IOM UN MIGRATION | GLOBAL DATA INSTITUTE DISPLACEMENT TRACKING MATRIX

RETURNING HOME FROM ABROAD:

Trends, Drivers, and Reintegration Challenges among Ukrainian Returnees from Abroad

JULY 2025

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION

Over three years since the full-scale invasion of Ukraine by the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation, one in four Ukrainians remains displaced due to the war. This includes 3.8 million people who are internally displaced within the country,[1] and 5.6 million refugees living abroad – 5.1 million of whom are in Europe.[2]

At the same time, 4.1 million individuals have returned to their places of origin, including 1.1 million individuals who returned to their places of origin in Ukraine from abroad,[3] as well as 340,000 individuals who came back to Ukraine from abroad but remained internally displaced.[4]

As of August 2024, the majority of refugees from Ukraine in Europe continue to express a strong desire to return home. Nearly two-thirds (61%) either planned to return, or hoped to do so one day. Only 12 per cent had lost hope of returning, while the rest were undecided.[5]

The voluntary, safe, and dignified return of refugees from Ukraine – and their sustainable reintegration – represents a critical step for Ukrainians rebuilding their lives, and a strategic pillar of Ukraine's national recovery. To ensure that support provided for refugees promotes voluntary, informed, and dignified solutions – including returns, when conditions permit – it is essential to understand return trends from abroad, the drivers, enablers, and barriers, as well as the challenges returnees face upon arrival.

To this end, this brief provides an overview of return trends from abroad since the onset of the full-scale invasion. It examines shifts in the demographic profile of returnees from abroad, countries of last displacement, and areas of return. It further explores the motivations behind return, the enablers, and barriers, returnees' socio-economic conditions upon return, and the sustainability of such returns.

These insights aim to inform planning and programming, enabling stakeholders to better anticipate future return trends and support needs among those who return to Ukraine from abroad.

[1] International Organization for Migration (IOM), Internal Displacement Report, April 2025.
[2] United Nations Higher Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Ukraine Refugee Situation, July 2025 (accessed: 2 July 2025).
[3] IOM, Ukraine Returns Report, April 2025.
[4] IOM, Internal Displacement Report, April 2025.
[5] UNHCR, Regional Intentions Survey Results (5th & 6th Round), Intentions and Perspectives of Refugees from Ukraine, March 2025.

2. KEY FINDINGS

The proportion of returnees who returned from abroad has stabilised since September 2023.

- Among returnees currently present in the country, the share of those who had returned from abroad increased from 19 per cent between February and September 2022 to 35 per cent between April and September 2023, before stabilising at around 29 to 32 per cent of all returnees, or 100,000 individuals, every six months.

Returns from abroad are more likely to have involved individuals or partial households rather than entire families.

- Fewer than half (44%) of those returning from abroad were living in households consisting exclusively of returnees, compared to nearly three-fourths (74%) of returnees from displacement within Ukraine.
- One in ten (11%) returnees from abroad reported living in single-parent households – nearly three times the rate observed among within-country returnees (4%).

Households with children were more likely to have displaced abroad – and returned - over a year prior to data collection, while more recent returns from abroad have increasingly involved older individuals.

- Only one-third (35%) of returnees from abroad who had returned in the year prior to data collection were living in households with children. This compares to more than half (56%) of those who had returned over a year prior to data collection.
- In contrast, 26 per cent of recent returnees from abroad (those who returned within the year prior to data collection) were aged 60 or older, compared to 21 per cent of earlier returnees (those who returned over a year prior to data collection).

Most returnees from abroad continue to come from within the European Union (EU). However, the geographic profile of returns is diversifying.

- Among returnees from abroad who had returned over a year prior to data collection, 93 per cent had returned from EU countries. This share has declined to 77 per cent among more recent returnees from abroad. At the same time, returns from countries such as Canada (from one to eight per cent), Moldova (from two to six per cent), and Bulgaria (from four to eight per cent) have increased.

Returnees from abroad are more likely than within-country returnees to have returned to less war-affected regions, with a growing share returning to Western and Central oblasts.

- As of March 2025, only 25 per cent of returnees from abroad were living in frontline raions, compared to 42 per cent of within-country returnees.
- Returnees from abroad were four times more likely than within-country returnees to have returned to Western oblasts (16 per cent, compared to four per cent), and nearly three times as likely to have returned to Central Ukraine (eight per cent, compared to three per cent). Among recent returnees from abroad, these shares were as high as 19 per cent of returns to the West, and 14 per cent to the Centre.

Returns from abroad are primarily driven by emotional and familial motivations, though access to employment and housing are important secondary motivators.

- Seventy per cent of returnees from abroad cited the desire to be home, or to reunite with family, as their primary reasons for having returned, compared to just 34 per cent of within-country returnees.
- Twenty-eight per cent included employment and 23 per cent included access to housing among their top three reasons for having returned.

Returnees from abroad were more likely to return to housing they owned, and less affected by war-related damage, than within-country returnees, though they still faced greater losses than the non-displaced.

- As of March 2025, 82 per cent of returnees from abroad lived in owned housing – matching the non-displaced (82%) and exceeding within-country returnees (74%).
- Six per cent of returnees from abroad were living in housing that was damaged or unfinished, compared to 13 per cent of within-country returnees, and four per cent of the non-displaced. Moreover, 11 per cent of returnees from abroad reported war-related losses or damage to household appliances – lower than within-country returnees (17%) but higher than the non-displaced (7%).

Returnees from abroad faced lower employment rates than other groups, largely due to domestic responsibilities and limited job opportunities in their areas of return.

- As of August 2024, only 61 per cent of working-age returnees from abroad were employed or self-employed, compared to 72 per cent of within-country returnees, and 68 per cent of the non-displaced; 16 per cent were unemployed (compared to nine and 10 per cent, respectively).
- Eighteen per cent of returnees from abroad were engaged in housework, childcare, or on parental leave. Among returnees from abroad seeking work, 35 per cent cited limited job opportunities in their areas of return as a major challenge, and 20 per cent pointed to a lack of schedule flexibility. Among those not seeking work, 17 per cent reported housework or childcare as a key reason.

Recent returnees from abroad faced greater gaps in access to goods and services, especially related to employment, healthcare, housing, and mobility.

- As of March 2025, only 22 per cent of recent returnees from abroad reported sufficient access to all assessed goods and services – compared to 31 per cent among earlier returnees from abroad, and 27 per cent among the non-displaced.
- Nearly half (44%) of recent returnees from abroad reported insufficient access to income-earning opportunities, 38 per cent to medicines, 36 per cent to building or reconstruction materials, 33 per cent to health services, and 19 per cent reported insufficient access to transportation or evacuation support.

Returnees face heightened vulnerability during early stages of reintegration.

- Overall, 83 per cent of recent returnees from abroad, and 87 per cent of recent within-country returnees, reported their households to have relied on livelihoods-based coping strategies in order to meet basic needs, compared to 74 per cent of earlier returnees from abroad, and 73 per cent of the non-displaced.
- This included reliance on severe, crisis- or emergency-level strategies, as reported by 59 per cent of recent returnees from abroad, and 65 per cent of recent within-country returnees, compared to 46 per cent of earlier returnees from abroad, and 50 per cent of the non-displaced.

Recent returnees from abroad faced a heightened risk of re-displacement, especially to locations outside the country.

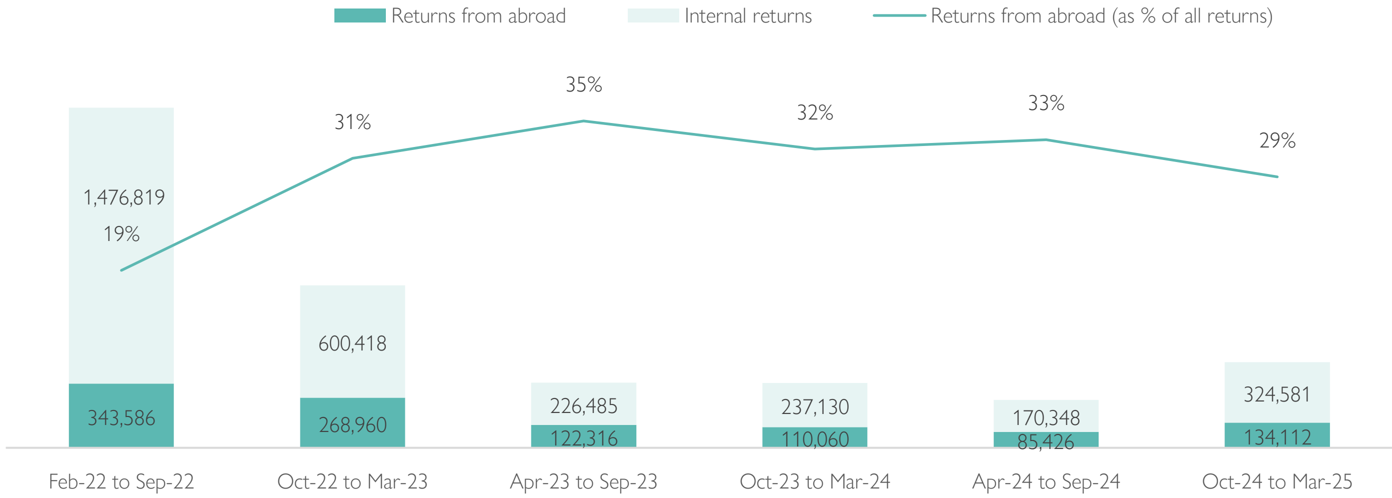
- Nearly one in four (24%) recent returnees from abroad reported that they were considering leaving their current locations again.
- Almost one in five (18%) were considering moving abroad again.

3. OVERVIEW

The proportion of returnees who returned from abroad has stabilised since September 2023. Among returnees currently present in the country, only about one-fifth (19%) of those who had returned up until September 2022 had come back from abroad. By the following year, in the six months leading up to September 2023, this share had risen to 35 per cent – or 122,000 out of a total of 349,000 returnees. Since then, the number of returns from abroad has stabilised at around 100,000 every six months, representing between 29 and 32 per cent of all returns (Figure 1).

In the absence of major and lasting contextual change, these figures are unlikely to change. As of August 2024, only five per cent of refugees from Ukraine in Europe were planning to return to Ukraine within 12 months.[6]

Figure 1 Estimated number of individuals by date of return among returnees currently present in Ukraine[7]

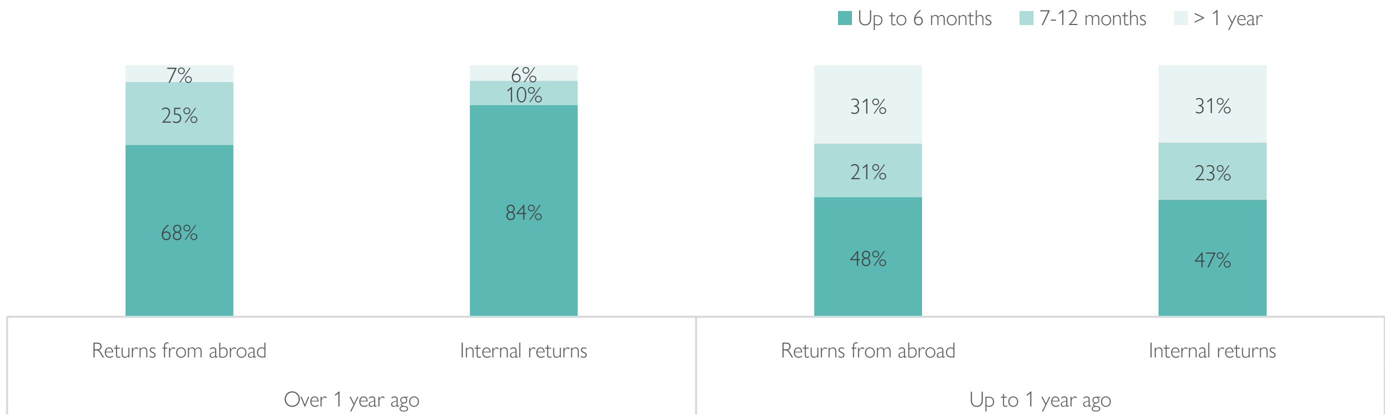


3.1. TIME SPENT IN DISPLACEMENT

Returnees from abroad generally experienced longer periods of displacement compared to those who returned from within Ukraine. The median reported duration of displacement among returnees from abroad was five months (150 days), compared to three months (90 days) among within-country returnees. Over half (58%) of within-country returnees reported that they had been displaced for three months or less, compared to only 39 per cent of those who had returned from abroad. Conversely, 17 per cent of returnees from abroad had been displaced for at least a year – nearly twice the share observed among within-country returnees (9%).

However, these differences were mainly driven by those who had returned over a year prior to data collection. Among individuals who had returned in the 12 months preceding data collection, the duration of displacement was similar across both groups: Roughly half of returnees from abroad (48%) and from displacement within Ukraine (47%) had spent only up to six months in displacement, while 31 per cent of each group reported having been displaced for over a year (Figure 2).

Figure 2 Share of returnees reporting length of displacement, by last location before return & time since return



[6] Ibid.

[7] The number of returns per time period are estimated based on the time since return reported by returnees. Population estimates cannot be compared to caseloads reported during earlier rounds of the GPS, as they do not account for flows abroad, only reflect the returnee population present in Ukraine at the time of data collection for GPS round 20 (February and April 2025), and with comparability of population estimates across rounds limited as a result of changes in baseline population estimates (also refer to the Methodological Note).

3.2. DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE

The demographic characteristics of returnees from abroad suggest that many of these returns involved individuals rather than entire households. Fewer than half (44%) of those who had returned from abroad were living in households consisting exclusively of returnees, compared to nearly three-fourths (74%) of returnees from displacement within Ukraine. Similarly, among prospective returnees[8] surveyed when crossing back into Ukraine between July and November 2024, only half (50%) reported returning with the same group they had left Ukraine with. Meanwhile, 22 per cent had both left and returned alone, and 28 per cent reported having returned either with a different group, or alone despite having left with others.[9]

Moreover, half (50%) of returnees from abroad lived in households with at least one child. This is notably higher than both the share among within-country returnees (41%), and the national average (32%). In addition, one in ten (11%) returnees from abroad were living in single-parent households – nearly three times the rate observed among within-country returnees (4%).[10]

Returnees, and in particular returnees from abroad, also tended to be younger than the general population. Only 21 per cent of returnees from abroad were aged 60 or older, compared to 24 per cent among within-country returnees, and 36 per cent across the population as a whole. Likely linked to this younger age profile, returnees from abroad were also slightly less likely to report household members with disabilities or chronic illnesses: 27 per cent reported a household member with a disability (compared to a national average of 29 per cent), and 38 per cent reported someone with a chronic illness (compared to a national average of 44 per cent) (Table 1).

Table 1 Share of individuals by household or individual demographic characteristics, by returnees' last location before return and overall

	Individuals in households with at least one child	Individuals in single-parent households	Individuals in households with persons with disabilities	Individuals in households with chronically ill members	Elderly individuals (aged 60 or older)	Individuals in households consisting exclusively of returnees
Returns from abroad	50%	11%	27%	38%	21%	44%
Internal returns	41%	4%	24%	42%	24%	74%
Entire population	32%	3%	29%	44%	36%	NA

CHANGE OVER TIME

The age profile of returnees has shifted over time. Among those who had returned from abroad over a year prior to data collection, 21 per cent were aged 60 or older. This figure increased to 26 per cent among more recent returnees (who had returned from abroad within the year preceding data collection).

Household demographics have also changed. Only one-third (35%) of recent returnees from abroad were living in households with children, compared to more than half (56%) of those who had returned over a year prior to data collection. This may be driven by refugee families being less likely to have short-term plans for return the more children they have, even if long-term return intentions, or hopes for return, remain unchanged.[11] Despite these trends, the share of returnees from abroad in single-parent households has remained largely stable, declining only slightly from 11 to nine per cent.

These demographic shifts are also likely to have impacted reported disability levels. Among recent returnees from abroad, 20 per cent identified as a person with a disability – up from eight per cent among those who had returned over a year prior to data collection. Similarly, the share of returnees from abroad in households including at least one person with a disability rose from 22 per cent among earlier returnees to 39 per cent among more recent ones.

These trends closely mirror demographic shifts among refugees from Ukraine in Europe. Between January 2023 and August 2024, the share of children among the refugee population dropped from 37 to 30 per cent, while the proportion of elderly individuals (aged 60 or older) rose from 11 to 19 per cent.[12]

These patterns suggest that households with children were more likely to have moved in the early phases of displacement and return, while more recent movements have increasingly involved older individuals. This may partly be due to the growing integration of working-age refugees and their families in host countries. As of August 2024, refugees participating in the host country labour market – whether employed or seeking work – expressed notably lower hopes of return (52%) compared to those outside the labour force (69%). Conversely, full-time caregivers or retirees were more likely to report plans to return within 12 months (7%) than those who were working or job-seeking (4%).[13]

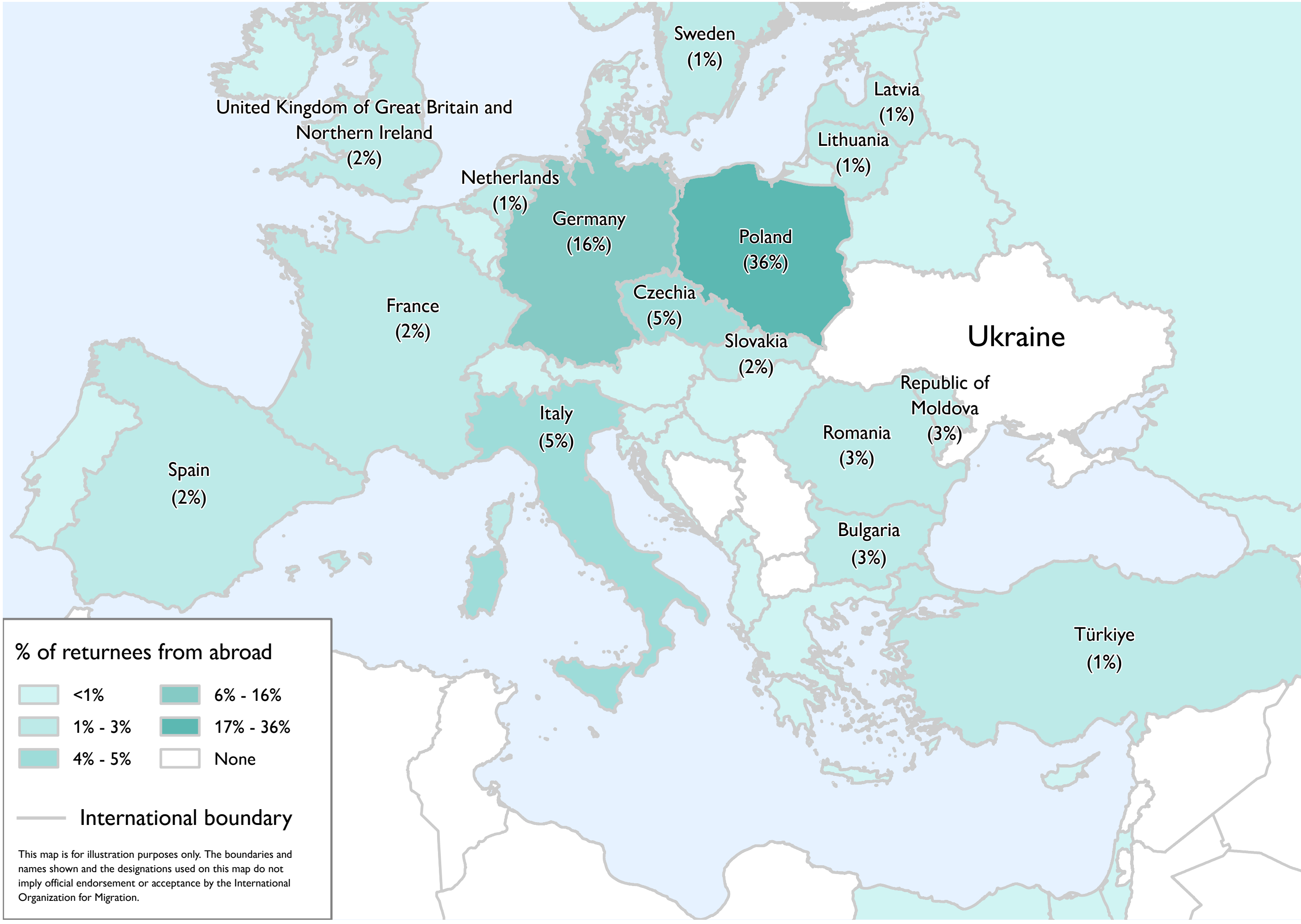
[8] Prospective returnees are defined as Ukrainians who spent more than half of the three months prior to the time of survey abroad, and plan to remain in Ukraine for more than 30 days.
[9] IOM, DTM Regional Analysis: Ukrainian Nationals Crossing Back to Ukraine – July-Nov 2024, June 2024.
[10] Single-parent households were defined as households with only one adult (aged 18 or above) and at least one child below the age of 18.
[11] Migration Policy Institute Europe (MPIE) and IOM, Exploring Refugees' Intentions to Return to Ukraine, Data Insights and Policy Responses, December 2024.
[12] UNHCR, Regional Intentions Survey Results (3rd & 4th Round), Intentions and Perspectives of Refugees from Ukraine, June 2023; UNHCR, Regional Intentions Survey Results (5th & 6th Round), Intentions and Perspectives of Refugees from Ukraine, March 2025.
[13] UNHCR, Lives on Hold: Intentions and Perspectives of Refugees, Refugee Returnees and Internally Displaced People from Ukraine, Regional Intentions Report #6, Summary Findings, November 2024.

3.3. COUNTRIES OF LAST DISPLACEMENT AND AREAS OF RETURN

The vast majority of returnees from abroad – 93 per cent – had returned from within Europe. Over one-third (36%) had returned directly from Poland, while 16 per cent had last stayed in Germany. Smaller shares had returned from the Czech Republic and Italy (five per cent each), as well as from Moldova, Bulgaria, and Romania (three per cent each) (Map 1).

Outside Europe, reported host countries included Canada, Türkiye, Israel, the United States, and Georgia (one per cent each), as well as Azerbaijan, Egypt, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan (less than one per cent each).

Map 1 Share of returnees from abroad reporting last location before return



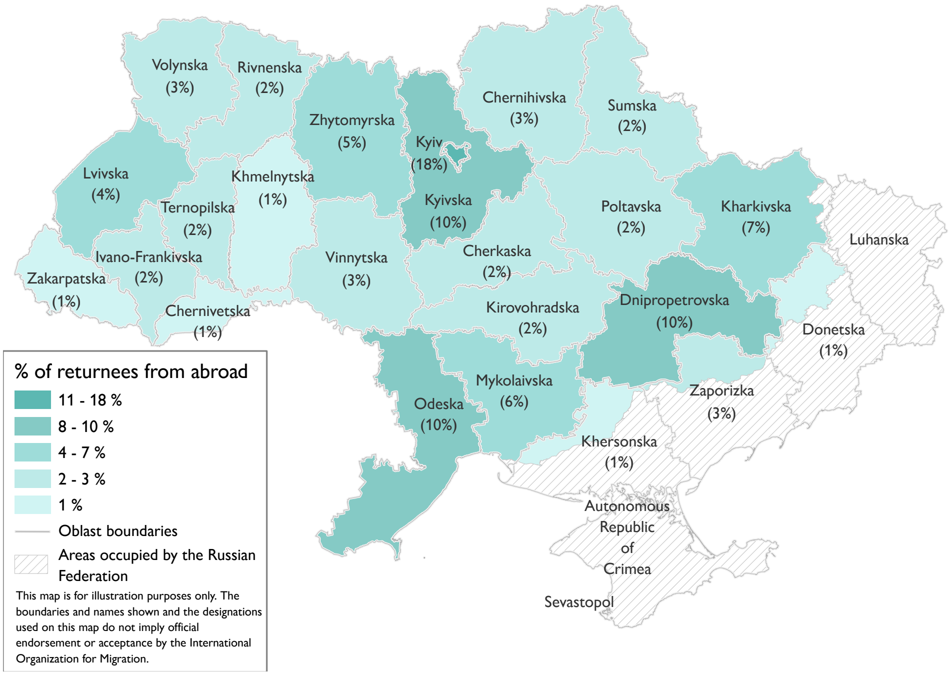
Looking at areas of return, 61 per cent per cent of all returnees from abroad had returned to Kyiv City (18%) and the surrounding Kyivska Oblast (10%), as well as to just four oblasts in the East and South of the country: Dnipropetrovska (10%), Odeska (10%), Kharkivska (7%), and Mykolaivska (6%) Oblasts (Map 2).

These patterns largely reflect the overall distribution of returnees, regardless of whether they returned from abroad or from within the country.[14] However, clear differences emerge between returnees from abroad and within-country returnees when comparing locations of return. As of March 2025, only one-fourth (25%) of returnees from abroad were living in frontline raions, compared to 42 per cent of those who had returned from displacement within Ukraine. Similarly, just 34 per cent of returnees from abroad had returned to frontline oblasts, compared to nearly half (48%) of within-country returnees.[15]

Conversely, **returnees from abroad were notably more likely than within-country returnees to have returned to less war-affected regions**. Sixteen per cent of returnees from abroad had returned to Western oblasts – four times the share of within-country returnees (4%) – and another eight per cent to Central Ukraine (compared to just three per cent of within-country returnees). Still, **a notable share of returnees from abroad had also returned to oblasts close to or on the frontline in the South and East**: 10 per cent each had returned to Odeska and Dnipropetrovska Oblasts, compared to just three and five per cent, respectively, among those who had returned from displacement within Ukraine (Figure 3).

[14] IOM, Ukraine Returns Report, April 2025.
[15] See the Methodology section for a definition of frontline raions and frontline oblasts.

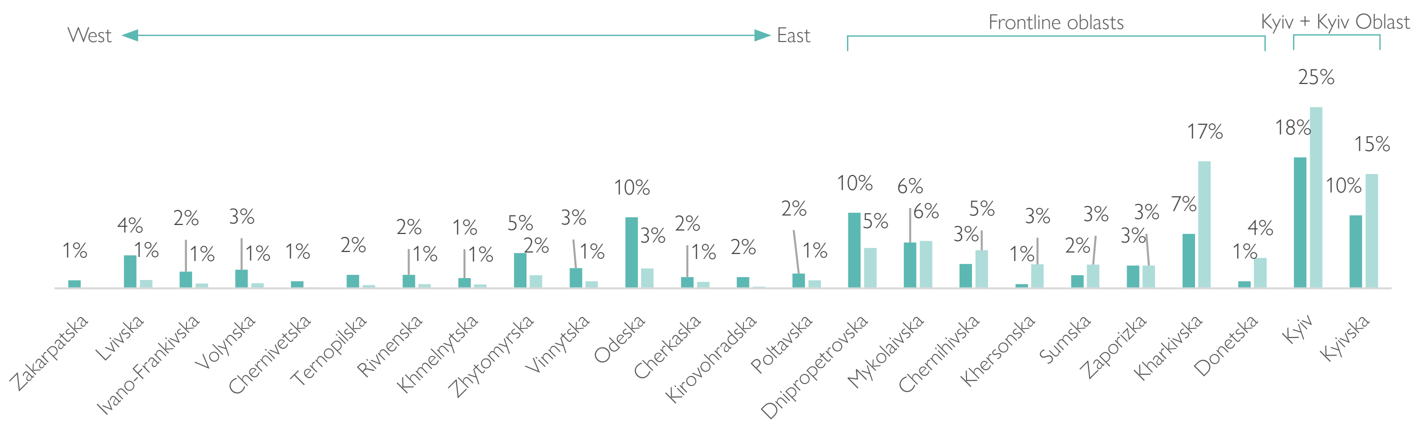
Map 2 Share of returnees from abroad reporting oblast of return



Among refugees from Ukraine who remained in Europe as of August 2024, all of the top oblasts of origin – with the exception of Kyiv City and Odeska Oblast – were located along the frontline, including partially occupied Khersonska, Donetska, and Zaporizka Oblasts. While 13 per cent of refugees were from Kyiv City and seven per cent from Odeska Oblast, the other top oblasts of origin included Kharkivska Oblast (13%), Dnipropetrovska, Khersonska and Donetska Oblasts (nine per cent each), and Zaporizka Oblast (6%).[16]

Similarly, among refugees from Ukraine surveyed in selected Eastern European countries, as of the end of November 2024, 13 per cent reported being from Kharkivska Oblast, 11 per cent from Kyiv City, nine per cent each from Odeska and Zaporizka Oblasts, eight per cent from Dnipropetrovska Oblast, and seven per cent from Khersonska Oblast.[17]

Figure 3 Share of returnees reporting oblast of return, by last location before return



CHANGE OVER TIME

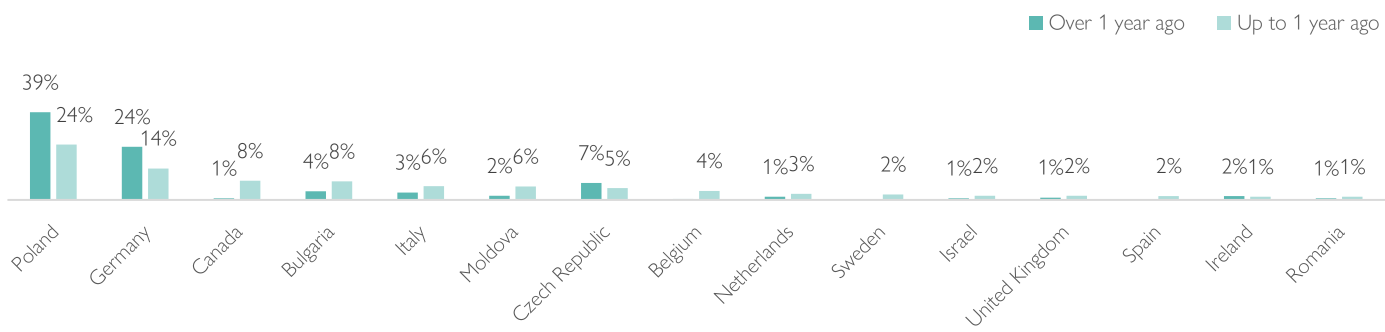
The proportion of returnees coming from the European Union (EU) has declined over time. Among those who had returned from abroad over a year prior to data collection, 93 per cent had returned from EU countries – primarily from Poland (39%) and Germany (24%). In contrast, among more recent returnees, this share has dropped to 77 per cent, with 24 per cent having returned from Poland, and 14 per cent from Germany.

Recent returnees were more likely to have returned from non-EU countries, or a broader mix of EU states. Notably, returns from Canada have increased from one to eight per cent, and from Moldova from two to six per cent. From EU countries, more recent returns were higher from Bulgaria (eight per cent, up from four per cent), Italy (six per cent, up from three per cent), Belgium (four per cent, up from less than one per cent), and the Netherlands (three per cent, up from one per cent) (Figure 4).

As regards future movement, among refugees from Ukraine in Europe, uncertainty about long-term prospects for return was more widespread among refugees not in countries neighbouring Ukraine than among those in neighbouring countries. As of August 2024, 69 per cent of refugees residing in countries neighbouring Ukraine expressed hopes for return, compared to 52 per cent of those in other European countries. Refugees not in neighbouring countries were much more likely to be undecided about their long-term return intentions (30 per cent, compared to 19 per cent in neighbouring countries), while 13 per cent had no intention to return, compared to eight per cent of those in neighbouring countries.[18]

[16] *UNHCR, Regional Intentions Survey Results (5th & 6th Round), Intentions and Perspectives of Refugees from Ukraine, March 2025.*
[17] *IOM, Regional Survey with Ukrainian Refugees, November 2024. When interpreting these findings, it is important to consider that they are based on purposive sampling, and only covered refugees in the following countries: Moldova, Estonia, Poland, Lithuania, Rumania, Slovakia, Latvia, and Hungary. Overall, 31 per cent of respondents were surveyed in Moldova. Results were weighted based on the number of Temporary Protection status holders in each country as of the end of 2024.*
[18] *Ibid.*

Figure 4 Share of returnees from abroad reporting last country before return, by time since return

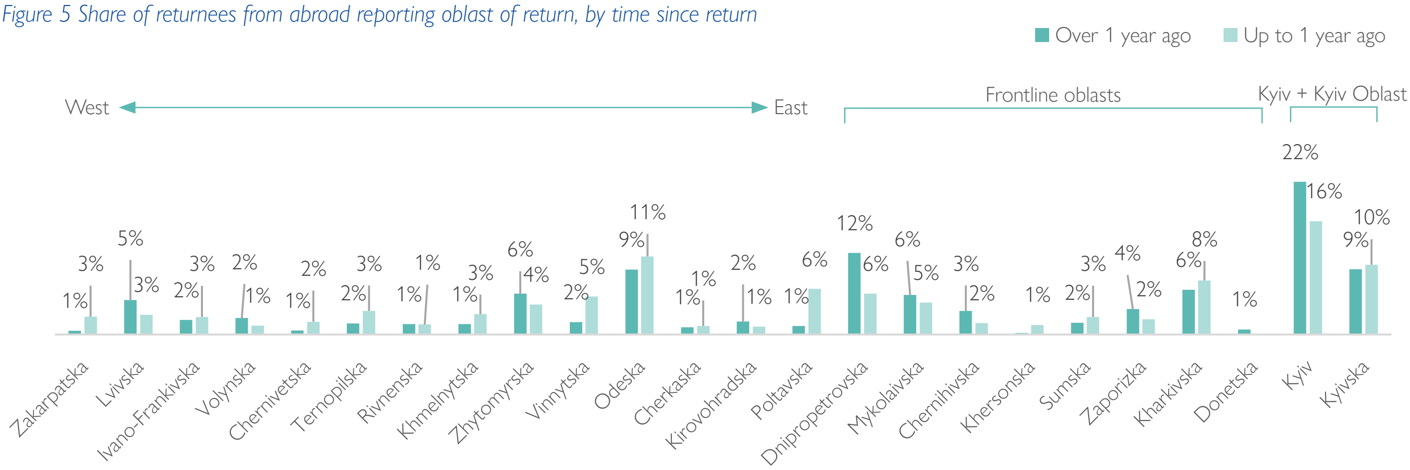


Looking at areas of return, returnees who came back from abroad over a year prior to data collection were slightly more likely to have returned to frontline raions than those who had returned more recently. Specifically, one-fourth (26%) of earlier returnees were living in raions that were considered frontline raions at the time of data collection (March 2025). This compares to just 20 per cent among more recent returnees. Similarly, one-third (33%) of earlier returnees from abroad were living in frontline oblasts, compared to just one-fourth (26%) of those who had come back from abroad more recently. This shift was mainly driven by a decline in returns to Dnipropetrovska Oblast, which fell from 12 per cent among earlier returnees to just six per cent among more recent ones.

By contrast, more recent returnees were increasingly concentrated in Western (19 per cent, up from 15 per cent) and Central (14 per cent, up from six per cent) Ukraine, as well as slightly more in Southern oblasts (17 per cent, compared to 15 per cent) – particularly Odeska (Figure 5).

Among prospective returnees surveyed at the border when crossing back into Ukraine between July and November 2024, 17 per cent reported that they were returning to Odeska Oblast, with another 14 and nine per cent, respectively, returning to Kyiv City and Kyivska Oblast. A further nine per cent were returning to Vinnytska Oblast in the West, while seven per cent reported returning to Dnipropetrovska Oblast.[19]

Figure 5 Share of returnees from abroad reporting oblast of return, by time since return



Reflecting continued trends, as of August 2024, **refugees from frontline oblasts remained less likely than others to express intentions to return in the near future**. While five per cent of refugees in Europe from both Kyiv City and Odeska Oblast expressed an intention to return to Ukraine within 12 months – matching the overall average among refugees in Europe – this figure declined to between two to four per cent among those from the main frontline oblasts, and to just one to two per cent among refugees from occupied parts of Khersonska, Donetksa, and Zaporizka Oblasts.[20]

Similarly, when surveyed at the border between July and November 2024, prospective returnees from most parts of Ukraine planned to return to their oblasts of origin, with the exception of those from Eastern Ukraine. Between 89 and 100 per cent of prospective returnees – regardless of region of origin – intended to return to their oblasts of origin. Only among those from the East of the country, this share fell to 71 per cent. This suggests that, while refugees from frontline areas may still return to the country, they may often be more likely to become internally displaced persons (IDPs) rather than to return home.[21]

General Population Survey (GPS) data confirms that, as of March 2025, an estimated 340,000 individuals who had previously been displaced abroad had returned to Ukraine but were now internally displaced. A majority of these individuals originated from the East (63%) and South (21%) of the country.

Throughout 2024, most commonly, prospective returnees from abroad decided to become internally displaced, rather than to return home, because their locations of origin were unsafe (38%), or their housing or property was damaged or destroyed (33%).[22]

[19] IOM, Crossing Back Survey, November 2024. When interpreting these findings, it is important to consider that they are based on purposive sampling, with 44 per cent of prospective returnees surveyed in Moldova.
[20] UNHCR, Regional Intentions Survey Results (5th & 6th Round), Intentions and Perspectives of Refugees from Ukraine, March 2025.
[21] IOM, DTM Regional Analysis: Ukrainian Nationals Crossing Back to Ukraine – July-Nov 2024, June 2024.
[22] IOM, Crossing Back Survey, November 2024. When interpreting these findings, it is important to consider that they are based on purposive sampling (n = 45). Among those who returned during the first half of 2024, the sample may include some individuals who spent less than half their time in the three months prior to data collection outside Ukraine.

4. DRIVERS OF RETURN

Refugees from Ukraine have primarily returned from abroad out of a desire to be home, and to reunite with family and friends. Seventy per cent of returnees from abroad identified these as their primary reasons for having returned, compared to just one-third (34%) of within-country returnees.

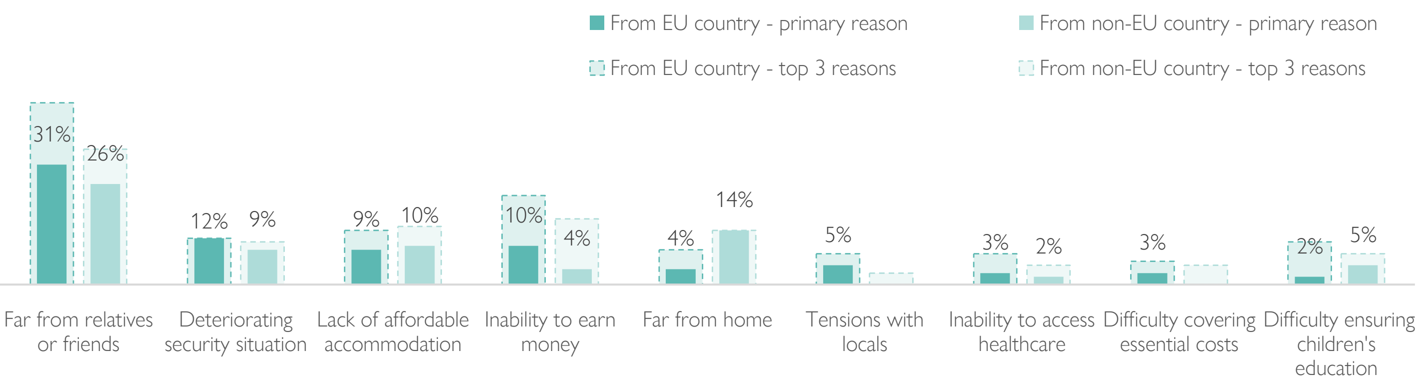
In contrast, returnees from abroad were notably less likely to report as their primary motivations for return perceived improvements in the security situation (eight per cent, compared to 21 per cent among within-country returnees), access to accommodation (five per cent, compared to 18 per cent) and employment (four per cent, compared to 17 per cent).

Figure 6 Share of returnees reporting their primary and top 3 reasons for having returned, by last location before return[23]

Nevertheless, **access to employment and housing remained important secondary motivators** also for returns from abroad. Among returnees from abroad, 28 per cent included employment and 23 per cent included access to housing among their top three reasons for having returned (Figure 6).

Returnees from EU countries were more likely than those from non-EU countries to report economic challenges and social tensions as their main reasons for having left their previous places of residence. Specifically, 10 per cent of returnees from EU countries reported an inability to earn money as their primary reason for having left their previous places of residence, compared to just four per cent of returnees from non-EU countries. In addition, five and three per cent, respectively, of returnees from EU countries reported tensions with locals and difficulties covering essential costs – notably higher than the less than one per cent of returnees from non-EU countries having cited these motivators (Figure 7).[24]

Figure 7 Share of returnees from abroad reporting their primary and top 3 reasons for having returned, by last location before return[25]



Lastly, mirroring trends among returnees overall, **in particular challenges accessing housing may drive returns to frontline areas.** Among those who had returned from abroad to frontline oblasts, eight per cent reported the availability of housing at home as their primary reason for having returned, while 14 per cent reported an inability to access housing in displacement as their primary reason for having left their previous locations – both double the rates found among those who had returned from abroad to non-frontline oblasts (four and seven per cent, respectively). Among returnees from abroad who had returned to frontline raions, these figures were even slightly higher – 10 and 15 per cent, respectively.[26]

8% *of returnees from abroad to frontline oblasts reported the availability of housing at home as their primary reason for having returned, compared to four per cent of those who returned to non-frontline oblasts.*

14% *of returnees from abroad to frontline oblasts reported an inability to access housing in displacement as their primary reason for having returned, compared to seven per cent of those who returned to non-frontline oblasts.*

[23] Percentage figures refer to the primary reasons.
[24] Results for returnees from non-EU countries are representative with a margin of error of 13%.
[25] Ibid. Percentage figures refer to the primary reasons.
[26] IOM, Displacement and Return in Ukraine: An analysis of trends, drivers and movement intentions, June 2025.

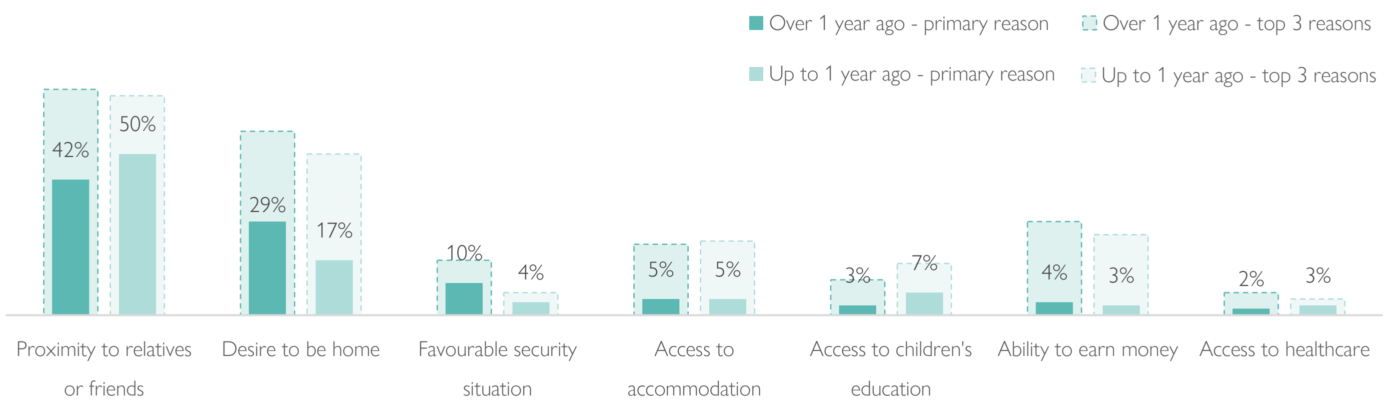
CHANGE OVER TIME

Overall, reasons for having returned from abroad have remained stable over time. The only notable shift was a decline in the proportion of returnees from abroad citing improved security as their primary motivation for return – falling from 10 per cent among those who had returned over a year prior to data collection, to just four per cent among more recent returnees (Figure 8). This reflects continued returns despite the ongoing war and its impact on civilians, with more than 900 violent events registered each week across the country between July 2024 and March 2025.[27]

Meanwhile, a low – but slightly growing share – of returnees from abroad left their previous locations as a result of financial strain. While only two per cent of earlier returnees from abroad had reported difficulties covering essential costs as their primary reason for having left their previous locations, this share rose to five per cent among more recent returnees.[28]

These trends suggest that, **although emotional drivers continue to dominate return decisions, financial strain abroad may have become a slightly more relevant consideration among some refugees**.

Figure 8 Share of returnees from abroad reporting their primary and top 3 reasons for having returned, by time since return[29]



DRIVERS, ENABLERS AND BARRIERS OF RETURN AMONG REFUGEES FROM UKRAINE IN EUROPE AND PROSPECTIVE RETURNEES

Sentiments among returnees from abroad are echoed both by refugees from Ukraine still in Europe and by prospective returnees surveyed while re-entering Ukraine. As of August 2024, among refugees in Europe who expressed an intention to return within 12 months, the top motivators for return were a general desire to return to Ukraine (63%), and to reunite with family (40%).[30]

At the same time, in particular **access to employment was acknowledged as being an additional factor** that would influence refugees' decisions to return if the war ended (43%), as was an end of occupation of territory (30%), access to owned property or other housing (21%), access to basic services (19%), and sufficient resources or support to reintegrate (16%).[31]

Similarly, among prospective returnees surveyed at the border between July and November 2024, the most commonly reported reasons for return were to reunite with family (52%), homesickness (29%), and to assist with family responsibilities (19%). These were followed by returning to study (17%), and having found or be holding a job in Ukraine (10%).[32]

Refugees surveyed in selected Eastern European countries increasingly report near-term return intentions (within six months following data collection) to be driven by a lack of resources or employment in host countries. Among those planning to return when surveyed in 2023, 13 and four per cent, respectively, had reported a lack of resources / money to cover living costs, or an inability to find a job, among their top three reasons for planning to return. These shares increased to 33 and 12 per cent, respectively in 2024. In contrast, the share of those who reported plans to return due to improvements in the security situation in Ukraine or their places of origin declined from 38 to 14 per cent over the same time period. Only the proportion of those planning to return to reunite with family remained constant at 55 to 57 per cent.[33]

The main barrier to return remained safety and security concerns. As of August 2024, 63 per cent of refugees not hoping for return reported those as a reason, significantly more than the second most commonly reported reason – concerns about access to basic services (28%). Conversely, 58 per cent of refugees indicated that they were likely to return should the war end, with another 19 per cent undecided.[34] Similarly, 62 per cent of refugees from Ukraine surveyed in selected Eastern European countries between July and November 2024 reported that they would return to Ukraine if it was safe.[35]

[27] Armed Conflict Location and Event Data (ACLED), ACLED Trendfinder, July 2025 (accessed: 11 July 2025).
[28] Ibid.
[29] Percentage figures refer to the primary reasons.
[30] UNHCR, Regional Intentions Survey Results (5th & 6th Round), Intentions and Perspectives of Refugees from Ukraine, March 2025
[31] Ibid.
[32] IOM, DTM Regional Analysis: Ukrainian Nationals Crossing Back to Ukraine – July-Nov 2024, June 2024.
[33] IOM, Regional Survey with Ukrainian Refugees, November 2024. When interpreting these findings, it is important to consider that they are based on purposive sampling, and only covered refugees in the following countries: Moldova, Estonia, Poland, Lithuania, Rumania, Slovakia, Latvia, and Hungary. Overall, 31 per cent of respondents were surveyed in Moldova. Results were weighted based on the number of Temporary Protection status holders in each country as of the end of 2023 and 2024. Results for 2023 are based on a sample size of 3,221 respondents, and those for 2024 on a sample size of 88 respondents.
[34] Ibid.
[35] IOM, Ukraine Regional Response: Needs, Intentions, and Border Crossings, November 2024.

5. SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONDITIONS UPON RETURN

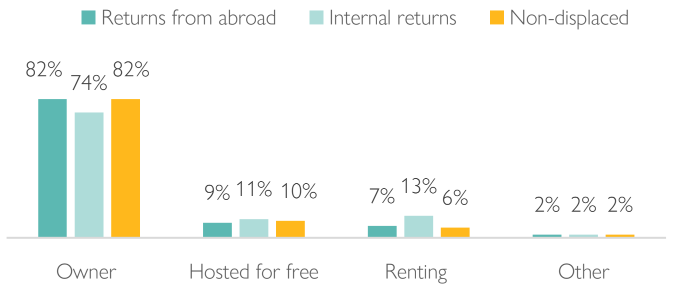
5.1. HOUSING

Returnees from abroad predominantly returned to housing they owned. Compared to within-country returnees, they were notably less likely to be living in housing that was damaged or destroyed by the war, or to have experienced war-related losses or damage to essential household items. However, they were slightly more likely to face these issues than the non-displaced.

Ninety per cent of prospective returnees surveyed at the border between July and November 2024 reported that they were returning to the same accommodation (owned or rented) they had lived in before fleeing the country. An additional, five per cent planned to stay with relatives, while three per cent expected to stay in private accommodation, such as hotels.[36] As of March 2025, 82 per cent of returnees from abroad were living in owned housing – the same proportion as the non-displaced (82%), and notably above the 74 per cent of within-country returnees reporting the same (Figure 9).

Despite this higher rate of home ownership, as of December 2024, returnees from abroad were less likely than within-country

Figure 9 Share of individuals reporting their occupancy status, by last location before return / displacement status

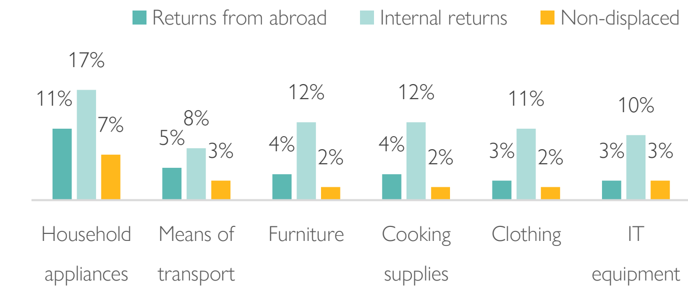


returnees to report owning a primary residence that had been damaged or destroyed by the war (15 per cent, compared to 25 per cent). They were, however, more likely than the non-displaced (7%) to report so.[37]

In total, and irrespective of home ownership, as of October 2024, six per cent of returnees from abroad were living in damaged or unfinished housing. This compares to 13 per cent among within-country returnees, and four per cent among the non-displaced.[38]

In addition to structural damage, returnees from abroad were also less likely than within-country returnees to report that their households had lost, sold, or experienced damage to essential household items due to the war. Still, they were somewhat more likely than the non-displaced to report such losses. Damage, sale or loss of household appliances was the most commonly reported issue: 11 per cent of returnees from abroad reported their households to have experienced such damage or loss, compared to 17 per cent of within-country returnees, and seven per cent of the non-displaced (Figure 10).

Figure 10 Share of individuals reporting their households to have lost, sold, or suffered damage to essential household items as a result of the full-scale invasion, by last location before return / displacement status

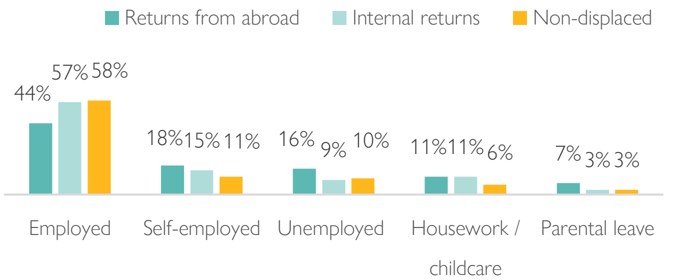


5.2. EMPLOYMENT

As of August 2024, returnees from abroad had lower employment rates than both within-country returnees and the non-displaced. This was in part due to greater childcare responsibilities and fewer job opportunities in the areas to which they had returned. Only 61 per cent of working-age returnees from abroad were employed or self-employed. This compares to 72 per cent of within-country returnees, and 68 per cent of the non-displaced. Unemployment was notably higher among returnees from abroad, with 16 per cent of working-age individuals unemployed – compared to nine per cent of within-country returnees and 10 per cent of the non-displaced.

In addition, a substantial share of returnees from abroad – 18 per cent – were primarily engaged in housework, childcare, or on parental leave – above the 14 per cent of within-country returnees and the nine per cent of the non-displaced reporting the same (Figure 11).

Figure 11 Share of working-age (18-60) individuals reporting employment status (top 5), by last location before return / displacement status[39]



Few prospective returnees expected to be able to resume their previous jobs. When surveyed while crossing the border back into Ukraine, only one in three (34%) reported plans to resume previous jobs. Meanwhile, 20 per cent expected to care for family, and 15 per cent were unemployed and planned to look for work.[40]

[36] IOM, Crossing Back Survey, November 2024. When interpreting these findings, it is important to consider that they are based on purposive sampling, with 44 per cent of prospective returnees surveyed in Moldova.
[37] IOM, General Population Survey (GPS) Round 19, December 2024.
[38] IOM, GPS Round 18, October 2024.
[39] IOM, GPS Round 17, August 2024.
[40] IOM, DTM Regional Analysis: Ukrainian Nationals Crossing Back to Ukraine – July-Nov 2024, June 2024.

Although similar shares of returnees from abroad (16%) and within-country returnees (15%) were actively seeking work – with the non-displaced slightly lower at 13 per cent – **returnees from abroad were more likely to identify a lack of schedule flexibility, and limited job opportunities in their areas of return, as barriers.** Among those actively looking for work, 20 per cent of returnees from abroad cited a lack of schedule flexibility as one of the top three challenges they faced, compared to just eight per cent of within-country returnees, and nine per cent of the non-displaced. In addition, 35 per cent of returnees from abroad reported a lack of job opportunities in their areas of return, higher than the 26 per cent of within-country returnees, and the 31 per cent of the non-displaced who reported the same.

Among those not actively seeking work, returnees from abroad were also more likely to cite domestic responsibilities and limited flexibility as key reasons. Seventeen per cent reported housework or childcare as one of their top three reasons for not looking for a job, compared to 11 per cent of within-country returnees, and 10 per cent of the non-displaced. In addition, four per cent of returnees from abroad reported a lack of schedule flexibility, compared to just one per cent each of the other two groups.[41]

These findings – combined with the high proportion of returnees from abroad living in single-parent households – underscore the need for flexible and accessible employment opportunities for individuals with substantial domestic responsibilities and limited schedule flexibility.

5.3. ACCESS TO GOODS AND SERVICES

Overall, access to goods and services among returnees from abroad was comparable to that of the non-displaced. However, returnees from abroad were more likely to report gaps in access to income-earning opportunities, mental health services, adequate education, and to a lesser extent, adequate accommodation. When looking at a defined list of goods and services, 28 per cent of returnees from abroad and 27 per cent of the non-displaced reported sufficient access to all assessed items. This was higher than the 23 per cent reported by within-country returnees.

Returnees from abroad most commonly reported insufficient access to income-earning opportunities (33%), medicines (25%), building or reconstruction materials (24%), mental health services, health services, and power banks or generators (23% each), adequate education (22%), and support for people with disabilities (20%).

Compared to the non-displaced, returnees from abroad were more likely to report insufficient access to income-earning opportunities (33 per cent, compared to 28 per cent), mental health services (23 per cent, compared to 15 per cent), and adequate education (22 per cent, compared to 17 per cent). Their access levels were largely comparable to those of within-

Table 2 Share of individuals reporting lack of access to goods and services to meet basic needs, by last location before return / displacement status

Good / service	Returns from abroad			Internal returns			Non-displaced
	All	Returned over 1 year ago	Returned up to 1 year ago	All	Returned over 1 year ago	Returned up to 1 year ago	
Income-earning opportunities	33%	28%	44%	34%	32%	41%	18%
Medicines	25%	19%	38%	28%	25%	39%	30%
Building / reconstruction materials	24%	20%	36%	26%	25%	31%	31%
Mental health services	23%	25%	19%	19%	18%	20%	15%
Health services	23%	19%	33%	27%	24%	35%	27%
Power banks / generators	23%	22%	24%	30%	28%	37%	22%
Access to adequate education	22%	21%	22%	23%	22%	28%	17%
Support for people with disabilities	20%	17%	28%	18%	17%	21%	21%
Food	15%	13%	21%	21%	19%	29%	18%
Legal consulting services	14%	12%	19%	13%	13%	15%	13%
Hygiene items	12%	8%	22%	13%	11%	21%	12%
Adequate accommodation	11%	10%	15%	11%	10%	16%	8%
Clothing and Non-Food Items (NFIs)	10&	8%	13%	11%	10%	17%	12%
Transportation / evacuation support	8%	4%	19%	7%	6%	9%	6%
Access to money	4%	4%	4%	8%	8%	10%	8%
None of the above	**28%**	**31%**	**22%**	**23%**	**25%**	**18%**	**27%**

[41] *Ibid.*

country returnees, though the share of those reporting insufficient access to mental health services was slightly higher among returnees from abroad (23 per cent, compared to 19 per cent among within-country returnees).

While only 11 per cent of both returnees from abroad and within-country returnees reported insufficient access to adequate accommodation, this share was slightly above the eight per cent of the non-displaced having reported the same. In turn, returnees from abroad (24%) and within-country returnees (26%) were less likely than the non-displaced (31%) to report insufficient access to building or construction materials, suggesting different types of housing needs between returnees and the non-displaced (Table 2).

Although, overall, returnees from abroad reported access levels similar to those of the non-displaced, access gaps varied significantly depending on how long ago returnees had returned. Both returnees from abroad and within-country returnees faced notably greater access gaps if they had returned more recently. Among returnees from abroad, only 22 per cent of those who had returned up to a year prior to data collection reported sufficient access to all assessed goods and services. In fact, they reported greater access gaps than both the non-displaced and earlier returnees from abroad with respect to almost all assessed goods and services. Most notably, nearly half (44%) of recent returnees from abroad reported insufficient access to income-earning opportunities, 38 per cent to medicines, 36 per cent to building or reconstruction materials, and 33 per cent to health services.

Recent returnees from abroad were also significantly more likely to report lacking access to transportation or evacuation support. Nineteen per cent identified this gap, compared to just nine per cent of recent within-country returnees, and six per cent of the non-displaced (Table 2).

Thus, while returnees from abroad who had been back for longer periods tended to report levels of access on par with the non-displaced, those who had returned more recently faced more pronounced barriers to re-establishing access to essential goods and services – particularly in areas related to employment, healthcare, housing, and mobility.

5.4. ABILITY TO MEET NEEDS

Returnees from abroad who had returned over a year prior to data collection reported levels of reliance on livelihoods-based coping strategies similar to the non-displaced. In contrast, more recent returnees – both from abroad and from within the country – were notably more likely to be in households that had resorted to coping strategies, including severe, crisis- or emergency-level strategies, in order to meet basic needs. Among those who had returned from abroad over a year prior to data collection, 74 per cent reported their households to have relied on livelihoods-based coping strategies, a figure close to the 76 per cent reported by early within-country returnees, and the 73 per cent reported by the non-displaced. However, this share was markedly higher among more recent returnees: 83 per cent of recent returnees from abroad, and 87 per cent of recent within-country returnees, reported that their households had resorted to such coping strategies to meet their basic needs.

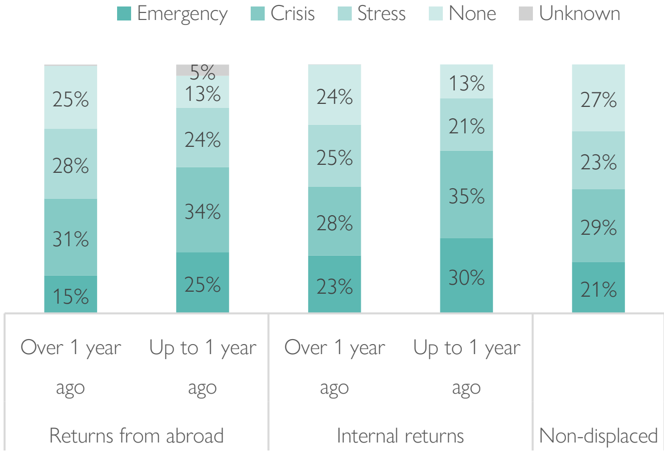
Reliance on more severe strategies was also notably more common among recent returnees: 59 per cent of recent returnees from abroad reported household reliance on crisis- or emergency-level strategies, compared to just 46 per cent among those who had returned from abroad earlier. Similarly, 65 per cent of recent within-country returnees reported such reliance, compared to 51 per cent of earlier within-country returnees, and 50 per cent of the non-displaced (Figure 12).

Crisis- and emergency-level strategies recent returnees from abroad were more likely than the non-displaced to have relied on included the sale of housing, land, or productive assets, and the reduction of essential expenditures:

- *Sale of house or land*: 11 per cent of recent returnees from abroad reported their households to have adopted this coping strategy in the 30 days prior to data collection in order to meet basic needs, or to already have exhausted it, compared to four per cent of the non-displaced (and nine per cent of recent within-country returnees);
- *Sale of productive assets*: 14 per cent of recent returnees from abroad reported their households to have relied on this coping strategy, compared to eight per cent of the non-displaced (and 16 per cent of recent within-country returnees);
- *Reduction of essential healthcare expenditures*: 53 per cent of recent returnees from abroad reported their households to have relied on this coping strategy, compared to 38 per cent of the non-displaced (and 55 per cent of recent within-country returnees);
- *Reduction of essential education expenditures:* 19 per cent of recent returnees from abroad reported their households to have relied on this coping strategy, compared to nine per cent of the non-displaced (and 16 per cent of recent within-country returnees).

Returnees from abroad – irrespective of time of return – were less likely than within-country returnees to have relied on humanitarian assistance as a coping strategy. Only 12 per cent of returnees from

Figure 12 Share of individuals reporting themselves or their household members as having had to adopt or already having exhausted stress-, crisis- or emergency-level livelihoods-based coping strategies to be able to meet basic needs in the 30 days prior to data collection, by last location before return / displacement status



abroad reported having used humanitarian assistance as a coping strategy in the 30 days prior to data collection, while eight per cent said that they had already exhausted this option. This contrasts with 23 per cent and nine per cent, respectively, among within-country returnees.

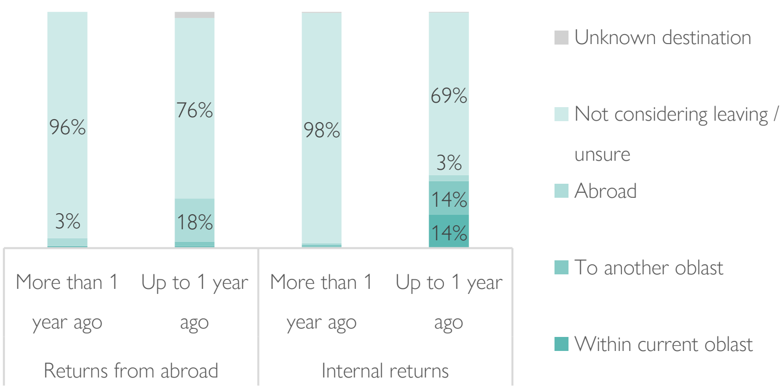
Altogether, these findings reinforce that returnees' reintegration is a long-term process. Whether returnees have returned from abroad, or from within the country, they may often require support upon return – especially in the early stages of reintegration – re-establishing access to essential goods and services, and sustainable livelihoods. Without this, they may be more likely to resort to harmful coping mechanisms that undermine long-term recovery, and the achievement of durable solutions. Prospective returnees at the border most commonly reported needing financial support (21%) upon return, followed by access to health services (19%), and support ensuring their personal safety (18%).[42] Refugees surveyed in selected Eastern European countries throughout 2024, who planned to return to Ukraine within six months from data collection, most commonly expected needing cash support (29%), transportation (12%), and job placement support (7%) upon return, followed by housing and medicines (six per cent each). Nearly half (48%) reported not expecting to need any type of support.[43]

5.5. SUSTAINABILITY OF RETURNS

In the absence of sufficient support or meaningful progress toward reintegration, returns may risk being unsustainable. Returns tend to become more sustainable, the longer someone has been back.

Overall, one in ten (10%) returnees from abroad were considering leaving their current locations again, either in the short or long term. This compares to eight per cent of within-country returnees, and just three per cent of the non-displaced. However – both among returnees from abroad and among within-country returnees – intentions to move varied significantly based on the length of time since return. Among those who had returned within the year prior to data collection, nearly one-fourth (24%) of returnees from abroad were considering leaving again. This share was even higher among within-country returnees, with 31 per cent reporting the same.

Figure 13 Share of returnees considering leaving their current locations in the short or long term, and reported destinations, by last location before return & time since return



When asked about potential destinations, returnees from abroad most commonly cited an intention to leave the country again (18%). Only a small share was thinking of moving within Ukraine, whether to another oblast (2%), or within their current oblast (1%). In contrast, within-country returnees were more likely to consider moving within Ukraine: 14 per cent each reported that they were thinking about moving to another oblast, or within their current oblast (Figure 13).

Overall, intentions to leave among returnees from abroad did not vary substantially depending on whether they had returned to frontline or non-frontline areas. Among those who had returned to non-frontline raions, 10 per cent were considering leaving, three per cent were unsure about their current intentions, and 87 per cent planned to stay. Among those who had returned to frontline raions, levels of uncertainty were slightly higher, with seven per cent being unsure about their intentions, eight per cent planning to leave, and the remaining 85 per cent planning to stay.

A BRIEF NOTE ON METHODOLOGY

The data presented in this report was commissioned by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and collected by Multicultural Insights as part of Round 20 of the General Population Survey (GPS). Data was collected by Multicultural Insights through screener phone-based interviews with 40,004 randomly selected respondents and follow-up interviews with 1,436 IDPs, 1,137 returnees, and 1,804 non-displaced residents, using the computer-assisted telephone interview (CATI) method, and a random digit dial (RDD) approach, with an overall sample error of 0.49% [CL95%]. Round 20 of data collection was completed between 5 February and 4 April 2025. Unless indicated otherwise, findings presented in this brief are representative, at a minimum, at a 90% confidence level and with a 10% margin of error.

In this report, Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) are defined as individuals who have been forced to flee or to leave their homes or who are staying outside their habitual residence in Ukraine due to the full-scale invasion in February 2022, regardless of whether they hold registered IDP status. The terms "return" and "returnee" are used without prejudice to status and refer to all people who have returned to their habitual residence after a period of displacement of minimum two weeks since February 2022, whether from abroad or from internal displacement within Ukraine. This definition excludes individuals who have come back to Ukraine from abroad but who have not returned to their places of habitual residence in the country.

For the purpose of this analysis, frontline areas were determined based on the Government of Ukraine's Resolution on "Regulations on the approval of the list of territories on which the Russian Federation is (was) or temporarily occupied", updated as of February 2025 (Order No. 376). Frontline raions are considered raions that are either bordering, adjacent to, or in proximity of active conflict zones with ongoing fighting, hostilities, or a high likelihood of such activities. Frontline oblasts are oblasts containing such raions.

The survey included all oblasts in Ukraine, excluding the Autonomous Republic of Crimea (ARC) and the areas of Donetska, Luhanska, Khersonska, and Zaporizka Oblasts under the temporary military control of the Russian Federation where phone coverage by Ukrainian operators is not available. All interviews were anonymous, and respondents were asked for consent before starting the interview.

Limitations: Those currently residing outside the territory of Ukraine were not interviewed, following active exclusion. Population estimates assume that minors (those under 18 years old) are accompanied by their adult parents or guardians, as well as a homogeneous household size across population groups. The sample frame is limited to adults that use mobile phones, in areas where phone networks were fully functional for the entire period of the survey. People residing in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea (ARC) or the occupied areas of Donetska, Zaporizka, Luhanska, and Khersonska Oblasts were not included in the survey.

[42] IOM, *DTM Regional Analysis: Ukrainian Nationals Crossing Back to Ukraine – July-Nov 2024*, June 2024.

[43] IOM, Regional Survey with Ukrainian Refugees, November 2024. When interpreting these findings, it is important to consider that they are based on purposive sampling, and only covered refugees in the following countries: Moldova, Estonia, Poland, Lithuania, Rumania, Slovakia, Latvia, and Hungary. Overall, 31 per cent of respondents were surveyed in Moldova. Results were weighted based on the number of Temporary Protection status holders in each country as of the end of 2024.

In partnership with Canada

Co-funded by the European Union

From the People of Japan

MINISTÈRE DE L'EUROPE ET DES AFFAIRES ÉTRANGÈRES
Liberté Égalité Fraternité

Belgium partner in development

Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Sweden Sverige