

War migrants: global experience and Ukrainian characteristics

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Introduction

The return of migrants to their country of origin reduces the burden on the social services of the host country and, under certain conditions, can have a positive impact on the economy of the country of origin. If this return is voluntary, it can be seen as a win-win for all parties. However, this situation can be difficult to achieve, as returnees face a number of challenges that often force them to migrate again or make them clients of social services or international assistance for a long time.

Available academic evidence suggests that return migration is widespread: over 50 per cent of migrants tend to return to their countries of origin within 15 years¹. First and foremost, most of the war migrants themselves, who had to leave their homeland involuntarily due to security threats, want to return home once such threats are eliminated. Another strong factor that will encourage many to return is the time-limited legal status².

There is also a debate in the literature as to whether migrant returns contribute to economic development. On the one hand, there is evidence that the return of migrants to Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) has had a positive impact on export competitiveness³, in particular because migrants have brought back new skills and knowledge that they acquired while working in more developed countries. However, according to other sources⁴, this is probably true for labour migrants, but not necessarily for those who were forced to emigrate because of the war. Labour migrants are, on average, a more active part of the labour force, and if it is possible to return them to their homeland at least partially, it is good for the economy.

At the same time, war migrants are either the entire population of certain areas (or, as in the former Yugoslavia, ethnic minorities), or at least relatively more active representatives of it. But then the dropout occurs in the host country: the more active and prepared find work, while the rest become accustomed to social assistance and, therefore, parasitism. It is the latter who are the first candidates for return after the end of assistance programs, especially given the interests of the host countries, which are interested in skilled labour and therefore do not push out those migrants who have found work and have adapted to local society. And, of course, such more active people are less likely to return to their home country unless there are better opportunities waiting for them (e.g., a job in their field of study). For these reasons, post-war returnees may also constitute a lower quality labour force, as well as a significant proportion of inactive (e.g. due to age or illness) and paternalistic people.

In addition, many of them have nowhere to return to (in Ukraine, the war destroyed at least 140,000 residential buildings, including about 18,000 multi-storey buildings). Therefore, a rapid mass return could create major problems and further worsen the lives of such migrants. On the other hand, time will work against the return, as migrants will adapt to life in the countries of temporary residence more and more deeply – Ukrainian children will go to local schools and universities, and parents will sooner or later find jobs. For these reasons, it is also not worth delaying this process.

1 Adda, Dustmann, Gorlach (2022), The Dynamics of Return Migration, Human Capital Accumulation, and Wage, Assimilation Review of Economic Studies 89 (6): 2841–71

2 <https://www.peopleinneed.net/how-many-ukrainians-will-return-home-after-the-war-10280gp>

3 Dany Bahar, Andreas Hauptmann, Cem Özgüzel, Hillel Rapoport; Migration and Knowledge Diffusion: The Effect of Returning Refugees on Export Performance in the Former Yugoslavia. The Review of Economics and Statistics 2024; 106 (2): 287–304. doi: https://doi.org/10.1162/rest_a_01165

4 Van Houte, Marieke, and Tine Davids. "Development and Return Migration: From Policy Panacea to Migrant Perspective Sustainability." Third World Quarterly 29, no. 7 (2008): 1411–29. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20455117>.

There is a large number of international organisations (primarily the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), and partly the World Bank, UNICEF, WHO, etc.), government agencies, international and local NGOs, and commissions at the level of local community governments that deal with the problems of returnees. Often, assistance is also provided by host countries interested in returning migrants, the European Commission, and international aid agencies of individual countries, such as USAID, SIDA, UKAID, etc. It is recommended to establish appropriate joint bodies to coordinate their actions.

However, according to research, assistance itself usually plays a secondary role compared to general living conditions, primarily the availability of work and housing⁵. For example, in Kosovo, 90 per cent of returnees reported a lack of work as the main obstacle⁶.

According to the IOM methodology, a return is considered “sustainable” if further migration is a matter of free decision – that is, the living conditions of migrants meet at least basic standards in terms of security, material conditions, healthcare, etc. In fact, this is a “tactical”, minimum level, which is quite logical from the point of view of an international agency, but hardly sufficient for the country itself at the strategic level. Ideally, a country of origin should become an attractive place to live in the long run, otherwise it will continue to lose the most entrepreneurial and often the most skilled part of its population, and in the case of Ukraine and other countries with a negative demographic trend, also the population in absolute terms. However, the solution to this problem depends not so much on international organisations as on the policy of the country itself and its security situation.

In Ukraine, if the war ends in a positive scenario, both approaches will be relevant. However, direct assistance to returnees to their homeland is likely to be provided by international organisations and Ukraine's partners, many of which are also host countries for war migrants. They have relatively universal recipes for organising such assistance, developed in dozens of other countries affected by military conflicts in recent decades.

Instead, this report focuses mainly on the measures that the Ukrainian government should take to ensure that the return of migrants is as large as possible, sustainable, and does not become a prelude to further migration.

It should be noted that even before the full-scale war, several million citizens left Ukraine in peacetime or relatively peaceful times, mainly for purely economic reasons⁷, and according to KIIS (commissioned by CASE-Ukraine), in May 2022, only 54.7% of respondents [said](#) that if the danger of hostilities persisted, they planned their future (their own and their children's) in Ukraine – the rest would prefer to emigrate. Therefore, such measures were relevant even before the full-scale war, but were not taken for various reasons, including lack of resources and opposition from groups of influence, or lack of understanding from international organisations and partners.

⁵ Van Houte, Marieke, and Tine Davids. “Development and Return Migration: From Policy Panacea to Migrant Perspective Sustainability.” *Third World Quarterly* 29, no. 7 (2008): 1411–29. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20455117>.

⁶ Möllers, Judith; Traikova, Diana; Herzfeld, Thomas; Bajrami, Egzon (2017) : Study on rural migration and return migration in Kosovo, Discussion Paper, No. 166, Leibniz Institute of Agricultural Development in Transition Economies (IAMO), Halle (Saale), <https://nbn-resolving.de/urn:nbn:de:gbv:3:2-76033>

⁷ According to the Institute of Demography estimates, by 2022, there were 2.5-3 million labour migrants abroad. <https://www.ukrinform.ua/rubric-society/3790729-za-kordonom-perebuvaet-majze-9-miljoniv-ukrainciv-demograf.html>

However, the exacerbation of the problem due to the war increases the chance of resolving old issues that have become much more urgent and have also become the subject of interest of new stakeholders, primarily countries that have provided shelter to Ukrainian migrants and are interested in their voluntary return to their homeland.

The first section describes and analyses the current situation of Ukrainian migrants and their requests for conditions for return. The second section describes and analyses the experience of a number of countries that have been through military operations in recent decades and have therefore faced problems with the subsequent return of migrants. The third analyses the challenges for return policies in different scenarios of the end of hostilities. The final section discusses some specific problems of Ukraine in this regard and provides policy recommendations for returnees.

Current situation of Ukrainian migrants

Estimates of the number of Ukrainian temporary migrants outside Ukraine and their needs

Extent of the problem

As of February 2024, [UNHCR](#) estimates that the total number of registered Ukrainian war migrants with different protection statuses staying abroad was **6,479,700 persons**. Of these, 6,004,000 are in Europe, including 1,252,500 are in Russia and Belarus (voluntarily or deported), of these 40 thousand are in Belarus. Outside Europe, mainly in the United States and Canada, there are 475,600 people (see Table 1). This estimate includes Ukrainians who have applied for asylum as refugees, persons with temporary protection, or other similar statuses.

These figures should be treated with caution, especially in terms of further calculations. First, the data on migrants in Russia and Belarus cannot be verified. Second, there is double counting. Many migrants from the eastern occupied regions had to cross the Russian border because they had no other way to escape. But some of them later found themselves in Western countries or on the government-controlled territory of Ukraine. Some citizens were able to obtain temporary protection or register as migrants in several countries, including countries outside Europe. In addition, UNHCR's estimates do not adequately take into account returns to Ukraine or movements within Europe due to local procedures or lack of data. The CES tried to more accurately estimate the number of Ukrainian migrants abroad based on data from border services and concluded that the number of Ukrainian refugees at the beginning of 2024 reached 4.9 million. Also, according to Eurostat, at the end of January 2024, about 4.3 million persons had temporary protection status in the EU. This is 24%-28% lower than the relevant UN estimate. This difference should be taken into account when making forecasts of the number of migrants who will potentially return.

In addition, the [data](#) of the State Border Guard Service, which coincides with the data of the border services of European countries, gives much lower figures. In particular, as of September 2023, there were 22.9 million departures from Ukraine since the beginning of the full-scale invasion and 20.1 million entries. The difference was 2.81 million persons, while the UNHCR estimate of the number of Ukrainian war migrants cited above is more than three times higher. Even if we assume that the border services did not record all migrants in the first weeks, this is not enough to explain the difference in estimates. This suggests that a significant proportion

of Ukrainians who left before February 2024 for other, mainly economic reasons were granted temporary asylum or similar status. The chances of these citizens' returning are slim. In the following analysis we would try whenever possible to account only on the war refugees.

Socio-demographic structure and lifestyle of Ukrainian migrants

Different surveys provide very similar data on Ukrainian temporary migrants. Unless otherwise stated, the figures in the following sections are taken from the [UNHCR report "Life on Pause: Intentions and Prospects of Refugees and IDPs from Ukraine, No. 4"](#), which provides the most recent detailed and consistent overview of the socio-economic characteristics of Ukrainian migrants in Europe. It is based on a survey of 3,850 migrant households conducted in April-May 2023. In the follow-up report, "Life on Pause, No. 5", released in February 2024, only a summary is currently available, which only includes demographic and socio-economic data.

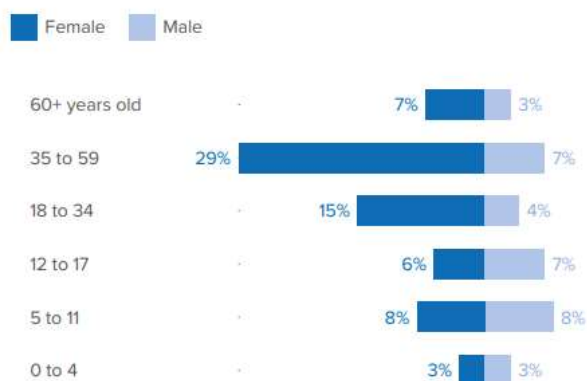
Demographic make-up of households:

As of July 2023, 80% of war migrants were women with children (according to other sources, up to 88%). The share of children among migrants is 35%. The share of adult men is 13%, mostly aged 18-59 (11%). The share of both sexes aged 60+ is 10%.

At the household level, the share of households with at least one child is 58%, while households with at least one elderly person account for 21%. Households with one adult aged 18-59 with dependents (children or the elderly) account for 36%. Households with two or more adults of working age with dependents account for another 30% of migrants. The share of households consisting of one or more elderly people (60+) is 6%. About 28% of households consist of one or more adults aged 18-59 without dependents. Such a composition of migrant households implies a high age dependency ratio ((children + elderly people / adults aged 18 to 59)), which is 83%. There is a high level of long-distance relationships among migrants – 37% of migrants stated that their spouse and/or children still live in Ukraine.

AGE AND GENDER OF HOUSEHOLD MEMBERS

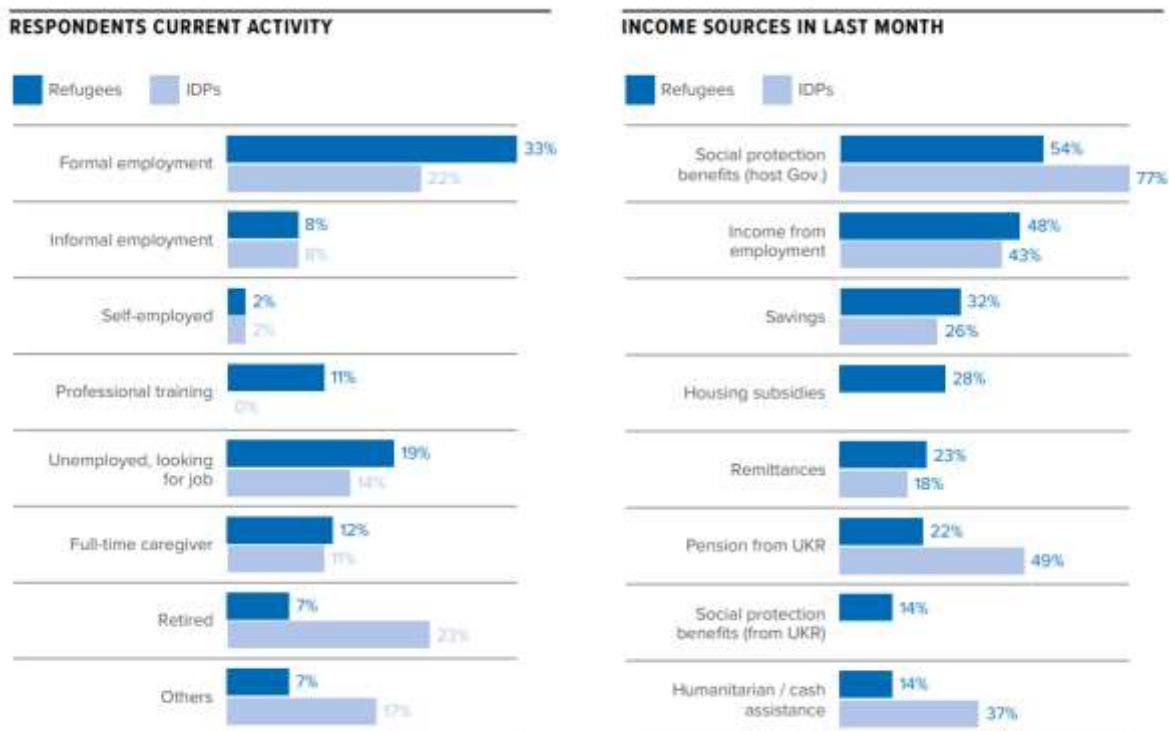
Refugees



Source: UNHCR, 2023, Page 23

Employment and income:

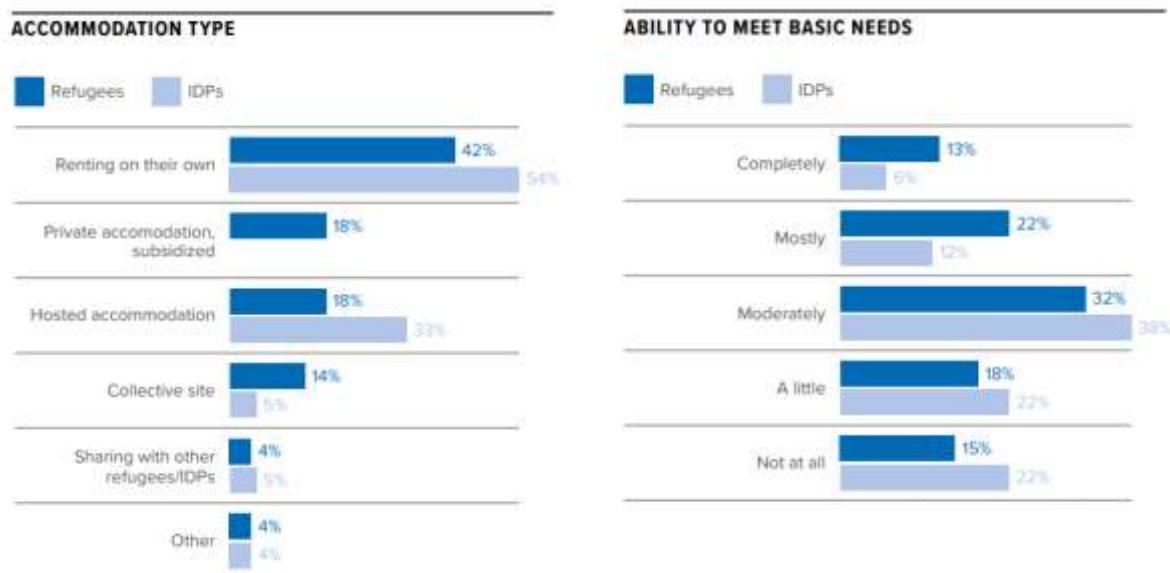
Migrants' incomes come from several sources. Approximately half (54%) receive social benefits in the host country, while a slightly smaller share receives salaries or self-employment income. In particular, 43% of adult migrants are employed, including 8% who are unofficially employed; 19% are looking for work and 11% are studying. Accordingly, 26 per cent are economically inactive, including 12 per cent who take care of other family members full-time.



Source: UNHCR, 2023, Page 24

Accommodation:

Evidence suggests that high rates of family separation among migrants affect their living conditions and possibly their intentions to return to Ukraine. Migrants report significant problems with access to stable housing and meeting basic needs, especially among those not engaged in economic activity. Overall, 18% of migrants live together with other migrants, possibly because they have fewer local contacts or cannot afford housing. 18% of migrants were hosted by their families or friends. 33% of migrants report that they are unable to meet basic needs.



Source: UNHCR, 2023, Page 25

Geography:

Geographically, the migrants came from different regions of Ukraine, with 39% coming from eastern Ukraine and 15% – from Kyiv, the regions with the largest cities, which were also the most affected by the war. The rest, over 30%, came from regions not directly affected by the war. Among those who fled from the east, the largest share of migrants (30%) came from Kharkiv region (30%), followed by Dnipro, Donetsk and Zaporizhzhia regions (29% each). 15% of migrants came from the south of Ukraine (Kherson, Mykolaiv and Odesa regions). The majority of migrants (80%) left their homes in the first months of 2022, indicating a long period of displacement. However, more than half of those from western Ukraine and about a third from the south left after April 2022.

Since the start of Russia's full-scale aggression, most Ukrainians have sought refuge in neighbouring countries. These countries are part of the Migrant Response Plan, a joint action plan by the UN Refugee Agency and other humanitarian organisations to help and support Ukrainians who have been forced to flee their homes. Approximately 45% of Ukrainian migrants registered in Europe now reside in countries neighbouring Ukraine. The vast majority of migrants currently residing in Ukraine's neighbouring countries arrived there directly. In contrast, a share of migrants from Kyiv are in countries that do not border Ukraine.

As of February 15, 2024, the largest number of Ukrainian migrants resided in Germany and Poland, with 1.1 million and 956.6 thousand people respectively.

Table 1. Countries with the largest number of Ukrainian migrants, February 2024

Country	Migrants from Ukraine registered in the country as of the date, in thousands	Country	Migrants from Ukraine registered in the country as of the date, in thousands

Germany	1,139.7	Moldova	116.2
Poland	956.6	Slovakia	115.9
Czech Republic	381.4	Ireland	104.3
United Kingdom	253.2	Austria	84.1
Spain	192.4	Romania	78.7
Italy	168.8	Belgium	75.1
Netherlands	149	France	69.7
Outside Europe (mainly in the United States and Canada)			475.6

Source: <https://data.unhcr.org/en/situations/ukraine>

It is important to note that Poland has become a kind of cross-border “bridge” for Ukrainians, a transit point before travelling to other countries. In particular, 381,400 Ukrainians travelled to the Czech Republic and 115,900 to Slovakia. In total, 1.9 million Ukrainians are registered with refugee status in neighbouring countries, and almost 3 million have applied for national protection programs.

Other European countries have received significantly fewer Ukrainians: England – 253,000, Spain and Italy – up to 200,000, the Netherlands – 150,000, Austria – 85,000, Belgium – 75,000, Norway, France and Switzerland – over 60,000.

Education of children:

There is no reliable information on the total number of Ukrainian children abroad. However, it is known that school-age children make up between 30% and 50% of the total number of migrants in any host country in Europe. The distribution of migrant children from Ukraine by country reflects the distribution of the total number of Ukrainian migrants, with Poland, Germany and the Czech Republic at the top of the list. A large number of children is also present in countries that are geographically distant, such as Italy, Spain and the UK.

According to the [European Commission](#), as of March 05, 2024, 831,500 school-age children were integrated into EU schools. In October 2022, this figure was [517,100 students](#)⁸. This growth is likely due to both an increase in the number of Ukrainian children abroad and an increase in the proportion of children enrolled in local schools. According to a [UN survey on migrant intentions](#) in August-September 2022, 18% of parents preferred their children to continue studying under the Ukrainian curriculum, and 73% intended to enrol their children in local schools. However, according to the [UN study “Learning on Pause”](#), at the end of the 2022-2023 school year, a significant number of Ukrainian children remained outside the educational system of the host

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countries: from 10% in the Czech Republic to 56% in Poland. This situation is influenced both by Ukrainian preferences or difficulties with local language, especially among adolescent children, and by the requirements for attending local educational institutions, which differ from country to country.

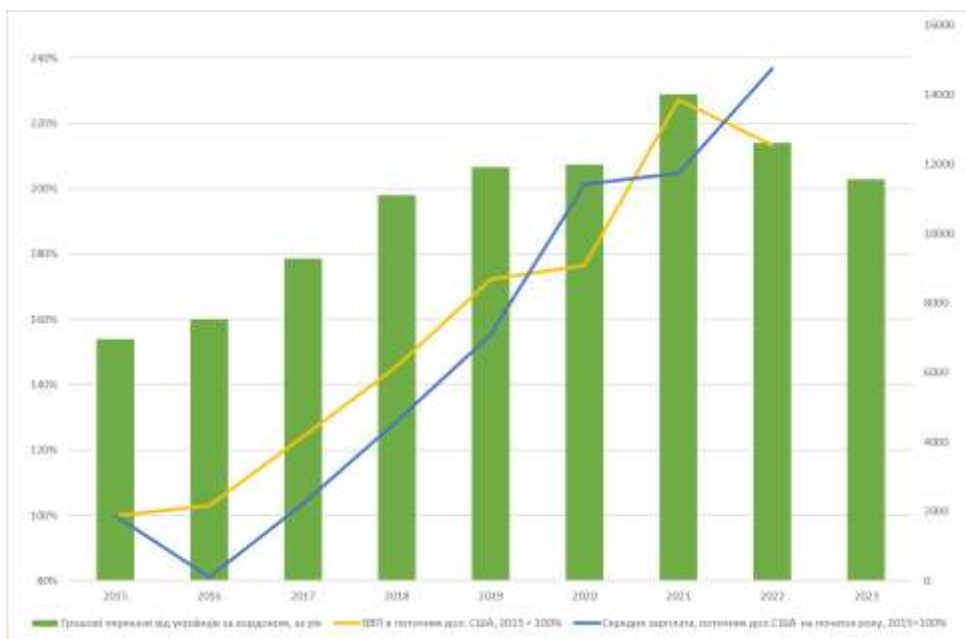
There is anecdotal evidence^{9 10 11} that a large number of migrant children from Ukraine are studying the Ukrainian curriculum using online or distance learning tools. In addition, some migrant children study the Ukrainian curriculum in informal conditions, often with migrant teachers from Ukraine.

In general, the socio-economic situation of Ukrainian migrants is characterised by various problems, including difficulties with employment, accommodation, income instability and family separation.

Economic impact of migration

In peacetime, migration was voluntary, mainly for economic reasons, and largely, if not mostly, temporary (“circular”).

On the one hand, it reduced the supply of labour within Ukraine. This helped to reduce unemployment and shadow employment, as well as increase wages, but likely held back GDP growth due to the shrinking labour force (see Figures 1 and 2). The reduction in unemployment, however, was affected by the COVID-19 epidemic, so it is impossible to identify a clear trend in this case. However, the increase in labour migration has certainly contributed to a decrease in shadow employment, which fell by almost 1



million people, or almost 23%, since 2016, the first year for which data is available.

Figure 1. GDP per capita and average wages in current US dollars compared to 2015 (graphs), and remittances from abroad in millions of current US dollars (diagram).

Data: Website *minfin.com.ua* (media), World Bank.

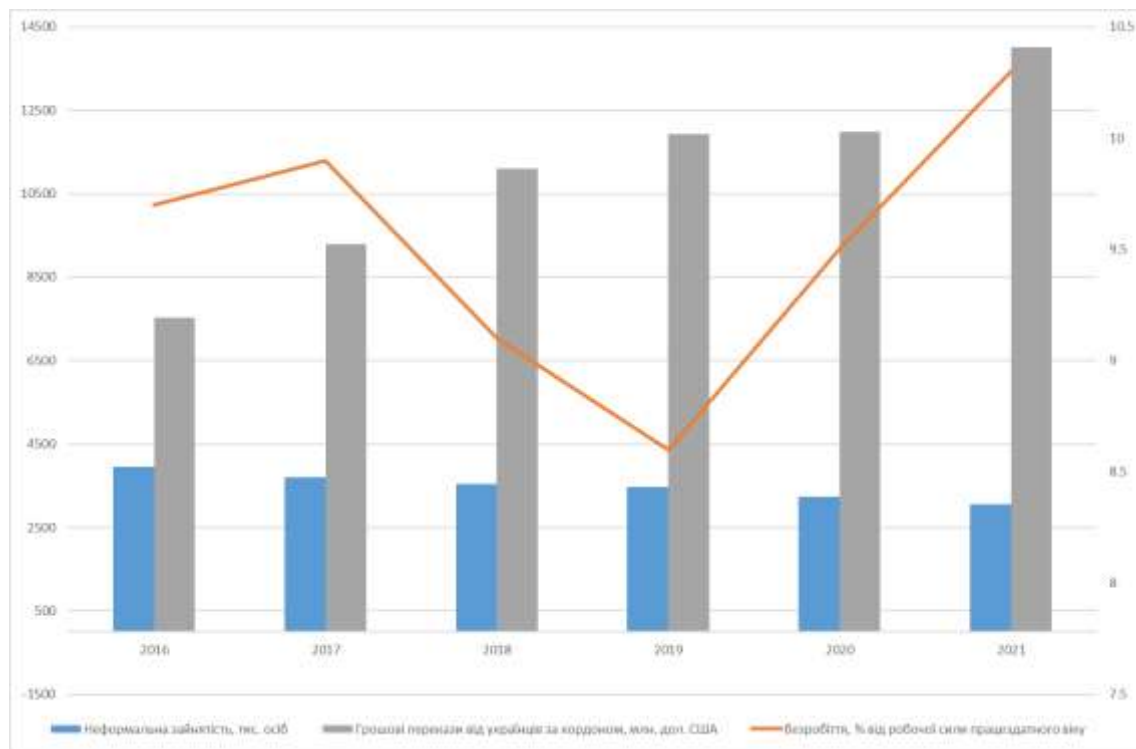
⁹ <https://eo.gov.ua/chym-zakordonni-shkoly-vidrizniaiutsia-vid-ukrainskykh-rezultaty-opytuvannia-batkiv-chyi-dity-znakhodiatsia-za-kordonom/2022/08/23/>

¹⁰ <https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/95767>, pages 13-14

¹¹ <https://www.rbc.ua/rus/news/uroki-emigratsiyi-k-shkolyari-ukrayini-zvikayut-1682600186.html>

Figure 2. The number of informally employed people and remittances from abroad in millions of current US dollars (diagrams) and the ILO unemployment level as a percentage of the working age labour force (graph).

Data: Website minfin.com.ua (media), State Statistics Service



According to the [NBU](http://nbu.gov.ua), revenues from labour migrants peaked in 2021 at more than USD 14 billion (including through informal channels). For comparison, exports of goods amounted to more than USD 68 billion, with crop products being the largest item at USD 15.5 billion. This contribution to the economy can be conditionally compared to the contribution that could be made by the relevant number of employees, self-employed and individual entrepreneurs, if they worked in Ukraine and produced the national average amount of value added each. In 2021, this amount was approximately USD 12.8 thousand per person employed – more than twice the average wage. That is, the income from migrants could exceed their potential economic contribution at home if there were 1.1 million or less migrants, while actual number is estimated to be several times higher. Therefore, Ukraine's economy would benefit (by 10-15%) if the country created more favourable conditions for value creation, primarily through a better business climate, and for making work at home more attractive, primarily through higher wages – which requires a reduction in the tax burden on such payments.

However, as can be seen from the diagram in Figure 1, the amount of revenues began to decline in 2022 – down to USD 12,621 million, and further in 2023 – down to USD 11,568 million, despite a significant increase in the number of migrants. This is partly due to the return of some labour migrants (about 400,000, where 75-80% are men)¹², but this factor could work only in 2022. The second factor is likely to be families moving

¹² According to the State Border Guard Service, [almost 400,000 citizens have returned to Ukraine since the beginning of the war, most of them are men – State Border Guard Service \(interfax.com.ua\)](http://interfax.com.ua)

to their breadwinners abroad under the guise of migrants from the war, i.e. with the possibility of receiving benefits and assistance. In this case, remittances to Ukraine stop. The high proportion of migrants from the western regions of Ukraine is probably due to this phenomenon. The chances of this part of migrants returning are low.

Migration, both voluntary (labour) and forced due to the war, has significantly undermined Ukraine's human capital. As can be seen from the UNHCR data cited above, 55% of migrants are aged 18 to 59, the rest are mostly children and adolescents, with only 10% being representatives of the older generation aged 60+. About 70% of migrants surveyed by the [CES in November 2022](#) had higher or incomplete higher education, while on average, 29.1% of Ukrainians aged 25 and older have such education. According to the [UNHCR](#), this share was 62%. Since younger adult migrants (respondents) could not have higher education by age, the actual share of migrants with higher education among the comparable 25+ category is even higher. The share of working-age people with higher education who left Ukraine is difficult to estimate from these data, as the total number of migrants is unknown and due to the incomparability of the data mentioned above.

It is even more difficult to estimate what proportion of these professionals will be ready to return to Ukraine after the war. On the one hand, people with higher education are more likely to speak foreign languages, or to be able to learn them more easily; they are also more active in job search and can potentially expect or already receive higher salaries, as well as work remotely. This will contribute to their gaining a foothold in host countries. On the other hand, their diplomas are not always recognised in the West, and the actual qualifications they have acquired in Ukraine do not always meet the standards and needs of employers there. Even before 2022, a significant percentage of labour migrants worked in positions that did not correspond to their speciality¹³. Now, according to the [CES, there are 51% of them](#). Such specialists may be more inclined to return to Ukraine. However, due to self-selection, their actual average productivity will probably be lower than that of those who have found or will find a job abroad and decide to stay there. Therefore, a negative impact on human capital is likely to occur even if the majority of migrants return.

However, there is another, perhaps greater, danger: the brain drain in peacetime. If the war ends in a suboptimal scenario (with the threat of renewed hostilities remaining, see below), up to 118,000 IT professionals¹⁴ alone could leave Ukraine, or about half of all migrants who have left. They will be pushed out by factors such as the risk of renewed conflict (with a ban on travel for men of military age), possible deterioration of economic conditions (such as those envisaged in the National Revenue Strategy adopted by the Cabinet of Ministers), and the curtailment of eurointegration, if it occurs. It is not yet known about similar studies of other creative industries, but it can be realistically assumed that the losses will be of the same order, especially since this is in line with general trends among the surveyed Ukrainian citizens.

Thus, if the danger persists, the need for constant military mobilisation and the deterioration of economic conditions for intellectual services producers continue, the country is likely to lose the prospect of rapid and sustainable economic growth associated with the development of post-industrial industries. In the realities of the 21st century, this will mean Ukraine lagging behind developed countries economically with no prospects of overcoming it.

¹³ According to the Institute of Demography and Social Studies, [in 2017, only one third of migrants worked in their profession](#).

¹⁴ [How many IT professionals want to leave Ukraine after the borders open – Forbes.ua](#)

Migration processes and conditions for returning to Ukraine

Most migrants who remain abroad left in February-March 2022. Despite the return of a significant proportion of those who left, the number of migrants is slowly growing. Thus, according to [CES](#) estimates, as of the end of June 2023, 5.6-6.7 million Ukrainians were abroad because of the war. This is by 0.3-0.5 million more than at the end of 2022, when the number of Ukrainian migrants was estimated at 5.3-6.2 million. A similar trend is recorded in [UN surveys](#).

Numerous studies of the attitudes of Ukrainians who were forced to leave for Europe as a result of the war in Ukraine show that most Ukrainians demonstrate their intention to return to Ukraine. For example, in the aforementioned [CES](#) study, based on an info Sapiens survey, as of November 2022, 74% of respondents planned to return, while 10% did not. In the next wave in April 2023, these shares changed to 63% and 18%, respectively. According to the [4Service survey](#), in April 2023, 72% of respondents planned to return home (12% less than in June 2022). At the same time, 16% intended to stay abroad. In an analytical note of [Sologub \(2024\)](#), based on Factum Group data for July-August 2023, 64% of respondents planned to return, while 13% planned to stay abroad. Similar data is presented in the [Opora](#) survey for April 2023: 67% of migrants would like to return to Ukraine, while 18% do not plan to do so.

According to the most recent [UNHCR survey](#), in December-January 2024, 65% of respondents planned to return to Ukraine (12% less than a year earlier), while 11% of respondents expressed a desire not to return (a 6% increase compared to last year). It should be understood that the increase in the share of migrants who do not want to return is not only due to a change in migrants' attitudes. It is also due to the fact that some of those who planned to return have implemented their plans.

The decision to return is primarily influenced by pull factors, the main one being the security situation. If the war continues for a long time (and 39 per cent of respondents believe that the [war will not end for another year or more](#), including 52% of young people), Ukrainian migrants will adapt to their new life abroad even more and the likelihood that they will stay in the host country will increase.

[Sologub \(2024\)](#) provides interesting results of several regression models that allow for correlation between different factors. For our analysis, it is interesting to compare those who have already returned in July-August 2023 with those who were abroad but expressed their intention to return (Table 2).

Table 2. Analysis of return factors for Ukrainian migrants.

Model 1: Returnees staying in Ukraine versus migrants staying abroad	Model 2: Migrants staying abroad and planning to return versus those staying abroad and not planning to return
Demographic factors: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (+) single/unmarried persons, • (-) emigrated together with a spouse. 	Demographic factors: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (-) planned to emigrate before the war; • (-) left in February-March 2022; • (-) persons with refugee status; • (-) have not visited Ukraine since

	February 2022.
<p>Pull factors:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (+) longing for family and home; • (+) desire for children to study in Ukraine; • (+) better employment opportunities in Ukraine; • (+) availability of real estate in Ukraine; (+) information from the Ukrainian government. 	<p>Pull factors:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (+) improvement of the security situation; • (+) longing for family and home; • (+) desire for children to study in Ukraine; • (+) better employment opportunities in Ukraine; • (+) desire to participate in the restoration of Ukraine
<p>Push factors:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (+) financial difficulties abroad. 	<p>Push factors:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (-) higher living standards abroad

Source: Sologub (2024).

According to another [survey](#) conducted by Info Sapiens, the following answers were received to the question: “Which of the following factors might encourage you to return to Ukraine?”, % of the total number of respondents:

- Final end of the war – 51.2%
- Absence of hostilities or air strikes in the territory of residence – 34.1%
- Decent paid job in Ukraine – 28.3%
- Higher standard of living in Ukraine – 20.7%
- Restoration of infrastructure in my region – 17.7%
- End of the temporary asylum – 17.4%

According to a UNHCR survey in early 2024, the majority of migrants cited the security situation in Ukraine as the main factor preventing their return, followed by a lack of financial resources and lack of housing. At the same time, 55% of those migrants who returned from abroad to Ukraine said that there were fewer employment opportunities than they had expected.

About 59% of migrants said they might be forced to return to Ukraine if they encountered problems in their host countries, mainly related to employment opportunities and legal status.

Both migrants abroad and IDPs in Ukraine attach great importance to living conditions: the availability of employment in the place that was their home before the war, as well as the stability of water, electricity, and basic services. 74% of respondents said that this was a prerequisite for their return.

Among other factors, various researchers mention geographical factors. In particular, migrants staying in countries bordering Ukraine are more likely to plan to return. For example, migrants in Germany, the largest group in Europe, are the least likely to return. However, it should be borne in mind that this result may be due to a correlation

with other factors, such as higher living standards due to more generous social benefits in the host country, or a higher proportion of respondents who have lost their homes and jobs in Ukraine.

Thus, for returnees to return, favourable conditions for meeting basic needs are necessary. Resolving the housing issue is also important, as some people simply have nowhere to return to. Another factor influencing the return of Ukrainian emigrants is the possibility of employment: many have lost their jobs.

In addition, it is important not to ignore the role of emotional factors. In in-depth interviews, one often hears that the decision to return was spontaneous or caused by homesickness.

At the same time, certain social pressures related to socially important issues should be taken into account. Respondents may provide the answer that they believe is most socially acceptable and does not necessarily correspond to their true plans. This means that the rate of return may be 30-50% lower than the current rate.

World experience

Iraq

Over the decades of conflict and mass violence in Iraq, including the Second Gulf War (2003), the sectarian war (2003-2011) and the military campaign against the Islamic State and al-Sham (ISIS) in 2013-2017, millions of Iraqis have been displaced. Migration from Iraq is characterised by several waves of migrants. After 2003, Iraqi citizens mainly migrated to neighbouring countries (Jordan, Syria, Lebanon and Iran). Subsequently, Iraqi migrants settled in Turkey and some countries outside the region (the United States, Canada and Australia, Germany, Greece and Finland).

The return of migrants to Iraq should be seen primarily in the context of a very complex and chaotic pattern of population movements in the region. During these periods, migration was often used as a spontaneous strategy to overcome political and economic instability, insecurity, lack of work, equality and social justice in Iraq. Others migrated abroad for medical, business, personal or family reasons.

According to available data (as of the end of 2023)¹⁵:

- approximately 5 million Iraqis have returned, living in poor living conditions and in need of assistance and support to meet basic living needs. At the same time, the number of migrants and asylum seekers from Iraq reaches 2.1 million persons¹⁶. However, it is difficult to establish their exact number, as not all of them return through official channels, including through programs to facilitate voluntary return, and a significant number of returns show signs of so-called cyclic migration (to visit relatives, sell assets, receive payments or pensions, and assess the situation).

The context is important. After the end of the conflict against ISIL, many Iraqis decided to return voluntarily. Among those who emigrated as asylum seekers, a significant number did not receive refugee status, which allows them to stay in the host country. Therefore, they were forced to return to Iraq;

- 1.14 million Iraqis continue to be internally displaced – 175,000 IDPs live in 25 camps in the Kurdistan region of Iraq, and more than 939,000 IDPs live in cities (90% of IDPs have not been able to return home for more than 3 years, and 70% have been in IDP status for more than 5 years). The large scale of internal displacement is an important deterrent to return;
- The situation is also complicated by the fact that:
 - Iraq is home to 260,000 Syrian migrants (86% of them live in urban areas, while the rest live in 9 migrant camps and one transit centre). The war in Syria has forced thousands of Iraqi migrants to return home (in 2013 alone, there were more than 50,000 of them);
 - between 250,000 and 1 million Iraqis in the country are missing¹⁷.

¹⁵ <https://www.unrefugees.org/emergencies/iraq/>,
<https://reporting.unhcr.org/operational/operations/iraq>

<https://reporting.unhcr.org/operational/situations/iraq-situation>,

¹⁶ UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division - International Migrant Stock 2020

¹⁷ <https://www.icmp.int/?resources=iraq-program-factsheet>

During 2019 and 2020, Iraq (in cooperation with the UN) completed the Migration Governance Indicator (MGI) assessment and created the National Migration Profile (NMP), which formed the basis of the National Migration Strategy (NMS). The main achievements were¹⁸:

- government measures to facilitate the dignified return and reintegration of Iraqis abroad (support offices were opened in embassies, embassy staff accompanied difficult return cases – lack of documents, rejected asylum applications, etc.);
- establishment of community councils in Turkey, Iran and other countries with large Iraqi populations to coordinate and facilitate return processes;
- returnees were able to obtain identity and residence permits, as well as vocational training courses according to their qualifications, skills and preferences, to facilitate their reintegration upon return;
- The EU-Iraq Partnership and Cooperation Agreement envisaged expanding the dialogue on enhancing the voluntary return of migrants. The so-called reintegration assistance (from the UN and the EU¹⁹) is still in place – the reintegration budget is a maximum of €1,800 for adults and €2,800 for children. Only €300 is provided in cash (at the time of departure from the airport). The rest can be used for starting a business, education or living in Iraq.

At the end of 2021, after successful democratic elections, the Iraqi government released a National Plan for Internal Displacement and launched the United Nations Development Cooperation Framework (UNDSCF)²⁰ in partnership with the UN. Mainly, the Iraqi government has been working over the past few years to close official camps trying to encourage displaced people to return home (the deadline for closing camps and voluntary return of all IDPs is currently June 30, 2024)²¹.

This has led many migrants to criticise the authorities for focusing mainly on closing the camps rather than more thoroughly ensuring appropriate conditions and preparing the infrastructure for return. Among the latest initiatives of the Iraqi government, adopted on January 30, 2024 at a meeting of the Higher Committee for Assistance and Support to Displaced Persons, a number of recommendations were approved to support migrants returning to their territories, namely²²:

- increasing one-time financial assistance to repatriates;
- launching special programs for their employment;
- allocating 2% of funds of the Ministry of Education and other ministries and governorates to build low-rise houses for returnees;
- payment of compensation for lost housing;
- payment of compensation to victims in accordance with Law No. 20 of 2009²³.

¹⁸ https://migrationnetwork.un.org/sites/g/files/tmzbd416/files/docs/gcm_voluntary_national_report-_iraq_.en.pdf

¹⁹ <https://iom-nederland.nl/en/voluntary-return/what-is-reintegration-assistance>

²⁰ <https://reliefweb.int/report/iraq/humanitarian-implementation-plan-hip-iraq-echoirqbud202491000-year-2024-version-1-18122023>

²¹ <https://www.returnmigration.eu/gapsblog/a-looming-threat-of-forced-repatriation>

²² <https://www.cabinet.iq/ar/category/R080@rPEuuhsGuB/R080@rPEuuhsGuB>

²³ https://www.cabinet.iq/ar/category/elcDjatun72_JLB/elcDjatun72_JLB

Among the government's digital services, a system of compensation for victims of war and terrorism was launched²⁴. Also, in September last year, the development of a national plan to reduce illegal immigration was announced²⁵.

Nevertheless, migrants continue to face significant obstacles to their return²⁶. And those who have already returned face low levels of access to basic goods (poor housing conditions, lack of electricity and water), search for a stable source of income (irregular/occasional work), and legal problems, mainly due to the lack of valid civil documents, which hinders their ability to access public services (education, healthcare and social security) and lack of legal tenure (evictions and multiple changes of residence), as well as ethnic and religious tensions and security risks (crime, human trafficking). In addition, the pace of new returns has slowed considerably in recent years, and some migrants are considering leaving again.

Rwanda

The country's population has been divided into two ethnic groups since pre-colonial times – Tutsi and Hutu. The political crisis that began in the late 1980s gradually transformed into an open civil ethnic war in 1990-1994. In April 1994, the plane of Rwandan President Juvenal Habyarimana, the leader of the Hutu-led political movement, was shot down. This was the catalyst for the start of mass killings. Hutu activists and the presidential guard began killing opposition politicians and Tutsi leaders, accusing them of killing the president. Local media actively used hate speech and called on citizens to kill Tutsis, and armed groups executed them en masse across the country. During the 100 days of terror, it is estimated that between 800,000 and 1 million Tutsis and moderate Hutus, who at the time made up about 20% of the country's population, were killed. In July 1994, the Tutsi rebels defeated the Hutu regime and the genocide ended, but 1.2 to 1.7 million Hutus – some of whom had participated in the genocide and feared retaliation – fled to neighbouring countries (Zaire (Congo), Burundi, Tanzania and Uganda). At the same time, approximately 1 million Rwandans were internally displaced.

The change of government persuaded some 800,000 Tutsi migrants who had long been abroad to return home during 1994-96. Another 1.3 million Hutus were forced to return to the country in late 1996 under controversial circumstances caused by the civil war in Congo and expulsion from Tanzania. 200,000 Hutu migrants returned to Rwanda during 1997. Over 30,000 additional Hutu migrants gradually repatriated during 1998-99²⁷.

In total, according to the Government of Rwanda²⁸, since 1994, more than 3.5 million Rwandan migrants have returned home and successfully reintegrated in the country (UNHCR – 3,449,600 persons have returned since the 1994 genocide). In the mid-1990s, the cornerstone of reintegration was a program to create small villages (with about a hundred families) where returnees in need of land and housing were provided with the necessary facilities. This ambitious program – known as “umudugudu” – led to a tectonic rearrangement of the country's rural population. In 4 years after the program

²⁴ <https://ur.gov.iq/index/show-eservice/10031/21/org>

²⁵ <https://www.cabinet.iq/ar/category/k6VbAjzvlshxo02/k6VbAjzvlshxo02>

²⁶ <https://reliefweb.int/report/iraq/progress-toward-durable-solutions-iraq-salah-al-din-december-2023>

²⁷ <https://reliefweb.int/report/burundi/uscr-country-report-rwanda-statistics-refugees-and-other-uprooted-people-jun-2001>

²⁸ <https://www.minema.gov.rw/news-detail/more-rwandans-have-voluntarily-returned-from-the-drc>

began (by the end of 1998), 85,000 houses²⁹ were built in 250 communities with the assistance of the UN and international NGOs.

Since 2009, Rwanda has been implementing the Comprehensive Solutions Strategy (CSS) for migrants. Since 2010, the Ministry of Disaster Management and Migrant Affairs has been implementing the project “Improving socio-economic opportunities for Rwandan returnees and other vulnerable groups”, as well as a number of other government initiatives³⁰:

- the “Come and See, Go and Tell” program (Rwandans who have lived outside the country for a long time are encouraged and assisted to visit and see for themselves how their homeland lives);
- annual Rwanda Day (celebrated in countries with large Rwandan populations, which gives them the opportunity to communicate with their countrymen, including government officials who travel there on purpose);
- incentives for potential returning refugees, including free health insurance for a year, free meals for three months and targeted cash subsidies.

In February 2018, the Rwandan government officially joined the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF), and the program “Sustainable Return and Reintegration of Rwandan Returnees” was launched in partnership with the UN, thus providing a favourable environment for migrants to return (right to work, open borders, access to long-term solutions such as resettlement and local integration, provision of primary healthcare and subsequent inclusion in the national health insurance system, and algorithms for providing food to children under 5 and other socially vulnerable groups)³¹.

Over the past five years, Rwanda has received 15,643 returnees, mostly from Congo, and both governments have worked together to ensure the safe return of migrants in close cooperation with UNHCR offices. The latter operate two transit centres where returnees receive temporary shelter and medical services, and have access to multipurpose cash assistance before moving to their place of origin (returnees usually stayed for several days in the transit centres before returning to their home countries, before travelling to their home regions on buses rented by UNHCR or travelling home on their own using the funds provided to them; the program also provides a 30-day food ration, plastic sheeting for shelter, water canisters, soap and other non-food items).

The conditions for reintegration and reconstruction in Rwanda remain ambiguous. Although peace prevailed in most of the country, ethnic and political tensions persisted. Returnees face difficulties in their reintegration given the length of time they have been in exile. Key basic needs include housing, education for children, healthcare services and income-generating opportunities.

An important feature is that Rwanda has been hosting migrants from other countries for almost three decades. As of October 2023, more than 135,000 migrants and asylum seekers were registered with UNHCR. They mostly come from Congo and Burundi. Of

²⁹ Hilhorst, Dorethea; Leeuwen, Mathijs (2000), "Emergency and Development: the Case of Imidugudu, Villagization in Rwanda"

³⁰ <https://www.theeastafrican.co.ke/tea/oped/comment/controversy-on-return-of-rwanda-refugees-is-unnecessary--1382020>

³¹ <https://migrants-refugees.va/country-profile/rwanda/>

the total number of migrants, 91 per cent live in five migrant camps³². But the situation is not simple, given that last year the British Supreme Court ruled that Rwanda is not a safe country to send migrants to: “removing the claimants to Rwanda would expose them to a real risk of ill-treatment” as they could be sent back to the home countries from which they fled³³.

Angola

The country gained independence from Portugal in 1975 amidst a long and brutal conflict. After gaining independence, the country plunged into a civil war that lasted almost 30 years (from 1975 to 2002) and had several phases of intense fighting and relative peace. The war was fought by three liberation movements (mainly the MPLA and UNITA, but also the FLNA), each with different political and ethnic affiliations. The MPLA won in 2002. However, by the end of the 27-year civil war, more than 500,000 people had been killed and the number of displaced and migrant people was 4 million – a third of the country's population. The war completely destroyed Angola's economy and infrastructure, and its governance system and economy were almost completely destroyed.

Following the peace agreement in April 2002, the Angolan government, UNHCR and the two countries that hosted the majority of Angolan migrants (Zambia and DR Congo) signed one-year tripartite agreements on migrant repatriation. With regard to IDPs, Angola was probably the only country in the world at the time to incorporate the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement of 1998 into national law³⁴ (since April 2001). Nevertheless, according to available data, about 50% of all IDPs and about 25% of migrants did not wait for the official repatriation process and returned to their places of origin without any support or assistance (this rate and scale of return is considered to be quite unique)³⁵. By the end of 2007, some 465,000 Angolan migrants had returned.

Seven years after the peace agreements were signed (in October 2009), although the vast majority of migrants had already returned, the Government, under the auspices of UNHCR, developed and adopted the Comprehensive Solutions Strategy for Migrants (CSS). It came into force in 2010. The program for the voluntary repatriation of Angolan migrants continued under the auspices of the UN International Organization for Migration (hereinafter – IOM), which was suspended several times due to lack of funds, tensions and other logistical problems. Thus, by the end of 2004, 94,000 migrants had been repatriated to Angola under the program. In 2005, the UN repatriated approximately 53,000 migrants to camps and settlements in DR Congo, Zambia and Namibia.

IOM has assisted the Government of Angola and continues to do so in combating trafficking in persons and providing necessary support to victims; supporting it in addressing mixed migration flows by enhancing its capacity to identify and assist vulnerable migrants; and promoting the active engagement of the diaspora in support of return policies. For its part, UNHCR assists with registration and documentation for

³² <https://data.unhcr.org/en/country/rwa>

³³ <https://apnews.com/article/uk-rwanda-plan-migrants-court-ruling-explainer-785e4f9973d378b0d1548170cdbc4e98>

³⁴ <https://www.refworld.org/legal/decreees/natlegbod/2001/en/120950>

³⁵ <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/542611468188337350/pdf/99618-WP-PUBLIC-Box393206B-Sustainable-Refugee-Return-15Sept-WEB-PUBLIC.pdf>

asylum seekers, provides humanitarian assistance to refugees, advocates for the integration of migrants, and supports the government in developing policies and legislation that meet global commitments to migrants.

Upon arrival in Angola, returnees were accommodated in 9 reception and transit centres built in the main return areas by the Angolan Ministry of Social Welfare and Reintegration (MINARS)³⁶. The Government of Angola provided returnees with social reintegration kits, food rations, construction tools, plastic sheeting, blankets, as well as temporary shelter tents and accommodation. In total, according to UNHCR, more than 523,000 Angolan migrants returned to the country between 2003 and 2015³⁷.

Also, in 2015, the Angolan government adopted a new law on migrants and asylum (Law 10/15), which obliged the state to finance and provide reception centres for migrants. However, this provision has hardly been implemented so far and many migrants do not have access to documents (or have difficulty obtaining them)³⁸. In 2018, the National Council for Migrants (CNR) was established, with UNHCR and IOM as active participants.

Overall, it should be noted that the Angolan case is very atypical in that migrants repatriated quickly and spontaneously, largely ignoring the repatriation program and having little support from their government and international organisations for reintegration. The reasons for this phenomenon should be sought in the local history, socio-economic and cultural circumstances that lead to exile and return.

Countries of the former Yugoslavia (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo)

The situation in the former Yugoslavia resembles that of Ukraine in that even in peacetime, a significant number of its population migrated to neighbouring EU countries as labour migrants, mostly temporarily. The wars that erupted during the break-up of Yugoslavia triggered flows of migrants fleeing the fighting and ethnic cleansing that accompanied some of these wars. This is most notably the case in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), where an inter-ethnic war with intervention by neighbouring countries (Serbia and Croatia) lasted from 1992 to 1995, and Kosovo, which became a field of ethnic cleansing in the late 1990s but gained independence from Serbia following its surrender in 1999. In Croatia, most of the migrants were formed as a result of Operation Storm, when the Croatian army destroyed the so-called Serbska Krajina, and several hundred thousand ethnic Serbs living there decided to emigrate. The main obstacle to the return of these migrants is the [unwillingness of the Croatian authorities and population to accept them](#), so this example is not relevant to Ukraine.

The examples of BiH and Kosovo are relatively more relevant, although in both cases the ethnic factor also played a major role. This slowed down the process of migrant return. For example, [in BiH, in 1999 \(four years after the end of the conflict\), more than 400,000 migrants remained abroad and were in no hurry to return, and there were more than 800,000 IDPs, while about 575,000 returned](#). The policy of international organisations, which actually managed the processes in both cases due to the weakness or absence of state structures, was that migrants should return to their

³⁶ <https://www.iom.int/news/iom-resumes-voluntary-repatriation-angolan-refugees>

³⁷ <https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/101122> (May 2023)

³⁸ <https://migrants-refugees.va/country-profile/angola/>

former homes, which were being restored for this purpose. However, in many cases, the local ethnic majorities did not want to see the return of ethnic minorities, and this posed the biggest problem, which, however, is not relevant to Ukraine.

Assistance to returning refugees was provided by international organisations, partly directly and partly through local NGOs. It included one-off material payments, housing rehabilitation, and grants for microbusinesses. However, it is unfortunately not possible to assess the effectiveness of these measures in achieving sustainable return because the security factor (in turn, related to the ethnic reasons described above) proved to be more important and overshadowed all others.

Challenges for migrant return policy in Ukraine depending on the outcome of the war

There are three main types of scenarios for the outcome of the current war between Russia and Ukraine. The worst-case scenario – Ukraine's defeat – does not involve the return of migrants, but only a multiple increase in their number, and is therefore not considered in this paper. The best-case scenario envisages the liberation of all occupied territories, Russia's (in the form in which it will remain) loss of potential and/or desire to pursue its imperial ambitions, and Ukraine's accession to NATO, i.e. the return of external security threats to the lowest level since the “perestroika” of the late 1980s. It should be noted that a return to a situation of peaceful coexistence with imperial Russia, similar to the period of 1991-2013, would not be perceived as similar to those times, if at all, due to the traumatic experience of further Russian aggression.

These two scenarios can be considered stable in the foreseeable future. Between them, there is a continuum of intermediate options that are a priori unstable and will mean that the threat of a renewed war remains. This does not exclude that if one of these intermediate scenarios is implemented, it will ultimately prove relatively stable and allow for peaceful development for decades, but in any case, the threat will remain and will require constant military tension.

Let us consider these scenarios in terms of pull factors for return migration. Since migrants care not only about their own fate, but also about the fate of their children, this factor is taken into account by default.

According to the World Bank's [research](#), the following factors are key to the return of migrants after the end of the conflict:

- **Security:** people will not feel confident if they have to live and work in an unsafe environment.
- **Housing:** War migrants need a place to return to after the conflict. This can be their own home, or new housing provided by the government or other organisations, or which they can purchase with compensation.
- **Possibility to earn a living:** People should be able to find work to support themselves and their families. This may involve reopening pre-war businesses, finding new jobs, or receiving assistance from the government or charitable organisations.
- **Comparison of living conditions:** Migrants will compare living conditions at home with those in the country of staying. Living conditions include access to

food, water, shelter, medical care, education, security and other important factors.

In the case of Ukraine, the absolute minimum of needs (except for security) are met by default, so the comparison of the quality of their satisfaction becomes crucial. [IOM experts also note](#) the importance of psychological comfort: embeddedness in local communities, restoration of personal social networks, inclusion in culture, etc. All this is included in the concept of “feeling at home”.

1. **Security and political stability.** Since it was the lack of security that caused the main wave of migration in our case, restoring security is essential for return, and the stronger the guarantees, the more migrants may return. However, it is not only about external security, but also about internal security: law and order, the rule of law, absence of repression, pogroms, etc.
 - a. In the best-case scenario, Ukraine finds itself in a situation not much worse than the countries of current residence of migrants in terms of external threats. Political stability is also maintained, which means relative law and order and the absence of repression. However, the state of law and order can vary greatly from place to place, and can be either better or worse than the current conditions in the host country. But in terms of the rule of law, Ukraine will almost certainly lose out to the host country, and migrants who have become accustomed to certain standards in this area may feel an unpleasant contrast when they return home – and this, if not quickly improved, may lead to repeated migration, this time permanently. Thus, the rule of law becomes the main security concern in this scenario.
 - b. In less favourable and sustainable scenarios, Ukraine will remain a generally less safe place (in terms of external security) than the host countries, so the security factor will work against return. The exception may be cases where migrants in the host country are forced to live in areas with a bad crime situation, and the state in the home country is able to compensate for lower external security with higher internal security. However, there are usually safer areas in the host country, and the question of moving to them (without the risk of external danger, as in Ukraine) comes down to economic opportunities.
2. **Economic opportunities.** Full-scale invasion is not the only reason for migration. A large proportion of migrants, comparable in number to the migrants left before there was a real danger to their lives. Moreover, of the migrants who left Ukraine after February 24, 2022, [11.2%](#) are residents of the western regions, where this danger is minimal. It is likely that a significant proportion of these people have temporarily or permanently emigrated mainly in search of economic opportunities, and thus such opportunities in their home country play a significant role in their plans for possible return. Ukraine has both disadvantages and advantages in this regard.

On the one hand, Ukraine will have economic advantages, at least for a number of popular professions:

- a. poorer countries, on average, grow faster, which creates better prospects for self-realisation, including through entrepreneurship, and career advancement;
- b. the post-war recovery is likely to further accelerate this process and create increased demand for workers in construction and other professions;

- c. in the case of a more or less favourable scenario, an inflow of investments can be expected due to rapid growth and the prospect of EU membership, which will also contribute to the creation of new jobs, career growth, higher wages, etc;
- d. the relatively low level of average income results in a lower cost of living than in richer countries, so with the same income in absolute terms (for example, when working remotely for a foreign client or firm), the standard of living in Ukraine may be higher.

At the same time, it is unlikely that the problems that led to labour migration before the full-scale invasion will disappear quickly:

- a. Ukraine will for a long time remain a country in the process of transition from “limited access [to attractive economic and political opportunities] order” (in the terms of North, Wallis, Weinhahnst) to “open access order”³⁹, and a largely “relational” economy⁴⁰, where success depends crucially on personal relationships with certain influential individuals and property rights are protected conventionally. This is manifested, in particular, in the suppression of entrepreneurship, subdued market competition, distortion of competitive selection, suboptimal levels of investment and savings, and ultimately slows or eliminates economic growth. This social order also directly and negatively affects entrepreneurial and career prospects. In this respect, Ukraine is losing out to its host countries, and this situation will persist in all scenarios, although the gap will narrow in the case of successful post-war transformation
- b. In all but the best-case scenario, the risk of renewed war will deter investment and savings. Also, in these scenarios, Ukraine will have difficulty maintaining a competitive tax burden due to the high defence expenditures that will be imposed on the demographic burden. In addition, forced militarisation may involve periodic diversion of citizens from economic activity to participate in military training, not to mention draft.
- c. The relatively low quality of higher and, more recently, secondary education (with some exceptions) will create unfavourable prospects for children.
- d. Wages and entrepreneurial income in Ukraine will remain generally lower than in the countries of staying for many years, and the level of public goods provision will be generally worse.
- e. Tax policy can develop in different ways. However, the National Revenue Strategy adopted by the CMU at the request of the IMF envisages a significant deterioration of conditions for both entrepreneurs and employees, and approximation to the worst examples of EU countries without any guarantee of transferring to Ukraine the best practices that partially compensate for the burdensome taxation and higher tax burden in those countries.

³⁹ Douglass C. North, John Joseph Wallis, Steven B. Webb, and Barry R. Weingast, “Limited Access Orders: Rethinking the Problems of Development and Violence,” 1 January 25, 2011. https://web.stanford.edu/group/mcnollgast/cgi-bin/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/Limited_Access_Orders_in_DW_-II_-2011.0125.submission-version.pdf

⁴⁰ Bálint Magyar and Bálint Madlovics, *The Anatomy of Post-Communist Regimes: A Conceptual Framework* (Budapest–New York: Central European University Press, 2020) <https://postcommunistregimes.com/>

Thus, even in the best-case scenario, Ukraine will not be able to offer migrants unequivocally better economic conditions than in the host countries. With wise government policy (see Recommendations), combined with the implementation of the best-case scenarios for the end of the war, economic prospects may become an attraction for a certain part of migrants, tentatively for those forced to live in unfavourable conditions ([18% in August 2023](#)) and those whose incomes as a result of migration are still lower than before the war ([18% in February 2024](#)).

3. **Measures for socio-cultural reintegration.** In the case of Ukraine, they may be less relevant than in other similar situations that have occurred in the world, because, at least for now, migrants do not live in other countries for so long that they forget their native language or lose social ties in their homeland. Moreover, modern means of communication make it possible to support them even at a distance. Nevertheless, there is a vulnerable group of migrants whose communities have been destroyed and whose social networks have been scattered by the war.
4. **Rebuilding housing and infrastructure.** [About 56%](#) of migrants come from the south and east, regions that remain largely occupied or where active hostilities continue. 30% of migrants say their homes have been destroyed or they do not know their fate. As of May 2023, the KSE estimates that [8.6% of the housing stock](#) was destroyed, which corresponds to approximately 1.3 million family dwellings. In addition, even if a particular family's home has survived, it is surrounded by destroyed houses, damaged infrastructure, etc., and is therefore unusable. It cannot be ruled out that after the active phase of hostilities is over, a certain part of the territory may remain under Russian occupation, so migrants from these territories will have to consider resettlement. At the same time, living conditions in host countries are not always comfortable: [18%](#) of migrants live in collective housing, and there are numerous cases of settlement in tents, gyms, and other non-residential premises. Those who have found more comfortable accommodation have to pay rent at local prices, which is not always compensated for at least partially by aid. In Ukraine, the majority of people had their own housing.

Regardless of the end of the war scenario, assistance with the restoration or construction of housing is and will be necessary to ensure the return of migrants. However, as the experience of the former Yugoslavia shows, the restoration of former housing is not very effective (although the circumstances there were somewhat different, see above). Such projects are also accompanied by high corruption risks. Finally, simply for reasons of fairness, affected people have the right to dispose of their property or compensation for its loss at their own discretion. Therefore, the best way to solve the housing problem is to provide targeted compensation to the victims, preferably in cash. Less fair, but probably more cost-effective, would be the provision of victims with special housing vouchers for the amount of compensation, with subsequent redemption in favour of the bearers – developers or repairers.

Temporarily occupied territories and the area of active hostilities

There are also specific challenges that are specific to Ukraine.

There is a separate issue of returning migrants from the active hostilities zone, the liberated temporarily occupied territories, and, in case of incomplete liberation, from

those territories that will remain under occupation. This problem has no precedent in recent history, as the wars of recent decades have not led to de facto border changes.

In the event of the liberation of the territories where intense hostilities took place, a political decision on their further development would be necessary. In particular, the territories in eastern Ukraine (the Donbas region) were a problematic old industrial region before the Russian invasion in 2014, from which active people increasingly migrated to other parts of Ukraine or abroad. Post-industrial development there has been stifled by uncomfortable living conditions, primarily high crime rates, polluted air and an industrial landscape. In addition, the unfavourable environment and high crime rate caused an outflow of intellectuals, especially from the territories of separate districts of Donetsk and Lugansk regions, which declared “independence” in 2014-15 and were de facto occupied by Russia.

Coal mining there is mostly unprofitable, as it cannot compete with open-pit coal. In any case, the use of hard coal will be reduced due to climate policies, in particular those of the EU, as this type of fossil fuel produces the highest greenhouse gas emissions of all. Instead, Ukraine's energy independence will increasingly be ensured by other methods of electricity generation, such as green and nuclear ones.

The industrial enterprises located there were built during the Russian Empire and, for the most part, the USSR. They were geographically and economically tied to counterparties in other parts of the empire, mostly in Russia. Accordingly, severing ties with the former empire and reorientation towards the EU and the rest of the world implies better conditions for industry in western Ukraine and near major seaports. Of all the regions to be de-occupied, only the Azov Sea region meets these criteria, given the free navigation through the Kerch Strait. For objective reasons, the owners of most other industrial enterprises destroyed during the hostilities are unlikely to be interested in restoring them, even if they receive compensation.

Prior to the full-scale invasion, the region was to some extent attractive to investors due to the availability of cheap labour, accustomed to industrial production conditions. However, the depopulation that has already occurred due to the war, and is likely to be complemented by mass migration of pro-Russian residents in the event of a successful de-occupation, reduces this factor to nothing. In turn, migrants returning to Ukraine will go to areas where it is easier to find well-paid work. Thus, a trap will be created that requires a political decision – whether to try to revive this region as an industrial and urban region or to facilitate the resettlement of its former residents in other, more promising, areas.

The first of these options will require significant intervention in market processes by the state and/or international donors, including the construction of housing and industrial parks with significant benefits for investors and the local population. At the same time, there is a great risk of inefficient investments, such as the construction of “ghost towns”, as well as ample opportunities for corruption (especially given regional traditions). Therefore, it is hardly worthwhile to implement the relevant state program at the expense of taxpayers. It's another matter that at least some local businessmen, led by Rinat Akhmetov, declare themselves patriots of Donbas, and are likely to be ready to bear the relevant investment risks and finance other programs on a charitable basis. If such a private initiative takes place, it would be worthy of support from the state and donors.

Otherwise, the region will be left with agriculture and the extraction of local minerals other than coal. It is also possible that shale gas extraction will begin. However, this will obviously not create jobs in the amount comparable to the pre-war population of the region. Thus, most returning migrants will have to settle elsewhere in Ukraine. To this

end, it is imperative that compensation for lost housing and other property be paid to them on an individual basis (through eVidnovlennia), with the possibility of choosing how to use it.

Equity issues/social tensions

Ukraine does not have such acute inter-ethnic conflicts as the countries analysed above. According to the Bogardus scale surveys⁴¹, Ukrainians are generally tolerant of all nationalities living in Ukraine, including Russian speakers. It is worth noting that after the occupation of Crimea, the first wave of hostilities in Donbas and the temporary occupation of the isolated districts of Donetsk and Lugansk regions, about one and a half million residents of that region became IDPs, but without any assistance from the state or international organisations, Ukrainian society has successfully absorbed this number of migrants. Some tensions may arise only between some representatives of mostly western Ukraine, who profess aggressive ethno-linguistic nationalism, and mostly Russian-speaking migrants from the east; or between pro-Russian migrants who fled from hostilities through Ukraine and the rest of Ukrainians. However, in the latter case, such migrants are unlikely be willing to return to Ukraine.

Also, according to [surveys](#), Ukrainians are generally tolerant of those compatriots who emigrated from Ukraine to escape the war, although they fear possible conflicts between those who stayed and those who left the country. However, the latter should not be seen as a single community: there may be different situations, as such migrants consist of at least three different groups.

The first is the residents of the temporarily occupied or frontline regions who had virtually no choice and were forced to leave their homes and have nowhere to return to (probably around [30-35%](#)). They urgently and definitely need help in returning.

The second group includes residents of Kyiv (including Kyiv City) and parts of Chernihiv, Kharkiv, Mykolaiv, Kherson and Sumy regions who also left en masse due to active hostilities and the threat of occupation, but were later able to return after de-occupation and the frontline moved away from their places of residence; as well as those who left due to the threat of air attacks. They differ from the first group in that they have housing in Ukraine, and in some cases, they have jobs (remote). Some of them have already returned, while others are still hesitant or unwilling to do so due to security threats or financial reasons. The number of such migrants is currently around [40-55%](#).

Finally, the third group (about [10-20%](#)) is made up of residents of the western regions of Ukraine who were hardly affected by the war, who were never really threatened by the occupation, and for whom air attacks were not the main reason for leaving. They mostly took advantage of the opportunity to receive assistance in host countries, possibly with a view to further emigration.

The challenge for the policy of returning migrants is to separate the first group from the rest. Due to the existence of the second and especially the third groups described above, society (particularly those who consciously stayed to defend the country) has an ambiguous attitude towards migrants. This attitude has gone so far as to cause the president to ask the question in his New Year's address to the nation: "Who are you – a citizen or a refugee?". In such circumstances, providing special assistance or privileges to those from the second and third groups returning to Ukraine would be perceived as

⁴¹ [Press releases and reports – INTER-ETHNIC PREJUDICES IN UKRAINE, OCTOBER 2023 \(kiis.com.ua\)](#)

unfair and, accordingly, would create unfavourable attitudes towards them. Thus, from the perspective of sustainable reintegration, such a policy would be counterproductive. Furthermore, assistance to returning migrants should be the same as assistance to IDPs belonging to the same category.

The first solution here is, as in the previous case, compensation for destroyed housing and lost property: only representatives of the first group, regardless of their region of origin, will be eligible for it. However, in the case of residents of the active hostilities area and the temporarily occupied territories (if they remain), this is not enough, as they have lost not only their property, but also their jobs and, to some extent, their social environment. Therefore, such migrants and IDPs will need comprehensive assistance, especially as there will be a large number of disabled and socially passive people who are not used to making their own way and therefore have not been able to establish themselves in host countries.

It is crucial to establish effective procedures in advance to identify and respond to the real needs of returnees, avoiding, if possible, providing assistance to those who may be considered “traitors” by certain groups (and who do not actually need such assistance), but ensuring that it is provided to those who are unlikely to be able to adjust without it.

Given the successful implementation of such policies, an optimal scenario for the end of the war, a rapid economic recovery after it, and at least the preservation of Ukraine's attractive economic factors in terms of simplified taxation for microbusinesses and the self-employed, especially in creative industries, we can expect a quick and successful adaptation of returnees. This will be facilitated, first of all, by the tolerance of Ukrainian society (if it can be preserved), its high capacity for adaptation (for example, the surprisingly painless adjustment of more than one and a half million IDPs after the first stage of the war in 2014-15, compared to, for example, the problems of Syrian migrants in Europe), as well as the availability of a large number of vacancies and other economic opportunities when the economy recovers along with structural changes. These factors were largely absent in the examples of other countries discussed above.

Existing programs to assist IDPs and war migrants

Currently, there are a number of programs in place in Ukraine to assist IDPs and war migrants.

- **Program “Living Allowance”:** IDPs receive a monthly living allowance: UAH 2000 for adults and UAH 3000 for children and persons with disabilities.
- **Program “Child Allowance”:** IDPs with several children under the age of 18 receive an additional monthly allowance: UAH 3000 for the second child, UAH 4500 for the third and subsequent children.
- **Program “One-Time Assistance”:** IDPs who have lost their homes as a result of the hostilities can receive a one-off payment: UAH 30,000 per person.
- **Program “Compensation for Destroyed Housing”:** IDPs who have lost their housing as a result of hostilities can receive compensation for its value.
- **Program “Employment”:** IDPs can receive assistance in finding employment in Ukraine. The state provides employers with compensation for labour costs for employing internally displaced persons as a result of hostilities during martial law in Ukraine – UAH 6,700 is paid for each person employed.
- **Compensation of expenses for temporary accommodation of internally displaced persons.** Housing owners who sheltered internally displaced persons free of charge were guaranteed state support in the amount of UAH 14.77 per one man-day of accommodation.

Program have also been introduced to encourage IDPs and migrants to start their own businesses. In particular,

- **Microgrant program of up to UAH 250 thousand:** This program is designed for those who want to start or develop their own small or micro business. The grant can be spent on rent, employee salaries, consulting services, equipment, repairs, marketing, etc.
- **Grant program for IT start-ups:** The aim of the program is to create new companies and jobs in the high-tech sector, as well as to increase IT exports. The grant recipient is obliged to create at least 3 jobs depending on the stage of the startup's life cycle.
- **Program “Start in IT”:** This program provides an opportunity for Ukrainians to receive funds to study at certified schools in IT specialities.

There is a gradual discussion about the future of the Temporary Protection Program in Europe. European countries are adopting programs to motivate Ukrainians to return home. In particular, at the end of 2023, several countries announced financial support for Ukrainian forced migrants who are ready to return home voluntarily. For example, [Norway](#) is ready to pay €1,500 per person. [Switzerland](#) offers between from €1,000 to €4,200 per person for repatriation and an additional €260 to €520 for transport costs. [Ireland](#) and the [Czech Republic](#) are considering similar programs. Such programs are primarily designed for people who have lived in Ukraine in areas that are relatively safe today, have surviving housing and could generally return, but are hesitant to do so because of financial problems.

Conclusions: problems specific to Ukraine and ways to solve them

If the war ends without Ukraine's complete defeat, the return operation will be one of the largest in history. In the most favourable scenario of a complete victory with the restoration of security, we can cautiously expect up to [54%](#) of temporary migrants to return voluntarily. A certain number more (depending on the policies of the host countries) may be subject to involuntary return, but this is difficult to estimate in advance. It can be assumed that, given the prospect of Ukraine's membership in the EU, in the event of such a scenario, social assistance to Ukrainian migrants will be terminated (this process has already begun), but measures for forced return will not be applied. In this case, about [8%](#) more of migrants may return. At the same time, a certain, currently undetermined, proportion of men of military age who had to leave their families may reunite with them through emigration if their wives manage to establish themselves in a new place.

In other end-of-conflict scenarios, the percentage of returnees is likely to be much lower, up to [40%](#), as the likelihood of the threats that forced them to migrate will remain high. Some of these migrants will return only temporarily to settle their affairs in Ukraine, but will continue to seek a better life for themselves and their children abroad.

All of these migrants will need job, some will also need housing (at least for a while) and, in some cases, assistance in adapting to a new place. The first and second are the responsibility of the Ukrainian government. The local position of local authorities at the community level will have an important impact.

Much also depends on the policy of the host countries towards Ukrainian migrants. The so-called “two-track race” policy, based on the Norwegian experience with migrants/refugees during the Yugoslav war in the 1990s, could also be an element of

comprehensive efforts of the Government of Ukraine to return migrants. Norway was able to simultaneously promote both integration and repatriation of migrants. They were granted full access to the labour market, education, social support and standard integration programs, while the Norwegian government continued to plan for their organised return.

A policy of rapid socio-economic integration of migrants in countries of temporary residence has proven to be beneficial to a country wishing to return its citizens. The new skills and work experience that migrants acquire abroad can be used to help rebuild the country, especially given the high labour and skills needs during this special period. Evidence also shows that successful integration in the host country facilitates reintegration when migrants decide to return. The ability to work, access to independent housing and the freedom to develop social contacts while abroad have been identified as important factors in supporting the social and economic reintegration of returnees.

The OECD identifies a number of necessary steps that can help countries successfully implement the two-track race policy.

According to the OECD recommendations, Ukraine should implement the following changes:

- host countries should **invest in the development of human capital of migrants during their temporary stay**, with a special emphasis on skills and experience in sectors that are important for both Ukraine and the host country;
- **support Ukrainian language training in host countries** for children and youth to ensure that they have the necessary language skills and cultural ties after a long period of displacement to return and successfully reintegrate;
- **recognition of skills and qualifications on both sides** (the so-called diploma recognition issue). This facilitates migrants' entry into the labour market in host countries, and will also facilitate the future transfer/implementation of acquired skills by Ukrainians upon their return to Ukraine. Ukraine, for its part, also needs to recognise the education systems in all countries of residence of Ukrainian migrants and not create administrative barriers to continuing education upon return;
- **maintain digital communication with citizens abroad and the diaspora;**
- **create a legal framework for regular migration** to ensure mobility for Ukrainians. In most European countries, migrants' current trips to Ukraine affect their status and access to assistance in their host countries, which consequently significantly limits any repeat visits.

Based on the analysis of international experience and taking into account the specifics of Ukraine, the Government and the VRU should implement the following measures:

- **Ensure internal and external security, in particular through the reform of law enforcement agencies** with a significant increase in their effectiveness (a surge in crime can be expected after the war), and, at the same time, protect law-abiding citizens and businesses from arbitrariness of law enforcement and regulatory authorities. In general, we are talking about a set of reforms aimed at establishing an effective rule of law. This will also have significant economic implications, as the rule of law is currently the weakest link among Ukraine's state institutions.

- **Continue and expand the E-vidnovlennia program**, providing compensation for lost property not only to citizens, but also to small and microbusiness entrepreneurs, and subsequently to other businesses.
- Launch state **programs for free retraining of citizens** to obtain professions that are currently in demand in Ukraine.
- **Preserve and promote financial ties between migrants and their home country.** Possible measures could include negotiations on the elimination of double taxation (an acute problem in the case of Poland⁴²), facilitating investment flows, and reducing the cost of remittances.
- **Provide for state support for temporary migrants** who plan to return to Ukraine and need assistance; in particular, assistance in finding a job, free housing for a certain period of time, if necessary. Make the IDPs eligible for such assistance too.
- Encourage citizens returning to Ukraine to start their own business – **expand the E-robota program**, simplify the conditions for obtaining grants for starting a business, expand the possibilities of targeted grants
- **Maintain and improve the simplified taxation system (STS) for microbusinesses in Ukraine**, making it much more attractive than the one in the EU. In particular, limit mandatory fiscalisation to only those taxpayers whose business characteristics pose real risks of exceeding the statutory upper thresholds for the respective STS groups; introduce a compromise de-shadowing regime for the self-employed, impose a moratorium on complicating activities, narrowing the application, and/or raising STS rates.
- Promote wage growth, conduct economic calculations and draft amendments to regulations to **reduce the burden on the pay-roll fund.**
- **Improve school education, with a special focus on online learning for migrant children**, to keep them in the Ukrainian educational and cultural field
- Reform higher education to improve its quality as an element of attractiveness for returning to Ukraine. **Simplify the conditions of admission to universities for Ukrainians who have studied abroad in recent years.**
- To start communication with European partners on the **gradual withdrawal of financial support for migrants in the EU countries, transforming such monthly support into a one-time significant financial assistance** to those returning to Ukraine. The optimal [concept](#) developed by the Swiss State Secretariat for Migration (SEM) should be used as an example.

⁴² <https://brdo.com.ua/top/ukrayinski-bizhentsi-mayut-platyty-podatky-z-ukrayinskyh-dohodiv-zminena-pozytsiya-minfinu-polshhi/#>

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World Migration Report 2022

<https://worldmigrationreport.iom.int/wmr-2022-interactive/>

<https://crisisresponse.iom.int/response/iraq-crisis-response-plan-2024>

RETURN INDEX

FINDINGS ROUND NINETEEN – IRAQ

https://iraqdtm.iom.int/images/ReturnIndex/202310104226390_Return_index_round19_October2023.pdf

The **Return Index** is a tool designed to measure the severity of conditions in places of return. It provides data on 16 different indicators related to 1) livelihoods and basic services and 2) perceptions of security and social cohesion. A severity score is calculated for each place of return assessed. Scores range from 0 (all essential conditions for return are met) to 100 (no essential conditions for return are met). Higher scores indicate more difficult living conditions for returnees. The scores are grouped into three severity categories: low, medium and high (which also includes very high).

<https://iraqdtm.iom.int/ReturnIndex#Dashboard>

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