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# DISPLACEMENT, REINTEGRATION, AND RECONCILIATION IN UKRAINE

## PART I: AN INTRODUCTION

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# TCUP REPORT

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TCUP Report: Displacement, Reintegration and Reconciliation in Ukraine: Part I: An Introduction

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# Key Terms

## INTERNALLY DISPLACED PERSON (IDP)

вимушено переміщена особа [ВПО]

IDPs have not crossed international borders but have fled within their home countries for safety, because of armed conflict, human rights violations, or natural disasters. Because they remain within the borders of the country of their citizenship, they are legally under the protection of their government. According to the [UN High Commission on Refugees](#), they retain all of their rights and protections under international human rights law. However, anthropologist Elizabeth Dunn argues that IDPs—who make up 64% of the world’s displaced population—experience a “protection gap” because of which they are protected neither by international law, nor are they fully protected as citizens in their home countries (Dunn 2017:3).

## REFUGEE

біженець

A refugee, in contrast, has fled war, violence, and persecution and has crossed an international border in order to find safety in another country. Specific [legal provisions](#) are designed to protect refugees who are unable or unwilling to return to their home country for fear of violence and persecution.

As we will see in the case of Ukraine, both terms are relevant. TCUP’s research will focus on internally displaced populations, but the term “refugee” can be applied to Ukrainians who fled to Russia when violence began.

# Displacement, Reintegration and Reconciliation in Ukraine

Since Russia's illegal annexation of the Crimean peninsula in March 2014, Ukraine has been forced to attend to the major issue of internal displacement. With the declaration of separatist republics and the ensuing Russian-backed conflict in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions of eastern Ukraine, the forced displacement of over a million Ukrainians has become one of the most complex issues facing Ukraine today.

**As both a domestic policy issue as well as a foreign policy one, the long-term implications of displacement color Ukraine's internal development as much as its relations with the European Union, the United States, and, of course, Russia. This report addresses the background of the problem of displacement, presenting key terms and concepts for understanding the context in Ukraine. Further reports in this series by other researchers will elaborate on some of the issues developed in this report.**

## The Scale of the Problem

On May 5, 2021, the Ministry of Social Policy of Ukraine released a [report](#) counting 1,466,077 [registered displaced people](#) from the temporarily occupied territories of Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts and the Autonomous Republic of Crimea. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, registered IDPs have access to various kinds of support depending on their

needs, including "non-food items," which can be items like clothing, blankets, or coal; in some cases, the UNHCR provides temporary emergency shelter and financial assistance, particularly along the contact line. The UNHCR also works with IDPs to do [advocacy work](#) to improve domestic policy regarding displaced populations.

Registration itself is a complicated issue. In 2015, the [Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre](#) wrote that, even though the Ukrainian Cabinet of Ministers established a unified registration system in October 2014, not all IDPs can and do register. Among the reasons they reported were the fact that some people were able to support themselves on their own savings and did not need government or international aid; men over 18 did not register in order to avoid conscription; people who lack government identification documents or residency papers were not allowed to register; and a shifting front line meant that not all people who left the Donbas were recognized as being from a non-government-controlled area.

Registered IDPs are not distributed evenly around

Ukraine. As of May 2021, the largest proportion of displaced people remains in Ukraine-controlled parts of the two regions where the conflict is ongoing: Donetsk oblast' (510,764 registered people) and Luhans'k oblast' (280,437 registered people). The city of Kyiv has the next highest number of registered IDPs (159,533; the rest of Kyiv oblast' has 62,901 registered); Kharkivs'ka (134,100), Dnipropetrovs'ka (71,171), Zaporiz'ka (56,017), and Odes'ka (37,487) regions have the next highest numbers of registered IDPs. Based on this data, which is also broken down by raion (sub-regional levels), we can see that the majority of registered IDPs have gravitated to major cities in the regions in closest proximity to the conflict zones. While many IDPs have moved several times, rather than staying in the place they first went following their displacement from Donetsk'k and Luhans'k regions, it seems that these regions have been the most common destinations for IDPs since the conflict began; [UNHCR data](#) shows these same regions as the recipients

of the largest numbers of IDPs as of April 2015.

## Difference and Distance: IDPs and belonging in Ukraine

In research on migration, one recurring issue of concern is that of difference and, relatedly, assimilation. This is linked to what Ayşe Çağlar and Nina Glick-Schiller refer to as “methodological nationalism” (2018:3), a framework in which researchers automatically think about societies as limited to national boundaries. This leads to a tendency to assume that all the people living within a national territory (a state) “share a common history and set of values, norms, social customs, and institutions” (2018:3). In this framework, migrants are inherently seen as others and therefore as holding a different set of values, norms, and customs. National origin becomes the primary defining factor of a migrant. Further, migrants that come from the same place start to be perceived as a homogenous group. Researchers, as well as people in the receiving society, see migrants from one place as all having the same national or ethno-religious background. People often also assume that migrants already have and want to keep their own established social networks rather than integrating into their new society.

This framework is useful for thinking about the experiences of displaced people in Ukraine. Çağlar and Glick-Schiller advocate for focusing on the migrant experience, rather than assuming a binary distinction between migrant and non-migrant (2018:5). In Ukraine, even though internally displaced populations may be known to have the same ethnic and religious background as other Ukrainians, they may still be treated as others in different cities and regions of Ukraine. Their sense of belonging to new places may be influenced by how people living in the receiving cities see them, based on linguistic and religious differences, as well as perceived differences in political opinions and affiliations. Importantly, researchers have documented different attitudes toward people displaced from Crimea versus those displaced from Donbas. Tetiana Bulakh notes that people who left Crimea were perceived as “ideological refugees” and were assumed to be resisting Russian occupation (2017:54). This perception was influenced by a number of factors, including previous forced deportations of Crimean Tatars, general support among Crimean Tatars for Crimea to remain part of Ukraine, and a lack of violent separatism from the territory. On the other



Information about registered IDPs as of May 5, 2021. Data from the Ministry of Social Policy of Ukraine.

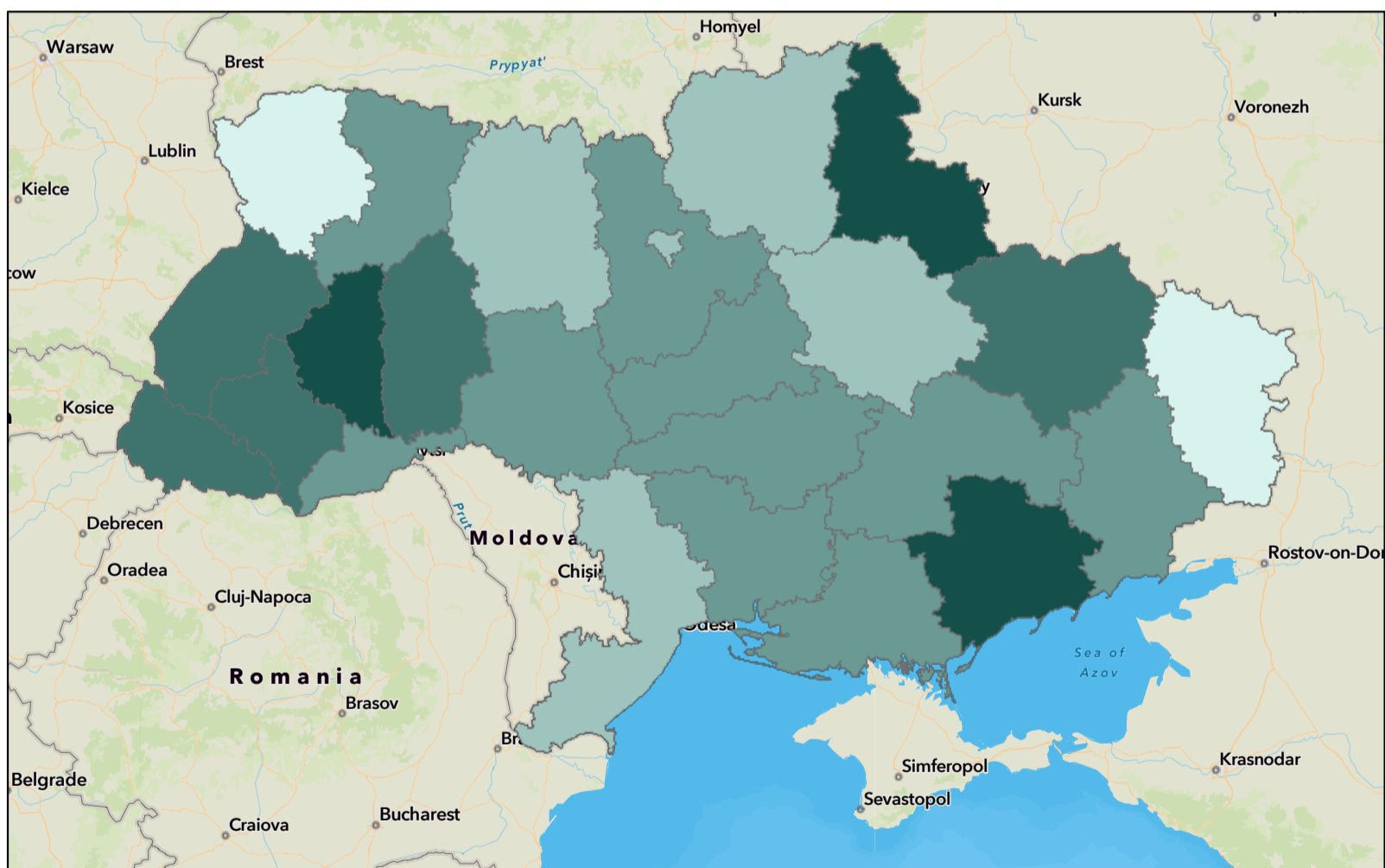
hand, people coming from the Donbas were viewed with more suspicion; men especially were seen as potential separatists or as not willing or able to defend Ukraine (see also Sereda 2020).

Viktoriia Sereda’s study of “social distance” between displaced populations and non-displaced populations in Ukraine confirmed the perception of displaced Crimeans as different from those from the Donbas, although she notes that respondents to her survey identified both groups as “belonging to Ukrainian society” (2020:11).<sup>1</sup>

1 Sereda’s research explores the hierarchies created around the sense of belonging that different people have. She measures “social distance” to indicate hierarchies of belonging. She uses a Bogardus scale to measure the level of acceptance of a respondent toward various out-groups. They were asked if they would accept a member of the

Her model shows no clear regional distinction defining people’s perceptions of displaced populations. L’viv, Ternopil, Ivano-Frankivs’k, and Zakarpattya—the regions farther from the conflict zone and often considered most culturally distinctive from eastern Ukraine—did exhibit the greatest distance toward IDPs, but so did Sums’ka and Zaporiz’ka regions, both of which border on the currently occupied territories. The least amount of distancing appeared in Volyns’ka oblast, in far western Ukraine.

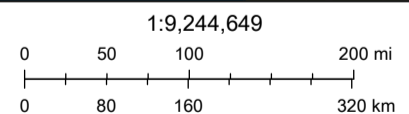
listed groups as one of the following: “a family member, a close friend, a neighbor, a work colleague, an inhabitant of Ukraine, a tourist—or if they would deny such a person entry to the country” (2020:6). Groups listed in the survey included Ukrainian-speaking Ukrainians, Russian-speaking Ukrainians, IDPs from Crimea, IDPs from Donbas, Crimean Tatars, Russians, Jews, Roma, Africans, Arabs, and other ethnic minorities; and finally, representatives of the LGBT community (2017 survey only).



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Attitude to IDPs from Donbas 2017

	2.18 - 2.50		2.51 - 3.00		3.01 - 3.50		3.51 - 4.00		4.01 - 4.23		4.24 - 4.50
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HURI, 2017 The President and Fellows of Harvard College. University of St.

Map Source: Ukrainian Research Institute at Harvard University. © 2017 The President and Fellows of Harvard College

Regional variations in social distance toward IDPs from Donbas. High mean values denote an attitude perceiving increased social distance. Map prepared in cooperation with Kostyantyn Bondarenko and the Ukrainian Research Institute, Harvard University.

The number of people relocated to each region may be a factor influencing the perception of displaced people; in May 2021, Volyns'ka oblast had 3,073 registered IDPs. On the other hand, the number of IDPs registered in a place cannot fully explain perceptions: Ternopil's'ka (2,132), Ivano-Frankivs'ka (3,806), and Zakarpats'ka (3,336) had some of the lowest numbers of registered IDPs, while Zaporiz'ka (56,017) and Sums'ka (11,193) had much higher numbers of people registered.

Further, Sereda's research shows that IDPs from the Donbas did not have a strong regional or ethno-linguistic identity. Rather, their primary identities were their urban affiliations and professional identities (2020:13). Importantly, the Ukrainian government did not establish displacement camps for people coming from the conflict zone. Instead, they encouraged people to integrate into their new cities.<sup>2</sup> This reflects Çaglar and Glick-Schiller's argument that groups of displaced people may not already have social networks that they left behind and would prefer to integrate into their new homes. Of

<sup>2</sup> This is according to Pablo Mateu, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, in a 2017 interview with Bohdan Nahaylo on *Ukraine Calling*. Mateu argued that the Ukrainian federal government did make several positive steps in dealing with the large number of displaced people coming from Donbas, including integration-focused policies, establishing the Ministry for Temporarily Occupied Territories and Internally Displaced People in 2016 (now called the [Ministry for Reintegration of the Temporarily Occupied Territories](#)).

course, the ease of this assimilation is dependent on the receiving city's attitudes to and support for displaced people. Many displaced people in Sereda's research faced discrimination in finding housing and work, as well as in their interactions with state institutions (2020:17). This discrimination was an important reason that many elected not to register as IDPs, preferring instead to work with civil society organizations or simply avoiding any assistance programs at all.

## Citizenship and "Passportization"

While the issue of internal displacement is the main focus of TCUP's research, it is essential to understand how Russian policy has treated displaced people, including both those who fled violence in Donbas for Russia, and those who currently live in the non-government-controlled areas (NGCAs) and who may be seeking work or services such as health care. The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the challenges for people living in NGCAs who may wish to go to Ukraine for health care, to access pensions, or for many other reasons, as the borders between Ukraine and the NGCAs were [closed in March 2020](#) and only a few checkpoints are currently open. In contrast, the border between the NGCAs and Russia never closed. Several policies changing the legal



The Shchastia checkpoint in Luhans'k oblast. Getty Images.

status of Ukrainian citizens living in NGCAs have created a new challenge for future reintegration.

Part of the population living in NGCAs has been able to access Russian passports and citizenship, for instance, through the Compatriots program, which was established in 2006 as one way to address the demographic crisis in Russia. It “recognizes ethnic Russians, Russian-speakers, and those who are ‘spiritually’ and ‘culturally’ linked to the Russian Federation as compatriots” (Woodard 2019:2). Participants in this program are resettled to so-called strategic areas of the Russian Federation based on the demand for their professional skills. Anthropologist Lauren Woodard argues that the definition of “compatriot” has evolved since the program was created, allowing the Putin regime to mobilize the idea when politically expedient. Deeming the movement of a million Ukrainians into southwest Russia a “refugee crisis” allowed Vladimir Putin’s administration to mobilize quickly. As Woodard points out, “Russian officials didn’t just offer refugee status, permanent residency, or citizenship to anyone, though. They offered permanent residency and citizenship only to those willing to move to strategic areas of the Russian Federation” (2019:114-115), such as the Far East.

Now, however, access to Russian citizenship has been expanded beyond the Compatriots program. One report in this series will address “passportization” as a policy program developed by the Putin administration to integrate former and current residents of the Donbas. In 2019, a mass naturalization campaign resulted in nearly 200,000 people from both the Luhans’k and Donets’k People’s Republics and the Ukrainian-government-controlled parts of those regions receiving Russian citizenship (Burkhardt 2020:2-3). A second decree, “aimed at people from the Donbas who have migrated to Russia before and have expressed an interest in settling there permanently by formalizing their residence status, but who previously had no prospect of speedy naturalization due to bureaucratic hurdles” (Burkhardt 2020:3), has already allowed 180,000 more people to access Russian citizenship (June 2020 data). These Russian passport-holders were not required to give up their Ukrainian citizenship; they may also hold passports from the Luhans’k and Donets’k People’s Republics, which are not recognized outside of those territories.

This policy allows refugees from Donbas who are currently living in Russia to become citizens more easily, and it also uses access to Russian passports to attract

Ukrainians still living in Donbas. Because Russia has kept its border with the NGCAs open during the COVID-19 pandemic, this latter group is able to claim Russian citizenship while continuing to live in the occupied territories. While this is typically considered an extralegal practice, it clearly benefits Russian domestic and foreign policy plans (Burkhardt 2020). First, it simplifies the process for Ukrainians seeking work in Russia because it fast-tracks their naturalization or citizenship, making work permits unnecessary. Second, it derails the multi-polar diplomatic negotiation process with Ukraine that has thus far been the only mechanism through which Ukraine has been able to attempt to resolve the conflict diplomatically. Both [Ukrainian](#) and [European](#) officials have called the passportization program an effort to “de facto integrate” the Donbas into Russia by integrating the population rather than the territory itself.

We can conclude that passportization is an intentional policy move developed by the Putin regime to enhance the leader’s position at home and abroad. These programs will have an impact on people’s desire to return to their homes in both the near and distant future. Given that Ukraine does not recognize dual citizenship, these multiple passports present a major problem for re-integrating the currently occupied territories.

## Major Questions for Future Research

Given the complexity of the problem of displacement and the large numbers of displaced people living in Ukraine and Russia, there are no simple policy solutions, especially as diplomatic negotiations between Ukraine and Russia (with Germany and France mediating in the Normandy Format) have stalled. Thus, how should we move forward to address the pressing needs of displaced people and the institutional failures to meet those needs? The reports in this series will present new research that deals with some of these questions.

A major challenge that TCUP will be tackling in collaboration with Ukrainian researchers is how to hold elections in the occupied territories. In October 2019, President Volodymyr Zelensky signed on to the [Steinmeier Formula](#), which was meant to establish a path toward ending the war. Local elections were an important component of the Formula. Oxana Shevel wrote in a [commentary for TCUP](#) at the time, “The formula calls for



elections to be held in the separatist-held territories in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions under Ukrainian legislation and the supervision of the OSCE (Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe). If the OSCE judges the elections to be free and fair 'overall,' then a special self-governing status for these territories will come into force." Shevel pointed out that the [majority of Ukrainians](#) did not support holding elections in those territories, and ultimately, Zelensky refused to agree to hold elections until Ukraine could regain control of its eastern border, which has yet to take place.

In the context of passportization, how can Ukraine hold elections when many people living in the non-government-controlled areas now (illegally) hold Russian citizenship?<sup>3</sup> How can local elections accommodate the nearly 1.5 million people who have been displaced from those regions and now live in Ukraine? Who should be allowed to stand for elections, based on the region's contentious past seven years? Using expert interviews, focus groups, and survey data, TCUP's first research component will engage with this issue, with the goal of producing a policy recommendation for Ukrainian policymakers.

Another essential consideration is about the ongoing needs of internally displaced populations. Here, Çağlar and Glick-Schiller's framework, which prioritizes the migrant experience, will establish the necessary context to best advocate for human-focused policies. Securing housing and work remain the main concerns of IDPs, and as resolution of the conflict and reintegration become more distant, these needs require more than just temporary solutions. How will Ukraine's ministries—at both national and local levels—deal with these long-term needs? TCUP's research will explore the implementation of policies and their effectiveness for meeting the needs of IDPs.

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<sup>3</sup> Dual citizenship is not legally permissible in Ukraine. There are certainly advantages for people living in NGCAs to keep their Ukrainian passports, as it allows them visa-free access to the European Union, but their Russian passports allow them to access work and services in Russia. Additionally, many people also hold documents from the Luhans'k/Donets'k People's Republics, which are not recognized as valid by Ukraine or any other government.

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