



INTERNATIONAL
RESCUE
COMMITTEE



Ukraine, 10 Years On: Normal Life Remains Out of Reach for Millions

Authors

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Acknowledgements

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Table of Contents

Foreward	2
Executive Summary	4
1. Material Conditions: Housing, Infrastructure, and Food	7
2. Social Interactions: Family Separation	10
3. Labor Market Access and Economic Stability	12
4. Physical Safety and Mental Wellbeing	15
5. Education	18
Recommendations	20
Methodology	22
Endnotes	23



Foreward

“We lived very close to Azovstal, so we were in the middle of the fighting. There were a lot of bombs and rockets around. The bridges were destroyed, making it challenging to leave the city,” says Henadii, one of the people assisted by the International Rescue Committee (IRC) in Poland, who was forced to flee devastated Mariupol amidst the heaviest fighting in 2022. The journey to Poland, where he evacuated his wife, mother and son with disabilities, was not the first time the family had faced the hardships of displacement; Henadii had already undertaken this difficult route back in 2014, when the conflict in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions of Ukraine erupted. Upon returning to Ukraine a few years later, he found himself compelled to flee once again, uncertain whether he would ever be able to return home.

In the public consciousness, 24 February 2024 marks two years of full-scale invasion of Ukraine. However, countless people, just like Henadii and his family, have been bearing the brunt of this conflict for a decade. The Donetsk and Luhansk regions first witnessed violence and destruction in 2014, but as swiftly as the war erupted in April 2014, it abruptly disappeared from the headlines.

The two-year mark of the full-scale invasion is a powerful reminder that the impact of this war extends far beyond the immediacy of 2022 events, encompassing a prolonged period of hardship for those affected. Even as Ukraine approaches this solemn anniversary, with a constant flow of news alerts marking daily bombings across the country, the reports of unfolding human tragedy cease to move the public, nor do they inspire the same unconditional international solidarity we witnessed two years ago. The plight of millions gradually fades into the backdrop of our desensitized awareness, as we stop following the news with due attention and empathy. Donors shift their funding priorities, and communities hosting refugees begin to display signs of fatigue. It is a stark reality, emphasizing the challenges of maintaining sustained support in the face of ongoing crises.

But the war is here with no end in sight, and the humanitarian needs remain dire. Inside Ukraine alone, more than 14.6 million people – roughly 40 percent of the population – will need humanitarian assistance in 2024. In Poland, the demographic composition underscores the heightened vulnerabilities faced by refugees from Ukraine, as 90 percent of refugees are women, children, and older persons. The situation of conflict-affected populations remains precarious as the decade of conflict spares no one – women, men and children, the internally displaced and refugees, but also local communities hosting those seeking safety.

Notably, the long war has taken an alarming toll on the mental health of Ukrainians; approximately one third of the population is now grappling with mental health issues, suffering from conditions such as depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder. Over 82 percent of people from Ukraine recently surveyed by the IRC across Europe admit that they have felt anxious, stressed or sad over the past few months.

The IRC and our partners, in Ukraine and refugee hosting countries across the world, tirelessly support those affected. I see firsthand the colossal efforts of our teams in Ukraine and beyond; I also bear witness to the enormous resilience of conflict-affected people, who tirelessly try to rebuild their lives and seek normalcy amidst the tragedy. Families caring for one another, children attending school, hopes and dreams that persist despite the challenges.

To create this report, we asked Ukrainians themselves to tell us what they want the world to know about the war, ten years on. One of the answers reads, "I hope the world has not become indifferent... and not used to the fact that there is a war in Ukraine. And the most important thing is for the world to know that the war began in 2014."

Our report findings convey a powerful message: normal life remains out of reach for millions of Ukrainians. As we commemorate a decade of conflict, it is imperative for the world to recognize that solidarity has no expiration date, and the humanitarian response to this war requires sustained support. With another protracted conflict in Europe, we call on the international community to help ensure this is not a forgotten crisis – and continue to stand with the people of Ukraine.

Zoe Daniels

Senior Director, Ukraine Crisis

February 2024



Executive Summary

Ukraine became an independent country in 1991 after the collapse of the Soviet Union. In recent years, it has been working to forge closer ties with the European Union and NATO, which escalated tensions with Russia. In 2014, Russia illegally annexed the Crimean Peninsula and began backing pro-Russian separatists in parts of eastern Ukraine. Eight years of fighting between 2014-2022 resulted in the deaths of over 3,000 people, forced more than 850,000 people from their homes, and left almost 3 million in need of aid.¹ In 2022, the conflict escalated into a war.

On February 24, 2022, Russia launched a full-scale invasion of Ukraine, including air strikes, heavy shelling, and armed combat across the entire country. The exact death toll from two years of full-scale war is unknown, but estimates suggest that at least 10,000 civilians have been killed.² Including military casualties, the death toll from ten years of conflict is nearly a quarter of a million people.³ The war has caused the largest displacement crisis in Europe since World War II. According to UNHCR, there are now 3.7 million internally displaced people (IDPs) living within Ukraine, another 6 million refugees and asylum-seekers across the region, and over 14 million people in need of humanitarian assistance.⁴

While the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 drew the world's attention, Ukrainian civilians have been living with the repercussions of the conflict for a decade. This report aims to shed light on the effects of the 10-year war on affected populations, specifically refugees in Europe, IDPs, and individuals within Ukraine impacted by the conflict. To document these impacts, the IRC launched a pan-European survey through its Signpost system – the IRC's community-led information service that empowers people on the move in times of crisis. We asked 640 Ukrainian clients inside the country and across Europe what they would want the world to know about the war. We also examined how the conflict has impacted aspects of their lives commonly considered as indicators of normalcy.

Eurostat identifies seven quality-of-life indicators, including material living conditions, leisure, social interactions, economic security, physical safety, governance and basic rights, and the overall experience of life. Drawing inspiration from these indicators, we have chosen to focus on key aspects of an individual's life that should be guaranteed as "normal," namely: material conditions (housing, infrastructure, food security), social interactions (family cohesion), economic stability (employment, ability to afford basic needs), physical safety and mental well-being, and access to quality education.

The survey, backed by past research from IRC and other organizations, illuminates the reality that normal life remains elusive for millions of Ukrainians, and that the decade-long conflict has had a devastating impact on almost every aspect of day-to-day life, including:

MATERIAL CONDITIONS: HOUSING, INFRASTRUCTURE, AND FOOD

Warfare has disrupted every aspect of normal life, including housing, basic infrastructure, access to food and water, and other essential needs.

- 1.5 million homes have been destroyed in Ukraine, with direct damages to buildings and infrastructure reaching an estimated \$135 billion USD.⁵
- 87 percent of IRC survey respondents reported having to leave their home at least once since 2014.
- Russian attacks on infrastructure have left millions without access to heat, electricity, water, or sanitation for extended periods of time.⁶
- Approximately one in three Ukrainian families faced food insecurity in 2023, and one in five faced severe insecurity in 2023; Ukraine now has the lowest level of food security of any European country.⁷

SOCIAL INTERACTIONS: FAMILY SEPARATION

The ongoing conflict has separated families and disrupted normal social interactions, leaving people isolated during a time of tremendous stress, and feeling anxious and uncertain about the wellbeing of their loved ones.

- Millions of families have been separated by the conflict; 74 percent of IRC survey respondents reported being separated from a close family member.
- Survey responses and other testimonials reveal that uncertainty about the wellbeing of loved ones is a major source of anxiety for Ukrainians.

LABOR MARKET ACCESS AND ECONOMIC STABILITY

The protracted conflict and ongoing war has taken a significant toll on the Ukrainian economy and the economic wellbeing of its people.

- The war has caused a massive drop in GDP and an accompanying loss of jobs; as of January 2024, the unemployment rate in Ukraine was 1 percent.⁸
- 70 percent of survey respondents reported losing a job or needing to change their career path as a result of the conflict, including 45 percent who had to accept another job with a lower wage or below their qualifications.
- Poverty rates have increased dramatically, with many frequently struggling to afford basic necessities like food, clothing, and medicine.⁹ Over 36 percent of survey respondents reported frequently having to skip buying basic necessities due to financial difficulties.

PHYSICAL SAFETY AND MENTAL WELLBEING

Day-to-day living conditions present a constant threat to physical safety, an experience that has inflicted widespread psychological trauma.

- A 2023 study found that 39 percent of IDP and 47 percent of refugees were experiencing high levels of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).¹⁰
- Gender-based violence has skyrocketed, in large part as a manifestation of combat-related stress disorders.¹¹

EDUCATION

Throughout the 10-year conflict in Ukraine, schools have become a target of artillery strikes and have been occupied as military encampments, disrupting education for millions of children.

- At least 4,000 schools have been damaged or destroyed in Ukraine since the start of the war.¹²
- As of the start of the 2023-2024 school year, 40 percent of students in Ukraine were not able to attend school fully in-person.¹³
- Ukrainian refugees also face significant barriers to education; during the 2022-2023 academic year, almost half of school-aged refugees were not enrolled in school in their host country.¹⁴

With no end in sight, the protracted nature of the conflict is a key factor in its physical and psychological toll. Ukrainians report feeling “exhausted mentally and physically” by the duration of the war, and the ongoing uncertainty around when it will be safe to return to their homes and recover a sense of normalcy in their lives.

“So that they know that people have not been able to return home for 10 years, like me and my child. We have been wandering around strange corners for 10 years now, changing schools, moving!”

– IRC's survey participant

1. Material Conditions: Housing, Infrastructure, and Food

The 10-year conflict in Ukraine had a profound impact on the lives and living conditions of Ukrainian civilians. Nearly every material aspect of normal life has been severely disrupted, including housing, infrastructure, access to food and water, and other essential needs.

The First Eight Years of Conflict

From 2014 to 2021, the conflict in Ukraine was concentrated in the Crimean Peninsula and the Donetsk and Luhansk regions in the east of the country. Despite the Minsk agreements of 2014-2015 calling for a ceasefire, the conflict persisted, with devastating consequences for civilians living in these parts of Ukraine. More than 850,000 people were forced from their homes, in part due to the widespread destruction of housing and other critical infrastructure. For example, an August 2014 assessment by the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe found that in the city of Pervomais'k (near Luhansk) almost all of the

apartment blocks had sustained damage and only 30 percent of detached houses remained intact.¹⁵ **According to the World Food Programme, by 2016, over half of the population living in the conflict zone had either completely lost or faced a significant reduction in income.** As poverty levels and food prices rose, more and more civilians experienced food insecurity. In 2016, there were 1.5 million people left hungry in Eastern Ukraine, including almost 300,000 who were “severely food insecure,” meaning they had run out of food and gone more than a day without eating.¹⁶



Kherson, Ukraine. Valentyna Drahoieva is showing the consequences of the shelling of her house to the IRC staff member Sviatoslav Rodiuk.

Photo: Tamara Kiptenko for the IRC

“We were without gas, light and food. Without anything... That’s how we lived. When I recall it, God, I can’t believe it all has happened to me still...war”

– Eva

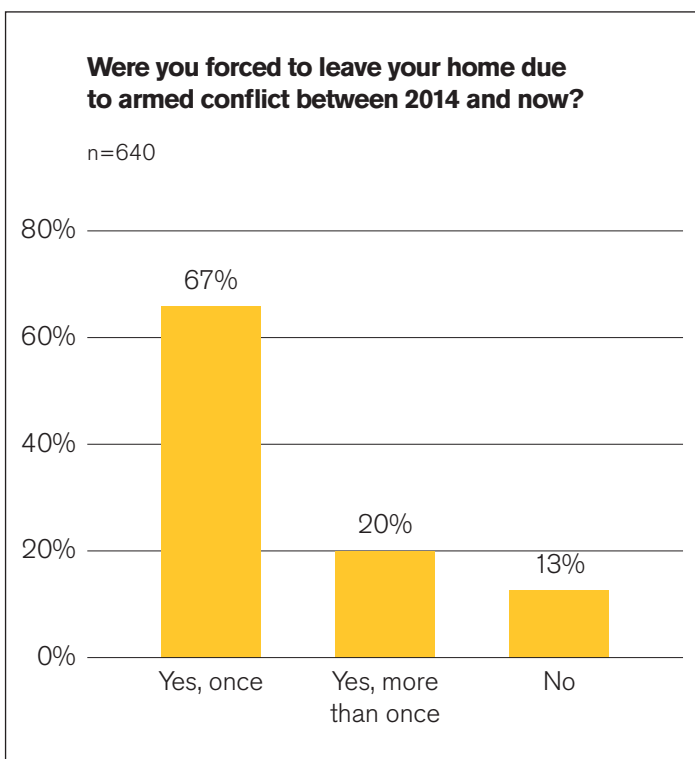
Full-Scale War: Housing and Infrastructure

Since the beginning of full-scale war in Ukraine in February 2022, the humanitarian crisis has engulfed the whole country and conditions have become significantly worse. Over the last two years, Russian forces have conducted extensive shelling across Ukraine, including strikes hitting residential areas and energy infrastructure.

As of June 2023, nearly 1.5 million homes had been destroyed during the war, with direct damages to buildings and infrastructure reaching an estimated \$135 billion USD.¹⁷ This widespread destruction has

wreaked havoc on the lives of Ukrainians, resulting in massive displacement, dangerous living conditions, food insecurity, and disruptions in access to medical care and other essential services.

According to a 2024 IRC survey of 640 Ukrainians, both living within Ukraine and refugees abroad, **87 percent of respondents reported having been forced to leave their home since 2014 as a result of the armed conflict, including 20 percent who had to relocate more than once:**



In part due to the destruction of housing, there are now 3.7 million IDPs within Ukraine and another 6 million refugees and asylum-seekers across the region.¹⁸

According to a UNHCR report, the majority of these IDPs and refugees intend to return to their homes, but there are significant barriers to doing so.¹⁹ For those who have remained in or returned to their homes, living conditions have been severely compromised. In the winter of 2022, Russian forces repeatedly attacked Ukrainian energy infrastructure, disrupting access to electricity, water, and heat for millions of Ukrainians.²⁰ For example, after a series of Russian strikes in November 2022, large areas of the country – including Lviv, Zaporizhzhia, Odesa, and Chernihiv – were completely disconnected from electricity; and Kyiv’s entire population of approximately 3 million was left without running water for a day.²¹ These disruptions continued through the winter, a time when temperatures were frequently below freezing in many parts of the country. According to a January 2023 IRC need assessment report, 27 percent of over 600 surveyed households in Ukraine reported not having access to sufficient heating.²²

Full-Scale War: Food

Access to food is an ongoing challenge, with poverty, domestic food production shortfalls, and compromised transportation systems all playing a role. The war has decimated Ukraine’s historically fertile and productive agricultural land. For example, mines have been deployed on Ukrainian farmland, affecting agricultural work and hindering the production of food.²³ On June 6, 2023, Russian forces destroyed the Kakhovka Dam in southern Ukraine, causing widespread flooding and disruption of existing irrigation infrastructure. The dam’s destruction alone was estimated to have caused the loss of several million tons of crops.²⁴ Reductions in Ukrainian food production have driven up food prices domestically and worldwide, which represents a particular challenge for those Ukrainians who have lost their jobs as a result of the conflict.²⁵ People in Ukraine also face difficulties

reaching food markets due to damaged public transportation infrastructure. According to the World Food Programme, approximately one-third of Ukrainian families (11 million people) were food insecure in 2023, and one-fifth were facing severe food insecurity.²⁶ Ukraine ranked 71st in the latest Global Food Security Index, representing the lowest level of food security in Europe.²⁷

In an illustration of the intersecting challenges of meeting one's basic needs, a woman living in Ukraine who responded to IRC's 2024 survey wrote,

"We are a young family expecting our second child and we don't have the money to buy things...we buy the most necessary things like clothes and food, and even then, we don't always have enough. For example, we can't afford to buy a winter jacket for a pregnant woman, so we have to stay at home in the cold...It is impossible to find a job with a good salary...We pray to God that the war will end."



In Eastern Ukraine, a young girl holds blankets that her family received from the IRC.

Photo: Diana Zeyneb Alhindawi for the IRC

2. Social Interactions: Family Separation

The protracted war in Ukraine has deprived millions of their basic material needs. It has also separated families and disrupted normal social interactions, leaving people isolated during a time of tremendous stress, and feeling anxious and uncertain about the wellbeing of their loved ones.

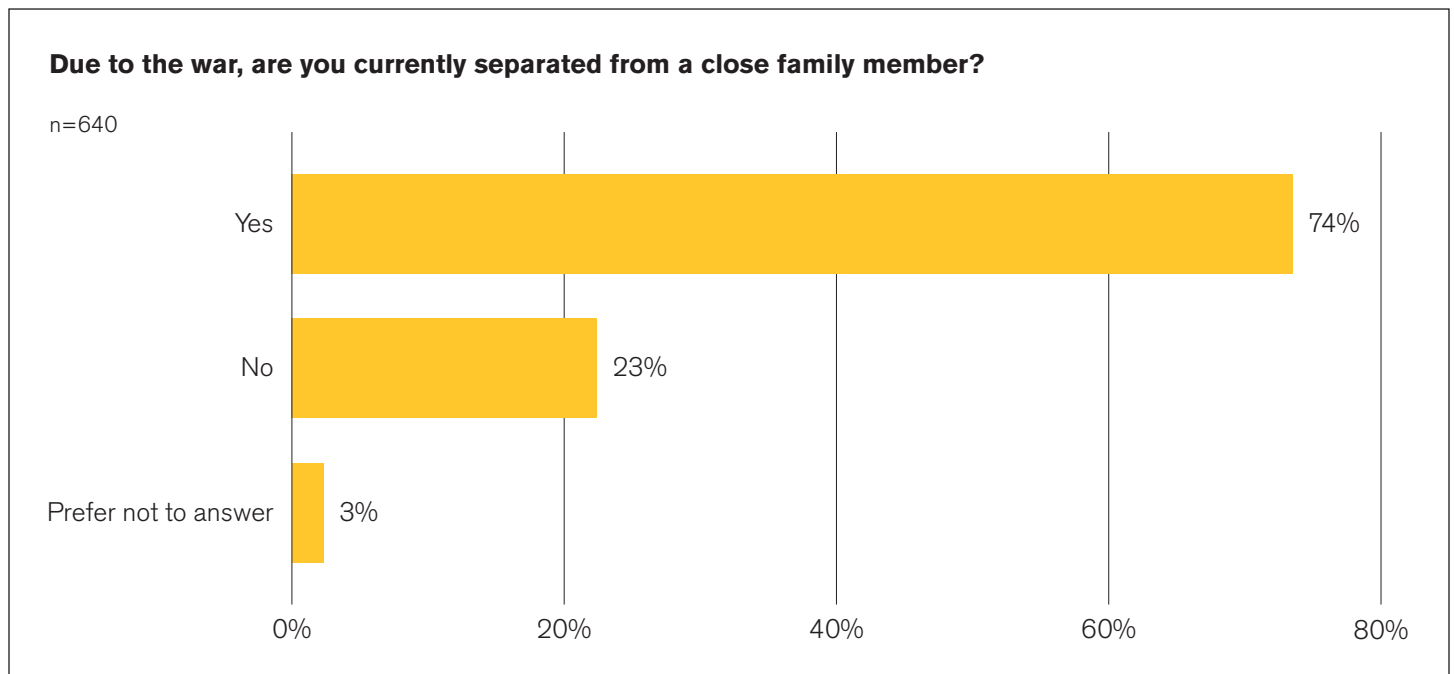
The Scale of Family Separation

It is difficult to quantify the scale of family separation during the first eight years (2014-2021) of the conflict. However, there are examples of families separated by Russia's annexation of Crimea and the subsequent fighting in eastern Ukraine. As of 2019, one activist had been living in Kyiv, separated from his wife and family in Crimea for five years. As a prominent voice opposed to Russian rule in Crimea, he feared prosecution if he returned to his home.²⁸

The scale of family separation has increased dramatically over the past two years. Soon after Russia launched its full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022,

the Ukrainian government declared martial law, including a travel ban that prevented most men from ages 18-60 from leaving the country.²⁹ There are now 3.7 million IDPs in Ukraine and almost 6 million people who have fled as refugees, the vast majority of them women and children.

In a 2024 IRC survey of 640 Ukrainians living in Ukraine and abroad, **74 percent of respondents reported being currently separated from a close family member (e.g. parent, spouse, child, or sibling) because of the war:**



“It was very hard to look at the children. I mean, to see how they experienced this separation from their father was very difficult.

Because the war made me realize that I had to live now and not put my dreams off for later.

I was especially afraid for my children, because I had no idea what to do when war broke out in my country.”

– Khrystyna



Athens, Greece. IRC client Khrystyna, 32, looks out at Athens.

Photo: Sumaya Agha for the IRC

The Impact of Family Separation

For those separated from their family members, communication is an ongoing challenge, with frequent blackouts and Internet outages making contact unpredictable. When asked what they would like the world to know about the humanitarian situation caused by the war in Ukraine, many IDPs responding to the survey emphasized the devastating impact of family separation.

“It’s scary, stressful, a feeling of uncertainty, uncertainty about the future and sadness for home, friends, and relatives. You are like a plant uprooted in the street,” wrote one respondent, an internally displaced woman living in Ukraine. “It is very difficult for people who have lost contact with their homes and relatives, and especially children...It is difficult to not have support in life, and to be alone in a strange city,” wrote another internally displaced woman in Ukraine.

Ukrainian refugees living in Europe report similar hardships as a result of family separation.

“[I feel] constant stress due to separation from relatives who stayed in Ukraine,” wrote one survey respondent, a woman living in Sweden.

In May 2022, IRC profiled Anastasiia, a young Ukrainian refugee who fled her home in Lviv for Poland.

She described the feeling of not knowing if her family members who remained in Ukraine were safe:

“It’s been so horrible, reading the news and wondering where family members are. All my relatives are in eastern Ukraine and I am afraid of what could happen to them... Nobody knows what will happen tomorrow. It’s the worst thing. There’s so much information to get through...we’re constantly, always, reading the news and hoping people are okay.”³⁰

The Forced Relocation of Ukrainian Children

Another troubling cause of family separation is Russia’s relocation of Ukrainian children to camps and other facilities in Russian territory. According to a 2023 report by the Yale School of Public Health’s Humanitarian Research Lab, there were at least 6,000 children from Ukraine who had been held at “re-education and adoption facilities” in Crimea and mainland Russia.³¹ The report identified at least 43 facilities operating with the goal of “political re-education.” In March 2023, the International Criminal Court issued arrest warrants for Russian President Vladimir Putin and Russian Children’s Rights Commissioner Maria Lvova-Belova, alleging that they were responsible for the war crime of “unlawful deportation of children.”³²

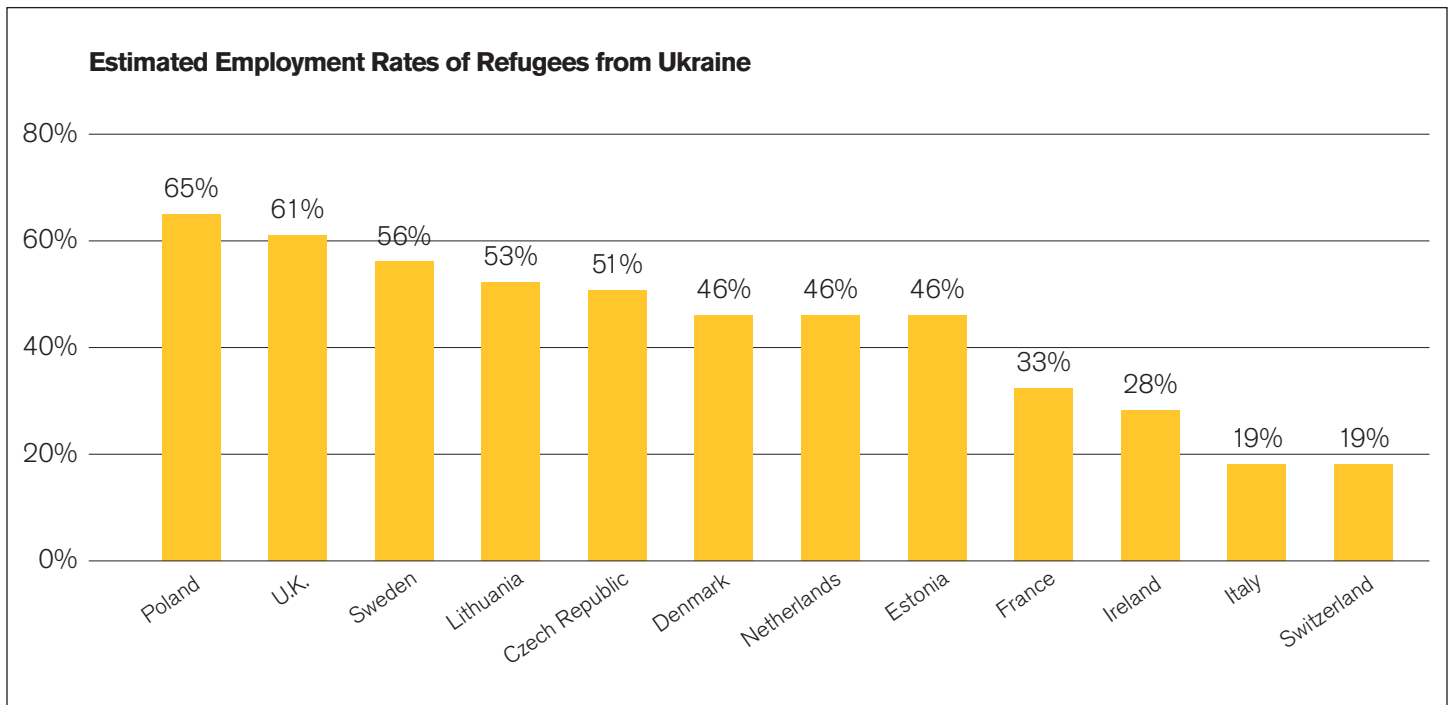
3. Labor Market Access and Economic Stability

Unsurprisingly, the protracted conflict and ongoing war has taken a significant toll on the Ukrainian economy and the economic wellbeing of its people. GDP has fallen substantially, millions of jobs have been lost, and poverty rates have increased.

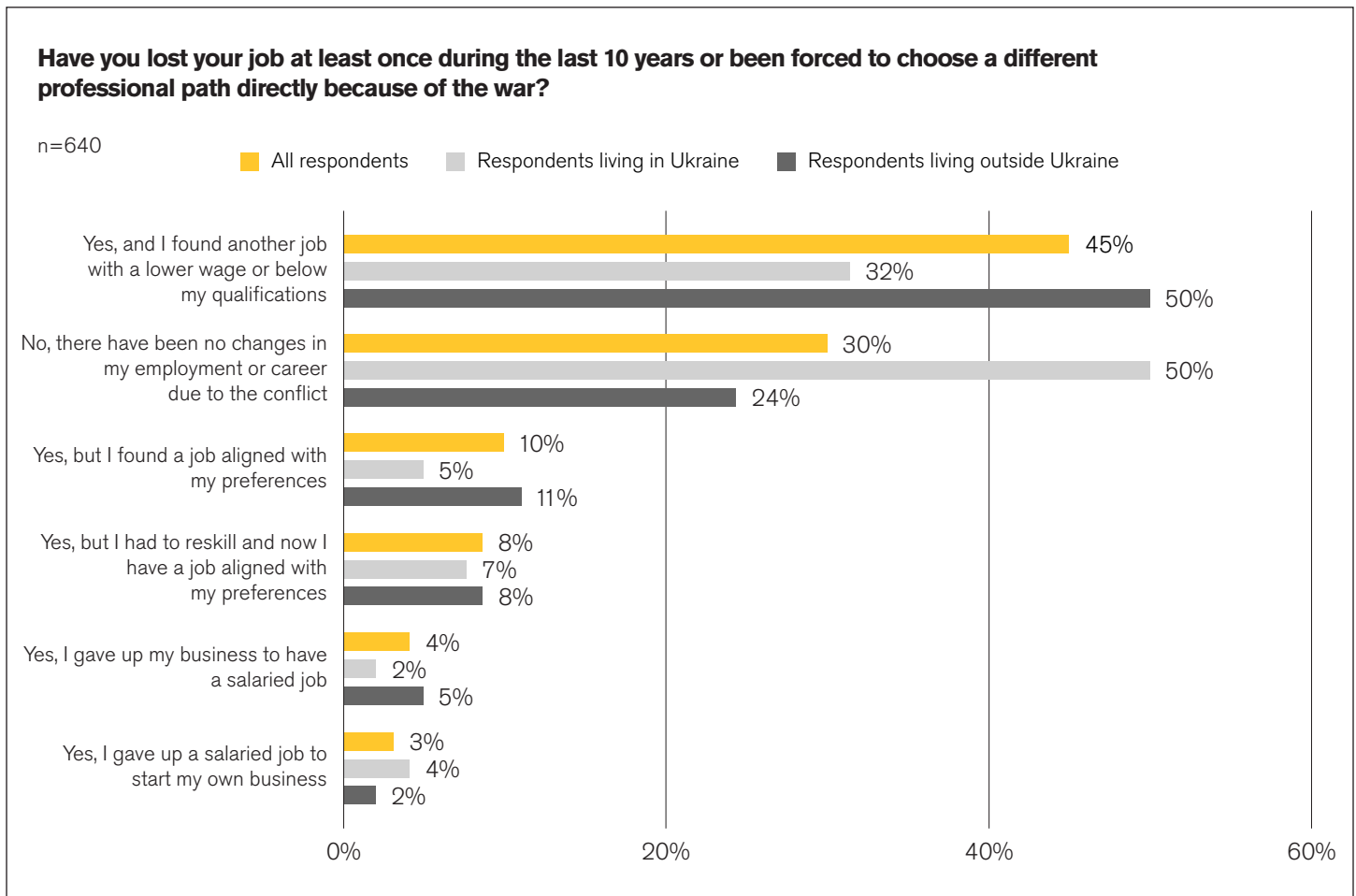
GDP Contraction and Job Loss

Concentrated in eastern Ukraine, the 2014-2022 conflict had a significant impact on the Donetsk and Luhansk regions, historically the industrial engines for the country. Ukraine experienced a 10 percent drop in GDP in 2014, according to the World Bank, coinciding with the beginning of the conflict. GDP stabilized between 2016-2021, but then plummeted 29 percent in 2022, coinciding with the start of Russia's full-scale invasion.³³ According to the UN's International Labour Organization

(ILO), 2.4 million jobs were lost in Ukraine between 2021-2022;³⁴ and the unemployment rate in Ukraine was 17 percent as of January 2024.³⁵ Employment is a major challenge for Ukrainian refugees as well. According to 2023 data from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), rates of employment for Ukrainian refugees were between 19 percent (in Switzerland and Italy) and 65 percent (in Poland).³⁶



IRC's 2024 survey of Ukrainians living in Ukraine and abroad mirrors these trends. Among the approximately 600 respondents, 70 percent reported losing a job or needing to change their career path due to the 10-year conflict. This includes 45 percent who said they lost a job and then found another with a lower wage or below their qualifications. Job loss and career change was particularly high for those respondents living outside Ukraine:



Barriers to Employment

A December 2022 IRC labour market assessment report found that there were simply not enough jobs available in Ukraine, and that available jobs offered low pay. Barriers to employment were especially high for IDPs, who often reported facing discrimination in hiring practices.³⁷

Ukrainian refugees living in Europe face several barriers in finding employment, including a lack of available employment opportunities, an incomplete knowledge of local languages, and insufficient access to childcare. Many Ukrainian refugees are highly educated and experienced, but their credentials are not necessarily

recognized within their host countries.³⁸ As a result, Ukrainian refugees often end up in jobs they are overqualified for, earning less money than they had previously earned. For example, one respondent to IRC's 2024 survey, a woman living in Bulgaria, reported,

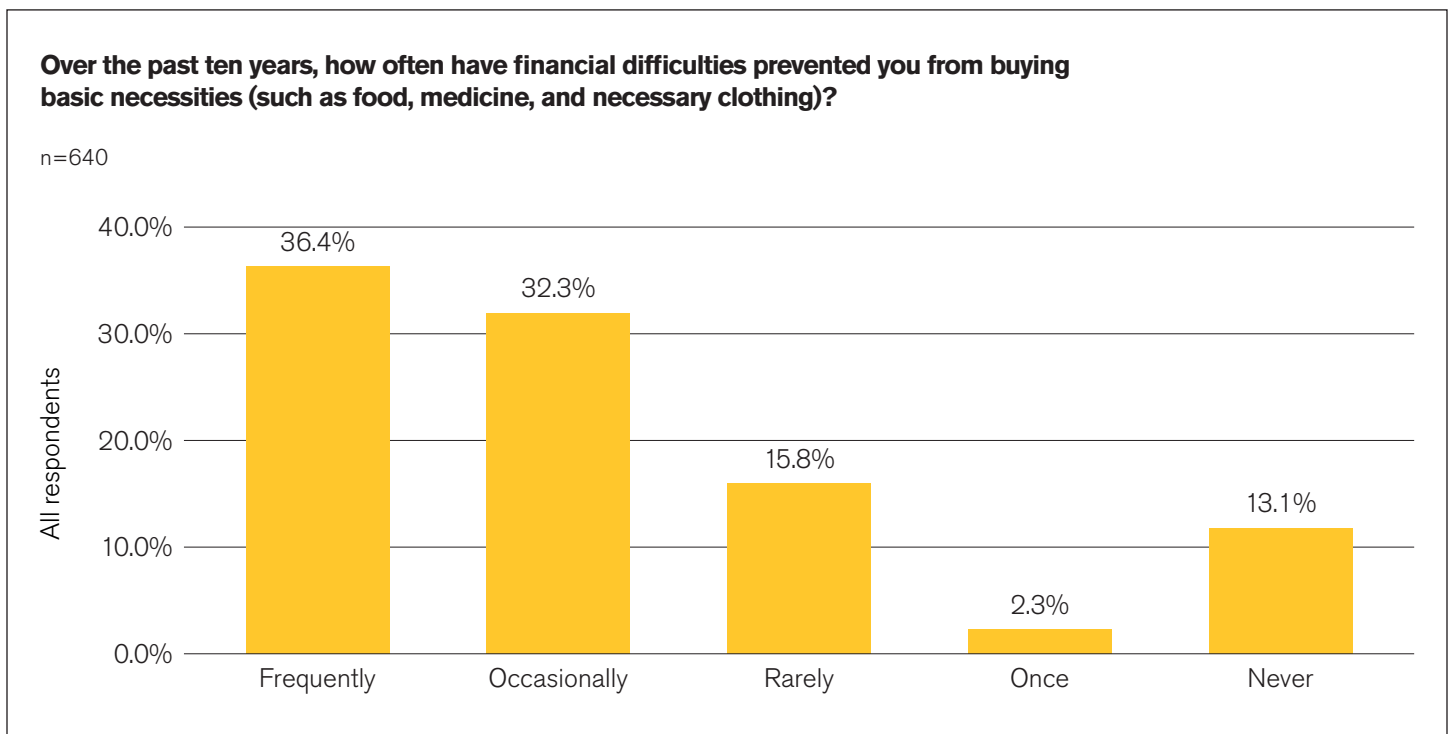
"I am a civil servant... I have a master's degree... [but] I am forced to do cleaning. It is humiliating... Many smart, qualified people are forced to do things other than what they are good at."

Ukrainian refugees have reported being exploited by employers and subjected to substandard working conditions. In a 2023 IRC assessment of Ukrainian refugees living in Poland, 55 percent reported experiencing labour market discrimination, including 14 percent who claimed to receive a lower salary than their Polish colleagues. Describing her working conditions in Poland, one focus group participant employed as a cleaner said,

“I clean the office spaces. I feel humiliated...I receive 16 PLN per hour, although I was promised 18 PLN per hour. The manager treats us like dirt. He finds pleasure in humiliating Ukrainian staff.”³⁹

Poverty Rates

As one would expect, levels of poverty have increased substantially in Ukraine. According to UNHCR, the poverty rate increased from 5.5 percent to 24.1 percent in 2022, corresponding to over 7 million people who were pushed into poverty.⁴⁰ According to the January 2023 IRC need assessment report, the number one need reported among Ukrainian households was “money,” with 94 percent of responding households identifying this as a priority.⁴¹ Poverty is also a significant problem for Ukrainian refugees living in Europe. For example, a November 2023 study by PAQ Research found that 57 percent of Ukrainian refugees in the Czech Republic were living below the poverty line.⁴² According to IRC’s 2024 survey, 87 percent of respondents experienced financial constraints that prevented them from purchasing essential items (like food, medicine, and necessary clothing), including 36 percent of respondents who experienced this “frequently”:



For people living within Ukraine and Ukrainian refugees abroad, the financial situation remains very precarious, with “money” and “employment” frequently identified as the biggest priorities across various need assessments. One survey respondent, a woman living in the Czech Republic, wrote,

“I am constantly stressed about whether I will have enough money to live on...sometimes I’ve had to work three jobs.” Another respondent, a woman living in Poland, wrote, “It’s a hard life. We often don’t have enough money to live a normal life.”

4. Physical Safety and Mental Wellbeing

Ten years of conflict and the resulting living conditions have increased threats to physical safety and widespread psychological trauma

Physical Safety

Most directly, the war has threatened the physical safety of Ukrainians due to the constant shelling and armed combat, which has destroyed homes and other key elements of civilian infrastructure. For example, Ukrainians leaving the eastern city of Bakhmut in December 2022 described nonstop Russian shelling, forcing residents to shelter in their basements.⁴³ The shelling continues now, two years into full-scale war. Valentyna, a woman living in the southern city of Kherson told IRC,

“Until today, we feel this war. The roof is leaking, we can’t sleep in our apartments because the area was shelled seven times. It’s horrible.” One survey respondent wrote, “I want the world to know how scary it is when rockets explode over your head.”

Furthermore, missile strikes targeting the energy grid and water sources left people across Ukraine without power and/or access to clean water and sanitation, increasing the risk of cold-related or water-borne illnesses.

Gender-Based Violence

Another significant threat to physical safety is gender-based violence (GBV). As in many other crisis settings, GBV has increased as a result of the conflict in Ukraine. Even before the full-scale invasion, IDP women reported higher rates of GBV than non-displaced women in Ukraine dating back to 2014.⁴⁴ But, the full-scale invasion raised the risk of GBV significantly.⁴⁵ From February 2022 to January 2023, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

(OHCHR) documented 133 cases of conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV).⁴⁶ Domestic violence has also skyrocketed, with police registering over 50 percent more domestic violence cases in the first five months of 2023 than during the same period in 2021. This spike has been attributed to combat-related stress disorders.⁴⁷

Mental Health Consequences

Living through war and displacement has had a profound psychological impact on the Ukrainian people. For example, a mother living near the Ukraine-Belarus border described to IRC the terror of living in a warzone:

“The scariest things are the helicopters and planes, when you hear them flying at night. When we heard the plane, we were trying to hide the kids in the basement, but the basement was not big enough for everybody to get into. The adults were just laying down on the ground and praying.”⁴⁸

It is well-established that the experience of war causes lasting mental trauma, and the war in Ukraine is no exception.⁴⁹ A 2023 study found that a majority of Ukrainians were experiencing moderate to high levels of stress or anxiety; and 39 percent of IDPs and 47 percent of refugees were experiencing high levels of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).⁵⁰



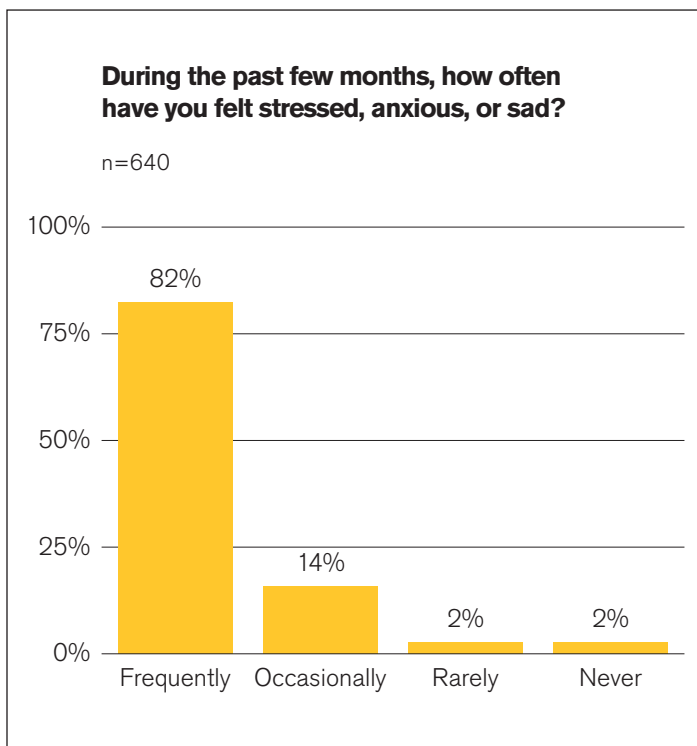
“There is nothing good in war! To be worried like that all the time. Old people and children are killed, it’s awful. I want peace. Peace, quietness, calmness. And I want to work.”

– Vira

Kherson, Ukraine. Elderly lady Vira Stremedlovskaya is in the yard of her house.

Photo: Tamara Kiptenko for the IRC

IRC's 2024 survey mirrored these results, finding widespread experiences of stress, anxiety, or sadness among Ukrainians living within the country and abroad:

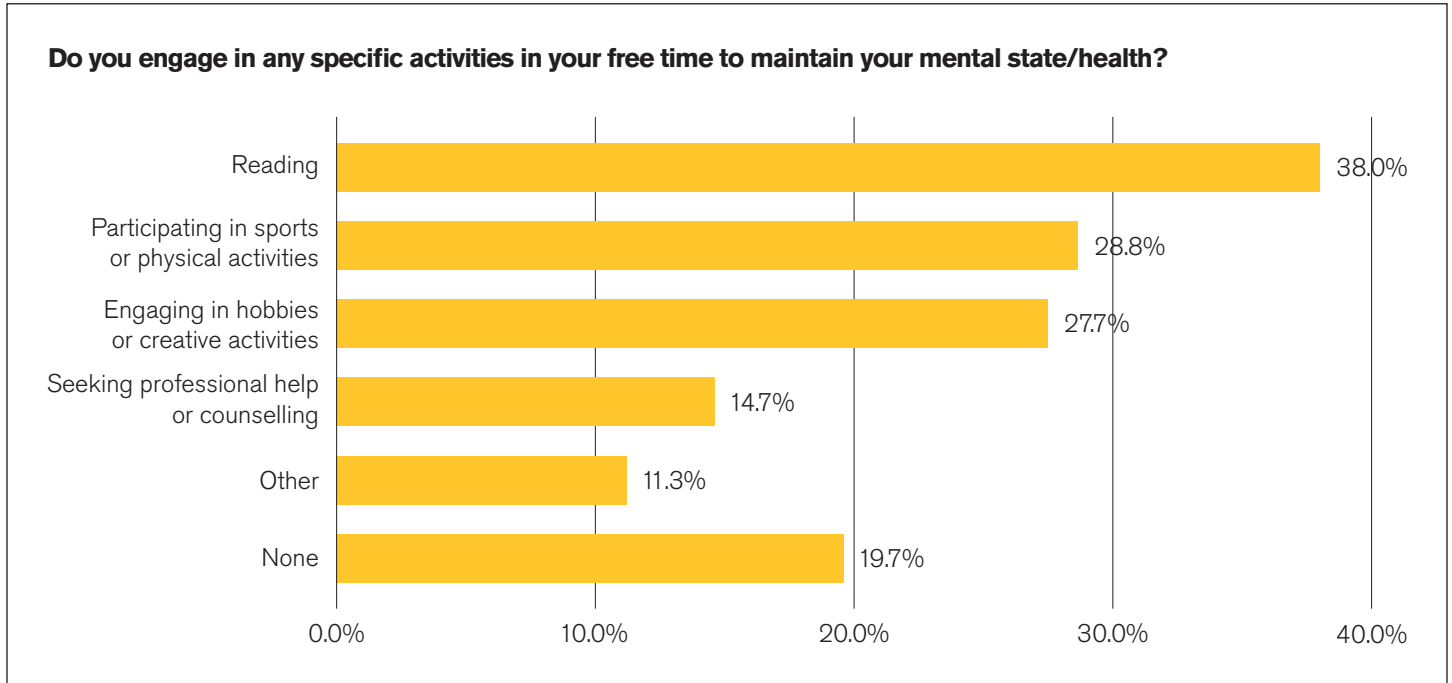


The protracted nature of the conflict in Ukraine has made its impacts especially overwhelming, as many Ukrainians report feeling drained by the ten-year conflict, with a sense that there is no end in sight. When asked what they would like the world to know about the conflict in Ukraine, many respondents to IRC's 2024 survey emphasized its duration.

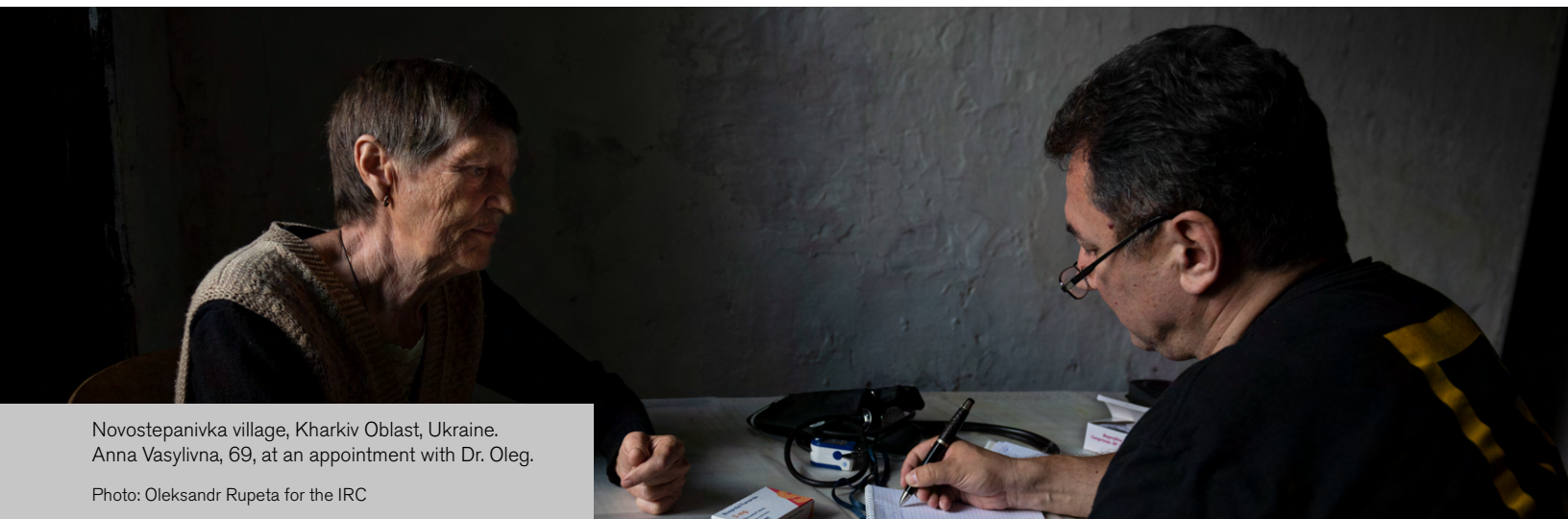
“This is a protracted war for survival. Most people are exhausted morally, emotionally, physically, and financially,” wrote one respondent, a woman living in Poland. Another woman living in Ukraine wrote, “Ukrainians are very tired of the war and need help...The hope of victory fades, and the psychological state [of the country] is deteriorating.” The psychological impact on children is especially profound. A 16-year-old boy living in Warsaw told IRC, “If you want to help children you should be there for them. You know how difficult is this period in our life? The period when we must make all those serious decisions about our future, while being in a completely new environment and witnessing how our home country is getting destroyed.”⁵¹

Maintaining Mental Health

When asked if they engaged in any specific activities to maintain their mental health, Ukrainians surveyed by IRC reported reading, participating in physical activity, and pursuing other hobbies. Despite experiencing high rates of stress and anxiety, only 15 percent of respondents reported seeking professional help or counseling:



There are several barriers to accessing mental health treatment in Ukraine, including cost, destruction of mental health facilities, and lack of personnel due to the injury and displacement of mental health professionals.⁵² For IDPs and refugees, mental health conditions may be exacerbated by grief, stress and anxiety related to the migration process, and uncertainty about the wellbeing of their loved ones. Refugees living in Europe face additional barriers to mental health treatment, including a lack of information about where to access treatment, and a lack of Ukrainian-speaking mental health professionals.⁵³



Novostepanivka village, Kharkiv Oblast, Ukraine.
Anna Vasylivna, 69, at an appointment with Dr. Oleg.

Photo: Oleksandr Rupeta for the IRC

5. Education

Throughout the 10-year conflict in Ukraine, schools have become a target of artillery strikes and have been occupied as military encampments, disrupting education for millions of children.

Destruction of Schools

During the first eight years of the conflict, schools within the conflict zone were under constant threat. According to Save the Children, about 750 schools in eastern Ukraine were damaged, destroyed, or forced to close between 2014 and 2021.⁵⁴ Both Ukrainian forces and Russian-backed separatists targeted schools with artillery attacks, and used schools as military facilities.

The full-scale invasion of Ukraine brought exponentially more upheaval to the education system. In the first 100 days after Russia's invasion on February 24, 2022, at least 1,888 schools were damaged or destroyed, more than double the number from 2014 to 2021.⁵⁵ By November 2023, nearly 4,000 Ukrainian schools had been damaged or destroyed, leaving many school-aged children without access to education. Most of this damage was as a result of missile and rocket strikes. Also, according to Human Rights Watch, Russian forces often stationed soldiers and military equipment in schools, ransacking the facilities in the process. For example, Human Rights Watch researchers visited a school that had been occupied by Russian forces in Borodianka (a town near Kyiv) and found extensive damage, including smashed windows, blood on the walls, stolen laptops, desks used as firewood, and anti-Ukraine graffiti.⁵⁶

Learning Loss

According to assessments by Ukraine's Ministry of Education, only 1.3 million children (33 percent) were able to attend schools fully in-person in May 2023. Meanwhile, 1.5 million children (37 percent) were learning online, and 1.2 million (30 percent) were learning via a hybrid of online and in-person classes.⁵⁷ The Ukrainian government funded the rehabilitation of schools and the construction of bomb shelters; those schools with shelters large enough to fit all students and staff were allowed to reopen.⁵⁸ As a result, the situation improved somewhat by the start of the 2023-2024 academic year in September 2023. But, over 40 percent of Ukrainian students were still not able to attend school fully in-person. Digital learning has been particularly challenging as frequent blackout and Internet outages interrupt students' classes.⁵⁹ According to a 2023 UNICEF survey, 57 percent of teachers in Ukraine reported a decline in their students' language abilities, and 45 percent reported a decline in math skills.⁶⁰

“We managed to squeeze me into Polish school with only Ukrainian students (...). I also studied in Ukrainian school. It was too much. Per day I would maybe have one hour off, when I don't have to do anything and can surf my phone. Other time of the day I would be very busy and going to bed late. I don't want this next year. I don't like online education; it is not for me. I need someone to be nearby me and point out with the finger things I don't understand.”

– Female, 12, Warsaw



Malynivka, Kharkiv Oblast, Ukraine. Natalia Samoilova (mother), Yana (aunt) with Eva after receiving winter kits and registering for financial aid.

Photo: Tamara Kiptenko for the IRC

Ukrainian refugees living in Europe also face significant barriers to educational access. According to a 2023 UNHCR report, almost half of school-aged Ukrainian refugees were not enrolled in schools in their host countries for the 2022-2023 academic year. There are several factors contributing to these low rates of enrollment, including administrative, linguistic, and legal obstacles; a lack of awareness about available options; and a reluctance on the part of parents to enroll their children in host country schools as they intend to return to Ukraine.⁶¹ Learning loss is a major concern for parents. One IRC survey respondent, a woman living in the Czech Republic, wrote,

“Because of the war, a generation of children is growing up with very limited knowledge...instead of being able to go to school, to participate in clubs, to develop normally, they are instead sitting in shelters.”

For those refugee children who are enrolled in school, the experience is not always easy. Social isolation, lack of language proficiency, and the effects of trauma and displacement are everyday challenges. Parents of Ukrainian refugee children enrolled in school in Europe reported experiences of bullying. For example, one mother reported to the IRC that her child heard comments like, “Go back to Ukraine,” at a school in Poland.⁶²

Recommendations

It is essential for the international community to sustain and strengthen its response to the Ukraine crisis by collaborating with both international and local organizations to address humanitarian needs.

- Provide continuous support to local organizations and civil society in Ukraine and reinforcing assistance to local responders. These organisations are the closest to the communities they serve, and the most agile in meeting the needs of affected populations.
- Ensure the full funding of the Humanitarian Response Plan, guaranteeing timely and predictable financial support to address the changing needs of the population. This includes a scaled-up commitment to mental health support, populations in hard to access areas, and addressing the needs of the most vulnerable.
- Increase funding for interventions that address protection risks and prevent and respond to gender-based violence.
- Ensure accountability for violations of international humanitarian and human rights law.

Support system strengthening and early recovery in Ukraine

- Discussions on the reconstruction of Ukraine have been largely centred around rebuilding critical infrastructure. The IRC is calling on international donors and the Government of Ukraine to ensure that people affected by this war are truly at the heart of the process.

- A people-centred approach to Ukraine's recovery means ensuring that refugees, internally displaced people, and local communities are actively involved in the formulation of recovery and reconstruction plans. The IRC highlights the essential role of civil society as a key partner in these endeavours, with a continuous engagement of diverse groups within the Ukrainian population, including women, youth, elders, and individuals with disabilities, each with their unique needs and priorities.
- Efforts to strengthen systems and support early recovery need to be invested in concurrently with the provision of timely humanitarian assistance. Some areas in Ukraine are already transitioning into early recovery phases, dealing with long-term displacement, engaging in discussions on durable solutions, and facing other issues beyond the scope of standard humanitarian funding mechanisms, while others require sustained humanitarian support.
- This should go hand in hand with investment in extensive demining, reestablishment of social infrastructure, and support for job creation in Ukraine.

Strengthen the support for refugees in host countries by providing appropriate funding for continued programming that helps fill gaps in social protection systems and reaches those with the highest needs.

- Refugees should be assisted for as long as needed, including adequate funding for services for refugees with specific needs and recent arrivals.
- There is a need for continued support for refugee inclusion, particularly when it comes to the

labour market, and strengthening systems that protect refugees from human trafficking and work exploitation.

- Children from Ukraine should have access to quality education and receive support for inclusion into local school systems. Hosting countries need to work on long-term solutions to support their inclusion into local schools and mitigate risks of drop-outs.
- The most vulnerable groups need special focus and support (financial assistance, accommodation), including among others: elders, people with disabilities, minorities, survivors of GBV, and single-headed households.

and coordinated approach across Europe, considering the specific needs of the most vulnerable individuals.

- Member States must grant displaced people access to asylum procedures outlined in the 1951 Refugee Convention, ensuring that rights under the Temporary Protection Directive (TPD) are maintained until a final decision on international protection is made. While a consistent approach across the EU is preferred, host governments are encouraged to propose national-level solutions for post-TPD transition, including labor mobility and long-term residency frameworks.

Develop durable options for transition out of the Temporary Protection (TP) regime.

- The decision by the Justice and Home Affairs Council of the European Union to extend the Temporary Protection regime for refugees fleeing Ukraine for another year, until March 2025, is necessary and welcomed. All Member States should ensure the timely implementation of the Directive and the extension of residence permits and access to social services, education, health care, job market, etc.
- The European Commission should extend the current Temporary Protection regime for an additional year until 2026, considering that over 4.2 million people are currently facing uncertainty as the regime approaches its end. This extension would provide more predictability for displaced persons who are currently unable to plan their immediate future, and it would also allow policymakers more time to develop durable solutions.
- The European Commission should explore options to help current Temporary Protection beneficiaries transition into more stable statuses, ensuring they maintain access to rights, protection, essential services, integration support, and safeguards against forced returns. This should be done with a collective

Methodology

This report synthesizes data from past reports and need assessments conducted by the IRC, partner organizations, and other organizations in the field; academic research; news articles; and a new survey (detailed below).

Survey Design

The survey was conducted by the International Rescue Committee (IRC), in collaboration with United for Ukraine and Refugee.info in Central Europe, Italy and Greece. It targeted individuals of Ukrainian nationality residing in various countries across Europe. The survey aimed to assess the experiences, needs, and perspectives of Ukrainians impacted by the conflict.

Sampling and Data Collection

The survey was conducted between December 21, 2023, and January 19, 2024. A non-probabilistic sampling method was utilized, primarily relying on the distribution of the survey through social media channels. This method facilitated outreach to individuals residing in diverse locations, including Ukraine, Germany, Romania, Great Britain, Poland, Sweden, Lithuania, Slovakia, Estonia, Czech Republic, Italy, France, Belgium, Moldova, and Bulgaria. The use of social media platforms enabled wide dissemination of the survey but constrained the ability to verify respondent identities and validate the accuracy of their responses. As such, all data collected are self-reported declarations and may be subject to biases inherent in self-reporting and social media distribution.

Respondent Profile

The survey received a total of 640 responses from individuals identifying as Ukrainian nationals. The respondents represented a broad spectrum of age groups, with the two largest cohorts being individuals aged 36 to 55 years (58 percent) and those aged 25 to 35 years (24 percent). Notably, the survey

sample was predominantly composed of female respondents, accounting for 87 percent of the total surveyed population.

Limitations

Several limitations are inherent in the methodology employed for this survey:

Non-Probabilistic Sampling:

The survey's reliance on non-probabilistic sampling methods precludes the generalizability of the findings to the broader population of Ukrainians. The results are representative only of the surveyed population and may not accurately reflect the experiences and perspectives of all Ukrainians in Europe.

Self-Reporting Bias:

The use of self-reported data collected via social media introduces the potential for response bias and inaccuracies. Respondents may have provided information selectively or inaccurately, leading to skewed results.

Lack of Verification:

The inability to verify respondent identities and the authenticity of their responses poses challenges to the reliability and validity of the data. Without means of verification, the accuracy of the reported information cannot be confirmed.

Social Media Distribution:

Distributing the survey through social media platforms limits the reach to individuals with internet access and social media presence, potentially excluding segments of the Ukrainian population who do not engage with these platforms.

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