation actions and available support through all major media channels, including the Ukrainian National Information Agency Ukrinform, web portals, YouTube, the social media channels of ministries, state services, local administrations, and the Diia app.

Information leaflets and flyers, such as “Ukraine is my home” or “Here is Ukraine”, were distributed at the community level across several oblasts. Local municipalities also played a key role in further disseminating information about existing state programmes in the areas of social support, housing, and employment. They promoted and relayed updates from various ministries through their own social media platforms, operated hotlines, and circulated information digests and other materials. Several localities developed their own roadmaps to support arriving IDPs, and some launched their own localised versions of the Diia app.

The main in-person locations for accessing comprehensive information on integration, return and reintegration are the local centres of administrative service provision (“TsNAP”), which act as administrative one-stop shops for IDPs. These centres serve as key access points for information on rights and entitlements and also deliver aid and services.

Social integration into receiving hromadas

At the state level, CMU Resolution No. 812 of 2023 mandated the creation of IDP Councils, with the aim of promoting the active involvement of IDPs in effective collaboration with local administrations, self-governance bodies, NGOs, international organisations, and other stakeholders involved in addressing issues concerning IDPs. These councils also promote activities designed to improve social cohesion.

By 2024, a total of 801 IDP Councils had been established across the country, including 25 at the oblast level and by the city of Kyiv, 105 at the raion level and 671 at the local level.

Furthermore, the Law on People’s Power at the Local Self-Government Level, adopted in January 2025, is expected to further support the integration of IDPs into the life of host communities. The law ensures the direct participation of all residents in local self-governance and guarantees timely and full access to information about the activities of local self-government bodies and officials to all inhabitants, regardless of their status.

In addition to this, civil society organisations have initiated a number of local initiatives to foster social cohesion through community-building activities. Cultural events, educational programmes for children, and psychosocial and legal support groups, such as those by the NGO Rokada, have helped displaced individuals adjust and connect with host communities.

Support across hromadas, including to anticipate and prepare for return and reconstruction

Plich-o-Plich (Side by Side) the United Communities is a national initiative aimed at linking partner communities in central and western regions with frontline communities located along the line of combat or near national borders. Its primary objective is to support the restoration of infrastructure in frontline areas, promote co-operation, and strengthen national unity. Activities under the initiative include, among others, organising children’s camps; holding cultural, educational, and sports events; providing humanitarian aid; co-financing reconstruction efforts; and forming joint teams to support ongoing recovery and rebuilding. While not explicitly designed for displacement-related outcomes, the initiative is expected to produce

positive spillover effects for the integration of IDPs and may help facilitate safe and sustainable returns when conditions allow.

Initiatives to support the return of IDPs, when the time is right

The stabilisation of the security situation is the key precondition for the state to support safe returns. Throughout 2023, the Ministry of Reintegration of the Temporarily Occupied Territories worked on developing a draft legal act for the State Programme on Supporting Safe Return and Reintegration of IDPs. Several local administrations contributed to this process by providing insights into early preparatory steps needed to support return, including the restoration of critical infrastructure, land and forest management, environmental monitoring, and assessments of the state of social infrastructure. At the time of writing this report, the status of this legal act was unknown.

In 2023, the grant programme “Mitsnist” (“Strength”) was developed to support the recovery and revitalisation of businesses affected by the invasion. This programme provides assistance to entrepreneurs, employers and their employees who are returning to their original places of residence and work. In 2023, 60 entrepreneurs and employers participated in this programme.

Support for return and reintegration of externally displaced persons

While measures to support internally displaced persons were implemented from the outset of Russia’s full-scale invasion, policies specifically aimed at supporting and facilitating the return of externally displaced persons (EDPs) have developed more slowly. One possible reason for this was the substantial support provided by host countries to EDPs (OECD, 2022^[30]), which initially helped alleviate some of the immediate pressures on Ukraine. Additionally, there was a prevailing expectation that EDPs would return soon and reintegrate into their previous lives or, if necessary, access the existing support mechanisms available to IDPs.

However, IDPs and EDPs often have different profiles as well as distinct needs. Although the majority of EDPs still consider returning to Ukraine, their experiences and evolving circumstances abroad inevitably influence both their willingness and capacity to do so. The longer their stay outside Ukraine, the more the decision to return begins to resemble a new migration process, shaped by a complex interplay of personal, social, and economic factors.

Over time, there has been a growing recognition in Ukraine of the importance of developing specific policies to support and facilitate the return, and of the role that the Ukrainian state can and should play in this area. This reflects an increasing awareness of the need for structured and co-ordinated approaches to support return and reintegration from abroad.¹²

Safety of returns

Since 2022, the vast majority of Ukrainians who have fled the country have done so because of the security situation. They left to protect themselves and their family members, especially children and elderly relatives. Given this context, the stabilisation of security conditions remains the key precondition for their return. For this reason, any return should be voluntary, appropriately timed and well prepared, ensuring that this key precondition is met and that returnees are properly informed of the security situation and the options available to them to protect themselves from any renewed danger.

Counselling and information sharing to enable return

The longer individuals remain abroad, the more complex the return process becomes, and the more important it is that it be carefully planned and thoroughly prepared. Transitioning from the intention to return to the concrete decision to return can be far more challenging than it may initially appear. Returnees often

need to take a series of significant steps in the host country, such as terminating employment, concluding the academic year for their children, ending housing leases, fulfilling tax obligations, renouncing temporary protection status and its associated social benefits, closing bank accounts, cancelling insurance policies, and ensuring that travel documentation is in order. At the same time, prospective returnees are likely to feel the need to make preparations for returning to Ukraine, such as securing housing, employment and access to education for their children. In addition, many wish to ensure that the decision to return will not be accompanied by unforeseen obstacles or administrative complications, or the need to re-migrate.

For these reasons, access to timely, accurate, and comprehensive information, as well as return counselling, is often essential before a final decision to return can be made. To address this need, in 2025, Ukraine initiated the establishment of several Unity Hubs¹³ across major destinations of externally displaced Ukrainians, which are specialised centres aiming to create conditions to support Ukrainians abroad and facilitate their return to Ukraine. The Ministry of Social Policy, Family and Unity of Ukraine is also advancing the establishment of the Network of Unity, a “network of networks”, designed to consolidate existing initiatives with the engagement of Ukrainian authorities, EU Member States, and Ukrainian civil society organisations already active abroad.

This model aims to enable Ukrainian citizens temporarily residing outside the country to maintain strong connections with Ukraine, access reliable information, and make informed decisions regarding their return. The Unity Hubs will provide a wide range of services, including educational and cultural spaces, language courses, counselling by return advisers and economic opportunity co-ordinators, consular services (as an external function), banking and postal services, assistance from the State Enterprise “Document”, forums for opinion leaders, programmes for children and youth, a Ukrainian café, a business hub and coworking space, and a UA Job Centre, among others.

In addition, the Ukrainian Government has supported the development of information platforms specially focussed on the return of several international organisations and NGOs.

For example, “Povertajsja dodomu” (Come back home), launched in late 2024, is an online platform and Telegram bot developed by the Come Back Home NGO, with the support of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the State Employment Service, and the National Social Service of Ukraine. It provides a step-by-step guide and a roadmap for return, including a list of available support services in Ukraine for returnees. This information helps Ukrainians abroad stay informed and make conscious, well-considered and well-founded decisions about voluntary return to Ukraine, including for short visits to reconnect with family and friends, assess the security situation, and evaluate living conditions, opportunities and future prospects.

Another initiative is UNHCR’s “Ukraine is Home” platform (<https://ukraineishome.org>), also launched in 2024 with the support of the Ministry for Development of Communities and Territories of Ukraine. The platform provides detailed information on the rights under temporary protection and relevant regulations for visiting Ukraine across more than 20 European countries. It also includes information on available support and financial assistance for returnees from abroad, employment and business opportunities in Ukraine, and a free hotline for inquiries about extending stays abroad and returning to Ukraine, accessible from any European country. The platform also brings together a range of other valuable information for those considering long-term return.

In parallel, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is scaling up its efforts to provide return-related information through consular centres abroad. Preparing documents for return

To cross international borders, Ukrainians must possess valid documents both to re-enter Ukraine and to prove their legal stay in their host country, particularly if they envisage returning to that country in the future. While Ukrainian citizens cannot be denied entry to Ukraine under any circumstances, some may need to contact a Ukrainian embassy or consulate in the host country prior to return. This may include applying for

an extension of their biometric passport if it has expired, obtaining a certificate for return if they left Ukraine with only an internal ID, or registering the birth of a child born abroad to confirm Ukrainian citizenship.

A particular issue of concern is the return of men. As of 18 May 2024, men aged 18 to 60 requiring consular services, such as renewing their biometric passports, are required to submit their individual military registration document. Men of conscription age can obtain or update their existing military registration documents through a dedicated special mobile application. Without an updated and validated document, they cannot be issued a passport for international travel. The only exception is the issuance of a certificate for return to Ukraine, for which an updated and validated individual military registration document is not required. In many instances, Ukrainian consular services have been reinforced with additional staff and resources to address these additional demands.

Cash assistance upon return

According to CMU Resolution No. 94, “Certain Aspects of Social Support for Internally Displaced Persons and Other Vulnerable Groups” (January 2024), Ukrainians returning from abroad after an extended stay (over 90 consecutive days) who have not yet secured employment or other sources of income in Ukraine may apply for temporary cash assistance to ensure a subsistence minimum. This support is available for six months and is equivalent to the cash assistance provided to low-income IDPs.

To promote economic independence and reduce reliance on social support, the cash assistance for low-income families is combined with employment activation measures. If a returning household includes unemployed individuals of working age, they are required to take steps toward self-sufficiency within two months of receiving assistance, either by securing employment or registering with the State Employment Service.

Housing

At the time of writing this report, there were no state programmes specifically targeting the housing needs of EDPs or returnees. However, EDPs and returnees are eligible to participate in housing support programmes available to all Ukrainian citizens, such as eRecovery (eVidnovlennya)/HOME (see Box 3.1). If returnees settle in a location other than their original place of residence and register as IDPs, they may also qualify for housing programmes specifically designed for IDPs.

Employment

There were also no dedicated state programmes targeting the employment of EDPs or returnees. Nonetheless, returning EDPs are eligible to participate in general employment support schemes open to all Ukrainians and to register as unemployed with the SES. If they return to a location other than their pre-displacement home and register as IDPs, they may also access employment programmes specifically tailored for IDPs.

Continuity of education for children

Since the start of the full-scale invasion, over 400 000 Ukrainian children displaced abroad have continued their education in Ukrainian schools online. Between 2022 and 2024, many displaced Ukrainian children studied exclusively through Ukrainian online schools, which often limited their integration in host countries. Others attended both a local school in their host country and either their original Ukrainian school online or the All-Ukrainian Online School (grades 5-11). By the end of 2022, 516 243 Ukrainian children were enrolled simultaneously in both host country schools and Ukrainian online schooling. This number was 292 249 in 2023, 319 805 in 2024, and almost 1 million in 2025. Dual enrolment placed a heavy burden on students and their parents, and many students experienced fatigue, poor learning outcomes, and increased dropout rates, either from Ukrainian online education or from local schools.

Despite these challenges, maintaining ties with the Ukrainian education system is widely regarded as crucial for supporting children's future return and reintegration. In recognition of this, the Ministry of Education and Science issued Recommendation No. 563 of 2023 (amended since then) "On the Approval of Methodological Recommendations on Certain Aspects of Education in General Secondary Schools Under Martial Law in Ukraine." On this basis, a special curriculum has been developed for Ukrainian children displaced abroad to help reduce their dual schooling burden. This curriculum, known as the Ukrainian Studies Component, provides 6 to 8 hours of instruction per week, depending on the student's grade level, and focusses on subjects not typically taught in host countries. These include Ukrainian language, literature, history, geography, and defence of Ukraine, delivered through specially designed, condensed, and adapted programmes for each subject. Lessons are held remotely, often in the evenings or on Saturdays, to accommodate students' schedules in their host country schools. These classes can be organised within Ukrainian schools as dedicated remote streams.

The All-Ukrainian Online School – the main state online educational platform – is part of the broader online education ecosystem in Ukraine. This ecosystem additionally includes the distance-learning International Ukrainian School for Ukrainians living abroad, numerous accredited private online schools, and the Ministry of Education and Science's initiatives such as *offlineschool.mon.gov.ua* – a registry of offline schools abroad offering the Ukrainian Studies Component. These solutions play a critical role in ensuring educational continuity for children who may return to Ukraine, by maintaining access to Ukrainian-language curricula and cultural components. All children who were forced to relocate and study abroad retain the right to re-enrol in Ukrainian schools upon their return. To determine the appropriate grade level, Ukrainian schools are advised, under Recommendation No. 1 162 of 2025¹⁴ "On Amendments to the Methodological Recommendations on Certain Issues of Education in General Secondary Education Institutions under Martial Law in Ukraine", to consider academic results from host country schools, provided the student presents an official certificate of attendance and achievement. The Ministry of Education and Science has developed correspondence tables aligning Ukraine's 12-point grading scale with the grading systems of 26 host countries to facilitate this process. Children who studied abroad but did not take subjects included in the Ukrainian educational curriculum, or who are unable to present documentation confirming their studies, may undergo an annual assessment before the start of the new school year or, in some cases, during the school year.

In some cases, an individual learning trajectory may be established, allowing students to independently study Ukrainian curriculum subjects using the resources of the distance-learning All-Ukrainian Online School.

The Ministry of Education and Science regularly updates its methodological recommendations, adapting them to changes in the security and migration situation.

Continuity of education for adults and transition to the Ukrainian labour market after studying abroad

Recognition of foreign educational documents is largely regarded in Ukraine as a critical instrument for supporting the return and reintegration of students and adults, as it enables continuity of academic studies and careers upon re-entry. The recognition of foreign educational documents in Ukraine is fully compliant with the provisions of the Lisbon Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region (1997), which Ukraine ratified in 1999, and takes place through ENIC Ukraine.

Psychosocial support

There are currently no specific psychological support programmes developed exclusively for EDPs or returnees. However, they can access the programmes that are available to the general population, such

as the nationwide mental health programme “How are you?” or seek assistance through one of the resilience centres operating across Ukraine.

Co-operation between Ukraine and host country stakeholders to support future returns from abroad

OECD countries offered an unprecedented level of support to Ukrainians fleeing the war of aggression (OECD, 2022^[31]; OECD, 2022^[30]). They provided different types of assistance to new arrivals to mitigate the risks of social and economic exclusion and to assist them in meeting their basic needs. In addition to emergency shelter, financial subsidies and cash benefits, displaced Ukrainians were typically granted access to education, health services, and labour markets. In many countries, they also benefitted from various integration measures (European Migration Network, 2024^[32]; Eurofound, 2024^[33]).

Intergovernmental measures and activities

Notwithstanding these support measures, the Ukrainian authorities quickly identified return as a national priority. This priority is rooted in the state’s responsibility to protect its citizens, the desire to foster unity and a sense of nationhood, and the need to ensure Ukraine’s reconstruction and long-term demographic sustainability.

To support this objective, policies aimed at facilitating return, developed in co-operation with host countries, even while the timing of actual return remains unclear, began gaining momentum in early 2023. Between 2023 and 2025, many of these policies were shaped in line with what the OECD refers to as a dual intent approach to integration. Dual intent integration seeks to enable the socio-economic integration of displaced Ukrainians in host countries while also avoiding the creation of barriers to future return. This approach can be pursued by ensuring that investment in human capital and inclusion support is balanced with deliberate efforts to minimise potential obstacles to return in both host countries and Ukraine (OECD, 2023^[34]).

There are different ways in which Ukraine and host countries have been gradually implementing dual intent principles:

- **Investing in the human capital development of Ukrainian displaced persons during their displacement.** In addition to retaining and building on the existing skills of displaced Ukrainians, the Government of Ukraine has actively encouraged host countries to support skills development and work experience in sectors that are essential for Ukraine’s recovery, such as construction, engineering, energy, health, IT and the green transition. Many of the same skills are in high demand in current host countries, creating meaningful economic opportunities for Ukrainians during their displacement. Recognising the importance of maintaining and enhancing the human capital of Ukrainians, regardless of where they are located, the Government of Ukraine launched the Skills Alliance for Ukraine in 2024 with support from Germany. This umbrella initiative is intended to co-ordinate, streamline, and scale up the efforts of host countries, international organisations and other partners to invest in the human capital of Ukrainians, including those displaced by the war (Box 3.7).
- **Streamlining the recognition of skills and qualifications in both directions.** Such policies aim to support the skills-appropriate labour market entry for displaced Ukrainians in current host countries, but also to ensure the effective transfer and utilisation of newly acquired skills and know-how upon their return to Ukraine. Between 2023 and 2027, Ukraine is expected to align its National Qualifications Framework with the European Qualifications Framework as part of broader efforts to facilitate mutual recognition of qualifications. In parallel, Ukraine is exploring the possibility of signing new bilateral agreements on the recognition of qualifications. In addition, Ukraine is part of the Lisbon Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region (1997). Already before the full-scale war, Ukraine had concluded bilateral

agreements under this framework with seven European countries for the recognition or establishment of equivalence of diplomas and qualifications. Similar agreements were also in place with 12 non-European countries (for the full list, see Annex 3.A), and efforts to expand this list currently continue.

Box 3.7. Skills Alliance for Ukraine

Launched at the Ukraine Recovery Conference 2024 in Berlin by the Ministry of Economy, Environment and Agriculture of Ukraine and the German Federal Ministry for Economic Co-operation and Development, the Skills Alliance for Ukraine is an umbrella initiative aimed at strengthening the human capital of Ukrainians, both inside the country and among those displaced abroad. The Alliance serves as a platform to share information on existing initiatives, scale up impactful activities, mobilise funding and co-ordinate efforts among a wide range of stakeholders.

By January 2025, the Alliance had brought together 70 partners, including national governments, international organisations, including the OECD, the private sector, NGOs and other actors. As of 2025, the total pledged budget exceeded EUR 700 million, allocated to support the training, reskilling and upskilling of over 190 000 Ukrainians over a three-year period.

Training activities are implemented through 42 projects, 25 of which explicitly target IDPs and their family members. The Skills Alliance continues to welcome new commitments on a rolling basis, with a focus primarily on scaling up and expanding existing activities.

Source: Skills Alliance meetings. Also see <https://www.bmz.de/en/news/press-releases/launch-of-the-international-skills-alliance-for-ukraine-215342>.

- Offering Ukrainian language training in host countries for children and young adults.** Ensuring that young Ukrainians retain the necessary language skills and cultural ties is regarded as essential for their eventual return and reintegration. In addition to Ukrainian language training provided through Ukrainian online schooling, Ukraine, together with the Ukrainian global community and with the support of host countries, has promoted the establishment of Ukrainian schools and extracurricular language activities in host countries. Throughout the displacement crisis, many host countries made Ukrainian language learning available in their public school systems. Sometimes they were able to build on existing practices within the country. For instance, Sweden already incorporated the teaching of home-country languages within its formal education system. Similarly, displaced Ukrainian students in some Canadian provinces (e.g. Alberta and Manitoba) were able to benefit from existing Ukrainian-English bilingual study programmes. Meanwhile, Estonia, Latvia and Romania have Ukrainian schools where students follow the national curriculum while studying selected subjects in Ukrainian. In August 2024, Europe's first bilingual Hungarian Ukrainian school opened in Budapest, fully funded by the Hungarian Government. The school offers Ukrainian and Hungarian high school diplomas. In its first year, it enrolled over 300 children and employed 33 teachers, with a total capacity for 700 students.¹⁵ Starting in September 2025, a pilot project to teach Ukrainian as a second foreign language was launched in middle and high schools of four academic regions of France (Paris region, Alpes-Maritimes (Nice), Versailles, and Créteil).
- Retaining and facilitating Ukrainians' financial and digital ties with their home country.** Many displaced Ukrainians living abroad earn an income from employment in their host countries. Others also receive income from Ukraine, including through remote work for Ukrainian enterprises. Against this backdrop, Ukraine is exploring ways to address challenges related to tax and social security

obligations. The issue of pension portability between countries is also increasingly under consideration due to the protracted displacement situation. Further measures could include facilitating small-scale investment flows and reducing the cost of money transfers. Ukraine's existing e-government infrastructure, including the Diia app, provides an opportunity for the country to remain connected with its displaced communities. It also enables displaced persons to assess their eligibility for various state-supported programmes and thereby helps them prepare for their return.

- **Supporting the right to visit Ukraine without losing temporary protection status.** Allowing externally displaced Ukrainians, who are often beneficiaries of temporary protection or similar statuses in non-EU host countries, to make short visits to Ukraine without risking the loss of their legal status or documentation in the host country is essential to maintain ties with Ukraine and to support informed and voluntary decisions about return when conditions allow. Such visits enable individuals to assess the security situation and reconnect with family or check on property without making a premature commitment to permanent return that remains largely unsafe. This approach can also support more sustainable reintegration processes.
- **Building unity, improving communication, and supporting return.** Since early 2025, Ukraine has taken steps to develop joint programmes with host countries to support local integration while also supporting possible returns later on. In 2025, agreements were concluded with several European countries to establish Unity Hubs, which will serve as contact points for displaced Ukrainians. These hubs, once operational, aim to provide courses in the local language and culture, assistance in finding employment both in the host country and in Ukraine, as well as guidance on voluntary return and engagement in reconstruction.

Outside the context of the Ukrainian displacement crisis, one way in which origin and host countries co-operate on return and reintegration is through Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration programmes (AVRR), which typically provide both travel and reintegration support (OECD, 2020^[35]). These programmes are generally designed for situations involving irregular migration rather than humanitarian displacement, and there is currently no programme in place in host countries that seeks to encourage the return of Ukrainians. However, recognising that some Ukrainians may wish to return, a small number of host countries have adapted elements of their existing AVRR programmes or introduced new measures to support those who wish to return despite unfavourable security conditions and who lack the necessary resources to do so (see Annex 3.B).

To date, the Ukrainian Government and stakeholders have not been actively involved in the design or implementation of these measures. However, if conditions in Ukraine change and larger-scale returns become possible, and if such programmes are considered an appropriate way to facilitate returns, this would need to be reconsidered. Experience shows that close co-ordination between home and host countries can improve the coherence and overall effectiveness of such initiatives, both in terms of uptake and in supporting the sustainability of returns (OECD, 2020^[35]).

Activities by international partners and civil society

International humanitarian organisations, volunteers, and civil society organisations in host countries have provided invaluable and wide-ranging support to displaced Ukrainians (Bejma and Ignăţoiu-Sora, 2024^[36]). Several of these organisations have launched programmes and projects aimed at strengthening the human capital of displaced Ukrainians in line with a dual intent approach: supporting their integration into host societies without compromising their return prospects, and in some cases, actively preparing them for return (Box 3.8).

Box 3.8. Selected initiatives by civil society in host countries that align with a dual intent approach

Poland

Care International, Tent Partnership for Refugees and UNICEF, in co-operation with the Polish Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Policy, launched an initiative to support the employment of displaced Ukrainians in line with their qualifications. The programme focusses on skills development and retraining to improve labour market opportunities.

In October 2022, Upwardly Global launched the Workforce Inclusion Programme in collaboration with the Information Society Development Foundation (FRSI), Ukrainian House, and other partners. This 18-month initiative aimed to provide displaced Ukrainian women with job coaching, job readiness training, language courses, technical skills development, and wrap-around services, such as childcare. The programme set out to help 500 participants find employment that matches their skills and to provide reskilling and upskilling opportunities for at least 200 participants.

UNITAR, with funding from the Government of Japan, launched the training programme “Bolstering livelihoods: Digital reskilling for Ukrainian women evacuees in Poland” in October 2023. The six-month hybrid initiative trained around 500 women in high-demand digital skills, enhancing their employment and income-generating potential. The programme also supports participants in developing socially responsible digital start-ups and building leadership and entrepreneurial skills.

Czechia

In 2022, People in Need, a Czech NGO, launched an Employment Support Programme to help displaced Ukrainians integrate into the Czech labour market. The programme includes Czech language courses, job placement support, and vocational training in sectors experiencing labour shortages. By mid-2023, the programme had benefited more than 1 000 Ukrainians, many of whom had secured employment across a range of industries.

UNICEF launched the CESTY Initiative, a multi-stakeholder partnership designed to support displaced Ukrainian youth through one of three skills-building pathways:

- paid internships and apprenticeships;
- entry-level low-skilled employment opportunities that combine work experience with language acquisition and professional development;
- scholarships enabling full-time study while covering basic living costs.

In 2024, the initiative connected 1 500 displaced Ukrainian youth with these opportunities. Through the Regional Pathways Initiative, UNICEF aims to expand this initiative to other host countries, including Poland and the Slovak Republic.

Croatia

The European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) partnered with the Croatian NGOs SVOJA and Solidarna in 2023 to support the economic integration of Ukrainian refugees. The initiative focusses on increasing labour market participation, particularly in the private sector, by providing skills training and employment support primarily to displaced Ukrainian women.

Slovak Republic

In 2022, the Pontis Foundation launched the Integration of Refugees project to support Ukrainian refugees in the Slovak Republic. The project provides Slovak language courses, cultural orientation, and vocational training in sectors such as construction, manufacturing, and services. By early 2024, it had attracted over 800 participants.

Source: OECD (2024^[29]), “Strengthening the human capital of forcibly displaced persons in and from Ukraine: Background note for the Ukraine Recovery Conference 2024”, <https://doi.org/10.1787/9afedf7c-en>; Skills Alliance for Ukraine meetings.

Activities by the Ukrainian global community

The Ukrainian global community played a crucial role in responding to the displacement crisis, helping displaced Ukrainians to maintain ties with Ukraine – a vital consideration for future returns. This engagement has included mobilising support for externally displaced Ukrainians, providing them with housing and social assistance, and helping them to adapt to life in their host countries. They have also co-ordinated closely with civil society actors in Ukraine and host countries, as well as co-operating with national and international organisations seeking reliable partners to support displaced populations (Koinova, 2024^[37]; ICMPD, 2024^[24]). Those already living abroad have also played a central role in preserving the national, cultural, and linguistic identity of those displaced by the aggression (Keudel et al., 2024^[25]).

Thanks to the wider Ukrainian global community, numerous initiatives in line with the dual intent integration approach have also been made possible. These activities have helped to ensure the continuity of education for displaced children and students, and to maintain the human capital of displaced adults (OSCE-ODIHR, 2024^[22]).

One notable example is the Ukrainian Global University (UGU). Established by a broad network of Ukrainians abroad in collaboration with the Office of the President of Ukraine, the UGU is a consortium of educational institutions that assists high school and university students, academics, and tutors in continuing their studies and research in host countries by providing placements and financial support.

Similarly, the long-standing Shevchenko Scientific Society in New York has supported scholars, writers, and actors affected by the war (Koinova, 2024^[37]). Many other grassroots initiatives have also flourished. These include teaching the Ukrainian language, history, and culture in host country schools and Ukrainian after-school programmes, organising Plast scout activities, and hosting summer camps for Ukrainian children. Such efforts have largely been made possible thanks to the commitment and voluntary work of Ukrainians already living abroad.

The role of pre-existing Ukrainian communities abroad has also been vital in fostering solidarity and maintaining national identity and ties among Ukrainians across different countries. For example, the Ukrainian World Congress connects communities in over 60 countries and co-ordinates numerous global actions, including simultaneous demonstrations linked to significant dates or political events. The World Federation of Ukrainian Women's Organisations has brought together female activists across many destination countries and in Ukraine, while the Alliance of Ukrainian Organisations has played a central role in mobilising diaspora support for the annual high-level Ukraine Recovery Conferences (Koinova, 2024^[37]).

State engagement with the Ukrainian global community

Ukrainian communities abroad have demonstrated unprecedented mobilisation in response to the invasion. The Ukrainian state also recognises their vital contribution to the national resistance during this time, as well as their untapped potential to preserve Ukrainian identity, promote and advocate for the Ukrainian cause abroad, and support the rebuilding and development of Ukraine.

Improving communication

A major shift in how the Ukrainian state envisions its relationship with Ukrainians abroad, including “foreign Ukrainians”, began to take shape in 2023. In late 2023, the Ukrainian Government appointed its first Ambassador-at-Large for the Ukrainian global community, with the aim of enhancing co-operation with Ukrainian communities abroad and strengthening their support for Ukraine. This shift was also accompanied by more consistent and deliberate use of the term “Ukrainian global community” in political discourse, a concept that encompasses all Ukrainians living abroad, regardless of their reasons for migration, as well as “foreign Ukrainians”, and emphasises self-identification with the democratic Ukrainian state and Ukrainian nationhood.

Leveraging and supporting engagement

The draft Strategy “Ukrainian Global Community: New Policies for the Period 2025-2027”, developed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 2024 (not yet adopted at the time of writing), outlines a vision in which Ukrainians abroad and “foreign Ukrainians” feel a sense of belonging to the Ukrainian global community and one global Ukrainian family. The strategy envisions them feeling supported by the Ukrainian state, contributing to its development and the protection of its interests, and ultimately returning to Ukraine to take an active role in its recovery.

Another policy change was the establishment, in late 2024, of the Ministry of National Unity (defunct as of July 2025, with functions transferred to the Ministry of Social Policy, Family and Unity) and the Agency of National Unity,¹⁶ a new institutional structure tasked with implementing state policy on engagement with the Ukrainian global community and Ukrainian civil society organisations in host countries. The Ministry’s main tasks included the development and implementation of state policy on issues of national unity and identity, as well as protecting the rights and interests of Ukrainians abroad. In co-ordination with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, it was responsible for responding to the cultural, educational and linguistic needs of Ukrainians abroad and for promoting the rights and freedoms of Ukrainian citizens and citizens of other countries with Ukrainian roots.

Specific programmes to encourage and support return

Regarding the return of Ukrainian citizens (including those not displaced by the invasion) from abroad, several strategic legal documents outlined this as a priority for Ukraine even before the start of the invasion, and several initiatives exist to support this priority.

Given the large number of Ukrainians abroad with tertiary education, including those employed in research and innovation, Ukraine has introduced special programmes and initiatives to sustain connections and foster collaboration within the global Ukrainian research community.

One main example is the activity of the National Research Foundation of Ukraine, which offers competitive grants for research projects in Ukraine. It has introduced grant schemes for “foreign Ukrainians”, as well as specific grant and mobility schemes to incentivise return and reintegration. It supports research co-operation with research institutions, communities and foundations in partner countries, and supports research mobility and frameworks of dual affiliations, enabling researchers to maintain ties with Ukrainian institutions while working abroad.

Ukraine actively participates in Horizon Europe, including instruments such as MSCA4Ukraine and ERA Fellowships, which directly address mobility and career continuity for displaced researchers, by allowing displaced Ukrainian researchers to continue their activities at academic and non-academic organisations in EU member states and Horizon Europe associated countries, while maintaining their connections to research and innovation communities in Ukraine. These programmes provide structured pathways for Ukrainian scientists to remain integrated in European research networks while facilitating eventual return and reintegration.

The Create Ukraine programme, launched in 2022, is another example of a concrete measure to facilitate the return of Ukrainians from the Ukrainian global community. It is a pilot initiative co-funded by the European Union and the Government of Lithuania under the EU4Youth programme. The project is managed by the Lithuanian organisation Central Project Management Agency and implemented by the KSE Foundation at the Ministry of Economy, Environment and Agriculture of Ukraine. Its objective is to reintegrate young Ukrainian professionals with international experience into Ukraine’s public sector to contribute to economic development and reform efforts. Ten selected participants engage in a 10-month programme, joining the advisory team of the Ministry of Economy, Environment and Agriculture. They receive comprehensive support from the Kyiv School of Economics, including targeted training in leadership, policy analysis, and project management, as well as mentorship from government officials. The

programme aims to harness the skills of the Ukrainian diaspora to drive change, enhance government-society partnerships, and address strategic challenges facing the country.¹⁷

Engaging with “foreign Ukrainians”

One of the tangible mechanisms through which the State of Ukraine engages with its diaspora is the formal recognition of individuals as “foreign Ukrainians”, as defined by the Law of Ukraine “On Foreign Ukrainians.” This status is granted to persons of Ukrainian origin and facilitates their return and integration into Ukrainian society. Holders of this status are entitled to certain privileges, including simplified procedures for obtaining residence permits, access to education, and eligibility for employment in Ukraine without the need for a work permit. The status serves as both a symbolic and practical instrument for fostering return, particularly among those with strong cultural or familial links to Ukraine. Since its creation in 2004, over 10 000 individuals have received this designation, illustrating an ongoing, though modest, effort to maintain legal and cultural ties with the diaspora (Table 3.3).

Table 3.3. Number of citizens of other countries and stateless persons who received the status of a “foreign Ukrainian”

Year	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Number of individuals	893	1 072	1 274	1 152	844	665	438	1 183	903	185
Year	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Number of individuals	664	481	587	..	92	660	..	..	..	217

Note: “..” stands for missing data.

Source: Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Multiple citizenship

In 2025, the Law On Amendments to Certain Laws of Ukraine Regarding Ensuring the Exercise of the Right to Acquire and Retain Ukrainian Citizenship (No. 11 469) amended several existing legislative acts and introduced the possibility of multiple citizenship. The proposed changes will allow citizens of certain countries to acquire Ukrainian citizenship via a simplified process, without having to renounce their existing citizenship. The first countries with which agreements on multiple citizenship are expected to be established, include Germany, Poland, Czechia, the United States and Canada. This list of countries is expected to be updated frequently. The law was explicitly adopted with the aim of facilitating the return of Ukrainians and maintaining ties with those who cannot return immediately.

Strategic frameworks

The range of actions to address internal displacement, prepare and support the return of externally displaced persons and engage with the Ukrainian global community necessitated having a coherent, co-ordinated and strategic legal framework to address complex policy challenges across all levels of state institutions and of society, ensuring a shared vision and alignment across all actors.

At the national level in Ukraine, this framework has been provided in the form of state strategies, which are legal documents containing a guiding vision for policies and actions aimed at tackling major challenges (Table 3.4). These strategies serve to streamline and organise existing actions, reduce duplication, and enhance policy coherence. They also enable strategic planning for future initiatives by fostering new thinking and a clearer long-term vision. Furthermore, they signal political commitment, reinforce institutional legitimacy, and establish a basis for co-operation with hromadas, civil society, international partners and stakeholders.

Table 3.4. National strategic documents with a focus on displaced populations, return, reintegration, and Ukrainian global community (UGC), as of 2025

Name of the Strategy	Status	Covered population groups and issues	Lead body
2014 – 2021			
Strategy of Integration of Internally Displaced Persons and Implementation of the Medium-term Solutions for Internal Displacement for the Period up to 2024	Adopted on 28 October 2021; revoked and replaced by the Strategy of 7 April 2023	IDPs	Ministry of Reintegration of the Temporarily Occupied Territories*
Strategy of the State Migration Policy of Ukraine for the period up to 2025	Adopted on 12 July 2017. Amendments as of 19 January 2024 introduced an objective to support the return of EDPs	EDP, Ukrainian labour migrants, other Ukrainians abroad, questions of return	State Migration Service
Strategy of the De-occupation and Reintegration of the Temporarily Occupied Territory of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the City of Sevastopol**	Adopted on 24 March 2021	IDP	Secretary of the National Security and Defense Council
Strategy of Information Security**	Adopted on 28 December 2021	Ukrainian diaspora	Secretary of the National Security and Defence Council
2022 onwards			
Strategy of State Policy on Internal Displacement for the Period up to 2025, and its Action Plan for 2023-2025	Adopted on 07 April 2023	IDPs	Ministry of Reintegration of the Temporarily Occupied Territories*
Strategy of Promoting Employment of IDPs	Project	IDPs	Ministry of Reintegration of the Temporarily Occupied Territories*
Strategy of Housing for IDPs	Project	IDPs	Ministry of Reintegration of the Temporarily Occupied Territories*
Strategy of Demographic Development of Ukraine for the Period up to 2040	Adopted on 30 September 2024	EDPs, UGC, including “foreign Ukrainians”, issues related to return	Ministry of Social Policy, Family and Unity
Employment Strategy of Ukraine	Project	Residents of Ukraine, including IDPs	Ministry of Economy, Environment and Agriculture
Strategy of the Consolidation of Ukrainian National and Civic Identity for the Period up to 2030	Adopted on 15 December 2023, active with amendments, last on 21 July 2025	Ukrainian citizens abroad, “foreign Ukrainians”	Ministry of Youth and Sport
Strategy of Ukraine’s Foreign Policy	Adopted on 18 April 2023; a new version is in preparation	EDPs, Ukrainian citizens abroad, “foreign Ukrainians”	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Ukrainian Global Community (UGC): New Policy for the Period 2025-2027 (draft)	Project	UGC including Ukrainians abroad and “foreign Ukrainians”, questions of return	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Strategy of Digital Development of Innovation Activity (aka Global Innovation Strategy WInWIn)	Adopted on 31 December 2024	Ukrainians in Ukraine (preventing outflow), Ukrainians abroad	Ministry of Digital Transformation
Strategy for the Development of Culture in Ukraine for the Period up to 2030	Adopted on 28 March 2025	Ukrainians abroad, “foreign Ukrainians”	Ministry of Culture

Note: * By late 2024, Ministry of Reintegration of the Temporarily Occupied Territories no longer existed. Each strategy was approved by the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine, except the ones marked with ** which were approved by presidential decrees.

Each strategy listed in Table 3.4 is usually led by one ministry or institutional body responsible for its overall development, implementation, and oversight. Strategies are subject to mandatory approval by all concerned authorities, as well as by the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Economy, Environment and Agriculture, and the Ministry of Digital Transformation. Strategies are also accompanied by action plans, which are approved for an initial three-year period together with the strategy. Upon completion of the three-year period, a subsequent action plan is developed either for another three-year term, or for the remaining duration of the strategy.

Internal displacement in state strategies

At the start of the invasion, Ukraine already had a Strategy of Integration of Internally Displaced Persons and Implementation of the Medium-Term Solutions for Internal Displacement for the Period up to 2024 in place, which provided a useful framework for initial response.

In light of the unprecedented challenges that emerged, the government developed a new document to guide its response and policy actions by 2023: the Strategy of State Policy on Internal Displacement for the Period up to 2025.¹⁸ The Ministry of Reintegration of the Temporarily Occupied Territories was the lead ministry responsible for co-ordinating actions to implement the strategy, but it ceased to exist at the end of 2024.

The objective of this Strategy is to mitigate the adverse effects of internal displacement resulting from the invasion by addressing the challenges faced by displaced individuals in adapting to and integrating within host communities and to support their reintegration in cases of voluntary return. The Strategy has five goals:

1. Increase state capacity to respond to the challenges of internal displacement and create conditions for implementing state policy in the area of internal displacement.
2. Create conditions for safe displacement from areas of military action and fulfil the humanitarian needs of internally displaced persons.
3. Facilitate the adaptation of IDPs to their new place of residence immediately after displacement.
4. Facilitate the integration of IDPs by creating conditions to develop their potential and increasing the capacity of receiving communities.
5. Support the safe return and reintegration of IDPs.

The Strategy's Action Plan for 2023-2025 contains many of the actions outlined earlier in the chapter, such as, for example, the creation of regional co-ordination centres or special programmes for IDP employment. The Action Plan envisages that the vast majority of measures will be implemented within existing budgetary allocations and donor funding. The Action Plan's indicators of success include a mix of indicators that track institutional processes, such as the adoption or revision of laws and regulations, and some metrics that capture increases in the number of beneficiaries reached through these policies.

Two accompanying and more specialised strategies, on the Employment of IDPs and on the Housing of IDPs, were developed by the Ministry of Reintegration of the Temporarily Occupied Territories but had not materialised at the time of writing this report.

External displacement, return and reintegration in state strategies

External displacement of Ukrainians is explicitly addressed by the Strategy of Ukraine's Foreign Policy. According to its Action Plan for 2023-2025, Ukraine ensures proper protection of the rights and interests of displaced Ukrainians, notably by developing a joint policy with the EU, its Member States, other foreign countries and international organisations to protect the rights and freedoms of Ukrainian citizens who have been displaced to other regions of Ukraine, EU Member States and other foreign countries as a result of the full-scale invasion, and provide them with the necessary assistance.

The issues of return and reintegration of Ukrainians abroad already partly featured in the Strategy of State Migration Policy of Ukraine for the Period up to 2025, adopted in 2017. The State Migration Service was nominated as the lead executive body responsible for co-ordination of actions to implement the Strategy.

The objective of the Strategy is to co-ordinate state efforts in developing and implementing migration policy in a manner that strengthens national cohesion and state security, supports socio-economic development, and helps to slow demographic decline. In its original version, the Strategy already stated that “the return of all Ukrainian citizens who are abroad is the main task of the State”.

To respond to the new challenges, this Strategy was amended in early 2024 to add the objective of creating “necessary conditions for the return and reintegration into the Ukrainian society of citizens of Ukraine who are labour migrants or who have received temporary protection abroad”.

The Strategy’s Action Plan for 2024-2025¹⁹ contains the following tasks to fulfil this objective:

1. Taking into account international practices, determine the responsibilities of various state and local authorities in the reintegration of returning migrants, and reflect the corresponding changes in the mandates of Ukrainian authorities. The authorities responsible for implementing this are the Ministry of Reintegration of the Temporarily Occupied Territories (defunct as of 2024), the Ministry of Economy, Environment and Agriculture, the State Migration Service, and the Ministry of Social Policy, Family and Unity.
2. Conduct a comparative review of international practices for including NGOs in the process of reintegration of returning migrants. The authorities responsible for implementing this are the Ministry of Reintegration of the Temporarily Occupied Territories (defunct as of 2024), the Ministry of Economy, Environment and Agriculture, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the State Migration Service, and the Ministry of Social Policy, Family and Unity.
3. Implement targeted information campaigns for Ukrainian citizens returning from abroad, aimed at enhancing financial literacy, with a particular focus on the effective use of remittances and overseas savings for investment purposes, including entrepreneurship and small business development. The authorities responsible for implementing this are the Ministry of Reintegration of the Temporarily Occupied Territories (defunct as of 2024), the Ministry of Culture, and the Ministry of Economy, Environment and Agriculture.
4. Develop a methodology to estimate the number of Ukrainian citizens returning after a prolonged stay abroad (over one year), including disaggregated data on their location, needs and level of integration into receiving hromadas. The authorities responsible for implementing this are the Ministry of Reintegration of the Temporarily Occupied Territories (defunct as of 2024), the Ministry of Economy, Environment and Agriculture, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Social Policy, Family and Unity, the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the State Migration Service, and the State Border Service.

The Strategy states that the Action Plan’s financing will be determined by the relevant executive authorities within their budgetary allocations for the corresponding years and will also be supported by donor funding. The Action Plan primarily includes indicators that track institutional processes, such as the adoption or revision of laws and regulations, but not metrics that capture quantitative outcomes or the number of beneficiaries reached through these policies.

In addition, the 2024 Strategy of the Demographic Development of Ukraine for the Period up to 2040 enshrined the goal of “fostering conditions for positive net migration and decreasing the number of Ukrainians leaving the country”. To this end, among other measures, it highlights the need to create an environment that enables the voluntary return of forcibly displaced Ukrainians, Ukrainians living abroad and “foreign Ukrainians”; as well as enhancing co-operation with the latter group. The Ministry of Social Policy, Family and Unity was nominated as the lead executive body responsible for co-ordinating the implementation of the Strategy.

The Strategy's Action Plan for 2024-2027²⁰ contains the following tasks to fulfil these objectives:

1. Draft and adopt a dedicated legal act enabling the provision of accompanying measures to support the return and reintegration of Ukrainian citizens following a prolonged stay abroad. The authorities responsible for implementing this are the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Reintegration of the Temporarily Occupied Territories (defunct as of 2024), the Ministry of Social Policy, Family and Unity, and the Ministry of Economy, Environment and Agriculture.
2. Implement the Strategy of State Migration Policy of Ukraine for the Period up to 2025.
3. Ensure the development of social housing funds, preferential mortgage lending programmes, rental subsidies and other housing support tools that can be used by Ukrainians who have left the temporarily occupied territories or war zones, or who have lost their homes, and who return to Ukraine after staying abroad under the terms of temporary protection. The authorities responsible for implementing this are the Ministry for Communities and Territories Development of Ukraine (defunct as of 2024), the Ministry of Economy, Environment and Agriculture, the Ministry of Social Policy, Family and Unity, and the Ministry of Finance.
4. Create digital tools for Ukrainians abroad, containing all the necessary information and services for citizens returning or intending to return to Ukraine. The authorities responsible for implementing this are the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Digital Transformation, and the Ministry of Culture.
5. Optimise procedures for issuing identity cards to Ukrainians wishing to return to Ukraine. The authorities responsible for implementing this are the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the State Migration Service.
6. Conduct at least three comprehensive quantitative and qualitative studies of the needs and attitudes of different categories of migrants regarding their intent to return to Ukraine and the prerequisites for returning to Ukraine, with the involvement of representatives of the Ukrainian diaspora. The authorities responsible for implementing this are the Ministry of Social Policy, Family and Unity, the Ministry of Internal Affairs, and the State Migration Service.
7. Ensure the provision of social services to Ukrainians returning to Ukraine from abroad with the aim of accelerating their reintegration. The authority responsible for implementing this is the Ministry of Social Policy, Family and Unity.
8. Create virtual resilience centres for Ukrainians abroad. The authority responsible for implementing this is the Ministry of Social Policy, Family and Unity.
9. Ensure that Ukrainian children who receive education in educational institutions in host countries study those subjects in the standard Ukrainian educational curriculum that are not provided for by the curricula of host country educational institutions. The authority responsible for implementing this is the Ministry of Education and Science.
10. Conduct an information campaign among Ukrainians abroad about opportunities for professional development and starting their own businesses in Ukraine. The authorities responsible for implementing this are the Ministry of Economy, Environment and Agriculture, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the Ministry of Culture.

In addition, the Strategy's Action Plan for 2024-2027 contains a set of tasks aimed at deepening co-operation with representatives of "foreign Ukrainians", and with the Ukrainian global community, including implementing various projects abroad jointly with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Economy, Environment and Agriculture.

The Strategy states that the Action Plan's financing will be determined by the relevant executive authorities within their budgetary allocations for the corresponding years and will also be supported by donor funding. The Action Plan includes a mix of indicators that track institutional processes, such as the adoption or

revision of laws and regulations, or the number of studies, surveys, or activities, and some metrics that capture the number of beneficiaries reached through some of the proposed actions.

Finally, the Strategy for Digital Development and Innovation Activity, adopted in late 2024, contains as one of its goals attracting human capital, notably through the intensification of contacts with researchers, innovators and founders of startups of Ukrainian origin located abroad, and their integration into innovation clusters, business incubators, accelerators, and science parks in Ukraine.

Diaspora engagement in state strategies

The draft Strategy of the Ukrainian Global Community (UGC): New Policy for the Period 2025-2027 is dedicated entirely to fostering collaboration with Ukrainians and “foreign Ukrainians” abroad. Among its various goals, the strategy contains a set of tasks aimed at deepening co-operation with representatives of “foreign Ukrainians” and the Ukrainian global community, including the implementation of various projects abroad. Developed over 2024, it had not been adopted at the time of writing this report.

Several other strategies, including the Strategy of Information Security, the Strategy of the Consolidation of Ukrainian National and Civic Identity for the Period up to 2030, and the Strategy for the Development of Culture in Ukraine for the Period up to 2030, while addressed to all Ukrainians, identify those abroad and the diaspora as groups requiring targeted approaches. These strategies emphasise the importance of strengthening communication and information links with these population groups, reinforcing shared civic and national identity, maintaining cultural ties, and engaging these groups in the promotion of Ukrainian culture internationally.

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Annex 3.A. Bilateral agreements on mutual recognition of educational documents

Country	Year	Name of the agreement, in Ukrainian, with a link to the legal text where possible
Hungary	2021; 1998	Угода між Кабінетом Міністрів України та Урядом Угорщини про взаємне визнання документів про освіту та наукові ступені від 22.07.2021 р. Угода між Кабінетом Міністрів України та Урядом Угорської Республіки про взаємне визнання та еквівалентність документів про освіту і наукові ступені, виданих в Україні та Угорській Республіці, від 27.10.1998 р.
Slovak Republic	2014	Угода між Кабінетом Міністрів України та Урядом Словацької Республіки про академічне взаємне визнання і еквівалентність документів про освіту, виданих в Україні та Словацькій Республіці від 08.04.2014 р.
Argentina	2011	Угода між Кабінетом Міністрів України та Урядом Аргентинської Республіки про взаємне визнання документів про вищу освіту від 20.04.2011 р.
Poland	2005	Угода між Кабінетом Міністрів України та Урядом Республіки Польща про академічне взаємовизнання документів про освіту та рівноцінність ступенів від 11.04.2005 року.
France	2005	Угода між Урядом України та Урядом Французької Республіки про взаємне визнання документів про наукові ступені і вчені звання від 14.06.2005 р.
Viet Nam	2004	Угода між Кабінетом Міністрів України і Урядом Соціалістичної Республіки В'єтнам про взаємне визнання документів про освіту, наукові ступені і вчені звання від 04.11.2004 р.
Equatorial Guinea	2004	Угода між Кабінетом Міністрів України та Урядом Республіки Екваторіальна Гвінея про взаємне визнання документів про освіту від 17.09.2004 р.
Mongolia	2004	Угода між Кабінетом Міністрів України і Урядом Монголії про взаємне визнання документів про освіту, наукові ступені і вчені звання від 22.09.2004 р.
Peru	2004	Угода між Урядом України та Урядом Республіки Перу про взаємне визнання документів про освіту і вчені звання від 16.07.2004 р.
Libya	2003	Угода між Кабінетом Міністрів України та Вищим Народним Комітетом Великої Соціалістичної Народної Лівійської Арабської Джамагії про взаємне визнання документів про освіту і наукові ступені від 30.06.2003 р.
Georgia	2002	Угода між КМУ і Виконавчою Владою Грузії про взаємне визнання та еквівалентність документів про освіту і вчені (науково-педагогічні) звання від 17.07.2002 р.
Kazakhstan	2001	Угода між Кабінетом Міністрів України і Урядом Республіки Казахстан про взаємне визнання та еквівалентність документів про освіту, наукові (вчені) ступені і вчені звання від 26.09.2001 р.
Bulgaria	2001	Угода між Кабінетом Міністрів України та Урядом Республіки Болгарія про взаємне визнання документів про освіту, наукові ступені і вчені звання від 27.06.2001 р.
Azerbaijan	2000	Угода між Кабінетом Міністрів України і Урядом Азербайджанської Республіки про взаємне визнання та еквівалентність документів про освіту і вчені звання від 16.03.2000 р.
Romania	1999	Угода між Кабінетом Міністрів України та Урядом Румунії про взаємне визнання і еквівалентність документів про освіту, наукові ступені, виданих в Україні та Румунії від 19.02.1999 р.
China	1998	Угода між Кабінетом Міністрів України та Урядом Китайської Народної Республіки про взаємне визнання та еквівалентність документів про освіту і наукові ступені від 10.12.1998 р.
Uzbekistan	1997	Угода між Урядом України і Урядом Республіки Узбекистан про взаємне визнання та еквівалентність документів про освіту від 18.04.1997 р.
Estonia	1996	Угода між Урядом України і Урядом Естонської Республіки про взаємне визнання документів про освіту і наукові ступені від 06.02.1996 р.

Source: Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine.

Annex 3.B. Examples of return support measures open to Ukrainians

Belgium

Belgium's Federal Agency for the Reception of Asylum Seekers (Fedasil) provides support to Ukrainians under temporary protection who wish to return home but do not have the resources to organise the journey themselves. This support is implemented together with IOM and Caritas International, with each request evaluated on a case-by-case basis. Fedasil primarily organises return by bus to selected cities in Ukraine, where security conditions are reassessed regularly (Belgian Federal Government, 2025^[38]). Travel costs, including transport to the departure point, are covered, and expenses for travel documents are reimbursed. Throughout the process, Fedasil and IOM offer guidance, while Caritas International may provide reintegration support upon arrival, such as assistance with housing, medical needs, or starting a business (Fedasil, 2025^[39]).

Czechia

The Czech Ministry of Interior launched a pilot programme in June 2024 specifically designed for Ukrainian beneficiaries of temporary protection who wish to terminate their status and return to Ukraine. The programme covers the cost of bus tickets from selected Czech cities to the closest safe city of the returnee's original residence in Ukraine. Additional care and adequate transportation is provided to individuals with special medical needs. Returnees are limited in their ability to reapply for a residence permit in Czechia during the following 12 months unless they reimburse half of the costs incurred for their return (Ministry of the Interior of the Czech Republic, 2025^[40]).

The Netherlands

The Dutch Repatriation and Departure Service (DTenV), under the Ministry of Justice and Security, extended eligibility to its standard assisted voluntary return programme to beneficiaries of temporary protection. With support from the IOM and NGOs, DTenV assists Ukrainians who wish to permanently return to Ukraine but lack travel documents or resources to organise their journey, including those with special needs (Ministry of Justice and Security, 2022^[41]). The programme provides counselling, ensuring the decision to return is conscious and voluntary (Ministry of Justice and Security, 2025^[42]).

Norway

In Norway, the Directorate of Immigration (UDI) offers information and financial support to Ukrainians with valid residence permits who decide to return to Ukraine permanently (Norwegian Directorate for Immigration, 2025^[43]). Ukrainians can apply for financial assistance amounting to NOK 17 500 per person, including for children. If they later choose to come back to Norway, they may be required to repay some or all of the financial assistance, depending on the duration of their stay abroad. Unlike Norway's standard assisted voluntary return programmes, this initiative focusses on facilitating voluntary returns for Ukrainians with legal residence and protection status.

Switzerland

The State Secretariat for Migration (SEM) offers support to Ukrainians under temporary protection “S Status” who wish to return voluntarily to Ukraine. This includes personalised counselling, logistical help with the journey, and additional benefits such as financial support of 500 Swiss Francs per adult, 250 Swiss Francs per child, and a maximum of 2000 Swiss Francs per family. Each case is assessed individually by cantonal Return Counselling Services to determine eligibility and the appropriate level of support.

Notes

¹ This chapter reviews only regulations that are directly relevant to the issues of return, reintegration, and engagement with the Ukrainian global community. It does not include regulations governing other areas of migration, such as the migration of nationals of other countries, labour migration of Ukrainians, granting refugee status in Ukraine, etc.

² Also known as the Law on the Legal Status of Ukrainians Abroad (Закон Про закордонних українців).

³ Unless stated otherwise, this section is based on the Regulations for each respective ministry (specific documents approved by Resolutions of the CMU), outlining the mandate, key tasks, functions, rights, and responsibilities, as of February 2025.

⁴ More generally, in Ukraine, the mandate of ministries is defined through a range of normative legal acts, the main ones being:

- The Constitution of Ukraine, which establishes the general principles of the organisation of executive power and the functioning of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine, which includes ministries.
- The Law of Ukraine on the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine, which regulates the activities of the government and defines the powers of ministries as central executive bodies.
- Resolutions and Orders of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine, approving and modifying Regulations of the Ministries.
- Regulations for the ministry, which are specific documents approved by the Cabinet of Ministers typically through Resolutions and sometimes through Orders, outlining the mandate, powers, key tasks, functions, rights and responsibilities of a particular ministry, and the organisational structure of each ministry.
- Laws of Ukraine regulating specific areas, such as, for example, legislation on education, the economy, and other sectors, which can further specify the functions of ministries in the relevant sectors.

⁵ The mandate of the ministry dates back to 1993.

⁶ Own elaboration. For other typologies, see, for example, (Koinova and Tsourapas, 2018^[44]).

⁷ Information collected from government officials during a fact-finding mission to Ukraine.

⁸ Association Internationale de Coopération Médecine / International Association for Co-operation in Medicine France-Ukraine.

⁹ Unless stated otherwise, information in this section was provided to the OECD by Ukrainian public officials during the OECD fact-finding mission.

¹⁰ For more information, see the Ministry of Economy, Environment and Agriculture Press Release “Relocation: 725 Enterprises Moved to Safe Regions”, of 30 August 2022, available at: <https://me.gov.ua>.

as well as information available at the single government site for business relocation aid: <https://auction.e-tender.ua/helpRelocation>.

¹¹ The legal basis for this is the Resolution of the CMU “On the Implementation of a Pilot Project to Introduce a Comprehensive Social Service to Build Resilience” and the Order of the CMU “On the Organisation of Activities and Ensuring Functionality of the Resilience Centres”.

¹² Information in this section is based on reviews of information provided by various ministries and the State Employment Service during the OECD fact-finding mission; information available on the Povertajsja Dodomu (Come back home) online platform and the UNHCR “Ukraine is Home” platform; and publicly available information on the websites of the National Social Services of Ukraine and the Ministry of National Unity of Ukraine.

¹³ The legal basis for this is the Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine of 14 July 2025 (No. 841) “On the implementation of an experimental project on developing a network of unity among Ukrainians abroad.”

¹⁴ Replacing the previous Recommendation No. 836 of 2024.

¹⁵ For more information, see the Office of the President of Ukraine press release: [President Visits State Ukrainian-Hungarian School in Budapest — Official website of the President of Ukraine](#), accessed in March 2025.

¹⁶ By Order of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine of 24 January 2025 (No. 73-r) “On the establishment of the state non-profit enterprise “Agency for National Unity””.

¹⁷ For more information, see <https://foundation.kse.ua/create-ukraine/>.

¹⁸ Adopted in March 2023, consulted in May 2025.

¹⁹ Adopted in September 2024, consulted in May 2025.

²⁰ Adopted in November 2024, consulted in May 2025.

4

Understanding intentions to return and actual returns: Space for further policy action

This chapter starts by reviewing available surveys to highlight factors influencing displaced persons' intentions to return. It then presents original data analysis, exploring whether intentions diminish over time, how intentions translate into actual returns, and what is known about current returnees. Particular attention is given to housing, employment, and access to public services including health and education – all constitutionally guaranteed rights in Ukraine and areas where policy action can meaningfully support return and reintegration. The chapter concludes with simulations illustrating how many Ukrainians may return under different hypothetical scenarios, providing insights into the preparedness of the current systems to support return and reintegration and identifying areas where further support and progress are needed.

Intentions to return are shaped by a complex set of factors

Key takeaways

- **Return intentions are diverse and evolving over time.** Surveys show that the share of individuals intending to return has declined since 2022, with notable differences by host region and individual profile.
- **Security and family unity are the strongest determinants of intention to return.** However, housing, employment and access to services are the most influential factors within the reach of policymakers.
- **Housing and employment conditions strongly shape return intentions.** Intact or reparable housing and the prospect of decent work encourage return, while destroyed housing and weak labour market opportunities act as major barriers.
- **Public services influence return intentions in both positive and negative ways.** Healthcare access in Ukraine is often viewed more favourably than abroad, making it both a pull factor and a reason for short-term visits. By contrast, the continuity of children's education in host countries is frequently cited as a reason for delaying or avoiding return.

From the earliest months of Russia's aggression, questions about whether and when displaced Ukrainians might return have been at the centre of discussions in both Ukraine and host countries. Alongside efforts to provide immediate support, authorities in Ukraine and abroad sought to anticipate the future course of displacement. Numerous surveys were launched in early 2022 and in subsequent years by international organisations, as well as analytical and research institutions in Ukraine and in host countries, to understand the needs of displaced populations and to capture their views on eventual return.

By 2025, more than 60 surveys containing questions on intentions to return had been conducted among individuals displaced by the aggression, across Ukraine and host OECD countries (see Annex 4.C). While the results are not directly comparable across the majority of surveys due to differences in definitions, sampling methodology, timeframe and location, they nevertheless allow for a general picture of the key factors underpinning return intentions to emerge. They provide valuable insights into how displaced persons weigh different aspects of life when considering return. This information is critical for policymakers, who must plan for the eventuality of return and reintegration even before wider returns begin.

Return intentions change over time and are diverse

The review of surveys undertaken for this report has highlighted not only the diversity of displaced persons' experiences, but also the fluidity of their intentions. They shift over time as security conditions, the situation in Ukraine, and prospects in host countries evolve.

Overall, the observed trend across intention surveys is that the share of individuals expressing an intention to return is gradually declining over time. For example, in UNHCR's surveys among Ukrainians displaced abroad, 83% expressed hopes of return in 2022. This share fell to 76% in 2023 and to 61% in 2024 (UNHCR, 2024^[1]). Similarly, the survey by the Centre for Economic Strategy, a Ukrainian think tank, recorded a drop from 74% in early 2023 to 63% later that year, and to 43% by the end of 2024 (Centre for Economic Strategy, 2025^[2]). As shown in the following sections of this chapter, however, caution is needed in interpreting this trend as a decline in the intentions to return of specific individuals, as different respondents are surveyed each time.

Differences are also apparent between host regions. The SAM-UKR survey conducted in 2023 found that nearly two in three respondents in neighbouring Central and Eastern European countries (62%) were certain they would return, compared with only one in three (33%) in Scandinavian countries (EUAA/OECD, 2024^[3]).

Intentions also differ by profile, with higher levels of expressed return among single-parent female-headed households, older people, households with dependants, and those maintaining stronger ties with Ukraine (UNHCR, 2024^[11]).

Security situation and family reunification remain the key factors shaping return intentions, though other considerations matter as well

Not surprisingly, the security situation, the course of the war and the threat of active hostilities remain the key factors reducing intentions to return. Across surveys, an improved security situation and family reunification consistently emerge as the main reasons for considering return (IMPACT, 2023^[4]; EUAA/OECD, 2024^[3]; MPI and IOM, 2024^[5]). At the same time, these figures illustrate the limitations of relying on headline numbers alone. Expressions of hope, plans, or reluctance to return often fluctuate with the immediate context and should not be interpreted as forecasts of future movements.

While safety and family unity are consistently the most important considerations, they are largely beyond the direct influence of policymakers. By contrast, factors such as the condition and availability of housing, access to employment opportunities, and the provision of public services are areas that remain within the reach of policymakers and where policies and specific measures can have an impact. Numerous surveys show that, indeed, beyond security, these factors are the next major elements that shape return intentions. Understanding how displaced persons perceive these factors, and how they interact with broader considerations, is therefore essential for preparing policies that can support safe, voluntary, and sustainable returns when safety conditions permit.

In this light, the rest of this section explores these three domains in greater depth. To improve comparability, the discussion focusses on seven large-scale surveys of displaced Ukrainians that contained sufficiently detailed and comparable questions on access to housing, employment, and social services. Where surveys were conducted in several rounds, the most recent results are presented, with earlier rounds referenced only where they provide unique insights not captured later. A full overview of the selected surveys and the methodology for selecting them is provided in Annex 4.C.

Housing as a factor shaping return intentions

Accommodation is one of the most frequently mentioned factors shaping displaced persons' intentions to return after security concerns. Taken together, the reviewed surveys suggest that the condition of housing in Ukraine is closely linked to intentions to return. Intact or reparable housing in Ukraine increases the likelihood of displaced persons considering return, while destroyed, inaccessible, or unaffordable housing is often described as a decisive barrier. Access to alternative housing, sometimes combined with financial or in-kind support, can encourage return even under less favourable circumstances.

Intact housing and ownership make displaced persons more likely to plan a return

Evidence indicates that displaced persons with undamaged or reparable housing more often report plans or hopes to return than those without. Responses in the sixth round of UNHCR's survey of intentions and perspectives of refugees show that externally displaced persons who owned a property that was not damaged were more likely to report plans to return within 12 months (UNHCR, 2024^[11]). The YOUkraina survey shows a similar pattern among those abroad, with a larger share planning or hoping to return where

housing was intact than where it was destroyed (60.6% compared with 52.8%) (Factum Group, 2023^[6]; Vox Ukraine, 2024^[7]).

Even damaged housing appears to have a more positive effect on the intention to return than uncertainty or lack of ownership. In the same UNHCR survey, externally displaced persons with damaged property more often reported hopes to return one day than those who did not know the status of their property or who did not own one (64% compared with 50%). The pattern was even more pronounced among internally displaced persons. Ownership of undamaged property was associated with a higher share planning to return within 12 months, while those without property were less likely to hope to return one day than others (56% compared with 70%).

Destroyed, inaccessible or unaffordable housing is a frequently cited barrier

Several surveys identify damaged, inaccessible, or unaffordable housing as a factor behind decisions not to return, including changes of mind among those who had previously intended to do so. In the fifth round of UNHCR's intentions survey (UNHCR, 2024^[8]), among externally displaced persons whose prior plans to return permanently did not materialise, 20% cited property that was damaged or inaccessible. Among those who had previously hoped to return one day but no longer did, 23% gave the same reason. For internally displaced persons, the corresponding figures were 7% and 12%. More generally, for IDPs, destroyed or inaccessible housing in the areas of origin was cited as the most important barrier for return. The YOUkraina survey found that among respondents not planning to return, 14% reported having no place to live and 24% cited the high cost of housing. Among those whose housing was destroyed, 40% reported not planning to return (Factum Group, 2023^[6]; Vox Ukraine, 2024^[7]).

These concerns extend beyond individual housing to occupation and broader issues of infrastructure and community viability. In mid-2023, among externally displaced persons who were not planning to return, 11% stated that this was because their locality was under occupation (Factum Group, 2023^[6]; Vox Ukraine, 2024^[7]). SAM-UKR responses reference fears that not only homes but entire communities had been destroyed (EUAA/OECD, 2024^[3]). Community-level assessments in IOM's Conditions of Return Assessment further illustrate the scale and variation of residential damage. Most assessed locations reported up to 40% of residences destroyed, with a smaller share reporting higher levels of destruction. These locations encompassed areas where the vast majority of returnees resided (95%) (IOM, 2024^[9]).

Access to suitable housing and support can encourage return once safety improves

While the end of hostilities remains the overriding condition, surveys show that access to property or alternative housing is often among the most important factors enabling return. In UNHCR Round 6, access to property or alternative housing was cited as the second most important factor for externally displaced persons after the end of war and occupation (UNHCR, 2024^[1]). For internally displaced persons, it was the most important factor, reported more often by those originating from the east, where property damage was more prevalent.

The third wave of the CES survey found that 19% of respondents said free housing in a safer region could encourage them to return to another part of Ukraine, with this share rising to 29% among older respondents. In addition, 17% would be encouraged by a job offer that included accommodation and 11% by rent support (Centre for Economic Strategy, 2024^[10]). In the fourth wave, housing and infrastructure items continued to be mentioned as potential enablers, including the loss of temporary shelter abroad and the restoration of infrastructure or one's own home, although they ranked below safety and livelihood considerations (Centre for Economic Strategy, 2025^[2]).

Employment as a factor shaping return intentions

Just as accommodation strongly shapes return intentions, employment opportunities are another central element influencing whether displaced persons consider returning to Ukraine. Findings from the different surveys show that concerns about economic conditions and the lack of decent work are among the most frequently cited barriers to return. At the same time, access to employment is consistently reported as one of the most important conditions that could enable return. Employment and income levels in host countries also influence return intentions, with those less integrated in labour markets abroad showing a greater inclination to return.

Limited economic opportunities are a major barrier for those considering return

Multiple surveys point to the economic situation and the lack of suitable work as important reasons for not contemplating immediate return. In UNHCR's fifth round, among externally displaced persons whose previous plans to return permanently did not materialise, 18% cited concerns about economic opportunities (UNHCR, 2024^[8]). Among those who had previously hoped to return one day but no longer did, 37% cited the worsening of economic opportunities. For internally displaced persons, the corresponding figures were 6% and 17%. Consistent with this, the YOUkraine survey reports that among those not planning to return, 58% cited the weak Ukrainian economy, 37% mentioned low wages in their field, and 30% pointed to the absence of a job or difficulty finding one (Factum Group, 2023^[6]; Vox Ukraine, 2024^[7]).

More recent evidence suggests that economic considerations are beginning to surpass other barriers. The latest SAM-UKR survey results indicate that the deterioration of the economic situation in Ukraine is viewed as the main barrier to return by 63% of those abroad, ahead even of security concerns at 62% (EUAA, 2025^[11]).

Available employment is one of the most important conditions affecting return intentions

When asked what could facilitate return, respondents frequently highlight work opportunities. In UNHCR's sixth round, access to employment in areas of return was the most important factor for externally displaced persons beyond the end of war and occupation, cited by 43% (UNHCR, 2024^[1]). It was also the second most important factor for internally displaced persons at 21%, following access to housing. Externally displaced persons participating in the labour force in host countries mentioned work opportunities as an enabling factor more often than those outside the labour force, at 50% compared with 25%.

The CES survey reinforces this picture. In the third wave, 26% said the opportunity to find a well-paid job quickly would encourage return to a safer region rather than their home region, rising to 32% among those aged 18 to 24 and 31% among those aged 35 to 49 (Centre for Economic Strategy, 2024^[10]). In the fourth wave, 35% said a well-paid job in Ukraine would persuade them to return and 40% pointed to a higher standard of living in Ukraine, with both incentives especially salient for younger adults (Centre for Economic Strategy, 2025^[2]).

Labour market integration abroad also shapes intentions to return

Individual circumstances abroad are closely linked to differences in stated intentions. UNHCR's sixth round shows that externally displaced persons in the host-country labour force were less likely to express hopes of returning than those outside the labour force, at 52% compared with 69% (UNHCR, 2024^[1]). Those outside the labour force were also more likely to report plans to return within the next 12 months, with 7% of caregivers and retirees doing so, compared to 4% of those in the labour force.

Regression analysis based on the intention questions of the CES third wave further indicates that people who were students, employed, running their own business, or actively seeking employment were less likely to want to return than those outside the labour force, by 57%, 31%, 70% and 47% respectively (Centre for

Economic Strategy, 2024^[10]). Higher income abroad was also linked with lower willingness to return, with those in the highest income group 85% less likely to want to return than those in the lowest group.

Public services as a factor shaping return intentions

Beyond housing and employment, access to public services including healthcare and education, and various forms of social assistance, also plays a significant role in shaping displaced persons' intentions to return. Healthcare access in Ukraine is often viewed more favourably than abroad, making it both a pull factor and a reason for short-term visits. By contrast, the continuity of children's education in host countries is frequently cited as a reason for delaying or avoiding return, while the availability of safe and good-quality schooling in Ukraine can encourage return or settlement in particular areas.

Access to basic services is essential, and gaps can drive further movement

Access to basic services is seen by many displaced persons as indispensable both for sustaining displacement and for enabling return. In UNHCR's intentions survey, 19% of externally displaced persons and 11% of internally displaced persons identified access to services as a key condition for return, with health and education specifically cited by 12% and 6% (UNHCR, 2024^[11]). At the same time, 60% of those abroad said that if the war continued, difficulties accessing rights and services in host countries could force them to return, highlighting the degree of reliance on stable support.

Healthcare access can encourage short-term visits from abroad and potentially even return

Healthcare is consistently reported as a significant factor in return decisions from abroad. In UNHCR's intentions survey, 33% of externally displaced persons cited access to healthcare as a reason for short-term visits, compared with 5% IDPs returning to home regions for this reason (UNHCR, 2024^[11]). The YOUkraina survey similarly found that 39% of returnees said better healthcare in Ukraine, including more accessible medication, influenced their decision to return, although only 1% identified it as the main reason (Factum Group, 2023^[6]). The same survey shows that dissatisfaction with healthcare in host countries grew between 2022 and 2023, with 46% of respondents reporting discontent compared with 40% the year before. Issues cited included long waiting times, high costs, language barriers and restricted access to medicines.

Education can be both a barrier to and a facilitator of return

Schooling considerations weigh heavily in decisions, but they can pull in different directions. In SAM-UKR, 37% of those not planning to return cited their children's enrolment in host country schools as a reason for staying abroad (EUAA/OECD, 2024^[3]). Meanwhile, the YOUkraina survey indicates that 26% of returnees mentioned the desire for their children to study in Ukraine as one of the reasons for returning (Factum Group, 2023^[6]). Education also influences settlement choices after return. In IMPACT's survey, 21% of home returnees and 20% of those who became internally displaced after returning said they remained in their current location because of schooling (IMPACT, 2024^[12]). This suggests that parents prioritise continuity and stability in their children's education, limiting their desire for further moves.

Do intentions to return truly diminish over time?

Key takeaways

- **Individuals' intentions regarding return are often subject to change.** Those initially considering staying may later contemplate returning or even proceed with return. This highlights the inherent uncertainty embedded within migration intentions.
- **Sample composition of displaced individuals changes over time.** A sizeable number of individuals have returned to Ukraine or moved to other countries, especially in earlier periods. As a result, a proportion of displaced individuals reporting an intention to stay in a host country increases over time, while the absolute number of such individuals may actually decline.
- **Individuals displaced at different points in time may have different intentions to stay from the outset.** For example, those displaced closer to the start of an academic year may have an intention to stay for at least the duration of the academic year.
- **Even when these considerations are accounted for, the longer individuals remain in a host country, the more likely they are to express an intention to continue staying.**

From the reviewed surveys it seems that intentions to return to Ukraine tend to decline over time. However, this interpretation warrants caution. Most of the reviewed surveys are conducted at a single point in time, meaning they capture different samples of individuals. Later surveys may include more recent arrivals who may differ in their motivations, expectations of stay and the time they took to prepare their move, as compared to those who arrived earlier. Moreover, later surveys do not include those individuals who have already departed, that is, those who have acted upon the wish to return that they may have expressed earlier. This shift in sample composition complicates the interpretation of trends over time.

A more robust approach involves the use of longitudinal data, which tracks the intentions of the same individuals at multiple time points. This allows for a clearer understanding of how return intentions evolve. Although such data are rare, they do exist. The IMPACT longitudinal survey is one such valuable example (for details, see Annex 4.A and (IMPACT Initiatives, 2025^[13])). IMPACT Initiatives has been running a longitudinal survey of Ukrainians displaced abroad from the onset of Russia's aggression, including those who have remained abroad and those who have returned. Designed to capture the evolving nature of displacement, it provides valuable insights into the migration dynamics, living conditions, return intentions and return decisions of the same individuals over time.

Sample composition of displaced individuals has altered over time, with a sizeable number of individuals returning to Ukraine, especially in earlier periods

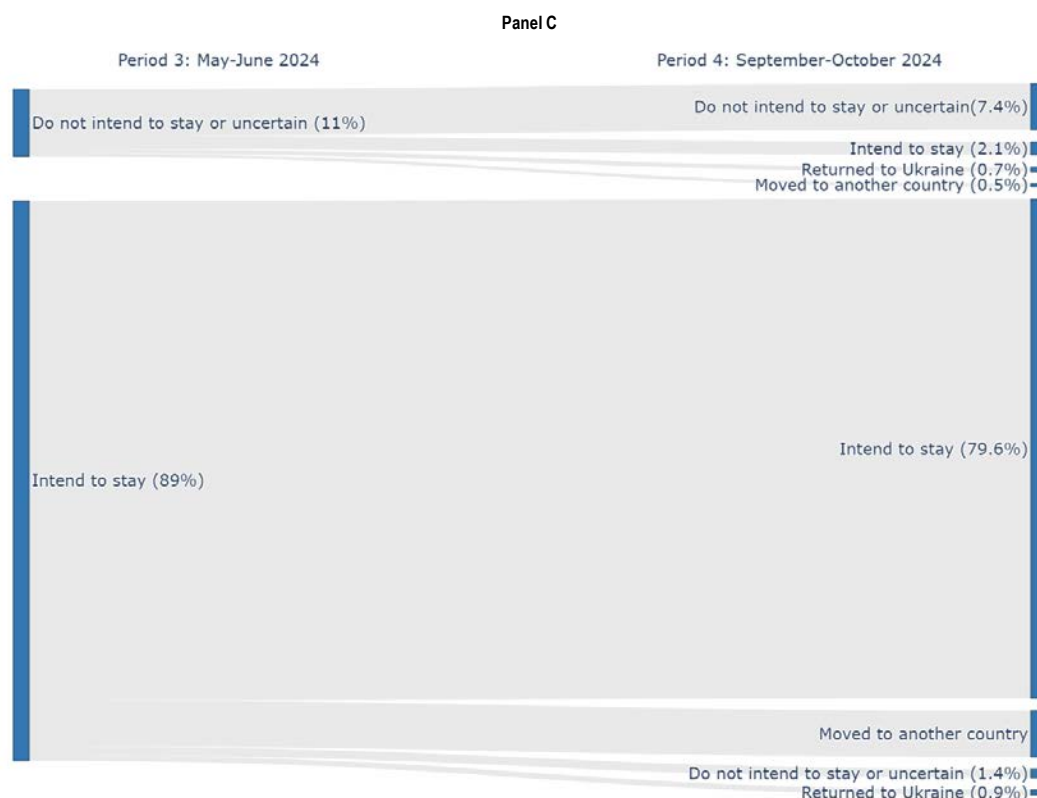
Using four rounds of IMPACT data, thereafter "IMPACT longitudinal data", our computations show how intentions of the same individuals to stay abroad evolve over time. Figure 4.1 focusses on individuals who provided responses to the survey question "What is your intention to stay in a host country within the next 6 months"¹ in four periods: August 2022, June 2023, May to June 2024, and September to November 2024.

The starting point of Figure 4.1 is Panel A. In the earliest period with available data, August 2022, 747 Ukrainians displaced abroad reported their intentions, with 69% stating that they intend to stay and 31% stating that they do not intend to stay in their current destination within the next six months or are uncertain.² By June 2023, 22.9% of this initial sample had returned to Ukraine (including 44% of those who did not plan to stay as of August 2022, or 13% of the total sample; and 15% of those who actually initially planned to stay, or 9.9% of the full initial sample). A small but significant percentage also changed their

intention, and either started contemplating staying (10.4% of the original sample) or on the contrary no longer intended to stay (5.9%). Panels B and C are constructed in a similar way, but taking, as a starting point, the remaining displaced individuals (in the same location as in the first period).

Figure 4.1. The evolution of individual intentions to stay





Note: Panel A: Total sample in period 1: 747 individuals. Panel B: Total sample in period 2: 569 individuals. This includes those who still intend to stay, as compared to period 1, and those who switched their intention between period 1 and 2, as shown in Panel A. Panel C: Total sample in period 3: 147 individuals. This includes those who still intend to stay, as compared to period 2, and those who switched their intention between period 2 and 3, as shown in Panel B.

Source: Calculations based on IMPACT longitudinal data.

Taken together, Panels A to C of Figure 4.1 demonstrate that the share of individuals who intend to stay, as a proportion of all displaced individuals in the same host country, increased over two years (from 69% in August 2022, to 79.6% in September and October 2024). However, the absolute number of such individuals actually declined within the same original sample (from 529 in August 2022, to 495 in September/October 2024). In other words, part of the relative increase is explained by a mechanical change of the sample composition, due to the fact that some people returned back home, and others left to another country.

Importantly, individuals' intentions regarding return are often fluid and subject to change. Those initially considering staying may later contemplate returning or even proceed with return. This highlights the inherent uncertainty embedded within migration intentions.

Individuals displaced at different points in time have different intentions to stay

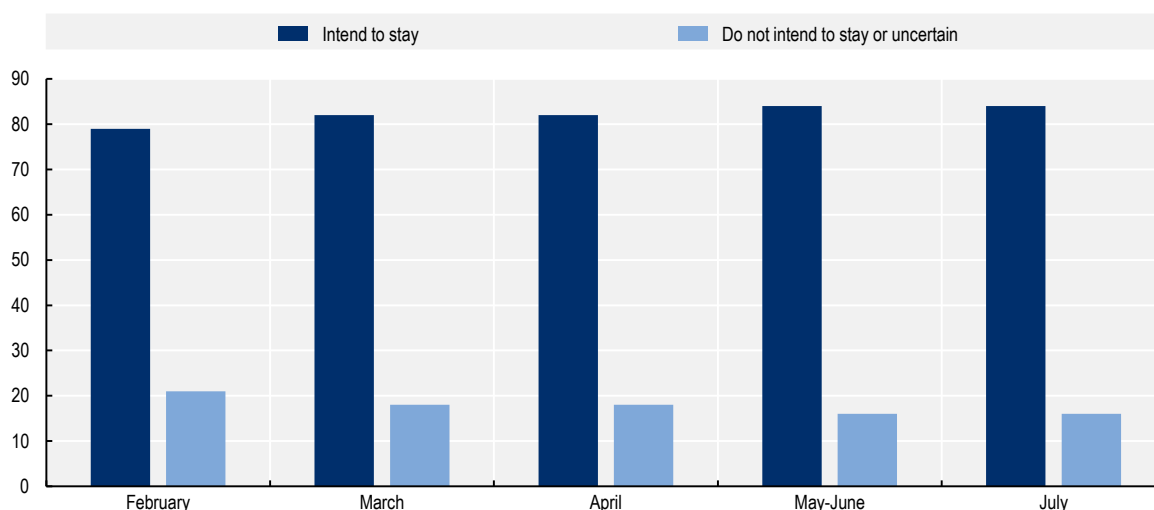
In addition, comparison of intentions to stay across various intention surveys conducted at different points in time suffers from the fact that such surveys contain individuals who might have arrived at different moments. In other words, such individuals may belong to different arrival cohorts. Those who arrived later may have distinct motivations influenced by unobservable factors, such as experience of prior displacement, greater economic and social strain caused by protracted aggression, or having had more time to prepare for their move. Moreover, as the war of aggression continues, other considerations besides immediate security may enter into individuals' decision to flee, such as fatigue from living under the war, economic hardship caused by the war, or the desire to reunite with family members and friends displaced

earlier. As such, individuals arriving at a later date may have different intentions regarding their stay or return as compared to those who arrived earlier.

Calculations based on IMPACT longitudinal data support this hypothesis. Individuals displaced in July 2022 show a slightly higher intention to remain in the host country in the coming six months as compared to individuals displaced between February and June 2022 (Figure 4.2). While the differences are not sizeable, they are statistically significant (Box 4.1).

Figure 4.2. The evolution of intentions to stay in a host country by arrival cohort; percentage of individuals

The months refer to the time of arrival in the current host country, 2022



Note: Average of responses to the question: “are you intending to stay in the current destination in the next 6 months”, across four rounds.
Source: Calculations based on IMPACT longitudinal data.

The longer individuals remain in a host country, the more likely they are to express an intention to stay longer, even when accounting for cohorts of displacement

A regression analysis based on IMPACT longitudinal data further helps disentangle the effects of both the timing of displacement (cohort effects) and the duration of displacement, while also accounting for individual characteristics (Box 4.1). It confirms the importance of accounting for cohort effects by showing that individuals who arrived in July 2022, as compared to February to June 2022, tended to show a slightly stronger inclination to remain at their destination in the coming 6 months. The period covered by the data is too short, however, to claim that *all* individuals who arrive later in the war of aggression have a different motivation to stay. It is possible that there is a seasonality effect: those arriving in July might be aiming to stay at least over the coming academic year, while not excluding later return or the possibility to change their mind.

Even once the cohort effects are accounted for, the duration of displacement matters as well. The longer individuals remain displaced, the more likely they are to report an intention to stay in their current location.

Going forward, these results suggest that the longer individuals stay, the more they grow attached to their new place of residence, integrate socially or economically, or feel that return is unfeasible or undesirable. At the same time, because different cohorts may have different motivations, cohort-specific strategies may be envisaged, recognising that displacements taking place at different moments in time may be associated with different intentions regarding the duration of stay, at least in the short run.

Box 4.1. Do intentions to stay differ for individuals with a longer period of displacement and for those arriving at a later date?

Research question

Many intention surveys conducted at different periods show that the share of displaced individuals who report that they still wish to return has diminished over time. Given this, it is tempting to think that, for many displaced individuals, the decision to return to Ukraine fades away over time. But can the decline in the shares of individuals who wish to return be taken as evidence that intentions change for the same individual as the time passes, while returns also take place? Or perhaps individuals, who arrived at a later date, had different return intentions from the outset?

Data and methodology

In order to disentangle the effects of “duration of displacement” and “cohort of arrival” on the intention to leave or to stay, longitudinal data are needed. Based on IMPACT longitudinal data (Annex 4.A), econometric panel data analysis is applied to estimate the following equation:

$$\text{Intention}_{it} = \alpha_i + \beta_1 \text{Duration\_of\_displacement}_{it} + \beta_2 \text{Cohort\_of\_displacement}_i + \beta_3 X_{it} + \varepsilon_{it}$$

In this equation, the dependent variable Intention_{it} is a dichotomous variable equal to one if, in wave t , the respondent i reports planning to stay in the current host country over the next six months (“Yes”), and zero if he or she reports not planning to stay or is uncertain. Independent variables of interest are: “duration of displacement” (measured in days) and the vector of dummy variables reflecting the “cohort of displacement” (measured in months, between February and July 2022, with February as the reference category). X_{it} is a set of individual socio-economic characteristics that include age, education, number of household members, and the number of children. These characteristics are measured at the beginning of each wave. Finally, ε_{it} is the error term. Given the dichotomous nature of the dependent variables, the chosen method of estimation is probit regression (panel data, random effects).

Table 4.1. Determinants of intentions of stay in a host country over the coming 6 months: Probit regression results

Dependent variable: dichotomous variable equal to 1 if individual reports an intention to stay in current destination over the coming 6 months, and 0 otherwise

Independent Variables	Marginal Effects
Time in displacement	0.015*** (0.004)
Displaced in March	0.045 (0.091)
Displaced in April	0.148 (0.104)
Displaced in May or June	0.091 (0.135)
Displaced in July	0.388*** (0.148)

Note: Estimation method: probit regression; panel data, random effects. Standard errors are in parentheses. The symbol (***) represents statistical significance at $p < 0.1$; (**) at $p < 0.05$, (*) at $p < 0.1$. Number of observations: 305. $R^2 = 0.134$.

Source: Computations based on IMPACT longitudinal data.

Results

Results reported in Table 4.1 show that a longer duration in displacement is associated in a significant and robust manner with an increased propensity to report an intention to stay in the coming six months. In addition, individuals displaced in July 2022, as compared to earlier arrivals, are more likely to express an intention to stay in their host countries in the coming 6 months.

These results are robust to the stepwise inclusion of additional variables, such as the presence of a family member with a disability (insignificant), employment status in host country (insignificant), employment status in Ukraine on the eve of the invasion (insignificant), income (insignificant), oblast of origin in Ukraine (insignificant), destination country (insignificant), and reason for displacement in addition to security (such as family or economic; insignificant).

Taken together, these results show that both duration of displacement and the cohort of arrival significantly shape intentions to stay in a host country.

From intention to decision: What factors actually make individuals return?

Key takeaways

- **Homesickness and desire to reunite with family are the most often reported reasons for return.** At the same time, family reunification in the host country is a strong anchor for non-return.
- **Economic and housing factors are the key enablers of returns.** Having employment in a host country significantly reduces the likelihood of return. At the same time, the fact of having been employed on the eve of the aggression in Ukraine increases the likelihood of return: returnees are often returning to their previous employment. Having good housing conditions in Ukraine is another key enabler of return.
- **Longer duration of displacement reduces the likelihood of return.**
- **As the insecurity situation continues,** the role of some factors (such as pre-war employment in Ukraine) will diminish, while the role of others, such as family reunification in the host country, may be enhanced. Nevertheless, it is reasonable to expect, based on these findings, that having employment arranged and a decent housing option in Ukraine will remain as strong conditions conducive to return.

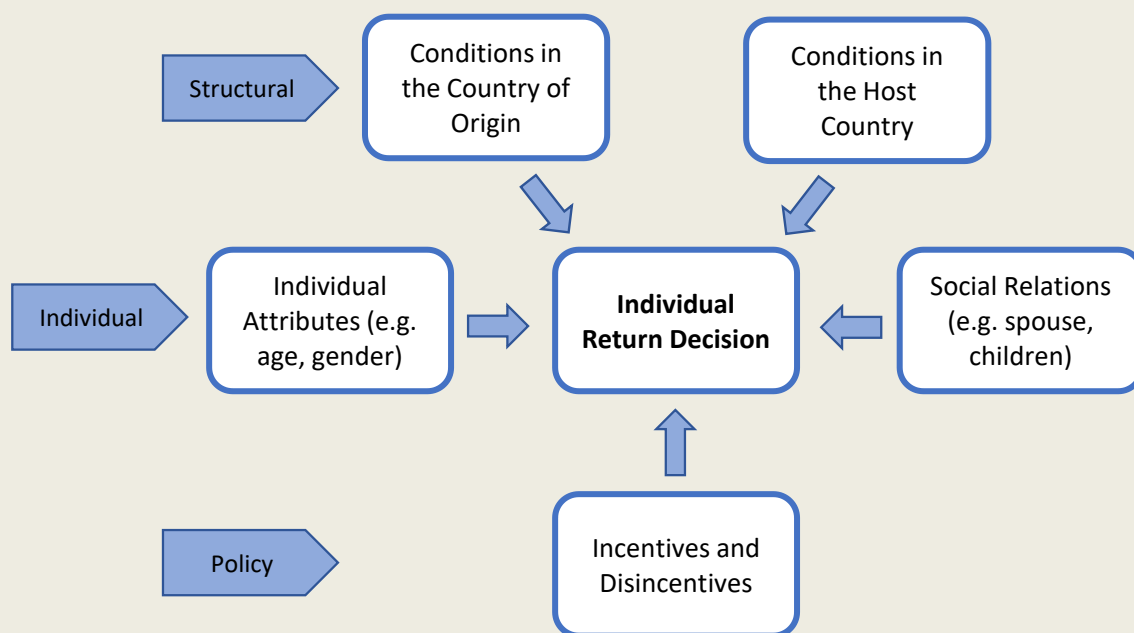
While often used interchangeably, the intention to return and the decision to return represent distinct stages in the migration cycle (OECD, 2024^[14]). Intention reflects a migrant's aspiration or hope to go back, shaped by emotional ties, perceived opportunities, or changing conditions in both origin and host countries. In contrast, a decision to return implies a concrete action, a commitment, often accompanied by logistical planning and readiness to undertake this act (see also Box 4.2). Understanding this distinction is crucial for designing policies that effectively support voluntary return and reintegration.

Gauging from the IOM General Population Survey (GPS) round 17, conducted in July and August 2024 (IOM, 2024^[15]) in Ukraine, there were approximately 4.3 million returnees already at that time. Among them, 24.4% returned from abroad, 47.9% returned from another oblast in Ukraine, and 27.4% returned from displacement within the same oblast.³

Box 4.2. What factors enable returns? Migration theory and evidence from other contexts

The decision to return is shaped by a complex mix of structural, contextual and individual factors (Figure 4.3). Return is rarely a single event or a purely rational decision. It is often the result of evolving considerations, including conditions in both the host and origin countries, or regions in the case of internally displaced persons, as well as personal aspirations, legal status, family circumstances and access to opportunities. In addition to these factors, policies in both host and origin countries can create incentives or disincentives that influence the timing and feasibility of return.

Figure 4.3. Factors influencing individual return decision by level



Source: OECD (2020^[16]), *Sustainable Reintegration of Returning Migrants: A Better Homecoming*, <https://doi.org/10.1787/5fee55b3-en>.

The decision to return is often explained in terms of push and pull factors, or deterrents and incentives to stay (OECD, 2020^[16]; OECD, 2024^[14]). Conditions in host countries such as access to legal status, employment, housing and public services can encourage individuals to stay. Conversely, lack of integration, unfulfilled hopes, or extended periods without regular status can increase the appeal of return, even if conditions in the origin country are challenging as well.

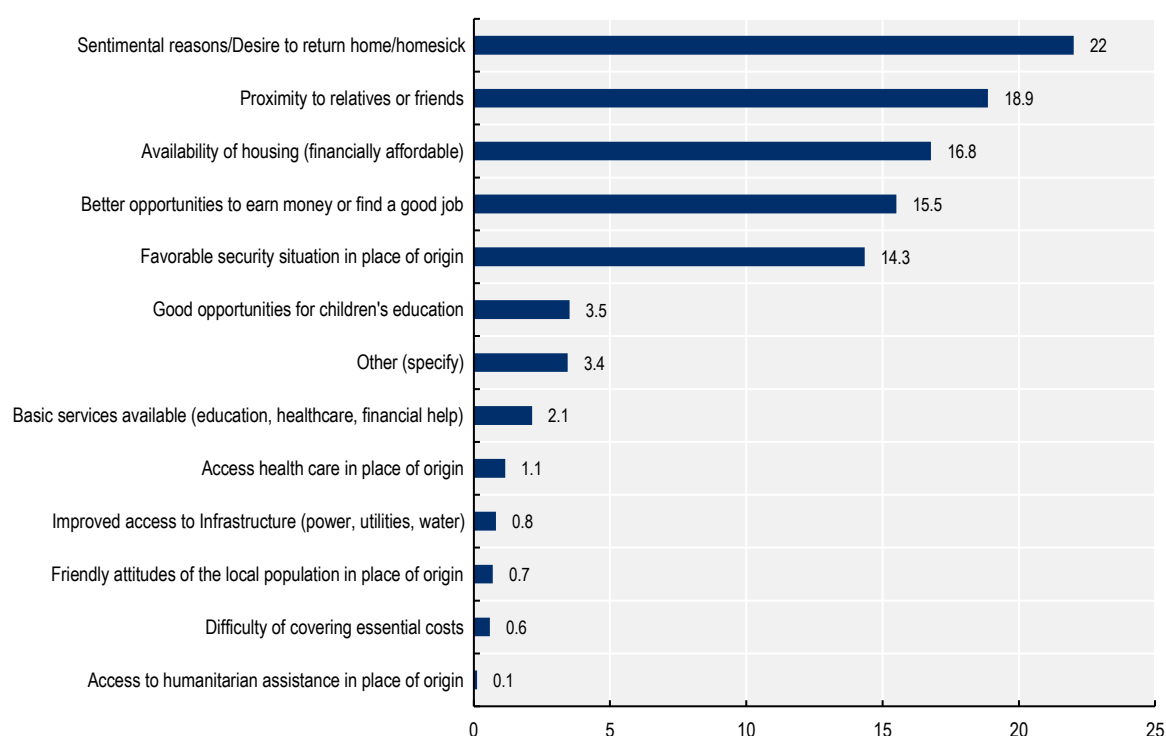
Most existing research on voluntary return has focussed on labour or economic migrants. As a result, economic and professional considerations are commonly cited as key influences, although the nature of their impact may vary (OECD, 2020^[16]). In some cases, return becomes attractive when individuals believe that the skills and experience acquired abroad will be more valuable in the country of origin (Wahba, 2015^[17]; Dustmann and Weiss, 2007^[18]). For others, return is linked to a perceived failure to meet economic goals in the host country (Constant and Massey, 2002^[19]). At the same time, migrants are more likely to remain abroad when the host country offers better economic prospects than the origin country (Song and Song, 2015^[20]). Those who have attained economic stability abroad may come to associate return with financial insecurity or a decline in well-being, further reducing the likelihood of return (Toomistu et al., 2024^[21]).

Beyond economic factors, return decisions are increasingly understood as socially embedded processes shaped by family, friends and community networks (OECD, 2024^[14]). Family reunification, the desire to care for relatives or start a family in the origin country, and feelings of homesickness can encourage return (Konzett-Smoliner, 2016^[22]). At the same time, migrants who have lost contact with their home communities or who feel unable to meet social expectations may be less likely to return (IOM, 2018^[23]; OECD, 2024^[14]). Personal emotional ties to the home country also play an important role. A large-scale OECD household survey conducted in 11 countries of origin found that the most commonly reported reason for return was an overall preference for the home country (OECD, 2017^[24]). Emotional and social dimensions of belonging often carry as much weight as economic considerations in shaping return intentions.

However, return patterns can vary significantly across different migration categories. Labour migrants and students tend to return earlier, often citing completed goals or social ties. By contrast, forcibly displaced persons face greater structural barriers to return. In these cases, the decision is driven less by economic opportunity and more by concerns related to safety, human rights and long-term prospects in the origin country. Research consistently finds that perceptions of safety and stability are among the most decisive factors influencing return among refugees and internally displaced persons (Black and Koser, 1999^[25]; Alrababa'h, Casalis and Masterson, 2020^[26]). Return is typically only considered when basic security, the rule of law (where it was broken) and access to essential services have been restored. As such, decisions are shaped more by progress in security and the restoration of public trust (in cases where it was broken) in the origin country rather than by policy incentives and the situation in host countries.

Calculations based on these data, thereafter “IOM GPS data round 17” (Annex 4.A), show that sentimental reasons, including homesickness, as well as the desire to be closer to relatives and friends, are the most important reasons for return for displaced Ukrainians, as they were cited by the largest share of returnees (Figure 4.4). Access to affordable housing and employment in original places of living are the next two most important reasons for return, cited by the second and third largest shares of returnees, amidst persisting insecurity and the fact that many returnees returned to areas that are still unsafe or were heavily damaged by Russia’s aggression (see also (IOM, 2024^[15])).

Figure 4.4. Reasons for moving back, per cent of Ukrainian returnees, July-August 2024



Note: This figure is based on responses to the question: "Can you tell me top 3 reasons why you returned to your place of origin, starting from the most important to less important?" The responses are aggregated and weighted according to the priority of each reason: a weight of 3 is assigned to the first (most important) reason, 2 to the second, and 1 to the third.

Source: Computations based on IOM General Population Survey Round 17.

Econometric analysis based on IMPACT longitudinal data (Box 4.3) further confirms the importance of economic and housing factors, alongside a range of other factors, as well as the duration of stay and of cohort effects, in enabling the return decision.

Box 4.3. What factors enable the return of Ukrainians displaced by the war of aggression?

Research question

What factors lead an individual to take a decision to return, that is, making a transition from "being in displacement" to "being back in Ukraine"?

Data and methodology

This question can be best answered, again, with longitudinal data, that is, data that track displaced individuals from one period to another, including those who continue staying and those who have returned between the two survey periods. IMPACT longitudinal data and a model set up similar to the one in Box 4.1 are used. The dependent variable "decision to return" is constructed as equal to one for individuals who report having returned to Ukraine between two survey rounds, and who also report an intention to stay there; and zero otherwise. Independent variables include time in displacement, cohort of displacement, and a set of individual socio-economic characteristics. The model does not control for gender, as the majority of the returnee sample is comprised of women. The model is built by a further

interchangeable inclusion of lagged (past) intentions to stay, reasons for displacement in addition to security reasons, and a range of other factors in host countries and in Ukraine, such as employment and housing. All models are estimated using probit panel data, random effects.

Results

Table 4.2 shows estimation results. In all regressions, non-reported controls include: age (positive and significant effect on the decision to return), educational attainment (insignificant), household size (insignificant), number of children (insignificant), household income (significant in some regressions but not robust), region of return to Ukraine (small positive and significant effect for some oblasts in central Ukraine), host countries (lower propensity to return from the Slovak Republic and Southern European countries, as compared with other European countries).

Column (1) shows the results of a baseline model, which includes duration of stay in the host country (measured as time in displacement, in days) and the cohort of displacement (measured by months of arrival, with February as the reference category). As expected, longer duration at destination has a negative statistically significant effect on the decision to return. Individuals arriving at a later date also have a lower propensity to return.

Column (2) includes a dichotomous variable “lagged intention to stay”, which is equal to one if, in the preceding survey round, the individual reported an intention to stay in the host country in the coming six months, and zero otherwise. Previous intention does not seem to affect the decision to return in a significant way, which confirms the findings of Figure 4.1, which show that intentions may change over time and that some individuals who did not initially intend to return actually do so.

Column (3) investigates whether, in addition to security reasons (common to all surveyed individuals), other reasons affected the displacement decision in the first place. Such reasons include economic motives, study, or family reunification. Reported here is the result for family reunification in the destination country, against security reasons only (non-reported effects of other reasons are insignificant). In other words, individuals who moved to a host country, as a result of Russia’s aggression, because they could join a family member already present there, are less likely to report returning to Ukraine.

Column (4) inquires into the role of selected factors in the host country that may affect the decision to return. Reported are the results for two factors relevant from a policy perspective: being employed (dichotomous variable) and accommodation (rented; versus own, provided for free by friends and family, or provided for free by the host state), both variables are lagged. Of these two, only the fact of being employed in the preceding round affects negatively the probability of having accomplished the return by the following survey round.

Table 4.2. Determinants of return: Probit regression results

Dependent variable: dichotomous variable equal to 1 if individual reports having returned to Ukraine from one survey round to another, and 0 otherwise

Variables	(1) Model 1: Baseline	(2) Model 2: +Intention to stay	(3) Model 3: +Reasons for displacement	(4) Model 4: +Factors in host country	(5) Model 5: +Factors in Ukraine
Time in displacement	-0.002*** (0.000)	-0.002*** (0.000)	-0.003*** (0.001)	-0.004* (0.002)	-0.003*** (0.001)
Displaced in March	0.010 (0.012)	0.010 (0.012)	0.006 (0.010)	0.021 (0.042)	0.007 (0.013)
Displaced in April	-0.017	-0.017	-0.017	-0.021	-0.019

	(0.014)	(0.014)	(0.014)	(0.054)	(0.024)
Displaced in May or June	-0.002	-0.002	0.011	-0.022	-0.019
	(0.015)	(0.015)	(0.013)	(0.071)	(0.027)
Displaced in July	-0.062*	-0.062*	-0.133***	-0.100	-0.069*
	(0.035)	(0.035)	(0.046)	(0.141)	(0.039)
Intention to stay, lagged		0.001			
		(0.004)			
Reason for original displacement: family			-0.072**		
			(0.029)		
Employed in host country, lagged				-0.063**	
				(0.030)	
Rented accommodation in host country, lagged				0.001	
				(0.025)	
Employed on 23.02.2022					0.024**
					(0.011)
Rented accommodation in Ukraine, lagged					0.012
					(0.013)
Accommodation's Condition in Ukraine					0.021***
					(0.005)
Observations	1 983	1 726	1 983	305	991

Note: Estimation method: probit regression; panel data, random effects. Standard errors are in parentheses. The symbol (***) represents statistical significance at $p < 0.1$; (**) at $p < 0.05$, (*) at $p < 0.1$.

Source: Computations based on IMPACT longitudinal data.

Column (5) investigates the role of selected factors in the home country that may affect the decision to return. Reported are again the results for factors relevant from a policy perspective: being employed on the eve of the aggression (dichotomous variable) and two variables for accommodation (rented; versus own, or provided for free; as well as housing condition: measured on a scale from 1 to 5, from very poor to very good). The fact of being employed on the eve of the aggression is a strong determinant of the decision to return. Most likely, returning individuals are returning to their previous employment. In addition, the condition of accommodation at home, though not the ownership, matters. Individuals are more likely to return to better living conditions.

The influence of a whole range of other factors was analysed, including employment downshifting in a host country as compared to Ukraine, receipt of assistance, satisfaction with the education system in host countries, satisfaction with online schooling through Ukrainian schools, self-assessed level of security, self-assessed language proficiency, number of prior visits to Ukraine, and family reunification in Ukraine, but none were found to be statistically significant, although numerous missing values and the availability of these questions only in some selected rounds might have affected the inference levels. Likewise, a large number of missing observations, and the fact that not all questions featured in columns 2 to 5 were asked in all rounds, precludes the inclusion of all variables into one model.

Results of the analysis in Box 4.3 show that, among the factors in the host country, having employment significantly reduces the likelihood of return. Accommodation type in the host country (rented, own, provided for free by friends and family, or provided for free by the host state) does not seem to affect the return decision in a significant way, once other factors are accounted for. In contrast, family reunification in the host country emerges as a strong anchor: if individuals have moved to rejoin their family, in addition to fleeing Ukraine because of the security situation, they have a lower likelihood of return.

From the home country perspective, employment and good housing conditions in Ukraine appear to be the key enablers of return. In particular, it is the fact of having been employed on the eve of the aggression

that matters. Most likely, individuals who make the decision to return do so because they can return to their previous employment.

In addition to this, duration of displacement and timing of arrival are also significant factors affecting decision to return. Those who have spent more time abroad, or moved abroad in July 2022 rather than between February and June 2022, are less likely to have returned by August 2024 (the timing of the last wave of the analysed data).

Interestingly, prior intentions to stay in the host country do not predict actual return behaviour in a significant way, underscoring the dynamic nature of return and stay decision making. Other factors, including satisfaction with services, security perceptions, and language proficiency, do not seem to affect return decisions either, though data limitations may have affected these results.

As the insecurity situation continues, it is clear that the role of some factors (such as pre-war employment in Ukraine) will diminish, while the role of others, such as family reunification in the host country, may be enhanced. Nevertheless, it is reasonable to expect, based on these findings, that the notion of having secured employment and a decent housing option in Ukraine will remain as strong conditions conducive to return.

What can be learnt from returns that already took place?

Key takeaways

- **Returns that already took place could be anticipated and hence planned for by policymakers.** Most of the returns took place soon after the positive news about the Ukrainian Armed Forces' advancement and the liberation of some temporarily occupied territories. Subsequent returns feature a certain seasonality.
- **Profiles of returnees are quite distinct from non-displaced individuals and those who are still in displacement.** Population movements have altered demographics in the origin and receiving places, requiring adjustments to public services.
- **Dynamics of return – and of non-return – is strongly shaped by individual profiles, oblast of origin, and the area of displacement.** The largest returns from internal displacement took place for those displaced within the same oblast (usually non-frontline), as well as for individuals returning to relatively safer areas. Understanding how many individuals will and will not return, as well as the profiles of returnees and non-returnees can help in making policy decisions on appropriate future approaches to integration and reintegration policies.

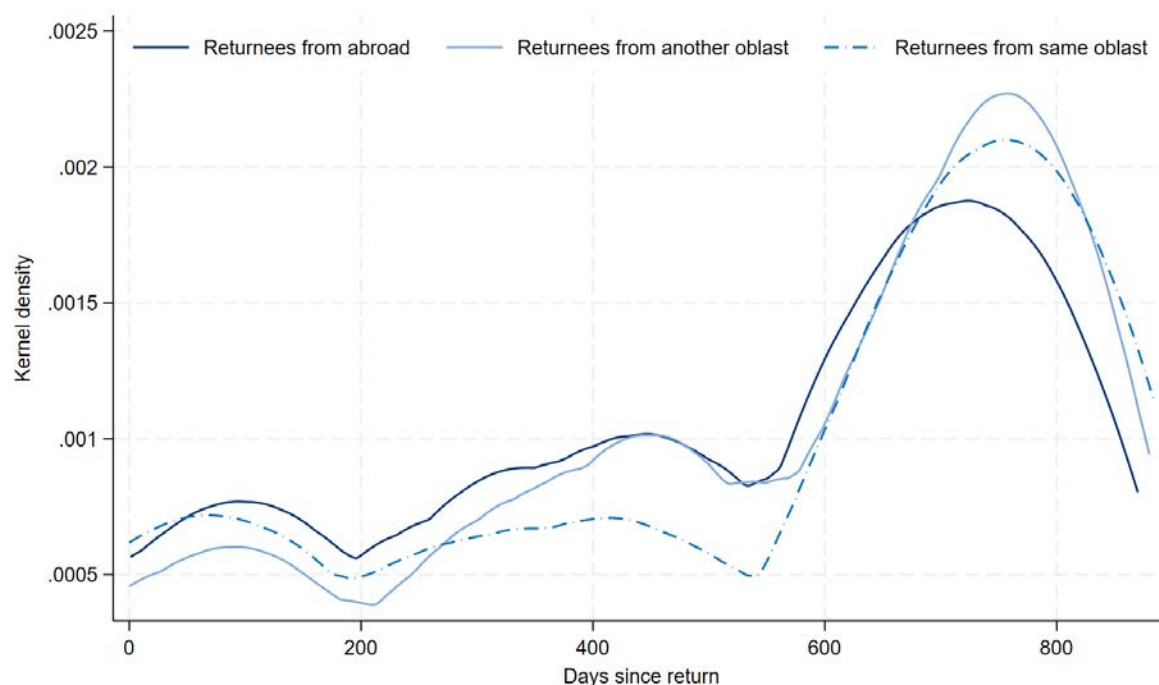
Timing of returns: Returns can be anticipated

The vast majority of those individuals who returned did so in spring/summer 2022, following the liberation of parts of Ukrainian territories by the Ukrainian Armed Forces. This is well-reflected in IOM GPS data round 17 (Figure 4.5): of those surveyed in July-August 2024 who had returned from abroad, two-thirds had done so 730 days or more prior to the survey, which roughly corresponds to summer 2022. Two smaller spikes in returns are also observed around 450 days prior to the survey, corresponding to the late spring-early summer 2023, and less than three months prior to the survey, corresponding to the late spring/early summer 2024. Similar patterns are also evident among returnees from another oblast and from the same oblast within Ukraine.

Summing up, returns initially took place upon a significant improvement in the security situation and thereafter exhibit a certain seasonality, likely linked to the end of the academic year for families with

children. Fewer returns over the colder months may also be linked to ongoing challenges with heating and power outages induced by Russia's attacks on critical infrastructure. Going forward, these findings also suggest that returns are typically planned, and hence can, to a certain extent, be anticipated by the Ukrainian Government.

Figure 4.5. Days since return, for returnees by different location of displacement, summer 2024



Note: Total sample: 1 166 observations. Tabulations are weighted to account for survey design and ensure representativeness.
Source: Computations based on IOM General Population Survey Round 17.

Profiles of returnees are quite distinct from non-displaced individuals and those who are still in displacement

Returnees have relatively distinct profiles compared to those who still remain displaced, and also compared to the non-displaced population.⁴

Calculations based on IOM GPS data round 17 show that, among returnees from abroad, 86.9 were women, reflecting the fact that the original displacement abroad was female dominated. The shares of women were also higher than those of men, but to a lesser extent, among returnees from a different oblast in Ukraine (66.3%), and returnees from the same oblast (63.8%). Among those who still remained in internal displacement, 66.7% were women. The share of women was the smallest among the non-displaced population: 5.4%.

Returnees from internal displacement in another oblast were older (44 years), compared to other returnees (aged, on average, 41 years) and those still internally displaced (43 years). The non-displaced population, however, were the oldest (their average age is 47.7 years).⁵

Returnees had a slightly larger household size (3.1 members for returnees from abroad, 2.9 for returnees from another oblast, 3.4 for returnees from the same oblast), compared with 2.7 among the non-displaced. Household size of IDPs was 2.9 members.

Returnees featured a higher proportion of individuals with higher education (53.5% among returnees from abroad, 54.1% among returnees from another oblast, 44.1% among returnees from the same oblast), as compared with IDPs (41.7%), or the non-displaced (37.8%).

Among all returnees, there was a higher share of returnees to urban areas (around 84%), compared to the location of IDPs (76.61% in urban areas) and the non-displaced population (71.21%).

Dynamics of return – and of non-return – are strongly shaped by individual profiles, oblasts of origin, and the area of displacement

Using the information on individual profiles of those who have already returned and those who are still in displacement, as well as information on the time that both groups spent in displacement, can help in understanding the dynamics of returns. Who has returned first? Who is still displaced and is likely to remain in displacement? Which individual characteristics are associated with a greater propensity to return over time? Answering these questions can help in understanding returns that already took place, as well as non-returns. As such, it can also help in better anticipating future returns and understanding not only how many people can return, but what new demographic composition will emerge as a result.

These questions can be answered using duration analysis. The duration analysis does not assume that everyone behaves the same way or returns at the same time, but instead helps identify which groups are more or less likely to return sooner.

Using the IOM GPS data round 17, conducted in Ukraine two and a half years after the start of the aggression on the territories that are under Ukrainian control, it is possible to shed light on the dynamics of return from internal displacement. A starting point is the identification of characteristics that make individuals more or less likely to return sooner from internal displacement, in a significant manner. Based on the duration analysis applied to these data (Box 4.4), such characteristics include: age, education, area of living, employment status, oblast of origin, and whether a person was displaced within the same oblast or outside the oblast of origin. Being a woman (rather than a man), having a larger household size, or a greater income do not appear to be factors that make individuals more or less likely to return sooner from internal displacement, once all other characteristics are accounted for.

Box 4.4. Applying duration analysis to returns from internal displacement

Duration analysis, also known as survival analysis, is a statistical method used to study the time until an event occurs, such as returning to the place of origin after displacement. One of the most widely used models in this field is the Cox proportional hazards model.

The Cox proportional hazards model estimates the effect of various factors on the hazard rate, the probability that the event (e.g. return migration) happens at a particular time, given that it has not happened yet. It is called “proportional hazards” because it assumes that the effect of each factor is multiplicative and constant over time. The model can be applied to censored data (e.g. when it is not known whether or when someone will return), and does not require specifying the baseline hazard function, making it semi-parametric and flexible. In the context of the return of displaced individuals, duration analysis can help identify which characteristics are associated with faster or slower return.

In this report, the Cox proportional hazards model is applied to the IOM GPS data round 17. Table 4.3 presents the results of a Cox proportional hazards regression model estimating the hazard of return over time, given the current number of days in displacement for those who have not returned yet, and the days in displacement for those who have already returned, for a sample of

2022 individuals, including current IDPs and returnees from internal displacement. The model estimates the effect of the following covariates on the hazard (likelihood of return): gender, age, household size, education level, area of living, employment status, income level, place of origin, and whether a person is internally displaced within the same oblast or outside the oblast. Hazard ratios above one, when significant, indicate a higher chance of return for individuals with the corresponding characteristics.

Table 4.3. Cox model of return from internal displacement

Event equal to 1 is the return

	Hazard ratios	Standard errors
Covariates:		
Female	1.007	(0.081)
Age below 40	0.761**	(0.072)
Household size	0.993	(0.022)
Education: technical vocational	1.081	(0.133)
Education: higher	1.343**	(0.165)
Urban area	1.400**	(0.133)
Self-employed	1.312***	(0.200)
Employee	0.873	(0.127)
Unemployed	0.997	(0.108)
Income below the mean	1.178	(0.096)
Place of origin: oblast partly occupied in August 2024	0.217***	(0.028)
Place of origin: oblast with past, present, or possible active hostilities in August 2024	0.545***	(0.057)
Place of origin: the city of Kyiv	1.390***	(0.231)
Displaced within the same oblast	5.427***	(0.744)
Observations	2 022	
LR chi2	596.3	
Prob > chi2	0.000	

Note: Reference categories are as follows: male (for female); age 40+ (for age below 40); secondary or below (for technical and higher education); rural (for urban); out of the labour force (for employee, self-employed, and unemployed); income above the mean (for income below the mean); other regions of Ukraine (for three dummies denoting the type of place of origin); displaced in another oblast (for displaced within the same oblast). Category "technical" includes technical and non-completed higher education. The symbol (***) represents statistical significance at $p < 0.1$; (**) at $p < 0.05$, (*) at $p < 0.1$. Sample restricted to population aged 18-65.

From this model, there is no significant difference in return hazard between men and women (from internal displacement), nor between individuals with a greater household or a different level of income.

Individuals aged less than 40 years have a 23.9% lower hazard of returning compared to the reference group (40 or above).

Higher education is associated with a 34.3% higher hazard of returning compared to the reference group (secondary education or below).

Individuals currently living in urban areas have a 40.0% higher hazard of returning compared to those in rural areas.

Being self-employed, as compared to any other employment statuses, is associated with a 31.2% higher hazard of returning.

Place of origin variables were grouped into four categories, based on the Ministry of Reintegration's instruction "On Approval of the List of Territories in which Military Operations are (were) Conducted or

Temporarily Occupied by the Russian Federation”, first published on 22.12.2022, with the updated version as of 17 August 2024 taken into account. The first category includes oblasts that were partly occupied (Donetsk, Kherson, Luhansk and Zaporizhzhia oblasts). The second category includes oblasts that were classified as having past or present active hostilities, as well as possible active hostilities (Chernihiv, Dnipropetrovsk, Kharkiv, Mykolaiv, Odesa, Sumy oblasts as well as the oblast of Kyiv). The third category includes all other oblasts. The fourth category includes the city of Kyiv. The results show that individuals who lived in partly temporarily occupied oblasts before the start of the 2022 full-scale aggression had a nearly 80% lower hazard of returning; individuals who lived in oblasts with active hostilities had a nearly 45% lower hazard of returning; and individuals living in the city of Kyiv had a 39.0% higher hazard of returning compared to displaced individuals from other oblasts.

Finally, displacement within the same oblast, as compared to those displaced to a different oblast, is the strongest predictor of return: displacement within the same oblast increases the hazard of return by nearly 5.4 times.¹

These estimates are used to construct survival curves representing the estimated probability of remaining displaced over time for groups of individuals, varying characteristics of interest while keeping all other characteristics at their mean or reference values (Figure 4.6 and Figure 4.7).

1. Unfortunately, information on housing could not be included, as it is not contained in this round of data.

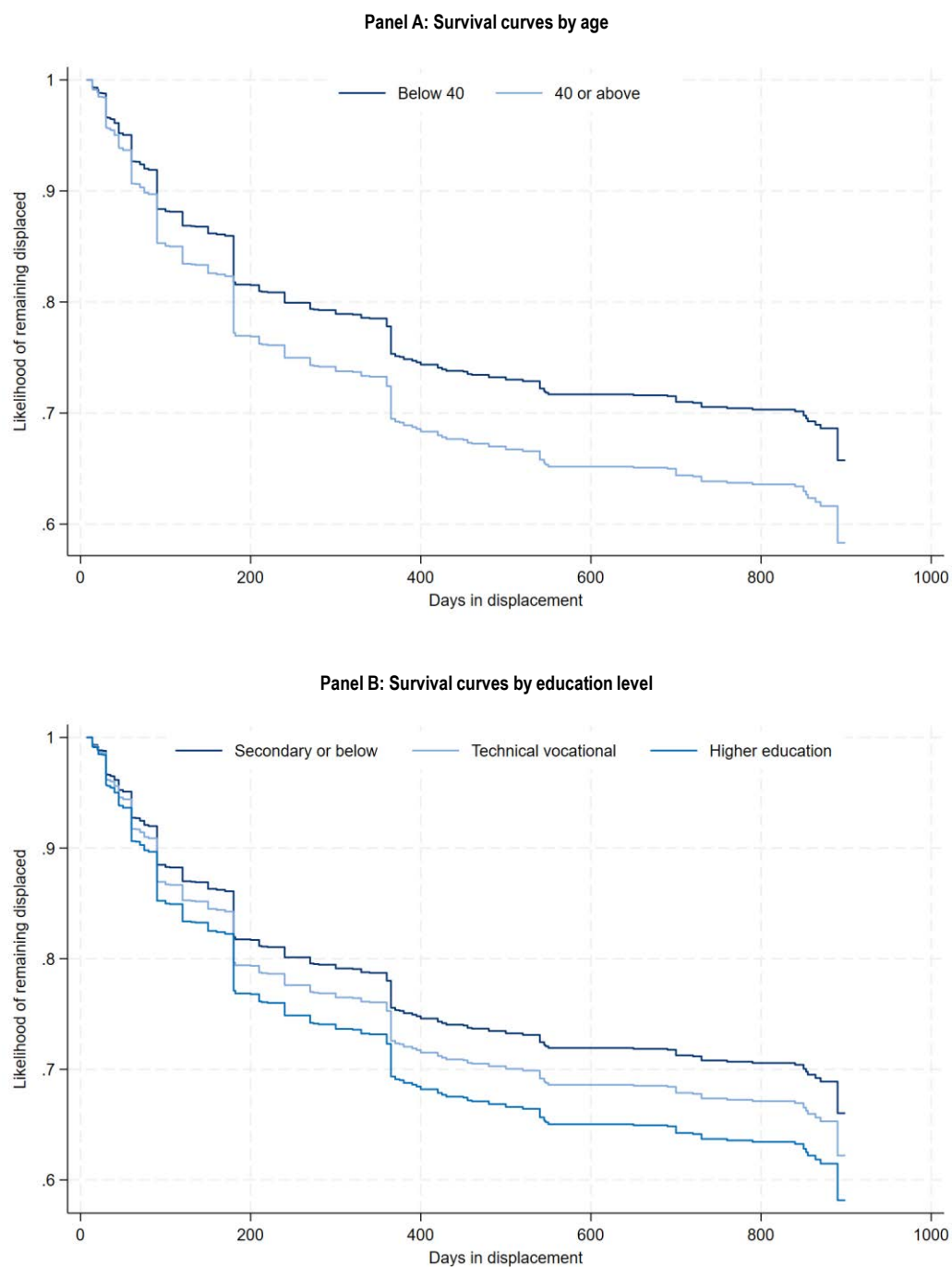
Once these characteristics have been identified, survival curves – graphs that show the probability of remaining displaced over time – can be constructed for individuals with and without these characteristics.

Figure 4.6 shows survival curves for individuals that differ only in one of the characteristics at a time, holding all other characteristics constant. Each curve represents the estimated probability of remaining displaced (i.e. not having returned) at each point in time since displacement. A steeper decline in the curve indicates a higher rate of return (shorter displacement duration), while a flatter curve suggests longer displacement durations.

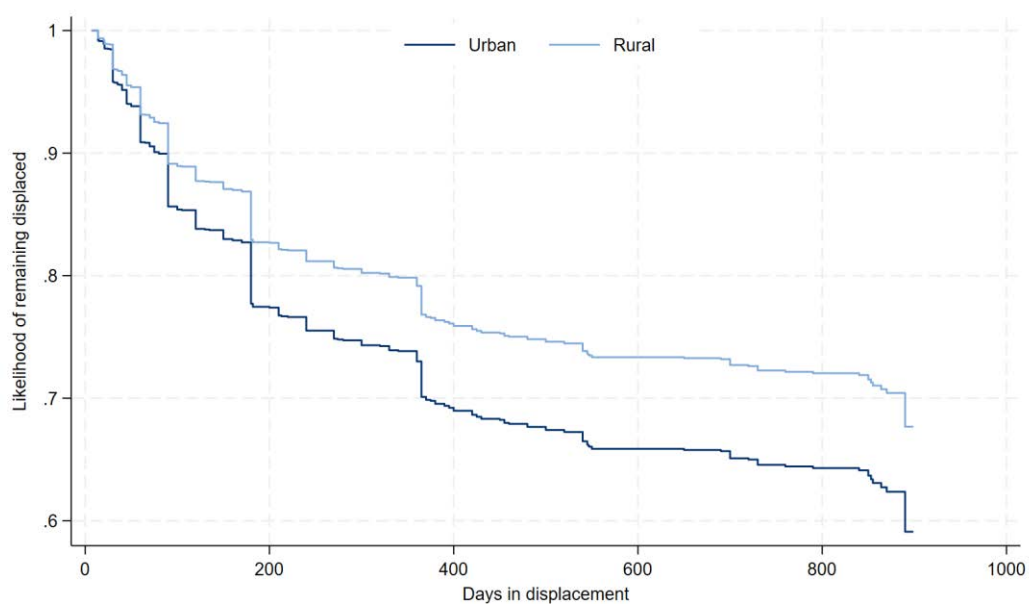
For example, from panel A, the curve for individuals who are younger than 40 years of age lies above the curve for individuals who are aged 40 or older, suggesting that younger individuals remain displaced longer. The age effect, however, disappears over time.

From panel B, the effect of education has a divergent effect on returns over time. Individuals with higher education tend to return faster as compared with others. As a result, two years after displacement, around 65% of displaced individuals with secondary and technical education level remain displaced, in contrast to around 55% of displaced individuals with higher education.

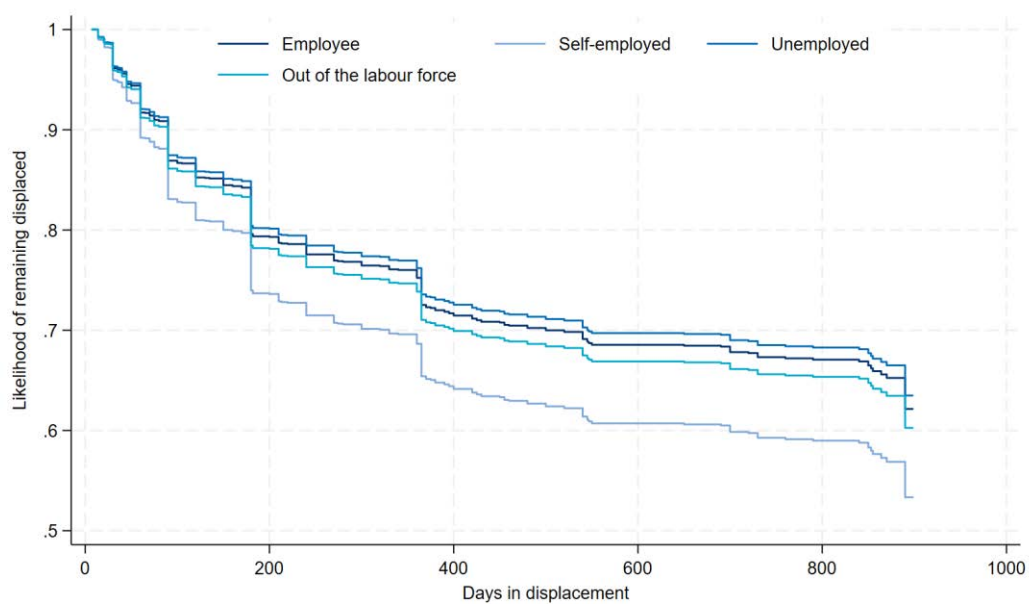
Figure 4.6. Estimated survival probabilities (the probabilities of remaining displaced) for groups with different characteristics, varying one characteristic at a time



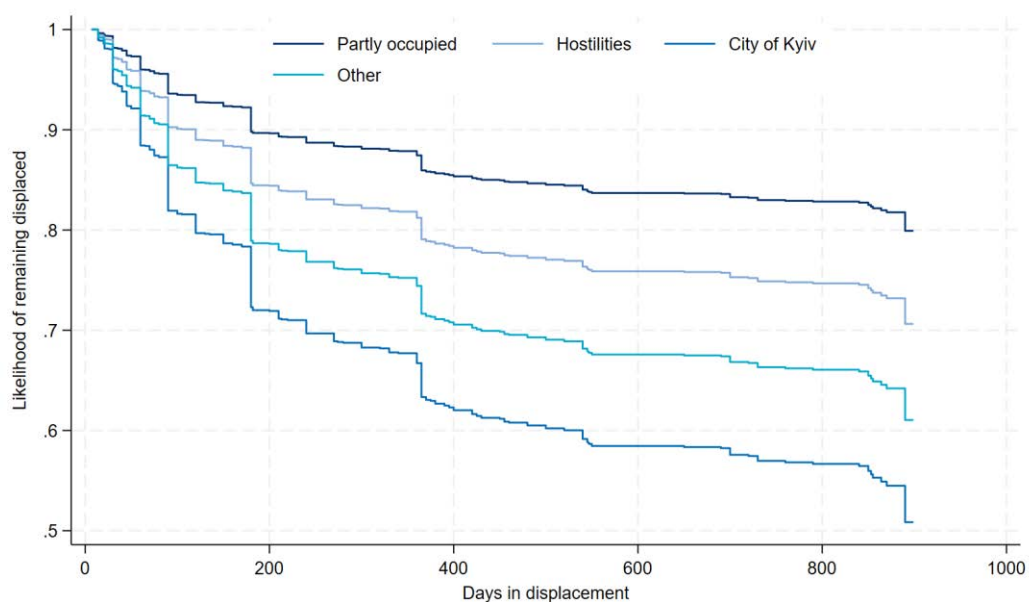
Panel C: Survival curves by current area of living



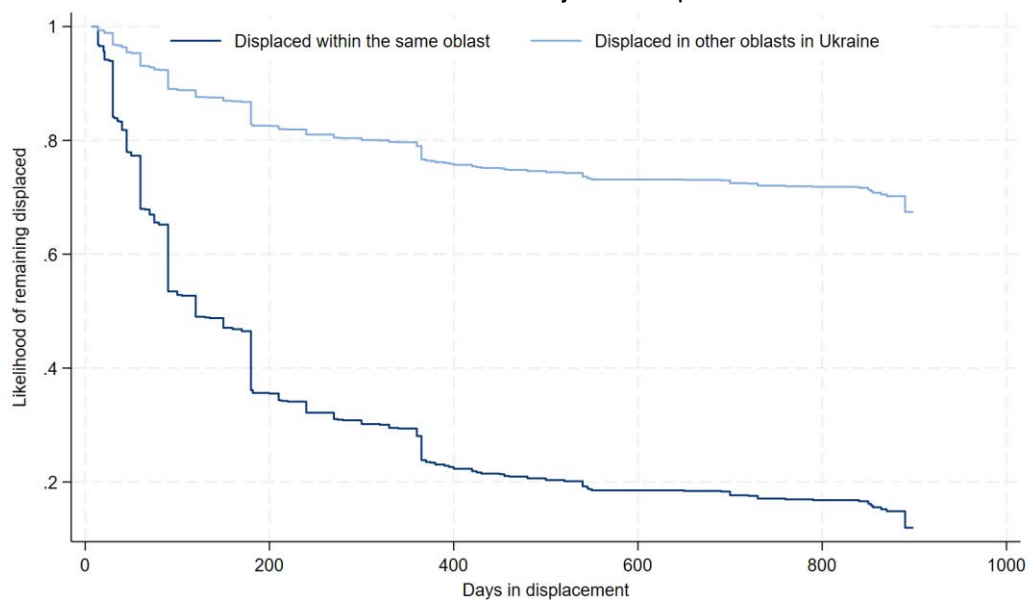
Panel D: Survival curves by employment status



Panel E: Survival curves by oblast of origin



Panel F: Survival curves by oblast of displacement



Note: Survival curves based on Cox model predictions (Box 4.4) holding all other covariates at their mean or reference values.
Source: Computations based on IOM General Population Survey Round 17.

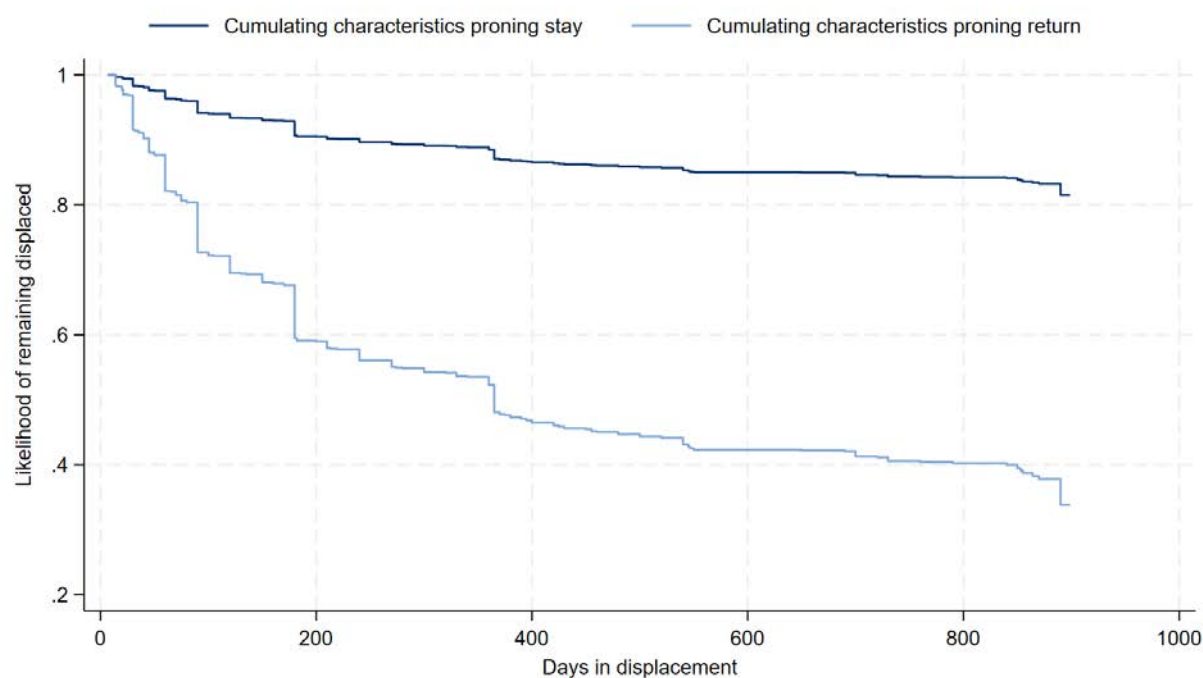
From Panel E, around 20% of individuals internally displaced from one of the oblasts partly occupied in August 2024 (including Donetsk, Kherson, Luhansk and Zaporizhzhia oblasts) have returned over 2022 to 2024. Around 30% have returned to oblasts with past, present, or possible active hostilities (Chernihiv, Dnipropetrovsk, Kharkiv, Mykolaiv, Odesa, Sumy oblasts as well as the oblast of Kyiv). The highest returns, at almost 50%, were to the city of Kyiv.⁶

The most striking result is in Panel F: almost 90% of individuals displaced within the same oblast have returned within two years, compared with only about 30% of individuals displaced to other oblasts. Moreover, the majority of returns happened within the first six months of displacement. It is worthwhile noting that this dynamic may be quite specific to the early months of the war, that will not necessarily be also observed with future returns. The reason for this is that the initial displacement during the early months involved significantly higher shares of individuals displaced within their non-frontline oblasts of origin (differently from subsequent displacements). As a result, many of the early intra-oblast return movements likely occurred within non-frontline areas, rather than representing large intra-oblast movements within frontline areas. Similar results are also found in other studies, such as (IOM, 2025^[27]), which show that among those who returned a long time ago, returns within non-frontline areas dominated, while returns within frontline areas became prevalent later on.

It is also useful to understand the dynamics of return for individuals who accumulate several traits that amplify the likelihood of return. For this, artificial profiles can be constructed. For example, one such profile can be for individuals who possess all individual characteristics that increase the hazard of return (aged 40 or older, having a higher education level, living in an urban area, being self-employed, returning to the city of Kyiv), while the second profile can be for individuals who possess all characteristics that minimise the hazard of return (younger, having secondary education or lower, living in a rural area, not being self-employed, returning to oblasts with active hostilities). Figure 4.7 shows the probabilities of remaining displaced for these two profiles. Given the strong effect of the oblast of origin and the oblast of displacement (whether within the same oblast or not), it focusses only on internal displacement outside the initial oblast of origin and only on returns to oblasts that are not temporarily partially occupied.

The results of Figure 4.7 suggest that, two years after the start of internal displacement (outside their oblast that was not partially occupied as of August 2024), about 65% displaced individuals with individual traits that increase the likelihood of return have effectively returned. Among individuals with characteristics that do not increase the likelihood of return, over 80% still remain displaced two years after their initial displacement. It is these individuals who are most likely to continue staying in displacement and are likely to be in need of specific targeted integration policies.

Figure 4.7. Estimated survival probabilities (the probabilities of remaining displaced) for individual profiles most prone to returning and most prone to staying



Note: Survival curves based on Cox model predictions (Box 4.4) holding all other covariates at their mean or reference values.

Source: Computations based on IOM General Population Survey Round 17.

How are returnees doing compared to the non-displaced population and those still displaced?

Key takeaways

- **There are notable disparities in home ownership and housing conditions, including damage, among different groups of the displaced population.** Returnees and non-displaced individuals are more likely to be homeowners than other population groups. In contrast, even two years after displacement, IDPs are more likely to rent their current dwelling or be hosted for free. Returnees from internal displacement are more likely than others to live in damaged housing.
- **IDPs and some returnees often lack legally recognised documents to prove their housing arrangements.** This may hinder integration and reintegration efforts.
- **State programmes to address housing issues are well known.** Still, more progress can be made to ease the application process, especially for some groups such as women returning from abroad.
- **Notable disparities are also observed in employment.** IDPs are the least likely to be employed. When they are employed, they are most likely to work as employees, rather than self-employed. Particular attention should also be paid to employment quality: the share of informal and casual employment is sizeable across all groups of displaced persons, as opposed to the non-displaced.
- **There is a higher share of poorer households among IDPs and the non-displaced as compared to returnees.** Yet, income difference across households are actually driven by factors other than displacement status, notably education level and employment. This underscores the importance of designing long-term income support mechanisms that are needs-based rather than strictly status-based, as status alone may not accurately reflect a household's vulnerability; as well as further promoting education, skill development, and employment-enhancing policies.

Further understanding how returnees are faring on the ground is essential for shaping effective reintegration policies. What are their outcomes in terms of housing, employment and income, which are the key considerations beyond security concerns shaping return intentions and actual returns? The analysis that follows provides answers to these questions. Unless stated otherwise, it is based on the IOM GPS rounds 16 and 17. The analysis distinguishes returnees from abroad and from internal displacement, in order to shed light on potential barriers to reintegration that may exist among these groups and to show whether there is space for public policies to improve their outcomes in a targeted manner. It also compares the outcomes of returnees with the outcomes of non-displaced individuals and of IDPs. Large differences may pose a challenge for social cohesion.

Housing situation among returnees, non-displaced population and IDPs

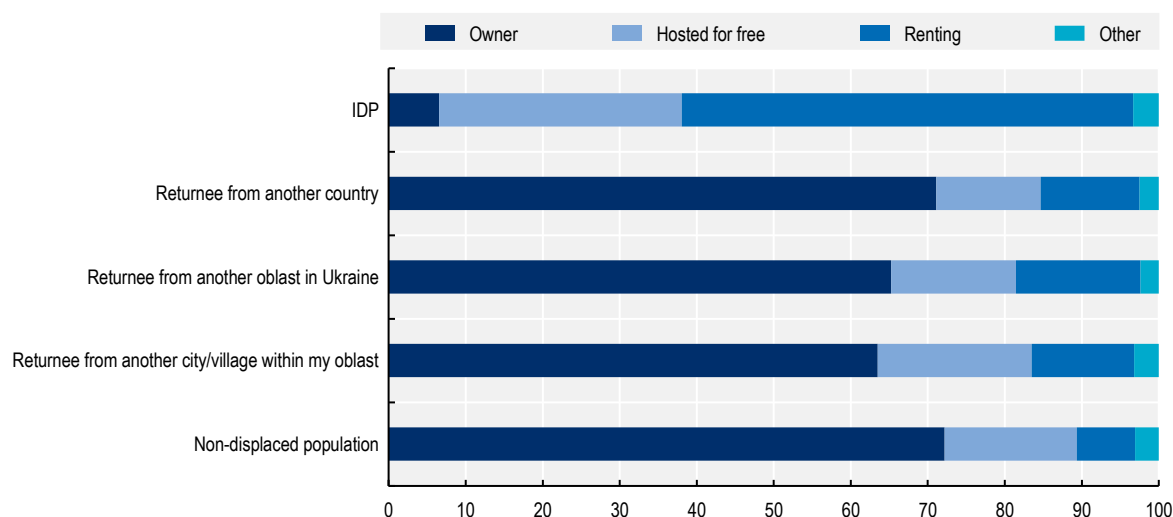
The full-scale Russian war against Ukraine has created tremendous challenges in the housing sector. As of late 2023, over 10% of the housing stock was destroyed (Miloserdov, 2024^[28]; World Bank et al., 2024^[29]), and even more was damaged. Areas that received large inflows of IDPs saw increased pressure on their housing sector, pressure that resulted in rising prices in both rental and mortgage markets, increasing unaffordability of housing and creating an imbalance between the quality and the cost of housing (Bobrova et al., 2025^[30]).

Moreover, a major change occurred in the housing tenure structure. If, before 2022, only about 4% of housing was rented, this figure rose to 14%, with significant pressures on large cities where renters may account for about a quarter of the population (Bobrova et al., 2025^[30]). The absence of a strong regulatory framework (which was of lesser relevance when the rental market was small) exacerbated the extent of the shadow-renting in the years since 2022, and led to an imbalance of power in favour of landlords, leaving tenants, especially vulnerable groups that include IDPs and some returnees, unprotected (Bobrova et al., 2025^[30]).

Returnees and non-displaced are more likely to be homeowners, in contrast to IDPs, who are more likely to rent or be hosted

Based on IOM GPS round 16, in the spring of 2024, IDPs exhibited the highest reliance on rental housing, with nearly 59% renting their accommodation. Although lower, rental rates were also notable among returnees, particularly those returning from other oblasts (16.2%), followed by those from the same region (13.3%) and from abroad (12.8%). Homeownership was most prevalent among non-displaced individuals and returnees from abroad, with similar rates of 72.2% and 71.1%, respectively. Additionally, a significant proportion of IDPs – 31.5% – were accommodated without charge, a figure that surpassed all other groups (Figure 4.8).⁷ These results support the notion that the availability of own housing can be an important factor in return decisions from abroad. The fact that returnees from internal displacement in another oblast had a relatively high rate of renting corroborates the fact that, to a greater extent, returns were driven by necessity and inability to stay in other locations, and that return was happening even to heavily damaged areas.

Figure 4.8. Ownership and occupancy status of IDPs, returnees and non-displaced population, spring 2024



Note: Tabulations are weighted to account for survey design and ensure representativeness.

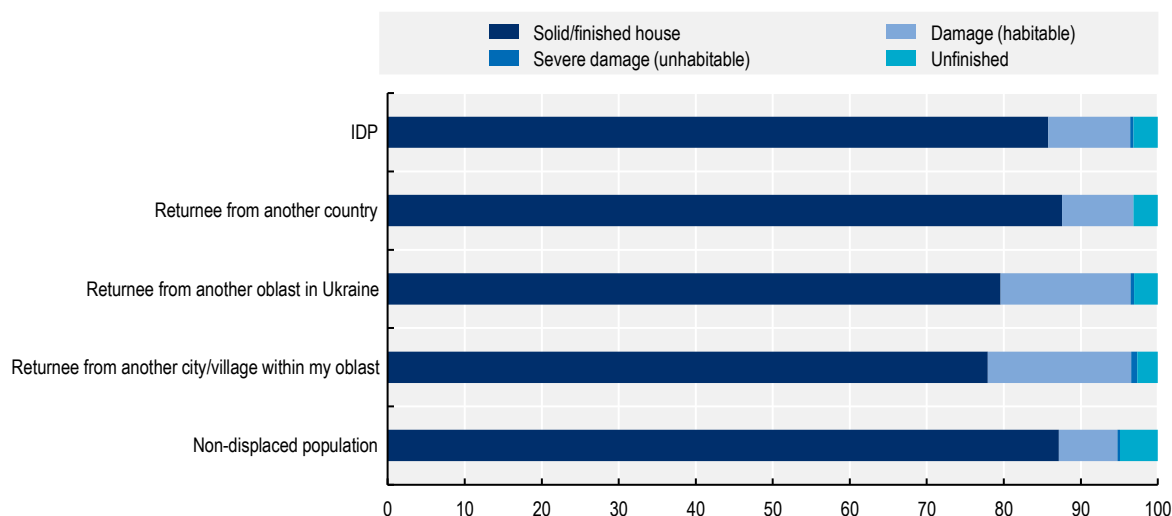
Source: Computations based on IOM General Population Survey Round 16.

Returnees from internal displacement are more likely than others to live in damaged housing

Looking at dwelling conditions (Figure 4.9), on average, 15.02% of returnees live in damaged but habitable housing. The highest proportion is among returnees from within the oblast (18.59%) or another oblast in Ukraine (16.87%). The findings again underscore that a significant share of returns occurred to areas heavily affected by damage, highlighting the continued vulnerability of returnees upon their return (IOM,

2024^[31]). Among returnees from abroad, 9.2% reported living in damaged housing, a proportion comparable to that of IDPs (10.6%). The lowest, though non-negligible, share of individuals living in damaged housing was recorded among the non-displaced (7.6%).

Figure 4.9. Conditions of dwelling of IDPs, returnees and non-displaced population, spring 2024



Note: Tabulations are weighted to account for survey design and ensure representativeness.

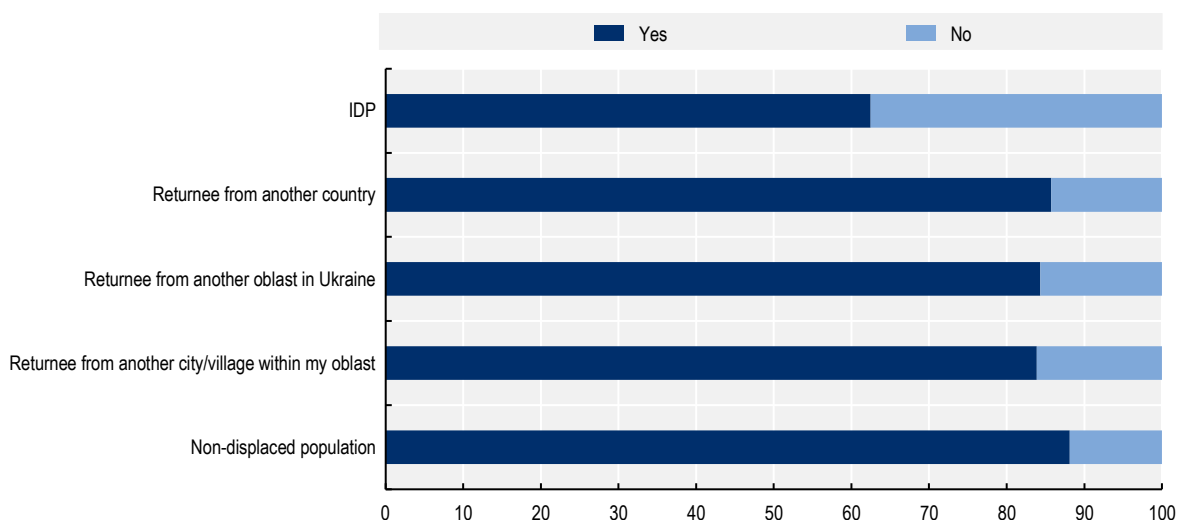
Source: Computations based on IOM General Population Survey Round 16.

IDPs have the greatest difficulty proving their current housing arrangement with legally recognised documents, but so do some returnees

An important consideration for policies to improve housing, as well as for the return and reintegration process, is whether individuals possess legally recognised documentation for their current housing arrangements, such as proof of property ownership or valid rental contracts. The absence of such documentation can hinder access to housing programmes, including compensation for damaged housing, legal protection and public services, and complicate long-term settlement or reconstruction efforts.

The highest share of individuals who do not have legally recognised documents for their current housing arrangement (Figure 4.10) is among IDPs (37.5%). This is followed by returnees from within the oblast (16.1%), another oblast (15.7%), and returnees from another country (14.3%). While a non-negligible share of the non-displaced population (11.9%) also reports this issue, this share is nevertheless the smallest as compared to other groups.

Figure 4.10. Legally recognised documents for current housing arrangement among returnees, IDPs, and non-displaced population, spring 2024

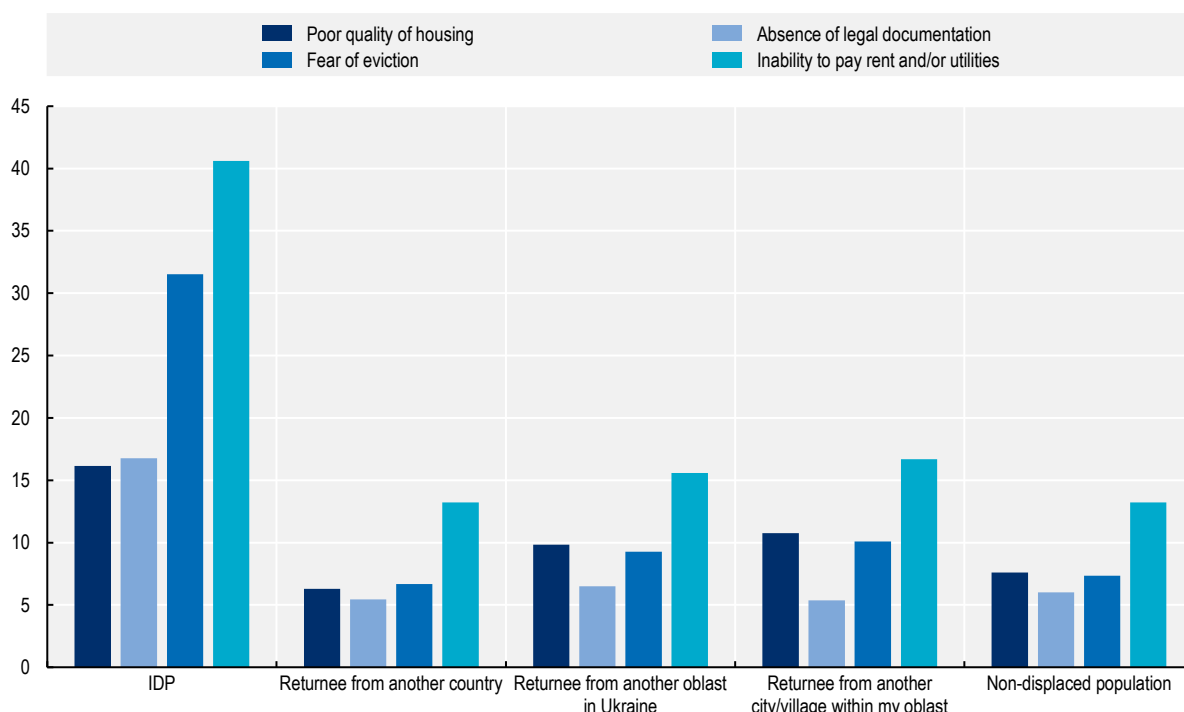


Note: Tabulations are weighted to account for survey design and ensure representativeness.

Source: Computations based on IOM General Population Survey Round 16.

Across all population groups, individuals renting, rather than owning, their current dwellings face the most critical challenges in terms of securing legally recognised documentation. Among IDPs renting their housing, 39.8% do not have legal documents. For IDPs in particular, this situation may exacerbate their vulnerability. Indeed, 16.8% of IDPs report that the absence of legal documentation limits their ability to stay in their current place as long as they wish (in contrast to around 5.5% among other groups), in addition to 40.6% of IDPs who may not be able to stay due to inability to pay rent and/or utilities (Figure 4.11). Also among the IDPs, there is the greatest proportion of homeowners who lack proper documentation (13.7%, against around 4.0% for other groups).

Figure 4.11. To what extent do the following factors limit your ability to stay in your current home as long as you wish? spring 2024



Note: Tabulations are weighted to account for survey design and ensure representativeness.

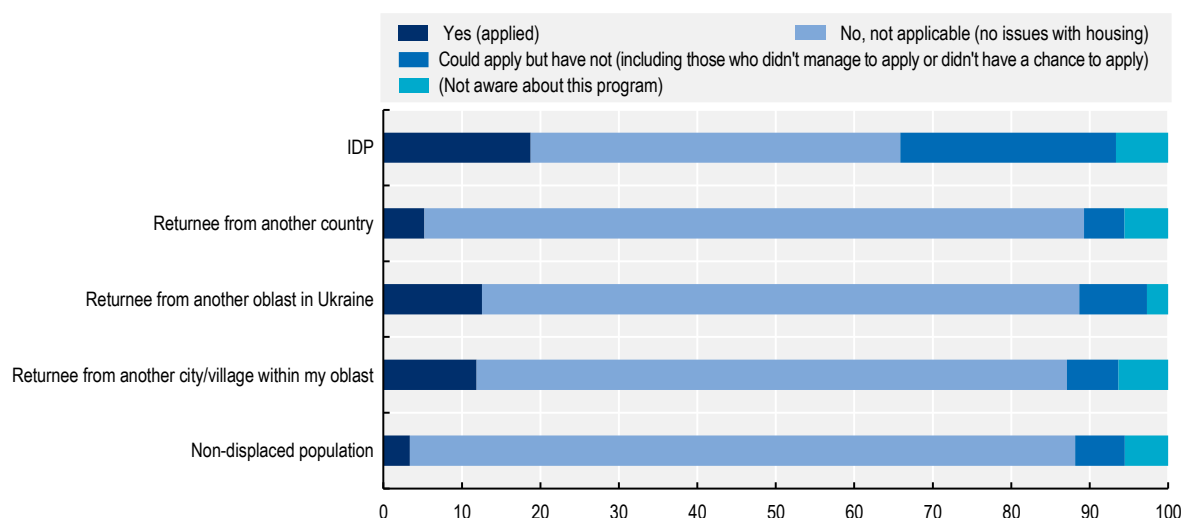
Source: Computations based on IOM General Population Survey Round 16.

There is decent awareness of state programmes to address housing issues, though application proves difficult, especially for women returning from abroad

In response to the severe and widespread destruction of residential infrastructure due to the Russia's full-scale aggression, the Ukrainian Government has implemented targeted compensation measures to support affected populations (described in Chapter 3). One of such measures is eRecovery (eVidnovlennya), a compensation programme for damaged or destroyed housing located in non-occupied territories outside active combat zones. If housing is damaged as a result of military action, the owner can report the damage through Diia app. Following an assessment by a commission, monetary compensation may be granted.

Among IDPs, there is both a higher percentage of individuals who applied for the programme (18.7%) and of those who could apply but did not manage to do so (27.5%), as compared to other groups (Figure 4.12). If general awareness about the programme seems to be quite high, IDPs and returnees from within the oblast appear to have the lowest awareness rate.

Figure 4.12. Application to the eRecovery (eVidnovlennya) programme, by IDPs, returnees and non-displaced population, spring 2024



Note: Tabulations are weighted to account for survey design and ensure representativeness.

Source: Computations based on IOM General Population Survey Round 16.

Among those who submitted applications for the eRecovery programme, a significant portion reported that the process was very difficult. This sentiment was most prevalent among IDPs, with 56.2% expressing difficulty, followed by returnees from abroad (40.4%) and from other oblasts (39.7%). While other groups also faced challenges, their reported difficulty rates were lower, though still notable at around 30%. Programme design can inadvertently disadvantage IDPs and, more broadly, individuals who fled currently occupied territories, due to the absence of clear mechanisms for verifying property ownership or assessing damage, compared to individuals who did not relocate but whose housing was damaged. They underscore the importance of developing alternative methods for establishing ownership and documenting damage in contexts where standard procedures are unfeasible.

Application to eRecovery (eVidnovlennya) features a strong gender dimension. Among those who could have applied but did not manage, 68.7% are women. Among those who are not aware of the programme, 76.45% are women. This gender disadvantage is particularly striking among women returnees from abroad: among those who could have applied but did not manage 94.1% are women, and among those who are not aware of the programme, 89.9% are women.

Employment situation among returnees, the non-displaced population and IDPs

The war of aggression has led to massive disruption to the labour market, due to physical destruction and damage, relocation of enterprises and workers, and disruption of economic activity (OECD, 2025^[32]).

Just as in housing, employment outcomes among displaced and returnee populations in Ukraine also reveal certain disparities. Evidence on post-return experiences points to significant gaps between expectations and local labour market realities. In UNHCR's sixth round, 53% of returnees reported that access to work opportunities after return was worse than expected, a concern particularly common among those in the south and east (UNHCR, 2024^[11]). IOM's Conditions of Return Assessment underscores the constraints on the demand side: in 53% of assessed locations, key informants reported that few or no residents seeking work could find suitable jobs (IOM, 2024^[9]).

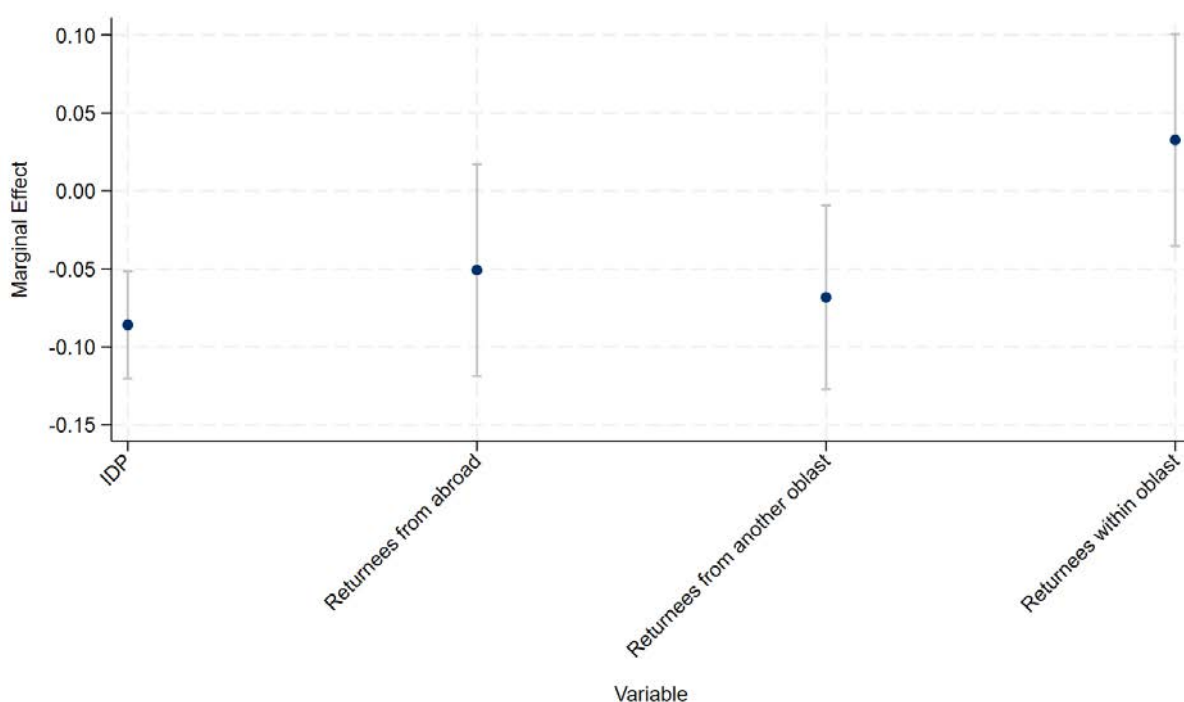
IDPs are the most disadvantaged in terms of employment, although some returnees from internal displacement have difficulties too

Employment of individuals may depend on many parameters. These can include the fact of displacement and return, but also a wide range of other factors, such as the level of education or area of living. Multivariate analysis can help in understanding whether, once individual socio-economic characteristics are accounted for, there is still a difference in employment across different groups of returnees, non-displaced individuals, and IDPs.

Multivariate analysis applied to the IOM GPS round 17 survey data (Box 4.5) shows that, once several socio-economic characteristics are taken into account, IDPs and returnees from internal displacement in another oblast are the two groups that are more likely to be unemployed than employed, as compared to non-displaced persons. IDPs are significantly less likely to be in employment than non-displaced individuals, with an estimated reduction in probability of about 8.2 percentage points (p.p.). Returnees from displacement in another oblast are also significantly less likely to be in employment than non-displaced individuals, with an estimated reduction in probability of about 4.6 p.p. Probability of being employed is not statistically different for returnees from the same region and from abroad as compared to the non-displaced (Figure 4.13).

Figure 4.13. Probability of employment, for returnees and IDPs, as compared to non-displaced population, summer 2024

Marginal effects with 95% confidence intervals



Note: Marginal Effects with 95% confidence intervals are reported based on the regression results in (Box 4.5). Sample restricted to population aged 18-65.

Source: Computations based on IOM General Population Survey Round 17.

Box 4.5. Understanding employment gaps across individuals with different displacement status

Research questions

Do employment outcomes differ across returnees, non-displaced individuals, and IDPs, once their individual socio-economic characteristics are accounted for? Which factors most strongly influence employment outcomes within each group?

Data and methodology

IOM GPS round 17 is used to answer these questions. The following equation is estimated:

$$\text{Employed}_i = \alpha_i + \beta_1 \text{Returnee\_from\_abroad}_i + \beta_2 \text{Returnee\_from\_another\_oblast}_i + \beta_3 \text{Returnee\_within\_oblast}_i + \beta_4 \text{IDP}_i + \beta_5 X_i + \varepsilon_i$$

In this equation, the dependent variable Employed_i is a dichotomous variable equal to one if the respondent i is employed, and zero otherwise. Four independent dichotomous variables of interest are: being a returnee from abroad; being a returnee from another oblast; being a returnee from within the oblast; or being an IDP. The reference category is that of a non-displaced individual. X_i is a set of individual socio-economic characteristics that include age, age squared, being female (male is the reference category), area of living (urban versus rural), household size and education level. Finally, ε_i is the error term.

This equation is first estimated on the pooled sample (Table 4.4, Column 1) to gauge the difference in employment rates between returnees, IDPs and non-displaced, while accounting for individual characteristics. It is then estimated on subsamples of returnees, IDPs and non-displaced individuals, excluding the displacement status variables (Table 4.4, Columns 2-4), in order to compare the factors that most strongly affect employment outcomes within each group.

Results

Table 4.4 presents marginal effects from the probit regressions.

From Column (1), coefficients on two variables – being a returnee from abroad and being a returnee from another oblast – are negative and statistically significant. They suggest that, once all socio-economic characteristics are taken into account, returnees from another oblast and IDPs are disadvantaged in terms of employment compared to the non-displaced. Being a returnee from another oblast reduces the probability of being employed by 4.6 p.p. as compared to the non-displaced. Being an IDP reduces the probability of employment by 8.2 p.p. compared to non-displaced individuals.

From Columns (2) to (4), comparing the effect of various socio-economic characteristics of returnees, non-displaced individuals, and IDPs on employment, a few differences and similarities are observed. For individuals within each of these groups, employment probability increases with age, but at a decreasing rate. Being female substantially decreases the probability of employment for IDPs and for returnees: the difference between IDP women and men in the probability of being employed is 11.60 p.p.; the difference between returnee women and men in probability of being employed is 5.40 p.p. There is no gender effect on employment for the non-displaced.

For all three groups, the chance of being employed is higher if individuals live in urban rather than rural areas; this effect is amplified for IDPs. The number of household members does not seem to affect employment probability. Among non-displaced and IDPs, individuals with technical education have greater employment chances compared to individuals with lower education levels. For returnees, having technical education does not seem to affect employment probability in a significant way. Across all three groups, individuals with higher education have the greatest employment probability, and

especially IDPs: the difference between an IDP with and without higher education in the probability of being employed is 21.70 p.p.

Table 4.4. Marginal effects from probit regressions examining determinants of employment

Dependent variable: dichotomous variable equal to 1 if individual is employed, and 0 otherwise

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Sample:	Pooled	Returnee	Non-displaced	IDP
Controls:				
Age	0.040*** (0.004)	0.036*** (0.007)	0.051*** (0.006)	0.033*** (0.007)
Age squared	-0.001*** (0.000)	-0.001*** (0.000)	-0.001*** (0.000)	-0.001*** (0.000)
Female	-0.055*** (0.016)	-0.054* (0.031)	-0.008 (0.024)	-0.116*** (0.026)
Urban	0.123*** (0.018)	0.118*** (0.039)	0.117*** (0.027)	0.133*** (0.030)
Household size	0.003 (0.004)	0.004 (0.008)	0.005 (0.008)	0.003 (0.008)
Technical education	0.072*** (0.022)	0.004 (0.043)	0.089*** (0.034)	0.099*** (0.037)
Higher education	0.186*** (0.021)	0.143*** (0.041)	0.181*** (0.034)	0.217*** (0.036)
Returnee from abroad	-0.039 (0.030)			
Returnee from another oblast	-0.046** (0.022)			
Returnee within oblast	0.015 (0.030)			
IDP	-0.082*** (0.016)			
Observations	3 815	991	1 508	1 316
Pseudo R2	0.280	0.250	0.305	0.271

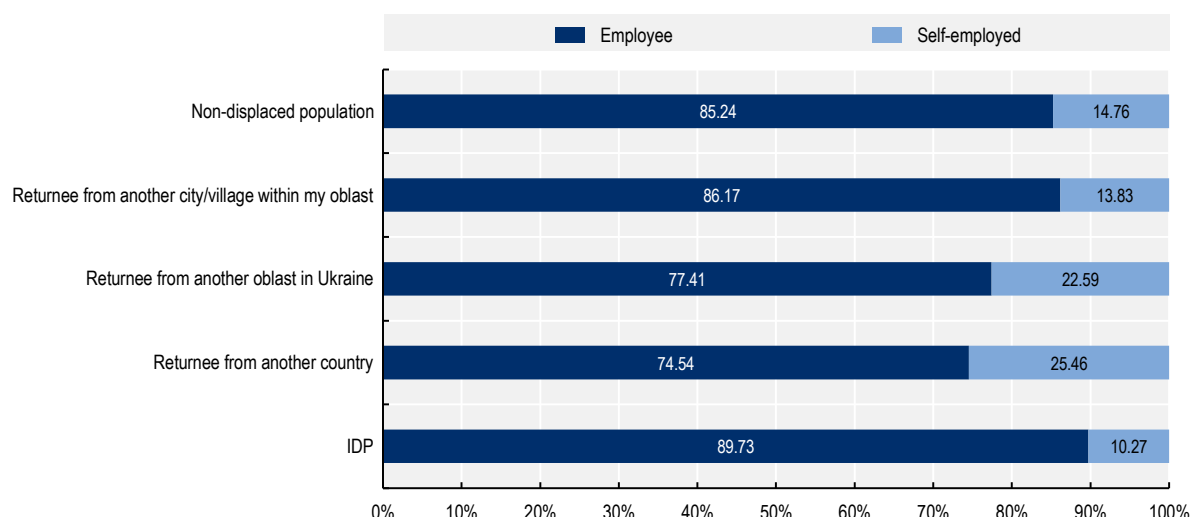
Note: Estimation method: probit regression. The reference categories are as follows: male (for female); rural (for urban); secondary education or below (for technical and higher education); non-displaced (for IDPs and returnees, in pooled regressions). The category "technical" includes technical and non-completed higher education. Samples are restricted to individuals aged 18-65. Standard errors are in parentheses. The symbol (***) represents statistical significance at $p < 0.1$; (**) at $p < 0.05$, (*) at $p < 0.1$. Regressions control for oblast of origin.

Source: Computations based on IOM General Population Survey Round 17.

The findings of the multivariate analysis also highlight some compounded vulnerabilities (Box 4.5): IDP women and IDPs in rural areas have particularly lower employment chances compared to all other groups. They require continued targeted policy attention. In contrast, higher education is the best employment guarantee for all groups, and technical education also offers strong protection for non-displaced individuals and for IDPs, highlighting changing labour market needs in favour of technical specialisation.

In addition to these findings, a closer look at status in employment⁸ shows that these groups have a different composition of status in employment. Among employed individuals, returnees from another country and from another oblast have the highest proportions of self-employed rather than employees. The share of self-employed is the smallest among employed IDPs (Figure 4.14).

Figure 4.14. Status in employment of returnees, non-displaced population, and IDPs, summer 2024



Note: Tabulations are weighted to account for survey design and ensure representativeness. Sample restricted to employed population aged 18-65.

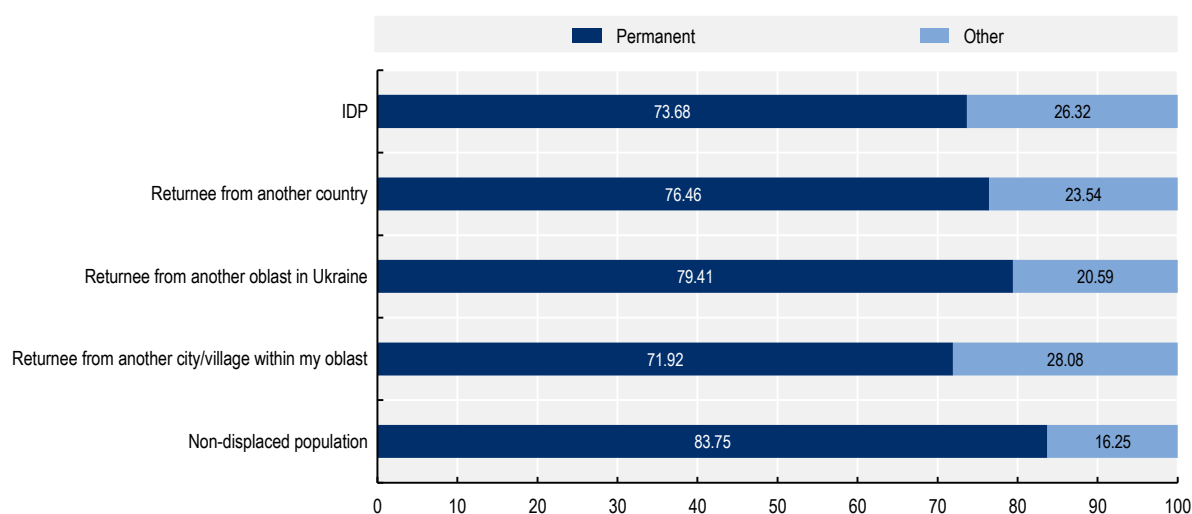
Source: Computations based on IOM General Population Survey Round 17.

Returnees and IDPs are at a higher risk of precarious employment compared to the non-displaced

In addition to status in employment, the type of employment that the different population groups have matters too. For employees, the data allow determining whether employment is permanent in nature, or whether it is temporary or casual (including informal).⁹ Permanent employment is often considered superior in work quality to temporary and casual employment, as it not only offers more stability but is also typically associated with better wages and protections (OECD, 2019^[33]).

Descriptive statistics in Figure 4.15 show that, at 28.08%, temporary and casual employment is most prevalent among returnees from another city or village within the same oblast. In other words, this population group faces the greatest precarity of employment. The outcomes of this group are most similar to IDPs, 26.32% of whom are employed on a temporary or casual basis. Returnees from abroad and from another oblast also have relatively high, albeit lower, rates of temporary or casual employment. The non-displaced have the greatest rate of employment in permanent jobs.

Figure 4.15. Type of employment of IDPs, returnees and non-displaced population, summer 2024



Note: Total sample: 1 806 observations. Tabulations are weighted to account for survey design and ensure representativeness.
Source: Computations based on IOM General Population Survey Round 17.

These results are corroborated by the multivariate analysis (Box 4.6), which confirms that returnees from any type of displacement and IDPs are more prone to temporary and casual informal employment, rather than permanent employment, as compared to the non-displaced population. IDPs are the most disadvantaged: being an IDP reduces the probability of being employed in a permanent rather than temporary job by 11.9 p.p. compared to non-displaced individuals. Taken together, these findings point to a need for employment support measures that go beyond job placement and encourage also better quality, stable, and formal employment.

Box 4.6. Understanding gaps in employment type across individuals with different displacement status

Multivariate analysis with a similar set-up to the one in Box 4.5 is applied to the survey data of returnees, non-displaced individuals and IDPs, in order to gauge differences in employment types between these population groups. The only difference is in the dependent variable: it is equal to 1 if an individual is employed in a permanent job, and 0 if they are employed in a temporary or casual job.

From Table 4.5, Column (1), the marginal effects on the dummy variables for returnees from all three types of destinations are negative and statistically significant, with relatively similar magnitudes of these effects. The marginal effect on the dummy variable for IDPs is the largest, and suggests that, *ceteris paribus*, the difference between an IDP and a non-displaced individual in the probability of being employed in a permanent job is minus 11.9 p.p.

From Columns (2) to (4), individual characteristics that correlate with employment type are gender, household size, and education. IDP and returnee women have a higher probability of being employed in permanent rather than non-permanent jobs compared to men. A greater household size is associated with a lower probability of having a permanent job, hinting at the necessity of employment in non-permanent jobs for workers with larger families. Across all groups, individuals with higher education have a greater probability of being employed in permanent jobs, with the greatest effect of education observed for returnees.

Table 4.5. Marginal effects from probit regressions examining determinants of employment type

Dependent variable: dichotomous variable equal to 1 if individual is employed in a permanent job, and 0 if employed in a temporary or a casual job

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Sample:	Pooled	Returnee	Non-displaced	IDP
Controls:				
Age	0.003 (0.006)	0.000 (0.011)	0.007 (0.008)	-0.004 (0.011)
Age squared	0.001 (0.000)	0.001 (0.000)	-0.001 (0.000)	0.001 (0.000)
Female	0.072*** (0.019)	0.082** (0.038)	0.036 (0.027)	0.110*** (0.036)
Urban	0.008 (0.025)	-0.059 (0.061)	0.021 (0.031)	0.023 (0.052)
Household size	-0.004 (0.006)	-0.006 (0.010)	0.013 (0.009)	-0.020* (0.011)
Technical education	0.034 (0.029)	0.078 (0.060)	0.021 (0.038)	0.012 (0.059)
Higher education	0.188*** (0.028)	0.229*** (0.055)	0.182*** (0.039)	0.165*** (0.057)
Returnee from abroad	-0.094** (0.040)			
Returnee from another oblast	-0.098*** (0.031)			
Returnee within oblast	-0.100*** (0.034)			
IDP	-0.119*** (0.023)			
Observations	1 732	503	679	547
Pseudo R2	0.088	0.077	0.094	0.069

Note: Estimation method: probit regression. The reference categories are as follows: male (for female); rural (for urban); secondary education or below (for technical and higher education); non-displaced (for IDPs and returnees, in pooled regressions). The category "technical" includes technical and non-completed higher education. Samples are restricted to individuals aged 18-65, employees only. Standard errors are in parentheses. The symbol (***) represents statistical significance at $p < 0.1$; (**) at $p < 0.05$, (*) at $p < 0.1$. Regressions control for oblast of origin.

Source: Computations based on IOM General Population Survey Round 17.

Income situation among families of returnees, the non-displaced population, and IDPs

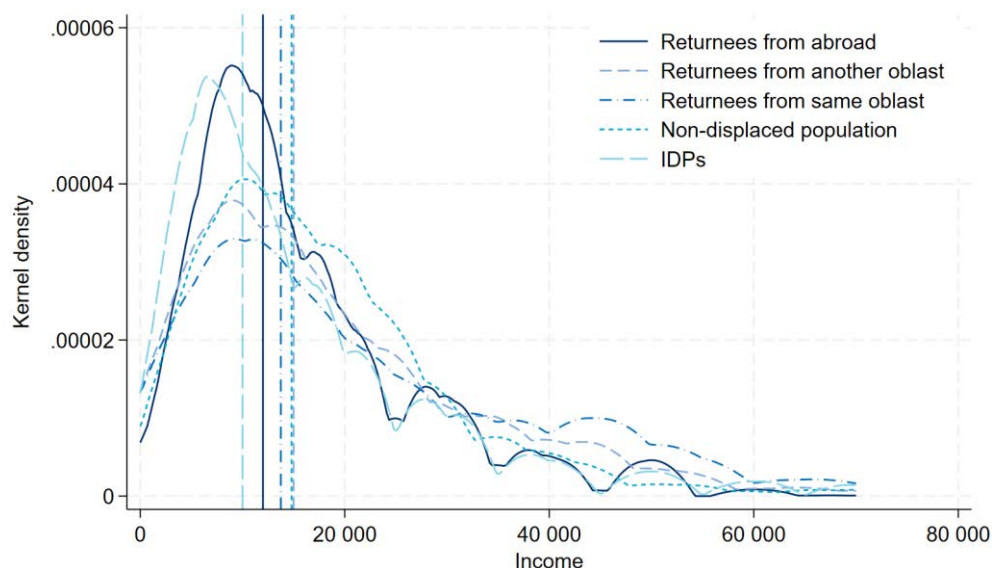
Understanding income differences between returnees, non-displaced individuals and IDPs can provide valuable insight into the economic disparities and vulnerabilities faced by each group.

There is a higher share of poorer individuals among non-displaced populations and IDPs

Figure 4.16 shows that the distributions of household monthly income for population groups with different displacement history. Reported household income includes income from all sources, including government assistance such as IDP allowances.

From Figure 4.16, the distributions of household monthly income of non-displaced and IDPs are quite similar. Both groups have a higher share of individuals with relatively low incomes compared to other groups. For returnees, the distribution is flatter, implying less significant concentration of very high or very low incomes. Still, there is a small spike of relatively well-off individuals. The medians of these income distributions are as follows: UAH 10 000 for the non-displaced population; UAH 12 000 for IDPs; UAH 15 000 for returnees from abroad, from another oblast in Ukraine, and from the same region.

Figure 4.16. Distributions and medians of household monthly income for IDPs, returnees and non-displaced population, summer 2024, UAH



Note: UAH: Ukrainian hryvna. Densities and medians are weighted to account for survey design and ensure representativeness. The total sample is restricted to the 1st to 99th percentile of the income distribution to mitigate the influence of outliers.

Source: Computations based on IOM General Population Survey Round 17.

Yet, household incomes are influenced by factors beyond displacement status

The results of the regression analysis (Box 4.7) suggest that, once a range of other individual characteristics is accounted for, household incomes do not statistically differ across individuals with different displacement statuses. This result needs to be interpreted in light of how household monthly income is measured: even if total household income appears comparable across groups, there remains a strongly displacement-related component to income vulnerability because IDPs are significantly more reliant on external assistance than others. In other words, total household incomes are comparable in part because IDP incomes were topped up by government assistance.

Beyond this, the most significant differences between respondents are driven by factors other than displacement status, notably their education level, employment status, and area of living (urban rather than rural).

These findings underscore the importance of provision income support to IDPs but also the value of designing longer-term income support mechanisms that are needs-based rather than strictly status-based, as status alone may not accurately reflect a household's and individuals' vulnerability. A needs-based approach can allow for a more comprehensive assessment of factors that go beyond displacement status, ensuring that assistance reaches those facing the greatest hardship. It can also help to forge a stronger sense of justice and social cohesion.

Box 4.7. Understanding household income gaps across individuals with different displacement status

Multivariate analysis with a set-up similar to the one in (Box 4.5) is applied to the survey data of returnees, non-displaced individuals and IDPs, in order to gauge differences in incomes between these population groups. The dependent variable reflects household income on a logarithmic scale. Estimations are conducted using ordinary least squares regressions (OLS).

Table 4.6. Coefficients from a regression examining determinants of household monthly income

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Sample:	Pooled	Returnee	Non-displaced	IDP
Controls:				
Age	-0.021*** (0.005)	-0.025*** (0.010)	-0.025*** (0.007)	-0.017** (0.008)
Age squared	0.000*** (0.000)	0.000* (0.000)	0.000*** (0.000)	0.000 (0.000)
Female	-0.187*** (0.024)	-0.172*** (0.053)	-0.177*** (0.036)	-0.209*** (0.042)
Urban	0.224*** (0.028)	0.298*** (0.065)	0.226*** (0.040)	0.166*** (0.048)
Household size (log)	0.397*** (0.007)	0.331*** (0.014)	0.442*** (0.012)	0.412*** (0.013)
Technical education	0.141*** (0.034)	0.166** (0.075)	0.147*** (0.050)	0.114** (0.057)
Higher education	0.470*** (0.034)	0.480*** (0.073)	0.552*** (0.052)	0.362*** (0.058)
Employee	0.459*** (0.032)	0.410*** (0.066)	0.566*** (0.049)	0.369*** (0.055)
Self-employed	0.738*** (0.052)	0.671*** (0.093)	0.816*** (0.081)	0.723*** (0.101)
Unemployed	0.023 (0.045)	-0.011 (0.099)	0.054 (0.074)	0.005 (0.071)
Returnee from abroad	0.040 (0.047)			
Returnee from another oblast in Ukraine	0.065 (0.039)			
Returnee within oblast	0.018 (0.047)			
IDP	0.062 (0.027)			
Constant	9.104*** (0.118)	9.317*** (0.231)	9.023*** (0.194)	8.974*** (0.240)
Observations	3 765	976	1 494	1 287
R-squared	0.343	0.307	0.413	0.275

Note: Estimation method: OLS regression. The reference categories are as follows: male (for female); rural (for urban); secondary education or below (for technical and higher education); out of the labour force (for employee, self-employed, and unemployed), non-displaced (for IDPs and returnees, in pooled regressions). The category "technical" includes technical and non-completed higher education. Standard errors are in parentheses. The symbol (***) represents statistical significance at $p < 0.1$; (**) at $p < 0.05$, (*) at $p < 0.1$. Regressions control for oblast of origin.

Source: Computations based on IOM General Population Survey Round 17.

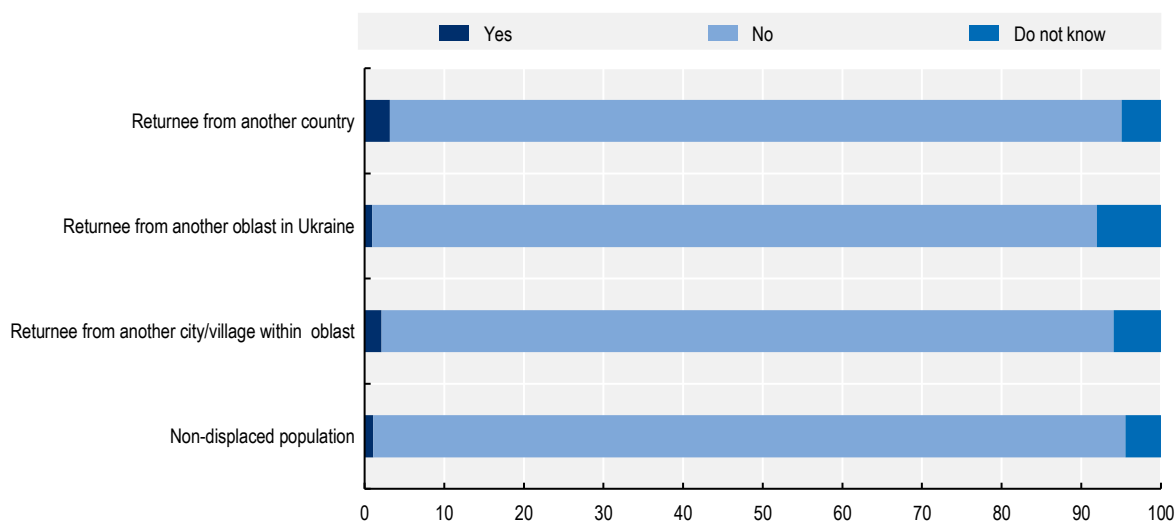
From Table 4.6, Column (1), no statistically significant effect is found on the dummy variables for returnees, nor for IDPs. From Columns (2) to (4), characteristics that affect household income are the respondent's age, gender, area of living, household size (also in logs), education, and employment status. Women across all three groups report lower household income, with IDP women reporting the lowest household income. Individuals in urban areas, as compared to rural areas, report higher incomes; this effect is the greatest for returnees. Household income naturally increases with household size. Individuals with technical and higher education report higher household incomes, the latter group being particularly better off across all groups. The self-employed also report the highest household incomes across all groups, as compared to individuals out of the labour force. Being a wage employee, too, significantly improves household incomes.

Sustainability of returns

For returnees, return is not just a question of movement, but of long-term safety, dignity, and opportunity. Ensuring the sustainability of returns is essential to prevent repeated displacement and migration to other countries, and to support lasting reintegration in countries of origin.

Computations based on IOM GPS round 17 survey data show that, among returnees, only a very small share considers leaving their current location in the nearest future (Figure 4.17). Only 3.17% of returnees from another country contemplate leaving, and fewer than 2% of individuals from other groups. There is, however, a certain degree of uncertainty: 8.01% of returnees from another oblast are not sure whether they might consider leaving, and the proportions fluctuate around 5% for other groups. Security concerns are the most commonly reported primary reason for considering new movement (IOM, 2025^[27]).

Figure 4.17. Intentions to leave the current location beyond the next three months



Note: Tabulations are weighted to account for survey design and ensure representativeness.

Source: Computations based on IOM General Population Survey Round 17.

There are some minor differences in the intentions to stay for individuals depending on occupancy status (Annex Figure 4.B.1), degree of housing damage (Annex Figure 4.B.2), or availability of legal documents for housing (Annex Figure 4.B.3). Generally, there is a higher share of individuals not intending to stay among those who are hosted for free or are renting their housing, as well as among those who do not have the legal documents for their housing, especially among returnees as contrasted to the non-displaced. The

small number of overall positive responses, however, precludes a meaningful multivariate analysis based on IOM data to determine statistical significance of these factors.

Some further insights can be drawn from IMPACT Round 28 survey, which highlights that accommodation is often the main reason for staying in the current location among different groups of returnees and internally displaced persons. Needs for housing support and repair vary by context, including among those returning from or to frontline areas. In these locations, accommodation plays an especially prominent role, with 74% of returnees to frontline areas reporting that available housing was the reason they planned to remain (IMPACT, 2024^[34]).

Evidence from IMPACT surveys also suggests that employment is an additional “anchoring” factor of stay. Employed returnees tend to stay even when conditions are not safe. Employment is mentioned as a key reason for staying in the current location after return by 48% of returnees, though assistance with job search is also commonly needed (IMPACT, 2024^[34]).

Beyond the sustainability of returns, an important longer-term question is also the sustainability of livelihoods. Evidence shows that unmet needs after return can create vulnerability. Over 2023-2024, more than half of returnees reported urgent unmet needs, particularly cash and food, with higher levels among those returning to their place of origin though not to their homes (IMPACT, 2023^[4]; IMPACT, 2024^[12]). There is also a high reliance on social protection benefits, with 72% of internally displaced persons and 62% of returnees receiving benefits (UNHCR, 2024^[1]) – though for the latter group this may also be due to the age composition. IOM’s CoRA (Conditions of Return Assessment) further highlighted tensions around the distribution of humanitarian aid in affected communities hosting the majority of returnees (IOM, 2024^[9]).

Access to services is not uniform, either. IOM’s findings suggest that 23% of returnees from abroad reported difficulties accessing health services and 25% reported problems accessing medicines, figures broadly similar to or slightly lower than for internally displaced and non-displaced persons. However, access to mental health services appeared more challenging: 23% of returnees from abroad reported difficulties, a higher share than in other groups (IOM, 2024^[9]).

As with healthcare, supply-side constraints in education are evident in Ukraine. IOM’s Conditions of Return Assessment records that 21% of assessed locations hosting 59% of returnees had damaged schools, although key informants reported that in 98% of locations most school-aged children were nonetheless able to attend lessons (IOM, 2024^[9]).

On the national level, returnees who returned more recently report poorer access to services, while those who returned earlier are more likely to report access levels comparable to the non-displaced (IOM, 2025^[35]).

Together, these findings suggest that when housing, employment, and access to basic services and protections are absent or limited, displaced persons, including returnees, resort to coping mechanisms. In the longer term, this may pose risks of moving again in search of support or, for the most vulnerable, on the contrary, compromise the possibility to move in the face of immediate danger.

New outflows from Ukraine

More recent survey data from Ukraine, collected in 2025, suggest that the majority of Ukrainian women (79%) were not planning to leave the country for an extended period (Centre for Economic Strategy, 2025^[36]). Family ties (91%) and patriotism (88%) dominated as reasons for staying. Despite a strong sense of attachment to Ukraine, around one in five women would like to relocate abroad but lacked the financial means to do so. This proportion reached 27% among IDP women. In the fourth year of the war, 15% of women were actively considering migration, primarily motivated by the prospect of a better standard of living (75%) and better security (73%). The highest inclination to leave was observed among younger

individuals, those with limited income and among Russian-speaking residents in frontline and western regions. Furthermore, individuals with prior experience living abroad were more likely to leave again (ibid).

Another survey, among women and men, showed that 96.3% would remain in the country upon the end of the hostilities either under any circumstances or if economic conditions were to improve, highlighting the central role of socio-economic stability and prospects in migration decisions (CASE Ukraine, 2025^[37]). Young people under 30, especially men, showed the greatest sensitivity to economic opportunities.

Anticipating returns: How many more Ukrainians might come back from abroad?

Key takeaways

- **Return dynamics are highly scenario dependent.** Modelled outcomes range from negligible returns under a prolonged status quo to up to two-thirds of those displaced in Europe returning under more favourable security scenarios, most within the first year after hostilities end.
- **Household circumstances shape return decisions more than individual demographics.** Families with children, particularly those reunited abroad, are less likely to return, while older-person households and single adults show higher return propensities.
- **Housing conditions are a decisive factor for both the likelihood and timing of return.** Access to intact or reparable housing strongly accelerates return, while destroyed housing, lack of property, or uncertainty over property conditions significantly delays or discourages return across all scenarios. These constraints ease under a more favourable security scenario.
- **Employment status in host countries is likely to play a more limited role than often assumed.** Differences in return behaviour between employed and unemployed Ukrainians displaced abroad are modest, reflecting widespread underemployment and the greater importance of future job quality and prospects in Ukraine than current labour market attachment.
- **Host country context influences return propensities.** Those displaced in neighbouring and Central-Eastern European countries are more likely to return than those in Western and Northern Europe, reflecting household composition, oblast of origin, and self-selection effects.
- **Returns are likely to reshape Ukraine's internal geography.** Many returnees are projected to settle outside their oblast of origin, particularly in urban centres with better housing, services, and jobs. This underscores the need for place-based reintegration planning.

The eventual and voluntary return and reintegration of Ukrainian nationals abroad,¹⁰ when people determine it is safe to do so, is a cornerstone of the government's ambition to rebuild its human capital, mitigate worsening demographic imbalances, and support Ukraine's recovery.¹¹ Understanding past intentions and return decisions is crucial for anticipating future return patterns. Such understanding can inform policy responses, particularly in areas where reintegration capacity or service delivery could become stretched. As noted earlier, return decisions are shaped by a complex interplay of factors, including individual characteristics, developments in Ukraine related primarily to security as well as to economic and institutional conditions, and circumstances in host countries such as legal status, access to work and prospects for family reunification. Importantly, return decisions result from a complex combination of push and pull factors that can, in some cases, lead the most vulnerable refugees, including those with limited access to housing, income or family support abroad, to be among the first to return.

To better understand who is likely to return, under what conditions and to which parts of Ukraine, the UNHCR and Brunel University of London have developed a prototype agent-based model (ABM) (Box 4.8), specifically tailored to the Ukrainian forced displacement context (UNHCR and Brunel University of

London, 2025^[38]). While the model simulates the return patterns of approximately 4.4 million refugees from Ukraine hosted across the EU-27 and Moldova, its results are extrapolated to reflect the broader displaced Ukrainian population across Europe, which exceeds 5 million.

The model's core value lies in its ability to capture the diversity of experiences, motivations, and needs that shape return decisions. It reflects the different weight attached to factors such as safety, housing, work and access to services across different population groups (see Box 4.8). This approach provides a more nuanced understanding than aggregate forecasting by identifying where returns are more likely to occur and which categories of displaced persons are more inclined to return under different post-war conditions.

Crucially, the model operates in a dynamic manner, simulating how preferences and behaviours evolve over time in response to changing realities such as shifts in security, legal frameworks, work opportunities or access to public services. While it does not aim to predict exact outcomes, it supports evidence-based decision making by identifying the relative influence of key drivers, potential threshold effects and interactions across different scenarios. This level of analytical granularity is essential for anticipating varied reintegration needs, prioritising interventions and informing long-term recovery planning.

The results presented below are based on simulations provided by the UNHCR and the Brunel University of London specifically for this report. Three hypothetical scenarios are modelled:

- **Ukraine's Victory:** All temporarily occupied territories are reclaimed by the end of 2026, triggering sustained investments in Ukraine's recovery, reconstruction and the reintegration of returnees. From a legal perspective, Temporary Protection in the EU ends in March 2027, with a gradual transition to alternative legal statuses for refugees who choose to remain in host countries (for example, work or study permits or other forms of residency).
- **Prolonged War (Status Quo):** Frontline hostilities and aerial attacks continue through late 2029, resulting in very limited or no investments, with the response remaining largely humanitarian in nature. From a legal perspective, the model assumes the extension of the current legal status whilst refugees transition into alternative forms of legal status.
- **Fragile Peace with Concessions:** Hostilities end by late 2026, with currently occupied areas remaining under the control of the Russian Federation, but no further territorial losses occurring. This situation allows for moderate levels of investment in areas under Ukrainian control, supporting recovery, reconstruction, and the reintegration of returnees.

In the model, the transition of refugees toward alternative legal statuses, while possible throughout all simulations, accelerates in the months preceding the materialisation of each scenario and voluntary returns are simulated through to December 2029. For refugees from oblasts currently under temporary occupation, the model assumes they would not be compelled to return under adverse conditions, and that alternative legal pathways or protection statuses would be made available.

Box 4.8. Applying agent-based modelling (ABM) to returns from external displacement

Agent-based modelling (ABM) offers a powerful and flexible computational approach for simulating how forcibly displaced individuals may behave under evolving conditions. ABM is increasingly applied in humanitarian contexts to anticipate refugee and returnee movements, as evidenced in recent applications (Ghorbani et al., 2024^[39]; Suleimenova, Bell and Groen, 2017^[40]). Unlike traditional forecasting methods based on aggregate trends, ABM takes a bottom-up approach by simulating individual agents, each representing a displaced person with distinct demographic, legal and socio-economic characteristics. These agents interact in dynamic virtual environments that reflect real-world conditions, allowing macro-level return patterns to emerge from diverse micro-level decisions.

The UNHCR – Brunel ABM was designed to support scenario-based policy and programme development in the context of Ukraine’s post-conflict recovery. It simulates the location choices of over 5 million forcibly displaced individuals across Europe, each modelled as a computational agent, who periodically assess whether to remain in their current host country or return to Ukraine. These decisions rely on an individualised utility scoring function for each location, reflecting agent-specific preferences and external conditions. Agents vary in how they assess factors like safety, work, housing, healthcare, education, and social ties, based on their socio-demographic profile. For example, caregivers may prioritise school access, while older adults may value healthcare or familiar environments.

These decision rules are applied across hypothetical post-war scenarios, each reflecting alternative paths for conflict resolution, recovery, or legal arrangements, enabling the model to track how return intentions shift under different plausible futures.

Unlike traditional statistical models that rely on historical aggregates, one of ABM’s methodological advantages is its capacity to integrate both structured data and expert qualitative insights without undermining analytical rigour.

This flexibility makes ABM particularly well-suited to humanitarian contexts, where key behavioural drivers are not always captured by official statistics. The model draws on multiple data sources: UNHCR’s Refugee Intentions Surveys across European host countries,¹ the Socio-Economic Insights Survey (SEIS) (UN Interagency Partners, 2025^[41]) on refugee socio-economic conditions in hosting countries, UNHCR’s Protection Monitoring inside Ukraine, its Skills Survey and broader recovery data, including the World Bank – EU – UN Rapid Damage and Needs Assessment (RDNA 4) (World Bank et al., 2024^[42]). The model development, including assumptions about parameters, was further guided by an informal advisory board comprising of technical experts from international financial institutions and development actors, relevant EU Directorates, the OECD and Ukrainian institutions such as the Ministry of Economy, and academic partners including the Kyiv School of Economics.

The model is implemented using high-performance computing infrastructure and simulates the period from January 2026 to late 2029. It covers all oblasts of Ukraine, EU host countries and Moldova. Each hypothetical scenario is run five times to mitigate stochastic variation, with averaged results used for analysis. Each agent in the model represents ten real individuals. Simulations are conducted using the SEAVEA toolkit and the ARCHER2 supercomputing platform.

By simulating the decisions of a diverse, data-informed population rather than relying on aggregate behavioural assumptions, the UNHCR – Brunel ABM provides a robust platform for stress-testing return scenarios and identifying policy-sensitive dynamics in recovery planning.

A forthcoming Methodological Note will equip decision makers with a clear and accessible understanding of the model’s functioning, without requiring engagement with the full technical specifications.

1. UNHCR, in partnership with Ipsos SA, “Lives on hold. Intentions and Perspectives of Refugees from Ukraine” survey series, rounds 1-6.

The findings illustrate that return trends may differ not only in scale but also in location and socio-demographic profile, depending on how the situation evolves. This deeper understanding can help guide recovery strategies that are both realistic and inclusive.

Results are expected to evolve over time. As refugees’ socio-demographic profiles change, through factors such as household composition (notably following family reunification), access to skilled employment in host countries, and age-related factors such as education, retirement, or the risk/potential for conscription, projected return figures and profiles will also shift, even under the same scenario assumptions. The

forecasting model will therefore continue to be updated as new data become available, and assumptions are revised, enhancing the accuracy and policy relevance of projections.

Return dynamics are highly scenario-dependent, with the model projecting vastly different outcomes by 2029 depending on the security trajectory in Ukraine (Figure 4.18). Under the Ukraine Victory scenario, an estimated 3.5 million refugees, representing 68% of the total refugee population in Europe, are projected to return by the end of 2029.¹² In contrast, under the Fragile Peace with Concessions scenario, projected returns reach 2.3 million (44%). Finally, under a prolonged Status Quo, net returns remain negligible at just 40 000 (1%), which aligns with the downward trend in returns observed since the beginning of the war,¹³ as well as the escalation of aerial and drone attacks recorded since mid-2024.

These differences have significant implications for policymaking, not only in terms of the scale and absorption capacity required, but also regarding the pace and concentration of returns. Higher-return scenarios suggest concentrated return movements within a short timeframe, particularly during the first year after the war. Conversely, lower-return scenarios highlight the importance of considering that a substantial share of refugees are likely to remain in host countries, even after Temporary Protection ends.

Figure 4.18. Estimated scale of returns to Ukraine from abroad by 2029 across three scenarios

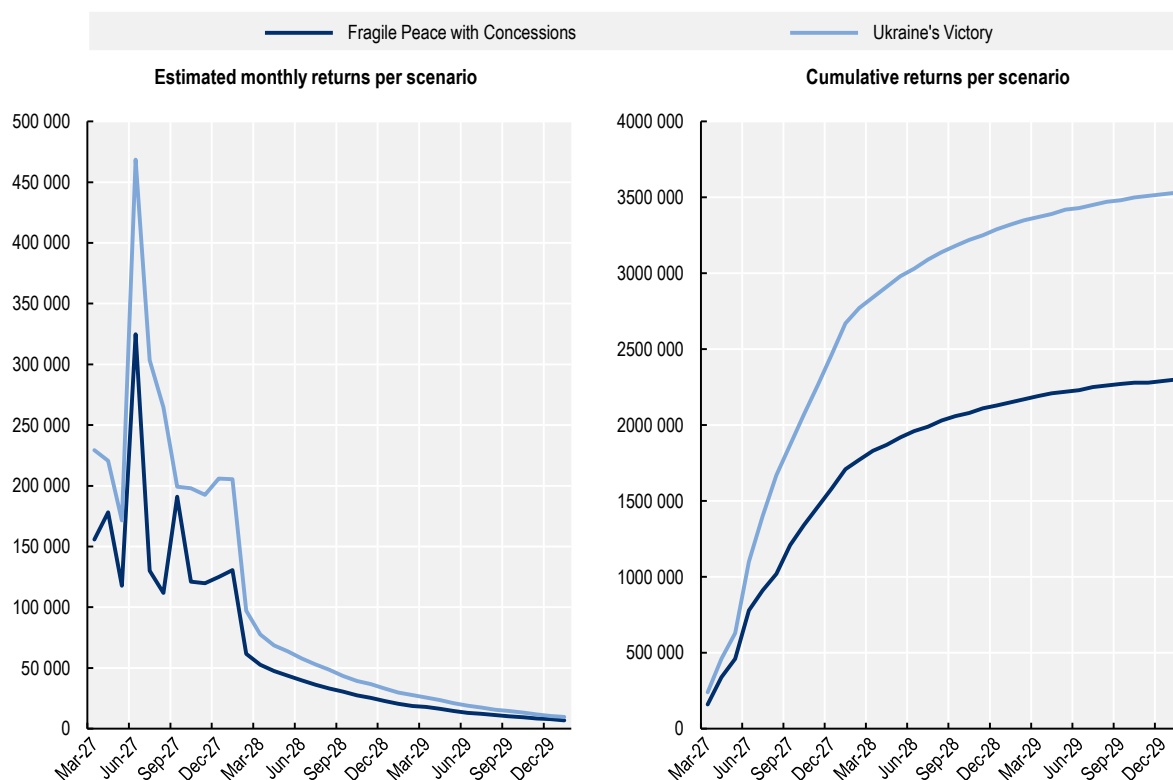
	Refugees by start of simulation	RETURNEES BY END OF SIMULATION		
		Prolonged War (Status Quo)	Fragile Peace with Concessions	Ukraine's Victory
EU & Moldova	4 390 000	30 000	1 940 000	2 980 000
Rest of Europe	810 000	10 000	360 000	550 000
Total	5 200 000	40 000	2 300 000	3 530 000
<i>% of refugees</i>		1%	44%	68%

Source: UNHCR – Brunel ABM.

Due to the very low number of projected returns under the Status Quo scenario, this case will not be analysed in detail in the model outputs relating to returnee profiles or return locations. The small sample size would limit the robustness and reliability of these disaggregated results.

Returns will not happen all at once but will increase over time. This increase will be shaped by multiple interrelated factors specific to each scenario, including perceived and actual security, access to housing and services, social ties both in Ukraine and in host countries, and comparative living standards. Under these scenarios, around three-quarters of the total estimated returns are expected to occur in the initial year after hostilities end under these scenarios, with the majority taking place between March 2027 and January 2028. While not indicative of a recurring seasonal trend, a noticeable peak in returns is observed in June 2027 (Figure 4.19). This is likely influenced by the end of the school year, highlighting how return decisions may be shaped by families' efforts to avoid disrupting their children's education.

Figure 4.19. Projected monthly and cumulative returns to Ukraine under alternative post-war scenarios



Source: UNHCR – Brunel ABM.

Return patterns reflect household circumstances more than demographic characteristics

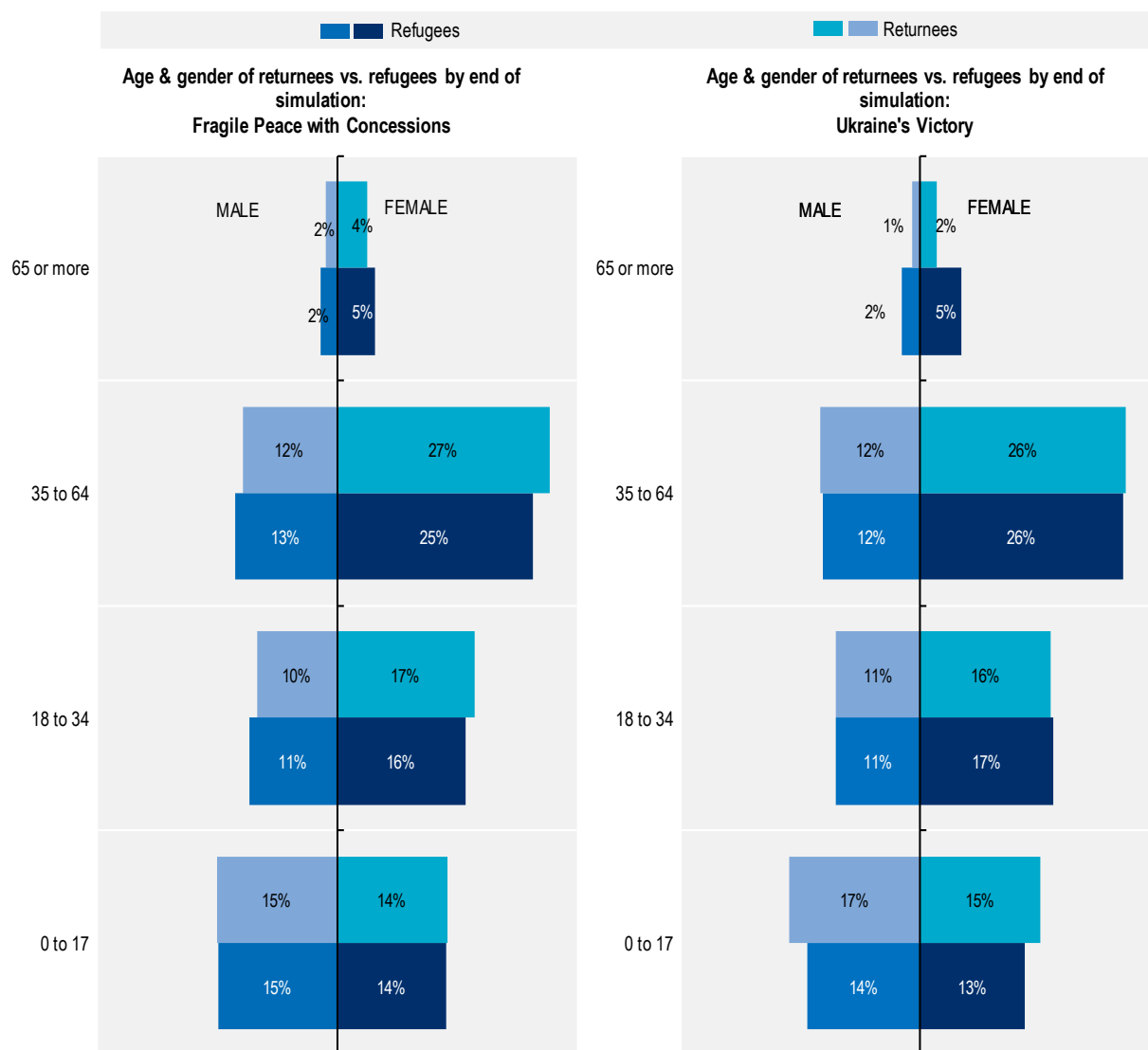
The demographic profile of returnees remains broadly similar to that of the overall refugee population, yet key differences emerge across age and household composition (Figure 4.20). The share of older persons among returnees (7% under Fragile Peace with Concessions and 8% under Ukraine's Victory) notably exceeds their proportion among stayers (3% and 5%, respectively), confirming a higher likelihood of return among older refugees, likely linked to property ownership and family ties in Ukraine, and a lower degree of integration in host countries.

At the household level, more pronounced differences emerge (Figure 4.21). Households with at least one child are consistently less represented among returnees than among those likely to remain abroad: 48% versus 53% under Fragile Peace with Concessions, and 45% versus 63% under Ukraine's Victory. This likely reflects families' preference for stability and educational continuity abroad. This is particularly true of families with two or more adults and dependants, who are estimated to remain abroad in higher proportions (28% versus 16% of returnees under Fragile Peace with Concessions, and 34% versus 17% under Ukraine's Victory). These are likely to be nuclear families who have already reunited in host countries, suggesting a higher degree of stability and forward planning.

Among those estimated to be more likely to return are households composed only of older persons (17-18% among returnees versus 10-14% among those remaining abroad). Additionally, single-adult households (18-59), including both those with dependants and those without, show a higher tendency to

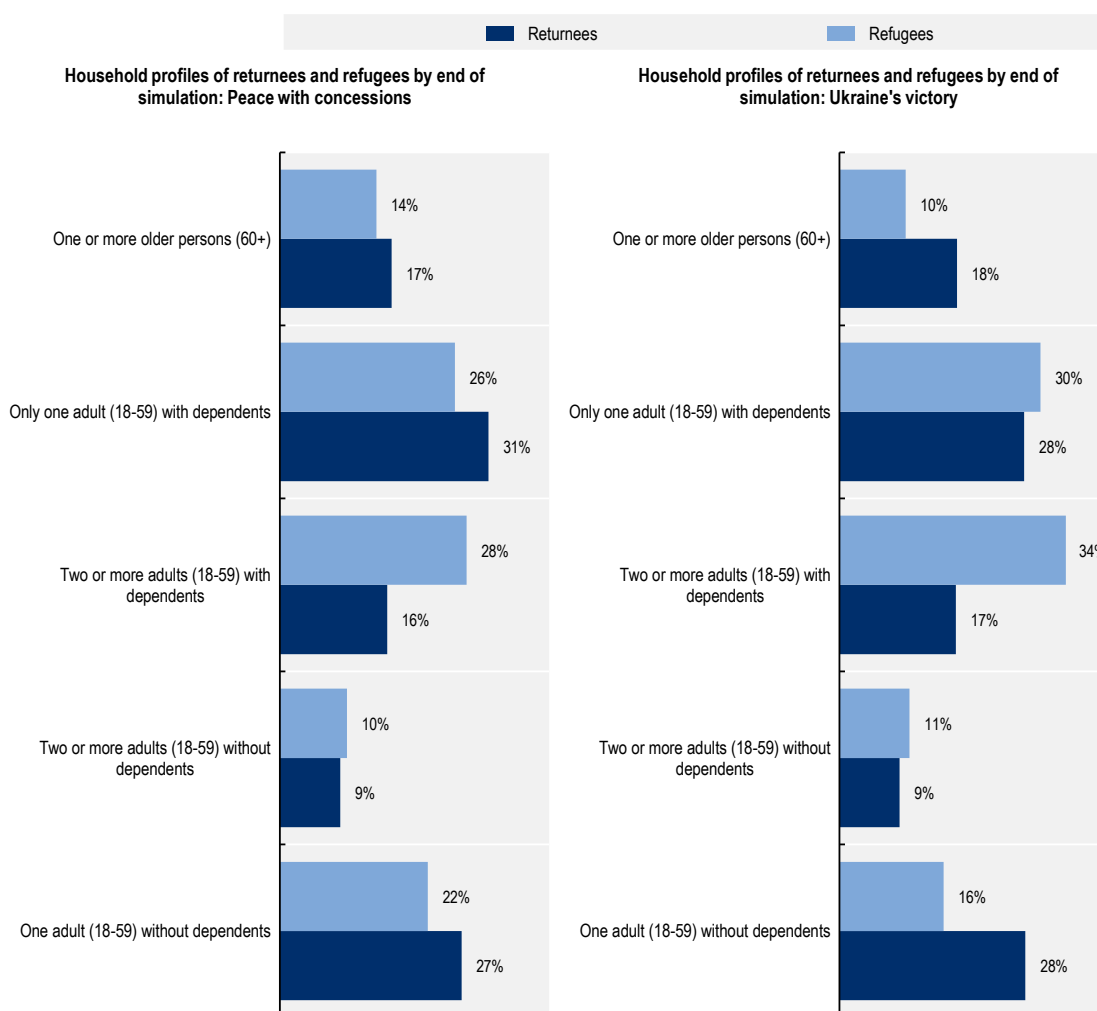
return. For single adults without dependants, this may stem from the higher cost of living and limited social support networks in host countries, which make remaining abroad less sustainable. For single adults with dependants, challenges in accessing the labour market due to limited childcare options may act as a driver for return.

Figure 4.20. Age and gender profiles of returnees and refugees under alternative post-war scenarios



Source: UNHCR – Brunel ABM.

Figure 4.21. Household profiles of returnees and refugees under alternative post-war scenarios



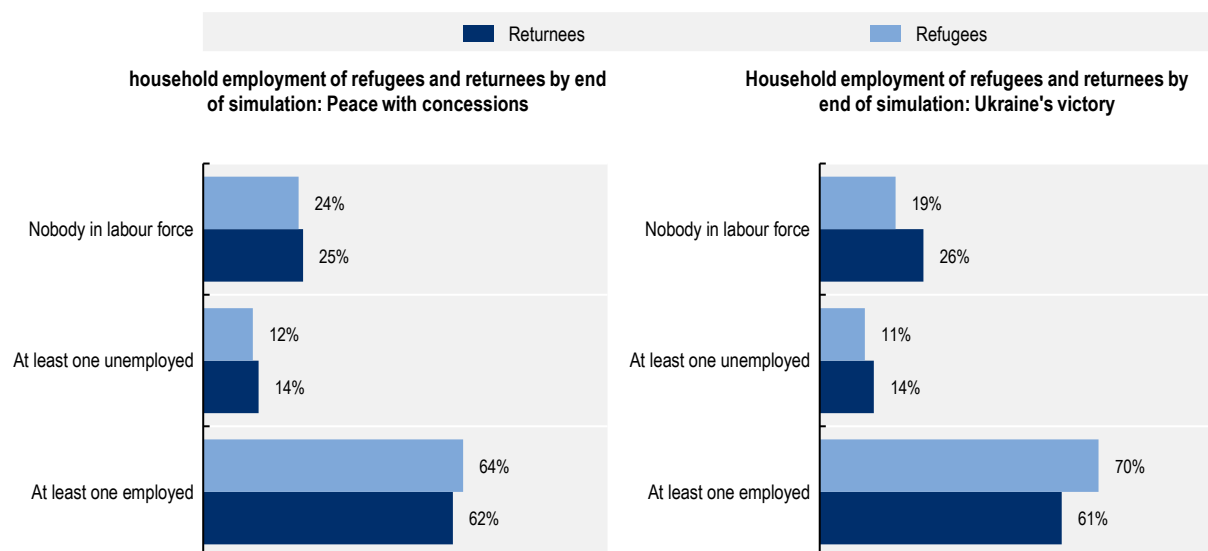
Source: UNHCR – Brunel ABM.

Employment status shows limited influence on return intentions

Employment in host countries appears to play a limited role in influencing return decisions. At the household level, there is a modest tendency to remain in the host country when at least one household member is employed. This trend is more pronounced under the Ukraine's Victory scenario, with 70% of households opting to stay being those with at least one member employed, compared to 61% among returnees. In contrast, under the Fragile Peace with Concessions scenario, the share of households with at least one member employed would be 64% among those that stay abroad and 62% among those who would return (see Figure 4.22).

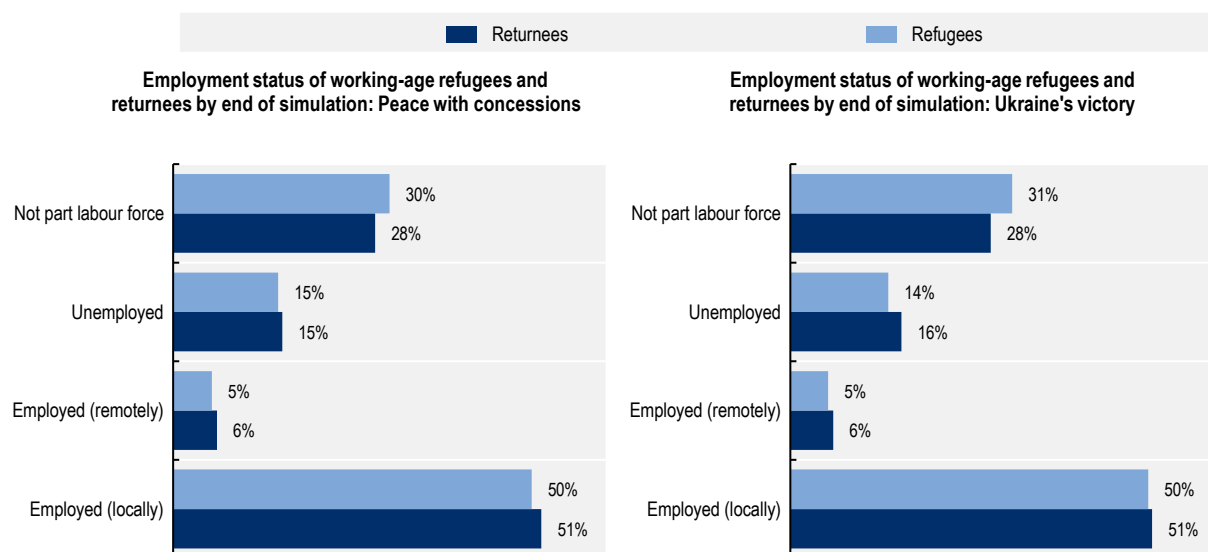
Among households with at least one unemployed member, the inclination to return is slightly stronger, with a share of 14% among returnees under both scenarios. Meanwhile, the proportion declines to 12% among those that would stay under Fragile Peace with Concessions and 11% under Ukraine's Victory. For households with no member in the labour force, a small tendency to return is observed under both scenarios, with a more notable difference under Ukraine's Victory (26% of returnees versus 19% of those who stay abroad) than under Fragile Peace with Concessions (25% versus 24%).

Figure 4.22. Household employment outcomes of returnees and refugees under alternative post-war scenarios



Source: UNHCR – Brunel ABM.

Figure 4.23. Individual employment outcomes of returnees and refugees under alternative post-war scenarios



Source: UNHCR – Brunel ABM.

At the individual level, among working-age refugees, differences are even less pronounced (Figure 4.23). For those employed locally, the likelihood of return is nearly identical across scenarios, 51% under Fragile Peace with Concessions and 50% under Ukraine's Victory. For those employed remotely, the figures are 6% versus 5%, respectively. Unemployment shows no impact under Fragile Peace with Concessions (15%

return in both cases), while under Ukraine's Victory, a slight preference for return is observed (16% versus 14%).

Refugees who are not participating in the labour force tend to prefer staying in host countries under both scenarios: 28% versus 30% under Fragile Peace with Concessions, and 28% versus 31% under Ukraine's Victory.

These findings may seem counterintuitive, as employment does not appear to be a major determinant of return decisions. However, this likely reflects the persistence of underemployment in host countries, where many refugees work below their skill levels and earn, on average, around two-thirds of local wages.¹⁴ Consequently, job satisfaction and the prospect of working in one's field of expertise upon returning to Ukraine may influence future decisions. Increased foreign investment and subsequent job creation could further encourage return, particularly among refugees with specialised skills.

These dynamics are also expected to evolve over time. Language proficiency plays a key role in employment outcomes, and as refugees' command of host-country languages improves, return patterns may shift.¹⁵

The limited impact of educational attainment on current return intentions is consistent with the prevalence of low-skilled employment among refugees. There are minimal differences between those returning and those staying. The only notable variation appears among specialists, as under Fragile Peace with Concessions, 28% of returnees would have a specialisation degree compared to 30% among those who would stay. Meanwhile, under Ukraine's Victory, the figures converge at 29% each, mirroring the overall refugee population.

A shifting geography of return

The model results suggest that a significant share of returnees are likely to resettle in a different oblast than their place of origin. Under the Fragile Peace with Concessions scenario, almost one in five returnees is projected to do so, rising to around one in three under the Ukraine's Victory scenario. This difference reflects not instability, but the interaction of housing availability, levels of destruction, and the relative attractiveness of urban areas – factors explicitly built into the model and reflective of plausible post-conflict dynamics.

Under the Fragile Peace with Concessions scenario, returns concentrate in oblasts under government control less affected by the war, which together host around 1.3 million returnees. The largest shares are expected in Dnipropetrovsk oblast (19%), the city of Kyiv (18%), Odesa oblast (12%), and Lviv oblast (7%). These regions combine functioning infrastructure, accessible services, and economic opportunities, and also absorb many people from eastern and southern oblasts who cannot yet return to their original homes.

Under the Ukraine's Victory scenario, the geography of return broadens eastward, with major urban centres and reopened eastern oblasts accounting for around 2.7 million returnees in total. The city of Kyiv remains the primary destination (34%), followed by the oblasts of Kharkiv (12%), Dnipropetrovsk (8%), and Odesa (8%). Newly accessible areas, such as the oblasts of Donetsk (7%), Kherson (4%), Zaporizhzhia (3%), and Luhansk (1%), also attract returnees. Lviv's share declines to around 3%, reflecting a smaller role as a western refuge once broader security is restored.

These outcomes reflect the model's assumptions and parameters, based on available data and expert judgment, particularly concerning the scale of war-related housing destruction and the uneven pace of reconstruction across oblasts, which are likely key drivers of these patterns. In many eastern and southern areas, extensive damage, combined with mine contamination and other remnants of war, is expected to delay recovery and reconstruction, including private housing. At the same time, urban centres are likely to offer comparatively larger housing availability, infrastructure, and job opportunities, further reinforcing their pull as destinations for returnees.

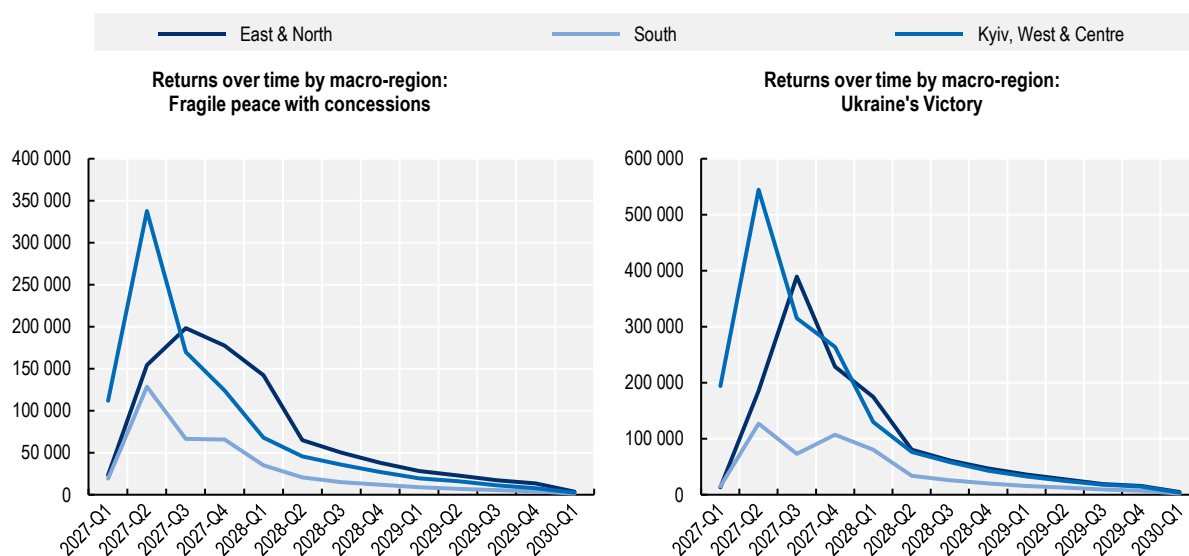
Most returns will likely take place early, though timing varies by property status, region of origin, and family type

Under the Fragile Peace with Concessions scenario, returns are projected to occur relatively quickly but not uniformly. By the end of 2027, around 70% of all returns will have taken place, indicating a strong initial movement back, mostly to areas under Ukrainian administration, supported by gradual improvements in security, access to services, and moderate levels of investment in reconstruction. The model nonetheless shows moderate differences in timing across macro-regions,¹⁶ property situations, and household types, pointing to distinct though overlapping rhythms of return.

When considering regions of return, the model identifies three broad trajectories that emerge under the Fragile Peace with Concessions scenario. By the end of 2027, the fastest pace of return is recorded in Kyiv (79%) and the Western region (75%), followed by the South (72%) and the Centre (72%), while the North (63%) and the East (58%) register slower progress. These variations likely reflect differences in proximity to former conflict zones, infrastructure recovery, and local security perceptions.

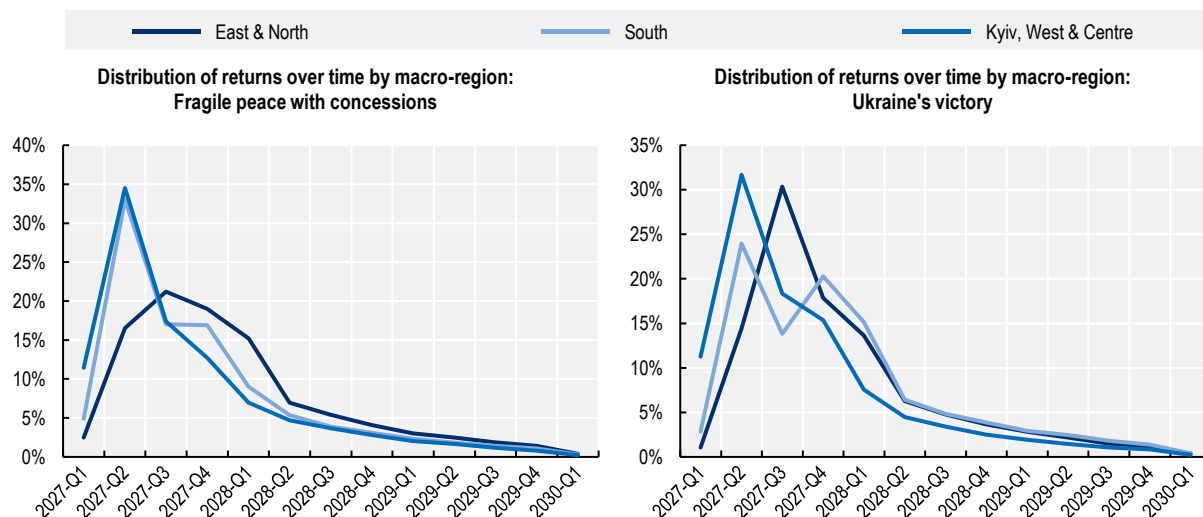
Under the Ukraine's Victory scenario, the geography of return shifts in line with Ukraine's full restoration of territorial control. Returns to the East and Centre accelerate significantly, with around 63% and 76% of returns taking place in 2027. In contrast, the South shows a slower pattern, with the 2027 share of returns falling from 72% to 61%, while Kyiv (77%) and the West (76%) remain broadly stable. This pattern likely reflects a redistribution of return flows: under Fragile Peace with Concessions, part of the early movement toward the South may have involved people originating from still-occupied eastern and southern oblasts seeking to establish themselves elsewhere within Ukraine. Under Ukraine's Victory, these individuals can instead return directly to their home oblasts, reducing movements toward southern regions and smoothing return flows more evenly across 2027-2028 (see Figure 4.24 and Figure 4.25).

Figure 4.24. Projected returns to Ukraine over time by macro-region under alternative post-war scenarios



Source: UNHCR – Brunel ABM.

Figure 4.25. Distribution of projected returns over time by macro-region under alternative post-war scenarios



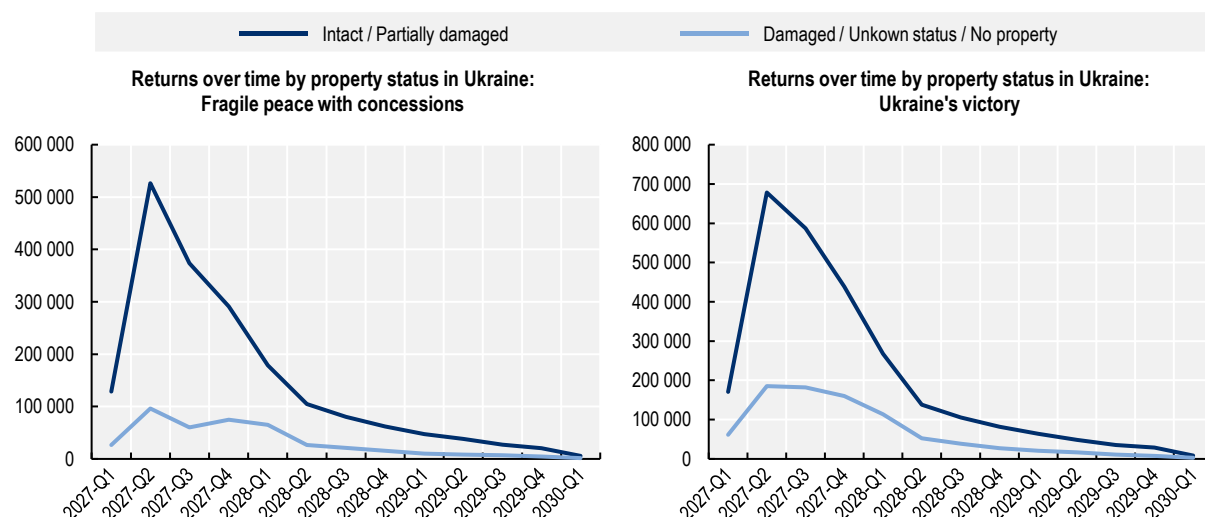
Source: UNHCR – Brunel ABM.

In the Fragile Peace with Concessions scenario, the condition of housing emerges as the strongest factor influencing the timing of return (see Figure 4.26 and Figure 4.27). On average, individuals with intact or partially damaged dwellings are expected to return earliest, with around 70% of their total returns projected in 2027. Those whose homes are fully damaged, who do not own property, or who do not know the condition of their house, likely more frequently located along the frontline or in areas remaining under Russian control, return more gradually, averaging around 62% in 2027 and extending further into 2028. This pattern reflects both the physical constraints of damaged housing and the importance of housing availability as a precondition for deciding to return.

In the Ukraine's Victory scenario, returns accelerate and become more uniform across property conditions. With Ukraine regaining control over all occupied territories, refugees who previously could not verify the state of their homes are likely to be able to access and assess them. As a result, the timing gap between those with intact dwellings and those with damaged or unknown housing conditions narrows considerably, with roughly 67-70% of all groups returning by 2027. The importance of housing availability is therefore accompanied by broader security expectations, as improved conditions and governance enable returns even in areas where housing is likely to be more frequently damaged or destroyed.

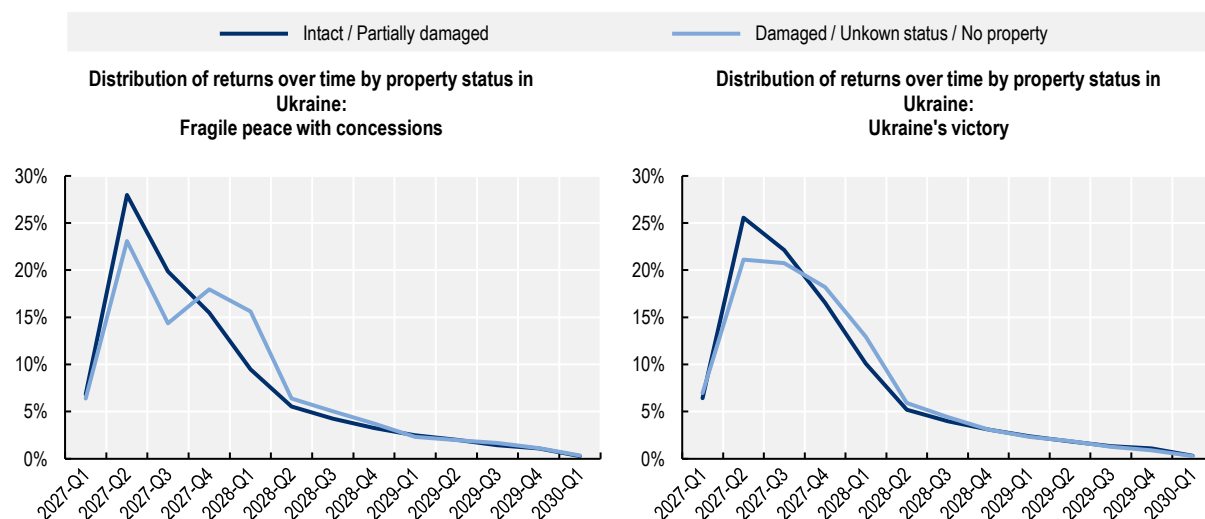
Overall, in both scenarios the model suggests that housing conditions remain a key determinant of return timing. Yet, under more favourable circumstances, such as full territorial recovery, constraints linked to property damage lose some of their delaying effects, as refugees gain both access and confidence to return. However, effective access to housing in Ukraine continues to be crucial across scenarios. Refugees without property or whose property has been partially or fully destroyed tend to remain in host countries, while those with access to intact property are more likely to return.

Figure 4.26. Projected returns to Ukraine over time by property status under alternative post-war scenarios



Source: UNHCR – Brunel ABM.

Figure 4.27. Distribution of projected returns over time by property status under alternative post-war scenarios

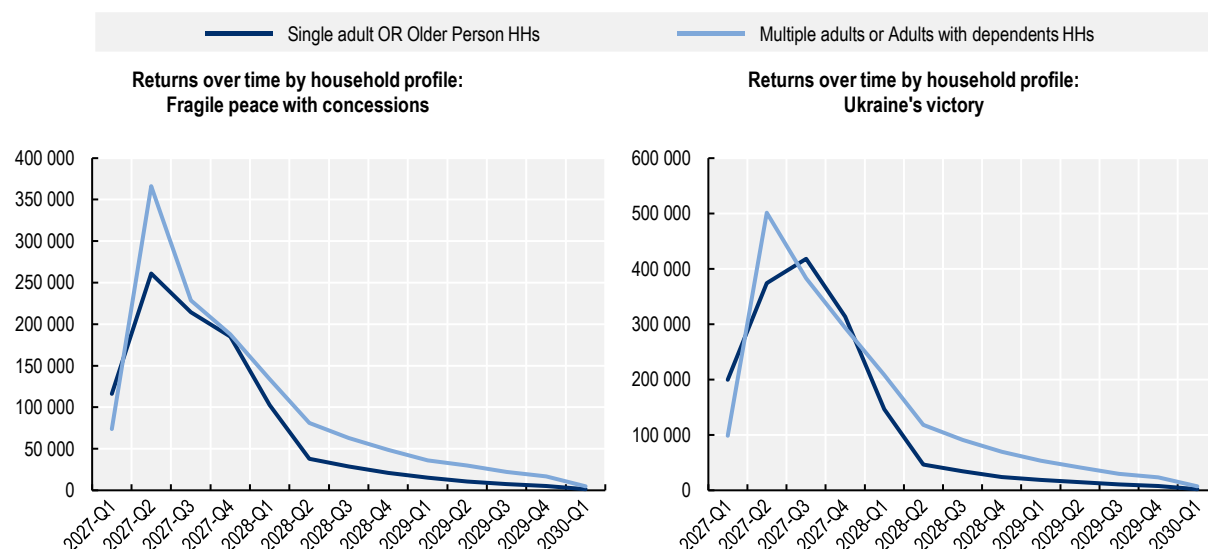


Source: UNHCR – Brunel ABM.

Although smaller, some differences by household composition are still discernible (see Figure 4.28 and Figure 4.29). On average, the model results show that single adults (18-59) and older-person households (aged 60+) return slightly earlier, with around 77% of their total returns taking place in 2027. By comparison, households with two or more adults without dependants average 68%, while those with dependants, whether single or with two or more adults, average 66%. A marked peak among single-caregiver households (32%) in early summer 2027 suggests that, while these often women-led

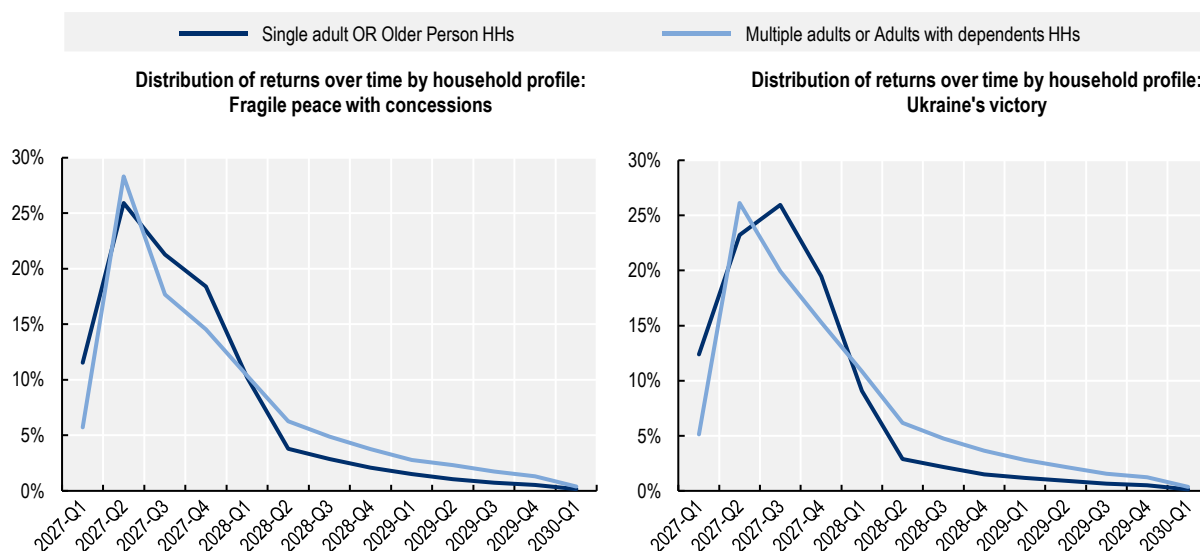
families are generally more socio-economically vulnerable and therefore expected to return earlier, they are also motivated by family reunification and tend to wait until the end of the school year before returning. This underlines the importance of educational continuity for their children. Under the Ukraine's Victory scenario, these patterns become even more pronounced, with an acceleration in returns among older persons (80%) and single adults (82%).

Figure 4.28. Projected returns over time by household profile under alternative post-war scenarios



Source: UNHCR – Brunel ABM.

Figure 4.29. Distribution of projected returns over time by household profile under alternative post-war scenarios



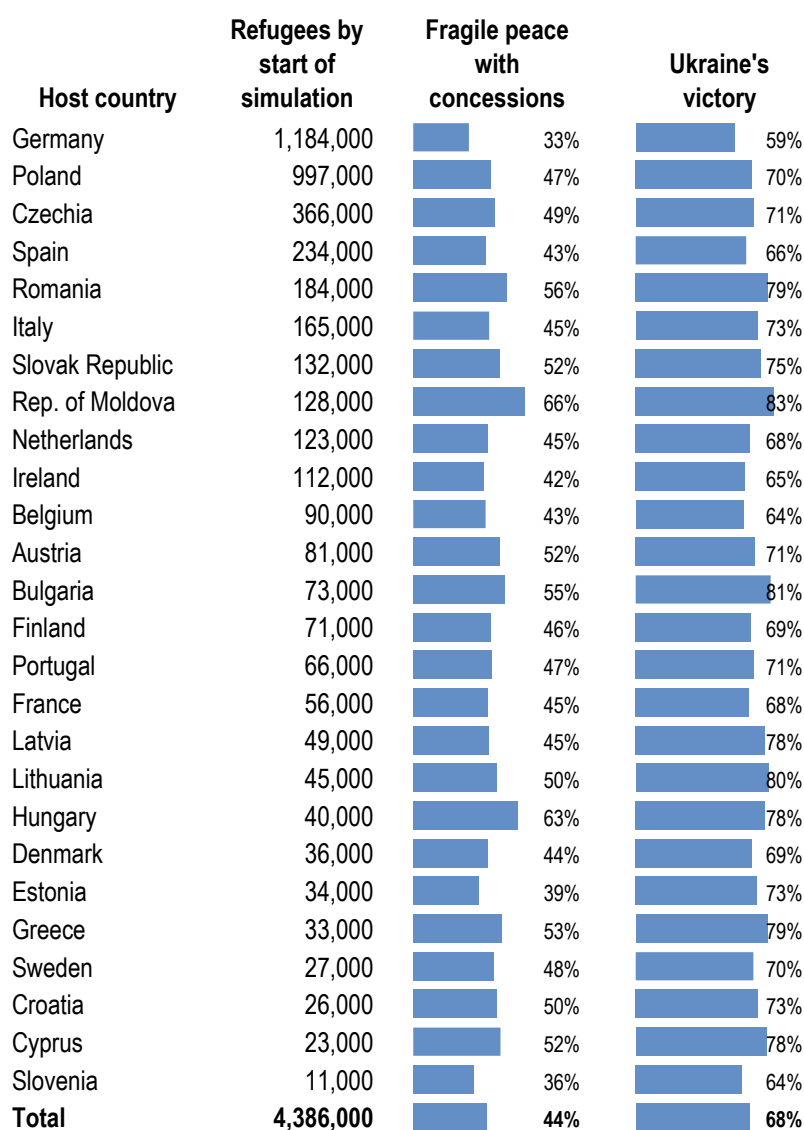
Source: UNHCR – Brunel ABM.

Host country variations matter

Estimated returns differ markedly across scenarios and host-country contexts (Figure 4.30). Under the Fragile Peace with Concessions scenario, refugees in neighbouring countries display an average projected return rate of 50%, compared to 41% in non-neighbouring countries. The pattern remains consistent under the Ukraine's Victory scenario, rising to 73% and 66%, respectively, consistent with the assumption that Ukraine regains all occupied territory.

Figure 4.30. Distribution of returnees by host country under alternative post-war scenarios

Percentage of returnees



Source: UNHCR – Brunel ABM.

Differences are also observed at the sub-regional level. Central and Eastern European countries, such as the Republic of Moldova, Bulgaria and Hungary, record the highest return propensities under both scenarios (ranging between 55-65% and 75-85%, respectively), while Western and Northern European

hosts, including Germany, Estonia and Belgium, show lower rates (35-45% and 60-65%). Southern European countries, including Greece, Italy, and Spain, record moderate return rates (45-55% and 70-75%), positioned between the higher levels observed in Central and Eastern Europe and the lower ones in Western and Northern Europe.

These differences reflect a combination of geographic, demographic, and socio-economic factors. Household composition plays a significant role: nuclear families with children, who are less likely to return, are more prevalent in non-neighbouring countries, whereas single caregivers, more frequently living in neighbouring countries, display a higher return likelihood. The area and oblast of origin also shape intentions, particularly under the Fragile Peace with Concessions scenario, as countries such as Germany, Poland and Estonia host a higher share of refugees from heavily affected or occupied eastern and southern oblasts. Finally, self-selection effects may also play a role, with refugees more prone to return having chosen to settle in neighbouring countries.

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Annex 4.A. Data description

The analysis of this chapter performed by the OECD Secretariat builds on three distinct micro datasets: IMPACT longitudinal data, IOM GPS Round 16, and IOM GPS Round 17.

IMPACT longitudinal data

The “IMPACT Initiatives” has been conducting a monthly *Longitudinal Survey of Ukrainian Refugees* – Ukrainians displaced abroad since the onset of Russia’s full-scale invasion. The objective of the survey is to regularly survey the same sample of people who left the country in the early days of the full-scale invasion, in order to understand mobility patterns, needs, integration trajectories, intentions to return, and returns.

Respondents were initially identified through convenience sampling among people who had crossed the border from Ukraine and were interviewed through a data collection initiative since 28 February 2022 in Poland, the Slovak Republic, Hungary, Romania and the Republic of Moldova at border crossings, transit sites, and reception centres, in partnership with UNHCR. From October 2022, additional sources were used, including Viber and Facebook dissemination campaigns. Surveys are conducted over the phone. Given the non-random sampling strategy, the results are not statistically representative and should be used as indicative only.

The sample includes individuals externally displaced, and returnees. Returnees are defined as individuals who were displaced abroad for at least one month, and have since returned to Ukraine (their original place of living, or another place within Ukraine). For the purposes of this report, the sample of returnees is further restricted to those returnees who also report an intention to continue staying in Ukraine.

While many waves of data collection exist, calculations in this report are done using four non-consecutive waves, in which all individual respondents are consistently re-interviewed. This allows for a balanced longitudinal panel, where each person is present in all four rounds, enabling the reliable tracking of individual trajectories over time. Overall, 1 125 individuals are tracked, resulting in a total of 4 500 observations across rounds. The four waves of this longitudinal extract are:

- Round 4 (conducted from 10 August to 3 September, 2022);
- Round 14 (conducted from 7 June to 29 June 2023);
- Pooled Rounds 25/26 (conducted from 8 May to 29 May 2024, and from 10 June to 24 June 2024);
- Rounds 29/30 (conducted over from 13 September to 8 October 2024, and from 18 October to 12 November 2024).

For more details on data collection, sample description, and descriptive statistics, see (IMPACT Initiatives, 2025^[13]).

IOM General population survey, rounds 16 and 17

IOM has been conducting *General Population Surveys* in Ukraine since the onset of Russia’s full-scale invasion. The data, commissioned by IOM, were gathered by Multicultural Insights through screener phone-based interviews using the computer-assisted telephone interview (CATI) method and a random digit dial (RDD) approach. The surveys are conducted among respondents based in Ukraine, in all oblasts,

excluding the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the areas of Donetsk, Luhansk, Kherson, and Zaporizhzhia under the temporary military control of the Russian Federation where phone coverage by Ukrainian operators is not available. The sample covers IDPs, returnees, and non-displaced individuals. It excludes individuals currently abroad. The sample frame is limited to adults aged 18+, who use mobile phones.

IDPs are defined as individuals who left their homes or are staying outside their habitual place of residence due to the full-scale invasion in February 2022, regardless of whether they hold registered IDP status. Returnees are defined as individuals who returned to their habitual place of residence after a significant period of displacement (minimum two weeks since February 2022), whether from abroad or from internal displacement within Ukraine. This definition excludes individuals who have come back to Ukraine from abroad but who have not returned to their places of habitual residence in the country. The terms “return” and “returnee” are used without prejudice to status. All remaining individuals are considered non-displaced.

In this report, rounds 16 and 17 are used separately.

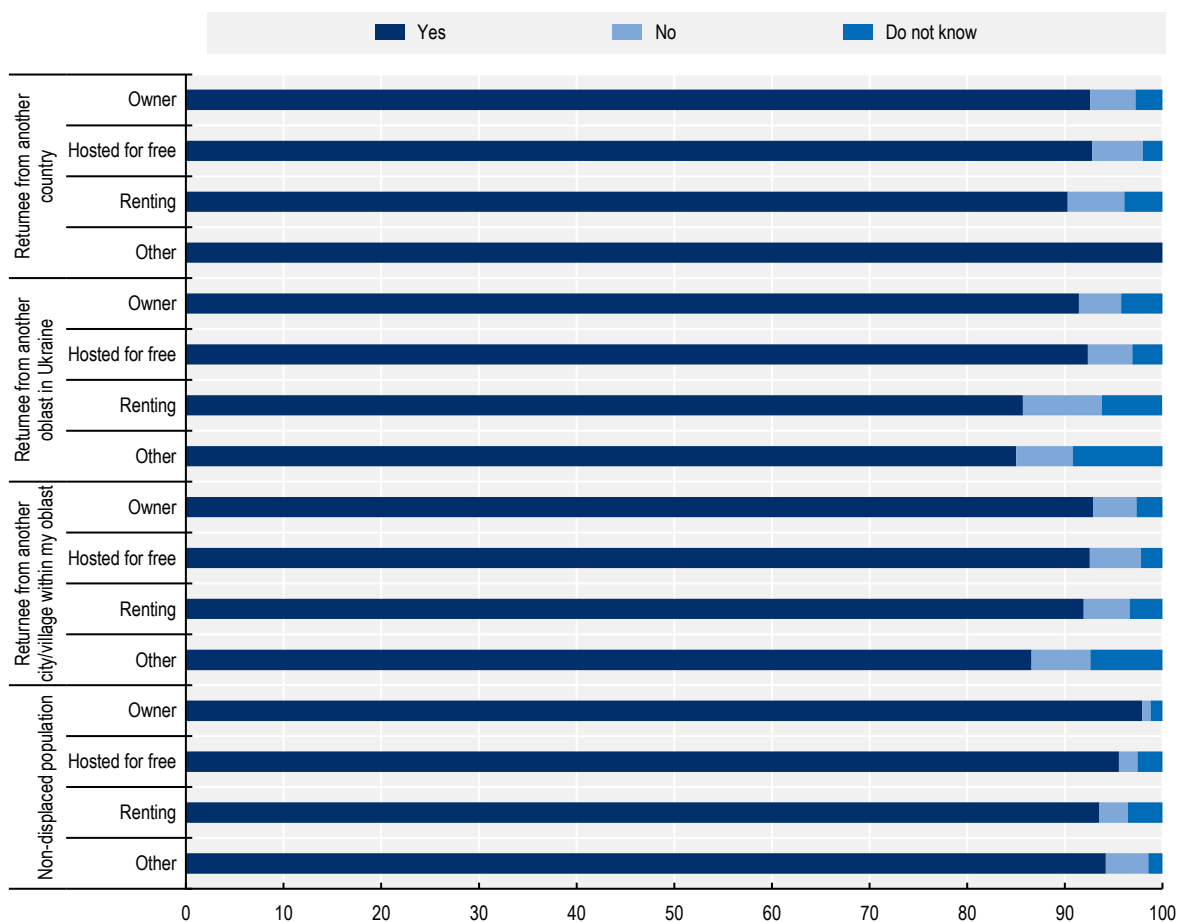
Round 16 was conducted between 10 March and 11 April 2024. It covers 1 639 returnees, 1 428 IDPs, and 2 266 non-displaced individuals. This round also contains a special housing module. It enables the analysis of this chapter, showing how returnees, non-displaced individuals, and IDPs compare in terms of ownership and occupancy status, whether their dwellings have different conditions, whether they have documents to prove their current housing arrangement, as well as their awareness about state programmes for damaged housing and participation in such programmes.

Round 17 was conducted between 13 July and 12 August 2024. It covers 1 188 returnees, 1 428 IDPs, and 1 800 non-displaced individuals. This round also contains a special employment module, enabling the analysis of on employment outcomes in this chapter.

For more details on data collection, sample description, and descriptive statistics, see (IOM, 2024^[43]; IOM, 2024^[31]; IOM, 2024^[15]).

Annex 4.B. Supplementary tables and figures

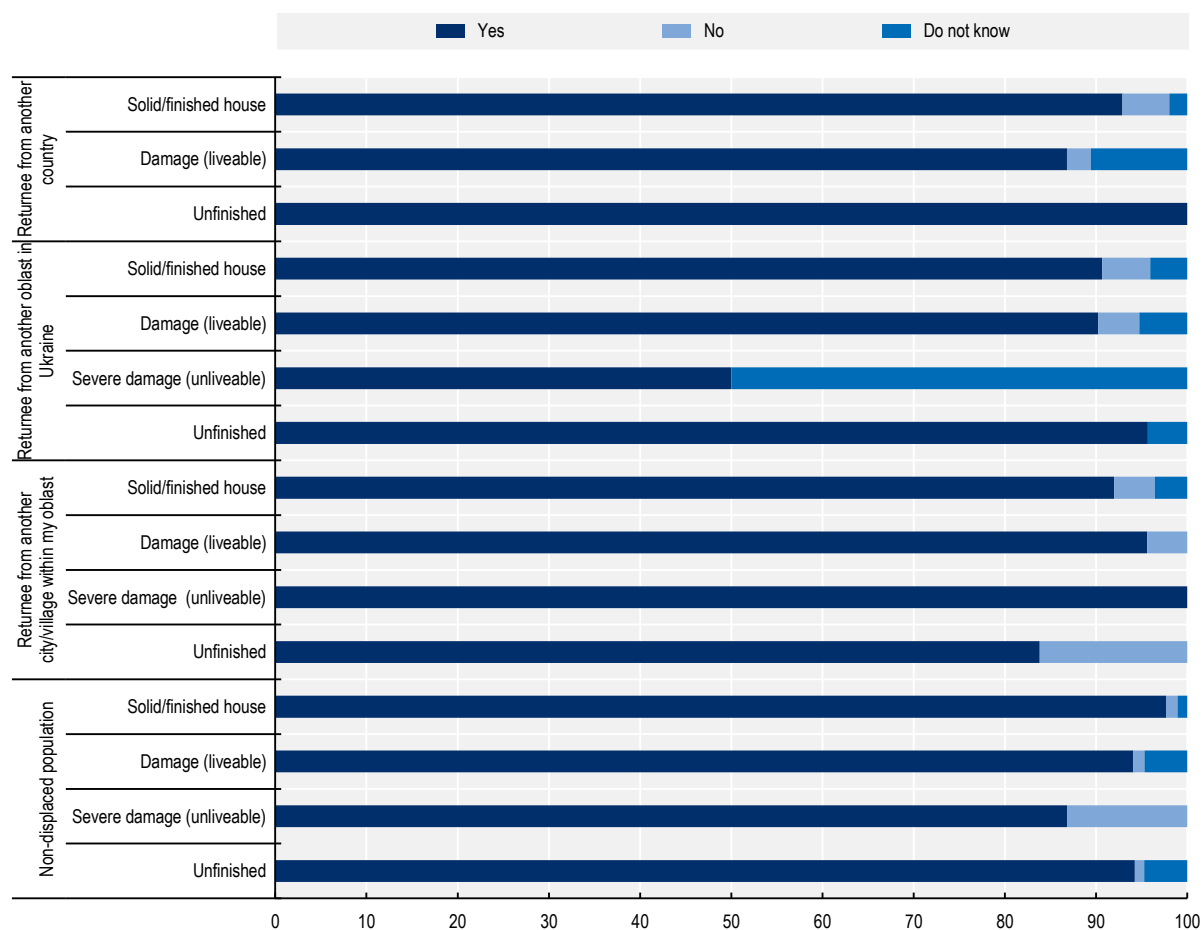
Annex Figure 4.B.1. Intentions to stay in the current place of living depending on occupancy status



Note: Tabulations are weighted to account for survey design and ensure representativeness.

Source: Computations based on IOM General Population Survey Round 17.

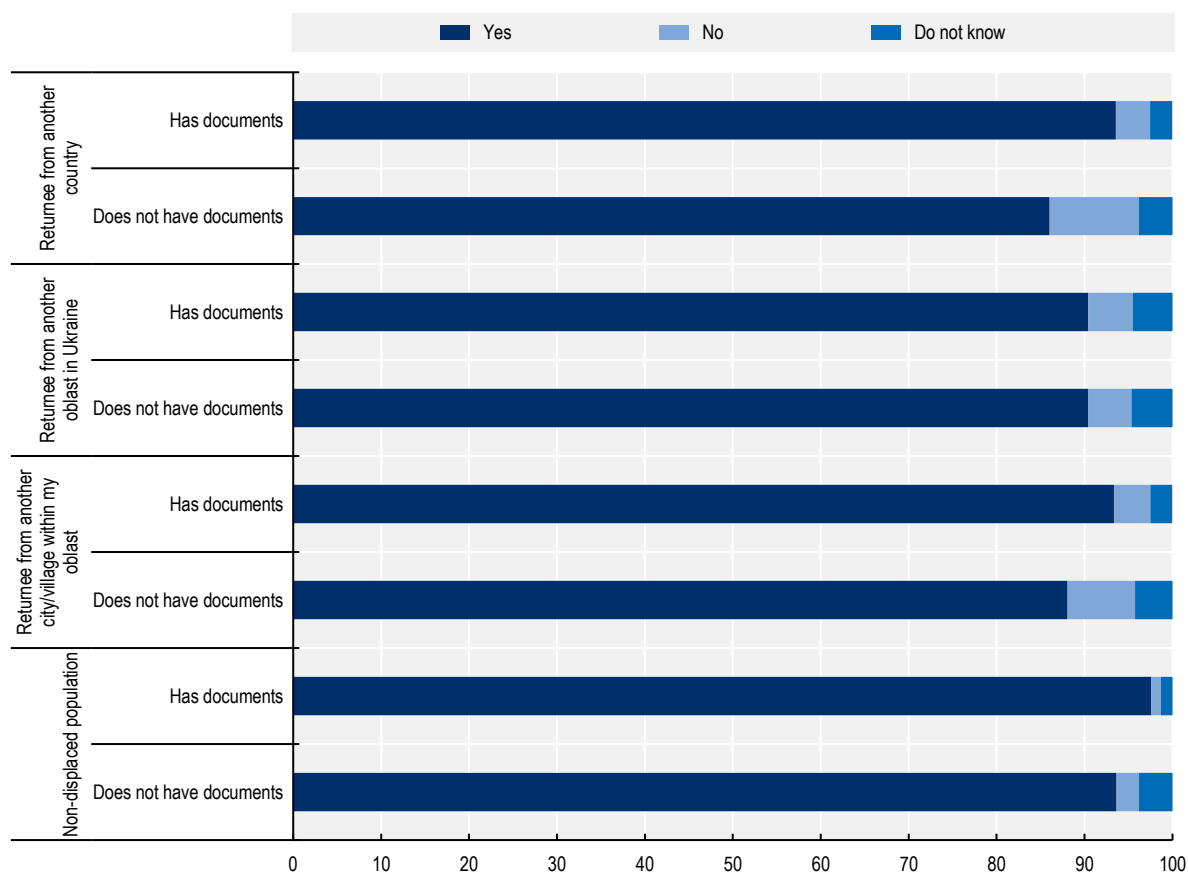
Annex Figure 4.B.2. Intentions to stay in the current place of living depending on conditions of dwelling



Note: Tabulations are weighted to account for survey design and ensure representativeness.

Source: Computations based on IOM General Population Survey Round 17.

Annex Figure 4.B.3. Intentions to stay in the current place of living depending on conditions of dwelling



Note: Tabulations are weighted to account for survey design and ensure representativeness.

Source: Computations based on IOM General Population Survey Round 17.

Annex 4.C. Overview of selected surveys on specific factors influencing return decisions

Methodological note

For the analysis, more than 60 surveys conducted in Ukraine and in host countries were reviewed to examine the extent to which three factors influence the return decisions of displaced Ukrainians. These factors are the availability and condition of housing (including ownership), access to employment, and access to social services in both Ukraine and host countries. Although these topics frequently emerge in discussions with displaced persons, many surveys do not address them explicitly.

The responses presented in this Annex draw on seven selected surveys. Several of these surveys were carried out in multiple rounds. Where surveys had several rounds, only the most recent responses are included. Earlier rounds are referenced only where they contained relevant questions that were later discontinued. In such cases, only these specific questions are included in the tables.

The selection of surveys was guided by the following criteria:

- Country coverage: surveys of externally displaced persons include either multiple destination countries or the main host countries.
- Thematic scope: surveys contain questions on housing, employment and social services, with responses that can be linked to return intentions.
- Sample size: a minimum of 500 respondents.
- Timing: surveys carried out after the first year of displacement, so as to avoid results that were strongly influenced by early expectations that the conflict would end quickly.

Annex Table 4.C.1. Insights from selected surveys of displaced Ukrainians on the relationship between housing and return decisions

Survey name	Time	Sample	Question	Responses
CES survey on Ukrainian refugees, 4th wave (Centre for Economic Strategy, 2025 ^[2])	November-December 2024	1000 externally displaced	Which of the following factors might encourage you to return to Ukraine?	Responses related to housing and infrastructure (% of respondents, multiple answers possible): 17% said that the loss of temporary shelter abroad would impact their decision to return (6th most popular reason). 16% considered the restoration of infrastructure in their region of origin (7th reason). 8% would be encouraged to return by the restoration of their own home (12th most popular factor). 6% said they would return if affordable housing abroad was lacking (14th reason). Comparatively, the survey found that safety, livelihood and employment considerations were more important in encouraging returns.
CES survey on Ukrainian refugees, 3rd wave (Centre for Economic Strategy, 2024 ^[10])	December 2023-January 2024	1000 externally displaced	Under what conditions would you consider returning to a safer region in Ukraine rather than your home region if it was still dangerous to come back to your region or it was not rebuilt?	19% said that the provision of free housing in a safer region was one of the key factors for returning to another part of Ukraine (the main factor was the availability of well-paid jobs). This was particularly important for the elderly (29%). - A similar share (17%) said they would return to another region if an employer offered a job with accommodation. 11% mentioned they could be persuaded by rent discounts.
			Has your housing been destroyed or damaged?	5% of refugees reported that their housing was completely destroyed. 19% reported that their housing was damaged but could be repaired or rebuilt.
IMPACT's longitudinal survey, Round 28 (IMPACT, 2024 ^[34]) (Special focus on returns to frontline areas)	August 2024	578 returnees from frontline areas to home regions, 247 returnees from frontline areas to other areas (IDPs to safer areas, 1 301 returnees from and to other areas (returnees to safer areas)	Where did you return to?	- Among surveyed returnees to frontline areas, the majority (87%) returned to their settlement of origin, while 14% settled elsewhere as IDPs. - Most originated from Kharkiv (37%), Mykolaiv (25%) and Zaporizhzhia (13%) oblasts, which were also the most common destinations upon return from abroad (38%, 25% and 14% respectively).
			What type of housing did you return to?	Returnees to frontline areas predominantly returned to their home settlements. As a result, most (81%) were residing in their own housing and did not have to strain household income with rent payments, unlike most IDPs who moved to safer areas.
			What type of assistance is needed for adaptation to new conditions upon return to Ukraine?	On average, 10% of returnees required housing assistance, ranking seventh among types of assistance needed. Differences emerged across groups: 8% of returnees to frontline areas mentioned housing support (finding housing and paying rent), ranking ninth. 47% of IDPs from frontline regions who moved to safer areas cited housing support as their main need. - Only 3% of returnees from and to safer areas saw housing support as necessary. 9% of returnees to frontline areas also needed assistance with rebuilding property and damage repair, compared to just 2% among those returning to safer areas.

Survey name	Time	Sample	Question	Responses
			What are the main reasons for staying in your current location?	Accommodation was the main reason across all groups (66%), with some variation: • 74% of returnees to frontline areas. • 57% of IDPs in safer areas. • 65% of returnees to safer areas.
IMPACT's longitudinal survey, Round 18 (IMPACT, 2023 ^[41]) (Special focus on return intentions)	October-November 2023	1047 returnees	What is your current settlement?	82% back in their original home settlement.
			In which type of accommodation do you reside?	• 76% in their own accommodation or that of close family members. • 18% in rented accommodation (8% among those who returned to their original settlement; 62% among those who settled elsewhere in Ukraine). • 4% with close friends or extended family. • 2% with volunteers or persons providing housing on a voluntary basis.
IOM Conditions of Return Assessment (CoRA), Round 9 (IOM, 2024 ^[9])	October-November 2024	1 238 locations across Ukraine (Key Informants interviewed in each regarding return conditions)	What is the level of residential damage or destruction?	• Key Informants reported that the majority of assessed locations (97%, 1 196 locations) had experienced up to 40% of residences destroyed by the war, where more than three-quarters of returnees resided (95%, 2 268 000 individuals). In 3% of locations (42 locations), more than 40% of residential structures were damaged or destroyed by shelling. Compared with Round 8, residential damage had worsened in 4% of assessed locations (30 locations). • At the same time, reconstruction efforts were ongoing in one-quarter of assessed locations (311 locations). Of these, 67% (201 locations) had undergone extensive reconstruction, with most damaged or destroyed houses either rehabilitated or in the process of being repaired.
IOM General Population Survey, Round 20 (IOM, 2025 ^[44])	February-April 2025	Data collected through screener interviews with 40 004 randomly selected respondents in Ukraine and follow-up interviews with 1 436 IDPs, 1 137 returnees, and 1 804 residents	What are the main reasons for having returned?	• Returnees from abroad were less likely than internal returnees to cite access to accommodation as a primary motivation (5% vs. 18%), though it remained an important secondary factor. Among returnees from abroad, 23% listed access to housing among their top three reasons for return. • Housing challenges also appeared to drive returns to frontline areas. Among returnees from abroad, 8% to frontline oblasts cited housing availability at home as their primary reason, compared with 4% to non-frontline oblasts. Similarly, 14% to frontline oblasts cited lack of housing in displacement, compared with 7% to non-frontline oblasts.
			What type of housing did you return to?	• 90% of prospective returnees surveyed at the border said they were returning to the same accommodation (owned or rented) they had lived in before fleeing. • 82% of returnees from abroad were living in owned housing – the same share as the non-displaced (82%) and higher than among internal returnees (74%).
SAM-UKR survey (EUAA/OECD, 2024 ^[3])	February-September 2023	3 418 adult externally displaced persons in the EU+	What was the reason for leaving Ukraine?	• 13% of respondents left because their home was damaged or destroyed. • <i>Responses from open-ended questions:</i> Some respondents reported complete or partial destruction of their properties, including homes, farms, warehouses, business premises, and in some cases entire communities.
			What are the reasons for not returning?	• <i>Responses from open-ended questions:</i> Fear that not only homes but also communities had been destroyed.

Survey name	Time	Sample	Question	Responses
UNHCR's survey of intentions and perspectives of refugees, round 6 (UNHCR, 2024 ^[11])	July-August 2024	5 000 externally displaced households in Europe, 4 700 internally displaced households, 1 500 returnees from abroad	What are the factors that would enable the decision to return, if the full-scale war and occupation ended?	For EDPs, beyond the end of war and occupation, access to their property or alternative housing was the second most important factor influencing returns (21%), following work opportunities. For IDPs, this was the main factor (31%), considered more important than employment. It was reported more frequently among those originating from the east (in particular from Donetsk and Luhansk), reflecting the fact that IDPs from the east more often reported property damage (49%) compared with other regions (36%).
			What are your return intentions (in relation to the state of your home)?	EDPs who owned a property in their place of origin that was not damaged were more likely to report plans to return in the next 12 months. Those who owned a property that was damaged were more likely to report hopes to return one day compared with those who did not know the status of their property or who did not own property (64% vs. 50%). IDPs who owned a property in their place of origin that was not damaged were more likely to report plans to return in the next 12 months (6%). Those who did not own property were less likely to report hopes to return one day compared with the rest (56% vs. 70%). IDPs who reported that their current housing conditions were better than in their place of origin were also less likely to report hopes to return one day (44% vs. 73%).
			What are the main reasons for short-term visits to Ukraine or to places of origin in Ukraine?	Among EDPs, 20% visited Ukraine to check property and general conditions. Among IDPs, 51% visited their home regions to check property and general conditions.
			What are the key socio-economic indicators of different groups?	Among IDPs, 58% were in private accommodation (including subsidised housing), compared with 84% of returnees. Among those still displaced abroad, 47% were in private accommodation (including subsidised housing).
UNHCR's survey of intentions and perspectives of refugees, round 5 (UNHCR, 2024 ^[8])	January-February 2024	4 000 externally displaced households in Europe, 4 800 internally displaced households, 1 100 returnees from abroad	Among respondents who were previously planning to return but did not, or who no longer plan to return, what was the main reason?	Among those whose previous plans to return permanently did not materialise: • EDPs: 20% did not return because their property had been damaged or was inaccessible. • IDPs: 7% did not return because their property had been damaged or was inaccessible. Among those who had previously hoped to return one day but were now undecided or reported no hope of returning: • EDPs: 23% changed their mind because their property had been damaged or was inaccessible. • IDPs: 12% changed their mind because their property had been damaged or was inaccessible.
YOUkraina survey (Factum Group, 2023 ^[6]), with additional	July-August 2023	700 externally displaced, 700 returnees	Are you planning to return to Ukraine?	• 60.3% of externally displaced said yes (either in the coming weeks or one day). • 60.6% said yes among those whose housing was intact. • 52.8% said yes among those whose housing was destroyed.

Survey name	Time	Sample	Question	Responses
analysis by Vox Ukraine (Vox Ukraine, 2024 ^[7])			Select all the factors that influenced your decision to return to Ukraine. Of all the factors mentioned, which was the most decisive in making your decision to return? (Question for returnees)	Among returnees, <i>difficulties faced abroad</i> influencing return (multiple answers possible) included: • 45% owning real estate or other property in Ukraine (the most common response; 5% cited this as the main factor). • 33% difficulties abroad such as learning the language, finding a job, securing accommodation, and making new friends. • 20% the impossibility of having free accommodation abroad (2% as the key factor). • 4% the cancellation of subsidies for housing rent. Among returnees, <i>prospects influencing return</i> (multiple answers possible) included: • 4% the reconstruction of infrastructure in their city. • 4% the restoration or repair of their housing.
			What is the housing situation of returnees? What is the perspective on reconstruction of housing?	Among those who returned: • 78.2% had housing that remained intact. • 15.9% had damaged housing. • 3.7% had housing that was destroyed. Somewhat more refugees than returnees (56% vs. 48%) believed that one should wait until the end of the war and then rebuild houses according to higher standards. Conversely, more returnees than refugees (40% vs. 33%) thought that reconstruction of houses should start immediately.
			Under which conditions would you consider returning to another region in Ukraine?	Among EDPs, 19% cited the availability of free housing and 17% cited the availability of a job offer with housing provided by the employer.
			What are the reasons for not planning to return?	23% of respondents did not plan to return. Among these: • 14% said it was because they had no place to live. • 11% said it was because their locality was under occupation. • 24% said it was because housing (owning or renting) was too expensive in Ukraine. Among respondents whose housing was destroyed, this share rose to 40%.

Note: For surveys conducted in several rounds, only the most recent responses are included. Earlier rounds are referenced only when they contained relevant questions that were later discontinued or not analysed; in such cases, only these specific questions are included in the table.

Annex Table 4.C.2. Insights from selected surveys of displaced Ukrainians on the relationship between employment and return decisions

Survey name	Time	Sample	Question	Responses
CES survey on Ukrainian refugees, 4th wave (Centre for Economic Strategy, 2025 ^[2])	November-December 2024	1000 externally displaced	Which of the following factors might encourage you to return to Ukraine?	Responses related to employment and livelihoods (% of respondents, multiple answers possible): 40% of respondents stated that a higher standard of living in Ukraine would influence their desire to return (second main reason after the end of the war). 35% said they would be persuaded by a well-paid job in Ukraine (fourth reason). As noted by the survey authors, compared with previous waves, economic factors have begun to play a greater role in return decisions than security concerns. This is particularly the case among younger age groups. For people aged 18-24, a higher standard of living and good salaries were among the key incentives to return. The respective shares were 61% (4 p.p. higher than in January 2024) and 50% (5 p.p. lower than in the previous wave of the survey).
CES survey on Ukrainian refugees, 3rd wave (Centre for Economic Strategy, 2024 ^[10])	December 2023 – January 2024	1000 externally displaced	Under what conditions would you consider returning to a safer region in Ukraine rather than your home region, if it was still dangerous to return there or it had not been rebuilt?	The most popular factor that could incentivise Ukrainian refugees to return to a safer region rather than their home region was the opportunity to find a well-paid job quickly (26%). This was more frequently mentioned by those aged 18-24 (32%) and 35-49 (31%).
			What is associated with the desire to return? (Results of regression analysis)	People who were students, employed, running their own businesses in the host country, or actively seeking employment were less likely to want to return compared with those who were neither employed nor looking for a job, by 57%, 31%, 70% and 47% respectively. Current income levels negatively correlated with the desire to return: the higher the income, the lower the willingness to return. For example, Ukrainians with the highest incomes were 85% less likely to want to return than those with the lowest incomes.
IMPACT's longitudinal survey, Round 28 (IMPACT, 2024 ^[34]) (Special focus on returns to frontline areas)	August 2024	578 returnees from frontline areas to home regions, 247 returnees from frontline areas to other areas (IDPs to safer areas, 1 301 returnees from	What are the reasons for returning?	While the main reasons were family reunification and homesickness, employment was the next most cited factor: 13% of returnees to frontline areas, 15% of IDPs to safer areas, and 9% of returnees to safer areas returned due to inability to secure employment. 12% of returnees to frontline areas, 6% of IDPs to safer areas, and 16% of returnees to safer areas returned to continue their pre-displacement jobs. Returning to pre-displacement jobs was slightly more common among those who returned in 2022 (15%) than among those who returned in 2023-2024 (10%).

Survey name	Time	Sample	Question	Responses
		and to other areas (returnees to safer areas)	What type of assistance is needed for adaptation to new conditions upon return to Ukraine?	Overall, 14% of returnees needed help with job search and job provision, ranking fourth among needs. This varied by group: • 30% of IDPs to safer areas (third most cited concern after accommodation and basic needs). • 15% of returnees to frontline areas (fifth). • 11% of returnees to safer areas. Only about 3% of all returnees needed support for small and medium-sized businesses, one of the lowest responses across categories, including just 1% of IDPs to safer areas. Longitudinal findings show that demand for job search assistance has fluctuated significantly since the start of the large-scale aggression.
			What are the main reasons for staying in your current location?	Employment was the second most important reason after housing (48% overall), mentioned by: • 44% of returnees to frontline areas. • 49% of IDPs to safer areas. • 49% of returnees to safer areas.
			Are you employed?	Employment levels among working-age respondents were: • 62% of returnees to frontline areas. • 63% of IDPs to safer areas. • 66% of returnees to safer areas. Returnees to frontline areas, however, reported significant childcare challenges limiting employment opportunities.
			Are you working at your skill level?	• Unlike externally displaced persons abroad, who often face professional downgrading, returnees to frontline areas largely maintained employment profiles aligned with their qualifications. Similar patterns were observed among IDPs and returnees to safer areas. • Managerial roles declined: 7% among returnees to frontline areas and IDPs to safer areas, compared with 15% among returnees to safer areas. Before the full-scale invasion, the shares were more equal (12%, 13% and 14% respectively). • 29% of former sales and service workers among returnees to frontline areas remained unemployed, indicating disruptions in local labour markets near the frontline.

Survey name	Time	Sample	Question	Responses
IMPACT's longitudinal survey, Round 20 (IMPACT, 2024 ^[12]) (Special focus on home returnees and returnees becoming IDPs)	December 2023 – January 2024	2 217 returnees	What is your income? What are the primary sources of your income?	The median monthly income per household member was UAH 5 292 (EUR 126) among IDPs (formerly displaced abroad) and UAH 5 502 (EUR 131) among home returnees (formerly displaced returning to their place of origin). Income levels generally did not vary by oblast, except in Kyiv city (UAH 8 862 / EUR 211). Sources of income differed: • 57% of IDPs relied on IDP payments as their primary (14%) or secondary (43%) source, compared with 3% of home returnees. • Salary was a source of income for 74% of home returnees (primary for 71%) and 63% of IDPs (primary for 58%). • Reliance on remittances was slightly higher among IDPs (by 5 p.p.). • Social security reliance was similar: 34% of IDPs and 32% of home returnees. Overall, although income levels were comparable, IDP households depended more on external financial aid.
			Are you employed?	57% of working-age (18-64) home returnees were employed, compared with 49% of IDPs in their current locations.
			Do you have unmet urgent needs? What are your unmet urgent needs?	• 55% of IDPs reported at least one urgent need, compared with 48% of home returnees. • Employment needs were reported by 7% of IDPs and 5% of home returnees.
			What are the reasons for returning to Ukraine?	• 14% of IDPs cited inability to find or sustain employment abroad as their reason for return (fourth most common), compared with 10% of home returnees (fifth most common). IDPs were more often pushed back by unfavourable conditions abroad, while home returnees were more often pulled by opportunities at home.
			For those certain about staying in their current location, what were the main reasons?	Multiple choices were available: • 45% of home returnees cited employment (third most common reason, after accommodation and family). 39% of IDPs cited employment (third most common reason, after accommodation and safety).
IMPACT's longitudinal survey, Round 18 (IMPACT, 2023 ^[4]) (Special focus on return intentions)	October-November 2023	4 693 respondents: 1 047 returnees and 3 646 externally displaced persons	What is your employment status in the host country? What was your employment status prior to return?	• Returnees were less likely to have had a job in their last host country (28%) than those who remained externally displaced (45%). • Those caring for children or working remotely for Ukraine had the highest incidence of return (9% among the externally displaced who stayed vs. 17% among those who returned). Among all surveyed returnees, 58% were employed or working independently.
			What is your income in the host country? What was your income prior to return?	• A statistically significant difference was found in per capita income between externally displaced and returnees, suggesting a link between lower income abroad and the inclination to return. • The average per capita income was EUR 330.3 among externally displaced who remained abroad and EUR 200.3 for those who had returned when last abroad. • Returnee households, typically averaging three members, most often fell within the income brackets of EUR 300–EUR 599 (44%) and EUR 0–EUR 299 (33%). Median household income was EUR 469, while mean household income was EUR 384.

Survey name	Time	Sample	Question	Responses
			What are the reasons for returning to Ukraine?	• Employment-related factors were the third most common reason: 15% of returnees cited resuming old jobs or the discontinuation of teleworking by employers. • 11% said they could not find employment opportunities abroad. Among those employed before the war, 20% reported returning because they had to resume their pre-war workplace duties or switch back to offline work.
			Do you have unmet urgent needs? What are your unmet urgent needs?	• 52% of returnees reported unmet urgent needs. • Employment needs were cited by 6% (the fourth most common need).
IOM Conditions of Return Assessment (CoRA), Round 9 (IOM, 2024 ^[9])	October-November 2024	1 238 locations across Ukraine (Key Informants interviewed in each regarding return conditions)	What is the availability of employment?	• Key Informants (KIs) in 53% of locations (657 locations) reported that few or no residents seeking work could find suitable job opportunities. An estimated 19% of returnees resided in these locations (448 314 individuals). • Over one-third of all assessed locations (38%, 476 locations) were rated as medium severity for livelihoods, primarily due to the slow recovery of the job market and the closure of businesses, which limited employment opportunities.
IOM General Population Survey, Round 20 (IOM, 2025 ^[44])	February-April 2025	Data collected through screener interviews with 40 004 randomly selected respondents in Ukraine and follow-up interviews with 1 436 IDPs, 1 137 returnees, and 1 804 residents	What are the main reasons for having returned?	Returnees from abroad were less likely than internal returnees to cite the ability to earn money as a primary motivation (4% vs. 17%), though access to housing remained an important secondary factor. Among returnees from abroad, 28% listed access to housing among their top three reasons. Country of return influenced responses. Returnees from EU countries were more likely than those from non-EU countries to report economic challenges as their main reason for return. Specifically, 10% of EU returnees cited inability to earn money as their primary reason, compared with 4% of non-EU returnees.
			Do you plan to continue your previous employment prior to displacement?	34% of prospective returnees surveyed at the border planned to resume previous jobs, while 15% were unemployed and intended to look for work.
			What are the main barriers to finding employment?	• Among those actively seeking work, 20% of returnees from abroad cited lack of schedule flexibility (mainly linked to care obligations) as one of their top three challenges, compared with 8% of internal returnees and 9% of the non-displaced. • 35% of returnees from abroad reported lack of job opportunities in their areas of return, higher than the 26% of internal returnees and 31% of the non-displaced.
SAM-UKR survey (EUAA, 2025 ^[11])	N/A	N/A	Are you planning to return?	Among those displaced abroad, those working remotely for Ukraine (55%) or not employed (45%) were more likely to plan to return compared with those employed in the host country (35%) or working remotely for another country (30%). Those not employed were about twice as likely to want to return as not, while those working remotely for Ukraine were nearly three times as likely to want to return.
			What are the main barriers to return?	Among displaced Ukrainians in the EU+, the deterioration of economic situation in Ukraine (63%) was seen as the main barrier, even exceeding concerns about security (62%).

Survey name	Time	Sample	Question	Responses
SAM-UKR survey (EUAA/OECD, 2024 ^[3])	February-September 2023	3 418 adult externally displaced persons in the EU+	What was the reason for leaving Ukraine?	Reasons for leaving the country by year of departure (% of respondents, multiple answers possible): 19% unemployment (24% among those who left in 2023 compared with 17% among those who left in 2022). 14% poverty and deprivation of basic needs (14% among those who left in 2023 and 13% among those who left in 2022).
			What are the reasons for not returning?	Reasons for not planning to return (% of respondents among those not planning to return, multiple answers possible):
			What are the reasons for returning?	Main reasons for planning to return (% of respondents among those planning to return, multiple answers possible): 27% believe the economic situation in Ukraine will improve (fifth most common reason). 22% said the cost of living abroad was too high (sixth). 18% said to return to former employment (seventh). 10% said they could not find a job in the host country (tenth).
UNHCR's survey of intentions and perspectives of refugees, round 6 (UNHCR, 2024 ^[11])	July-August 2024	5 000 externally displaced households in Europe, 4 700 internally displaced households, 1 500 returnees from abroad	What are the factors that would enable the decision to return, if the full-scale war and occupation ended?	For EDPs, apart from the end of the war and the occupation of territories, access to work opportunities in areas of return was the most important factor influencing returns (43%). This was more frequently reported among EDPs participating in the labour force in host countries (working or looking for work) compared with those outside the labour force (50% vs. 25%). Moreover, EDPs in the labour force of host countries had lower hopes of returning compared with those outside the labour force (52% vs. 69%). Those who were full-time caregivers or retired were more likely to indicate plans to return in the next 12 months compared with those working or looking for work (7% vs. 4%). For IDPs, this was the second most important factor (21%), following access to their property or alternative housing. IDPs participating in the labour force in areas of displacement (working or looking for work) were less likely to be planning to return in the next 12 months compared with those outside the labour force (3% vs. 5%), and less likely to be hoping to return one day (67% vs. 71%).
			What are the main reasons for short-term visits to Ukraine or to places of origin in Ukraine?	Among EDPs, 28% visited Ukraine to work temporarily, compared with 12% of IDPs who returned to their home regions for this reason.
			What are the key socio-economic indicators of different groups?	Among EDPs, 45% were employed or self-employed, compared with 43% of IDPs and 49% of returnees. Yet only 39% of EDPs, 17% of IDPs and 23% of returnees said their income was enough to cover all or most basic needs. Among returnees, regional differences were notable. Those currently residing in Kyiv city were more likely to be working (60%), and 35% of those in Kyiv city reported their income was sufficient to cover all or most basic needs. However, among all returnees in work, around one-third reported that their employment was at a lower level compared with before displacement, while 10% said their employment was at a higher level. The latter was more common among women and those with higher education levels.

Survey name	Time	Sample	Question	Responses
			How do you assess your return experiences? (Question for returnees)	53% of respondents reported that access to work opportunities was worse than expected before return. Concern about access to work was more frequently indicated among those who had returned to the south or the east (60% and 61% reporting worse conditions than expected, respectively).
UNHCR's survey of intentions and perspectives of refugees, round 5 (UNHCR, 2024 ^[6])	January-February 2024	4 000 externally displaced households in Europe, 4 800 internally displaced households, 1 100 returnees from abroad	What is associated with the desire to return? (Results of regression analysis)	• People who were students, employed, running their own businesses in the host country, or actively seeking employment were less likely to want to return compared with those who were neither employed nor looking for a job, by 57%, 31%, 70% and 47% respectively. • Current income levels negatively correlated with the desire to return to Ukraine: the higher the income, the lower the willingness to return. For example, Ukrainians with the highest incomes were 85% less likely to want to return than those with the lowest incomes.
			Among respondents who were previously planning to return but did not, or who no longer plan to return, what was the main reason?	Among those whose previous plans to return permanently did not materialise: • EDPs: 18% did not return due to concerns about economic opportunities. • IDPs: 6% did not return due to concerns about economic opportunities. Among those who had previously hoped to return one day but were now undecided or reported no hope of returning: • EDPs: 37% changed their mind due to the worsening of economic opportunities. • IDPs: 17% changed their mind due to the worsening of economic opportunities.
YOUkraina survey (Factum Group, 2023 ^[6])	July-August 2023	700 externally displaced, 700 returnees	What are the main reasons why you do not plan or do not want to return to Ukraine? (Question for externally displaced)	Among respondents who did not plan to return to Ukraine, the reasons mentioned (multiple answers possible) included: • 58% cited the weak Ukrainian economy (3% said it was the main barrier to return). • 51% said that even after the end of the war, they did not see a bright future in Ukraine (14% cited this as the main barrier, making it the most cited main barrier). • 37% mentioned low wages in their respective field in Ukraine (2% saw it as the main barrier). • 33% said their level of well-being had increased abroad compared with Ukraine (6% saw it as the main barrier; fourth most common after not seeing a bright future, rocket attacks, and not feeling safe in Ukraine). • 30% mentioned not having a job or difficulties securing employment (2% saw it as the main barrier). Responses from open-ended questions: • Conditions for return included stabilisation and improvement of the economic situation, a sufficient level of income, stable work, and opportunities to find a job.

Survey name	Time	Sample	Question	Responses
			Select all the factors that influenced your decision to return to Ukraine. Of all the factors mentioned, which was the most decisive in making your decision to return? (Question for returnees)	Among returnees, difficulties abroad influencing return linked to employment and livelihoods (multiple answers possible) included: • 33% mentioned difficulties abroad such as learning the language, finding a job, securing accommodation, and making new friends. • 26% said it was easier to find employment in Ukraine (better job, job in their field, etc.). • 21% cited financial difficulties in the host country. • 18% reported a decreased standard of living and quality of life compared with Ukraine. • 13% mentioned the availability of decently paid work in their field (2% saw it as the main factor for returning). • 10% referred to a diminished sense of dignity due to living on allowances. • 7% mentioned the availability of decently paid work, regardless of whether it was in their field.
			How have the conditions of your life abroad changed after moving from Ukraine in the following areas? (Question for externally displaced)	In relation to employment conditions, respondents reported feeling slightly worse off abroad compared with their situation in Ukraine (–4%).
			Which of the following do you not like or find most inconvenient in the city (region) where you live. Summer 2022 vs. summer 2023 (Question for externally displaced)	Language barrier (63% in 2022, 60% in 2023). Difficulty finding a job (42% in 2022, 30% in 2023). Price level (28% in 2022, 20% in 2023).
			Returnees vs. externally displaced: Which factors impacted the decision to return? Additional analysis by Vox Ukraine (2024 ^[7])	• Factors that significantly increased the probability of returning to Ukraine included missing family or home, the desire for children to study in Ukraine, better job opportunities in Ukraine, the return of friends to Ukraine, and owning property in Ukraine. • Significant “push” factors included feeling lonely, finding it hard to integrate abroad, and a sense of humiliation from living on subsidies. • Language and job-related factors turned out to be insignificant, except that people in the host country who had less qualified jobs than they had in Ukraine were more likely to plan to return. • Counterintuitively, those who said subsidies received from the host country were sufficient were also more likely to plan to return compared with those for whom subsidies were insufficient. A possible explanation is that among those for whom subsidies were not enough, a higher share were working (54% compared with 44% among those for whom subsidies were sufficient). Although having a job abroad was not significant in itself, it may have indirectly impacted return plans.

Note: For surveys conducted in several rounds, only the most recent responses are included. Earlier rounds are referenced only when they contained relevant questions that were later discontinued or not analysed; in such cases, only these specific questions are included in the table.

Annex Table 4.C.3. Insights from selected surveys of displaced Ukrainians on the relationship between access to public services, social assistance and return decisions

Survey name	Time	Sample	Question	Responses
CES survey on Ukrainian refugees, 4th wave (Centre for Economic Strategy, 2025 ^[2])	November – December 2024	1000 externally displaced	Which of the following factors might encourage you to return to Ukraine?	Responses related to social services and assistance (% of total respondents, multiple answers possible): • 11% said that financial assistance from Ukraine could encourage them to return (8th most popular response). • 9% would be encouraged by assistance with returning to another region in Ukraine (10th most common response). • 8% said they would return if social benefits abroad were cancelled (11th most common response).
IMPACT's longitudinal survey, Round 28 (IMPACT, 2024 ^[34]) (Special focus on returns to frontline areas)	August 2024	578 returnees from frontline areas to home regions, 247 returnees from frontline areas to other areas (IDPs to safer areas), 1 301 returnees from and to other areas (returnees to safer areas)	What are the reasons for returning?	• 7% of all returnees said their return was motivated by a desire to attend education or go to school in Ukraine. This was slightly lower among returnees to frontline areas (5%), likely reflecting that many returned without children. • 6% overall returned to access medical treatment and supplies. This share was 7% among both returnees to frontline areas and IDPs in safer areas, and 5% among returnees to safer areas.
			What type of assistance is needed for adaptation to new conditions upon return to Ukraine?	• The livelihood situation worsened over the past year for all returnees, with those returning to frontline areas particularly affected. Half (50%) of all returnees adopted coping mechanisms, and 23% reduced food consumption due to insufficient income. Rates were higher among returnees to frontline areas (55%) and IDPs in safer areas (54%) compared with 47% of returnees to safer areas. • Assistance with covering basic necessities was needed by 30% of returnees to frontline areas, 33% of IDPs in safer areas, and 19% of returnees to safer areas. • Healthcare services and items were also a need, especially on the frontline (15% vs. 10% among IDPs in safer areas and 10% among returnees to safer areas). • Assistance with accessing education for children was reported by 10% of returnees to frontline areas, 8% of IDPs in safer areas, and 7% of returnees to safer areas. • Psychological support needs were similar across groups, averaging 7%. • The need for assistance with bureaucratic obstacles was reported more frequently by IDPs in safer areas (6%) than by returnees to the frontline (2%) or returnees to safer areas (4%).
			What are the main reasons for staying in your current location?	• Education was the fourth most common reason for staying among IDPs in safer areas (29%), compared with 13% of returnees to frontline areas. Overall, 22% across all groups cited education as a reason to stay. • Benefits and support from national authorities were also more often mentioned by IDPs in safer areas (10%) than by returnees to the frontline (3%) or to safer areas (2%). • Medical treatment was cited by 7% of returnees to frontline areas, compared with 3% of IDPs in safer areas, averaging 5% across all groups.

Survey name	Time	Sample	Question	Responses
IMPACT's longitudinal survey, Round 20 (IMPACT, 2024 ^[12]) (Special focus on home returnees and returnees becoming IDPs)	December 2023 – January 2024	2 217 returnees	Do you have unmet urgent needs? What are your unmet urgent needs?	55% of IDPs reported at least one urgent need, compared with 48% of home returnees. Specific needs were reported more frequently by IDPs than home returnees: • Cash (38% vs. 35%). • Material assistance (10% vs. 8%). • Food (7% vs. 4%).
			For those certain in their intentions to stay in their current location, what were the main reasons?	Multiple responses were possible: • Education: 20% of IDPs and 21% of home returnees. • Benefits or support from authorities: 10% of IDPs and 2% of home returnees. • Medical treatment: 4% of IDPs and 5% of home returnees.
IMPACT's longitudinal survey, Round 18 (IMPACT, 2023 ^[4]) (Special focus on return intentions)	October- November 2023	4 693 respondents: 1047 returnees and 3 646 externally displaced persons	What are the reasons for returning to Ukraine?	Multiple responses possible: • 7% indicated the desire to attend education or school in Ukraine. • 6% cited the need to access specific medical treatment or supplies in Ukraine (seventh and eighth most common reasons respectively).
			What are your most urgent needs?	• 52% of returnees reported unmet urgent needs. • Material assistance, such as NFIs and clothing, was cited by 12% of returnees and by 19% of those living outside their home settlement. • Medical treatment or items were needed by 11% of all returnees.
IOM Conditions of Return Assessment (CoRA), Round 9 (IOM, 2024 ^[9])	October – November 2024	1 238 locations across Ukraine (Key Informants interviewed in each regarding return conditions)	How is the access to public services?	• According to Key Informants, 98% of locations (1 216 locations), hosting up to 100% of returnees, reported that most school-aged children were able to attend lessons. • Around one-quarter of assessed locations (23%), hosting 125 164 returnees, reported some problems with access to police stations or legal services. • Up to 28% of returnees in assessed locations resided in locations where damage to government offices was reported. • 24% resided in locations where damage to health clinics was reported.
			Are there social tensions?	KIs indicated concerns about community tensions in 54% of assessed locations (663 locations), affecting 72% of returnees (1 715 000 individuals). These concerns most often arose from the allocation of humanitarian aid.
IOM General Population Survey, Round 20 (IOM, 2025 ^[44])	February-April 2025	Data collected through screener interviews with 40 004 randomly selected respondents in Ukraine and follow-up interviews with 1 436 IDPs, 1 137 returnees, and	Are you able to access goods and services to meet basic needs?	Overall, access to goods and services among returnees from abroad was similar to that of the non-displaced. However, they were more likely to report gaps in mental health services and education. • 23% of returnees from abroad reported lack of access to mental health services, compared with 19% of internal returnees and 15% of the non-displaced. • 22% of returnees from abroad reported lack of access to adequate education, compared with 23% of internal returnees and 17% of the non-displaced. • 23% of returnees from abroad reported difficulties accessing health services, less than internal returnees (27%) and the non-displaced (27%). 25% reported issues accessing medicines, compared with 28% of internal returnees and 30% of the non-displaced.

Survey name	Time	Sample	Question	Responses
		1 804 residents	Have you had to resort to coping strategies, including severe, crisis- or emergency-level strategies, to meet basic needs?	Reliance on severe coping strategies was more common among recent returnees. 59% of recent returnees from abroad reported reliance on crisis- or emergency-level strategies, compared with 46% of earlier returnees from abroad. 65% of recent internal returnees reported such reliance, compared with 51% of earlier internal returnees and 50% of the non-displaced. Examples of coping strategies used (share of recent returnees from abroad compared with others): - Sale of house or land: 11% vs. 9% of recent internal returnees and 4% of the non-displaced. - Sale of productive assets: 14% vs. 16% of recent internal returnees and 8% of the non-displaced. - Reduction of essential healthcare expenditures: 53% vs. 55% of recent internal returnees and 38% of the non-displaced. - Reduction of essential education expenditures: 19% vs. 16% of recent internal returnees and 9% of the non-displaced.
SAM-UKR survey (EUAA/OECD, 2024 ^[3])	February-September 2023	3 418 adult externally displaced persons in the EU+	What are the reasons for not returning?	Reasons for not planning to return (% of respondents among those not planning to return, multiple answers possible): 37% said their children were enrolled in education in the host country (sixth most common reason).
UNHCR's survey of intentions and perspectives of refugees, round 6 (UNHCR, 2024 ^[1])	July-August 2024	5 000 externally displaced households in Europe, 4 700 internally displaced households, 1 500 returnees from abroad	What are the factors that would enable decision to return, if the full-scale war and occupation ends?	For all displaced persons, access to basic services in areas of return was the third most important factor influencing return decisions (19% for EDPs, 11% for IDPs) and access to health and education in areas of return was the fourth most important factor (12% for EDPs, 6% for IDPs). For EDPs, in the scenario that the war continues for the next 12 months, a significant proportion of refugees indicate that they could be compelled to return even if this would not be their first choice, if they face challenges in accessing rights and services in host countries (60%).
			What are the main reasons for short-term visits to Ukraine or place of origin in Ukraine?	Among EDPs, 33% visited Ukraine to access healthcare, compared to 5% IDPs returning to home regions for this reason.
			What are the key socio-economic indicators of different groups?	Among EDPs, 68% are receiving social protection benefits. Among IDPs and returnees, 72% and 62% respectively receive social protection benefits.
YOUkraina survey (Factum Group, 2023 ^[6])	July-August 2023	700 externally displaced, 700 returnees	Select all the factors that influenced your decision to return to Ukraine? (<i>Question for returnees</i>)	Among the returnees, reasons to return included (multiple answers possible): 39% mentioned better healthcare in Ukraine or more accessible medication (1% saw it as a key factor). 26% wished for their children to study in Ukraine. 13% cited their health condition (need for treatment).
			How have the conditions of your life abroad changed after moving from Ukraine in the following areas?	In relation to obtaining medical services, refugees overall felt significantly worse off abroad compared with Ukraine (–23%). However, they believed that education, housing and living conditions, and psychological state were better abroad than in Ukraine (+11%, +9% and +4% respectively).

Survey name	Time	Sample	Question	Responses
			Which of the following do you not like or find most inconvenient in the city (region) where you live? (Summer 2022 vs. Summer 2023) (<i>Question for externally displaced</i>)	Medical system (40% in 2022, 46% in 2023). Externally displaced who reported not feeling comfortable abroad experienced the most difficulties with the medical system. Dissatisfaction was primarily linked to long waiting times for medical appointments, language barriers, restrictions on purchasing medicines without prescriptions, and limited access to home visits by doctors or ambulance services. There was also dissatisfaction with the high cost of services and health insurance, and at times with receiving unqualified medical care, including underdiagnosis and misdiagnosis.
			Think about your experience living abroad during the war. What areas in Ukraine have you come to value more? (Multiple answers possible)	• During their stay abroad, nearly every second Ukrainian reconsidered their attitude towards Ukrainian medicine (59%). • 20% mentioned school education. • 18% preschool education and kindergartens. • 17% higher education.
			Returnees vs. externally displaced: Which factors impacted the decision to return? <i>Additional analysis by Vox Ukraine (Vox Ukraine, 2024^[7])</i>	• Factors that significantly increased the likelihood of returning to Ukraine included missing family or home, wanting children to study in Ukraine, better job opportunities in Ukraine, the return of friends to Ukraine, and owning property in the country. • Conversely, “push” factors included feelings of loneliness, difficulty integrating abroad, and a sense of humiliation from living on subsidies.

Note: For surveys conducted in several rounds, only the most recent responses are included. Earlier rounds are referenced only when they contained relevant questions that were later discontinued or not analysed; in such cases, only these specific questions are included in the table.

Notes

¹ The survey also contains other questions, such as intentions to return within one month, and intentions to return one day. However, the questions were not asked in all periods, precluding from a longitudinal type of analysis of the answers. Here, preference is given to the analysis of answers to the question “intentions to stay in current place”, because it was asked in a greater number of rounds and contains more non-missing observations; although the opposite of this intention is not necessarily “return”, it may also be “moving forward”.

² The relatively high share of individuals reporting an intention to stay may be partly explained by the way the question is framed: it refers only to plans for the next six months.

³ Unless stated otherwise, here and further in this section: computations of OECD staff based on IOM General Population Survey, rounds 16 or 17.

⁴ Full data description, survey methodology, and socio-economic characteristics of returnees can be found in IOM publications, for example, in (IOM, 2024^[15]).

⁵ Data are collected among individuals aged 18 and over.

⁶ These results correspond to findings of other studies, such as (IMPACT Initiatives, 2025^[13]), which reports that, in the same period (August 2024), 27% of returnees have settled in frontline areas, comprising Kharkiv, Mykolaiv, Zaporizhzhia, Donetsk, Sumy, Kherson, Dnipropetrovsk and Chernihiv oblasts in that study.

⁷ In subsequent rounds of IOM General Population Surveys, the response option was augmented to include “hosted for free or paying utilities only”. The majority of individuals in fact report paying for utilities, that is, not being hosted entirely for free.

⁸ “Employment status” refers to an individual’s position in the labour market, categorising them as employed, unemployed, or outside the labour force. This classification is based on the person’s engagement in economic activities during a specified reference period. “Status in employment”, according to the most recent International Classification of Status in Employment (ICSE), developed by the ILO, classifies employed individuals based on the type of authority exercised by the workers in their job as “dependent” and “independent”. The IOM survey data provides only categorisation “employee” and “self-employed”, which can be considered as broadly corresponding to the “dependent worker” and “independent worker” current international statistical standard, at least for the purposes of this report.

⁹ Informal employment can be permanent or temporary; conversely, permanent employment in principle can sometimes be informal. The data at hand singles out “permanent”, “temporary”, and “informal” as independent categories, with an implicit assumption that “informal” is used synonymously to casual. For this reason, and also to allow sufficient observations to enable the analysis, in this section, “temporary” and “informal” are grouped and are contrasted with “permanent”.

¹⁰ In this section, authored by UNHCR in collaboration with Brunel University London, the term “refugee” is used to refer to individuals displaced from Ukraine, reflecting international refugee law and UNHCR’s mandate. Elsewhere in this report, a broader analytical term “externally displaced Ukrainians” is used, which encompasses refugees as per international refugee law, and additionally includes persons who left

Ukraine to de facto seek international protection abroad, but who were admitted by another country because they were already in possession of other documents authorising travel and stay, for example on grounds such as tourism, study, employment.

¹¹ As highlighted, for example, in Ukraine's Strategy for Demographic Development up to 2040.

¹² The model considers only the Ukrainian refugee population in EU27 + Moldova (4.38 million). Total returns indicated are calculated based on the total refugee population in Europe (5.19 million) as of October 2025.

¹³ See UNHCR (2025^[46]).

¹⁴ See ILO (2025^[45]).

¹⁵ Insights from the forthcoming UNHCR Skills Survey on Ukrainian refugees.

¹⁶ The macro-regions classification of oblasts referred to in the analysis of the UNHCR-BUL ABM results is as follows: Centre (Cherkasy, Kirovohrad, Poltava, Vinnytsia), East (Dnipropetrovsk, Donetsk, Kharkiv, Luhansk, Zaporizhzhia), Kyiv (Kyiv City), North (Chernihiv, Kyiv oblast, Sumy, Zhytomyr), South (Kherson, Mykolaiv, Odesa), West (Chernivtsi, Ivano-Frankivsk, Khmelnytskyi, Lviv, Rivne, Ternopil, Volyn, Zakarpattia).

5

International practices in return, reintegration, and diaspora engagement

Ukraine is not alone in facing the complex task of supporting return, reintegration and diaspora engagement. Many countries have also addressed challenges following conflict, disaster or large-scale emigration. This chapter draws on international examples to explore how displaced persons have been supported to return in safety and dignity, and how those remaining abroad have contributed to national recovery. While grounded in shared international principles, these experiences highlight the importance of context-specific and flexible approaches, offering practical lessons for Ukraine's evolving strategy.

How can international experiences serve Ukraine?

Supporting the return and reintegration of displaced populations is a complex task that many governments have addressed in various contexts. Even more governments have sought meaningful ways to engage with nationals for whom returning home is not an option, as well as with their diaspora, to maintain ties and enable them to contribute to recovery and development efforts. Drawing on a broad range of international experience, this chapter explores how return, reintegration, and engagement with diaspora communities have been approached worldwide, and what lessons can be drawn from these international examples for Ukrainian policymakers.

The chapter is divided into three main sections. The first section sets the policies of return and reintegration within a broader perspective of international standards and frameworks. It stresses that, as of 2025, given the security situation, the principle of voluntariness remains the dominant standard guiding the policy on returns for Ukraine and, importantly, for countries hosting Ukrainian nationals. As such, these principles also guide the selection of international examples presented in the subsequent sections. The second section provides examples of concrete measures and policies to support voluntary and spontaneous returns and reintegration of displaced persons and to prepare repatriation when a peace or settlement agreement is reached. Echoing the previous chapters, particular attention is paid to the role of security and safety concerns, housing, employment policies and access to other public services in supporting return and reintegration. Examples of ways to monitor the outcomes of returnees and evaluate programmes that address return and reintegration are also included. The final section is dedicated to examples of international practices of diaspora engagement. The examples presented in this report were collected through a series of expert workshops and consultations organised by the OECD throughout 2025.

While Ukraine is not alone in developing meaningful strategies to support the return and reintegration of its nationals and engage with its diaspora, the situation in which the Ukrainian state and its displaced citizens find themselves as a result of Russia's war of aggression is exceptional in many ways. Several features characterise its uniqueness. Ukraine is facing external aggression rather than internal conflict. The sheer scale of internal and external displacement creates complex challenges for managing the situation. The human resources needed to implement programmes are often displaced themselves, or continue to face active hostilities. The severe fiscal pressures generated by the war also limit the state's capacity to expand support systems on a large scale. Many voluntary returns occur amidst ongoing hostilities that not only provoke new displacements and jeopardise the sustainability of returns, but also leave the non-displaced population in an increasingly vulnerable position, requiring support for all these different groups simultaneously.

The uncertainty surrounding the outcome of the war perpetuates the protracted situation faced by displaced persons, returnees, and non-displaced individuals alike. In this context, many existing international examples of return following civil wars or internal ethnic conflicts are generally of limited relevance. Many of these examples were reviewed but not included in the report. Meanwhile other examples in the areas of security, safety, or social cohesion are only partially relevant for Ukraine. Some could only become relevant under certain future conditions and settings, such as after the end of active hostilities. Nevertheless, they can currently serve as reference points to help anticipate the types of concerns Ukraine may need to address. In contrast, examples relating to monitoring and evaluation, as well as diaspora engagement, are more universally applicable.

The Ukrainian Government is also not starting to develop its policies of return, reintegration, and diaspora engagement from scratch. Rather, it builds on its own previous experience addressing these issues since independence. Moreover, in the three years following the start of the war, the Ukrainian Government, civil society, and international organisations have already deployed numerous innovative solutions. Given this context, the examples presented here are not prescriptive, but rather serve as a source of inspiration for Ukrainian policymakers in areas where gaps remain and the situation continues to evolve.

International standards, frameworks and principles relevant to voluntary return and reintegration of displaced persons

In international practice, the term “return” can have a range of meanings depending on the context. In the Ukrainian context in 2025, it remains appropriate to speak about policies that support voluntary and spontaneous return and that aim to support and encourage repatriation once a peace settlement is reached (Box 5.1). UNHCR continues to call upon states not to apply forced return to nationals and former residents of Ukraine, including those who have had their asylum claims rejected.

Box 5.1. Definition of return and typology of returns

While the topic of return migration has received growing international attention in recent decades, there is no single universally agreed definition of the term (OECD, 2020^[1]), as it is applied in diverse policy contexts. Return can be broadly understood as the act or process of going back to, or being taken back to, the point of departure (IOM, 2019^[2]). This may occur within national borders or across international borders. The term is most often used in relation to first-generation migrants, though discussions around diasporic or ethnic return may also involve later-generation descendants returning to their ancestral homelands (Cohen, 1997^[3]).

Return may take different forms, which are typically categorised as either voluntary or forced.

Voluntary return can be either spontaneous or assisted. Spontaneous voluntary return is an independent return that involves no formal support from States or other international or national actors. In contrast, assisted voluntary return involves administrative, logistical and financial support. Typically, it is applied to individuals who have received a negative decision on their asylum application, victims of trafficking in human beings, stranded migrants, qualified nationals, and other migrants who are unable or unwilling to remain in the host country but who wish to return to their countries of origin (IOM, 2019^[2]). In many cases, this support is extended through Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration (AVRR) programmes, which can include pre-departure counselling, cash or in-kind assistance to facilitate reinsertion into the country of origin (OECD, 2020^[1]).

In addition, in humanitarian settings, the term repatriation is also used to designate “the personal right of a prisoner of war, civil detainee, refugee, or of a civilian to return to his or her country of nationality under specific conditions laid down in various international instruments” (IOM, 2019^[2]).

Forced return, by contrast, refers to situations in which individuals are returned under pressure, compulsion or coercion (IOM, 2019^[2]). This may involve legal or administrative enforcement, and while it is lawful under certain conditions, particularly in the context of irregular migration, it raises distinct concerns in humanitarian contexts. Forced return in such settings may conflict with international protection obligations and human rights principles, particularly the obligation to ensure that return does not place individuals at risk of serious harm.

In displacement contexts generally, and in the case of Ukraine specifically, repatriation and voluntary return from international protection abroad is regarded by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) as one of three durable solutions, alongside local integration and resettlement in a third country (UNHCR, 2003^[4]). Where conditions permit, return to the place of origin is often the preferred solution for many displaced persons, provided that it occurs voluntarily, in conditions of safety and dignity, and with realistic prospects for sustainable reintegration.

Indeed, in contexts of humanitarian displacement, the principle of voluntariness in return is central, reflecting both the agency of the individual and the need for conditions that enable informed, uncoerced decision making. This principle is embedded in numerous international standards and frameworks governing refugee returns. In addition to voluntariness, international standards are grounded in two other core legal principles: the right to return and the obligation of non-refoulement. The right to return is a long-standing principle of international human rights law. First articulated in Article 13 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, it affirms that “Everyone has the right to leave any country, including his own, and to return to his country.” This right has since been reaffirmed in various binding instruments, including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1976), and is reflected in regional frameworks such as the European Convention on Human Rights, which states that no one shall be denied the right to enter the territory of the state of which they are a national. Legal scholars widely consider these instruments to have attained the status of customary international law, thereby binding even on states that are not formal parties.

Closely linked to the right to return is the principle of non-refoulement, one of the most fundamental protections in international refugee law, and typically relevant to host countries. Enshrined in the 1951 Refugee Convention and widely recognised as a rule of customary international law, non-refoulement prohibits States from returning individuals to a country where there is a real risk of being subjected to persecution, torture, or inhuman or degrading treatment and punishment, or to any other human rights violation (EMN, 2025^[5]). Some legal scholars and international bodies, including UNHCR, have argued that non-refoulement has acquired the status of *jus cogens* – a peremptory norm of international law – from which no derogation is permitted (Costello and Foster, 2016^[6]; Allain, 2001^[7]; Goodwin-Gill and McAdam, 2021^[8]).

In the case of internally displaced persons (IDPs), while no binding international treaty exists, normative guidance is provided by the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, endorsed by the UN Commission on Human Rights in 1998. Although not legally enforceable, these principles have been widely accepted as a standard for national and international responses to internal displacement. They affirm the right of IDPs to return voluntarily, in safety and dignity, and emphasise the responsibilities of national authorities to support their reintegration and recovery. As with international displacement, the principles underline that return must not be imposed and that displaced persons should be enabled to make informed decisions about their future.

These, alongside other principles (see Table 5.1), establish a foundation that should continue to guide national strategies in both Ukraine and host countries on voluntary return and the eventual repatriation of displaced Ukrainians.

Because other forms of return are not relevant to the case of displaced Ukrainians, this report does not examine examples of their management in other countries.

Table 5.1. Main international legal standards, frameworks and principles relevant to voluntary return and reintegration of displaced persons

This table summarises key international legal and normative references that support voluntary return, repatriation, and sustainable reintegration of displaced persons. The information is ordered by year.

Framework / Instrument/ Guiding principles	Year	Relevance	Key considerations for Ukraine and its partners
Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)	1948	Affirms the right to return to one's country (Art. 13); dignity; equality; and protection from persecution.	Policies should uphold the right of displaced persons to return voluntarily and safely, ensuring equal treatment, dignity, and protection from any form of discrimination.
1951 Refugee Convention and 1967 Protocol	1951 / 1967	Core refugee protections including non-refoulement, voluntary return, and respect for rights upon return.	Return processes should ensure voluntariness, safety, and access to civil documentation, while avoiding any form of forced return or coercion.
International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)	1966	Emphasises freedom of movement, protection from arbitrary return, and civil rights upon return.	Reintegration policies should ensure full civil and political participation for returnees and uphold principles of equality and non-discrimination.
Convention Against Torture (CAT)	1984	Prohibits return where there is a risk of torture or inhuman treatment.	Return assessments should consider protection risks and uphold safeguards to prevent return to unsafe or insecure areas.
UNHCR's Handbook on Voluntary Repatriation	1996	Reaffirms that return should be voluntary, safe, and dignified; emphasises informed decision making and reintegration planning.	Policies should ensure informed choice for returnees, and that basic needs (housing, services, legal status) are addressed to facilitate sustainable reintegration.
UNHCR Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement	1998	Highlights rights of internally displaced persons (IDPs) to return voluntarily, in safety and dignity; supports restitution and participation	Reintegration efforts should prioritise voluntary return or local integration of IDPs, access to housing, services, and justice mechanisms, and support for community reconciliation.
EU Charter of Fundamental Rights	2000 (binding since 2009)	Upholds rights of dignity, liberty, and security; prohibits collective expulsions and ensures protection from refoulement.	For returnees from EU countries, reintegration measures should align with EU rights frameworks, reinforcing rights-based approaches and procedural guarantees.
UNHCR's Framework for Durable Solutions	2003	Emphasises physical, legal, and material safety, and sustainable reintegration	Ukraine should ensure access to jobs, housing, and public services for returnees, and promote social cohesion in return areas.
UNHCR's Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF)	2016	Promotes burden-sharing, community support, and co-ordinated international responses.	Ukraine can draw on the CRRF to strengthen partnerships with host countries, donors, and diaspora, and ensure inclusive, community-based reintegration strategies.
IOM's Framework on Return and Reintegration	2017	Advocates for an integrated approach that includes economic, social, and psychosocial dimensions; gender-sensitive and rights-based.	This model offers a comprehensive structure for national reintegration policies that prioritise livelihoods, mental health, and area-based development.
Global Compact on Refugees (GCR)	2018	Calls for international solidarity, shared responsibility, and sustainable reintegration.	Ukraine can engage multilateral actors to support co-ordinated and durable solutions that benefit both returnees and local communities.
Global Compact for Migration (GCM)	2018	Encourages safe and dignified return, inclusive reintegration, and safeguards against statelessness.	Reintegration efforts could draw on GCM guidance to establish comprehensive support measures for returning migrants, including legal counselling, documentation, and tailored services that respect human rights and prevent vulnerabilities such as statelessness.

Measures and policies to support the return and reintegration of displaced persons

Chapter 4 has shown that the key considerations for displaced individuals contemplating return are safety and security, as well as housing, employment, access to public services and sustainability of livelihoods. Drawing on this, this chapter is structured thematically to highlight international practices in these key areas that can support the return and reintegration of displaced persons. Even if decisions to return are often influenced by factors beyond the direct control of national authorities, public policy can play an important role in ensuring that displaced persons and returnees are treated with dignity, protected from harm, and supported in rebuilding their lives.

This section focusses on those persons displaced by the war of aggression who are seeking to exercise their right to return. Ukrainians abroad who left for economic reasons prior to the war of aggression, or who were born outside Ukraine but may now consider returning, are guided by different circumstances and motivations. Their differing circumstances require different support, which will be discussed in the next section on diaspora engagement.

Strengthening conditions for safe return that are within Ukraine's reach

What are the key considerations for policymakers in Ukraine?

- **Ensure that voluntary returnees receive the same level of protection as the non-displaced.** It is important to make all returnees aware of the existing safety measures and lifesaving options in their place of return, and to ensure they are adequately consulted as stakeholders in future plans.
- **Safety means more than the absence of active hostilities.** Displaced persons assess safety through various forms of physical security. Demining, restoration of essential services, and a clear commitment to rebuilding are key signals of readiness for return. These must be monitored and communicated effectively to support safe and voluntary return decisions.
- **Plan for the future by establishing clear recovery benchmarks grounded in trust and transparency.** In the immediate aftermath of the settlement of the war of aggression, there will be a need to establish well-defined frameworks for return and repatriation. Government assessments of safe return areas will need to align with displaced persons' own perceptions. Engaging communities, supporting go-and-see visits, and sharing returnee experiences can help build confidence.
- **Social cohesion is a core element of safety.** Even if physical risks are addressed, returnees may not return, or may leave again, if they feel excluded. Social cohesion among returnees and stayers should be assessed and strengthened alongside other security concerns. Community engagement and trust-building initiatives can help prevent tensions between returnees and stayers and support voluntary, dignified, and sustainable returns.

The direct threat to physical safety has been the key reason for the displacement of Ukrainians since 2014, and especially since February 2022. As of 2025, when this report was written, this threat remains present in Ukraine. Regions are affected by active hostilities in different ways. While the frontline areas are particularly dangerous and at risk of a broader military offensive, daily large-scale drone and missile attacks across the entire country mean that no part of Ukraine can be considered fully safe. Moreover, as of 2025, there remains considerable uncertainty regarding the effectiveness and reliability of any future security guarantees that can be put in place in the face of and external aggressor.

Living with an external threat

As of 2025, security and safety for returnees cannot be fully guaranteed anywhere in the country. What Ukraine can do, however, is support voluntary, spontaneous returnees by ensuring they have the same access to information and lifesaving support as the non-displaced Ukrainian population, who have developed a range of strategies for living with the threat. This is particularly important for returnees who have spent considerable time away from Ukraine and are unaware of the most recent developments and practices relating to safety and security in their region of return. Moreover, it is important that returnees and displaced populations are adequately consulted as stakeholders in the preparation of future security measures and plans, alongside non-displaced population.

Israel is a modern example of a country that, over the decades, has adapted to living with external threats, which have shaped many aspects of its national policy, society, and infrastructure. While the overview of its comprehensive set of national programmes and strategies to ensure physical safety is outside the scope of this report, what is relevant is how immigrants and returning residents are integrated into these frameworks. In Israel, the Home Front Command is responsible for developing civil defence instructions that guide civilians on how to respond to emergencies, including reacting to missile alerts, locating and using public shelters, and using emergency hotlines and other emergency alert systems. These materials are available in several languages and significant efforts are made to disseminate them widely. For example, the Jewish Agency for Israel, which facilitates immigration to Israel and supports the integration of new immigrants and returnees, in co-operation with the Ministry of Aliyah and Integration, disseminates these materials and ensures that they are available even prior to departure (Nefesh B'Nefesh, 2025^[9]). Once in Israel, immigrants and returnees have numerous ways to access this information. For example, newly arriving immigrants (olim) can benefit from voluntary integration programmes offered by Absorption Centres (Merkaz Klita). These centres serve as transitional hubs to facilitate a “soft landing” in the country. The numerous integration services they offer include life skills training, emergency protocols, and psychological support.

Japan is another country that lives under constant threats of a different nature, such as earthquakes, tsunamis, typhoons, and volcanic eruptions, which make disaster preparedness a critical part of daily life and public policy. Japan has developed the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030 as a roadmap for reducing disaster risk, strengthening resilience, and ensuring effective recovery. Understanding the risk and investing in preparedness are key parts of the Framework. Importantly, the Framework explicitly recognises migrants, displaced people, and newcomers as critical groups to be included in disaster risk reduction strategies and in strengthening the resilience of communities. Building on this Framework, Japan ensures that all population groups have access to disaster information, early warnings, and participatory measures, enabling newcomers and displaced persons to prepare for, respond to, and recover from natural hazards alongside local populations (UNDRR, 2015^[10]).

Acting on other elements of physical safety and security

The decision to return depends not only on the absence of active hostilities, but also on whether individuals believe they can enjoy other aspects of safety. In Ukraine, as of 2025, in addition to drone attacks, missile strikes, and active shelling, landmine contamination is another major threat to physical security. Ukraine is currently assessed to be the most heavily mine contaminated country in the world (UNMAS, 2025^[11]), which makes large scale demining operations essential for enabling safe return. In many international settings, the completion of mine clearance and the removal of unexploded ordnance often serves as a tangible indicator that physical conditions are sufficiently secure to allow other returns.

For example, upon the end of active hostilities in both Iraq and Syria, mine clearance has been identified as a priority in return areas, emphasising the need to address these threats before broader return movements are facilitated. In the case of Syria, while an estimated 60 000 returnees had returned to Raqqa

shortly after the Islamic State left the area in 2017, unexploded landmines were estimated at the time to be causing between 50 and 70 casualties per week (Reuters, 2018^[12]). The United Nations continues to support clearance efforts in various areas, estimating that more than 60 people were killed and 90 injured due to explosive ordnance in January 2025, making returnee groups such as farmers and shepherds particularly vulnerable, as they return to their land in newly accessible regions (UN, 2025^[13]). In Iraq, widespread contamination from landmines and explosive remnants of war, affecting an area equivalent to 300 000 football fields, continues to endanger civilians and severely hinder the return of displaced families and the reconstruction of communities (ICRC, 2025^[14]) (See also Box 5.2).

Box 5.2. Demining efforts in Sri Lanka to promote IDP returns

Between 2002 and 2022, Sri Lanka's demining efforts, led by the National Mine Action Centre (NMAC), resulted in the clearing of over 200 km² of minefields. Mine action has played an instrumental role in the safe resettlement of IDPs in Sri Lanka's northern and eastern provinces, releasing safe land for resettlement, reconstruction, and livelihood activities.

The Ministry of Housing and Construction reported that over 900 000 IDPs had been resettled by July 2022. The Sri Lanka National Mine Action Completion Strategy (2023-2027) continues to prioritise the clearance of land for the resettlement of the remaining IDPs (Internal Displacement Monitoring Center, 2022^[15]); (Mine Action Review, 2021^[16]) (The Halo Trust, 2025^[17]) Despite contaminated areas being marked and mine risk education being provided to all societal groups, returnees are still likely to enter contaminated areas, especially zones with potential for agriculture (Sri Lanka National Steering Committee for Mine Action, 2010^[18]). Non-technical survey activities are therefore implemented in parallel to identify previously unknown contamination and inform the populations about continued risks (Sri Lanka National Mine Action Centre, 2024^[19]).

Furthermore, other international organisations, such as the Halo Trust, employ mostly formerly displaced persons in demining activities. This approach contributes to spreading information about the safety situation on the ground, enables returnees to become directly familiar with the situation, and involves returnees in their communities' development.

In other cases, the restoration of basic services has also served as a practical benchmark for enabling returns and for assessing the readiness of heavily damaged areas for return. Following the 2017 siege of Marawi in the Philippines, alongside other criteria, authorities guided returns based on the re-establishment of essential services such as water, electricity, and healthcare (ADB, 2018^[20]; CCCHP, 2023^[21]). This underscores that provisions for safe return should go beyond addressing the physical threat and include access to hygienic and healthy living conditions.

Anticipating future needs to establish clear safety frameworks and build trust in the safety of returns

Several international examples can serve as a reference point for the types of considerations that will become pressing for Ukraine in the immediate aftermath of the settlement of the war of aggression.

One key consideration is the need to establish well-defined frameworks for return and repatriation, grounded in transparent values and principles. For example, the General Framework Agreement for Peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina, also known as the Dayton Peace Agreement, which put an end to the Bosnian War, contains an Agreement on Refugees and Displaced Persons. The Agreement served as a foundation for voluntary return and repatriation. Its key principle was the right to return to homes in a voluntary manner and the commitment of the signatory parties to ensure the safety of returns (Annex 7, Art. 1). The

signatories called upon UNHCR and countries hosting war refugees to co-develop a repatriation plan to enable an early, peaceful, orderly, and phased return of refugees and displaced persons, including priorities for certain areas and certain categories of returnees (Annex 7, Art. 1). Ultimately, the Agreement emphasised that the choice of return destination must rest with the individual or family, without external pressure or forced relocation to areas facing serious danger or insecurity, or to areas lacking the basic infrastructure necessary for resuming a normal life (Annex 7, Art. 1). The signatories also committed to creating in their territories sustainable conditions conducive to return and harmonious reintegration, and to providing all possible assistance to that effect (Annex 7, Art. 2), including adequately monitored short-term repatriation assistance on a non-discriminatory basis to all returning refugees and displaced persons in need, to help them re-establish their lives and livelihoods in their communities (Annex 7, Art. 6). Amnesty provisions were included for returnees, with exceptions only for those accused of serious violations of international humanitarian law (Annex 7, Art. 7) (OHR, 1995^[22]).

Another consideration is that perceptions of safety are inherently personal and shaped by individual experiences and context. Yet authorities typically need to establish additional well-defined safety standards and benchmarks for what constitutes a safe return. Such frameworks should reflect the lived realities of both non-displaced and displaced populations and should be developed in consultation with those directly affected.

For example, in the case of the 2011 accident at the Fukushima Nuclear Power Plant, the Japanese Government set a reference dose of 20 mSv/year, which became the de facto safety threshold, guiding initial evacuation zones and the return of 160 000 evacuees six years later once airborne radiation fell below this level. However, this threshold was publicly contested and led to the voluntary evacuation of over 50 000 individuals who chose to leave despite not living in areas formally designated for evacuation. The resulting lack of trust in government safety assurances is believed to have contributed to persistently low rates of return, between 17 and 30% as of 2024 (IRSN, 2016^[23]; Reconstruction Agency, 2024^[24]).

While safety benchmarks such as those applied in Fukushima were met with scepticism among displaced communities, the government's efforts to communicate the criteria transparently eventually allowed adaptive responses to emerge that gradually overcame the initial mistrust. In situations where immediate return was not desirable for many displaced individuals due to ongoing safety concerns, the Japanese authorities, in collaboration with affected communities, explored alternative transitional return models that gradually rebuilt trust in the return process and its safety while also promoting continuity, agency, and a sense of control over the return process (see 0).

Yet another consideration is balancing immediate perceptions shaped by social media with a broader and more durable understanding of safety. Here, the lived experience and perspectives of returnees themselves can be critical in addressing possible misperceptions. Examples from other countries show that go-and-see visits, where individuals travel to their area of origin for a short period, enable them to assess whether they feel safe to return based on their personal circumstances (see Annex 5.B). Such visits also reinforce confidence in the authorities' own reporting and evaluations of the situation. Beyond providing a direct impression of the physical safety conditions, these visits allow returnees to envision their reintegration, anticipate potential challenges, and prepare more effectively for a sustainable return, including on an emotional level.

Between January and July 2025, with the support and oversight of UNHCR and the Turkish Red Crescent, Türkiye's Directorate General of Migration Management introduced a formal go-and-see scheme for Syrians under temporary protection. Under this programme, one adult per Syrian family could apply through provincial migration offices using an online booking system, obtain an exit and re-entry permit, and visit Syria up to three times within six months without losing protection status in Türkiye (Lagrang, 2025^[25]; Directorate of Immigration Administration, 2025^[26]). Importantly, the scheme is not understood as the first step towards permanent return, but rather as a trust-building mechanism. It fosters the circulation of first-

hand information within returnee networks and helps shape support measures that reflect the actual needs reported by beneficiaries, with the involvement of both host and home countries.

Somali returnees from Kenya benefited from similar visits organised by the two governments with UNHCR's support. These initiatives provided a more nuanced understanding of conditions for return, enabling concrete adjustments to return planning, such as revising transportation routes for safety reasons and prompting local authorities to allocate land for returnees.

Prioritising social inclusion, social cohesion and fairness as a pre-condition of safe return

Alongside physical security, the sense of being accepted and valued within a community is an essential dimension of safety for returnees. This form of psychological safety determines whether people feel welcome, respected, and able to rebuild their lives without fear of exclusion, hostility, or discrimination. Even when physical risks have been reduced, a lack of social acceptance can deter returns or prompt onward movement. A cohesive society can be understood as one that works towards the well-being of all its members, combats exclusion and marginalisation, creates a shared sense of belonging, promotes trust, and offers opportunities for upward mobility for all (OECD, 2011^[27]). While approaches to fostering cohesion vary, common elements across different conceptualisations include promoting trust within and between social groups, co-operation for the common good, and an inclusive identity that bridges differences (Fiedler and Rohles, 2021^[28]).

One of the distinct features of the Ukrainian situation is that, in the face of external aggression, Ukrainian society has solidified in many ways. The feeling of national identity, belonging, and common purpose has been strengthened, in stark contrast to countries that have experienced internal conflicts and civil wars that have led to polarisation. Despite this, and especially if the situation becomes protracted, there is a risk that social cohesion may be challenged in the longer term, as has been the case in other countries after major crises (Fiedler and Rohles, 2021^[28]). Typically, trust among various groups within society weakens because many individuals live through different shared (and non-shared) experiences. Social divisions can appear along various lines, such as whether individuals have had homes and localities fully destroyed or not, whether they have served in the military or not, and whether they have been displaced or not. The risk of future social divisions between stayers and returnees should not be ignored in Ukraine, where large-scale displacement has affected communities differently, and where both the displaced and non-displaced have developed distinct perspectives, networks, and coping strategies.

Experience from Israel, Syria, Central Asia, and the Western Balkans suggests that co-operation tends to decline between different groups, and individuals act more generously towards members of their own group but less so towards others. When such attitudes translate into preferential treatment towards certain groups, a sense of justice and fairness can be altered, creating feelings of insecurity among different groups.

Research from Burundi, which experienced a major conflict between 1993 and 2005 that resulted in an estimated 5% of the population being killed, 10% displaced abroad, and a much higher share internally displaced, shows that a higher proportion of returnees within a community can have a negative effect on social cohesion. Nationwide data indicate that communities with larger shares of returnees tend to report lower levels of trust, mutual help, and community participation among residents (Ruiz and Vargas-Silva, 2022^[29]). One explanation is that those who remained during the conflict had to protect scarce community resources and formed stronger bonds with other local residents. Those who were displaced were less likely to develop or maintain such bonds. Further research found this dynamic to be particularly pronounced among internal returnees (Ruiz and Vargas-Silva, 2024^[30]), who had significantly lower levels of trust, reconciliation, and community engagement than the non-displaced. Greater exposure to violence was also associated with more negative effects on reconciliation and community engagement for returnees compared to stayers, while the effects on trust were more mixed.

It is not only the perceptions of returnees that matter. Distrust and discriminatory attitudes from stayers towards returnees can also undermine social cohesion. Studies from the aftermath of the Balkan Wars document how discrimination against returnees could escalate from individual acts in daily life to more systemic forms. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, local authorities and residents' tactics against returnees included delaying the processing of property claims, refusing to reconnect utilities, and engaging in petty bureaucratic harassment of some returnees (Ó Tuathail and Dahlman, 2004^[31]). Some municipalities allocated socially owned land to displaced persons of the locally dominant ethnicity in order to consolidate wartime demographic changes. Minority returnees often faced low-level antagonism and social pressure to sell reclaimed property at unfavourable prices to stayers. Similar patterns were reported in post-war Croatia, where Serb returnees frequently encountered hostility from Croat stayers, including verbal harassment, social exclusion, and in some cases violence, as well as discriminatory barriers to employment and public services. These practices contributed to an environment in which many returnees felt unwelcome and, in some cases, were pressured either directly or indirectly to re-emigrate or relinquish property rights (Koska, 2008^[32]; Djuric, 2010^[33]).

Tensions in post-conflict and post-displacement settings can emerge not only between different ethnic groups, as was largely the case in the Western Balkans, but also within affected groups themselves. In Kyrgyzstan, for example, trust within Uzbek communities was found to be low after conflict, as some individuals felt that their co-ethnics had not provided sufficient support during the clashes (Hager, Krakowski and Schaub, 2019^[34]). Differences in the experiences of violence led to suspicions about why certain community members had not been targeted or had suffered less, which in turn strained internal relationships further.

To address and prevent these issues, it is vital to establish clear and solid foundations for social acceptance of returnees. At least some of these foundations can be envisaged by Ukraine already now.

For example, in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Dayton Peace Agreement explicitly recognised the right of return “in safety, without risk of harassment, intimidation, persecution, or discrimination” (Annex 7, Art. 1), placing responsibility on signatories to take all necessary steps to prevent activities within their territories that would endanger this principle. Under the agreement, immediate confidence-building measures were taken, including the repeal of any remaining discriminatory legislation and administrative practices, suppression of incitement to hatred through media and other channels, and protection of minority populations. Moreover, the signatories explicitly committed not to “discriminate against returning refugees and displaced persons with respect to conscription into military service” (Annex 7, Art. 2). Further, the Law on Prohibition of Discrimination, first adopted in 2009 and amended in 2016, expanded the protected grounds to include, among others, language, social origin, and “any other status” which implicitly encompasses displacement history.

Alongside legislative reform, training for judges and judicial staff on international and European anti-discrimination standards and their application were organised, reinforcing institutional capacity to uphold these protections. Complementing legal reform and institutional capacity-building, public awareness initiatives helped to reinforce equality norms and encourage social acceptance. International organisations also played an important role in implementation. The sustained engagement of the OSCE, including national surveys on public perceptions of discrimination and support for awareness campaigns, was instrumental in challenging stereotypes and encouraging equal treatment for vulnerable groups, including returnees, migrants, and minorities.

While there is broad agreement on the importance of social cohesion for durable reintegration, there is less consensus on the most effective methods for fostering it in post-conflict environments. Community-driven development (CDD) programmes, however, tend to be the most common tool for supporting social cohesion in post-conflict societies. They aim to promote cohesion by fostering community participation in decision making, bringing divided groups together, and addressing shared needs (King, 2013^[35]; Idris, 2016^[36]). While the specific design of such programmes varies, they generally provide communities with a

high degree of control over the development process, the allocation of resources, and decision making authority.

Some CDD programmes have demonstrated notable success in these contexts. In Indonesia's Kecamatan Development Programme, post-conflict communities in Maluku and Aceh used the CDD model to jointly identify priorities, manage funds transparently, and rebuild infrastructure serving multiple groups. Its emphasis on open meetings, clear rules for fund allocation, and inclusive facilitation helped reduce perceptions of bias in resource distribution (Barron, Diprose and Woolcock, 2011^[37]).

Other CDD initiatives have had more limited or even negative impacts on social cohesion. In Sierra Leone, a large-scale CDD programme increased community participation in decision making but did not lead to measurable improvements in trust. Deep-seated grievances meant that competition over project resources intensified existing divisions (Casey, Glennerster and Miguel, 2012^[38]). Insufficient attention to the local political economy, unequal participation, and the absence of mechanisms to mediate disputes over resource allocation undermined the intended inclusivity and reconciliatory objectives of the programmes.

Evidence suggests that both the design of a CDD programme and the context are critical in determining its impact. As noted by Mallett and Slater (2013, p. 8^[39]), "*How* something is designed and implemented may be just as, if not more important, than *what* it is that is being implemented in the first place." The success of such initiatives depends on factors such as the baseline level of social cohesion, the extent to which community relations were damaged by conflict, and the motives and strategies of key actors (Mallett and Slater, 2013^[39]; Idris, 2016^[36]). These factors can vary between communities within conflict-affected regions, and programme design should reflect these differences to avoid reinforcing existing divisions.

While not a traditional CDD programme, Colombia's *Manos a la Paz* (Hands for Peace) initiative demonstrates how CDD principles can be adapted to target specific groups as agents of change. Led by the High Council for Post-Conflict and implemented by UNDP, the programme placed more than 1 500 young people from diverse backgrounds in mayors' and governors' offices and other regional entities across 263 municipalities prioritised for post-conflict development. These young people contributed to reconciliation and capacity-building by delivering workshops on education for peace, anti-discrimination, and gender-sensitive policies (UNDP, 2017^[40]). By positioning youth as intermediaries between communities and local authorities, the programme built trust, reduced stigma around vulnerable populations, and illustrated how participatory and inclusive approaches can be adapted to strengthen social cohesion in targeted, group-focussed peacebuilding efforts.

Together, these programmes illustrate how structured mentoring, shared cultural experiences, and inclusive leadership can break down barriers and strengthen social cohesion across communities and groups. While some of the mentioned initiatives are not specifically designed for returning migrants, the underlying model is readily adaptable to benefit returnees and stayers alike. Often, such programmes are run by non-governmental and civil society organisations, with local or central government playing, at most, a financing role. A more prominent role for government in designing and scaling up such programmes could strengthen alignment with national strategies, avoid duplication, and expand multi-stakeholder partnerships. Moreover, programmes to address and prevent tensions among displaced individuals, returnees, and stayers should be undertaken as part of a broader approach involving legal protections, institutional redress mechanisms, public campaigns that acknowledge past traumas and promote equality between these different groups, and appropriate communication from all levels of authority.

Addressing housing needs

What are the key considerations for policymakers in Ukraine?

- **Invest in social housing as a way to support IDPs and vulnerable returnees.** Affordable housing plays a central role in supporting IDPs and shaping displaced persons' decisions to return. Begin work early on building a strong institutional framework for social housing that is inclusive of these populations as a durable exit strategy from temporary solutions, as well as on establishing sustainable financing mechanisms to reduce reliance on short-term donor funding and fragmented projects.
- **Regulate the housing market as a tool to improve conditions for IDPs and support returns.** Large-scale destruction and displacement inevitably create disequilibrium in the private housing rental market, placing IDPs in fragile positions and excluding vulnerable returnees. Stabilising prices, protecting tenants' rights, and ensuring non-discrimination require modern regulation and enforcement mechanisms at different levels.
- **Clear, accessible mechanisms are needed to resolve housing, land, and property claims.** This includes ensuring legal assistance, preserving records, and addressing gaps in documentation and inheritance rights.
- **Link housing to livelihoods and services.** Reconstruction should prioritise areas where returnees can access employment, public services, and infrastructure. Return to places of origin may not always be viable, and sustainable reintegration depends on more than shelter alone.

The war of aggression has created multiple and overlapping housing challenges in Ukraine, especially for displaced populations – both those still displaced and those considering return. As shown throughout the report, as of 2025, the following three major housing issues affect current and future integration, return, and reintegration prospects for displaced populations. The first issue is the lack of available housing for the currently displaced population within Ukraine, especially in light of continued displacement and damage, as well as for returnees whose housing was destroyed.

The second issue is the unregulated rental market, with a power imbalance between tenants and landlords. The lack of protections and widespread discrimination is especially palpable for IDPs, exacerbating their uncertainty and instability, preventing their local integration, and motivating either relocation abroad or a move back to damaged housing in dangerous areas. For those contemplating return from abroad, rising prices not only create a barrier to return, but can also encourage prolonged stay abroad for owners who can rent out their housing in Ukraine and finance their continued stay, or result in returns to dangerous areas and damaged housing for those who are not owners and who cannot continue staying abroad.

The third issue is the lack of documentation to prove ownership for a significant number of displaced persons, a problem that impedes access to existing housing programmes. In the future, when the war of aggression is settled and return to damaged and re-occupied areas is envisaged, this issue will pose serious challenges for resolving property disputes and housing restitution.

Taken together, these challenges suggest that an effective response will require not only physical reconstruction of housing but also sustained progress on legal and institutional reforms that enable access at scale and help ensure that vulnerable groups are not left behind. Such reforms will also be essential for addressing ownership disputes and supporting fair and transparent restitution processes as people seek to recover their homes. International experience indicates that without a strong legal and institutional foundation, even well-designed housing initiatives can face delays in implementation, uneven outcomes, and reduced trust among affected communities.

Investing into housing and developing the social housing sector

Given the scale and urgency of housing needs, a range of complementary schemes to support rebuilding and the provision of temporary or permanent housing is typically envisaged. Often, these efforts result in a patchwork of parallel initiatives targeting different populations and regions.

To overcome fragmentation, some post-conflict housing efforts have aimed to bring greater coherence to reconstruction through co-ordinated, large-scale programmes. One of the most ambitious housing recovery efforts in Europe was the Regional Housing Programme (RHP), launched in 2012 by Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Montenegro, and Serbia. It was designed to provide durable housing solutions for the most vulnerable refugees and internally displaced persons from the 1990s conflicts (see Annex 5.C). Supported by the European Union, UNHCR, OSCE, and the Council of Europe Development Bank (CEB), the RHP delivered over 11 300 housing units across the region by 2023, benefiting approximately 36 000 individuals (see Table 5.2). The programme ensured that housing was tailor-made to meet the needs of the beneficiaries, allowing them to choose whether to remain in the places of displacement or return to their home area, as well as to select the appropriate type of housing based on their reported needs.

Table 5.2. Outcomes of the Regional Housing Programme (2012-2023)

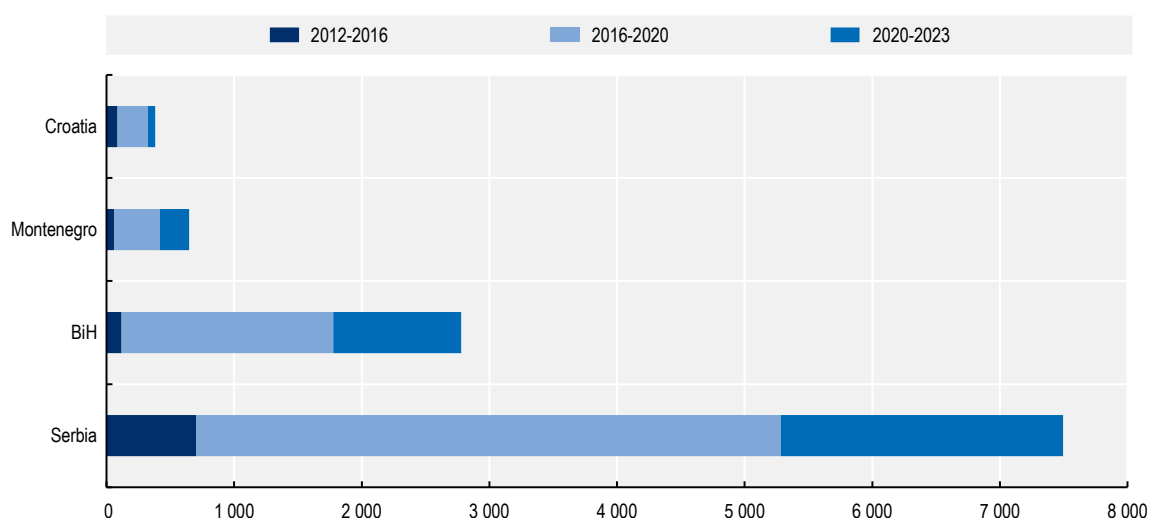
	Number of beneficiaries	Housing units	Total costs of housing projects (EUR)	National contribution
Bosnia and Herzegovina	9 000	2 778	74 million	10 million
Croatia	934	382	20.6 million	5.8 million
Montenegro	2 000	646	25.3 million	5.5 million
Serbia	24 000	7 495	162.9 million	30.3 million

Source: Compilation based on the Regional Housing Programme Country Factsheets 2023, to be accessed via <https://regionalhousingprogramme.org/media/publications/>.

This project, however, required time. Progress in the early years was slowed by gaps in legal and regulatory frameworks, complex procurement processes, and the time needed to establish institutional responsibilities (European Commission, 2014^[41]). These initial challenges were gradually overcome, and during its mid-phase the programme accelerated significantly (see Figure 5.1), supported by improved co-ordination, clearer beneficiary selection processes, and stronger engagement across all levels of government.

In addition to housing itself, the greatest challenge for affected populations is the affordability of housing. To address this issue, a significant part of the external donor funding in Bosnia and Herzegovina was channelled into social housing, often with an explicit objective of providing durable housing solutions for IDPs (Council of Europe Development Bank, 2017^[42]). Moreover, efforts were made to develop the institutional and regulatory frameworks needed to strengthen the country's social housing system (Council of Europe Development Bank, 2023^[43]).

Figure 5.1. Number of housing units built through the Regional Housing Programme (2012-2023)



Source: Compilation based on the Regional Housing Programme Country Factsheets 2023, to be accessed via <https://regionalhousingprogramme.org/media/publications/>.

Box 5.3. Transitioning from collective centres to sustainable social housing in Bosnia and Herzegovina

The Durable Solutions for Collective Centre Residents (DSCCR) project in Bosnia and Herzegovina was implemented by Catholic Relief Services (CRS), which has been present in the country since 1993. Initially focussed on emergency assistance for those displaced by conflict, CRS became a key implementing partner of the BiH Government in 2003, supporting housing reconstruction and the return of displaced persons (Catholic Relief Services, 2019^[44]).

The DSCCR initiative has extended well beyond physical reconstruction, requiring parallel progress on legislative reform. Due to BiH's complex administrative structure, a harmonised national social housing system would require the adoption of 13 separate laws across different jurisdictions. As of 2023, CRS had provided technical assistance leading to the enactment of six such laws in select cantons, with work ongoing in others (CRS, 2023^[45]).

The project introduced six distinct models of social housing, tailored to different needs and implemented in both urban and rural contexts. In some cases, housing was specifically designed for vulnerable groups. For example, in Potocari, two buildings comprising 33 apartments and seven business premises were constructed to support displaced persons from Srebrenica, enabling both housing and opportunities for self-employment. Similarly, in 2010, a centre was established in the municipality of Jablanica to house former collective centre residents who could not return to their pre-war homes.

Importantly, the project helped challenge prevailing assumptions about return – particularly the widespread belief among citizens and some international actors that return should only involve reclaiming one's pre-war home and property. Given the widespread destruction across BiH, where 40% of housing stock had been damaged, this expectation was often unrealistic. Through sustained advocacy, technical expertise, and inclusive dialogue, CRS helped shift perceptions and demonstrate that durable solutions could include well-integrated, non-profit rental housing in new communities. These housing models not only offered safe and dignified living conditions but also provided long-term support such as subsidised rent and essential utilities.

More generally, social housing, defined as residential rental accommodation provided at sub-market prices, targeted and allocated according to specific rules (Salvi del Pero et al., 2016^[46]), represents an important solution to the problem of housing unaffordability worldwide, even outside the conflict and disaster management context. A key prerequisite for investing in social housing is the setting of an appropriate legal framework that establishes its operational principles and outlines its model. Many OECD countries have developed solid institutional frameworks for diverse social housing models to respond to their varied demographic and socio-economic needs (Salvi del Pero et al., 2016^[46]; OECD, 2020^[47]). In Austria, Denmark and the Netherlands, social housing encompasses over 20% of all housing stock. Examples of models vary, but the key considerations when building social housing models from scratch include the principles of eligibility (universalist or targeted), the type of providers (regional and municipal authorities, non-profit, limited-profit or co-operative housing associations, national governments, for-profit providers, and others), and the type of financing for expansion and maintenance (rental income from tenants, borrowing by the social housing provider, payments and/or subsidies from others, including governments).

These modalities have important social implications, including for the integration of vulnerable displaced populations. For example, a universalist approach to eligibility, such as the one practised in Austria, Denmark and the Netherlands, generally results in greater social mixing and minimises the “ghettoisation” of neighbourhoods, even though a certain degree of targeting towards refugees and other vulnerable groups also exists (OECD, 2021^[48]).

Reconstruction examples from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Montenegro and Serbia also show that rehabilitating and rebuilding housing in post-conflict settings is not only a lengthy process but also a costly one, requiring sustainable financing solutions over an extended period. Long-term funding enables authorities to plan strategically and can foster confidence among potential returnees in the viability of rebuilding their lives. In practice, housing reconstruction efforts are typically financed through a range of mechanisms, but in many post-conflict contexts they are heavily reliant on donor support. For example, in the RHP programme, in each participating country the contribution of external donors – primarily the European Union – was at least four times greater than national funding.

To anticipate donor fatigue, and in the face of the sheer scale of the housing needs, it is important to attract other sources of financing early on and ensure a gradual transition toward more autonomous financing models. Having a stable, self-sustaining, long-term funding source for affordable housing is a major issue that many countries have to address even in a peaceful context. Latvia is an example of a country that recently had to seek ways to resolve its general problem of housing affordability. Similarly to Ukraine, it had an under-developed social housing model and sought sustainable ways to finance it. In response, Latvia established a revolving fund scheme – the Housing Affordability Fund – composed of initial capital from the Latvian Recovery and Resilience Plan together with a state loan, while factoring in future loan repayments from developers and a share of the rents paid by tenants of the newly built affordable dwellings. The establishment of the Fund is largely considered a major first step towards boosting investment in affordable housing (OECD, 2023^[49]).

Regulating the private rental market

While waiting for the housing stock to be rebuilt, displaced individuals often have to find housing solutions in the private rental market. Large-scale destruction and displacement can lead to housing rental market imbalances, resulting in rising prices, housing insecurity, a weakening of tenants’ rights, and discrimination against affected populations.

In the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina in the United States in 2005, rental prices in New Orleans increased by 36% in the first year and by 46% within three years, far outpacing income growth, especially for low-income households who were disproportionately affected (Sapat et al., 2011^[50]). The situation was aggravated by the fact that the recovery response overlooked the needs of tenants and non-owners.

Despite early proposals advocating for rental repair programmes and the adaptive reuse of existing housing stock, only 18% of damaged rental units received assistance, compared to 62% of owner-occupied units (Sapat et al., 2011^[50]). This disparity underscores the importance of ensuring that all displaced households, regardless of tenure status, are included in housing recovery efforts, otherwise deepening inequalities within communities. Even if financial housing assistance was provided to counter the situation, it proved ineffective and led to prolonged longer-term instability (Box 5.4).

Box 5.4. When short-term support becomes long-term instability: Lessons from post-Katrina New Orleans

Displaced residents of New Orleans encountered numerous barriers in accessing housing support following the devastation caused by Hurricane Katrina in 2005 (Henrici, Childers and Shaw, 2015^[51]). Many were transitioned from public housing, where rents were income-based and utilities included, into the Housing Choice Voucher Programme. This tenant-based subsidy required displaced persons to secure accommodation in the private rental market. Many landlords were unwilling to participate, and displaced households, unfamiliar with the full costs and procedures of renting privately, struggled to qualify. At the same time, rent and utility costs rose substantially, further burdening families who had previously lived in stable, subsidised housing.

To respond to the prolonged displacement crisis, several federal programmes were introduced. The Disaster Housing Assistance Programme (DHAP), developed by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), provided longer-term rental assistance and case management to over 36 000 households. DHAP did not adjust benefits based on income and was designed to gradually transition households from full assistance to paying market rents. However, unclear eligibility rules and limited guidance meant that many households left the programme early in search of other support. While the case management element was viewed positively, it lacked a focus on employment or skills development, leaving many households without the income stability required for long-term recovery (Buron and Locke, 2013^[52]).

At the same time, the Disaster Voucher Programme (DVP) expanded eligibility to households affected by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, including those already receiving HUD support before the storms. Two years after Katrina, more than 11 000 households in the Gulf region were still receiving what had originally been intended as temporary assistance (Katz, 2008^[53]). Additional Tenant Protection Vouchers were later issued to former residents of demolished public housing developments, with the aim of enabling access to new housing following large-scale redevelopment.

Despite these efforts, residents frequently faced confusion about eligibility, limited access to information, and overlapping forms of support. In some cases, households received duplicate assistance through multiple programmes, reflecting weaknesses in co-ordination and oversight (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, 2008^[54]). Many were also unaware that their former housing developments would not be rebuilt, only learning of demolition plans informally. The sudden shift from publicly managed housing to market-based assistance, combined with administrative barriers, contributed to prolonged housing insecurity for many low-income and displaced families.

Similarly, as a result of the 2023 earthquake in Türkiye and Syria, in Hatay (one of the most affected provinces), rental prices rose substantially. In neighbouring towns just outside the earthquake zone, rents reportedly rose by as much as 100%, largely due to opportunistic price increases by private landlords (International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, 2023^[55]). Importantly, these high prices emerged as a key factor in delaying return and prompting displaced persons to relocate to other

regions (Eraslan, 2024^[56]). In response, the Turkish Government introduced fines to penalise landlords found to be exploiting the crisis.

The particularity of rental market imbalances is that they can be found worldwide even outside emergency contexts. As such, examples of housing market regulations are abundant and some can serve as inspiration in contexts where conflict and disaster have led to long-lasting nationwide imbalances. For example, private housing rental markets are well regulated in the vast majority of OECD countries. In many cases, regulations address rent levels as a tool to ensure longer-term economic sustainability, prevent poverty, combat homelessness, and support social mobility (Salvi del Pero et al., 2016^[46]; United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, 2021^[57]). In Australia, Austria, Canada, Croatia, Denmark, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Sweden and the United States, regulated and non-regulated rents co-exist in the private rental sector (OECD, 2025^[58]). In Germany, rental prices are regulated through a rent index, which calculates the average rent for specific neighbourhoods or districts. This index serves as a benchmark for setting and adjusting rents. Landlords are generally not allowed to increase rents beyond a certain percentage above the local reference rent. Adjustments to rent are often linked to the Consumer Price Index, ensuring that changes reflect broader economic conditions. Additionally, rent increases are usually permitted only once per year, making the process predictable for tenants. These regulations are enforced at both the federal and municipal levels, and the index is updated regularly to reflect current market conditions. In France, since 2018, agglomerations with tight housing markets have piloted a rent control measure, whereby the initial rent levels are determined within a benchmark range. The city of Paris was the first jurisdiction to implement the measure in 2019, followed by several other cities in subsequent years.

The success of these pricing regulations is grounded in the broader housing regulations that define the rights and obligations of landlords and tenants, including landlord registration and written rental contracts (OECD, 2025^[58]). In many OECD countries, enforcement of these regulations is delegated to the municipal level for better efficiency. Many countries have a sophisticated governance structure to implement, enforce, monitor, and improve these regulations, with particular attention paid to non-discrimination and the inclusion of vulnerable populations, such as refugees.

Facilitating the recovery of ownership

The loss or denial of access to homes, land, and property is one of the most common and enduring consequences of conflict-related displacement. The longer the displacement lasts, the higher the risk that returnees will find their property destroyed, requisitioned by the state (for example, for military purposes), or occupied or appropriated. Others face the challenge of having lost legal or informal claims to what was once theirs. These issues make housing, land, and property (HLP) restitution often one of the central priorities of recovery and reconstruction, particularly once conflict is settled. Looking ahead, these issues may become pressing in Ukraine, especially after the war's settlement and in the most heavily damaged areas.

One successful example of addressing the issue is the Dayton Peace Agreement, which enshrined the right of all citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina displaced during the war to return to their homes. To implement this principle, the Property Law Implementation Plan (PLIP) was created to ensure that property rights were recognised and enforceable for everyone (Office of the High Representative, 2000^[59]). PLIP's success was driven by co-ordinated pressure on local authorities to implement property law decisions, combined with support for relocating unlawful occupants and identifying alternative housing options. Authorities also took steps to ensure that those enforcing restitution, including local police and elected officials, were themselves adequately housed. This helped build trust in state institutions and judicial processes among displaced claimants. The regular publication of municipality-level implementation statistics further enhanced transparency and accountability (Poulsen, 2010^[60]). The initiative proved highly effective, with the restitution rate for 200 000 occupied housing units in Bosnia and Herzegovina,

increasing from 21% in its first year to 92% by the fourth year. PLIP remains one of the most recognised achievements in the implementation of Annex 7 of the Dayton Peace Agreement (Serrano, 2015^[61]).

To strengthen restitution efforts globally, the United Nations developed the Pinheiro Principles, which establish key standards to guide HLP restitution for displaced persons (see Box 5.5). These principles reaffirm key human rights standards and outline the responsibilities of states in creating national procedures, institutions, and mechanisms to support fair, accessible, and effective restitution. They also emphasise the need for a process that is transparent, non-discriminatory, and responsive to all affected groups.

Box 5.5. The Pinheiro Principles

The Pinheiro Principles, adopted by the United Nations in 2005, provide a comprehensive normative framework for the restitution of housing, land and property to refugees and displaced persons (UN Sub-Commission on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights, 2005^[62]). The Principles are intended to guide states, local authorities and international partners in developing fair, lawful and inclusive restitution policies and mechanisms in the aftermath of conflict or disaster.

The Principles affirm that all persons, whether displaced internally or externally, and regardless of their legal status, have a right to reclaim housing, land or property from which they were arbitrarily or unlawfully removed. This right applies equally to those who return to their place of origin and to those who do not, underscoring that restitution is a legal entitlement rather than a benefit contingent on return. In cases where restitution is not factually possible, affected persons should be entitled to fair and effective compensation.

The Principles stress the importance of equality and non-discrimination in restitution processes. They place a particular focus on ensuring that women's and girls' rights to housing, land and property are recognised and upheld both in law and in practice.

The Principles also address the rights of tenants and other non-owners following displacement, as well as the situation of secondary occupants who may have taken up residence during the period of displacement.

To make these rights effective, the Principles call for accessible, transparent and timely restitution procedures. States should support these with sufficient resources and, where necessary, provide legal aid. Informal or collective claims mechanisms may also be integrated, provided they align with international standards.

The right to restitution is linked to broader rights, including the right to adequate housing, the peaceful enjoyment of possessions, and freedom of movement. Importantly, restitution should not be used as a means to pressure or accelerate return movements.

Although not legally binding, the Pinheiro Principles have become a widely used international reference in post-conflict recovery and have informed housing and land policies in countries such as Bosnia and Herzegovina, Colombia and Iraq. They provide a rights-based foundation for rebuilding trust, restoring property rights, and supporting long-term reintegration after displacement.

Despite its importance, the practical implementation of restitution is often fraught with difficulties. Land records and civil documentation may have been damaged, destroyed, or never existed, particularly for households with informal or undocumented tenure. Properties may have been transferred without prior formalised agreement. In some contexts, unclear or overlapping legal frameworks create confusion over ownership or use rights. Where return is delayed, property boundaries may become contested, and

families may lose use-rights over time. The presence of secondary occupants further complicates restitution, especially where those now living in the properties have no other place to go. If not carefully managed, these challenges can undermine broader return and reconstruction efforts.

One of the most persistent practical challenges in receiving compensation for damaged housing, and in securing restitution of housing when it has been requisitioned or unlawfully occupied, relates to the documentation required to prove ownership or rights to use or inhabit a property. In Ukraine, as in many displacement contexts, documentation is often lost, destroyed, or left behind during flight. Even where documents are preserved, they may not be legally sufficient to assert ownership, particularly if they are informal, outdated, or issued in the name of a deceased relative.

A 2017 survey conducted by the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) among Syrian refugees in Lebanon, Iraq and Jordan found that while two-thirds of respondents reported having owned their previous residence in Syria, only 17% had access to any form of property documentation while in displacement. Many refugee heads of household perceived themselves as owners, even when the land or housing was formally registered to another member of the family. Nearly 70% of those who reported holding documentation stated that the documents were in someone else's name, often a male relative, which further complicates efforts to verify ownership and pursue restitution claims (NRC, 2017^[63]).

Women often face singular challenges in being recognised as legal heirs or rights-holders. In many contexts, property documentation and land titles are issued in the names of male family members, making it particularly difficult for women to assert their rights in cases of separation, or when the spouse is missing or has died. In Uganda, for example, women and children were especially vulnerable to dispossession and land grabbing, with only 36% of widows in Northern Uganda reporting that they had received the majority of their late husband's assets (World Bank, 2006^[64]; Adelman and Peterman, 2014^[65]). Similar patterns have been observed in other contexts. Following Hurricane Katrina in the United States in 2005, almost none of the low-income African American women had access to HLP documentation necessary to pursue legal remedies (Henrici, Childers and Shaw, 2015^[51]).

Examples of how to address documentation-related barriers include using a broader range of evidence beyond formal ownership titles. In Kosovo, the Housing and Property Claims Commission (HPCC) accepted, and when necessary actively sought, alternative forms of proof to support claims (HPCC, 2007^[66]). These included witness statements, utility bills such as electricity, water and telephone records, photographs, and tax receipts to verify claims when formal documentation was missing or incomplete. This flexible evidentiary approach enabled displaced persons to assert their rights more easily and improved access to restitution procedures. It also allowed authorities to verify claims in situations where official records were partial or contested.

Anticipating possible disputes and judicial bottlenecks

Restitution processes, while essential, almost inevitably give rise to disputes. Conflicting claims, incomplete documentation, and overlapping rights mean that housing, land, and property (HLP) restitution can become highly contested. In such settings, flexibility in evidence requirements, though critical to ensuring access, can also open the door to abuse.

In Kosovo, some individuals exploited the process through fraudulent practices, including the use of forged property titles and false identity documents. Other concerns included the intimidation or corruption of local officials to validate illegitimate claims, unlawful expropriation of property for the benefit of well-connected property developers, and the manipulation of land registries to alter official ownership records (Tawil, 2009^[67]). These experiences highlight that while the acceptance of diverse forms of evidence is critical to ensuring access to restitution, it must be supported by strong verification processes and credible, impartial dispute resolution mechanisms to prevent abuse.

Looking ahead, it is essential to anticipate and prepare for a likely increase in HLP disputes following returns, so that these do not overwhelm judicial systems or exceed the processing capacity of relevant authorities. Equally, unresolved disputes may deter returns, as potential returnees may visit their areas of origin but choose not to return permanently if disputes are not settled in a timely or credible manner.

In the case of Syria, it was estimated in 2022 that the approximately HLP 3 million claims submitted to courts since the start of the conflict in 2011 would require the exclusive work of about 2 000 courts and 1 000 administrative bodies over the following ten years to be processed and resolved. Just six months after the fall of the Assad regime, OCHA noted a dramatic increase in HLP claims and a pressing need for legal assistance to help individuals recover or reconstitute the documentation required to prove property ownership (OCHA, 2025^[68]; Clutterbuck, 2025^[69]).

Limited institutional capacity can hinder restitution efforts. Authorities may face constraints in staffing and co-ordination across levels of government. In Lebanon, for example, efforts to support return after the civil war were slowed by overlapping mandates and weak co-ordination, despite the creation of dedicated institutions and the availability of funding (UN-Habitat, 2025^[70]). Restitution processes may also be hampered by low public trust, insufficient legal assistance, and limited public access to information. These factors highlight the need for HLP restitution frameworks that are legally robust, inclusive, and tailored to the realities on the ground.

Alternative dispute resolution mechanisms, particularly community-based solutions involving customary committees or family networks, often play a prominent role in resolving housing, land and property (HLP) disputes. Their flexibility allows for the resolution of a higher volume of cases and the management of agreements that range from informal to semi-formal arrangements (NRC, 2017^[63]). Their purpose is to address property, inheritance, and family disputes amicably and at low cost, outside the formal court system. While their rulings are generally not legally binding, they are grounded in local customs and mutual consent, fostering social trust in contexts where state institutions lack the technical capacity to resolve each case. Their emergence demonstrates both community resilience and the demand for flexible dispute-resolution mechanisms that can respond to high volumes of claims.

In post-conflict Uganda, local councils functioned as grassroots justice providers, resolving disputes over land, inheritance, and property through locally accessible, low-cost mechanisms (Khadiagala, 2001^[71]). These elected committees typically relied on a combination of customary norms and informal procedures to mediate conflicts. For female returnees, especially widows, local councils offered an alternative to traditionally male-dominated dispute resolution forums, enabling them to assert claims to land and housing that were previously out of reach. By decentralising dispute resolution and embedding it within familiar community settings, they helped to democratise access to justice. Although the effectiveness of local councils declined over time due to limited formal authority and increasing elite capture, other community-based dispute resolution approaches continued to emerge (see Box 5.6).

Box 5.6. Collaborative dispute resolution in Uganda's West Nile region

The Norwegian Refugee Council's Information, Counselling and Legal Assistance (ICLA) programme developed a decentralised model of collaborative dispute resolution in Uganda's West Nile region (NRC, 2024^[72]). This approach was tailored to settings marked by displacement and overlapping claims, and recognised that formal court processes are often perceived by refugees as inaccessible due to their length, cost and complexity.

The collaborative dispute resolution model includes structured training for local leaders, representatives of the Office of the Prime Minister, and key stakeholders from both refugee and host communities. Training covers core topics such as HLP conflict analysis, dispute resolution procedures, roles and responsibilities of community actors, and the promotion of women's HLP rights. The goal is to enable participants not only to mediate disputes effectively but also to share this knowledge within their communities.

By empowering local leaders to manage disputes at scale and monitoring their engagement through regular follow-up by ICLA paralegals, the model fosters local ownership, broad outreach and long-term sustainability. Where power imbalances arise between disputing parties, the ICLA team intervenes directly to help ensure fair and equitable mediation.

At the same time, their limitations should not be overlooked. Without formal recognition, such mechanisms remain vulnerable to political interference and may lack the consistency and authority needed to guarantee durable solutions. If agreements are not anchored in formal legal frameworks, there is a risk that disputes may resurface, particularly as returnees seek to secure long-term housing stability or to transfer property across generations. The most effective approaches therefore tend to combine the accessibility and community legitimacy of informal mechanisms with pathways to formal adjudication, ensuring both immediate conflict resolution and lasting legal certainty.

Looking ahead: Rebuilding areas

Housing reconstruction efforts following displacement often focus on rebuilding in areas where displaced populations have settled. However, returning to one's place of origin does not necessarily ensure sustainable livelihoods or long-term recovery (see also Box 5.7). In some cases, reconstruction may take place in new locations, particularly where more viable labour opportunities are available. In post-conflict contexts, these areas may differ from returnees' original homes, and not all returnees may be able or willing to return to them. In such situations, governments not only lead physical reconstruction, but also conduct labour market assessments and engage with potential returnees to understand their skills, needs and aspirations. These insights can guide decisions on where to prioritise housing provision, ensuring that it is aligned with access to public services and sustainable livelihood opportunities.

Box 5.7. Transitional communities in the aftermath of the Fukushima disaster in Japan

The long-term goal of returning to Fukushima led to the creation of transitional towns, sometimes referred to as “second towns” or “long-term refuge in waiting”. These were community-based, temporary resettlement models established in host municipalities. They allowed displaced communities to remain together and access public services while awaiting the possibility of return, which in some cases could take decades.

This approach resonated particularly with younger evacuees from towns such as Naraha. The mayor of Iitate Village then advanced this idea by proposing a dual-residency registry, enabling residents to remain legally connected to both their current and original municipalities. This gave rise to the dual residency (or half return) temporary solution, which enabled evacuees to resettle in nearby cities but continue commuting to work in their areas of origin during the day (Mosneaga, 2015^[73]). This became the case also for those in temporary housing sites in Fukushima urban and rural areas such as Date City, which became semi-permanent bases particularly for young families, whose children also commuted to school in their original home regions (Itonaga, 2014^[74]). Even severely affected municipalities in the radiation “red zone”, including Futaba, Ōkuma, Namie and Tomioka, expressed interest in such solutions.

Bangladesh provides a cautionary example. Following Cyclone Sidr in 2007, the government and international partners engaged in a reconstruction effort, yet a more complex challenge emerged in restoring income sources in areas where livelihoods were closely linked to natural resources. In the cyclone-affected coastal zones, the destruction of farmland, fishing equipment and forest access left many traditional subsistence activities no longer viable. While approximately 90% of displaced households expressed willingness to rebuild their homes, the absence of economic security meant that restoring housing in environmentally depleted areas could not ensure long-term sustainability and led to re-migration.

In the Western Balkans, the Regional Housing Programme (RHP) aimed not only to restore homes but also to support livelihoods. It helped returnees to establish small home-based businesses, such as catering services, hair salons, and small-scale farming in their communities of origin. These efforts were supported by additional livelihood assistance provided by non-governmental organisations outside the RHP, including the provision of greenhouses and farming equipment. Under the RHP, close to 3 000 contracts were signed with approximately 200 companies across four participating countries, contributing to job creation and generating broader economic benefits in the affected regions (Regional Housing Programme, 2023^[75]).

These examples highlight that while the reconstruction of permanent housing is a vital component of return, policies must address the full scope of livelihood restoration. Achieving sustainable reintegration requires an integrated approach that combines adequate housing with meaningful opportunities for income generation and self-reliance.

Promoting employment and entrepreneurship opportunities

What are the key considerations for policymakers in Ukraine?

- **Link training to recovery needs.** Map returnee skills and focus retraining on sectors with labour shortages. Collaborate with employers to ensure clear pathways into available jobs.
- **Adapt employment support to diverse returnee profiles.** Provide targeted measures for women, youth, older persons, persons with disabilities, and skilled professionals considering return.
- **Promote entrepreneurship before and after return.** Offer training, mentoring and business support to enable self-employment, especially in areas with limited wage jobs.
- **Facilitate access to finance and incentives.** Support returnee entrepreneurs through grants, loans, guarantees, and targeted business incentives to stimulate local recovery.

Re-establishing livelihoods is a critical pillar of sustainable reintegration, requiring comprehensive support that extends beyond the reconstruction of housing. While housing provides the physical foundation for return, it is often access to employment and income-generating opportunities that determines whether displaced persons can return and remain.

For many, the decision to return is influenced not only by the safety conditions in their place of origin, but also by the availability of sustainable livelihoods upon arrival. Governments and communities frequently consider the return of displaced populations essential to post-conflict or post-disaster recovery, particularly in restoring human capital and revitalising local economies. Yet returnees often face significant challenges in accessing the labour market. Skills mismatches, shifts in the economic landscape, and structural barriers for groups such as women, youth, and persons with disabilities may hinder successful reintegration. Without targeted support, many returnees may struggle to find decent employment or risk falling into the NEET category (not in employment, education or training), particularly among younger cohorts entering the labour market for the first time.

In response to these challenges, governments and their partners have introduced a wide range of policies and initiatives. This section draws on international experience to highlight three priority areas: aligning employment support with local recovery needs, promoting inclusive labour market access following return, and supporting entrepreneurship and self-employment as pathways to reintegration.

Link employment with local recovery

Whether displacement is caused by conflict or natural disasters, it often results in damage that extends well beyond the immediate destruction of homes and infrastructure. It can profoundly disrupt local economies, labour markets and employment opportunities. Productive land, business premises and distribution networks may be severely affected, and the economic sectors that once provided the majority of jobs may no longer be viable. Return and reintegration efforts must therefore take account of the changed economic landscape.

The experience of Aceh, Indonesia, following the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami, illustrates how local labour markets can shift over the course of recovery. The tsunami caused widespread devastation, including the loss of over 150 000 lives. Fishing had previously been the dominant economic activity in the region, but the resumption of this sector was dependent on the reconstruction of ports and other infrastructure, much of it supported through international aid (Nose, 2019^[76]). In the immediate post-disaster period, labour-intensive public works created short-term jobs in a range of sectors, but the construction sector expanded particularly fast. Over time, many former fishers, particularly those with higher levels of education or

affected by trauma, moved into other sectors, contributing to more lasting changes in the labour market (Nose, 2019^[76]; Vidyattama, Merdikawati and Tadjoeeddin, 2021^[77]).

Employment support for returnees and local communities must reflect these new realities rather than replicate pre-displacement conditions. In post-conflict and post-disaster contexts, economic recovery is often accompanied by rapid shifts in the types of skills demanded, which is why access to upskilling and reskilling opportunities, particularly in sectors with current labour shortages, is essential. Yet both employers and workers may struggle to adapt to these changes. Businesses often face uncertainty and limited resources to invest in training, while workers may lack the financial means or confidence to retrain without a clear prospect of stable employment. For displaced persons, these barriers are especially high, as many cannot afford to interrupt existing income streams or relocate for training opportunities.

The sheer scale of economic disruption in Ukraine, combined with prolonged periods of unemployment and underemployment linked to displacement, means that skill development cannot be addressed in an ad hoc manner. Skilling, reskilling and upskilling initiatives must be planned systematically, grounded in evidence and responsive to labour market realities. They should recognise the evolving needs of employers while also allowing flexibility for workers to participate without jeopardising their livelihoods. A balanced approach that connects training provision to local economic demand can help ensure that such programmes contribute meaningfully to both individual recovery and wider reconstruction efforts.

One area where both employer interest and potential for impact are particularly high in post-conflict settings is in technical and vocational education and training (TVET). During recovery and reconstruction, labour demand often rises in technical and construction sectors. To ensure that labour market support effectively meets the needs of local recovery, opportunities to access TVET or targeted courses that facilitate rapid upskilling and reskilling should be made available to both returnees and local populations, while integrating other complementary components of livelihood provision in line with the realities on the ground.

A large-scale initiative in Rwanda between 2010 and 2014 demonstrates the potential of combining TVET with complementary support. Implemented by IOM and the Japanese Ministry for Disaster Management and Refugee Affairs, the programme assisted over 13 000 beneficiaries, including Rwandan returnees and vulnerable members of high-return areas (Gedde, 2012^[78]; Reliefweb, 2016^[79]). Beneficiaries received vocational training alongside support such as livestock and construction materials, enabling both income generation and housing rehabilitation. The programme led to an average income increase of 78% for direct participants, with 63% reporting improved living conditions (IOM, 2015^[80]). To ensure continuity and sustainability, a training-of-trainers component was introduced, enabling 184 instructors to pass on their skills to an estimated 1 500 additional returnees and host community members (IOM, 2015^[80]). The project was eventually handed over to the Government of Rwanda, marking a transition to national ownership (IOM, 2014^[81]; IOM Rwanda, 2015^[82]).

Investments in upskilling and reskilling need not wait until return has taken place. In fact, they can be particularly valuable when initiated during displacement. One of the most persistent challenges facing displaced persons is long-term unemployment, which is commonly defined as being out of work for more than 26 weeks or, in some cases, for more than a year. Prolonged unemployment is associated with a range of negative effects, including heightened stress, anxiety and depression, the emergence of physical and mental health issues, and declining self-confidence. It also tends to contribute to skill erosion and reinforce social stigma, all of which reduce the likelihood of re-employment (Juncker, 2016^[83]). These patterns are well documented even in stable contexts and are often exacerbated in situations of displacement. For this reason, supporting access to employment services and training during displacement can help mitigate the longer-term consequences of inactivity and facilitate more effective reintegration upon return.

The Step Forward to Return project in Serbia offers a practical example of how employment-focussed interventions delivered prior to return can enhance the sustainability of reintegration. The programme supported IDPs through enrolment in TVET programmes, the provision of income-generation grants to

families, and targeted entrepreneurship training. By addressing employment barriers before relocation, the initiative helped equip participants with market-relevant skills, enabling them to generate income immediately upon return. Providing such support in advance ensures that returnees are not only physically relocated but are also economically prepared to reintegrate into their communities, thereby reducing dependence on social assistance and strengthening their long-term prospects (IDC, 2025^[84]).

The URA programme, jointly implemented by the governments of Kosovo and Germany, provides targeted support to Kosovar returnees both before and after their return. In selected Länder in Germany, individuals considering return can access financial assistance to help cover the costs of TVET, as well as receive job counselling and psychosocial support to prepare for reintegration. Upon return to Kosovo, responsibility for delivering these support measures is transferred to the relevant authorities in Priština, ensuring continuity of assistance throughout the reintegration process.

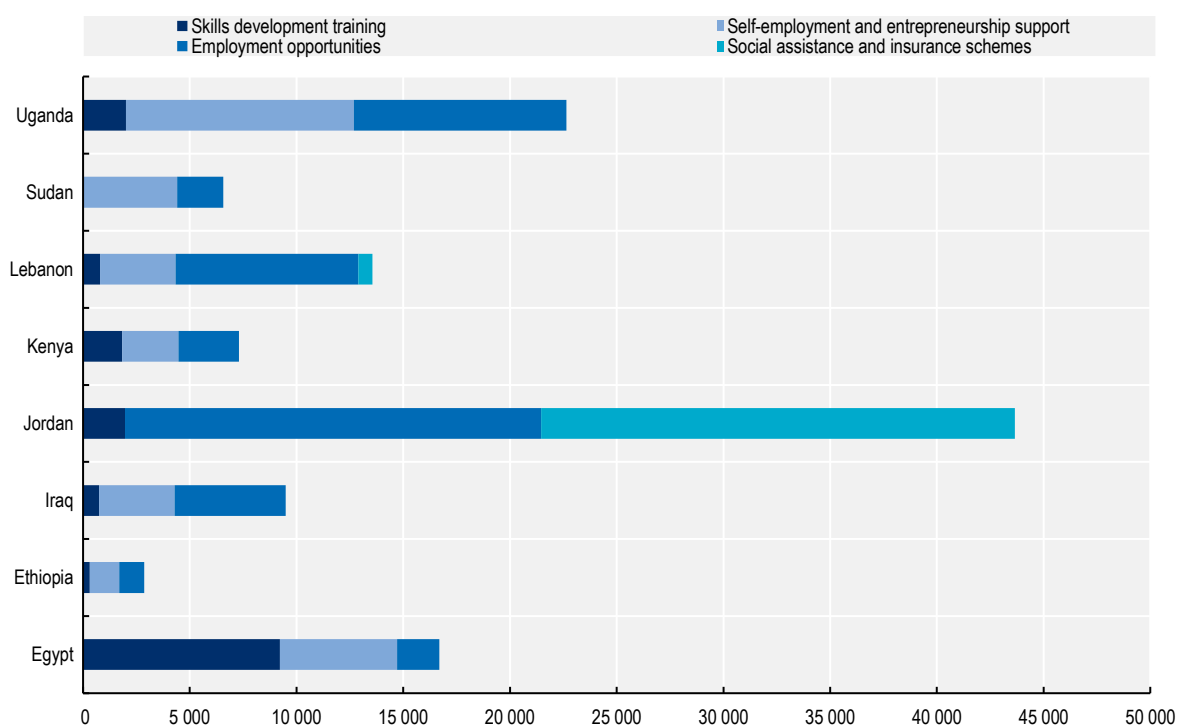
An important consideration in supporting returnees is the recognition of skills and training acquired abroad or in other regions. Returnees who have completed education or vocational training, or who have gained work experience in different sectors, may possess valuable and transferable skills. However, without formal recognition by national authorities or informal acceptance by employers, they may face barriers to entering the formal labour market. In many cases, a combined approach is needed, supporting both the certification of prior learning and access to additional training to address any remaining skills gaps.

The Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) programme implemented by the ILO in Jordan illustrates how such measures can improve access to formal employment. The programme has supported 13 550 individuals – including 10 795 Syrian refugees and 2 755 Jordanians – by providing training and certifying newly acquired or previously held skills in sectors such as construction, confectionery and garment production. Notably, 45% of beneficiaries were women, a significant achievement in light of the male-dominated nature of the construction sector. (ILO, 2025^[85]; UNHCR, 2021^[86]).

Aligning employment support with local economic recovery efforts offers additional benefits beyond improving livelihoods. It can help strengthen returnees' attachment to their place of return, foster social cohesion, and accelerate the broader recovery process, objectives that often reflect the priorities of national and local authorities encouraging return. The PROSPECTS programme, implemented by the International Labour Organization (ILO) across eight countries in the Middle East and North Africa and East Africa, seeks to enhance how governments and stakeholders, including the private sector, respond to forced displacement and support sustainable reintegration and economic recovery (ILO, 2025^[87]). The programme provides an integrated framework built on four pillars: education and learning, economic inclusion, protection and social protection, and critical infrastructure development. Notably, PROSPECTS is situated at the humanitarian – development – peace nexus, aiming to move beyond short-term responses and deliver more durable, locally adapted solutions for both displaced populations and their host communities. Its interventions are tailored to the specific needs and institutional contexts of each participating country (see Figure 5.2 for Phase I results and Annex 5.D).

A key element of the PROSPECTS programme is the Employment-Intensive Investment Programme (EIIP), which focusses on labour-intensive public works that address immediate community needs while generating short- and medium-term employment for both displaced and host populations. As a cross-cutting intervention, the EIIP not only helps to close infrastructure gaps but also creates economic opportunities at the local level. It enables individuals to develop practical skills, contribute to local economic revitalisation, support emergency response efforts, and gain valuable experience within the labour market. Although primarily designed for refugee and IDP-hosting contexts, the EIIP model has been used in return settings as well.

Figure 5.2. Results of the first phase of the PROSPECTS programme (2019-2024)



Source: Selective compilation of indicators based on results from ILO exclusively of the first phase of the programme (2019-2024), available on ILO (2024^[88]), *PROSPECTS Monitoring Dashboard*, <https://app.powerbi.com/view?r=eyJrJoiZGNjZjg0YTAtMDEwNC00MDhMLTk4MGMtODAxMTBkMTc4OTUzIiwidCI6ImQ0OWIwN2NhLTlzMDEtNGU3Yy1iMmNiLWUxMjEyNzg1Mjg1MCIslmMiOjI9>.

While public authorities and international organisations often play a central role in the early stages of reintegration programmes, long-term employment opportunities and sustainable livelihoods are typically generated by the private sector. Moreover, the government alone cannot meet the scale of upskilling and reskilling needs that accompany recovery and reconstruction needed in Ukraine. It is therefore essential to ensure the close involvement of the private sector in upskilling and reskilling, hiring returnees and recognising the value of the skills and experience they may bring.

This cannot however be assumed to happen on its own, and a nationwide approach is required to foster an environment in which employers have clear incentives to invest in workplace training and to view skills development as a productive long-term investment. Creating such conditions is essential for building a more resilient labour market and ensuring that both businesses and workers are equipped to adapt to structural economic change.

Engaging the private sector is key to creating sustainable livelihoods for returnees, but incentives must be designed with care. Experience from OECD countries shows that governments can encourage employers to invest in training and recruitment through a range of measures. These include wage and training subsidies, as in Ireland, and tax incentives, as used in Germany. Other approaches involve loans offered at preferential rates, such as those under Korea's programme or the EU's Skills and Education Guarantee Pilot. Some countries, including Italy, have introduced training levies to support collective investment in skills, while France has established individual learning account schemes that are transferable between jobs and accessible to all workers, including the self-employed (OECD, 2021^[89]). In Ireland, companies can also include payback clauses in employment contracts, allowing them to recover part of their investment in training if a worker leaves shortly after completing it.

Ukraine could explore similar mechanisms to encourage greater investment in skills within its labour market. Specific incentives could also be introduced for employers who recruit and train displaced Ukrainians, particularly those returning from abroad, by developing incentives that combine skills development with clear pathways to employment. For multinational companies that operate both in Ukraine and in host countries where many displaced Ukrainians currently reside, such schemes could be designed to facilitate recruitment abroad with a view to encouraging intra-company transfers and long-term employment in Ukraine upon return. Encouraging this type of employer engagement can also help retain talent within company networks, strengthen business continuity, and create more predictable pathways for the reintegration of skilled workers.

Governments can also turn to alternative or complementary tools, such as incorporating social inclusion criteria into public procurement processes. For instance, contractors bidding for public tenders can be required to employ a specified number or share of returnees alongside non-displaced local residents, thereby expanding employment opportunities for everyone while advancing broader reintegration objectives.

Businesses can also be encouraged to support the employment of displaced persons and returnees through non-financial measures. Public hiring pledges, for example, can motivate companies to commit voluntarily to recruiting individuals from specific groups. A notable example is the Tent Partnership for Refugees, an initiative that has mobilised the private sector to support the economic integration of refugees. Since 2016, the initiative has worked with over 500 companies globally, including Amazon, Starbucks, IKEA and Unilever, to secure commitments to hire, train, and support refugees in their workforce. In 2022, the Tent Partnership introduced a dedicated programme and set of guidelines to support companies in hiring Ukrainians displaced abroad. This experience provides a useful reference point for designing similar efforts to facilitate the employment of returnees (Tent Partnership for Refugees; DLA Piper, 2022^[90]). Moreover, many of the participating companies already have operations in Ukraine or plan to expand their presence, which could open further opportunities for Ukrainian refugees hired abroad who may wish to transfer their employment within the same company to Ukraine. By adapting these models to return contexts, it is possible to strengthen private sector engagement in reintegration and expand access to meaningful employment for returnees.

Promote inclusive labour market access

A key objective of employment support in return contexts should be to promote inclusivity and equal access across the labour market. This applies not only to balancing opportunities between returnees and members of the local community, but also to ensuring that no particular group is either systematically favoured or excluded. If support measures are perceived as prioritising one group over another, this can risk undermining social cohesion and generating resentment. At the same time, it is important to recognise that different groups may face distinct challenges and barriers, which merit tailored attention and targeted interventions.

To enhance labour force participation and reduce the risk of long-term unemployment, employment programmes must reflect the diverse profiles and needs of returnees. One group requiring particular support is young people whose final years of schooling and entry into the labour market occurred during displacement. These circumstances may have resulted in gaps in education, limited exposure to work experience, and a lack of access to career guidance. As a result, some young returnees may fall into the NEET category. Programmes must be sufficiently flexible to respond to these challenges by offering targeted skills development, career counselling, and psychosocial support to help them navigate the transition into employment and overcome uncertainty in the labour market.

To address the specific needs of NEET youth, those with limited prior work experience, or individuals who have never participated in the labour market of their country of origin, the PROSPECTS programme has introduced Job Search Clubs (JSCs). This group-based model offers a practical and accessible way to

support young people in their transition into employment. Unlike traditional training programmes, JSCs consist of short, intensive sessions that help participants identify job opportunities, improve their CVs, practice interview techniques, and provide mutual support throughout the job search process. The model places strong emphasis on peer learning, behavioural activation, and ongoing coaching, which often continues informally beyond the initial sessions. Within the PROSPECTS framework, JSCs have been tailored to different country contexts and embedded in public employment services, TVET systems, and youth strategies. As a low-cost and adaptable intervention, JSCs have proved effective in tackling youth unemployment and promoting social cohesion between displaced and host community youth.

Another group disproportionately represented among displaced Ukrainians is women. Some of the challenges they faced during displacement, including care responsibilities, exposure to exploitation, and work in the informal economy (OECD, 2023^[91]), are likely to continue upon return. This highlights the importance of gender-sensitive and targeted measures to support their reintegration into the labour market. These efforts should extend beyond the returnee population and contribute more broadly to improving labour market participation among women in Ukraine. Key priorities could include expanding access to childcare, removing structural barriers to employment, and supporting women's entrepreneurship.

Moreover, experience from other recovery and reconstruction settings shows that well-designed interventions can help women enter new sectors where labour shortages have emerged. In Iraq, for example, the ILO worked in partnership with Erbil Polytechnic University and with the tourism and antiquities authorities to introduce training in culturally significant areas such as stone paving, clay brick building, and other professions. These sectors, traditionally male-dominated, have become increasingly accessible to women. The training programmes are delivered alongside formal certification, equipping women with marketable skills in the region (ILO, 2023^[92]). This and similar initiatives across Iraq have aimed not only to create employment and contribute to reconstruction, but also to promote more inclusive workplaces and challenge traditional gender roles. The ILO has also involved local governments and communities in programme delivery, including by training engineers from local authorities to supervise activities on the ground, thereby strengthening local ownership and institutional capacity.

Yet inclusive labour market access also needs a geographical dimension, ensuring that reskilling, upskilling, and employment opportunities are accessible across the country and not concentrated in specific regions, such as capital cities. Returnees have a right to return to their home and home region, even if options elsewhere in the territory should also be available to them. This means that livelihood opportunities should be made available also under reconstruction taking place at different speeds in different places.

Making training opportunities more accessible outside major urban centres is therefore essential for inclusive recovery and reintegration. This is particularly important for returnees who face barriers such as distance, limited mobility, inadequate transport infrastructure, or other socio-economic constraints. In Uganda, mobile TVET units have proven to be an effective way of addressing such challenges. Under the Refugee and Host Community Access and Innovation in Skills for Employment (RAISE) programme, existing facilities such as local schools were used as training centres. This allowed skills development to reach individuals who could not or did not wish to relocate to urban areas, especially women and those with caregiving responsibilities. The decentralised model led to participation levels that exceeded expectations by 32%, with particularly strong engagement among vulnerable groups (ANCHOR, 2023^[93]).

Support entrepreneurship and self-employment among returnees

In parallel to promoting wage employment, entrepreneurship and self-employment can serve as important pathways for returnees and displaced persons seeking to rebuild their lives. These options are particularly relevant in areas where formal employment opportunities remain limited or where conditions may not support immediate job creation. By combining entrepreneurial skills with vocational skills, returnees can establish new income sources and reduce dependence on often scarce wage employment.

When adequately supported, small-scale business ventures can also help revitalise local economies. They can create additional jobs and services, benefiting not only returnees but also members of the host communities who may continue to face economic challenges. The dual role of entrepreneurship as both a coping strategy in the absence of formal jobs and a contributor to local development highlights the need for integrated support programmes. Such programmes should aim to build individual business capacity while also addressing structural gaps in employment provision.

One of the most significant barriers to entrepreneurship is limited access to financing. In Pakistan, for example, while up to 57% of returnees expressed a desire to start a business, fewer than 25% had sufficient savings or access to capital to act on these plans (Farooq and Arif, 2023^[94]). This underscores the importance of targeted support initiatives such as grants, start-up capital and pre-return business counselling or training.

In most cases, financial support to returnees looking to start their own businesses is provided through relatively small grants. The “Reintegrate II” project in Serbia, for example, offers pre-return support to individuals interested in establishing small enterprises in their former communities. Under this initiative, beneficiaries received grants of up to EUR 3 000 to launch their businesses before returning. This was complemented by additional reintegration assistance upon their arrival, contributing to more stable and sustainable reintegration outcomes. In contrast, programmes targeting potential returnees from the diaspora or from among economic migrants may be able to offer more extensive financial incentives or tax-related benefits, as will be further discussed later in the chapter.

Social enterprises can also offer a valuable model for creating employment opportunities for returning displaced persons. By combining economic activity with social objectives, these enterprises not only promote entrepreneurship but also help to strengthen the local business environment. Although they may not always be highly competitive in purely economic terms, their broader contributions, including the provision of essential services and the reinforcement of social capital, make them an important complement to traditional labour market mechanisms.

Micro-franchising initiatives in Haiti, such as V’ice Haiti, illustrate the potential of the social and solidarity economy in addressing both livelihood needs and service delivery gaps (Blumenthal, 2019^[95]). These models generate income opportunities for low-income populations while delivering affordable goods to underserved communities. By combining the flexibility of self-employment with the structured support of a franchisor and a last-mile distribution model, social micro-franchising can reduce risks for individual entrepreneurs, broaden economic participation, and help strengthen local service provision.

Worker co-operatives represent another form of enterprise that can support entrepreneurs who may lack the resources to start a business independently. By pooling efforts and resources, individuals can pursue shared objectives and overcome financial barriers. In Spain, the Mondragon Corporation co-operative played a significant role in restoring employment and stimulating economic development in the Basque region after the Spanish Civil War (OECD, 2023^[96]). Beyond their potential to generate employment, modern co-operative movements often bring together a more diverse range of stakeholders and place greater emphasis on promoting the general interest. This extends beyond the traditional focus on serving the mutual interests of members with similar professional or sectoral backgrounds (OECD, 2023^[96]).

In this context, the social and solidarity economy offers promising avenues for inclusive development. With appropriate government support, including subsidies, tax incentives, and regulatory flexibility, such models can help create sustainable employment opportunities for returnees, particularly in fragile or post-conflict settings where more community-oriented economic structures are needed.

Box 5.8. Fostering female participation in green entrepreneurship in Türkiye: The SEECO and SOGREEN projects

Since 2021, the Social Entrepreneurship, Empowerment, and Cohesion Project (SEECO) in Türkiye has supported over 4 000 women and young people from both refugee and host communities across 11 provinces. The project has provided targeted entrepreneurship training and subgrants to 1 100 women entrepreneurs, with 73% of these grants awarded to women-led enterprises operating in sectors that contribute to the green transition. In parallel, SEECO has established 14 community facilities, with plans to develop 76 more. These centres offer essential services such as childcare, safe transportation, and co-working spaces, directly addressing the structural barriers that limit women's participation in economic activity.

In a context where women's labour market participation remains below 40% and access to credit is limited, SEECO provides an important model for enabling women's entrepreneurship and linking it to environmental sustainability objectives.

Building on SEECO's success, the Socially Inclusive Green Transition Project (SOGREEN) was launched in 2025. SOGREEN will provide reimbursable financing to more than 1 800 small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), 60% of which are expected to be women-led or women-owned. It will also offer incubation and acceleration grants to over 3 000 entrepreneurs, maintaining a similar proportion of women beneficiaries. Importantly, SOGREEN is designed to include returnees as part of Türkiye's broader recovery and reconstruction efforts following the 2023 earthquake, enabling their participation in economic revitalisation.

As Ukraine seeks to support women returnees and vulnerable groups in the aftermath of displacement and conflict, the SEECO and SOGREEN projects offer a practical and scalable framework. By combining entrepreneurship support with green and inclusive development priorities, and by addressing critical barriers to participation, these initiatives demonstrate how targeted support can be embedded into broader recovery strategies. Their financing structure also offers valuable insights: SEECO began with a USD 48.04 million grant from the European Union Facility for Refugees in Türkiye (FRiT), while SOGREEN is backed by a USD 400 million loan from the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD), providing a path towards long-term sustainability and national ownership.

Source: World Bank (2025^[97]), *Women at the Heart of Change: Shaping Entrepreneurship and Green Innovation in Türkiye*, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/results/2025/02/20/women-at-the-heart-of-change-shaping-entrepreneurship-and-green-innovation-in-turkiye>.

Ensuring access to public services and safety nets

What are the key considerations for policymakers in Ukraine?

- **Prepare public services for possible surges in demand.** Returns can place an additional strain on schools, health facilities and welfare offices. Adjusting capacity where necessary and investing in service delivery staff will be critical to maintain service quality.
- **Build local capacity and information systems.** Training municipal officials, improving co-ordination and developing accessible one-stop digital and in-person platforms will ensure returnees can navigate services effectively.
- **Ensure fairness in public assistance but acknowledge that returnees have different needs.** Assistance should be provided on the basis of need and integrated into mainstream systems to avoid perceptions of preferential treatment, while still addressing the specific barriers faced by returnees.
- **Strengthen portability of pensions.** Alongside negotiating international arrangements, Ukraine should consider establishing unilateral schemes that allow displaced persons to maintain or expand contributions to domestic social protection systems while abroad.

Access to public services and social protection systems is fundamental to the viability of return and reintegration. For those considering a return, confidence that they will be able to rely on healthcare, education, pensions and other forms of social support is often as important as physical security or housing. These systems offer not only essential services but also reassurance of continuity and fairness, which can significantly influence decisions about return and long-term reintegration.

The nature of challenges differs between those displaced internally and those who have lived abroad. Internally displaced persons have remained within Ukraine's institutional framework, with their needs visible to the state and their entitlements maintained within the existing system. By contrast, returnees from abroad will face the task of re-entering Ukrainian public services after an extended period in host countries. Questions such as how children will reintegrate into schools, how health records can be transferred, or how pension contributions abroad can be recognised are likely to come to the fore. Addressing these issues will be essential to ensure a smooth and equitable transition, particularly given the considerable efforts host countries have made to integrate Ukrainians into their own public systems at the outset of displacement.

Experience from other contexts shows that ensuring access to services and safety nets requires action across several interconnected areas. Anticipating and reinforcing the capacity of public services is crucial, particularly in post-conflict situations where infrastructure and staffing are already fragile. At the same time, reintegration support must address the specific needs of returnees in a way that remains fair and inclusive, avoiding perceptions of preferential treatment. Equally important is ensuring that returnees have clear and accessible information on how to navigate public services and exercise their entitlements, which helps to foster trust and support effective reintegration. Finally, continuity of entitlements across borders is also essential, as the portability of pensions can help prevent the loss of rights and encourage voluntary and sustainable returns.

Anticipate possible changes in demand on public services

Returns of displaced persons can increase demands on public services. Health services, schools, social assistance, housing offices and local administrations are often the first to experience strain as they respond to a sudden spike in returnees seeking support. Anticipating these pressures is not only a matter of service

delivery for the entire population but also of maintaining trust, preventing inequalities, and safeguarding social cohesion during a sensitive period of reintegration.

The specific conditions of return flows play an important role. While there have been cases where displaced people have returned in large numbers over a short period of time due to return programmes in host countries or sudden expulsion orders, as with Afghan refugees from Iran and Pakistan, returns in the case of Ukraine are unlikely to follow this pattern. Unlike displacement, which often occurs suddenly and under chaotic conditions, returns are expected to be more planned and gradual. Individuals are likely to take time to assess conditions, secure accommodation, identify schools for their children, and in some cases arrange employment before moving back. This means that governments, in principle, have the opportunity to plan ahead. Anticipating increases in demand and preparing the ground for them is therefore not only possible but essential. Effective preparation requires early investment in planning, the mobilisation of additional capacity, and mechanisms to ensure that both returnees and host communities have equitable access to services.

Area-based capacity-building approaches have been utilised in several contexts. In Afghanistan, UNHCR worked with national and local stakeholders to establish 80 Priority Areas of Return and Reintegration (PARRs). These areas were strategically selected based on the concentration of returnees and internally displaced persons (IDPs), as well as on their absorption capacity and the availability of existing services. Within each PARR, projects seek to improve access to education, healthcare, shelter and livelihoods, while also supporting community-based initiatives that strengthen public services as a whole. In parallel, cash and in-kind assistance is provided to the most vulnerable families to help them cope with the immediate pressures associated with returns (UNHCR, 2025^[98]). The PARRs exemplify an inclusive, area-based “whole-of-community” approach that supports both returnees and host populations. Their design recognises that sustainable reintegration depends on strengthening services for all, rather than targeting returnees in isolation.

Uganda offers a further example of how area-based planning can reinforce local service systems under strain. Through the ReHoPE framework and a dedicated National Education Response Plan, additional resources were channelled to districts facing rapid population increases (Government of Uganda and United Nations, 2017^[99]). Rather than establishing parallel structures, the approach sought to strengthen mainstream education and health services for both newcomers and residents. By aligning with the national development plan and securing multi-year financing, Uganda was able to maintain service quality during periods of demographic pressure while avoiding perceptions of preferential treatment.

Bosnia and Herzegovina developed a complementary approach to managing simultaneous returns to fragile municipalities after the conflict. In partnership with UNHCR, authorities established a network of legal aid and information centres and created the Return Application Database System (UNHCR, 2004^[100]). The database offered planners forward-looking data on the likely timing and destinations of return movements, enabling them to anticipate pressure points in housing offices, schools and local welfare systems. At the same time, the legal aid centres channelled people to the appropriate services, reducing administrative backlogs and ensuring that returnees had better access to support.

In Iraq, the government, together with IOM, developed tools to map service capacity in areas of large-scale returns. The Return Index and accompanying governorate profiles track conditions across indicators for basic services, livelihoods and social cohesion (IOM, 2025^[101]). The Index aggregates 16 indicators into two severity scales: one for livelihoods and basic services and another for safety and social cohesion. This evidence-based approach provides insights into the severity of conditions in return locations and has enabled the prioritisation of investments where schools, clinics, water supply and civil documentation services were most under strain. By aligning the pace of returns with the absorptive capacity of local systems, the tool has supported more sustainable reintegration planning.

The experiences of Iraq and Bosnia and Herzegovina underscore the importance of data-driven approaches to anticipate and manage the pressures that accompany returns. Since the time of the Balkan

Wars, advances in technology and data systems now allow for more dynamic forms of monitoring. Tools such as IOM's Return Index which relies on structured expert interviews to assess capacities across regions can provide valuable insights but could increasingly be complemented by automated data collection and digital platforms. Harnessing such tools would enable authorities not only to track evolving demands on schools, healthcare, housing and social services in real time but also to respond more swiftly and allocate resources more effectively. Developing such monitoring capacities is therefore an important dimension of planning for sustainable reintegration. While the Return Index has already been applied on an ad hoc basis in Ukraine, there will be a need for more consistent monitoring of capacities once wider returns become feasible and are encouraged.

Finally, the capacity of national systems to absorb returns will depend not only on infrastructure but also on the ability of local and regional authorities to manage the pressures administratively. Without targeted investments in training, staffing and institutional strengthening, even well-designed policies may falter when implemented on the ground. Preparing officials, enhancing co-ordination across agencies and ensuring that resources are equitably distributed will be decisive in determining whether public services can cope with the demands of return flows in a way that supports stability, fairness and long-term reintegration.

Ensure targeted support for returnees where necessary

Reintegration requires not only strong public services but, in some cases, targeted support to address the particular barriers returnees may face. These may include challenges with documentation, education, healthcare continuity and psychosocial well-being. Providing such support in a needs-based manner helps ensure that returnees can reintegrate without disadvantage, while avoiding perceptions of unfair preferential treatment. When carefully balanced, targeted measures can complement broader public services and reinforce fairness and cohesion within communities.

Education of children is a particularly sensitive area. Returnee households, especially those from abroad, may require additional support to re-enter the school system. Children often return with diverse educational experiences, shaped by different curricula, languages of instruction and teaching methods. Some may have faced long interruptions in their schooling or difficulties in adapting to new environments while displaced. On return, they may encounter barriers to the recognition of prior learning, uncertainty over grade placement, or even requirements to repeat a school year. During the Ukrainian displacement crisis, many host countries invested considerable effort to ensure that Ukrainian children could enter their schools quickly and smoothly (OECD, 2023^[102]). Ensuring an equally efficient re-entry into Ukraine's education system will be vital to avoid frustration, stigma or prolonged disruptions to children's learning.

Return flows can place pressures on schools, and there may be a temptation to establish parallel classes or separate tracks for local and returnee children. This, however, should be approached with caution. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, following the large-scale returns of displaced persons in the early 2000s, international organisations supported bridging classes and provided psychosocial support to children who had been educated abroad or under different entity curricula. In response, the policy of "two schools under one roof" was introduced as a temporary measure to address the divisive post-war education system and encourage refugee return. Despite international efforts to phase it out, the arrangement became permanent, reinforcing ethnic divisions and separation between returnees and stayees. While some progress has since been made through administrative and legal unification, the case demonstrates the risks of unequal or fragmented reintegration measures (OSCE, 2018^[103]).

In Mexico, the Programa Binacional de Educación Migrante (PROBEM) was established to ease the bureaucratic process of enrolling returnee children who had studied in the United States into the Mexican education system (Government of Mexico, 2015^[104]). The programme has played an important role in facilitating the recognition of school records, simplifying enrolment procedures, and providing bilingual support to help children adapt to Mexican schools. It has also promoted exchanges between teachers in

Mexico and the United States, enabling educators to better understand the experiences of migrant children and helping to reduce stigma (Ramirez, Davalos and Gómez, 2024^[105]). At the same time, PROBEM has faced challenges, particularly in ensuring consistent implementation across Mexico's states and in securing sufficient funding. These limitations have sometimes resulted in uneven access to support, underscoring the importance of strong co-ordination and adequate resources in similar initiatives.

Healthcare continuity is another critical area. Returnees from abroad may face difficulties in transferring medical records or maintaining ongoing treatment, particularly for chronic illnesses or specialised care. Records may be fragmented across health systems and languages, complicating continuity of care.

One way of addressing this challenge is through cross-border health data exchange. The European Union's Directive on Patients' Rights in Cross-border Healthcare (2011/24/EU) established the eHealth Digital Service Infrastructure, which enables the secure transfer of prescriptions and patient summaries between member states. Although originally designed to facilitate care for temporary cross-border patients, the framework has also proven highly relevant for returning migrants and retirees, as it provides a reliable mechanism for the interoperable exchange of essential health data. Over time, the system is expected to include additional records such as medical images, laboratory results, and hospital discharge reports.

By early 2025, however, only a limited number of EU countries had the technical capacity to exchange data digitally across borders. Work is ongoing to expand participation, and some successful examples already demonstrate its potential. Since 2024, Estonia and Finland have enabled the exchange of electronic health records, thereby ensuring continuity of treatment for patients moving between their systems. Transfers require the explicit consent of patients through national eGovernment platforms, yet the arrangement is already being used by cross-border migrants, highlighting the practical value of interoperable health systems.

These experiences underline the potential of bilateral and regional mechanisms to facilitate continuity of care for returning displaced persons. Such arrangements are particularly valuable in areas such as chronic illness management or children's vaccination records, where uninterrupted access is essential. Nonetheless, significant challenges remain. Ensuring robust data protection and achieving interoperability between national health systems are complex and require sustained political and technical co-operation. Establishing clear protocols for recognising health records issued abroad, including those in non-standard formats, would further help to reduce administrative barriers and safeguard continuity of treatment.

Beyond physical health, mental health support also requires attention. Reintegration often brings an additional layer of stress linked to changed community dynamics, feelings of alienation, reverse culture shock when returning from abroad, and uncertainties about belonging, alongside the trauma of conflict itself. Training mainstream mental health providers to recognise displacement-related stressors is therefore essential. Kosovo, after 1999, expanded its mental health services to address the distinct pressures faced by returnees, combining psychiatric care with social work interventions. In Sierra Leone, programmes for demobilised combatants and displaced returnees integrated counselling into reintegration packages, addressing both psychological and practical challenges.

Colombia's PAPSIVI programme, established under the 2011 Victims and Land Restitution Law, represents one of the most ambitious efforts globally. It provides individual, family and community-based care through interdisciplinary teams, with particular attention to cultural sensitivity and the differentiated needs of groups such as Afro-Colombian, Indigenous and Roma populations (Government of Colombia, 2017^[106]). PAPSIVI provides individual, family, community and culturally sensitive collective care, delivered by interdisciplinary teams that include both professionals and trained conflict survivors. Between 2012 and 2021, PAPSIVI reached more than 768 000 victims, reflecting the scale and ambition of the initiative. However, this figure represents only around one ninth of the estimated 9.25 million Colombians officially recognised as affected by the conflict (Infobae, 2022^[107]).

Some groups will require particular attention, as reintegration processes often involve populations that are diverse. Persons with disabilities, the elderly, and minorities may face compounded challenges upon return. Targeted support and inclusive social assistance are needed to ensure that reintegration is equitable and sustainable. Access to accurate and up-to-date information is a cross-cutting need. During displacement, public service systems evolve, with new procedures, digitalisation, or changes in entitlements that may be unfamiliar to those who have been away. Ensuring that returnees can easily navigate these systems is vital both for reintegration and for decisions about whether and when to return.

A digital one-stop information portal is considered good practice. Portugal's Programa Regressar, for example, not only provides financial and employment assistance but also centralises information through a single digital platform and dedicated helpdesk. This enables returnees to access guidance on taxes, social security, education, and housing in one place, reducing the need to interact with multiple ministries.

At the same time, face-to-face support remains indispensable, particularly for those in vulnerable situations, including the elderly. While digital platforms such as Ukraine's Diia can greatly expand access to services, reliance on them alone risks alienating groups affected by the digital divide. Georgia has addressed this need through the creation of Public Service Halls (PSH), one-stop shops offering more than 250 government services under a single roof. Mobile PSH units also travel to remote settlements and areas heavily affected by displacement, providing returnees and IDPs with direct access to essential documentation. These services include issuing identity cards, registering births for children born abroad, and reissuing lost property papers, ensuring that all individuals can restore their legal status and access public services without unnecessary delay. This exists alongside digital tools such as my.gov.ge, but by combining digital innovations with face-to-face assistance, it is better able to ensure inclusion of vulnerable groups who may otherwise be disadvantaged by the digital divide.

Finally, access to legal advice and counselling can be decisive in helping returnees navigate rights, documentation, and entitlements. After the Dayton Peace Agreement, UNHCR and OSCE supported the establishment of local legal aid centres across Bosnia and Herzegovina. These centres provided free advice on property restitution, housing reconstruction, documentation, and welfare, acting as crucial intermediaries for returnees often unfamiliar with new legislation or facing obstruction from local authorities. Similarly, Colombia's Personerías (local ombudsman offices) offered guidance to returnees and other conflict victims under the 2011 Victims' Law, supporting claims for reparations, land restitution, pensions, and welfare enrolment. NGOs further complemented these efforts by running mobile legal clinics in rural areas of return. Despite these initiatives, challenges persisted in both BiH and Colombia, including long administrative delays, uneven access in rural areas, and continued bureaucratic complexity. These experiences underline the importance of ensuring not only that services are available but also that returnees can effectively understand and access them.

Improve the portability of pension contributions across borders

When it comes to returns from abroad, a key longer-term challenge regarding public services relates to the portability of pensions. This refers to the ability of individuals to retain and access the entitlements they have built up through employment-based contributions while living and working abroad. Allowing these rights to be recognised across borders helps to safeguard entitlements, reduces uncertainty, and fosters confidence in both mobility and return.

For Ukrainian displaced persons abroad, this question is particularly significant. Many have entered employment during displacement and contributed to host-country pension systems. The prospect of losing access to these contributions upon return could create perceptions of disadvantage for individuals and their families and weaken incentives to return. Experience from the Western Balkans and elsewhere also shows that some people return after extended periods abroad, often at retirement or other key life-course stages. These are precisely the stages when social protection needs are the greatest, making the

recognition and transfer of contributions accrued abroad at fair conditions decisive for secure returns later in life.

This challenge is amplified by pre-existing pressures on Ukraine's social protection system. Even before 2022, international assessments highlighted structural weaknesses, including gaps in coverage for vulnerable groups, limitations in service quality and gender responsiveness, and persistent financing constraints (United Nations Ukraine, 2021^[108]). Addressing pension portability is therefore not only about supporting voluntary and dignified return in the short term, but also about equipping Ukraine's social protection system to manage long-term demographic and fiscal pressures in a sustainable and equitable way.

Countries employ a variety of mechanisms to make social benefits and pensions portable for migrants, with practices differing considerably across regions. One of the most established approaches is the use of bilateral or multilateral agreements that align benefit entitlements between participating states. Such agreements typically allow pension contributions made in one country to be recognised in another, thereby enabling workers to build up rights across borders and avoiding the risk of losing entitlements when relocating. Within this field, the European Union represents the most advanced model, offering a co-ordinated framework that links national social security systems and facilitates the accumulation and transfer of rights across its member states. Beyond the EU, countries including Canada and the United States have developed multiple bilateral arrangements that cover pensions and, in certain cases, extend also to healthcare and unemployment insurance (Holzmann, 2021^[109]).

Another model relies on private or mixed schemes, which tend to emerge in contexts where national social protection systems are less comprehensive or fragmented (Holzmann, 2021^[109]). In such situations, migrants may turn to private pension and insurance providers offering cross-border portability, or to hybrid instruments developed with the involvement of international organisations. While these initiatives provide some continuity of protection, their reach is limited, as they are often accessible only to better-off migrants and cover a narrower range of benefits.

A further option involves the adoption of national legislation with extraterritorial provisions, through which states unilaterally allow their nationals abroad to continue contributing to and benefiting from the domestic social protection system (Holzmann, 2021^[109]). Although still relatively uncommon, such measures are becoming more popular among migrant-sending countries, particularly where migrants are expected to return or retire in their country of origin. Under these arrangements, workers can remain affiliated with home-country pension funds even while employed abroad. In some cases, governments extend voluntary pension schemes to diaspora communities, offering flexible contribution options that maintain links with the national system. While this approach cannot fully resolve challenges of co-ordination with host-country schemes, it provides a baseline of protection and continuity for mobile populations.

In Ukraine's case, where millions of displaced persons are currently abroad, exploring such measures could bring significant benefits. Allowing or encouraging displaced persons to maintain or expand contributions to Ukrainian pension and social insurance funds while abroad would not only enhance their long-term security but also strengthen financial and social connections with Ukraine. Importantly, such schemes could operate in parallel with bilateral agreements, complementing rather than replacing them, and position Ukraine as a proactive partner in managing returns longer term. By offering a degree of predictability to those who remain uncertain about the timing of their return but wish to secure future entitlements, unilateral mechanisms could provide both a safety net for individuals and a constructive channel of engagement for the state.

The Philippines offers an example of how origin countries can secure social protection for citizens working abroad and ensure continuity upon return (PSI, 2025^[110]). The Social Security System (SSS), which manages the private-sector pension fund, has adopted a twofold approach. First, it has concluded social security agreements with destination countries to ensure the mutual recognition of rights. Second, it has developed dedicated programmes for overseas Filipinos, enabling them to retain entitlement to the Social

Security System benefits and loan facilities while abroad. Two main schemes are in place. The Regular Coverage Programme provides both long-term and short-term benefits, including sickness, maternity, disability, retirement, and death or funeral support, subject to qualifying conditions. It also grants access to salary, housing, and educational loans, with loan amounts linked to contributions and service duration. The Flexi-fund Programme offers an additional savings mechanism, allowing overseas workers to set aside a portion of their income abroad and benefit from tax-exempt returns, supplementing their regular entitlements. Health coverage is complemented by the Philippine Health Insurance Corporation (PhilHealth), which maintains offices in 13 countries to facilitate access and assistance.

In addition to the Social Security System, the Philippines has established the Overseas Workers Welfare Administration (OWWA), an agency attached to the Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE) that is mandated to protect and promote the welfare of overseas Filipino workers (OFWs) and their dependents (PSI, 2025^[110]). OWWA functions as a membership-based institution, financed through a USD 25 contribution from each member, which is pooled into a trust fund to sustain its operations and services. Membership provides access to a wide range of benefits, including health-related assistance such as disability and burial support, as well as education and training opportunities, including scholarships for dependents and skills upgrading. Members are also entitled to welfare assistance, such as psychosocial and legal support for distressed OFWs, and repatriation in cases of political unrest or natural disasters. Beyond immediate protection, OWWA also invests in livelihood development and reintegration programmes, helping returning migrants and their families to re-establish sustainable livelihoods.

Sri Lanka has taken a different approach by introducing a contributory pension scheme for its estimated 2 million migrant workers abroad (ILO, 2018^[111]). Participants can contribute either through regular monthly instalments or through lump-sum payments, making the system more flexible. A notable feature of the scheme is the government's commitment to subsidising 60% of the cost, which makes it significantly more accessible than many other unilateral arrangements that place the full burden on workers (Olivier, 2017^[112]). The scheme provides a guaranteed old-age pension from the age of 60 and includes survivors' benefits, thereby ensuring a degree of long-term social protection for both migrants and their families.

Monitoring, evaluating, and adapting to changing needs

What are the key considerations for policymakers in Ukraine?

- **Build integrated and trusted monitoring.** Link administrative records across ministries and municipalities, establish nation-wide surveys, possibly with digital collection methods, produce timely and disaggregated indicators on the number of IDPs and returnees, their needs and progress towards reintegration; as well as on safety, housing, employment, public services and social cohesion, and communicate findings clearly to meet live information expectations and counter misinformation.
- **Institutionalise adaptive and participatory evaluation.** Apply a national framework with clear criteria of effectiveness, efficiency, relevance, sustainability, coherence and impact, combine quantitative and qualitative evidence, involve returnees and communities, track outcomes over time including secondary migration, and translate findings into programme adjustments and budget shifts.
- **Resource and govern for the long term.** Allocate stable financing for data, analysis and public communication, define mandates and data sharing protocols across levels of government, ensure national ownership with targeted technical support from partners, and draw on methods from AVRR evaluations while recognising the different context of returns by displaced citizens.

Return and reintegration are not one-off events but dynamic processes that unfold over time. The needs of returnees, as well as those of the communities to which they return, are likely to evolve as circumstances change. Initial priorities may centre on housing, safety and access to basic services, while over the longer term challenges linked to livelihoods, social cohesion, and psychological well-being often become more prominent. These shifts require monitoring systems that can capture not only immediate conditions but also emerging vulnerabilities and opportunities over time. Resource availability is also likely to change. Support that is readily mobilised in the immediate aftermath of displacement or return may not be sustained in the longer term, requiring authorities to adjust expectations, identify new sources of funding, and prioritise interventions strategically. At the same time, reintegration outcomes may diverge across regions and population groups, underscoring the need for monitoring systems that are disaggregated, inclusive and sensitive to diverse experiences.

It is important to distinguish between two complementary dimensions of monitoring. The first concerns tracking numbers, locations, characteristics, needs and outcomes of returnees, which provides a basis for anticipating pressures on services and targeting support geographically. The second relates to monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of policies and measures, ensuring that resources invested translate into positive outcomes for both returnees and host communities. Both dimensions are necessary, and without the second there is a risk of generating data without learning from it.

As part of the current displacement crisis, significant monitoring is already being undertaken by international organisations, civil society actors and various ad hoc initiatives, often with support from private partners. However, systematic monitoring by the state itself remains limited. Building national capacity in this area will be critical to ensure ownership, coherence and sustainability. International practice highlights that effective approaches combine robust institutional systems for data collection and co-ordination with adaptive mechanisms that allow policies to be refined as evidence emerges. Transparent data-sharing arrangements across government institutions, complemented by inputs from civil society, international partners and returnees themselves, can provide the foundation for responsive and accountable policies. Equally, participatory evaluation methods and innovative digital tools can ensure that feedback loops are maintained and that policy adjustments remain grounded in the lived realities of displaced populations. For Ukraine, developing such monitoring and evaluation mechanisms will be essential to sustain reintegration efforts, allocate resources effectively, and maintain public trust over what is certain to be a long and evolving process.

Build integrated data collection and monitoring systems

Effective return and reintegration policies require reliable data. Without systematic monitoring, authorities risk overlooking both immediate needs and longer-term vulnerabilities of returnees and host communities. International statistical standards provide a useful guidance as to what to measure when it comes to return and reintegration, as well as how to measure.

For returnees from external displacement, the key international statistical standard is the International Recommendations on Refugee Statistics (IRRS) (EGRIS, 2018^[113]), compiled by the Expert Group on Refugee and Internally Displaced Persons Statistics and adopted by the United Nations Statistical Commission (Decision 49/115) in 2018. They provide the internationally agreed statistical frameworks standardising terminology and classifications for refugees and for persons returned from abroad after having sought or received international protection, including refugees and beneficiaries of temporary protection. The Recommendations contain guidance on the inclusion of these populations in national systems, as well as priority indicators to assess and monitor their situation. According to the IRRS, for returnees, the basic statistics to collect would include the total stock of persons who returned from abroad after seeking international protection, and the flow of citizens who have returned after seeking international protection over a pre-defined reference period of time, disaggregated by a number of demographic characteristics.

For IDPs, the key international statistical standard is the International Recommendations on IDP Statistics (IRIS) (EGRIS, 2020^[114]), compiled by the Expert Group on Refugee and Internally Displaced Persons Statistics, and adopted by the United Nations Statistical Commission (Decision 51/116) in 2020. They provide the internationally agreed statistical frameworks standardising terminology and classifications for IDPs. According to IRIS, countries may collect data on three categories of IDPs: those in locations of displacement, in locations of return, and in other settlement locations. In addition, it is critically important to statistically identify persons who have overcome key displacement-related vulnerabilities (have been locally integrated, returned and reintegrated, or settled elsewhere), and may no longer require support. Finally, for policymakers, it is also important to monitor progress towards progress towards a “durable solution” – a situation in which “IDPs no longer have any specific assistance and protection needs that are linked to their displacement and can enjoy their human rights without discrimination on account of their displacement”, as per the Inter-Agency Standing Committee’s Framework on Durable Solutions for Internally Displaced Persons. IRIS contains a statistical framework for measuring such progress.

Both documents provide an assessment of data sources and data collection methods for these purposes, including administrative data, population and household censuses data, sample surveys, and other data sources; outlining advantages and disadvantages of each source. They also contain recommendations to improve co-ordination at national, regional and international levels as well as data quality, statistical legal frameworks and capacity development.

The experiences of host countries during the Ukrainian displacement crisis, however, also offer valuable practical insights for the design and operationalisation of administrative data to monitor displacement. Faced with an unprecedented inflow of displaced persons from Ukraine in 2022, several governments developed interactive dashboards to ensure transparent and timely access to information. These tools were not only instrumental in managing immediate pressures but also served to build public trust by making data widely available and accessible. The lessons from these experiences highlight the importance of cross-agency co-operation, integration of diverse data sources, and regular public updates, all of which could be adapted to monitor return and reintegration in Ukraine.

Spain provides a strong example of such an approach. The Ministry of Inclusion, Social Security and Migration has maintained a dashboard that systematically presents information on the number of Ukrainians with valid residence documentation affiliated with the national social security system (Ministerio de Inclusión, Seguridad Social y Migraciones, 2025^[115]; Permanent Observatory on Immigration, 2025^[116]). Updated monthly and freely accessible online, the dashboard is a product of inter-institutional collaboration that brings together data from the General Directorate of Police, the General Treasury of Social Security and other agencies. This integration allows not only for the tracking of residence permits and social security contributions, but also for a much broader set of indicators that reflect vulnerabilities and integration challenges. Variables such as type of permit, reason for granting, economic activity, and demographic factors including gender and age provide a granular picture of the status of Ukrainians in Spain. The result is a comprehensive monitoring tool that captures both legal-administrative data and socio-economic realities, offering a transparent basis for policymaking and public communication.

Ireland has similarly provided timely and accessible data. The Central Statistics Office compiles information from at least five public sector bodies and updates its dashboards roughly once a month. Data on arrivals are presented through heat maps disaggregated by county, making patterns of settlement and regional impact immediately visible to a wide audience. The dashboards also include information on school enrolment of Ukrainian children, allocation of social housing units, and marital status, offering a multidimensional perspective on the integration of displaced persons. At the same time, the Irish example underlines the methodological challenges of monitoring highly mobile populations. Many figures remain estimates, as not all Ukrainians who received a Personal Public Service Number (PPSN) continued to reside in Ireland, and some arrivals may never have been captured by the registration system in the first place (Central Statistics Office, 2024^[117]). While these limitations complicate precise measurement, the

dashboards nonetheless demonstrate the value of inter-agency co-operation and regular dissemination of available data as a means of ensuring transparency, managing expectations, and informing different stakeholders.

To strengthen the reliability of its estimates, the Irish Statistical Office has also experimented with monitoring so-called “signs of life” in administrative data. Rather than relying solely on registration numbers, the authorities tracked indicators of continued residence and activity, such as attendance at events organised by Intreo Public Employment Services, receipt of welfare payments, enrolment in further education and training courses offered by the state agency SOLAS (Further Education and Training Authority), evidence of employment income, or changes of address reported to the Department of Social Protection (Central Statistics Office, 2024^[117]). These indicators enabled a more accurate assessment of whether Ukrainians registered under the Temporary Protection Directive remained in Ireland or had subsequently left. Despite this, significant limitations persist. The system cannot easily capture patterns of circular migration, nor can it provide clarity on the destinations of those who have departed. Nonetheless, the experiment demonstrates the value of inter-agency data exchange and the potential of administrative records, when combined with occasional surveys, to generate more detailed insights into the social and economic integration of displaced populations (Central Statistics Office, 2025^[118]).

In Europe, such monitoring was possible largely because Ukrainians were visible in administrative data through registration under the Temporary Protection Directive. In Ukraine, IDPs are registered, but there is no equivalent system for returnees. Authorities will therefore need to consider whether returnees should be made visible in national data in order to track their numbers and reintegration processes, or whether programme evaluations alone can provide sufficient insights into uptake and needs.

The broader lesson from these examples is that robust inter-agency collaboration is essential to generate the kind of comprehensive picture needed for effective policymaking. No single institution is able to collect and analyse all the necessary information on its own. Monitoring typically relies on the linking of diverse data sources and on co-operation across agencies at national and local levels (see also Box 5.9). By combining administrative data, survey evidence and real-time monitoring tools, governments can move beyond partial or fragmented insights to produce a more accurate and actionable understanding of reintegration dynamics.

Box 5.9. Monitoring returns and reintegration in Kosovo

Since the aftermath of the Balkan Wars, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) Mission in Kosovo has taken a leading role in monitoring and assessing the situation of returnees, with a mandate focussed on promoting and protecting human rights and ensuring compliance with international standards. Monitoring has been co-ordinated with the Ministry of Communities and Returns and supported technically by international partners, notably UNHCR. A multi-level structure was established that includes municipal offices for communities and return (MOCRs), municipal task forces for returns, and Municipal Working Groups on Return (MWGRs) (OSCE Mission in Kosovo, 2014^[119]). This structure has been underpinned by robust legislation, notably Regulation 02/2010, which set out clear mandates for assessing the needs of returnees, providing relevant information, and reporting regularly to municipal and central bodies on reintegration challenges (OSCE Mission in Kosovo, 2016^[120]). Over time, legal frameworks, action plans and strategies have been repeatedly revised to expand support and align with guidance from organisations such as the CEB, OSCE and UNHCR.

One outcome of these efforts was the Strategy for Reintegration of Repatriated Persons in Kosovo (2013), which incorporated OSCE recommendations to strengthen data collection, improve co-ordination between municipalities and central government, and enhance analysis of reintegration

outcomes. A case management system was created to facilitate information exchange across levels of government. For example, the Department for Reintegration of Repatriated Persons (DRRP) in the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the MOCRs began sharing information on assisted voluntary returnees and those requesting support, enabling more consistent monitoring (OSCE Mission in Kosovo, 2016^[120]). Regular interviews and meetings between OSCE, the DRRP and MOCRs further ensured follow-up on data reporting obligations and analysis.

Despite these advances, gaps remain. Under-reporting is a persistent challenge, with only around 62% of repatriated persons registered in the case management system, and capacity constraints limit the analytical use of data. The OSCE has identified the need for continued investment in training and capacity-building so that collected information is not only used for statistics but also for evaluating integration outcomes and adapting support.

In parallel, the OSCE has monitored security incidents affecting minority communities, including robberies, attacks, property destruction and desecration of graves. Because police data does not distinguish whether victims are returnees, the OSCE relies on MOCR records to add this dimension. These efforts have enabled targeted advocacy, such as increasing police presence in areas of heightened tension.

The Kosovo experience demonstrates the importance of clear legal mandates, inter-institutional co-operation, and transparent data management in monitoring return and reintegration. Sustained government commitment to maintaining and updating databases remains critical. Making such data available not only to institutions but also to the wider public can strengthen transparency, accountability, and trust – while also informing those abroad about safety conditions and livelihood opportunities in areas of return.

Neither the monitoring of returnee stocks and locations nor the evaluation of programme effectiveness can rely solely on administrative or governmental sources. Complementary data collection, for example through surveys or other innovative methods, is often necessary.

Innovative tools can support survey data collection. The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), for instance, has made extensive use of KoboToolbox, a computer-assisted personal interviewing platform created in 2013 with support from the United Nations Office for the Co-ordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and in partnership with UNHCR. KoboToolbox has been deployed in over 220 countries and territories by more than 32 000 NGOs, IGOs, government institutions and development banks to collect survey data. It enables field workers to record the number of people reached by programmes, conduct site assessments, and capture information on needs and intentions. More than half of national Red Cross and Red Crescent societies now use KoboToolbox, supported by dedicated servers for secure data storage (DeLange, 2022^[121]). The tool has been applied in a range of humanitarian contexts, including the displacement crises in Ukraine, and for real-time monitoring of social inclusion and service delivery projects (KoboToolbox, 2025^[122]).

MARTA (Monitoring Automated for Real Time Analysis) is another example of an innovative, low-cost and community-driven data collection system that was designed to monitor socio-economic conditions and project outcomes in difficult environments. Initially piloted during the 2018-2020 Ebola crisis in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), MARTA utilises mobile tools such as KoboToolbox and relies on training local students to conduct high-frequency surveys using smartphones. These surveys capture data on beneficiary well-being, project progress and community perceptions, with the option of including Global Positioning System co-ordinates and photos. Information is uploaded to a secure server, enabling real-time, geolocated analysis.

During its pilot phase, MARTA collected more than 100 000 surveys and 2 million data points, demonstrating its capacity to track key indicators, identify risks at an early stage and inform timely

responses (Bermeo, Bance and Kiemtoré, 2021^[123]). Its flexibility makes it particularly relevant for return and reintegration contexts, where rapid beneficiary registration, dynamic needs assessments and continuous monitoring of outcomes such as employment, mobility and social cohesion are critical. Reflecting this potential, the MARTA system was scaled up to monitor the entire World Bank social protection portfolio in the DRC, covering interventions from community infrastructure to public works.

Valuable lessons here can also be drawn from efforts to assess migrant integration outcomes, particularly for underrepresented groups. In addition to quantitative statistical data, qualitative and participatory approaches can be useful to ensure that the voices of those most affected are fully reflected. A recent initiative addressing the integration of migrant and refugee children across Belgium, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy and Spain illustrates this well (Serrano, Fernández and Marcos, 2024^[124]). Recognising the lack of indicators to capture children's specific integration experiences, researchers adopted a participatory action research approach that placed children at the centre of the process. A Children's Advisory Group was involved throughout, guiding the design, selection and validation of indicators. More than 300 children, starting from the age of six, took part in mapping exercises, workshops and refinement of indicators, alongside parents, educators and policymakers. The process was deliberately iterative and inclusive, combining bottom-up engagement with expert review and multi-level validation. The outcome was a set of up to 30 indicators, capturing both children's integration outcomes and the barriers or enablers shaping them. This experience shows how participatory approaches can generate context-sensitive indicators, uphold ethical standards and ensure that measurement tools reflect the lived realities and priorities of the groups they seek to serve.

The credibility of monitoring systems is as important as their technical capacity. In the digital age, individual experiences and impressions spread rapidly through online networks, shaping narratives about return and reintegration. Negative accounts, or reports of tension between returnees and host communities, can easily overshadow positive developments and deter others from returning. At the same time, overly selective promotion of success stories without acknowledgement of ongoing challenges can undermine public trust. To be effective, monitoring frameworks must therefore provide balanced, transparent and reliable information, offering an honest reflection of both progress achieved and the difficulties encountered.

Establishing such systems can help manage expectations among displaced populations by ensuring that decisions about return are informed by accurate information rather than rumours or fragmented impressions. It can also reinforce confidence in national and local institutions by showing a readiness to engage openly with the complexities of reintegration and to adapt policies as evidence emerges. By capturing diverse experiences across regions and groups, monitoring systems can counter misinformation, promote understanding between returnees and host communities, and support the view that reintegration is a shared national priority rather than a challenge borne only by individuals.

Evaluate return and reintegration support regularly and adapt as needed

Return and reintegration are long-term processes that cannot be fully understood through one-off measurements. Monitoring systems play an important role in tracking numbers, locations and immediate conditions, but they do not in themselves reveal whether support measures are effective. To generate real insight, monitoring must be coupled with structured programme evaluations that assess whether interventions are achieving their intended results and remain relevant as circumstances evolve.

Evaluations should not be understood narrowly as technical audits, but as comprehensive exercises that combine quantitative and qualitative evidence to assess effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability. Importantly, they should capture the perspectives of returnees and host communities alongside those of implementing authorities. By doing so, evaluations can provide a more accurate understanding of reintegration dynamics, highlight where interventions succeed or fall short, and suggest how programmes should adapt over time.

Regular and well-designed evaluations also help ensure accountability, both to displaced populations and to the wider public. They demonstrate that reintegration efforts are not static, but responsive to changing needs and grounded in evidence. In Ukraine's case, embedding such mechanisms from the outset would provide a means to track progress, identify emerging vulnerabilities, and build confidence in the state's capacity to manage reintegration effectively. For return and reintegration, evaluations can be broadly understood as structured, evidence-based analyses that combine quantitative and qualitative information to answer questions on effectiveness, efficiency, appropriateness and implementation (EMN, 2016^[125]; EUAA, 2024^[126]).

To serve as a reliable basis for adaptation, they should apply clear and consistent criteria and measure outcomes against well-defined goals. Establishing clear and consistent benchmarks is not only a technical exercise but a way of shaping what is seen as evidence of success or failure and whether overall policy is moving in the right direction. Applying such criteria systematically at national and local levels also enables comparisons between regions and programmes, allowing evaluators to identify recurring challenges, highlight good practice and build a cumulative evidence base.

When considering how benchmarks could be established, and how municipalities could be encouraged to track them consistently, useful inspiration can be drawn from related fields such as migrant integration and disaster recovery. Frameworks developed for assessing integration outcomes, for instance, demonstrate the value of structured and comparable benchmarks. The United Kingdom's Home Office Indicators of Integration Framework (2019) provides a strong example. It sets out 14 domains of integration, including employment, housing, education, health, language, safety, social connections, and rights and responsibilities. Each domain is accompanied by suggested outcome indicators, data sources and methods of measurement. This approach enables policymakers and practitioners to link interventions to measurable outcomes and to assess progress across both individual and community levels. Crucially, the framework was designed to be flexible: it can be applied consistently at national and local levels, while still allowing authorities and civil society organisations to adapt indicators to their specific contexts. By establishing a clear structure and encouraging the systematic use of both administrative and survey data, the framework offers a tool for tracking integration in a way that is comparable across regions and over time, while also remaining responsive to evolving needs.

Another relevant field is disaster recovery, which faces similar challenges of evolving needs over extended periods. Australia has developed a comprehensive monitoring and evaluation framework specifically tailored for disaster recovery programmes. The framework defines expected outcomes, standardises key evaluation questions such as effectiveness, efficiency and governance, and places strong emphasis on community involvement in both the design and dissemination of findings. This ensures that evaluations capture not only technical dimensions but also local perspectives, while enabling lessons from one recovery effort to inform future responses and maintaining accountability over time.

To support local actors in developing their own recovery programmes and monitoring systems, the federal government has established the National Disaster Recovery Monitoring and Evaluation Database (Australian Institute for Disaster Resilience, 2025^[127]). This platform consolidates evaluations from nine different types of disaster events across five jurisdictions, highlighting lessons learned and identifying programme outcomes, activities and associated indicators. By offering practitioners access to past and current evaluations, the database promotes consistency and quality in recovery efforts nationwide.

A second key consideration for designing evaluations of return and reintegration policies and measures is the importance of adopting a longitudinal perspective. Reintegration is not a short-term outcome that can be captured only in the first months after return, but a gradual and often uneven process that unfolds over years. Evidence from longer-term studies shows that while initial support may stabilise returnees, new vulnerabilities often surface later, such as difficulties in sustaining employment, challenges in securing adequate housing, or exclusion from social and community networks. Evaluations conducted too early risk presenting an overly optimistic view of outcomes, as they capture temporary stabilisation rather than

durable reintegration. Longitudinal approaches, although resource-intensive, provide essential insights into how reintegration trajectories evolve, which forms of support prove most sustainable, and when additional interventions may be required to prevent renewed marginalisation.

Evaluations should also employ participatory approaches that give greater weight to the perspectives of returnees and local communities. Evidence shows that the perceived usefulness of reintegration measures often differs markedly between beneficiaries and programme administrators. For example, in an assessment of Belgian-supported returns to Armenia and Georgia, returnees highlighted the flexibility and relevance of financial assistance in starting small businesses, while caseworkers placed stronger emphasis on procedural oversight and accountability (Lietaert, 2019^[128]). Such differences underscore the risk that programmes lose credibility if designed and assessed without meaningful engagement of those directly affected. Participatory methods, including structured interviews, community consultations and participatory action research, not only reveal context-specific challenges and solutions often overlooked in top-down reviews but also strengthen ownership and trust. By embedding these perspectives, reintegration support becomes more responsive, legitimate and better aligned with the realities of returnees and their communities.

Successful evaluations also employ mixed methods that combine quantitative and qualitative evidence. Evaluations that have integrated qualitative research, through interviews, focus groups or ethnographic methods, have revealed critical factors such as social acceptance, psychological resilience, and the role of family and community networks. These elements often prove decisive in determining whether reintegration is sustainable. For Ukraine, adopting a mixed-methods approach would help ensure that monitoring frameworks do not reduce reintegration to economic metrics but instead capture the broader social and human dimensions of the process.

At the same time, experience from past evaluations of return and reintegration measures, even if they focus primarily on AVRR programmes, brings to light enduring challenges (EMN, 2016^[125]). Moreover, many evaluations have been shaped by external donor priorities, limiting the role of national authorities and local communities in setting objectives or applying lessons learned. This can weaken local ownership and reduce the likelihood that findings translate into long-term policy adjustments. It is also important to recognise that in many past cases return programmes were influenced by the priorities of host countries seeking to repatriate foreign nationals without a legal basis to stay. These political and institutional dynamics differ fundamentally from the situation of displaced Ukrainians, whose potential returns are grounded in their right to return and in the broader framework of national recovery.

Sustainable monitoring and evaluation require not only sound methodologies but also dedicated financing and clear institutional responsibility. Without earmarked budgets, trained personnel, and well-defined mandates, evaluations risk remaining ad hoc exercises that do not inform long-term policymaking. For Ukraine, it will be important to reserve a share of reintegration funding specifically for evaluation and to strengthen analytical capacities at both local and national levels. International partners can play a valuable role in providing technical support and bridging initial capacity gaps, but ultimate ownership of monitoring and evaluation processes must lie with Ukrainian institutions. National leadership will ensure continuity, foster public trust, and allow reintegration policies to evolve on the basis of credible and nationally anchored evidence.

Taken together, the lessons from international practice highlight that monitoring and evaluation are not peripheral tasks but essential components of effective return and reintegration strategies. They provide the mechanisms through which policies can remain adaptive, inclusive and accountable over what will inevitably be a protracted and uneven process. For Ukraine, embedding robust systems of data collection, participatory evaluation and longitudinal analysis within clear institutional frameworks will be crucial to sustaining progress. Evaluations should not only measure outcomes but also support continuous learning, allowing reintegration policies to respond to shifting needs, resource constraints and diverse regional realities. By investing early in credible, transparent and nationally led evaluation systems, Ukraine can

build the evidence base necessary to guide reintegration at scale, maintain the confidence of both returnees and host communities, and ensure that the right to return is realised in ways that contribute to national recovery and cohesion.

Measures and policies for working with the diaspora communities

As discussed in earlier chapters, Ukraine's global presence long predates the events of 2022. The Ukrainian diaspora has evolved over many decades, encompassing historic communities dating back to the nineteenth century, more recent emigrants who left following independence and acquired citizenship elsewhere, and substantial numbers of labour migrants who were already abroad in 2022. Since the full-scale invasion, millions of externally displaced persons have joined these existing groups, further expanding and diversifying Ukraine's communities abroad. While the term diaspora is at times used to refer mainly to long-standing Ukrainian organisations and historic communities, the forward-looking policy agenda must consider all groups that now constitute the Ukrainian global community. The international practices presented in this section are therefore reviewed with this broader and more inclusive understanding in mind.

Engaging this diverse global community is increasingly important for Ukraine's recovery and reconstruction. Many Ukrainians abroad, irrespective of when or why they left, have retained strong personal, professional or cultural ties to the country. Their potential contributions span economic, social and civic spheres, and can be mobilised both from a distance and through more direct involvement. An effective policy approach therefore requires recognising the different profiles, expectations and capacities within these communities and tailoring engagement instruments accordingly.

There are, however, important distinctions to consider. Unlike displaced persons, for whom the state has a responsibility to ensure conditions for safe and dignified return, those in the diaspora or those who left for economic reasons are not entitled to the same forms of state-supported return. Their involvement is more likely to depend on the creation of favourable conditions that encourage voluntary engagement, whether through investment, knowledge transfer or, in some cases, return. These efforts are typically situated within broader migrant attraction and diaspora engagement strategies.

At the same time, return should not necessarily be viewed as the primary objective for these groups. In many cases, the efforts required to facilitate return may be substantial and not justified under current conditions. International experience also shows that return intentions are highly personal and not easily predicted by a person's migration profile. Individuals with ancestral ties may choose to return even if they have never lived in the country, while recent emigrants may not consider return feasible due to family, economic or personal circumstances. Nonetheless, Ukrainians abroad can bring significant benefits regardless of their place of residence. The focus should be on fostering sustained engagement that enables meaningful contributions to recovery and reconstruction, whether from a distance or through direct involvement.

This section presents relevant policy options and international experiences for Ukraine, with a focus on two core areas: leveraging economic contributions from abroad, and strengthening cultural, educational and civic ties within an inclusive and forward-looking diaspora engagement framework.

Leveraging diaspora contributions for economic recovery and reconstruction

What are the key considerations for policymakers in Ukraine?

- **Create visible and accessible pathways for contribution from abroad.** Recognise that many Ukrainians overseas may not return soon, yet are willing to support recovery. Provide concrete and accountable channels to contribute skills, knowledge or volunteer time remotely, and ensure these are widely communicated.
- **Enable transparent and trusted financial engagement.** Put in place the legal, regulatory and digital infrastructure needed to facilitate diaspora capital flows, including secure online platforms, matching grant schemes, tailored investment products and diaspora bonds, with clear safeguards against misuse.
- **Foster an enabling environment for diaspora entrepreneurship.** Develop coherent policies and co-ordinated support frameworks that attract and facilitate diaspora-led or diaspora-supported ventures, ensuring they can mobilise investment, knowledge, networks and credibility to strengthen domestic industries and connect them to global markets.
- **Leverage diaspora expertise in critical sectors.** Engage professionals abroad in targeted initiatives to support priority areas such as health, education, digitalisation and green reconstruction.

Economic engagement from diaspora communities can play a transformative role in supporting post-conflict recovery and long-term development. International experience shows that diaspora contributions extend far beyond household transfers to encompass investment, entrepreneurship, knowledge exchange and market access. These flows of capital and expertise can bolster resilience, stimulate innovation and connect national economies to global networks. For Ukraine, they could also provide vital support in addressing the extraordinary financial, technical and human capital needs of reconstruction.

Realising their full potential requires more than goodwill: it depends on transparent and predictable legal frameworks, trusted financial and digital infrastructure, and targeted mechanisms that make participation from abroad straightforward and secure. When such foundations are in place, diaspora engagement can become a stable and sustainable driver of economic growth, whether through direct involvement at home or sustained contributions from a distance.

Strengthen channels for diaspora investments

Mobilising diaspora investment will be especially important for Ukraine's recovery. Rebuilding housing, infrastructure and utilities, while also revitalising small and medium-sized enterprises, will demand levels of capital that cannot be met by public budgets and international assistance alone. Diaspora investors can help bridge this gap, while also bringing innovation, skills and market connections that stimulate long-term growth. To make this possible, governments need to create predictable and transparent regulatory frameworks, ensure the security of financial flows, and establish trusted and accessible platforms tailored to diaspora communities. Equally important are incentives that encourage sustained engagement, whether through financial products designed for the diaspora, opportunities to co-invest with local partners, or programmes that prioritise investment in key sectors such as housing, energy, agriculture and technology. When combined with inclusive governance and clear alignment with national recovery strategies, such measures can channel diaspora resources into high-impact initiatives that reinforce both reconstruction and economic resilience.

Several countries have already shown how enabling conditions can be built, with policies that integrate diaspora investment into wider development strategies. Mexico's long-standing "3×1" scheme offers an example of how governments can directly match and multiply diaspora contributions. Under this programme, every dollar invested by hometown associations abroad is matched by contributions from federal, state and local authorities, tripling the original sum. The pooled resources are then channelled into social infrastructure or productive projects in migrants' communities of origin. The initiative has not only mobilised substantial collective investments in areas with high poverty or marginalisation, but has also strengthened co-operation between diaspora groups and public institutions, creating enduring partnerships for local development.

Beyond collective contributions to community projects, some countries have sought to create avenues for more substantial investments by enabling diaspora members to pool resources and access national financial systems. In Rwanda, the Rwanda Diaspora Mortgage Group (RDMG) pools resources from diaspora members in Europe to collectively access mortgage facilities from national banks. This approach has lowered barriers to investment in sectors such as real estate, agriculture, tourism, education, IT and transport (Kabeera, 2011^[129]). By providing a structured mechanism for diaspora financing, the RDMG addresses several obstacles that typically hinder diaspora investment, including limited access to credit, lack of co-ordination, and high entry costs. However, investors still face challenges such as bureaucratic hurdles, poor customer service, corruption, and limited access to reliable information about opportunities (Rubyutsa, 2012^[130]). Nonetheless, the growing range of mortgage products offered by national Rwandan banks (including the Bank of Kigali) for diaspora investors, alongside improvements in banking services for remittances management and personal transactions, provides significant opportunities for the Rwandan diaspora to engage in productive investment in their home country (BK, 2025^[131]).

Tunisia's recent policies also demonstrate a move towards more systematic and inclusive approaches to attracting diaspora capital. Measures to improve financial inclusion are enabling members of the diaspora to invest in priority sectors, positioning them as important contributors to economic growth and technological advancement. These actions form part of a broader commitment to people-centred migration governance that values the role of diasporas in meeting long-term development objectives. Tunisia is also upgrading its financial systems to allow diaspora investors to operate either as resident or non-resident investors, supported by digital investment profiles and reforms set out in its 2026-2030 development plan. Different initiatives led by the Office of Tunisians Abroad (OTE) are helping to simplify cross-border investment procedures, reflecting a broader trend towards the digitalisation and institutionalisation of diaspora engagement.

Enterprises, SMEs and infrastructure in the country of origin can also be supported by the diaspora or by those unable to return from abroad, provided that appropriate incentives, grants, tax benefits, or investment platforms are in place to encourage their business activities. The "Diaspora Investment Window" programme in Kosovo is an example of an initiative that promotes diaspora-led investments and entrepreneurship, offering a structured pathway for Kosovars living abroad to contribute meaningfully to their country's economic development. Launched in 2024 by the Kosovo Credit Guarantee Fund, the programme enables members of the diaspora to invest in newly established micro, small and medium-sized enterprises in Kosovo (Kosovo Credit Guarantee Fund, 2025^[132]). Eligible businesses must be at least 30% owned by diaspora members, who may invest alone, with local partners, or with foreign co-investors. Loans can range from EUR 3 000 to EUR 3 million and have flexible terms, with eligible investment sectors including real estate, agriculture, manufacturing and education. The programme thus encourages both diaspora-led business activity and foreign direct investment in key sectors that foster nationwide economic development. Further financial incentives are provided through loan guarantees of up to 80%, making it easier to access credit from registered financial institutions such as Raiffeisen Bank.

To support housing development in Nigeria and enable property ownership among its diaspora, the Committee of Nigerians in Diaspora has partnered with the Federal Mortgage Bank of Nigeria (FMBN) and

the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) to facilitate diaspora contributions to the National Housing Fund (NHF). Through this initiative, eligible members of the diaspora can access loans of up to 50 million Naira (approximately USD 80 000-100 000) to purchase homes in Nigeria (Owotemu, Ifechi-Fred and Faleti, 2024^[133]). A similar approach has been adopted in Colombia, where the programme Colombia Nos Une, run by the Directorate for Immigration, Consular Affairs and Citizen Services of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, offers a housing scheme for emigrants seeking to buy property in the country but requiring financial assistance. Implemented in partnership with the National Bank of Colombia and the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), the Mi Casa con Remesas initiative enables participants to leverage remittance flows to secure housing finance.

Innovative financial instruments such as diaspora bonds have also enabled members of the diaspora to contribute economically to the development of their country of origin without perceiving the investment as excessively risky or requiring continuous, hands-on involvement to generate satisfactory returns (see Annex 5.E). In India and Nigeria, diaspora bonds have proven to be trusted instruments, typically issued for a designated and limited period to mobilise funding for specific infrastructure development projects. By contrast, Israel's long-standing bonds programme has been designed to operate on a continuous basis, regardless of the country's economic cycle, thereby providing a stable source of funding while fostering social cohesion between citizens abroad and those at home. For many in the diaspora, purchasing such bonds is both an economic act and an expression of solidarity with their country of origin.

Beyond government-led initiatives, partnerships with development agencies, civil society and the private sector can expand investment opportunities. In 2020, the London-based African Foundation for Development (AFFORD) launched its AFFORD Business Centre Benin project, supported by the Swiss Agency for Development and Co-operation, to mobilise diaspora-led SMEs through outreach campaigns in Europe and match them with viable projects in their country of origin. In Tunisia, the Mobi-TRE project has targeted investment from diaspora members based in Italy, with a focus on fostering regional investment in Tunisia.

Crowdfunding platforms can also serve as effective tools for mobilising diaspora finance, particularly when they are designed around shared identities or causes. Homestrings, for example, enables diaspora investors to fund infrastructure and SME projects in their countries of origin through a regulated online platform, offering both financial returns and measurable social impact. Initially launched as an early-stage crowdfunding platform in Africa, Homestrings has since evolved into a diaspora investment advisory service. With a network of over 5 000 members, it has channelled more than USD 25 million into 35 transactions across 12 countries, often with relatively modest minimum capital requirements.

Other platforms target different communities but apply similar principles. LaunchGood, for instance, was founded by members of the global Muslim community to support initiatives that reflect shared values such as compassion, justice and generosity. While rooted in a faith-based network, it is open to all and has attracted a diverse donor base. By offering zero per cent platform fees and connecting projects to a large and engaged global audience, LaunchGood has facilitated the rapid mobilisation of resources for causes ranging from humanitarian relief to educational initiatives. During Ramadan 2024 alone, the platform raised approximately USD 69 million for projects worldwide.

These examples illustrate how platforms tailored to a specific community or identity can foster trust, visibility and scale in fundraising. A similar model could be adapted to mobilise diaspora communities around the recovery and reconstruction of Ukraine, enabling small contributions from a broad base of supporters to be channelled into targeted, high-impact projects aligned with national priorities.

Across these diverse examples, several enabling conditions emerge as critical for sustaining diaspora finance and investment. These include reducing transaction costs, ensuring the security and transparency of all channels, offering trusted and accessible platforms, and aligning investment opportunities with national priorities. When such conditions are in place, diaspora capital can flow through multiple pathways

such as remittances, direct investment, housing finance, or innovative instruments such as diaspora bonds, becoming a reliable driver of economic recovery and long-term development.

Encourage diaspora entrepreneurship and business co-operation

Diaspora entrepreneurs can make important contributions to innovation, capital mobilisation and access to global markets. Their combination of knowledge of local conditions and international experience enables them to identify market opportunities, strengthen value chains and link domestic firms with partners abroad. Many operate as transnational entrepreneurs, drawing on established networks, sector-specific expertise, technical knowledge and cultural awareness to create economic linkages between host and origin countries. In high-risk investment environments, they can provide both financial resources and the credibility needed to attract additional investment. Facilitating continued transnational mobility and circular migration can maximise these benefits and may, in some cases, be more effective than focussing solely on permanent return.

Research has demonstrated how the growth of technology industries in India, Taiwan and Israel in the late 20th century was directly linked to the return of professionals from Silicon Valley (Saxenian, 2002^[134]; Saxenian, 2006^[135]). Returning diaspora engineers brought valuable international experience, extensive social and business networks and the ability to operate fluently in multiple economic systems, enabling them to identify market opportunities, locate foreign partners and manage cross-border business operations more effectively than domestic peers with limited international experience and connections.

Taiwan's Hsinchu Science Park provides an example of the transformative impact of diaspora entrepreneurship. Many US-educated Taiwanese engineers returned to establish businesses in sectors such as semiconductors, making use of their professional contacts and encouraging further investment in the nascent industry. Within two decades of the Park's creation, it hosted more than 280 companies, 40% of which had been founded by US-educated returnees (Saxenian, 2002^[134]). The contributions of the Taiwanese diaspora to local development have not depended on permanent return. Many engineers routinely travelled between the United States and Taiwan, acting as intermediaries between the two markets, creating synergies and fostering trust between investor communities. Taiwanese angel investors and venture capitalists often worked for companies or start-ups in both regions, seizing opportunities in both their home and host countries.

Recognising the value of diaspora entrepreneurship, several countries have developed dedicated programmes to attract and support these actors. In Armenia, the NerUzh Diaspora Tech Startup Programme, implemented by the government in collaboration with the Foundation for Armenian Science and Technology, introduces diaspora entrepreneurs to the Armenian innovation landscape through an intensive programme in Armenia. The programme targets young entrepreneurs aged 18 to 35 of Armenian descent who are ready to move to Armenia to implement their business ideas. Grants of up to USD 30 000, mentorship and technical support are awarded to the most promising projects (The Ministry of High-Tech Industry, 2025^[136]; Office of the High Commissioner for Diaspora Affairs, 2025^[137]). Launched in 2018, NerUzh is currently supporting its sixth cohort, after a brief suspension during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Efforts to support diaspora entrepreneurs have also extended beyond the technology sector. Portugal's Programa Regressar, a comprehensive government initiative for returnees, facilitated access to a dedicated "Return Credit Line" for diaspora entrepreneurs. This instrument, with a credit limit of EUR 1 million per enterprise and EUR 500 000 per returning citizen, aimed to promote business investment and new ventures by Portuguese entrepreneurs and their descendants. The programme was paused prior to the COVID-19 pandemic with plans for revision, although no updates have been announced. In the Indian state of Kerala, the NORKA ROOTS agency operates several schemes for returning Non-Resident Keralites, including business development support offering access to loans in sectors such as agriculture, fisheries and small-scale industries through partnerships with nearly 20 financial institutions.

While such initiatives highlight the potential of diaspora entrepreneurship, many entrepreneurs face regulatory, financial and market access barriers that can be difficult to overcome without targeted support. To address these challenges, governments and development partners have created programmes offering comprehensive assistance. MEETAFrica, a joint initiative of the French Development Agency and Expertise France under the Rabat Process, provides expert advice, mentoring and access to start-up funds for diaspora entrepreneurs from Cameroon, Morocco, Senegal, Côte d'Ivoire and Tunisia (MEETAFrica, 2025^[138]). In the case of the Tunisian diaspora, for example, MEETAFrica has supported enterprises in sectors including science and technology, health, renewable energy and organic agriculture. It has also developed “soft landing” facilities in innovation hubs, mapped resources and created networks of support structures to strengthen entrepreneurship ecosystems. The programme places particular emphasis on engaging African university students in France and Germany and supporting them to launch businesses in their home countries (Campus France, 2017^[139]).

Not all diaspora entrepreneurs establish their own ventures in their countries of origin. Many play a bridging role, investing in existing enterprises, mentoring local business leaders and opening access to international markets. The Netherlands-based ZidiCircle illustrates how such engagement can be structured. Operating across Europe and Africa, ZidiCircle works with small and medium-sized enterprise support organisations to identify promising businesses in sectors such as renewable energy, sustainable agriculture and technology, and matches them with trained diaspora angel investors and experienced entrepreneurs. This model enables diaspora professionals to contribute expertise, market knowledge and contacts to strengthen local enterprises. By facilitating targeted investment and knowledge transfer without requiring full business relocation, such initiatives broaden the scope of diaspora engagement and ensure that domestic firms benefit from the skills and networks necessary for growth.

This bridging role can be particularly valuable in contexts where local markets face structural challenges, as seen in Lebanon. Despite prolonged political and economic instability, diaspora entrepreneurs and investors have been instrumental in developing innovation ecosystems capable of sustaining high-risk, high-growth ventures (Benton, 2023^[140]). These ecosystems often rely on a small number of experienced diaspora professionals who bring both strong international networks and trusted local relationships, enabling them to connect global capital with domestic opportunities. Lebanon Venture Partners, founded in 2009 by three general partners from North America and the Gulf, demonstrates how diaspora investors can introduce international business practices, foster trust among stakeholders and attract investment that might otherwise not have materialised. Their dual perspective allowed them to adapt global models to local conditions, build confidence among foreign and domestic partners, and advance the longer-term vision of a competitive knowledge economy.

Many countries also draw on diaspora business networks to drive innovation and expand opportunities for domestic firms. In Chile, the ChileGlobal Network, supported by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' export promotion agency ProChile, links Chilean entrepreneurs to members of the diaspora in the United States, Canada and Europe. It organises technological missions, meetings with entrepreneurs and authorities, and internships for young Chileans in diaspora-led companies abroad, fostering skills transfer and innovation. Similarly, in Scotland, the GlobalScot Network engages experienced diaspora professionals overseas to mentor local enterprises, provide market insights, facilitate introductions to potential partners and strengthen trade and investment links. New Zealand's World Class New Zealand Network connects leading members of the Kiwi diaspora to domestic businesses and celebrates their contributions through annual awards, while Albania's Connect Albania scheme supports entrepreneurs, business leaders and sector specialists from the Albanian diaspora in Italy with grants to attract Italian investors to Albania.

When supported by well-designed policies and co-ordinated engagement frameworks, diaspora entrepreneurs can become key agents of economic transformation. They bring investment, knowledge, networks and credibility that can strengthen domestic industries and connect them to global markets. For countries facing the complex task of post-crisis recovery, creating an enabling environment for diaspora

entrepreneurship is not only a matter of economic opportunity but also a strategic investment in long-term resilience and competitiveness.

Promote skills exchange and knowledge transfer

Effective diaspora engagement extends beyond remittances and investment to encompass the exchange of skills, knowledge and professional experience. Mechanisms such as professional exchanges, targeted return projects, mentorship initiatives and virtual collaboration platforms can help connect diaspora skills with domestic needs. When aligned with strategic priorities and implemented through accessible and trusted channels, such initiatives can strengthen institutional capacities, promote innovation and enhance the competitiveness of economies in countries of origin.

A critical first step in enabling such engagement is to identify and map the skills, experience and areas of interest available within diaspora communities. Several governments have developed online platforms and digital tools for this purpose, encouraging members of their diaspora to self-report their professional expertise and indicate how they would like to contribute. In Barbados, for example, a dedicated data platform invites Barbadians abroad to register, share their skills and perspectives, and become involved in strategic national initiatives. The Be Basque Talent Network, established to attract skilled workers to the Basque region of Spain, uses a similar approach. While aimed at skilled migrants more broadly, it actively markets its services to individuals of Basque descent interested in returning, allowing them to register their interest and indicate their skills profile.

In India, a comparable database was developed during the COVID-19 pandemic in response to the increased return of economic migrants. To support their reintegration into the labour market, the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship, under the Skill India Mission and in partnership with the Ministry of Civil Aviation and the Ministry of External Affairs, established the SWADES (Skilled Workers Arrival Database for Employment Support) programme. Returning citizens complete a skills form, following which they receive a SWADES skills card. The data is then shared with employers to facilitate suitable placement opportunities.

Identifying and mapping skills within the diaspora is only the first step. The next challenge lies in effectively mobilising this expertise in ways that benefit both the individual and the country of origin. For many origin countries, particularly those with significant ongoing emigration of highly qualified professionals and students, the objective is to promote forms of engagement and return migration that foster brain circulation and brain gain rather than permanent loss of talent.

The *I Choose Croatia* programme illustrates how targeted interventions can leverage diaspora expertise to address specific national priorities. It supports the involvement of highly skilled members of the diaspora in the development of underserved or depopulated regions by offering reintegration grants for up to two years to those who relocate to less developed areas, facilitating both economic and social revitalisation.

Strengthening public sector capacities through the return of skilled diaspora members has gained momentum in recent decades as governments increasingly recognise the value of such engagement for national development. These initiatives are often premised on the understanding that potential returnees may be motivated less by financial incentives and more by the opportunity to make a meaningful and lasting contribution to their country of origin. By providing structured opportunities to serve in public institutions, such programmes can enable diaspora professionals to apply their expertise, introduce international best practices and strengthen governance systems.

In Benin, for example, the National Association of Communes signed an agreement in 2018 with the Association of French Elected Officials of Beninese Origin to facilitate the engagement of Beninese-origin elected officials from France in supporting local mayors to improve governance and administrative effectiveness. In Armenia, the iGorts Fellowship, launched in 2020, places diaspora professionals in

government institutions for 12 months, enabling them to contribute to policy development, institutional reform and capacity building while drawing on their international experience.

A similar approach is taken in Lithuania through the Create Lithuania programme, which annually attracts around 20 highly skilled diaspora members to work in public sector bodies on issues ranging from improving the country's image to enhancing competitiveness, promoting entrepreneurship and fostering foreign direct investment. Participants are integrated into the government structure, collaborating with public officials, businesses and civil society to address complex policy challenges. The success of this initiative has led to the piloting of a similar programme in Ukraine, known as Create Ukraine.

Other programmes, such as the Romania Wants to Meet You – Young Professionals Programme, launched by the I Believe in Romania (Cred în România) youth association, follow similar models but focus on building partnerships with leading companies and private employers, including Deloitte, Microsoft and Accenture. These partnerships create employment opportunities exclusively for diaspora members who have been living abroad for at least five years, hold a higher education qualification from an institution outside Romania, and are seeking suitable roles in Bucharest. Leveraging shared history and cultural ties, the programme also targets young professionals from the Republic of Moldova, thereby widening the pool of applicants and increasing the potential for return.

The Repat Armenia Foundation illustrates the importance of establishing robust support networks for highly skilled expatriates who wish to return to Armenia and contribute their expertise to the country's economic and innovation landscape. While there may be a clear demand for skills and knowledge, effective matching of diaspora talent with suitable opportunities often requires targeted facilitation. Initiatives of this kind typically place strong emphasis on ensuring that the opportunities offered are commensurate with the skills, experience and aspirations of diaspora members, thereby making return a more attractive and viable option. In the case of Armenia, the Foundation provides repatriation and integration consultations to more than 1 000 expatriates annually, building a network of over 12 000 members. It supports them in securing appropriate employment with local companies, facilitates recruitment processes, and assists them in contributing to Armenia's innovation sector. To date, more than 750 Armenian expatriates have permanently returned through the Foundation.

In Viet Nam, Come Home Pho Good similarly facilitates connections between employers and prospective returnees, with recruitment agencies such as Robert Walters identifying and engaging overseas Vietnamese professionals who are willing to return and interested in employment opportunities in Viet Nam.

In some cases, these programmes focus on specific sectors. Many initiatives prioritise attracting scientists and researchers, recognising their potential to strengthen research and development capacity and foster innovation in countries of origin. The *Balik Scientist Programme* in the Philippines encourages scientists, technologists and experts from the diaspora to return and share their knowledge in areas critical to the country's scientific, agro-industrial and economic development. Between 2007 and May 2019, the programme engaged 236 scientists in 348 projects, with the majority coming from North America and Asia, and a smaller proportion from Europe, Australia and Africa. Similarly, Croatia's *Unity through Knowledge Fund* facilitates exchanges between Croatian researchers abroad and their domestic counterparts. It aims to strengthen national research capacity, support technology transfer to Croatian companies, and promote international investment in Croatian science, while fostering an environment conducive to innovation.

Countries such as China and India operate large-scale national programmes to encourage the return of skilled diaspora members, but these are increasingly complemented by targeted regional and city-level initiatives designed to meet specific local development priorities. This shift reflects a recognition that while national frameworks provide strategic direction and resources, regional and municipal authorities are often best placed to identify pressing skills shortages, adapt incentives to local conditions, and foster the institutional and business environments in which returnees can have the greatest impact. For example, in China, the national strategy to attract overseas talent is supported by a network of localised programmes

that address the needs of particular industrial clusters and innovation hubs. Shenzhen, one of the country's leading technological and innovation centres, launched the Peacock Talent Programme in 2011 to attract highly qualified overseas returnees, many of whom have completed postgraduate or doctoral studies abroad (Box 5.10).

Box 5.10. Supporting the return of highly skilled diaspora to Shenzhen: Peacock Talent Programme

The Peacock Talent Programme provides subsidies to returning scientists and engineers in the ICT and Internet industries, with amounts determined by their professional experience and affiliations with internationally recognised universities. Its objective is to attract and transform these returnees into “scientific entrepreneurs” in Shenzhen, enabling them not only to engage in advanced research but also to collaborate with local institutions on applied innovations.

Participants have noted that Shenzhen's well-developed supply chains, strong industrial base and supportive entrepreneurship policies create an enabling environment for professional growth. Many have sought to work with Chinese employers, while others have established businesses in China that build on their international experience and capitalise on the potential of the domestic market. The programme offers direct financial support from the city government of up to USD 74 000, with allocations based on educational qualifications, the feasibility of the proposed venture and its capacity to attract additional talent.

However, some returnees have chosen to retain academic positions abroad as a safeguard in the event of dissatisfaction with their professional integration in China. This tendency has been linked to perceptions of a limited “nurturing environment” in certain higher education institutions, which may constrain the ability of returnees to contribute to institutional development alongside their entrepreneurial and innovation roles. For many, the flexibility to maintain overseas academic posts, combined with favourable visa arrangements for individuals of Chinese descent holding foreign passports, has been an important factor in the decision to return.

Source: Wang (2022^[141]), “Talent Migration in Knowledge Economy: The Case of China's Silicon Valley, Shenzhen”, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12134-021-00875-5>.

A central challenge in designing diaspora return programmes for skilled professionals is ensuring that the conditions offered are sufficiently attractive to encourage return. While it is rarely feasible to match the salary levels available in host countries, other factors can be decisive in influencing return decisions. Professional opportunities, career development prospects, and quality-of-life benefits can help offset potential reductions in income and make return a viable and appealing option. The specific considerations vary depending on individual profiles. A study of Italian scientists working overseas found that the probability of returning was highest (77%) among those on fixed-term contracts, while it declined sharply to 18% for those in permanent academic positions (Sbalchiero and Tuzzi, 2017^[142]). Full professors were the least inclined to return, with factors such as older age, extended periods abroad, favourable professional circumstances and working conditions, and family responsibilities cited as possible reasons.

It is also important to ensure that such initiatives are not perceived domestically as unfair. The Create Lithuania programme, for example, has acknowledged challenges related to offering slightly higher financial compensation than the average in the public sector in order to attract participants. This has the potential to be viewed negatively by other public servants whose salaries are fixed by law at lower levels. Addressing such sensitivities requires careful management and clear communication of the tangible benefits these programmes bring to national institutions, the wider economy and local communities.

Given that many members of the diaspora prefer to maintain transnational lifestyles, and in light of the significant resources required to facilitate permanent return, some countries have developed temporary or “virtual” return schemes to facilitate knowledge transfer and skills exchange. These mechanisms allow professionals to contribute to national development without requiring relocation. Temporary Return of Qualified Nationals (TRQN) programmes, implemented by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) on behalf of the Netherlands, are one example. They provide opportunities for diaspora professionals to apply their knowledge, expertise and cultural understanding to support development and reconstruction in their countries of origin.

During the TRQN III phase (December 2012 to November 2015), assignments covered a wide range of sectors and activities. In Afghanistan, diaspora medical professionals provided two and a half months of essential training to the next generation of doctors at Kabul Medical University. In Ghana, health specialists undertook short but repeated missions of between two and eight weeks to improve the use of ICT in healthcare. In Georgia, urban planners delivered targeted training, while in Morocco, diaspora experts worked with local NGOs to raise awareness on social issues such as sexual and reproductive health and human rights. In Armenia, geophysics specialists provided technical training in the local language. The duration of assignments varied across countries and projects, averaging between 60 and 187 days per expert, demonstrating the model’s adaptability in addressing different national and sectoral needs (Table 5.3).

Table 5.3. Allocation of diaspora experts and duration of return assignments under TRQN III by country (December 2012 – November 2015)

	Total number of diaspora experts	Total number of assignments	Total days invested	Average days per expert	Average days per assignment	Number of repeated assignments
Afghanistan	42	63	5 662	134	90	16
Armenia	12	14	845	70	60	2
Cape Verde	9	15	1099	122	73	3
Georgia	15	34	1 958	131	57	10
Ghana	13	31	1075	83	35	10
Iraq	25	33	2 415	97	73	7
Morocco	32	51	4 691	147	92	13
Somalia	42	76	7 875	187	103	18
Sudan	16	18	956	60	53	2

Note: These numbers draw from the April 2015 List of TRQN III experts. The statistics in this chart differ slightly from the overall project numbers. For example, the total number of experts contracted under the project was 212, but 6 had not begun their assignments by then and were not included.

Source: Leith and Rivas (2015^[143]), “The Temporary Return of Qualified Nationals Project (TRQN) III: Evaluation report”, https://iom-nederland.nl/images/Publications/Evaluation_TRQN_Response_IOM.pdf.

The 2015 evaluation of the third phase of TRQN found that 91.0% of participating experts identified “the opportunity to contribute to your home country” as their primary motivation for involvement (Leith and Rivas, 2015^[143]). This underlines that diaspora professionals are often driven more by personal and emotional connections, or by a sense of duty to their country of origin, than by financial gain or career advancement. Short-term return assignments can therefore provide a valuable means of harnessing diaspora expertise in areas critical for recovery and reconstruction, while avoiding many of the significant costs associated with permanent return for both the individuals and the communities involved. The relatively short duration of these assignments – often taken as a form of professional sabbatical – allows experts to maintain their existing employment and personal arrangements in their current countries.

In some cases, such short-term return opportunities have been actively facilitated through bilateral arrangements between origin and host countries, particularly in response to urgent recovery needs. Following the 2009 earthquake and tsunami in Samoa, the Samoan and New Zealand Governments agreed on a scheme that allowed Samoans in New Zealand to return temporarily for up to one month to assist in relief and reconstruction efforts, without risking the loss of their jobs or residence permits in New Zealand. For affected households, this arrangement not only provided critical emotional support during a period of crisis but also encouraged the flow of informal remittances and in-kind contributions to communities in need.

Recognising the benefits of such partial return models, several countries have integrated them into their broader return strategies. China was one of the first to formally adopt this approach, initially encouraging short visits by international students settled abroad as early as 1992. In 2001, it expanded this policy to include professionals working overseas, inviting them to contribute to China's economic development without the need for relocation (Zweig, Fung and Han, 2008^[144]). Since then, most Chinese return initiatives have incorporated flexible short-term and even virtual return opportunities (Lei and Guo, 2020^[145]), including the Peacock Talent Programme (see Box 5.10).

Virtual returns refer to the engagement of diaspora human capital while individuals remain physically abroad, with no relocation taking place. Through remote collaboration, they can contribute to the economy of their ancestral country and its enterprises by providing specialised expertise, undertaking project-based work, mentoring local professionals, or participating in research and innovation activities (Labrianidis and Karampekios, 2022^[146]). Such arrangements allow skills and know-how to be channelled into recovery and reconstruction efforts without incurring the relocation costs and personal disruptions that are often associated with permanent return. Virtual return models can be particularly relevant in post-crisis settings, where security conditions, family commitments or professional obligations may limit physical mobility, but where digital connectivity offers an effective alternative for sustained engagement.

Fostering cultural, educational and civic ties with the diaspora

What are the key considerations for policymakers in Ukraine?

- **Invest in cultural, educational and civic co-operation with the diaspora.** While diaspora self-organisation often emerges during times of crisis, sustained engagement requires continued support and active efforts from the country of origin.
- **Prioritise engagement of younger generations, including young adults.** Support cultural exchange, educational partnerships and leadership initiatives, including co-operation with Ukrainian heritage schools and scouting organisations abroad, to strengthen identity and connections to Ukraine and foster the foundations for their future contribution to recovery and development.
- **Make diaspora's political participation meaningful, not symbolic.** Establish structured feedback channels and targeted consultations to ensure diaspora voices and expertise help shape recovery policies.

Diaspora engagement is not limited to its economic dimension. The global Ukrainian community can play a vital role in sustaining and promoting Ukrainian identity, language and culture, while fostering mutual understanding and solidarity between Ukrainians at home and abroad. Through cultural exchanges, educational partnerships and civic co-operation, the diaspora can strengthen social cohesion, contribute to democratic processes in Ukraine, and serve as a credible and influential voice for Ukraine internationally. Maintaining strong two-way connections requires institutionalised channels for political participation,

support for community-led initiatives, and investment in programmes that encourage active engagement across generations. When nurtured over time, these ties can help transform temporary contacts and return visits into longer-term commitments, while ensuring that those who choose to return permanently have access to the reintegration support they need to contribute fully to the country's future.

Strengthen cultural ties

Strengthening cultural identity and emotional ties with the country of origin remains an essential dimension of diaspora engagement, particularly for sustaining connections among second- and third-generation members. Cultural expressions through food, music and art nurture a shared sense of pride and belonging, while structured initiatives such as internships, volunteer placements and cultural exchanges provide meaningful pathways for young people to engage with their heritage and contribute to development initiatives. Well-designed strategies in this area can deepen emotional bonds, encourage youth leadership in areas such as climate action and innovation, and foster inclusive environments that recognise and empower diaspora youth as active contributors to sustainable development.

Many diaspora engagement programmes focus specifically on young people, with the aim of cultivating a lasting sense of identity across generations. Camps for children and other short-term visits that combine cultural and touristic experiences with opportunities to learn about social life, services and professional prospects in the country of origin can create valuable and lasting links. Such experiences often enable participants to form networks with peers in the diaspora who share a similar connection to the ancestral country, as well as with local residents. These personal and professional relationships can serve as a foundation for sustained engagement and, in some cases, pave the way for deeper involvement in the country's future.

Since 2012, Armenia has implemented the Ari Tun programme, which brings young people from the diaspora to Armenia for homestay visits, language immersion and civic engagement. It is open to diaspora youth aged 13 to 18 who are not citizens of the Republic of Armenia, except those with dual citizenship. The programme aims to strengthen cultural identity and foster enduring connections with the homeland. Over a two-week period, participants receive Armenian language courses in both Eastern and Western Armenian, attend classes in Armenian studies, and take lessons in national songs and dances. The programme also includes educational visits to historical and cultural landmarks, museums and academic institutions, as well as meetings with government officials, cultural and artistic figures, and opportunities to participate in sports and cultural events. All in-country costs are covered by the government of the Republic of Armenia. In 2025, the programme hosted 600 diaspora youth.

Similarly, Taglit Birthright Israel offers young diaspora Jews aged between 18 and 26 free ten-day heritage trips to Israel, with the aim of strengthening Jewish identity and fostering global connections with the State of Israel. The programme combines cultural education, travel and civic dialogue, and has hosted nearly 1 million participants since its inception in 1999. Its stated mission is to provide all young Jewish adults with opportunities for transformative and immersive shared experiences in Israel, laying the foundation for ongoing engagement with their heritage. Eligibility requires recognition as Jewish by one of the recognised Jewish denominations (Reform, Reconstructionist, Conservative, Orthodox, Sephardic) and the absence of exclusive adherence to another religion. Participants must also have at least one Jewish parent who identifies as such, or be recognised as Jewish through conversion. The programme is largely funded by Jewish diaspora organisations in partnership with the Government of Israel.

While many earlier initiatives primarily targeted underage diaspora members, there is an increasing trend towards adopting a broader definition of diaspora youth. Such approaches recognise that engagement opportunities should extend to young adults who may already have completed their education and begun their professional careers, yet remain open to exploring their heritage and considering future connections with their country of origin.

The Know India Programme, implemented by the Indian Ministry of External Affairs, reflects this expanded scope. It targets members of the Indian diaspora aged under 35, enabling participants who are no longer in school and may be established in their careers to familiarise themselves with India's history, politics, culture and economic opportunities. Over three weeks, participants take part in organised visits to research institutions, cultural landmarks and sites of historical significance. The programme also provides information on relevant government schemes and organisations that could support them at various stages of their lives, including in the event of a return to India. In this way, it serves as both a cultural immersion and a practical orientation to potential pathways for engagement (Ministry of External Affairs, 2024^[147]).

There are a range of cultural activities aimed at all age groups and individuals with diverse ties to ancestral countries. Cultural celebrations and gatherings, such as the Global Irish Festival Series, which each year organises activities and facilitates travel for members of the Irish diaspora in different locations of the country (Fáilte Ireland, 2025^[148]). These events can help the diaspora associate holidays with their home country, spend time in new areas of the country, and meet other members of the diaspora. In honouring shared history and cultural ties, many commemorative ceremonies, organised at the county or city level, can engage the entire national diaspora, as is the case with the Ireland-Canada Homecoming 2025 ceremony which marks the departure of 2 500 people setting sail for Upper Canada two centuries prior. Spanning a rich programme that includes conversations with various speakers, celebratory meals, and other activities, the celebration is particularly symbolic for the Irish diaspora.

Similarly, Barbados organises the We Gatherin' events, designed to deepen connections between the country and its diaspora while highlighting different themes in each edition. The 2025 programme invites all Barbadians to celebrate traditional ways of life, showcase the country's diverse talent and achievements, contribute to local communities, capitalise on economic opportunities, and collaborate on shaping a shared vision for the nation's future. As in Ireland, these "homecoming" events also serve to strengthen local pride. During the We Gatherin' year, for instance, individual parishes open their own heritage centres to highlight their distinct culture, history and identity. These events demonstrate how diaspora-focussed activities can be combined with broader community-building efforts, creating a mutually reinforcing relationship between national heritage and local development.

Origin countries increasingly seek to sustain diaspora connections through a gradual spectrum of opportunities. What may begin with cultural immersion or youth exchanges is often complemented by initiatives that provide diaspora members with practical entitlements and legal recognition. Such measures not only acknowledge heritage but also create a structured framework for longer-term engagement. Importantly, they are often designed with more than cultural preservation in mind: governments view them as a way to build trust, lower barriers for future relocation, and, in some cases, pave the way for eventual return.

One prominent approach has been to grant diaspora members a semi-formal status that both recognises their heritage and provides tangible benefits. In Poland, the Karta Polaka grants holders a range of rights and entitlements, including eligibility to apply for a residence permit and, subsequently, for Polish citizenship with fee exemptions. It also eases access to education, healthcare, and financial assistance intended for settlement and livelihood, as well as discounted train fares and free entry to state museums. Holders are further exempt from the requirement to obtain a work permit or a permit to establish and conduct business activities. Initially introduced to support individuals of Polish ancestry who, due to the Second World War, had been forced to leave their home territories and had acquired new citizenship under the USSR, the Karta Polaka was expanded in 2019 to allow citizens of any country with proven Polish ancestry to obtain it. This reform has extended its reach beyond Eastern Europe, strengthening Poland's capacity to engage its diaspora more globally (Kuznicow-Wyszynski, 2024^[149]).

A comparable model has been introduced in Serbia. The NGO Returning Point, which facilitates access to legal services for all members of the diaspora who are considering return, tailors assistance to their specific needs. Reflecting elements of the Polish model, the organisation has introduced the Carta Serbica, which

simplifies the process for diaspora members without Serbian citizenship to obtain the necessary residence or work permits. In addition to legal facilitation, it provides broader support and fosters direct contact between potential returnees and relevant government institutions, ensuring that assistance is adapted to individual circumstances.

Other countries adopt a more gradual, step-by-step approach that allows diaspora members to test their attachment to the homeland before making a permanent decision. Israel, for example, has developed measures to accommodate different levels of interest and commitment.

Taglit Birthright Israel offers an initial entry point, but those wishing to explore Israel more deeply can join the Masa programme, which provides a wide range of opportunities lasting from one to ten months, including academic study, internships, volunteer placements and cultural immersion. Among its offerings is the Masa Remote Work programme, which enables members of the Jewish diaspora aged 22 to 30 from selected countries, including the United States, Canada and the United Kingdom, to live in Israel as digital nomads while continuing to work for their overseas employers. Masa covers a comprehensive package of arrangements, including entry permits and visas, medical insurance, accommodation, workspace, security and guidance. Participants receive a visa that allows remote work without imposing Israeli tax obligations on them or their employers. Evaluations indicate that alumni of Masa are more likely to remain engaged with Israel, pursue aliyah (immigration to Israel), or return for work and study.

For those who decide to return permanently, Israel provides additional support (see Annex 5.F). The Sal Klita Absorption Basket offers a package of financial assistance to cover living expenses for the first six months, supports language immersion activities, and provides rental assistance during the first year.

While few countries have as comprehensive a framework as Israel, others have nonetheless established targeted systems that combine engagement with practical return support. The Global Estonian programme illustrates how sustained engagement can be achieved through a combination of tailored assistance, proactive outreach, and co-ordinated service provision. Managed in co-operation with foundations and relevant government agencies, the programme offers personalised counselling and practical guidance to diaspora members considering a return, including information on employment opportunities, education, housing, and administrative procedures. By ensuring that advice is relevant to individual circumstances and accessible from abroad, the initiative helps potential returnees make informed decisions and prepares them for reintegration. Such measures are important not only to facilitate return when it occurs, but also to maintain long-term connections across generations, reinforcing a sense of belonging even for those who may not return immediately.

Taken together, these examples demonstrate that fostering cultural, educational, and civic ties is not only about preserving heritage but also about building a foundation for deeper engagement. When complemented by accessible legal pathways and practical return support, such ties can gradually evolve into concrete mobility decisions. For Ukraine, ensuring that cultural affinity and civic engagement are linked to well-designed opportunities for return can transform diaspora bonds into a long-term asset for national recovery and reconstruction.

Work towards meaningful and reciprocal engagement

Building meaningful civic and political partnerships with diaspora communities, including those unable or unwilling to return, can play a critical role in national recovery and long-term reconstruction strategies. Beyond remittances and humanitarian support, the diaspora represents a reservoir of civic, political, cultural, and professional capital that can be mobilised to shape inclusive post-crisis futures. An essential part of this approach is ensuring the diaspora receives a clear message that they matter to the country of origin and that their engagement is valued as a partnership of mutual benefit and shared commitment to national development.

Ireland's Emigrant Support Programme demonstrates effective engagement through civil society and NGOs, promoting Irish cultural heritage by funding language classes, events and celebrations abroad, thereby supporting diaspora community activities. By awarding grants to organisations and initiatives that demonstrate positive impact on Irish diaspora communities, the government recognises and encourages further engagement whilst supporting diaspora visibility internationally, confirming their value to national identity and efficiently reaching the most disadvantaged and potentially disengaged communities abroad.

There are a growing number of initiatives from other origin countries as well aimed at investing in and supporting their diaspora communities. Colombia's programme "Colombia Nos Une" exemplifies this by transforming consular services into comprehensive support centres that address diaspora needs through targeted social initiatives whilst simultaneously strengthening national connections. Similarly, Georgia has developed an integrated framework combining digital platforms, youth leadership programmes, and national celebrations to maintain diaspora engagement. Both examples underscore that sustainable diaspora engagement requires reciprocal arrangements to bring value to both sides.

Various initiatives have sought to involve diaspora communities in recovery and reconstruction processes. The Sri Lankan experience illustrates both the opportunities and the challenges of such engagement in a post-conflict context. In 2015, the government invited diaspora communities to contribute to its post-war development and peace agenda, including through a national conference on reconciliation and sustainable peace. Discussions covered themes such as diaspora identity, the role of skills, ideas and capital in recovery, and activism in justice, reconciliation and social cohesion. The process also brought to the fore concerns raised by diaspora representatives, including the need to broaden the focus beyond the Tamil diaspora to include Sinhala and Muslim communities, to address gaps in understanding diaspora expectations, to improve mechanisms for negotiating aid with local communities, and to integrate gender perspectives. However, despite broad areas of agreement emerging during the consultations, the outcomes were not translated into a coherent and sustained strategy, which ultimately weakened trust and engagement among diaspora communities.

Fostering meaningful engagement with new generations of diaspora communities requires structured approaches that institutionalise their participation across all phases of public policy. Establishing continuous channels of communication through embassies and dedicated government platforms ensures that younger diaspora members remain informed about national priorities and opportunities for contribution. Inclusive policy planning that integrates their perspectives into short-, medium-, and long-term strategies strengthens the link between diaspora expertise and national development needs. Consequently, moving from basic outreach to institutional frameworks, many countries have successfully formalised diaspora engagement by legally recognising their membership in the diaspora and through mechanisms such as advisory councils, external voting rights, and formal roles in policymaking. These approaches not only strengthen ties between the diaspora and their countries of origin, but also empower displaced citizens to remain actively involved in shaping policies that affect their communities at home.

France's approach through the Assemblée des Français de l'Étranger (AFE) illustrates how formal consultation mechanisms can provide diaspora communities with direct input into national policy. Established in 2004 as a consultative body to the French Government, the Assemblée des Français de l'Étranger provides insights and recommendations on issues affecting French expatriates, including education, social services, taxation, and cultural affairs. The institution's distinctive structure involves 90 members appointed by consular advisors and the 11 deputies of France's National Assembly representing French citizens abroad, who convene twice yearly for plenaries to deliberate on policies affecting approximately 2.5 million French expatriates worldwide (Sénat, 2025^[150]).

One of the most recent and large-scale initiatives of the Assemblée des Français de l'Étranger has been the organisation of the Social Protection Conference for French Citizens Abroad (Assises de la Protection Sociale des Français de l'Étranger), aiming to engage the French diaspora in shaping national social policy. This participatory process, organised in collaboration with the National Commission for Public Debate

(CNDP), is centred around three key themes: educational scholarships (including support for students with disabilities), direct social assistance and support for local social organisations, and the future of the Caisse des Français de l'Étranger (CFE) – a public institution that enables French citizens living abroad to maintain access to French-style social security, including health insurance, maternity benefits, and workplace accident coverage while living abroad (Alliance Solidaire des Français de l'Étranger, 2025^[151]). By collecting testimonies, proposals, and expert input from across the global French community, and by opening all debates to any member of the diaspora, the Assemblée des Français de l'Étranger seeks to formulate actionable recommendations to improve these systems (Français du Monde, 2025^[152]).

Mexico has likewise invested significantly in strengthening diaspora engagement, particularly by enhancing the involvement of its diaspora in national political processes. Since 2002, Mexico has maintained a permanent inter-ministerial commission, the National Council for Mexican Communities Abroad (Consejo Nacional para las Comunidades Mexicanas en el Exterior), with the mandate of proposing and implementing policies for the benefit of Mexican communities abroad. In addition, the majority of Mexican states, as well as Mexico City, have established state-level offices or ministries dedicated to migrant or expatriate affairs, co-ordinated through a national secretariat.

At the institutional level, another important mechanism for engaging diaspora groups operates through structures such as the Institute for Mexicans Abroad (IME). This body, established within Mexico's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, reaches Mexicans living and working abroad to ensure their voices are represented in national policymaking. IME's stated mission is to strengthen the ties between the Mexican diaspora and their home country by nurturing their cultural identity and sense of national pride, whilst also supporting their integration into their host societies (Government of Mexico, 2025^[153]). The IME has also established the Consultative Council of the Institute for Mexicans Abroad (CCIME), composed of 101 elected members representing the Mexican and Mexican-American communities in the United States, 4 members in Canada, 10 Latin American organisations, and 10 special advisors (Consulado General de México en San Francisco, 2016^[154]). As an advisory body to the ministry, its mandate is to analyse the problems, challenges, and opportunities facing Mexican communities abroad.

Drawing from observations from the Consultative Council of the Institute for Mexicans Abroad, the IME has implemented numerous programmes addressing the various needs of the diaspora in the areas of education, business and entrepreneurship, and healthcare. One such initiative was the 2024 Summit in Seattle, organised in collaboration with the Mexican diaspora, to design and strengthen adult education programmes tailored to migrants' needs. By creating a channel for representation of diaspora voices, other grassroots diaspora organisations (such as La Asociación de Líderes de las Plazas Comunitarias en el Exterior, supported by the Mexican Consulate in Seattle), were included in co-developing educational tools specifically for Mexican communities in the United States and Canada (Instituto de los Mexicanos en el Exterior, 2024^[155]). This underscored a broad, community-driven approach to educational inclusion, co-created with diaspora groups. The work of the Institute for Mexicans Abroad in North America, where significant numbers of Latin Americans reside, has been found to be distinctly inspiring for other countries from the region, whose diaspora populations have similar needs (ILO, 2015^[156]). Under the umbrella of Latino communities, Mexico's innovative diaspora engagement programmes in the areas of health and labour policy – particularly its Ventanilla de Salud (Health Window) and Labor Rights Week initiatives – have been adapted or emulated by consulates from countries like Honduras, El Salvador, Guatemala, Ecuador and Colombia (Délano, 2014^[157]).

Building on more accessible digital engagement models, the Global Estonian programme demonstrates how countries can create comprehensive online platforms that facilitate meaningful participation without requiring substantial resource commitments. The programme ensures that all services and information covering aspects of interest to diaspora members are accessible online, whilst some live events and services can be made fully interactive, enabling meaningful participation from Estonians abroad. This includes bi-annual virtual forums co-ordinated by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in which Estonians abroad

can participate, featuring high-level members of the Estonian Government or notable personalities, such as ministers or former presidents. The most recent forum's theme was Estonian cultural identity, whilst themes of past editions also included Estonia's education system, multilingualism, and storytelling from diaspora members. At the latest edition of the forum, in-person consultations and meetings were also organised in cities abroad with high numbers of Estonians, such as Stockholm.

These diverse examples illustrate that meaningful political engagement requires both investment and institutional commitment from countries of origin. Effective diaspora engagement necessitates creating genuine opportunities for political participation, policy input, and civic involvement. The most successful approaches combine multiple channels of engagement, from formal advisory structures to digital platforms and support for diaspora-led initiatives in host countries. For Ukraine, embracing such comprehensive engagement frameworks could transform the diaspora from temporary supporters into long-term partners in national development, ensuring that their commitment to Ukraine's future is matched by Ukraine's commitment to their meaningful participation in shaping that future.

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Annex 5.A. Dual residency and transitional towns in Japan

Why this matters for Ukraine

Following the Fukushima nuclear accident, Japan saw the emergence of transitional towns and dual residency arrangements as pragmatic responses to the complex realities of return. These solutions enabled displaced persons to navigate concerns about safety and uncertainty over long-term conditions, while preserving ties to their home communities. For Ukrainian policymakers, these experiences offer relevant insights into how flexible, in-between arrangements can support voluntary return over time, even after prolonged displacement and in areas where perceptions of risk remain a barrier.

Following the 2011 nuclear accident at the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant, the Japanese Government established a reference dose of 20 millisieverts per year (mSv/year) as the operational safety threshold for return. This level, which was 20 times higher than the pre-Fukushima limit, informed the designation of evacuation zones and the phased return of approximately 160 000 evacuees. Returns began six years after the disaster, once airborne radiation levels had fallen below the established threshold.

However, the government's safety assessment was not widely accepted by many affected residents. Public concern regarding the elevated dose level contributed to the voluntary self-evacuation of over 50 000 further individuals who were not subject to formal evacuation orders but nonetheless chose to leave. This misalignment between official guidance and displaced persons' perceptions of risk generated lasting distrust in government communication and policy decisions. As of 2024, return rates to former evacuation zones remained low, ranging between 17 and 30% (IRSN, 2016^[23]; Reconstruction Agency, 2024^[24]).

In areas such as the Nagadoro district, where evacuation orders were lifted in 2023, residents faced a number of practical and social barriers to return. While decontamination efforts were concentrated in the designated revitalisation base, radiation levels in surrounding homes and farmland remained a concern. The expiration of evacuee status also meant the loss of associated government support, placing many in a difficult position: either return to a region where infrastructure had deteriorated over more than a decade of restricted access, or resettle permanently elsewhere without continued assistance. The physical degradation of dwellings, many of which had collapsed after years of neglect, further discouraged return. Interviews with potential returnees revealed a range of additional concerns, including fear of social exclusion by neighbouring communities due to doubts over decontamination, and anticipated low demand for local agricultural products. At the same time, some expressed concern that choosing not to return might be seen as a betrayal of public investment in clean-up efforts. These complex social dynamics significantly influenced individual decisions about return (Hidaka et al., 2022^[158]).

Similar patterns were observed in Minamisoma City, where return remained limited despite the lifting of formal restrictions. A small increase in returns followed the termination of compensation and housing subsidies in areas of resettlement, suggesting that economic pressure played a role. However, many former residents cited ongoing concerns about radiation, limited employment opportunities, and the deterioration of services in their home areas as major deterrents to return (Do, 2020^[159]).

In response to these challenges, some adaptive solutions emerged outside the formal return framework. One such idea was the concept of a “transitional town,” also referred to as an out-of-town or virtual community. Proposed by scholars and local leaders, this approach offered an alternative to the binary choice between return and permanent resettlement. It aimed to relocate entire communities to host municipalities, preserving social networks and service access while allowing return to be postponed until conditions improved (Fassert and Hasegawa, 2019^[160]). Although no large-scale relocations were implemented, individual arrangements were made. In Iitate Village, for example, some displaced families formed a de facto satellite community in Fukushima City. During the 2018-2019 school year, 75 children from Iitate were enrolled in their original village school, with 90% commuting from neighbouring cities.

Closely related to this concept was the practice of dual residency, sometimes referred to as “half-return.” This arrangement allowed households to divide their lives between their places of origin and their temporary homes. In municipalities such as Kawauchi and Watari, families adopted flexible living patterns, enabling one parent to remain in the village for work or care responsibilities while the other relocated with children to areas perceived as safer. However, such arrangements were not formally supported. As temporary housing assistance and compensation were phased out between 2017 and 2018, families were increasingly pressured to choose between full return or permanent relocation. Many faced the risk of falling into financial hardship due to the cost of maintaining two households (Fassert and Hasegawa, 2019^[160]).

Efforts to formalise dual residency were limited and uneven. In Japan, residents must register with their municipality of residence to access services such as education and healthcare. In response, Iitate Village proposed the creation of evacuation communities and a system of two-district residency. Its “Two-District Residence 100-Year Vision” advocated a long-term model of gradual recovery for individuals, families, and communities. This approach recognised the persistence of contamination, particularly in forested areas, and the challenges of decontamination. A formal “double residency card” system was later proposed to local authorities and gained the endorsement of the Science Council of Japan in 2017 (Itonaga, 2019^[161]). The institutionalisation of such dual residential rights has been seen as essential for sustaining community ties and facilitating future restoration efforts in affected regions (Mosneaga, 2015^[73]).

The Fukushima case illustrates that even when formal restrictions are lifted, return cannot be assumed. Divergences between institutional safety assessments and displaced persons’ lived experience can undermine confidence in return policies. Adaptive solutions, such as dual residency and transitional communities, offer alternative models that acknowledge uncertainty and support gradual reintegration. Ensuring that return strategies are responsive to diverse perceptions of safety, and that they prioritise trust-building and inclusive planning, is essential for enabling informed, voluntary and sustainable return.

Annex 5.B. Go-and-see and come-and-tell visits in Somalia and Syria

Why this matters for Ukraine

Ensuring that decisions to return are voluntary, safe and informed will be central to Ukraine's long-term strategy for supporting the return and reintegration of displaced persons. Experience from other contexts shows that perceptions of safety and trust in information provided by authorities are as important as the actual security situation on the ground. Structured go-and-see and come-and-tell mechanisms have proven valuable tools for building confidence in return processes, allowing potential returnees to assess conditions first-hand and to hear directly from peers who have already returned.

For Ukraine, such mechanisms could provide a credible way of bridging the information gap between displaced populations abroad, internally displaced persons, and national and local authorities. Alongside supporting well-informed choices, these visits can also help authorities better understand the expectations, concerns and practical needs of those considering return, informing the design of reintegration support policies and communication strategies.

Go-and-see and come-and-tell visits are participatory confidence-building mechanisms commonly used in post-conflict and post-disaster settings to ensure that decisions to return are genuinely voluntary and based on reliable, first-hand information. Typically organised by humanitarian partners such as UNHCR in co-operation with national authorities, go-and-see visits enable selected representatives of displaced populations to travel to potential areas of return to assess security, access to services and livelihood opportunities. Come-and-tell visits involve former returnees travelling to displacement areas to share their experiences and provide realistic information about living conditions at home.

These visits aim to address a recurring challenge in return processes: the limited availability of trustworthy and up-to-date information for displaced persons when deciding whether to return. They also strengthen dialogue between displaced communities, host and home-country governments, and local authorities, often revealing practical obstacles and policy gaps that can be addressed before actual returns take place.

When conducted transparently and with appropriate safeguards, such visits can enhance voluntariness, manage expectations and build trust in official information. Experiences from Somalia and, more recently, from Syria demonstrate both the potential and the limitations of these mechanisms, offering valuable lessons for Ukraine on how participatory approaches can foster informed and sustainable return when designed and co-ordinated effectively.

Somalia

The Voluntary Repatriation Programme (VolRep) in Somalia, established under the 2013 Tripartite Agreement between the governments of Kenya and Somalia and UNHCR, provided a structured framework for the voluntary repatriation of Somali refugees from Kenya. It enshrined the principles of voluntariness, safety and dignity, while mandating each party to provide accurate and timely information about conditions in Somalia (Government of the Republic of Kenya; Government of the Federal Republic

of Somalia; UN High Commissioner for Refugees, 2013^[162]). Around 82 000 returnees from Kenya to Somalia benefitted from the programme before it closed in 2019. Go-and-see and come-and-tell visits were introduced as confidence-building measures to ensure that any decision to return was informed and uncoerced.

Organised by UNHCR in close co-operation with Somali and Kenyan authorities and humanitarian partners such as the Norwegian Refugee Council, these visits enabled refugee community representatives from the four refugee camps in Dadaab, Kenya to travel to selected areas in Somalia to assess living conditions and security (UNHCR, 2015^[163]; NRC, 2017^[164]). In total, seven go-and-see missions took place between 2015 and 2019, each bringing around 30 Somali refugee leaders to 12 different locations such as Mogadishu and Baidoa. Participants met with government officials, inspected schools and health facilities, and consulted with internally displaced persons and recent returnees.

The visits generated practical recommendations, including proposals for safer transport arrangements, such as encouraging air travel over road travel to Baidoa, and for land allocation to returnees by local authorities in South West State. They also provided an opportunity for direct dialogue between potential returnees and national and local institutions, fostering mutual understanding and trust. Come-and-tell visits followed a reciprocal logic, with former returnees visiting the Dadaab camps to share their experiences of reintegration, helping others make better-informed decisions and reducing misinformation (UNHCR, 2018^[165]).

While the number of visits remained limited, they were instrumental in aligning expectations, supporting voluntariness and prompting authorities to address logistical and administrative bottlenecks. They also led to complementary support measures, including Return Help Desks established in Dadaab camps to provide continuous information on safety, services and assistance. These efforts illustrate how structured and participatory approaches can make return processes more transparent and responsive to displaced populations' concerns, while preventing premature or unsafe return.

Syria

Following the fall of the Assad regime in December 2024, discussions on the return of Syrian refugees regained prominence across host countries and Syria. As of October 2025, more than 1.1 million Syrians had returned from neighbouring countries, while nearly 2 million internally displaced persons had returned to their places of origin (UNHCR, 2025^[166]). In this context, the Government of Türkiye introduced a temporary arrangement allowing registered Syrian refugees to undertake short visits to Syria to evaluate conditions before deciding on return.

The arrangement, implemented between January and July 2025 under the supervision of the Provincial Directorates of Migration Management with humanitarian oversight from UNHCR, was open to all Syrian households. One adult per household could apply for a travel permit for up to three short visits of 15 days each within a six-month period. Participation in these visits did not affect the individual's legal status in Türkiye and did not imply any obligation to return permanently.

The initiative aimed to enable refugees to make better-informed decisions about return by offering first-hand observation of safety, services and livelihood conditions. While the programme was designed to safeguard voluntariness, participation remained relatively limited. Recent surveys have found that the main barriers included lack of information, continued security risks in parts of Syria, financial constraints, and the absence of accommodation or social networks to facilitate temporary visits (Upinion, 2025^[167]).

Among those who travelled, experiences varied according to region and individual circumstances. Participants generally reported that conditions in many areas remained fragile, with limited access to public services, constrained economic opportunities and incomplete infrastructure restoration. For some, the

visits confirmed that conditions for return were not yet met, while others observed gradual improvements in specific locations.

It is too early to evaluate the full impact of the scheme, but early surveys suggest mixed effects on return intentions: around 46% of participants said the visits encouraged return, while a similar share (46%) said they were discouraged, with the rest reporting no effect (Upinion, 2025^[167]). Regardless whether it leads to actual returns, this still suggests that go-and-see visits can support more informed and realistic decision making, helping to manage expectations and reduce misinformation within refugee communities. However, the experience from Türkiye also shows that displaced persons may require targeted support, such as financial assistance, accommodation options, or contact networks, to be able to participate safely and effectively.

This indicates that while such visits can facilitate informed decisions and reduce misinformation, interested displaced persons may face financial or logistical barriers, reinforcing the need for complementary support measures.

Challenges

Experience from Somalia and Syria highlights both the potential and the limitations of go-and-see and come-and-tell visits as instruments to support voluntary and informed return. While such initiatives can foster trust and provide reliable information on local conditions, they also present practical, legal and institutional challenges that require careful design and co-ordination. The table below summarises key considerations.

Challenges	Description
Limited representativeness and changing conditions	Go-and-see visits typically involve small groups and focus on a few accessible areas, which may not reflect broader realities. In Somalia, for example, participants could travel only to 12 locations considered stable, limiting the scope for extrapolating observations to other areas (Nasrullah and Rono, 2018 ^[168]). Moreover, conditions in potential areas of return can change quickly, particularly in post-conflict settings. Information gathered during visits may become outdated rapidly, and initial perceptions of safety may not correspond to evolving realities.
Legal, financial and logistical constraints	Administrative requirements, limited financial means, and the absence of social networks can restrict participation. In Türkiye, the temporary arrangement allowed all households to apply for visits, yet personal circumstances often proved decisive. Many lacked the financial resources, accommodation or social networks to travel, and the uncoordinated nature of visits meant that the ability to review essential aspects such as housing, healthcare and education varied across individuals.
Risk of misinterpretation or politicisation	In some contexts, go-and-see initiatives have been misinterpreted as steps towards organised or state-driven return. In Kenya, threats from the government regarding the Dadaab camps' potential closure around the time of go-and-see visits created uncertainty among refugees and risked perceptions of political pressure to return (NRC, 2017 ^[164]). To prevent such situations, close co-ordination among authorities, host governments and humanitarian partners is essential, supported by consistent messaging that emphasises voluntariness and the exploratory purpose of the visits.
Sustaining dialogue and policy feedback	The usefulness of go-and-see visits depends on whether the insights collected are systematically shared with both authorities and displaced communities. Structured follow-up mechanisms, such as feedback sessions, help desks and information-sharing platforms, can ensure that lessons from visits inform return planning and institutional learning.

Annex 5.C. Regional Housing Programme in the Western Balkans

Why this matters for Ukraine

The Regional Housing Programme (RHP) offers valuable lessons for Ukrainian authorities as they plan long-term housing solutions for displaced persons. Initiated by four Western Balkan countries, the RHP demonstrates how co-ordinated regional co-operation, strong donor partnerships, and diversified housing modalities can provide durable solutions for displaced populations following conflict. The experience also highlights the importance of inclusive beneficiary selection processes, tailored housing support, and investment in institutional frameworks to ensure transparency, sustainability and local ownership. At the same time, the RHP reveals common challenges, such as expanding scale, inter-governmental co-ordination, and securing sustainable financing, which should be anticipated and addressed in Ukraine's reconstruction planning.

The Regional Housing Programme (RHP) was a joint initiative launched by four Western Balkan countries (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Montenegro and Serbia) to provide durable housing solutions for refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) who were displaced during the 1990s conflicts. Implemented between 2012 and 2023, the programme was supported by international donors and co-ordinated by the Council of Europe Development Bank (CEB), in partnership with UNHCR and the OSCE.

The RHP offered seven housing modalities designed to respond to the diverse needs and preferences of displaced persons:

- *Construction of apartments:* Built on municipally owned plots in specially designated locations. Apartment size was adjusted to the number of family members.
- *Reconstruction of houses:* Repaired or completed damaged or partially built homes, either at the original site or in a new location where beneficiaries had acquired land but lacked the means to finish construction.
- *Provision of building materials:* Enabled self-reconstruction by supplying building materials or, where needed, providing financial support to outsource the works.
- *Purchase of apartments:* Acquired available properties on the market to provide immediate housing.
- *Construction of prefabricated houses:* Delivered prefabricated units that could be quickly assembled on-site to meet urgent needs.
- *Purchase of village houses:* Facilitated return to rural areas by purchasing homes with adjoining land, supporting agricultural livelihoods.
- *Provision of accommodation in institutions of social welfare:* Offered housing in supported living facilities for elderly or disabled beneficiaries requiring additional care.

These modalities were implemented based on beneficiary choice and local context, with attention to construction standards, energy efficiency, and resilience to natural hazards. In cities such as Belgrade and Novi Sad, large-scale apartment construction also stimulated local labour markets and service economies.

The provision of housing and adjoining land enabled some beneficiaries to develop home-based income-generating activities, including catering, farming, and small-scale services such as hairdressing. Complementary livelihood support was also provided by NGOs outside the RHP framework, including greenhouses and farming tools. In total, close to 3 000 contracts were signed with over 200 companies across the region, contributing to local job creation and economic recovery.

The governance of the RHP was designed to promote national ownership, strategic co-ordination, and donor engagement. In each participating country, line ministries and implementing agencies were fully responsible for managing their national housing projects. This included developing feasibility assessments, identifying technical assistance needs, and overseeing implementation in collaboration with the CEB. Before grant disbursement, the CEB carried out institutional capacity assessments to verify compliance with programme standards.

Technical Assistance, managed by the CEB and embedded within national institutions, was demand-driven, results-oriented, and adapted to each country's needs. Beneficiary selection prioritised the most vulnerable, guided by broad outreach campaigns and a shared set of eligibility criteria. To support programme delivery, the CEB worked closely with EPTISA Southeast Europe (for implementation support) and Deloitte Belgrade (for financial management). Programme tools – such as guidance manuals and standardised templates – were jointly developed with international partners including GIZ and the Danish Refugee Council, contributing to consistency and quality assurance.

Annex Table 5.C.1. Programme overview

Programme name	Regional Housing Programme
Time period	2012-2023
Implementing parties	Bosnia and Herzegovina: Ministry for Human Rights and Refugees; Federal Ministry of Displaced Persons and Refugees; Republic Secretariat of Displaced Persons and Migration; The Department of Brcko District Government for Displaced Persons, Refugees and Housing Issues; Republic of Croatia: Ministry of Spatial Planning, Construction and State Assets; Montenegro: Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare; Capital Projects Administration; Republic of Serbia: Commissariat for Refugees and Migration; Public Sector Projects Implementation Unit Ltd. Belgrade
Impacted groups and countries	Refugees, displaced persons, returnees
Programme focus	Housing reconstruction
Involved international organisations	UNHCR, OSCE, CEB
How was this activity funded?	Donor funding, channeled through the RHP Fund managed by the Council of Europe Development Bank
Total number of beneficiaries	36 000 persons (11 300 families)
Main outcomes	11 301 housing units were delivered, including: 2 286 packages of building materials. 246 places in social welfare institutions for the elderly. 383 prefabricated houses. 1975 reconstructed houses. 1 755 purchased village houses. 382 purchased apartments. 4 274 newly constructed apartments
Total cost of the program	EUR 294 million (238 million from the EU; 24 million from the United States; 10 million from Germany ; 7.6 million from Norway, 6.4 million from Switzerland ; 5 million from Italy ; 1.3 million from Denmark ; 1 million from Türkiye; 0.5 million from Luxembourg and others)
Other stakeholders involved	Some donors to the RHP were closely involved in progress monitoring (United States, Germany, Norway, Switzerland, Italy, Denmark, Türkiye, Luxembourg, Spain, Cyprus, Czechia, Hungary, Romania and the Slovak Republic).
Website	https://regionalhousingprogramme.org

Challenges

In its early years, the RHP was subject to regular monitoring, including by the European Commission through its Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA II) (European Commission, 2014^[41]). These assessments identified several challenges, many of which are common to post-conflict housing programmes. These are summarised below:

Challenge	Description
Scaling up funding and activities	When launched in 2012, the RHP aimed to assist approximately 74 000 individuals (27 000 households) over five years, with a projected cost of EUR 584 million. However, over the full 11-year implementation period, available funding was four times lower, and the programme ultimately supported only about half of the intended beneficiaries (Council of Europe Development Bank, 2012 ^[169]).
Capturing the scale and complexity of housing solutions	While diverse housing modalities were implemented, nearly 2 300 beneficiaries received only construction materials – one of the simplest and least costly forms of support. Though appropriate in some cases, this raises questions about the balance of effort and investment across the programme's portfolio and whether reporting fully reflected the scale and complexity of housing needs addressed.
Length and transparency of beneficiary selection	The first four years of implementation were largely devoted to establishing a transparent, country-led beneficiary selection process. However, delays arose due to the high volume of applications, complex eligibility criteria, and difficulties in verifying vulnerability. Cross-border co-ordination, including the exchange of beneficiary information between host and return countries, also proved challenging.
Institutional co-ordination and implementation arrangements	Implementation structures varied by country, with some involving multiple ministries or agencies. Where overlapping mandates or unclear responsibilities existed, the process slowed. Although the Council of Europe Development Bank (CEB) assessed institutional readiness, sustained co-ordination remained a key challenge throughout.
Weak legal and regulatory frameworks for social housing	In some participating countries, laws covering refugee support did not fully address reintegration and long-term housing issues. Even after construction began, social housing legislation and frameworks for municipal-level housing management, including for utilities and maintenance, were still under development, affecting programme sustainability.
Sustaining local integration and managing community tensions	Although the risk of social tensions was not widespread, concerns existed that displaced beneficiaries receiving housing could be perceived as privileged by host communities. This risk was to be mitigated through targeted efforts at the municipal level to promote social cohesion and through prior experience in working with vulnerable populations.

Annex 5.D. PROSPECTS Programme in the Middle East and East Africa region

Why this matters for Ukraine

The PROSPECTS programme demonstrates how an integrated approach at the humanitarian, development and peace nexus can help displaced persons move from assistance to self-reliance while strengthening host communities. PROSPECTS has been implemented in settings marked by both internal displacement and cross border refugee movements, where uncertainty about the future of displaced populations required flexible approaches grounded in employment, dignity and local capacity building. Across these diverse environments, PROSPECTS has consistently used employment creation as a central mechanism to empower displaced persons, rebuild livelihoods, while also reinforcing social cohesion. Its focus on education, skills, social protection and decent work, delivered through national systems and with private sector participation, offers valuable lessons for Ukraine in preparing for returns, local (re)integration, but also labour-intensive reconstruction period.

The Employment-Intensive Investment Programme (EIIP) within PROSPECTS provides a practical model for combining short-term job creation with local infrastructure rehabilitation, linking training to real worksites and creating entry points for women and vulnerable groups. This experience is particularly relevant for Ukraine, where the reconstruction of essential infrastructure will require sizeable public works that could also serve as structured employment pathways for internally displaced persons and returnees from abroad. EIIP type approaches can contribute to rebuilding local economies, reducing social tensions and strengthening trust within communities receiving returnees.

Equally important are the operational lessons. PROSPECTS highlights the value of multi-year planning, clearly defined institutional roles, and consistent labour standards across programmes. For Ukraine, adapting these elements could help transform emergency support into durable reintegration outcomes, anchor returns in local economic development, and foster confidence through transparent, nationally led delivery.

The Partnership for Improving Prospects for Forcibly Displaced Persons and Host Communities (PROSPECTS) is a multi-country initiative led by the International Labour Organization (ILO) and funded by the government of the Netherlands. Implemented since 2019, with a second phase running from 2024 to 2027, it operates across eight countries in the Middle East and East Africa: Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Sudan, Ethiopia, Kenya and Uganda. The programme brings together key international partners, including UNHCR, UNICEF, the International Finance Corporation (IFC) and the World Bank, to strengthen national and local capacities to manage displacement, promote self-reliance, and support sustainable livelihoods.

Across these countries, PROSPECTS adapts its interventions to distinct displacement dynamics and national priorities. The programme does not focus on a single population group but responds to the composition of displaced persons in each context. In Sudan, for example, activities target refugee, internally displaced, returnee and host community populations in East Darfur and West Kordofan. In Iraq, the focus varies across regions, ranging from refugees in Dohuk governorate to internally displaced persons and host communities in Ninewa. These interventions are therefore concentrated in areas most affected by displacement pressures or in need of reconstruction, rather than being applied uniformly across

national territories. This flexibility in design and targeting represents an important lesson for Ukraine, where return and reintegration needs will also vary considerably across regions.

Working at the humanitarian – development – peace nexus, PROSPECTS seeks to move beyond short-term assistance towards durable and locally driven solutions. Its activities are structured around four interlinked pillars: education and learning, economic inclusion, social protection and critical infrastructure development. The programme aims to expand access to quality education and skills development, create decent employment and enterprise opportunities, and reinforce social protection systems for both displaced persons and host communities.

By combining labour-intensive public works, vocational training and partnerships with employers, PROSPECTS builds resilience, fosters social cohesion and supports inclusive local economic growth in areas affected by displacement. Its complementary interventions link job creation with skills development and employability support. For example, the EIIP generates decent work through community infrastructure projects, while work-based learning and Job Search Clubs (JSCs) prepare individuals to access these opportunities with relevant skills and confidence. Together, these components help bridge the gap between job seekers and available employment, contributing to local development and social stability.

Main outcomes of Phase I (2019-2023) (ILO, 2024^[88]):

During its first phase, PROSPECTS achieved significant results across the eight participating countries:

- 51 policies, plans and laws addressing inclusive access to social protection and services for forcibly displaced and host communities were adopted or amended.
- 218 000 people received work permits or business registrations, enabling formal participation in local economies.
- 108 000 individuals were supported by business development services and financial institutions to expand earning and livelihood opportunities.
- 25 000 apprenticeships, on-the-job training and work-based learning opportunities were created or developed (UNHCR, 2025^[170]).
- 16 876 beneficiaries completed certified skills development programmes, including life skills, digital skills and vocational education and training, with the largest number in Egypt (9 219).
- 51 352 paid jobs or employment opportunities were created, with 53% allocated to host community members.

These outcomes underline the programme's contribution to strengthening labour markets, expanding decent work opportunities, and fostering social inclusion in fragile and displacement-affected contexts.

Employment-Intensive Investment Programme (EIIP)

A key element of the PROSPECTS programme is the Employment Intensive Investment Programme (EIIP), which serves as a flexible and cross cutting mechanism that simultaneously addresses infrastructure gaps, creates employment, builds skills, strengthens local economies and enables rapid crisis response in refugee hosting areas. EIIP interventions are designed around labour intensive public works that meet immediate community needs while generating short- and medium-term jobs for both refugees and host populations.

A defining feature of the EIIP is its strong emphasis on community participation. Local actors, including government officials, contractors and workers, are actively engaged in participatory planning processes to identify infrastructure priorities and employment opportunities. Projects undertaken through this approach have included the rehabilitation of water irrigation systems in Iraq, the restoration of health and water facilities in Sudan, rubble removal in post blast Beirut, and road upgrades in Kenya and Ethiopia.

Following the earthquake in Syria at the beginning of 2024, the EIIP model was also applied to support critical infrastructure rehabilitation and to restore water systems in the affected areas of Aleppo. Over a three-month period, the project specifically targeted women and persons with disabilities to ensure inclusive access to decent employment. It also provided vocational training to 60 individuals to enhance their long-term employability. In total, 140 workers participated in the rehabilitation of infrastructure and recycling of debris, restoring essential public services while earning income and contributing both to individual livelihoods and to the broader recovery of affected urban areas.

One of the key operational lessons from the EIIP is the value of localised monitoring, particularly in fragile contexts affected by insecurity or environmental constraints. In Sudan, decentralised mechanisms such as Local Economic Development Committees, comprising representatives from state level ministries, employers and workers' organisations, were established to maintain oversight and continuity when central government access was limited due to conflict or resource constraints. In Iraq, university students were engaged to support real time data collection in conflict affected areas through digital tools.

The EIIP has also demonstrated the potential for displaced persons to contribute beyond the role of workers. In Uganda, refugee owned construction businesses have participated in project delivery, while in Ethiopia, graduates of technical and vocational education and training programmes formed co-operatives to take on implementation roles. These examples point to the broader economic potential of returnees and displaced persons as entrepreneurs and contractors.

While the programme has provided short term employment to support the reconstruction and maintenance of essential public infrastructure, its contributions extend further. It has reinforced multiple thematic pillars of the PROSPECTS programme, particularly in the area of skills development. In both Ethiopia and Iraq, trainees from vocational education institutions were able to apply their new competencies directly through EIIP supported contracts, thereby bridging training with practical labour market experience.

In addition, the programme has supported pathways into entrepreneurship. Participants interested in establishing their own businesses were referred to the ILO's Start and Improve Your Business services, which provided business counselling and guidance for developing enterprise ideas, particularly in construction and related fields. The EIIP has also been linked to infrastructure projects that support psychosocial services and employment counselling. In Uganda and Iraq, this included the construction of community and youth centres, where PROSPECTS partners subsequently expanded the range of services offered. Through collaboration with agencies such as UNICEF and UNHCR, the EIIP model has demonstrated flexibility and alignment with broader development goals. It has served as both an entry point and a bridge to more durable livelihoods, enterprise development and improved access to social services.

In Iraq, the EIIP has also had a notable impact on women's labour market participation, not only by providing immediate employment opportunities but also by opening pathways for long term training and professional development. Through its partnership with Erbil Polytechnic University, the programme introduced skills training in stone paving and clay brick building, fields that had previously largely excluded women. These training programmes, backed by formal certification, have helped women gain marketable technical skills relevant for heritage restoration and reconstruction. Moreover, the EIIP has integrated women into the broader institutional strengthening process by building the capacities of local trainers and supervisors, many of whom are women, to manage future infrastructure projects under decent work conditions. The programme's alignment with national policy efforts, including the development of a National Public Works Programme, further ensures that these skills and employment channels will be sustained and scaled.

Education and skills development

To promote equitable access to decent work for both refugees and host community members, the PROSPECTS programme has implemented a range of targeted initiatives to strengthen education and skills development systems. Its activities focus on improving the delivery and relevance of training, ensuring the recognition of prior learning and qualifications, and facilitating smoother school-to-work transitions through career guidance and work-based learning opportunities.

Work-based learning has been a central pillar of this approach. In Uganda, where apprenticeships had traditionally taken place informally, the programme helped formalise arrangements between craftspeople and trainees, aligning training content with industry needs and linking successful participants to national certification. A hospitality-sector pilot, co-designed with hotel owners, developed a curriculum tailored to employer demand. Refugee apprentices received accommodation, stipends and fee coverage, enabling 94 of 100 participants to complete the year-long course, of which three-quarters consisted of on-the-job learning. Supervisors were trained to mentor apprentices and track their progress through logbooks, bridging the gap between theory and practice. The Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development co-ordinated the initiative under Uganda's National Apprenticeship Framework, ensuring compliance and stakeholder alignment (ILO, 2022^[171]).

The programme has also fostered partnerships with the private sector and technology providers to modernise skills delivery and widen employment opportunities. In Egypt, collaboration between the ILO and Amazon Web Services supported refugees and host community members to develop technical and soft skills for entry-level roles in the cloud-based services industry through the “re/Start” initiative (AWS, 2025^[172]). In parallel, the ILO partnered with SkillLab, a social enterprise from the Netherlands, and the Alexandria Business Association to pilot a digital skills-profiling tool that enables jobseekers to assess and communicate their competencies to potential employers (ILO, 2022^[173]). These complementary efforts demonstrate how PROSPECTS integrates innovation and partnerships to build more inclusive and demand-driven training systems in displacement-affected settings.

Job Search Clubs (JSCs)

Job Search Clubs (JSCs) are a group-based approach developed under the PROSPECTS programme to help young people transition into employment. In participating countries, where youth unemployment is high and many young people, including many displaced persons, are out of work or education, the clubs offer a practical and behavioural method to build confidence and job seeking skills. Through short, intensive sessions, participants identify job opportunities, improve their CVs, practise interviews and support one another throughout the job search. The model emphasises peer learning, behavioural activation and ongoing coaching, and has been adapted to different national contexts within public employment services and vocational education systems.

Challenges

Following the completion of the first phase of the programme (2019-2024), the International Labour Organization conducted a comprehensive evaluation highlighting key lessons across all activity pillars and noting differences in implementation across the eight participating countries. The main findings and challenges identified are summarised below (ILO, 2025^[174]), unless specified otherwise.

Challenges	Description
Coordination between diverse partners	The evaluation underscored the complexity of aligning the mandates, planning cycles, budget structures and analytical approaches of humanitarian and development actors. These differences made joint programming and collaboration challenging. They were mitigated through continuous dialogue, joint missions and workshops that fostered mutual understanding, the adoption of shared terminology, flexible multi-year programming and improved co-ordination and data analysis to align efforts towards common goals (UNHCR, 2025 ^[170]).
Communication around the functioning of the EIIP	Clear communication on the Employment Intensive Investment Programme was essential to distinguish it from traditional cash-for-work schemes and to clarify formal employment expectations, such as social security contributions and occupational safety and health compliance. In Jordan, for example, insufficient understanding of social security registration prevented some refugee workers from transitioning into formal jobs after their EIIP contracts ended. Capacity building for both workers and institutional partners, including UNICEF and UNHCR, was therefore critical to embed the EIIP approach in broader programming and procurement processes.
Standardisation among implementing actors	The need for greater operational consistency was also identified. With different humanitarian actors offering varying compensation levels and employment conditions, EIIP occasionally faced competition from higher paying but less sustainable alternatives. In Iraq, PROSPECTS developed Standard Operating Procedures to harmonise compensation, contracts and working conditions with national and international standards, ensuring fairness and coherence across initiatives.

Annex 5.E. Diaspora bonds in India, Israel, and Nigeria

Why this matters for Ukraine

Many Ukrainians abroad wish to contribute to recovery and reconstruction without relocating or making long-term business commitments. Diaspora bonds can offer a structured way to channel this support, combining financial security for investors with visible national impact. International experience shows that such instruments can mobilise substantial resources, whether as a crisis response, as in India and Nigeria, or through sustained issuance over decades, as in Israel. For Ukraine, diaspora bonds could become a complementary tool to harness solidarity capital for reconstruction, particularly from those not yet ready or able to return. Their success, however, will depend on credible institutions, transparent use of funds, and careful design to reflect the diversity of Ukraine's diaspora communities.

Diaspora bonds are government debt securities marketed primarily to nationals living abroad, their descendants, or others with close ties to the country (Gevorkyan, 2021^[175]). Typically issued at below-market yields, whether through a patriotic discount or during times when access to conventional borrowing is constrained, they can help diversify investor bases, provide predictable external finance, and reinforce connections between states and their diaspora communities.

Beyond financial returns, diaspora investors are often motivated by solidarity and identity. Research highlights the importance of “emotional returns”, the pride of contributing to one’s homeland, as a key factor in investment decisions (Chander, 2001^[176]; Ayanruoh and Benedetto, 2018^[177]). This dynamic has been particularly visible in Israel and Nigeria, where diaspora bonds have been explicitly framed as contributions to national development. Nevertheless, the success of diaspora bonds depends on trust, sound governance, and credible institutions. International experience shows that while patriotism can provide an incentive, investors remain highly attentive to transparency, accountability, and robust regulatory compliance (Ketkar and Ratha, 2007^[178]).

Not all initiatives have succeeded as intended. Ethiopia’s attempt in the late 2000s to raise funds for the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam illustrates the risks of weak credibility and contested projects. Despite the presence of a large diaspora, the initiative raised limited resources due to concerns over governance, political repression, and the absence of transparent monitoring mechanisms. Many diaspora members also objected to the project itself, which was politically sensitive and environmentally controversial, and felt excluded from meaningful consultation. As a result, the initiative not only failed to mobilise significant resources but also contributed to alienation among parts of the diaspora community. The case demonstrates that patriotic appeals alone are insufficient, and that poorly chosen or divisive projects can undermine confidence and trust in such instruments.

For Ukraine, where the desire among citizens abroad to support recovery and reconstruction is likely to be considerable, diaspora bonds could represent a meaningful complementary tool. Their feasibility, however, will depend on transparent governance, credible safeguards, and careful design to ensure both financial viability and sustained diaspora confidence.

Israel

Israel's diaspora bond initiative, managed by the Development Corporation for Israel (DCI), is one of the longest-standing and most successful examples. Launched in the 1950s under the leadership of Prime Minister David Ben Gurion, it targeted the Jewish diaspora in the United States, supported by high-level outreach and marketing campaigns (Gevorkyan, 2021^[175]). Since 1951, Israel Bonds have raised more than USD 44 billion, with most sales in North America (Gevorkyan, 2021^[179]). Proceeds have been channelled into sectors such as agriculture, energy, transport, technology, and immigration. More recently, investors have also been able to donate bonds to charities, universities, and other institutions in Israel.

Although yields are lower than comparable sovereign bonds, their appeal derives from trust in their developmental impact and solidarity with Israel. Key contractual features, including limited transferability and the absence of collective action clauses, have reinforced investor confidence (Mulliken, 2024^[180]). Unlike many diaspora bond schemes, which are often designed to raise concessional financing during crises, Israel Bonds are issued continuously across market cycles, with a wide range of maturities and denominations. Bradley, Salvatierra and Gulati (2024^[181]) have analysed the connections between periods of financial recession in Israel and the uptake of diaspora bonds. They find that diaspora bonds attract significantly more funding during crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, when they provided an important source of low-cost financing. Nonetheless, they have also offered a permanent vehicle for diaspora engagement since their establishment (Vos, 2012^[182]).

A further factor in Israel's success has been the careful adaptation of bond issuance to the legal and regulatory frameworks of key host countries (Gevorkyan, 2021^[179]). The DCI was established in New York and registered as an official broker-dealer with the US Securities and Exchange Commission. Canada Israel Securities, Ltd was incorporated to operate in Canada, while Israel Bonds International was established in Mexico with activities across South America and Europe. Each organisation was set up in compliance with local legislation. Although this approach entailed additional complexity and required strong monitoring and reporting, it also signalled the government's willingness to prioritise trust and financial security by meeting the regulatory requirements of countries where diaspora communities had settled.

India

India has made use of diaspora bonds at several critical moments to address external financing needs. The government-owned State Bank of India (SBI) first issued the Indian Development Bonds in 1991 during a balance-of-payments crisis. This was followed by the Resurgent India Bonds in 1998 and the Indian Millennium Deposits (IMDs) in 2000, which alone raised USD 5.5 billion. Across the three programmes, more than USD 11 billion was mobilised (Ketkar and Ratha, 2007^[178]).

The relative success of these instruments has been partly attributed to diaspora familiarity with India's markets, which reduced their risk aversion compared to other foreign investors. Unlike Israel's approach, however, India offered near-market yields, suggesting that patriotic or solidarity motives played a smaller role. Instead, investors were primarily motivated by the combination of competitive returns and confidence in their knowledge of domestic market dynamics (Ketkar and Ratha, 2007^[178]).

Selecting the right markets for issuance is a critical decision in any diaspora bond programme, and India's experience with the IMDs highlights both the opportunities and the trade-offs involved. The State Bank of India chose not to register the IMDs with the US Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC), as their classification as deposits made compliance with US securities law more complex. As a result, the bonds were issued instead to diaspora investors in Europe, the Gulf States and the Middle East. While this approach avoided regulatory complications, it also excluded the large and economically influential Indian diaspora in the United States, limiting the programme's overall reach. For Ukraine, this underscores the importance of carefully weighing regulatory feasibility against the need to include major diaspora communities in any potential bond initiative.

Nigeria

Nigeria launched its first five-year diaspora bond in 2017, raising USD 300 million in its first week, with an interest rate of 5.62% (Kazeem, 2017^[183]). The initiative was launched against the backdrop of significant remittance inflows, with Nigerian diaspora communities in the United States sending USD 5.7 billion in 2015. Given that Nigerians represent the largest population of foreign-born Africans in the United States, the bond was expected to provide a promising avenue for financing part of the government's deficit. From a financial perspective, the issuance was a success: it was oversubscribed by 30% and the principal was fully repaid in 2022.

A key factor in this success was Nigeria's ability to secure regulatory approval in major high-income jurisdictions, particularly the United States and the United Kingdom (Rustomjee, 2018^[184]). Clearance from the US Securities and Exchange Commission and the UK Listing Authority enabled Nigeria to market the bond as a retail instrument to diaspora investors living in developed economies. Access to these well-regulated capital markets was essential in building confidence and enhancing the bond's credibility. By aligning its issuance with international standards for transparency and investor protection, Nigeria mitigated concerns related to sovereign and currency risk. Successfully navigating these regulatory environments, home to some of the largest Nigerian diaspora communities, was a critical factor in the oversubscription of the bond. The experience highlights the importance of institutional readiness and compliance for emerging economies seeking to mobilise diaspora capital through formal financial instruments.

Challenges

International experience shows that diaspora bonds can mobilise significant resources, but their success depends on credibility, inclusiveness, and the ability to sustain investor confidence over time. For Ukraine, these challenges are particularly relevant given the diversity of its diaspora, which includes both long-established communities and those displaced more recently. The table below summarises key considerations.

Challenges	Description
Ensuring continued attractiveness throughout long-term reconstruction efforts	Diaspora investors are most willing to accept lower yields when motivated by solidarity during crises (Khayreddine, Aboubaker and Hassiba, 2024 ^[185]). Over time, however, prolonged instability, political change or solidarity fatigue can erode confidence and engagement, making bonds an unreliable long-term source of financing without strong safeguards. Negative past experiences may also deter investors from participating again, placing considerable pressure on governments to ensure early initiatives succeed.
Economic volatility and investor confidence	Macroeconomic conditions strongly influence investor confidence. In Nigeria, dependence on oil revenues left diaspora bonds vulnerable to commodity price swings and currency instability, discouraging some investors (Gevorkyan, 2021 ^[175] ; Gevorkyan, 2021 ^[179]). Stable macroeconomic management is therefore essential to sustain credibility, which also complicates the use of such instruments during full-scale war.
Finding the right approach with diverse diaspora	The Ukrainian diaspora today combines long-established communities abroad with large numbers of citizens who have left since 2014 and especially after 2022. These groups are not concentrated in the same places, have different profiles, and engage with Ukraine for different reasons. Established diaspora members, often second or third generation, may be motivated by identity and heritage, while more recent migrants may have closer family or economic ties but face greater financial constraints. International experience shows that diaspora size alone does not determine potential, and that designing instruments that reflect this diversity is essential.
Reaching diverse diaspora members	Diaspora bonds that are marketed mainly through private banks or wealth managers risk reaching only wealthier investors, as seen in Nigeria (Kazeem, 2017 ^[183]). Excluding some members can threaten to alienate diaspora more broadly and undermine their desire to contribute to the development of the country through other channels as well.
Respecting the social contract with the diaspora	Issuing diaspora bonds implicitly creates expectations of accountability, transparency, and participation in decisions on how funds are used. Disagreement over government projects, as in Ethiopia, has shown how contested or opaque investments can alienate diaspora communities and undermine engagement (Famoroti, 2022 ^[186]).

Annex 5.F. Diaspora returns in Israel

Why this matters for Ukraine

Israel has developed a long-term, staged approach to engaging its diaspora, strengthening ties over time and providing clear pathways for those who choose to settle. In the current context, returns from the Ukrainian diaspora are likely to remain limited. However, Israel's model demonstrates how to lay the groundwork for future return through consistent outreach abroad, the promotion of visits, opportunities for short-term and permanent return, and predictable early support on arrival. For Ukraine, adapting selected elements could help sustain connections with communities abroad, support voluntary and informed choices, and improve reintegration outcomes when conditions allow.

Over the years, Israel has developed a highly structured and multi-layered approach to diaspora engagement, with numerous programmes and measures spanning different spheres of life and encouraging investment in the country. From its inception, Israel has also promoted the settlement of individuals of Jewish heritage. The 1950 Law of Return is the main legal instrument structuring Israel's strategy of reterritorialisation of diaspora Jews. It establishes a straightforward framework that grants Israeli citizenship to any non-Israeli Jew and entitles them to settle in Israel, with provisions also applying to their children and grandchildren. In the context of the formation of the State of Israel, the Law primarily enabled the immigration of Holocaust survivors and Jews in neighbouring Arab states after 1948; later it supported those arriving after the fall of the Soviet Union.

A further shift towards actively attracting Jews abroad occurred in the 1990s, when labour and capital shortages brought greater focus on the potential economic contribution of returnees (Cohen, 2013^[187]). Return programmes constructed by state agencies, notably the Ministry of Aliyah and Integration, the Jewish Agency for Israel, and other non-governmental, private and diaspora organisations working in close partnership with government, have therefore often targeted highly skilled returnees, in particular engineers and scientists, considered an economic asset to the country (Grossman, 2024^[188]). While efforts to facilitate skilled return migration remain a priority, and are reflected for example in recent reforms on the recognition of qualifications, the full range of measures is available to the broader Jewish diaspora wishing to return. The selected measures below illustrate Israel's step-by-step approach to strengthening ties and facilitating eventual return.

Israeli Houses in host countries

Israeli Houses were first launched in 2014 by the Ministry of Aliyah and Integration in co-operation with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. There are currently 15 houses operating mainly in cities with large Israeli and Jewish populations abroad, including New York, Miami, Los Angeles, Paris, Berlin and Toronto. Typically located within consulates or embassies, they function as cultural and community hubs designed to maintain close contact with Israeli citizens living abroad while facilitating future return.

Activities include Hebrew-language classes, Israeli holiday celebrations, cultural events and youth activities. Co-ordination with local diaspora organisations, Jewish community centres and NGOs is frequent, enabling wide outreach. Israeli Houses are also tasked with gathering feedback from Israelis abroad and conveying their concerns to Israeli ministries, creating a two-way channel of communication.

This model shows how consular structures can act not only as providers of documents and consular services, but also as proactive community spaces.

The official mandate of Israeli Houses is also to provide advice and guidance for those interested in returning, including personal support and counselling to plan the move (Ministry of Aliyah and Integration, 2025^[189]). They organise lectures on rights and benefits for returnees, orientation sessions on employment and education in Israel, and practical guidance on the return process. In recent years, some Israeli Houses have also employed dedicated Aliyah co-ordinators to support potential returnees throughout the process, although this role is not available in every location. The extent of return-related support therefore varies by community. While Israeli Houses in the United States place strong emphasis on guidance for return, in other settings the focus is more limited. In Berlin, for example, activities focus primarily on cultural ties, and encouragement of return occurs informally and on an individual basis upon request.

Birthright Israel (Taglit)

Birthright Israel was founded in 1999 to provide free, short-term heritage trips for young diaspora Jews aged 18-26 who had not previously participated in an organised programme in Israel. Trips typically last 10 days and combine historical and cultural tours with peer-to-peer engagement and educational workshops. A distinctive element is the participation of Israeli peers, which fosters connections and dialogue.

Since its inception, more than 800 000 young adults from over 70 countries have joined Birthright trips, with annual participation reaching around 40 000 before the COVID-19 pandemic. Evaluations indicate that the programme strengthens Jewish identity, increases connection with Israel, and encourages participation in longer-term initiatives such as Masa. Birthright is organised as a non-profit partnership with a three-way funding model involving the Government of Israel, the Jewish Agency and Jewish communities, and major philanthropic donors (notably the Adelson Family Foundation). Participation is free of charge, supporting accessibility across socio-economic groups.

For Ukraine, Birthright demonstrates how short, fully subsidised exposure programmes can provide an entry point for longer-term engagement. An adapted Ukrainian model could target displaced youth, offering cultural, educational and professional familiarisation visits that sustain ties during displacement while encouraging future return when conditions allow.

Masa Israel Journey

Masa Israel Journey was launched in 2004 as a joint initiative of the Government of Israel (through the Prime Minister's Office and the Ministry of Aliyah and Integration) and the Jewish Agency for Israel. It offers medium- to long-term programmes, usually between five and 12 months, for young diaspora Jews aged 18-30. By 2023, more than 200 000 young people from over 60 countries had participated, with an annual intake of around 12 000.

Masa provides over 200 tracks covering academic study, internships, volunteering, leadership training and religious study. The aim is to strengthen Jewish identity, foster professional and educational development, and create lasting links with Israel. Participants live in Israeli cities, are paired with mentors, and often integrate into local universities or workplaces. Evaluations indicate that alumni are more likely to remain engaged with Israel, pursue aliyah, or return for work and study. The programme is funded through a hybrid public – private model: roughly one-third of costs are covered by the Government of Israel, one-third by the Jewish Agency and philanthropic foundations, with the remainder from participant contributions. Scholarships and grants of USD 500 to USD 3 000 per person are provided, with additional needs-based support available.

Sal Klita Absorption Basket

The Absorption Basket is financial assistance for returnees who choose to migrate formally to Israel, providing support during the initial period as they settle. Assistance covers living expenses for the duration of ulpan study (six months), during which returnees learn Hebrew and receive orientation on Israeli society, politics and culture. Financial assistance also includes rental support for the first 12 months in Israel. The Absorption Basket is available to new immigrants from around the world.

To qualify, individuals must obtain new-immigrant status and use the financial support within the first year after arrival. Payments are issued in instalments, with the first portion provided at the airport upon arrival or directly into the recipient's bank account. The remaining payments are disbursed monthly over six months. After this period, additional financial aid may be available, such as assured income payments, to support continued integration. The assistance is universal for those eligible and is not customised to specific needs; the value of each instalment is determined by age and marital status. In 2025, the total of cash and bank payments was ILS 21 194 (EUR 5 415) for a single person, ILS 34 262 (EUR 8 755) for a single-parent household, and ILS 40 405 (EUR 10 325) for a couple.

Absorption Centers (Merkaz Klita)

Israel also operates residential acculturation centres that provide comprehensive support for new immigrants (olim) as they transition to life in the country. These Absorption Centres, or Merkaz Klita, are primarily intended for those with more substantial settlement support needs, such as limited language skills, limited financial means, or other factors that may complicate their settlement in the country. They serve as transitional hubs offering both accommodation and a structured package of integration assistance during the first months after arrival. In addition to housing, they provide language instruction, life skills training, guidance on employment and public services, psychological counselling, and support for children's school integration.

Developed in the late 1960s to accommodate the sharp rise in immigration, particularly from Western countries, Absorption Centres have since evolved into an essential component of Israel's integration infrastructure. A key element of each centre is the ulpan, an intensive Hebrew language school that provides around five hours of immersive instruction daily for five months. Today, 18 Absorption Centres are operated by the Jewish Agency, serving several thousand new immigrants each year. Thirteen of these are dedicated to Ethiopian newcomers, offering subsidised housing and culturally adapted assistance, while others host immigrants from the former Soviet Union, South America, and other regions. Several centres also specialise in supporting arrivals from crisis zones, including the Middle East and North Africa, under the Aliyah of Rescue programme.

Glossary

Asylum seeker: a person who seeks protection from persecution or serious harm in a country other than their own and awaits a decision on the application for refugee status under relevant international and national instruments.

Beneficiary of temporary protection (BTP): a citizen of Ukraine who obtained the corresponding status as per the European Temporary Protection Directive. The term has a legal basis in the EU member states.

Externally displaced person (EDP): a citizen of Ukraine displaced outside Ukraine as a result of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Unlike IDPs, this term does not have a legal basis in Ukraine, and is used solely for analytical purposes in this report, as a juxtaposition to the term "internally displaced". The term covers persons in need of international protection as per international law defining such persons, including but not limited to beneficiaries of temporary protection as per the European Temporary Protection Directive, beneficiaries of other similar statuses in non-EU countries, asylum seekers and refugees since February 2022. It also includes persons who left Ukraine to de facto seek international protection abroad, but who were admitted by another country on the ground of other documents authorising travel and stay, for example on grounds such as tourism, study, labour, or family reunification.

First-generation migrants from Ukraine: individuals born in Ukraine, including in the Soviet Republic of Ukraine before the declaration of independence in 1991, and residing outside of Ukraine, regardless of their legal status or citizenship held. The term does not have a legal basis in Ukraine. It is used for statistical purposes in this report, as per statistical definitions used in the OECD Database on Immigrants in OECD Countries (DIOC).

Foreign Ukrainian: a person who is a citizen of a state other than Ukraine, or a stateless person, of Ukrainian ethnic origin or descent from Ukraine. The term has a legal basis in Ukraine as per the Law of Ukraine on Foreign Ukrainians.

Internally displaced person (IDP): an internally displaced person is a citizen of Ukraine, a foreigner, or a stateless person who is legally present in the territory of Ukraine and has the right to lawfully reside in Ukraine, and who was forced to leave or abandon their place of residence as a result of or to avoid the negative consequences of armed conflict, temporary occupation, widespread violence, human rights violations, or natural or man-made emergencies. The term has a legal basis in Ukraine, as per the Law of Ukraine on Ensuring the Rights and Freedoms of Internally Displaced Persons. Internally displaced persons may be registered and hence have a corresponding legal status, making them eligible for certain state support programmes and visible in administrative statistics; or unregistered, which means that they still have a number of rights and may be visible in survey data, but are not eligible for certain state support programmes and may not be visible in administrative statistics.

Refugee: a person who has fled their country to escape conflict, violence, or well-founded fear of persecution to seek international protection abroad. Unless otherwise specified, this broad understanding is used in this report. In international law, and depending on country-specific application, the term can have more nuanced definitions. For example, the term "refugee" established by the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol is narrower, as it applies to individuals with a well-founded fear of persecution for

specific reasons who are unable or unwilling to seek protection from their country of origin. In the EU context, a refugee is either a third-country national who, owing to a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership of a particular social group, is outside the country of nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail themselves of the protection of that country, or a stateless person, who, being outside of the country of former habitual residence for the same reasons as mentioned before, is unable or, owing to such fear, unwilling to return to it, and to whom exclusion grounds do not apply. The recognition by an EU Member State of a third-country national or stateless person as a refugee manifests in granting a refugee status.

Returnee from abroad: a person of Ukrainian origin who has resided outside of Ukraine for reasons other than tourism, and who has returned to Ukraine or their habitual place of residence with the intention of staying long-term. It includes “persons who have returned from abroad after seeking international protection”, as defined by the statistical concept of the International Recommendations on Refugee Statistics (IRRS) in 2018, as well as other returning migrants from abroad. In this report, the term corresponds to the term “returned from a host state”, used in several laws in Ukraine, for example, in the Law on External Labour Migration.

Returnee from internal displacement: an IDP who has returned to their habitual place of residence, which in this report corresponds to the terms “return to previous place of residence” and “return to the place of residence left behind”, as per the Law of Ukraine on Ensuring the Rights and Freedoms of Internally Displaced Persons. In the International Recommendations on IDP Statistics (IRIS) 2020, the corresponding term is “return to their former homes or habitual place of residence”.

Ukrainian abroad: a citizen of Ukraine, who is abroad for reasons other than tourism, including labour migrants and their family members, students, Ukrainian spouses of non-Ukrainian citizens, Ukrainians on other legal statuses, Ukrainians in irregular situations, and also externally displaced persons as a result of Russia’s full-scale aggression. This term is used in draft State Strategy “Ukrainian Global Community: New Policies for the Period 2025-2027”.

Ukrainian diaspora: a term used to refer to people of Ukrainian descent abroad. The term, while not explicitly defined, is used in several legal acts in Ukraine, for example in the Decree of the President of Ukraine on the Decision of the National Security and Defence Council of Ukraine “On the Strategy for Information Security.” In Ukraine, the term is predominantly used in historical and cultural contexts to refer to earlier waves of emigrants from the 20th century and before.

Ukrainian global community (global Ukrainians): a term used to refer to people of Ukrainian origin, including citizens, who reside outside the state borders of Ukraine. The term had a legal precedent in Ukraine as per the National Concept for Co-operation with Foreign Ukrainians up to 2010, adopted by Presidential decree in 2006. It is also used in the draft State Strategy “Ukrainian Global Community: New Policies for the Period 2025-2027”. This includes “foreign Ukrainians” and “Ukrainians abroad”, who identify themselves with Ukraine, and express a willingness to belong to the Ukrainian nation.

Ukraine's Strategic Response to the Displacement Crisis

Return, Reintegrate, Reconnect

Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine has radically affected the lives of millions of Ukrainians. About a quarter of Ukrainians were forced to leave their homes, seeking refuge in other parts of Ukraine or abroad. Some have already returned, others wish to return but may lack the possibility, yet others may not return immediately. Nevertheless, their contribution to Ukraine's victory and recovery can still be invaluable.

This report provides a comprehensive overview of Ukraine's institutional and legal framework, as well as policy response to enhance integration of internally displaced; support return and reintegration of both internally and externally displaced; and engage with Ukrainian global community. It also analyses socio-economic conditions of those who already returned, the evolution of return intentions of those who are still displaced, and future return dynamics under different security scenarios.

Drawing on international experience – including OECD country practices – the report identifies potential bottlenecks that may impede future reintegration processes in Ukraine. Intended to inform Ukrainian authorities and their international partners, it offers practical policy directions to facilitate return and reintegration and maintain meaningful ties with non-returnees.



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