Ida Kjeøy and Guri Tyldum

Assessing future migration among Ukrainian refugees in Poland and Norway

Faforeport 2022:23

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ISBN 978-82-324-0657-9 (paper edition)
ISBN 978-82-324-0658-6 (web edition)
ISSN 0801-6143 (paper edition)
ISSN 2387-6859 (web edition)

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Preface

This report concludes a study conducted by researchers at Fafo, commissioned by the Norwegian Directorate of Immigration and the Norwegian Ministry of Justice and Public Security. Here, we describe how Ukrainian refugees in Poland and Norway talk about their migration decisions and how they think about future migration and repatriation to Ukraine. We are grateful for this opportunity to familiarize ourselves with this highly salient topic. Our thanks go to Stina Holth and Rachel Eide at the Norwegian Directorate of immigration, and to Stine Münter at the Norwegian Ministry of Justice, and their colleagues, for their timely comments and contributions to on our manuscript and preliminary findings. We would also like to thank Dominic Wach at the Centre of Migration Research at the University of Warsaw, for his assistance in navigating and understanding the complex field of Polish Public policy, and for aiding us in getting access to respondents in Polish NGOs and government agencies. Thanks also to Emil Chrol, for assisting during fieldwork in Poland, and for his excellent work in facilitating interviews and getting access to Ukrainian refugees, and to Ivanna Kyliushyk and her colleagues at Ukraine House in Warsaw, for letting us meet refugees at their offices, and for their assistance in understanding the challenges of the refugee reception system. Numerous others have assisted us in getting access to Ukrainian refugees in Norway. We are very grateful for their assistance, but to protect the anonymity of our respondents, and, however we choose to not provide their names here.

At Fafo, Research Director Hanne Kavli has given invaluable support and encouragement throughout the project period and has read and commented on the report. Jon Lahlum has given efficient and timely support to get the report ready to print in time. Thanks also to the editors at the Language Factory for their thorough reading of the text.

But most importantly – our gratitude goes to the numerous refugees in Poland and Norway, who have shared their often painful stories of war, flight and their dreams for the future. The strength and optimism that many displayed has been both impressing and inspiring. We hope that we with this report can contribute to a better understanding of their situation, and of the challenges they are facing in exile.

Oslo, 4th November 2022

Ida Kjeøy and Guri Tyldum

Sammendrag

Denne rapporten presenterer hovedfunnene fra en studie av migrasjonsambisjoner og migrasjonsbeslutninger blant ukrainske flyktninger i Polen og Norge. Rapporten tar for seg følgende fire forskningsspørsmål.

- Hva har formet migrasjonsstrømmene fra Ukraina sommeren og høsten 2022, og hvorfor dro ikke disse flyktningene fra Ukraina tidligere?
- Vil de store gruppene av ukrainske flyktninger i Polen reise videre til andre land i Europa?
- Hvorfor reiser noen flyktninger tilbake til Ukraina nå?
- Har de ukrainske flyktningene tenkt å vende tilbake til Ukraina når krigen er over?

Analysen er basert på kvalitative intervjuer med flyktninger, beslutningstakere og frivillige organisasjoner i Polen og Norge, utført sommeren og høsten 2022.Dataene er analysert i lys av den bredere litteraturen om migrasjonsambisjoner blant flyktninger.

En beslutning om å flykte, returnere eller bli boende er sjeldent enkel, og i denne rapporten har vi forsøkt å beskrive ambivalensen som mange flyktninger uttrykker når de snakker om fremtiden. Mange presenterer både sterke argumenter for at de ønsker å reise tilbake til Ukraina, og sterke argumenter for at de ønsker å gå videre og starte et nytt liv i utlandet. Innenfor det samme intervjuet kan en flyktning snakke om hjemlandet sitt og alle tingene hun savnet og ikke var villig til å gi opp, og i andre deler av det samme intervjuet snakke om hvorfor hun tror hun ikke skal reise tilbake – ofte knyttet til mangel på jobber og begrensede økonomiske muligheter. I denne rapporten tar vi ikke sikte på å klassifisere flyktninger etter migrasjons- eller returintensjoner, men peker på de faktorene som får flyktninger til å uttrykke et ønske om å

returnere, og de faktorene de legger vekt på når de uttrykker et ønske om å bli.

Hva har påvirket migrasjonsstrømmene fra Ukraina sommeren og høsten 2022, og hvorfor dro ikke disse flyktningene fra Ukraina tidligere?

De som forlot Ukraina de første månedene etter krigens utbrudd, dro ofte i all hast. Hovedmålet var å komme seg til et trygt sted, og de tenkte ikke så mye på hvor de ville dra. Blant dem som havnet i Norge i mars og april, sier mange at det var en tilfeldighet, fordi de hadde slekt eller venner der, eller fordi Norge ble anbefalt av de frivillige de møtte da de krysset grensen fra Ukraina. I denne rapporten viser vi hvordan flyktningene som forlot Ukraina i de tidlige fasene av konflikten ofte hadde tilgang til en av tre ressurser: 1) familie eller venner i utlandet som de kunne reise til 2) oppsparte midler (eller inntekt fra Ukraina) som de kunne leve av om de flyttet til utlandet eller 3) nok informasjon om systemene som hjelper flyktninger i Europa, til å være trygge på at de kunne reise ut av Ukraina, og at de ville bli tatt vare på. Det er mekanismer som sannsynligvis har ført til at flyktninger med utdanning, nettverk og økonomiske ressurser fra Ukraina, har vært overrepresentert blant flyktningene som forlot Ukraina i den tidlige fasen. En rekke spørre undersøkelser fra ulike land har også antydet at flyktningene som forlot Ukraina i krigens første fase, hadde høyere utdanning enn det som er vanlig for den ukrainske befolkningen som helhet.

Flyktningene vi har møtt i Polen og Norge som har forlatt Ukraina etter juni 2022, ser ut til å ha en noe annen profil. Noen kommer direkte fra områder nær frontlinjen, og knytter beslutningen om å dra nå til umiddelbare hendelser: for eksempel at et missil har truffet et hus i nabolaget, eller til og med hjemmet eller arbeidsplassen deres. Mange hadde verken jobb eller andre inntektskilder da de bestemte seg for å reise. Noen har først oppholdt seg i Ukraina som internt fordrevne, og så dratt videre. Det er også noen som drar fra Ukraina nå fordi de er utslitte, ikke av å bo i områder som er direkte berørt av selve krigen, men av konstante alarmer og frykt for missilangrep. De nyankomne ser i større grad enn i første fase ut til å ha en konkret plan for hvilket land de skal reise til og hvordan de skal komme seg dit.

Vil de store gruppene av ukrainske flyktninger i Polen reise videre til andre land i Europa hvis krigen ikke snart tar slutt?

I Polen finnes det noen tiltak for å støtte de ukrainske flyktninger som leter etter bolig, jobb og skolegang, men systemene er ikke rigget for å ivareta flyktninger som ikke selv skaffer seg dette. Det finnes arbeidsmarkedstiltak, noen systemer for inntektssikring, hjelp til å skaffe bolig og tilgang til utdanning for barn, men de fleste av disse tjenestene er tjenester som enkelte flyktninger kan få tilgang til om de kommer i kontakt med de rette aktørene, men ikke noe de har rett på. Spesielt innenfor boligmarkedet er situasjonen krevende.

De vi har snakket med i frivillige organisasjoner og som er representanter for lokale og sentrale myndigheter forteller at de tiltakene som eksisterer for flyktningene mangler overordnet koordinering, og at det er få planer for å sikre flyktningene på lang sikt. Siden tiltakene som oftest er prosjektfinansiert er det også betydelig usikkerhet knyttet til fremtidig i finansiering. De fleste vi har snakket med har liten tro på at dette vil bli bedre, men noen håper forbedring kan komme gjennom EU-initiativer og/eller internasjonal finansiering.

Blant de flyktningene vi har møtt i Polen uttrykker de fleste en sterk preferanse for å bli værende i Polen. Nærheten til Ukraina gjør det mulig å reise frem og tilbake for å besøke familie som har blitt igjen i Ukraina, eller for å vedlikeholde eiendom eller følge opp bedrifter. Det er en stor ukrainsk diaspora i Polen, som bistår med både mellommenneskelig støtte og praktisk hjelp. Den sterke kulturelle nærheten mellom Polen og Ukraina gjør at språkbarrierene er små. For kvinner med ektemenn og sønner i Ukraina betyr det å være i Polen å være fysisk nær dem, og for personer som får av lønn eller penger fra ektemenn i Ukraina, er levekostnadene i Polen lavere enn i Vest-Europa. Men det store antallet flyktninger som ankommer Polen samtidig, har gjort det vanskelig å klare seg økonomisk i Polen. Å finne et sted å bo blir stadig vanskeligere og for flyktninger med utdanning er det vanskelig å finne jobber der de kan bruke utdannelsen sin – de jobbene som er tilgjengelig er ofte ufaglærte, fysisk tunge og dårlig betalt.

De som ikke klarer å finne en inntektskilde eller et sted å bo i Polen, må enten flytte til andre land eller Europa, eller reise tilbake til Ukraina. I

sommer, da vi gjorde vårt feltarbeid i Polen, valgte mange av de som sliter med å klare seg i Polen, å returnere til Ukraina heller enn å reise videre til andre land i Europa. Det kan virke som om det fremdeles er begrensede kunnskaper om de mer omfattende økonomiske støttesystemene som finnes for flyktninger i andre land i Europa. De som var på vei t tilbake til Ukraina var bekymret for at de ikke vil klare seg i andre europeiske land uten jobb og uten språkkunnskaper. Etter hvert som de ukrainske flykningene som har reist til Vest-Europa blir mer etablert, og de begynner å dele historiene sine på sosiale medier – går vi ut ifra at denne informasjonen kan spre seg raskere. Da er det også mulig at en større andel av de som ikke klarer seg i Polen velger å reise videre, i stedet for å vende tilbake.

Hvorfor reiser noen flyktninger tilbake til Ukraina nå?

Noen ukrainske flyktninger vender nå tilbake til et Ukraina som fortsatt er i krig. Noen reiser tilbake til områder i vestlige eller sentrale områder av Ukraina, som har vært mindre direkte berørt av krigen. Dette er gjerne flyktninger som forlot Ukraina i den tidlige fasen av konflikten da ingen steder i Ukraina føltes trygge. De reiser tilbake nå fordi den umiddelbare faren for invasjon er over i disse områdene. Andre vender tilbake til områder som er mer berørt av krigen. Mange føler seg at de i sommer og høst har befunnet seg i en avgjørende fase, der de har måttet ta en beslutning om de vil vende tilbake til sitt gamle liv, eller starte et nytt liv som flyktning i Europa. Mange har beholdt jobbene sine selv om de har vært på flukt, og noen har til og med fortsatt å jobbe fra «hjemmekontor» i utlandet. Men de frykter at hvis de ikke vender tilbake nå, vil de ikke kunne beholde jobben mye lengre, og da vil de heller ikke ha en jobb å vende tilbake til hvis de ønsker å returnere senere. Andre ønsker å reise tilbake for å ta vare på boliger og hager som har stått ubeskyttet i månedsvis. Flyktninger fra områdene rundt Kyiv, som de russiske styrkene okkuperte i februar/mars, snakker om hjem der vinduer og tak er knust fra kuler og missiler, og som ikke vil overleve vinteren hvis de ikke drar tilbake nå. Noen reiste også tilbake i sommer fordi det nye skoleåret nærmet seg og de ønsket at barna deres skulle fortsette sin utdanning i Ukraina. Noen er usikre på om ukrainske skoler vil godkjenne utdannelse fra utlandet, og frykter at barna deres må ta et

skoleår på nytt om de ikke følger ukrainsk undervisning. Noen av respondentene våre har høyere utdanning fra Ukraina, og reiser tilbake fordi de føler at prosessen som ville være nødvendig for å kunne jobbe i yrket sitt i utlandet er for krevende. Noen av de som var på vei tilbake sa at det var for å se hvordan livet var der nå, og var åpne på at de kanskje ville reise ut igjen om kort tid hvis ting ikke gikk bra. Disse respondentene sa alle at de ville flytte til et annet land enn de først hadde reist til, hvis de skulle forlate Ukraina igjen.

Flere studier tyder på at returambisjoner har en tendens til å være sterkere blant flyktninger som oppholder seg i nabolandene til en konfliktsone. Våre respondenter i Norge var også mindre tilbøyelige til å uttrykke returintensjoner sammenlignet med de vi møtte i Polen.

Har de ukrainske flyktningene tenkt å vende tilbake til Ukraina når krigen er over?

De fleste av våre respondenter havnet i Norge ved en tilfeldighet, enten fordi de hadde venner eller slektninger her som de kunne bo hos, eller fordi Norge ble anbefalt av de frivillige de møtte ved grensen fra Ukraina. Noen var innstilt på å returnere til Ukraina så snart som mulig, men de fleste flyktningene vi møtte under feltarbeidet i Norge, uttrykte en intensjon eller et ønske om å bli i Norge, selv om det skulle bli fred i Ukraina. Mange kommer fra områder som nå er okkupert av russerne, eller områder hvor boliger, infrastruktur og arbeidsplasser er sterkt skadet. De ga ofte uttrykk for at de ikke har noe å vende tilbake til. Andre stoler ikke på en fredsavtale med Russland, og frykter at om de returnerer, risikerer de å måtte flykte igjen, og startet fra stretch igjen, om noen år. Noen av våre respondenter fra Øst- og Sør-Ukraina sier også at de ikke føler seg velkomne i Vest-Ukraina, og at de derfor ikke ønsker å returnere dit, hvis det blir et alternativ.

Våre respondenter fremhever noen særskilte elementer ved det norske systemet som gjør at de ønsker å bli værende. De liker at det norske samfunnet er velorganisert, forutsigbart og gir økonomisk stabilitet. De ser også muligheter i Norge, for eksempel for å etablere bedrifter og for god kvalitet på utdanningen til barna. Når de gir uttrykk for at de ønsker å bli, er det som oftest gitt at de får en mulighet til å forlenge

oppholdstillatelse. Ingen har gitt uttrykk for at de ønsker å bli i landet om de i framtiden ikke skulle ha lovlig opphold.

Summary

This report presents the main findings from a study of migration aspirations and migration decision-making among Ukrainian refugees in Poland and Norway, focusing on the following four research questions.

- What are the mechanisms that shape migration flows out of Ukraine during the summer and autumn of 2022, and why did these refugees not leave earlier?
- Will the large groups of refugees in Poland move on to other countries in Europe if the war does not end soon?
- Why are some refugees returning to Ukraine now?
- Do the refugees intend to return to Ukraine when the war is over?

The analysis is based on qualitative interviews with refugees, policymakers and NGOs in Poland and Norway, conducted during the summer and autumn of 2022. The data is analysed in light of the wider literature on migration aspirations in refugee populations.

A decision to flee, return, or remain in a country of refuge is rarely easily made, and in this report, we have tried to describe the ambivalence that many refugees express when they talk of the future. For many, there are strong arguments for wanting to go back to Ukraine, but also strong arguments for moving on and starting a new life abroad. Some refugees would in the same interview talk convincingly about their homeland and all the things they missed and were not willing to give up, and in other parts talk about why they think they might not be going back – often tied to lack of jobs and poor economic prospects. With this report, we do not aim to classify refugees according to migration or return intentions, but rather point to the factors that induce them to express a desire to return, and the factors they emphasise when they talk of the desire to stay.

What are the mechanisms that shape migration flows out of Ukraine during the summer and autumn of 2022, and why did these refugees not leave earlier?

The refugees who left Ukraine in the first months after the outbreak of the war often left in a hurry. Their main aim was to leave Ukraine for a safe place, and they did not think much about where they wanted to go. Amongst those who ended up in Norway in March and April, many say that they did so by coincidence – they came to Norway because they had relatives here, or because Norway was recommended by the volunteers they met when they crossed the border from Ukraine. The refugees who left Ukraine in the early phases of the conflict tended to have access to one of three resources: 1) networks abroad that they could go to 2) savings (or income from Ukraine) that they could rely on if they moved abroad or 3) enough information about refugee reception systems in Europe to be confident that they could go to Europe and that someone would take care of them there. This suggests that refugees with educational and economic resources from Ukraine will be overrepresented among the refugees who left Ukraine in the early phase. Several surveys have also suggested that the refugees who left Ukraine in the first phases of the war had higher education than what is common in Ukraine.

The respondents we have met in Poland and Norway who left Ukraine after June 2022, appear to have a somewhat different profile. Some come directly from areas close to the front line and tie their decision to leave now to a missile hitting a house in their neighbourhood, or even their home or workplace. Many link their decision to leave Ukraine to the lack of a job or other sources of income. Some had first stayed in Ukraine as internally displaced before they moved on. There are also some who leave now because they are exhausted, not from living in areas directly impacted by the war itself, but by constant alarms and fear of missile attacks. To a larger extent than in the first phase, the new arrivals appear to have a concrete plan of where to go and how to get there.

Will the large groups of refugees in Poland move on to other countries in Europe if the war does not end soon?

The Ukrainian refugees who stay in Poland are given some support to access the labour market, to secure a sustainable income, to have a place to live and to access education for children. This assistance is provided by a range of different actors. Most of these services are, however, not rights based, meaning that these are services some refugees can access, but they are not entitled to them. Although there are organisations assisting with housing, language training and economic support, refugees in need of such assistance are not always able to obtain it.

Our respondents in NGOs and representatives of local and central government report of little overall coordination of measures, few plans for the long-term integration of refugees, and substantial uncertainty with regards to long-term funding. While there is a strong sense of pessimism that this is not likely to improve, there are some who hope improvement can come through EU initiatives and/or international funding. The optimistic tone does in no way dominate in the interviews we have conducted.

There is a strong preference among many Ukrainian refugees for remaining in Poland. The near proximity to Ukraine makes it possible to go back and forth to visit relatives or check on properties and businesses. The large diaspora provides psychological and practical assistance and the cultural and linguistic proximity between the two countries means that language barriers are small and the refugees feel more at home. For women with husbands and sons in Ukraine, being in Poland means being physically close to them, and for persons dependent on salaries from Ukraine, the living expenses in Poland are lower than in Western Europe. However, the large number of refugees arriving at the same time in Poland has made it difficult for some refugees to get by there. Finding a place to live is increasingly difficult and refugees with an education struggle to find jobs where they can use their skills.

The refugees who struggle to find a source of income or a place to live in Poland either have to move on to other countries in Europe or return to Ukraine. At the time when we conducted our fieldwork, it seemed that many of those who struggled to get by in Poland choose to return rather

than move on. They seemed to be unaware of the more extensive economic support systems for refugees in other countries of Europe. They worried that they would not get by in other European countries without a job and without speaking the languages. As more people get settled in Western Europe and they start sharing their stories on social media, this information might perhaps spread more rapidly. It is possible that this also will lead to more of the refugees moving on, rather than returning, if they are not able to make ends meet in Poland.

Why are some refugees returning to Ukraine now?

Some Ukrainian refugees are returning to a Ukraine still at war. Some return to areas in Western or Central areas of Ukraine that have been less directly affected by the war. They left in the early phase of the conflict when no place in Ukraine felt safe, and return now because they feel the immediate danger of invasion is over in these areas. Others are returning to areas more affected by the war. Many talked of this period as a defining moment – at which they had to decide if they wanted to return to their old life or start a new life as a refugee in Europe. Some feared that if they did not return now, they would lose their job, and would not have a job to return to if they wanted to return later. Others return to take care of dwellings and gardens that have been standing unprotected for months. Refugees from the areas around Kyiv that had been occupied by Russian forces in February/March talk of homes with windows and roofs broken from bullets and missiles that will not survive the winter if they do not go back to save them now. When we did our interviews in late July, some also returned because the new school year was approaching and they wanted their children to continue their education in Ukraine. Some of our respondents have higher education from Ukraine and returned because they felt the process of being able to work in their profession abroad was too demanding. Some of those returning also suggested that they only went back to Ukraine to see what life was like there now and were open to the idea of leaving again shortly if things did not work out. These respondents all said that they would move to a different country if they were to leave Ukraine again.

Several studies suggest that return ambitions tend to be stronger among refugees who remain in neighbouring countries to a conflict zone. In our data this also seems to be the case, that respondents who have moved as far as Norway were less likely to express return intentions compared with those who stay in Poland.

Do the refugees in Norway intend to return to Ukraine when the war is over?

Most of our respondents in Norway ended up in in this country by coincidence. They came to Norway because they had friends or relatives living here that they came to stay with, or because Norway was recommended to them by the volunteers they met when crossing the border from Ukraine. Some were set on returning to Ukraine as soon as possible, but most of the refugees we met during our fieldwork in Norway expressed an intention or wish to remain in Norway, even if a peace deal were to be signed. Many came from areas now occupied by the Russians, or areas were dwellings, infrastructure and workplaces were heavily damaged, and feel that they have nothing to return to. Others do not trust in a peace deal with Russia and fear they would just have to flee again in a few years. Some of our respondents from Eastern and Southern Ukraine also say that they do not feel welcome in Western Ukraine and therefore do not wish to return to other areas of Ukraine if they cannot return to their homeland due to occupation.

Our respondents often enthusiastically emphasise elements of the Norwegian system that make them inclined to remain; in particular that Norwegian society is well-organised, predictable and gives economic stability. They also see possibilities in Norway, for example, for establishing businesses and for good quality education for their children. When saying that they want to stay, however, this does not imply that they are willing to stay illegally.

1 Introduction

This report presents the main findings from a study of migration aspirations and migration decisions among Ukrainian refugees[1] in Poland and Norway. Refugees are not migrants by choice, but are driven to migrate by war, conflict or persecution. Some readers may therefore find it strange – or even unethical – to present their movements as an outcome of decision-making processes. But although the alternatives they have to choose from may not always be optimal, people in war-torn countries also make choices about mobility. Understanding these decision-making processes is essential for any actor interested in understanding and predicting future refugee movements and patterns of repatriation and returns.[2]

The report is intended for policymakers and others with an interest in understanding the current refugee movements into and out of Ukraine. The first wave of refugees out of Ukraine in February and March 2022 constituted the largest refugee movement in Europe since the second world war, and refugee reception systems have been struggling to assist

[1] Ukrainians in Europe are given temporary collective protection and because of this they are not formally given refugee status (in accordance with Section 28 of the Norwegian Immigration Act formal refugee status requires individual assessment in each case). In spite of this, we have chosen to refer to the Ukrainians in Europe as refugees. This is partly because we in this report take the perspective of the refugees as our starting point – and they think and talk about themselves as refugees, and partly in recognition that if the Ukrainians were to apply for protection on an individual basis today, they would most likely be given refugee status.

[2] From a policy perspective, it is common to distinguish between "repatriation" (referring to refugees and other migrants who go back to their country of origin in spite of having a legal right to stay) and "return" (referring to migrants who have lost or never had a legal right to stay). In this report we will, however, use these concepts interchangeably, simply referring to the act of going back to their homeland – independent of legal status, as is commonly done in academic migration literature.

the refugees that have come thus far. Policymakers all over Europe are asking how these refugee movements will evolve over the next years. Will the refugees continue to arrive in the current numbers throughout next year? Is there a chance that there will be another large movement of refugees out of Ukraine? And when can we expect that the refugees will start returning to Ukraine? We cannot predict the development of the war – the main factor shaping refugee movements. However, with this report, we hope to shed light on four key questions that can contribute to a better understanding of current and future refugee movements:

- What are the mechanisms that shape migration flows out of Ukraine during the summer and autumn of 2022, and why did these refugees not leave earlier?
- Will the large groups of refugees in Poland move on to other countries in Europe if the war does not end soon?
- Why are some refugees returning to Ukraine now?
- Do the refugees intend to return to Ukraine when the war is over?

Our analysis is based on qualitative interviews with refugees, policymakers and NGOs in Poland and Norway. Fieldwork was conducted during the summer and autumn of 2022. The data is analysed in light of the wider literature on migration aspirations in refugee populations (see for instance Akesson & Coupland, 2018; Crawley & Skleparis, 2018; Erdal & Oeppen, 2018; Kvittingen, Valenta, Tabbara, Baslan, & Berg, 2018; Rottmann & Kaya, 2021; Schmeidl, 1997), as well our own previous research on migration aspirations and migration strategies among Syrian refugees in Jordan and Lebanon (Tyldum, 2021; Tyldum & Zhang, Forthcoming).

1.1 The structure of the report

This report is structured into eight chapters. In the chapter immediately below, we begin by describing the data and fieldwork on which our analysis builds. The next chapter asks, 'who is leaving Ukraine now?', and describes the narratives presented by the refugees who left Ukraine during the summer and autumn of 2022. In the two subsequent chapters, we move our attention to Poland. First, we look at how the refugees

have been received in Poland and ask to what extent the measures in place are sufficient to cover their needs. We then hear from the Ukrainian refugees in Poland, and how they talk about staying, moving on to other destinations or returning to Ukraine. In the following chapter, we analyse narratives presented by those who have decided to return to Ukraine after some time in either Poland or other countries in Europe. Then, in the first of two chapters focused on Norway, we briefly description of the refugee reception system in Norway – to guide international readers with limited knowledge of the Norwegian system.[3] Thereafter, in the penultimate chapter, we analyse the narratives Ukrainian refugees in Norway present when they talk about their long-term plans. In the report's concluding chapter, we discuss the implications of these empirical findings considering refugee needs in the short and long term.

[3] The chapter on refugee reception in Poland is both longer and more problematising than the one on refugee assistance in Norway. This is because we expect our readers to be more interested in the Polish reception system, due to the large numbers of refugees currently in Poland, and the impact we expect the refugee reception in Poland may have on future migration patterns among Ukrainian refugees.

2 Methodology and sources of data

This report looks at migration aspirations among Ukrainian refugees in Norway and Poland. We ask what factors shape the refugees' decision to leave their country of residence, and for those already abroad, what shapes their decision to remain or return. In this chapter, we discuss the methodological strategies and analytical assumptions that underlay this work.

2.1 Analytical approach

The report approaches migration decision-making among refugees drawing on two analytical approaches. On one hand, we map the objective opportunities for support and assistance for refugees. On the other, we look at how the refugees talk and think about migration and return through an analysis of their narratives of migration.

A decision to flee, return, or remain in a country of refuge is rarely easily made. Although quantitative survey questions often give such an impression, refugees can rarely be divided into clearcut groups who either want to return to their homeland or who do not want to do so. Many have good reasons for wanting to return, and just as good reasons for not wanting to. As we will show later in this report, some will express a strong desire to return and a strong desire to stay in the country of refuge in the same interview. This means that the answers we get on questions of migration and return not only depend on how we ask the questions, but also on the context the questions are asked in. To complicate matters further, a decision to flee, return, or remain in countries of refuge is also given meaning in a moral framework, where some reasons are understood as more legitimate for fleeing, and some groups as more legitimate as refugees (for instance mothers with young children versus

men of fighting age). This makes some answers or reasons "easier" to talk about, while other choices can be more taboo.

In this report, we seek to describe the complex economic and moral landscapes in which decisions to flee, return, or remain are made. Rather than asking why individuals choose to migrate, we tap into the refugees' understandings of migration and return, and ask: in what situations do they think migration and return are good choices, and what kinds of life goals motivate return migration (or staying) as a strategy? To do this, we use narrative analysis that draws on Ann Swidler's (1986) theory of cultural repertoires (Tyldum, 2015, 2021).

A key element in this analysis has been to map how the economic structures that shape migration aspirations – in particular the systems for assistance and support for Ukrainian refugees in Ukraine, Poland and Norway – make it possible to stay, in the short and long run. When the refugees talk about return, secondary migration or local integration, these narratives must be understood in light of the conditions under which they live, i.e., what rights and opportunities they have in Ukraine, Norway or Poland. As it has been an explicit ambition of our project to assess the likelihood of the Ukrainian refugees currently in Poland moving on to other locations in Europe, we have given particular emphasis to understanding the systems of reception and assistance in Poland.

2.2 Data collection among refugees in Norway and Poland

The narrative analysis draws on qualitative interviews with refugees in three different locations in Poland and three different locations in Norway. In this section, we give a short presentation of the data and how we analysed it.

We conducted 44 interviews with refugees in Poland and Norway. Of these, 28 were semi-structured interviews that were recorded and subsequently transcribed. Another 16 interviews were in the form of shorter informal conversations where notes were taken either during the interview or directly after the interview (most of these short

interviews were conducted in public places, such as train stations or schools).

Respondents were selected with the aim of getting access to a variety of narratives about migration and return. In Poland, fieldwork was conducted in three areas with different economic and organisational infrastructures: in the capital, Warsaw, which has had particularly high numbers of refugee arrivals; in the border town Przemysl, through which many refugees travel but where there are few employment opportunities locally; and in a poor, agricultural area to which Ukrainians have come for seasonal work also before the February invasion. While international and non-governmental organisations are strongly present in Warsaw and Przemysl, the organisations were not as visible in the agricultural areas.

Also in Norway, interviews were conducted in three areas with different economic and organisational infrastructures: in the capital, Oslo; in a medium-sized municipality in Western Norway; and in a small municipality on the coast of Northern Norway. Most of the interviews in Oslo were with refugees who stayed in a shelter for newly-arrived refugees, while the interviews in Western and Northern Norway were with Ukrainian refugees who had been settled, and who had their own place of residence, and often had started a language course.

Most interviews were conducted in Russian by a Russian speaking project worker. The respondents were given the option of being interviewed in Ukrainian with an interpreter, but our respondents did not mind speaking Russian with us. Most of the respondents were from Eastern and Central parts of Ukraine and were often native Russian speakers. Two respondents were interviewed in English, and another two were interviewed with an interpreter in a combination of Ukrainian and Russian, as preferred by the respondents.

Respondents were recruited through different networks and organisations. In some settings, respondents were offered a small economic incentive (NOK 100 or PLN 50) for taking part in the interview. The money was given up front, and it was made clear to the respondent that they still could refuse to answer the questions posed.

In Norway, some were asked if they wanted to participate in an interview after we had arranged a focus group session on migration aspirations comprised of respondents from the same Norwegian language course. Others were recruited through Ukrainian NGOs in Norway and Poland, teachers, social workers and other refugees. Both in Norway and Poland, several respondents were recruited through employers in agriculture.

It was not our aim to access a representative sample of Ukrainian refugees, as this has little relevance in a qualitative analysis. Instead, we sought to maximise variance in narratives in order to describe the *variation* in strategies and narratives that exist in the various areas. For instance, as we discovered that most of the refugees we had met, in both Poland and Norway, came from areas directly affected by the war in southern and eastern areas, we purposively sought out respondents from Western Ukraine, to see if their narratives differ systematically from those in the east. Similarly, when we realised that most of our respondents in Norway had left Ukraine during February and March 2022, we sought out respondents who had more recently left Ukraine, and subsequently more recently arrived in Norway.

Interviews were conducted between July and October 2022 and lasted from 30 minutes to 1.5 hours. Respondents were informed that the information they give would be treated anonymously. When we refer their stories here, names and sometimes also their place of residence, gender or age are altered slightly to secure their anonymity, however, not enough to change the meaning. Some of the respondents who are quoted multiple times we refer to by two different names, to make sure they cannot be recognised based on their story.

It was our impression that the respondents appreciated having this opportunity to tell their story. For some of our respondents in Norway, our interviewer was among the first Norwegians they had talked to after arriving in the country – and many took the chance to ask questions about the legal framework, access to healthcare or practical issues in their community. Newly-arrived refugees are often vulnerable in their new country of residence, in particular in a setting where there is a lack of Ukrainian language interpreters, and social workers are overworked due

to the high arrival numbers. Thus, we believed it to be our duty to provide the relevant information when asked.

2.3 Mapping systems of reception and support for refugees in Poland and Norway – semi-structured interviews and desk study

To understand the systems of reception and assistance for Ukrainian refugees in Poland, we draw on both a review of available literature and laws, as well as interviews with key informants representing Polish national and local authorities, NGOs and international organisations based in Poland. The description of the Norwegian systems for reception and assistance of refugees is given less attention, as we assume much of this to be known to our Norwegian readers. However, to make it easier for international readers to understand the contexts of the interviews, we have also a short section on the systems of protection for Ukrainian refugees in Norway.

In Poland, we conducted 19 semi-structured interviews with key informants from the Polish government, Warsaw local government, international organisations based in Warsaw and non-government organisations in Poland. Some of our respondents were recommended by Dominik Wach at the Centre for Migration research at the University of Warsaw, others were recruited through networks. The interviews were conducted in English, in person or via Microsoft Teams. They lasted between 45 minutes and 1.5 hours. We asked about their roles in the current situation and about changes in policies and measures as a consequence of the influx of refugees. In addition, we visited central information points for Ukrainian refugees in Warsaw and mapped existing research literature on the subject.

3 Who is leaving Ukraine now?

> They started bombing the neighbouring street. Our house was shaking, the windows opened by themselves … I realised that if I want some kind of future for my child, I had to leave Ukraine. (Maria, 38. Left Ukraine for Poland in July 2022)

Between February and May 2022, 3.5 million Ukrainian refugees crossed the border to Poland (Duszczyk & Kaczmarczyk, 2022). During the first weeks after the escalation of the war, there were large numbers of refugees crossing the border every day, but from late March, the number of daily border crossings stabilised at around 30,000 a day. In the first acute phase of the conflict, people from all over Ukraine left more or less in a panic. In the early days of the conflict, no place in Ukraine felt safe – as the outcome of the war was uncertain. People feared missile attacks, invasion and occupation all across Ukraine, and it is not difficult to understand or explain why they left.

However, some did not leave in the early phases of the conflict but are now crossing the border several months after the outbreak of war. In this chapter, we try to understand these movements and ask why they did not leave earlier, and what it was that triggered, facilitated or motivated them to leave when they did. We ask if the current movements are best understood as a continuation of the acute movements after the invasion, or if there are signs that the refugees who come now are motivated by other factors than the refugees who moved out in the first wave. The analysis is based on interviews with refugees who came to Poland or Norway during the summer and autumn of 2022. We have not been to Ukraine ourselves after the February invasion, but base our descriptions of the situation in Ukraine on what the refugees tell us, as well as information provided by international organisations that are present on the ground.

3.1 When bombs hit your neighbourhood

Amongst our respondents who left Ukraine in July and August, several talk about a specific situation, often a missile attack, which brought the war to their own home, neighbourhood or workplace, and which triggered their decision to leave. These respondents are from the areas in Eastern or Southern Ukraine which have been under attack from Russian forces during the summer and autumn of 2022. Many have been living with the harsh realities of war for much of the last half year. They often say that it has not been equally bad all the time; there have been periods with terrifying nights in a shelter, but also weeks where everything felt more normal – except for the sirens going off at regular intervals. Maria, one of our respondents from Kharkiv, talks about what triggered her decision to leave, almost five months into the conflict:

> The last straw was that we received a message – a warning of artillery fire. And they started bombing the neighbouring street. Our house was shaking, the windows opened by themselves, the chandelier was shaking … And then I realised that if I want some kind of future for my child, then I have to leave Ukraine. My child [5 years old] was terrified – and he is still afraid, even when we are here in safety [Poland]. He doesn't want to be outdoors … He only wants to be where there is four walls and a roof over our head … (Maria, 38)

Maria refers to the missiles landing in near proximity of her home when explaining her motivation to flee. She is particularly concerned about the effect these attacks have on her son. This concern about the impact on children is something we find in the stories of several other respondents. For instance, Irina (42) worked in a military hospital in one of the cities that have been experienced more or less constant fighting and missile attacks since the invasion started. She had moved into the hospital with her 12-year-old daughter, working day and night. She felt safe there and was proud to be contributing in a meaningful way. Until a bomb hit the hospital directly. The windows and doors were blown in, and parts of the building was in ruins. From this day, her daughter was terrified and did not want to stay in the city. They rented an appartement in a city a bit further from the front line for two weeks – but the girl was still terrified when the sirens went off. “I realised that if I was

going to move away, I had to do it properly – to move far away. A clean cut and a new start", Irina explains.

Both Maria and Irina had accepted living in a city with active warfare and regular missile attacks, with the sirens, ruins and the scarcity of products associated with it. It is only when the buildings they are in are directly impacted by missile attacks, that they decide to leave. They both say they would stay if it were not for their child, but that being hit by a bomb makes them aware that the strain on their child is unacceptable.

For these two women, leaving Ukraine is triggered by a dramatic military event (as described above). But there are also other triggers that make people living in a war zone aware that they must leave, for instance when acute needs arise that cannot be addressed by staying. This was the case for Alina, who left a city occupied by Russia (and in the middle of a Ukrainian counter offensive) because there was no longer access to medical services that her grandson needed:

> We stayed in NN in spite of heavy fighting and in spite of Russian occupation until July. There were no green corridors – no way out. But my grandson (8 years old) is ill and he needed a procedure that demands specialist doctors. And a lot of medical workers had left NN. Therefore, we had to go to Kyiv for an examination. We had to get out by ourselves – it was very scary … When we reached Ukrainian controlled territory, I cried. (Alina, 57)

Once Alina and her family reached Kyiv, they realised that they still didn't feel safe there – with the sirens going off almost daily. They went on to Poland, but after just a few weeks her daughter decided she would not be able to get a job there, and searched the internet until she found a German family willing to take them in.

The refugees who have left cities marked by heavy fighting and/or occupation during the summer tell surprisingly similar stories. They were all set on waiting it out in Ukraine, despite bombs and artillery fire, but had to leave to secure the mental or physical health of children in the family. It should, however, be noted that when we ask the respondents who leave these areas near the front line if they think those left behind will

soon leave Ukraine as well, they are not at all certain that this will happen. They describe people who stay in Ukraine because they want to stay and protect their country, and who work as volunteers. They take great pride in the efforts of their compatriots.

According to Irina, people also stay because they think that the worst will soon be over. She has just left a city with more or less constant fighting for months. But their mayor is very popular and good at motivating people, she says. She shows me the videos he's sharing on WhatsApp and laughs and mimics the mayor saying, "only three more weeks now". But it has been much more than three weeks since he started saying this. Of course, people don't think the war will be over in three weeks, they can hope that the heavy bombardment of their city and the immediate danger of invasion will be over in three weeks. And three more weeks they can handle.

3.2 Difficult to get by as internally displaced

When fleeing from the occupied territories in the south and east of Ukraine, many of our respondents have travelled into safer areas in Ukraine as a first step.[4] This makes them internally displaced persons. According to the United Nation High Commissioner of Refugees (UNHCR), about 7 million persons have been displaced internally in Ukraine following the February 2022 invasion. In addition, some 13 million people are estimated to be stranded in affected areas or unable to leave due to heightened security risks, destruction of bridges and roads, as well as lack of resources or information on where to find safety and accommodation.[5]

One element that may impact on future refugee movements out of Ukraine is the conditions for the internally displaced. Will they remain in Ukraine, or will they after some time move out to seek protection

[4]Most of our respondents left occupied territories before they came under Russian control, and only two of our respondents travelled out of occupied Ukraine via Russia.

[5] https://www.unhcr.org/ua/en/internally-displaced-persons

elsewhere in Europe? We have not been inside Ukraine, and we cannot say anything about how those who remain in Ukraine experience the situation. The stories we present here are the stories of those who have chosen to leave, and whether their experiences are representative for those who remain we cannot know. Internally displaced persons will often have less holding them back from moving on; many have not yet found a job where they currently live, their dwelling is probably temporary and their ties to the local community are not yet very strong. Numerous international aid organisations are involved in distributing aid to internally displaced persons in Ukraine, and according to our respondents, there is also a system where internally displaced persons who meet certain criteria can register online to receive payments from the Ukrainian government. Some respondents report that this system works well, others say they were not able to access these payments for various reasons. One reason is because they were not formally registered as living in the occupied parts, but there are other reasons that the respondents do not understand themselves. Oksana is one of them:

> I tried to apply for assistance as an internally displaced person. But then it was all just beginning, I mean, payments from the state. And everything was very slow. They only gave me a certificate of internal resettlement for a month and a half. Nobody told me anything and they did not explain to me what I should do [to get my rights formalised] and how I should do it. (Oksana, 48)

While UNHCR estimate that there are about 7 million internally displaced persons in Ukraine, only 1.46 million are registered as internally displaced (and thus eligible for payments) by the Ukrainian government[6].

Some of those leaving Ukraine talk of massive support for internal refugees across Ukraine. They say that food and clothes are distributed to the displaced, and that people are opening their homes to those who flee. However, the respondents who talk about this in our data are mainly persons who are not internally displaced themselves, but who know people involved in distributing this aid. Some respondents also

[6] https://www.unhcr.org/ua/en/resources/idp-dashboard

complained that this support is only for the internally displaced, and not for ordinary Ukrainian people, who also struggle to get by with raising prices and high unemployment. Among those respondents who first were internally displaced, we hear few stories of receiving such aid. We asked most respondents if their relatives at home received aid, and the recent arrivals if they had received aid before they left. Only one respondent talked about aid being distributed to persons who are not internally displaced in Ukraine – the mother of a young man who had remained in Ukraine to work as a volunteer:

> In Odessa, they distribute a lot of humanitarian aid, nappies, and food for children. My son called me and told me that a lot of help came to them. They packed everything in bags and then delivered it to people. They have lists of low-income families, families with children, pensioners and disabled people. And they delivered it to them. Basically, it was products for one week. This is a big help. (Hanna, 41)

Some of our Russian-speaking respondents would also tell stories of not being met with respect and openness when trying to start a new life as an internally displaced person in Western parts of Ukraine. As one of our respondents bluntly put it: "We are from Donbas – they blame us for the war". For these respondents, the feeling of not being welcome in other parts of Ukraine contributed to the decision to leave. We will come back to this point in the chapter on long-term plans among Ukrainian refugees in Norway.

3.3 Difficult economic conditions in Ukraine

Among our respondents, a key factor driving those leaving Ukraine during the summer and autumn was not having a job or a secure source of income. According to Irina (42), who had just left one of the cities on the front line, this was even a recommendation from their mayor. If you don't have a job, you should leave, because it is not safe here now, he told his residents on one of his social media videos, according to Irina. And without a job it is difficult to get by in Ukraine now. While all of Europe is bracing for a difficult winter, the situation in Ukraine is particularly harsh. Millions of jobs have been lost due to damage to

infrastructure and the closure of businesses. According to the International Labour Office (2022), the closure of Black Sea ports has cut off about 90 percent of the country's grain exports and half of its total exports. The United Nation Development Programme (UNDP) estimates that if the conflict continues, 90 percent of the Ukrainian population could face poverty or vulnerability to poverty (International Labour Office, 2022).

Sophia comes from Irpin – known for brutal attacks from Russian military against civilians in the early phases of the war.[7] She and her mother fled to a settlement for internal refugees before the Russians arrived and stayed there for six weeks. When the Russians withdrew from the central parts of the country, Sophia and her mother returned to Irpin. Their house was not as badly impacted as many of the neighbours' houses, she told us, and showed us photos: we see a garden full of rubble and a house with broken windows, no doors, half a roof, and walls covered with hundreds of bullet and shrapnel marks. When she and her mother came back to the village, there was no gas, no water and no electricity in the city. They received no economic support to rebuild. The factory she had worked in was no longer operating. The income they had previously had from renting out rooms to students was gone, as the university was closed. She and her mother lived on her mother's pension and she stayed for three months – helping her mother get the house in order, before she left for Poland.

Sergei left Ukraine when he lost his job. He has extensive international networks and speaks English fluently. He and his girlfriend moved from Odessa to Lviv to work for one of the large international organisations when the war broke out. They worked for this organisation for six months before their contract ended. Then his girlfriend left to join relatives who had obtained refugee status in Europe. Sergei started the process of getting a permit to leave the country himself and joined her abroad a month later.

[7] https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-61667500

In the areas now occupied by Russian forces the economic situation is also often harsh. Infrastructure is often badly hit after fighting and much of the population with education and resources have fled. Both factors contribute to key businesses not operating. Klara's hometown was a small railway town. Since the train no longer runs, many of the jobs have disappeared with it. As Ukrainian banks are closed, people struggle to get access to income from Ukraine, and to get support from the Russian forces, you have to give up Ukrainian citizenship and register for a Russian passport. Alina describes how registering for Russian citizenship is a last resort for the old and those with no other means to survive. She left Kherson in July 2022 – the city had then been occupied by Russian forces since March 2022:

> Many people were left with no income at all. And now the banks have closed there, and people don't receive pensions … It's very difficult. People go to work for a bowl of soup.
>
> And the Russians? Don't they give any payments?
>
> They now issue 10 thousand roubles [170 EUR]. But there are huge lines. Pensioners go there, yes, and those who have nothing left at all. To get this money, you have to sign up and stand in a huge queue. You also need to get a Russian passport … It's very hard. I always cry when I talk to people I know who stayed [in Kherson]. (Alina, 57)

Others remained in Ukraine in spite of security concerns but then left when the economic situation deteriorated. Klara (48) remained in the village several months after the Russian invasion. "There were no working phones, no electricity, no internet – the only thing resembling a law enforcement body was the Russian military, and they were the ones we were most afraid of. It was terrifying", Klara tells us. However, when she left it was because she needed to go out to earn money. In the first weeks it was impossible to get access to food - the bakery remained open and distributed a loaf per person a day – and this was the only food they got. There were no jobs, and no chance of getting an income from staying. Thus, she left via Russia to Poland with her son in his twenties, to work in agriculture through the summer. She tells us she intends to go back to the village now that she has earned some money –

but she needs to get her son to safety first. She doesn't want him to be mobilised by the Russians. They are planning to move to Scotland for agricultural work when the agricultural season is over in Poland.

Luba, just left a suburb of Kharkiv in Ukraine, and talks of a situation where people no longer get paid – even if they have jobs:

> In Ukraine now, people don't even get paid their salaries. When I left, I wrote to my boss that I was going on holiday at my own expense. But those who stayed and who still work, they do not get paid either. There is no money in the company. (Luba, 28)

Most other people who have recently left say that salaries are paid. They also all say that if you cannot pay for gas or electricity, nobody is going to cut off the supply this winter – they have been reassured about this. However, inflation is strong, and salaries are generally not increasing as much as prices of food and other necessary goods.

3.4 Exhaustion from fear and alarms

Many of the examples mentioned so far in the chapter are from people fleeing the southern or eastern parts of Ukraine, but there are also refugees who have left within the past months who come from central areas of Ukraine – further from the front line. They are not fleeing immediate danger from Russian troops but talk about how the constant alarms and the fear of missile attacks made it difficult for them to stay in Ukraine.

We conducted our fieldwork in July, August and September. In this period, there were some incidents where Russian missiles hit civilian targets in areas far from the front line, including apartments, houses and a shopping centre. But these incidents were relatively rare. This changed from mid-October, when Kyiv and other cities of central and western Ukraine were much more systematically targeted. But even in August when the actual risk of being hit in these random missile attacks on civilian targets appeared to be relatively small, the missile attacks were recurring topics in our interviews. Our respondents who had just left Ukraine were exhausted. The consequence of this terror bombing is that people all over Ukraine feel unsafe – even in periods when the attacks

are rare, because sirens go off much more often than there are actual impacts. As Hanna explains in the quote below:

> People leave because of [the missile attacks] – they fear for their lives. Many try to endure it, but at some point, they break down. You never know where and when the missiles will land. The children are very afraid of sirens. It is really scary when the siren starts to howl. Very stressful. Any normal person would be afraid of such things.
>
> For me it was worst when I was at work, where there were no shelters … And I would sit at work and think: "What if they come and bomb us now? And then what will happen to my child [5 years old who was in preschool] … Who will take care of him?" My husband is a solider fighting … (Oksana, 32)

The missile attacks and the constant sirens are the main reasons our respondents coming from regions further away from the front line bring up when they talk about why they left. The risk of being hit may not be high, but they cannot get used to the constant threat.

> The way I see it, what is happening now is not a war, but a genocide. War is when adults and professional men fight. But this is just the murder of women and children. This is not a war … A few days ago, 10 rockets were fired at Mykolaiv in one place … And what about the shooting in the Odesa region, not to mention Vinnytsia [city in central Ukraine where several residential houses were hit]?! It's just destruction … Many children are in the state of shock … Many have mental traumas. They will be marked for life … Those sirens … I don't want them to see or hear it. (Tatjana, 36)

Among our respondents who said they were not able to cope with the constant sirens, persons who had been internally displaced before they left Ukraine were overrepresented. Having fled occupied territories or areas with extensive fighting, they had learned to fear the shelling that the sirens warned of. Thus, the sirens triggered brutal memories and took away the feeling of having reached a place of safety. For the refugees we met in Poland and Norway, this was often spoken of as a key reason why they decide to move on.

> In Kyiv, we rented an apartment. But then, when a house was bombed in Kyiv, when the sirens were constantly going off, we realised that we did not have enough endurance and that we were already on the verge. It was very scary ... We were afraid to go outside. Can you imagine, on the streets of Kyiv after 2 pm there is no one at all? Everyone quickly went out in the morning, bought something to eat, products, saw the neighbours and returned home ... That's how scary it was. (Alina, 57)

3.5 Are the refugees who leave now different from those who left in the first phase?

This study draws mainly on qualitative data, and consequently we cannot say anything about demographic differences between refugees who arrived immediately after the February invasion (the first phase) and those who have come during the summer and autumn (the second phase). However, based on our qualitative interviews, we have identified some mechanisms that suggest that there have been some changes in the characteristics of the refugees who arrive in Poland and Norway.

Delayed exits for those without networks abroad

Several surveys suggest that the refugees who left Ukraine in the first phase of the conflict had more economic resources and were more likely to have higher education compared to the Ukrainian population at large. For instance, in a survey of Ukrainian refugees who arrived in Germany between March and June 2022, 78 percent have a bachelor degree or higher (Panchenko, 2022). In a survey of Ukrainians who arrived in Austria in April 2022, more than half consider themselves either upper class or upper middle class (Kohlenberger et al., 2022). In our qualitative interviews with refugees who arrived in Norway in March and April, we also met predominantly persons with higher education and property in Ukraine, and many with friends and family abroad. Among our respondents who arrived during the summer and autumn 2022, however, we more often met respondents with less education, and who did not have networks abroad. Our data collection strategy does not aim to produce representative data, and this pattern in our data (that the refugees arriving later seem to have less education and networks) could

be the result of random variation. However, we have identified some processes that could explain how people without networks and information access faced more challenges in leaving Ukraine in the early phase. And we suggest this as a hypothesis to be explored.

The story of Nina (below) illustrates the difficulties refugees with less information and less networks experience when they need to leave a warzone. For them, it took months from when they made the decision to leave until they actually left the country. We met them in Norway in September 2022, less than two months after they had arrived in the country.

> Nina and her daughter left for a city a bit further from the Russian border a few days after the February 2022 invasion started. Their home was shelled just days later, and as they did not have a home to return to, they decided to leave Ukraine to seek refugee status. They found out that they could apply for a visa to the UK online and sent in an application. They remained in Eastern Ukraine, close to the front line, while they waited for an answer. But as weeks passed and they did not hear back on the visa application, the Russian forces came closer. In the end they felt they could not wait any longer and bought train tickets to Poland. From there they were assisted by volunteers who suggested that they went to Norway, and who helped them to do so. (Nina, 45)

Nina and her family wanted to leave the country immediately following the outbreak of war but did not have any relatives or friends in Europe to go to, and they did not know how to proceed to seek refugee status. They did not have the economic assets nor the information or networks that enabled so many others to leave as soon as the Russian forces invaded. As we will come back to later in this report, they also knew very little about refugee rights, and did not know that they only needed to get to the border to Poland to seek protection there. According to Nina and her daughter, they have friends that are still in their hometown wanting to get out, but not able to do so. They don't have jobs and incomes any longer, and don't have the money to travel to the border, nor to live on while abroad.

Nina's story illustrates the difficulties that people without networks, money and access to information face if they wish to leave a war-torn area. It can explain the pattern seen in all surveys among Ukrainian refugees in Europe thus far – the overrepresentation of persons with higher education. We do not know if the refugees with less education will remain in Ukraine, or if they will have a higher likelihood of leaving in later waves of refugee movements, when information about opportunities and rights for refugees in Europe will be better known.

The refugees who come now more often know where they are going

According to volunteers who work at the train station in Przemysl – the Polish city on the border between Ukraine and Poland, the refugees who have come during the summer and autumn of 2022 differ from those who came in the first wave, in that they are more likely to have a concrete plan for where they are going when they arrive in Poland. While the refugees who came in the early phase of the war barely had any luggage, and often had no idea where they would go and what they should do to manage outside Ukraine, the refugees who arrive now are much more likely to have a plan. They don't need advice on where to go. The refugees used the internet and their own networks to prepare before they go, and when they arrived in Przemysl, most of the refugees already had tickets for their onward journey. Some have an agreement with an employer somewhere in Europe, others have found a family willing to shelter them, or they were going to join friends or family who have already refugee status abroad.

This does not necessarily stand in contrast to the argument above – that the refugees who came during the summer and autumn of 2022 seem to have less resources, networks and education than those who came in the early phase. Based on our interviews in Norway and Poland, the refugees who took the first trains out of Ukraine when the February 2022 invasion started appear to often have had one or more of three resources: 1) friends or family abroad that they could stay with for a while; 2) money to pay for a place to live and food for a couple of weeks at least; or 3) enough knowledge of the European refugee reception system to know that they would be provided for when they reach the

border. Without any of these it would be a giant leap of faith to simply leave the country – in particular if you don't speak any foreign languages and have not been abroad before.

The refugees who did not have friends to stay with, money or information, appear to have waited until they found an employer who could give them a source of income, or some private persons offering private accommodation on internet sites, before they took the chance of leaving. Some also seem to start arriving at the border now, as the information about the refugee reception systems in Europe reaches more refugees in Ukraine.

3.6 Chapter summary

The refugees who left Ukraine in the first months after the outbreak of the war often left in a hurry. Their main aim was to leave Ukraine for a safe place, and they did not think much about where they wanted to go. Amongst those who ended up in Norway in March and April, many say that they did so by coincidence – they came to Norway because they had relatives here, or because Norway was recommended by the volunteers they met when they crossed the border from Ukraine. In this chapter, we have argued that the refugees who left Ukraine in the early phases of the conflict tended to have access to one of three resources: 1) networks abroad that they could go to; 2) savings (or income from Ukraine) that they could rely on if they moved abroad; or 3) enough information about refugee assistance systems in Europe to be confident that they could go to Europe and that someone would take care of them there. This suggests that refugees with educational and economic resources from Ukraine will be overrepresented among the refugees who left Ukraine in the early phase. Several surveys have also suggested that the refugees who left Ukraine in the first phases of the war had higher education than is common in Ukraine.

The respondents we have met in Poland and Norway who left Ukraine after June 2022 appear to have a somewhat different profile. Some come directly from areas close to the front line and tie their decision to leave now to a missile hitting a house in the neighbourhood, or even their home or workplace. Many link their decision to leave Ukraine to the lack

of a job or other sources of income. Some had first stayed in Ukraine as internally displaced before they moved on. There are also some who leave now because they are exhausted, not from living in areas directly impacted by the war itself, but by constant alarms and fear of missile attacks. To a larger extent than in the first phase, the new arrivals appear to have a concrete plan of where to go and how to get there. This might imply that the knowledge of refugee routes and rights in Europe are now reaching a larger portion of the Ukrainian population.

4 Reception of Ukrainian refugees in Poland

> If we look at the millions of people that have left Ukraine and moved to Poland, I suspect around 2 million in Poland, and that's like a 5 percent increase in the population. That's a lot to absorb. Especially for housing, jobs and schools. I don't know of many other countries that can absorb that number of people, and then be okay. (Representative of International organisation based in Poland)

> It is almost as if [the politicians] are waiting for [the Ukrainians] to realise themselves, that if they can't make it work here, they are going to have to go somewhere else. I believe that they are not going to rise up and provide jobs, housing, education for these people for the next few years. That is not the plan. (Representative of Warsaw-based NGO)

In this chapter, we take a closer look at the systems in place in Poland for receiving Ukrainian refugees. We also look at how policymakers, and people working in relevant national and international organisations currently based in Poland, assess the degree to which established mechanisms and measures will be sufficient to meet the needs of the Ukrainian refugees in the months to come. The chapter is based on interviews with actors placed in central positions in bureaucracy and organisational life and is limited in scope to the situation in Poland's capital, Warsaw. When we did our interviews, it was six months since the first Ukrainian refugees arrived in Poland.

Through our interviews, we find policymakers and organisations to be pessimistic about Poland putting in place institutional structures to aid Ukrainians to find long-term solutions for themselves in Poland. Whether Ukrainians stay in Poland, move on to other countries in

Europe or move back to Ukraine will, therefore, depend in part on whether they are able to get by in Poland, despite the relatively low levels of support for integration available in the country.

We would like to stress that there are no representative quantitative data available (surveys or registers) that can tell us who the Ukrainian refugees in Poland are and how they are coping with their current situation. We do not even know for certain how many Ukrainians there are in Poland right now. The latest estimate (August 2022) from Maciej Duszczyk at the University of Warsaw is that there are approximately one million Ukrainian refugees in the country (Duszczyk & Kaczmarczyk, 2022; Topolewska, 2022) others estimate double this.[8]

4.1 Migrants and refugees in Poland: Background and legal framework

Before the war in Ukraine, and the subsequent influx of a large number of Ukrainian refugees, Poland was amongst the countries in the EU receiving the fewest refugees per year (Molęda-Zdziech, Pachocka, & Wach, 2021). Before 2011, the country had little experience in receiving any forms of migrants, a situation which has changed over the last ten years, with the number of migrant workers increasing from 100,000 in 2011 to more than two million in 2020, a large majority being Ukrainian male labour migrants (Duszczyk & Kaczmarczyk, 2022).

When the Ukrainian *refugees*[9] started arriving in Poland in 2022, the government did not make alterations to their existing refugee reception system, as was done for example in Norway (see chapter on refugee reception in Norway later in this report), but rather passed a *Law on assistance to Ukrainian citizens in connection with the armed conflict on the*

[8] Warsaw city estimates that there are currently 130,000 Ukrainians who have come to the city and adjacent areas after the war. If these numbers are correct, this is a 5 percent increase in the Warsaw population (Interview with city official, September 2022).

[9] We use the term "Ukrainian refugees" throughout this report, but the reader should note that the Ukrainians in Poland are not defined as refugees under the Geneva Convention, according to Polish law. See also footnote 1.

territory of the country, often referred to as the Special Act (Dz.U, 2022 poz. 583). In this law, the Ukrainians were not given rights as refugees as defined in Polish law, but instead granted temporary protection and their own set of rights. We will come back to some of the details of the law, but in short, it gave Ukrainians who left Ukraine as a result of the latest Russian aggression, the right to stay legally for 18 months, full access to the Polish labour market without a work permit and full access to public services, including healthcare, education and social benefits, similar to Polish citizens.

In the following sections of this chapter, we present the systems in place to allow Ukrainian refugees to get a job, find suitable housing and for children to be accepted into Polish schools. Under each section, we present what the Special Act provides, what the Warsaw city level provides and what organisations provide, and then turn to our respondents' assessments of whether the measures are sufficient to meet the needs of the Ukrainian refugees. Later in the chapter, we discuss the role of the central government in long-term planning and coordination of policies, and how the presence of numerous international funders shapes the situation. We have not conducted a systematic assessment either of the needs of Ukrainian refugees or the policies implemented. What we present here is an analysis of some key documents, impressions and experiences presented to us in interviews with key informants.

4.2 Systems of refugee reception

The massive influx of refugees in Poland in February and March 2022 created a new situation in the country. In just a few weeks of February and March, Polish individuals mobilised, local organisations redefined their purpose to start helping refugees, and international organisations arrived to provide assistance. Parallel to this, numerous central and local government entities tried to get an overview of needs and provide assistance. The large number of actors, the changing needs and the changing funding situation makes it a challenging field to get an overview of. Here, we present the consequences for Ukrainians' access to: the labour market, other income forms, housing, childcare and education.

Access to the labour market

Under the Special Act, enacted from March 9th, 2022, Ukrainian refugees were given access to the Polish labour market without the need for a work permit. Through this, they were also entitled to use the services of public labour offices to help them find work.

It is the city that runs the public labour offices, and in Warsaw, the city has opened a separate labour office for Ukrainians which gives out information about available jobs and assists with applications, with short-term childcare offered on the premises. Warsaw city reports that 55,000 Ukrainian refugees now have legal and registered work in Warsaw (Warsaw city official, September 2022).

Our respondents, both policy actors and NGO representatives who work with Ukrainians on a day-to-day basis, say that Ukrainians *can* get a job in Poland right now, and some also add that they *should*. The importance of getting any job fast is strongly underlined by all our respondents – both from the city and NGOs, as the two below quotes illustrate:

> It's been clear from the beginning that the strategy of the Polish government is to as quickly as possible allow for economic inclusion of the Ukrainians into the Polish labour market (NGO, September 2022).
>
> The first priority of the city of Warsaw – to get them into to the labour market. (Interview with city official, September 2022).

When our respondents say that it is easy for Ukrainians to get a job in Poland right now, they argue that the levels of unemployment are generally low, that Ukrainian and Polish languages are very similar, and that Ukrainians can work in some sectors without learning Polish. The fact that there were many Ukrainian workers in Poland before the war is also talked about as a factor which can make it easier to get a job. However, relatively few reflect on the fact that the Ukrainians who worked in Poland prior to the war were often men engaged in manual labour, many of whom it is assumed have returned to Ukraine to enlist, whereas many of the refugees currently in Poland are women alone with children (Duszczyk & Kaczmarczyk, 2022).

Our respondents in Warsaw city underline that many of the Ukrainians currently in Warsaw have high levels of education and that there is a mismatch between jobs offered (mainly low-paid, low-skilled and manual), and the qualifications of the refugees. From other sources (see for example NRC 2022), we also know that many Ukrainians in Poland are experiencing difficulties in getting their Ukrainian education acknowledged. According to one government official, a system for conversion of education exists, but it is fragmented, and perceived within government not to be very good. They added that migrant workers cannot expect to work according to their qualifications.

> Also before the war, very many people from Ukraine worked in Poland below their qualifications … The system is okay with migrants working below qualifications. I don't think experts will succeed in changing things in this area. Migrants will always be worse off than local workers. (Government official, September 2022)".

We find this perspective in several of our interviews. Our respondents acknowledge that Ukrainians in Poland work below qualifications, and to some extent expect them to do so. However, as in the quote below, they acknowledge that it can be a challenge to get the Ukrainians to accept the jobs that are available to them:

> It's a problem that most of the Ukrainian women who are in Poland now are from the cities. And we tell them, let's go to the strawberries and they say No! No! (Interview with Government official, August 2022).

The perspective of the government official above is reflected in other interviews we have conducted, for example with respondents from Warsaw city. In one interview, our respondent described that Ukrainian women have to be persuaded to take jobs that are available, and for example accept working in warehouses driving a forklift, or as bus drivers in the city (interview with city official, September 2022).

Few organisations are currently specialising in helping Ukrainians access work, except for offering short-term Polish language courses. The organisations we have talked to refer Ukrainians to the assistance with finding jobs provided by the city and to new search engines that have a

filter to show employers offering jobs where it is sufficient to speak Ukrainian.[10] Some also underline that there are many businesses who are hiring Ukrainians as part of their solidarity work, and that offer Polish conversation classes and/or apartments to their Ukrainian employees.

To conclude this section, there are some mechanisms in place to assist Ukrainians in Poland to get access a job. Amongst our respondents, government and NGOs alike, there is an expectation that people should get a job as soon as possible. The mismatch which exists between the qualifications of the refugees and the jobs available is something that the respondents from both government and NGOs are aware of, but accept, presenting it as something the individual refugee should work around or overcome.[11]

Access to other sources of sustainable income

According to the Special Act, Ukrainians who registered for a Polish identification number (PESEL) – which over 1 million currently have[12] – can access social benefits in Poland and are given a one-time cash allowance for subsistence, amounting to PLN 300 (63 EUR) per person. On a general level, it is difficult to live on social benefits alone in Poland as the benefits are few and the payments small. However, child support is a bit more generous than the others (PLN 500 per child per month) and can amount to a considerable sum for families with many children (Topolewska, 2022). Refugees can also apply for all social benefits that are available to Poles, but the threshold for receiving such benefits in

[10] The languages are quite similar, and many Ukrainians *understand* Polish without necessarily being able to speak the language.

[11] In their labour market assessment, the Norwegian Refugee Council find that as services to facilitate access to the labour market are increasingly being provided to newly displaced Ukrainians, frustration is surfacing around the lack of similar resources for other refugees, economic migrants and Polish nationals (NRC, 2022).

[12] PESEL is not an accurate estimate of the number of Ukrainians currently in Poland because some have registered and later left the country, and some have never registered.

Poland is high, and we have in our fieldwork not come across any stories of refugees who have been able to access them.

In the first months after the war broke out, the Polish and international organisations added to the public services by providing the refugees with for example cash cards and free food. Some of the large international organisations offered cash assistance with relatively high amounts. There is substantially less of this kind of support available for Ukrainians now compared to in the first months. The organisations that have stopped giving out cash refer to lack of funding as their main reason for stopping. Others say that they have changed the organisation of their support from previously targeting all to now targeting people with special needs (mainly single persons, persons with disabilities, the elderly and others who will have difficulties finding a job).

Access to housing

In our interviews with NGOs and refugees, access to decent housing is pointed to as the largest challenge for Ukrainian refugees in the major cities. Under the Special Act, the government provided housing for the Ukrainian refugees by giving financial assistance to Polish individuals and companies who privately housed refugees. The assistance was limited to 120 days and amounted to PLN 1,200 per month per person (approximately 250 EUR). Now, people are no longer entitled to support for housing the refugees who came when the war broke out, but are entitled to support for new arrivals.

Local government is responsible for providing social housing, but according to our respondents, there is a substantial shortage of social housing even for Polish citizens in need. Warsaw city offers free shelter housing for Ukrainian refugees in altered business buildings. In our interviews with Warsaw city, we were told that there are seven larger shelters only for Ukrainians who have come following the outbreak of the war, housing approximately 1,200 persons, mainly women with children and people aged over 60 (interview with city official, September 2022). In these shelters, the city provides free food and Polish language courses, on a voluntary basis. According to our respondents from the city, most of the people living there are currently without work, but

there are exceptions (interview with city official, September 2022). The shelters are relatively full, but there is still room for those who are in need, according to our city respondents. We have not visited these shelters and cannot say anything about the quality of this accommodation. We have found that the NGOs talk of the shelters as mainly a short-term solution for refugees in need. In line with this, the refugees we have interviewed who are looking for a place to stay do not seem consider these shelters to be a viable option.

When asked directly whether the city has plans to offer other housing of a more permanent nature, our city official respondents refer to talks with international donors with the aim of increasing the city's capacity, but admit that with rents in Warsaw skyrocketing and winter being around the corner, these plans will not be sufficient to meet needs:

> Even if there is an investment, it will be just a fraction of what is needed. So the gap between the needs and the means to address them is going to stay for a long time – because the government has not prepared any policy. Everything was left for the local governments to deal with. (Interview with city official, September 2022).

As the quote above shows, our respondent from the city level is worried about the housing situation and feels that the government has not done much to meet the current needs of the Ukrainians in the housing market.

On the level of national and international organisations, many seem to refer Ukrainians looking for housing to the few organisations in Warsaw who have specialised their efforts in matching Ukrainians who need an apartment with Polish families who have apartments for rent or offered for free. One of the largest organisations specialised in this in Warsaw can cover the first month of rent for the refugees, but after that, the refugees have to cover it themselves. While the number of Poles willing to let Ukrainians live for free was exceptionally high in the first months following the war, these numbers have been reduced over the summer, according to our respondents. In the beginning, it was also easier for Ukrainians to use savings to rent apartments in the city, but rent has

risen dramatically over the last months[13] and the organisations we have talked to refer to landlords having the impression that Ukrainians' savings are nearing the end:

> A lot of people don't want to rent to Ukrainians now … They are afraid that people will not manage to pay … People don't want these kinds of problems. And the Ukrainians aren't stable. They stay here one month, the situation could change and then they will say: we're going back to Ukraine. (NGO, September 2022).

In some of our interviews, we have also been told stories that are circulating amongst landlords and others about people who left Ukrainians in their homes over the summer, and when they return, their homes have been emptied, and the Ukrainians are gone. Stories like these make our respondents worried that it will be even more difficult to find people who are willing to rent to Ukrainians in the future. Some of the international organisations in Poland have suggested implementing cash-for-rent programmes as a solution here, but their efforts have so far been thwarted by local organisations who fear that giving Ukrainians money for rent will only lead to higher prices on the rental market (Representative of Warsaw based NGO, September 2022).

To conclude this section, housing is something both the organisations and public servants view as a key problem for the refugees in Poland, and a problem to which they have few solutions. As the months pass, the refugees' own savings are decreasing and the willingness to rent an apartment to a Ukrainian is generally lower than it was in February 2022. The organisations we have talked to say that numbers of refugees they are in contact with that are without housing is increasing day-by-day, and that almost all available housing is of a temporary nature, like shelters or private housing. One of our respondents who works in one of the Polish ministries sums up impressions we have heard in several

[13] The war in Ukraine and the influx of refugees has affected the Polish housing market dramatically. It is hard to get at the concrete numbers, but many of our respondents talk about a fifteen percent increase in the price of rent in Warsaw, some of a doubling, over the last six months.

interviews, with little optimism about finding solutions to the problem before the winter sets in:

> We have to do something because otherwise they will be homeless and sleeping on the streets. But this kind of housing won't be something that the two of us would like to live in … [And] I don't think there's enough time, you know, to produce anything. (Government official, September 2022)".

Access to education

In the Special Act, Ukrainians were given full and equal access to public services, including education. To accommodate for an increase in the number of pupils and student, the government has also eased the rules on teacher overtime and on recognising teacher diplomas from Ukraine, and waived the rule requiring teaching assistants to certify knowledge of the Polish language. The Ministry of Education and Science has also prepared information in Ukrainian for parents on how to enrol a child in school and what rights their children have and launched a helpline (UNESCO, 2022).

According to Polish law, all children have a right and obligation to go to school, but children using the Ukrainian government's distance education platform are exempt from compulsory education. To support distance learning, the Ministry has implemented an initiative which collects and distributes used computer equipment to Ukrainian children studying online (UNESCO, 2022). According to our respondents, there is currently no system in place to make sure that children are participating in one of the two education systems.

It is the cities who run public schools in Poland, receiving government funding per child enrolled (interview with government official, August 2022). Respondents from the city state that a large portion of the increased costs the city has as a consequence of the Ukrainian refugee influx is currently not being compensated by the government (interview with city official, September 2022). With the backing of international funding however, Warsaw city has arranged summer classes for Ukrainian and Polish students and hired Ukrainian-speaking assistants to help children in their adaptation to Polish schools. However, in the

beginning of the school year, there is still uncertainty regarding whether the funding for these programmes will last throughout the year (Interview with NGO, September 2022). The city also has an offer of providing computers and other materials for children who participate in Ukrainian distance learning programmes, in cooperation with international organisations, but the offer is limited (interview with city official, September 2022). NGOs are to a large extent cooperating with the city on these measures, and also arranging after-school activities for Ukrainian mothers and children. From our interviews with the city, we have the impression that international organisations organise and fund a large majority of the measures available (interview with city official, September 2022).

According to one of our respondents from Warsaw city, they have also prepared 1,500 separate places for Ukrainian children in public nurseries, with the aim of allowing women alone with children to also find work, but only 200-250 of these places are currently in use. The respondents from the city government explain this as due to Ukrainians being less used to sending their children to a nursery and that there is a strong tradition in the Ukrainian community that children under five should be taken care of by their mothers. We do not know if there actually *is* a difference in attitudes between Poland and Ukraine on this issue, but note that enrolment in nurseries in Poland was only slightly higher than in Ukraine prior to the war (93 compared to 86 percent) and both Poland and Ukraine have higher average enrolment of children in nurseries than the average for Europe.[14] As we show in the next chapter, one of our respondents in Warsaw talks of not being able to access a nursery because she was not registered as living at a permanent address.

Our respondents are deeply worried about the pressure schools and nurseries are facing because they are open also for Ukrainian refugees. They refer to a teacher and classroom crisis existing in Poland also before the war, and many share stories about Polish and Ukrainians who have had problems enrolling their children in schools this term (Autumn 2022). In our interviews with Warsaw city, our respondents state

[14] Statistics made available by UNESCO Statistics" (2022)

that also they were worried about the pressure on education and other public services, but that they feel that they are coping. Still, the mere number of refugees is something that comes up in most of our interviews:

> There was a prediction that Warsaw was going to achieve this number in population by 2050. And in half a year, we are there. Of course, we don't know how long they will stay. But as of today, as a service provider, we are dealing with the number of customers which we predicted we would get in 2050" (Interview with city, September 2022).

The school year started in Poland on the 1st of September and many feared that the number of Ukrainians in school would increase dramatically over the summer, and as one respondent said, "crash the system". However, they find that this has not happened in Warsaw. The number of Ukrainian children in the Warsaw education system is approximately 17,000, which is the same as before the summer. If this pattern is the same in other cities in Poland, our respondents say it can be an indication that only a small portion of Ukrainian children are currently enrolled in Polish schools. It is possible that these children are following Ukrainian distance learning, but there are no registers available which can say this for certain. We do not know if there have been refused attempts to enrol these children in the Polish education system, or if the parents have chosen not to enrol them in school. The possibility that there are now many children in Poland who are not receiving an education is described by one of our respondents as the most important to problem to be solved right now (interview with city official, September 2022.

In our interviews with NGOs, however, there is both a worry that schools and other institutions will collapse as a result of the many Ukrainians, and a worry that Poles will build up frustration towards the Ukrainians as classes increase in size and they see that it is more difficult for them to get their children enrolled in school. As we will see in the next chapter, although the city level says that they have control over the situation and the necessary capacity to enrol the Ukrainian

students, NGOs and the refugees themselves tell a different story, about schools being difficult to access for Ukrainian children.

4.3 Critique of central government

In our interviews, NGO workers and representatives from the city of Warsaw often voiced extensive critiques of the central government, in particular for their lack of coordination and long-term planning. They claim that the government have no explicit policy for improving this situation.

> This government has decided not to have a migration policy. They simply scrapped that part of the administration. And the division which was dealing with migration at the Ministry of Interior was dissolved. To a certain extent, the Belarussian and Ukrainians put together with the government policy is kind of a perfect storm. (City official, September 2022).

> I think that the government attitude is that the crisis is over … (City official, September 2022).

When our respondents express little trust in the central government, this has roots far beyond the issues of refugee reception. The political discourse in Poland is relatively polarised, and it might be that the role of the government would have been described differently if more of our fieldwork had been conducted outside of Warsaw. It is likely that the actors we have talked to in this project are politically opposed to the government's policies in general.[15] However, even respondents who work in the Polish ministries do not believe that central government politicians will present solutions to the problems identified in the previous section of the current chapter. The representatives of the opposition and the representatives from the central government appear to agree on some issues: they agree that there are challenges in the systems of reception for Ukrainian refugees as described above, and they say that they do not expect that the central government will present any solutions to these

[15] We have made several attempts to identify respondents who would be more supportive of the government's policies, without success.

problems. When referring to the newly appointed Minister for Integration, responsible amongst other things for coordinating efforts dealing with the Ukrainians, one of our respondents from the central government also expresses doubt that she will try to coordinate efforts to support the Ukrainians in the future:

> There's nobody who will take responsibility to *really* coordinate the whole thing. I'm absolutely sure that this Minister for Integration won't do it either. Well, what I've heard is that she's planning some kind of mapping of initiatives taken for Ukrainians. Because sometimes even the one ministry doesn't know what the other is doing. It is a big mess (Government official, September 2022).

Several of our respondents have also called for a more active settlement policy, to distribute refugees more evenly around the country. According to our respondents, Ukrainian refugees who did not go to relatives or employers in Poland, tended to go into the major cities when they moved away from the border areas. This has resulted in a concentration of refugees in the major cities, and in particular in the capital Warsaw. As one representative of Warsaw city government argued, a more active government policy to distribute the refugees more evenly across the country would be the only way to ease the pressure Warsaw city is currently facing (interview with city official, September 2022).

4.4 Optimism about international funding?

While there seems to be pessimism amongst our respondents as to whether the problems facing Ukrainian refugees in Poland today will be dealt with by the Polish government, some respondents are still optimistic about finding adequate solutions with the help of international actors and through international funding. Many of the measures we have identified as available for Ukrainian refugees in Poland are financed in full or partially by international donors or through UN or EU funding.[16] Also many of the measures run by the city are subcontracted

[16] Also, before the war, EU funds were the main source of financing for integration projects according to Moleda-Zdziech, Pachocka and Wach, 2021: 10.

to international actors. According to the city and government officials we have interviewed, the involvement of international actors is what has made possible the measures already in place. They also see international funding as the only solution for the future, as shown in the quotes below.

> Without foreign experience, foreign capacity, foreign finances, as a local government, we wouldn't be able to cope with a crisis of this magnitude. (Interview with city official, September 2022).

> There are a lot of European pilot funds available and [Poland is] going to receive a lot of money … which can be used for assisting Ukrainians. This is not happening in the light of politics, it's happening in the shadows. People are doing their jobs and nobody is going to the TV and saying 'we are doing this and that'. So it's possible that we'll manage it, not being visible for the politics and politicians. (Interview with government official, September 2022).

> If the international community were to stop their involvement in Poland, we would be done, financially and in terms of capacity. (Interview with city official, September 2022).

Other respondents point to the downsides of giving international funding too strong a role. Some of the Polish NGOs we have interviewed refer to a situation where they have had access to seemingly limitless funding after the war, a situation very new to previously understaffed and underfinanced organisations. The international funding made it possible to put measures and services into place quickly, but also meant that new actors who have never dealt with issues concerning vulnerable groups or migrants appeared on the scene. During our short fieldwork in Poland, both in June and in September 2022, we came across several overstaffed offices and information points that appeared to be in contact with few actual refugees in search of the information or assistance they were there to provide. We were also told of meetings and activities that had to be cancelled because no Ukrainians came. Some of the local NGOs we have interviewed argue that too many actors have been eager to attract international funding for whatever activities the international funders wanted to stimulate, and then proceed to implement these

activities with little knowledge of Poland or of Ukrainians. We also met representatives of organisations that have had internal discussions on whether they should accept international funding at all, as they have felt that they are increasingly solving needs defined by international actors instead of needs that they themselves see the need to solve. Some say they feel a pressure to follow the agendas of international donor organisations.

Another problem with international funding is that it is often short term. This creates great uncertainty amongst the implementing organisations. A respondent from one of the international organisations that has brought a substantial budget to Poland, confirms that there is a high risk of international funding ending abruptly:

> Many [large international organisations] arrived with flexible funds from their head office or their main donors, but have already spent it. And next year they are looking at less than half the money they had this year. (International organisation, temporarily based in Warsaw, September 2022).

> So like [large international organisation], for example, this year is giving significant sums to the big cities to cover more. And that's because they have the bandwidth to do so and the funds ... But I don't think they plan on that next year, because they're also hoping the government will fund the municipalities to do that ... So the funding environment next year is going be very different. (International organisation, temporarily based in Warsaw, September 2022).

To sum up, some of our respondents are optimistic about the possibilities that international funding can provide, but there is also great uncertainty connected to whether such funds will be available in the coming months and years, and also several pitfalls with international donors financing measures for local refugee reception.

4.5 Chapter summary

In this chapter, we have described how the Ukrainians who are in Poland are given some support to access the labour market, to secure a sustainable income, to have a place to live and access to education for

children. This assistance is provided by a range of different actors. Most of these services are, however, not rights based, meaning that these are services some refugees *can* access, but they are not entitled to them. Although there are organisations assisting with housing, language training and economic support, some refugees in need of such assistance are not able to obtain it.

Our respondents representing NGOs and local and central government report of little overall coordination of measures, few plans for the long-term integration of refugees, and substantial uncertainty in funding, as much of it is project based. While there is a strong sense of pessimism that this is not likely to improve, there are some who hope improvement can come through EU initiatives and/or international funding. The optimistic tone does in no way dominate in the interviews we have conducted.

5 Long-term plans among Ukrainian refugees in Poland

> When we first arrived, it was like we were living in a fog. It was not possible to make any plans. It is only now – 3-4 months in – that we are starting to think about the future. We know that we will not return to Ukraine. We take Polish language classes now and will try to find jobs and settle down here. But it has been difficult. If it doesn't work out – is it really that cold in Norway? And is education for children free? (Kristina, 38. Refugee in Poland since March 2022)

In the first weeks after the invasion in February 2022, several million refugees entered Poland. Half a year later, heavy fighting is still going on in parts of Ukraine, and more or less daily sirens warn of the risk of missile or drone attacks in the rest of the country. The refugees who came to Poland thinking the war would be over in a couple of weeks, are starting to realise that the war can potentially last for many more months or even several years. In this chapter, we look at how the refugees in Poland think about the future and ask if the prospects of a more long-term war will induce people to seek refuge in other countries in Europe. And, if the systems described in the previous chapter are able to accommodate the more long-term needs of these refugees if they decide to stay in Poland.

5.1 Reasons for wanting to remain in Poland

Remaining in order to return home as soon as possible

A key element for a desire to stay in Poland was, for many of our respondents, their explicit intent on returning to Ukraine as soon as possible. Being physically close to Ukraine also makes it possible to go back

once in a while on short visits, for instance, to take care of elderly relatives who are still in Ukraine or to check on property or businesses. Most of our respondents in Poland had husbands or sons left in Ukraine – who could not leave, or who did not want to leave, because they wanted to stay to defend Ukraine (either assisting in the civil defence or working as a volunteer to assist refugees and others). There is a strong sense of pride among many of the refugees we talked to – pride in the fight that their compatriots are fighting now – and some say they want to be as close as possible, to be able to assist when possible. Many had left to protect children but wanted to return to help fight the enemy and participate in the rebuilding of Ukraine as soon as possible.

A large diaspora to provide assistance

In the early phase of the conflict, many Ukrainian refugees went to where they had friends or family members. For many of our respondents, this was first and foremost an economic issue: going to relatives meant staying for free and not have to pay rent. Having networks abroad also eases adaptation to the new society – some get assistance in finding jobs, schools or healthcare – but perhaps most importantly, friends and family abroad can be an important psychological support. As men of fighting age are generally not allowed to leave Ukraine, most of our respondents, and most of the Ukrainian refugees in Poland, are women travelling alone with children. For these women, it was often essential to go to stay with family or friends, in order to have another adult to talk to and to lean on, and who could help them with practical support such as taking care of the children.

A large diaspora also means that the society has adapted to Ukrainians and Ukrainians speakers even before the war. In Poland there are Ukrainian churches (both the Ukrainian Greek catholic Church and Orthodox Church) in the major cities. Some respondents also talk of schools for Ukrainian children, following Ukrainian curricula and teaching in the Ukrainian language – something that is important for those

set on returning to Ukraine as soon as the situation allows it.[17] Marina was one of those appreciating the opportunity to be able to send her child to Ukrainian school in Poland. She was hoping to be able to return in time for the start of the school term in September – but if not, she was happy that the child could be taught Ukrainian curricula in Poland.

> I really want my child to go to school in Ukraine. Even if remotely. But if everything does not work out, then, of course, he will go to a Ukrainian school here [in Poland]. You need to go to school, online teaching is not very effective. (Marina, 35)

Feeling more at home

Most of the refugees we talked to in Poland expressed a strong preference for staying in Poland. This was first and foremost because of the strong cultural and linguistic proximity between Ukraine and Poland. Most Ukrainians understand spoken Polish, and many Polish understand Ukrainian as well.[18] Thus, Ukrainians without knowledge of foreign languages can go to Poland and speak their own language and will be able to do some jobs, and to make themselves understood in most areas of life. In addition, the food is similar and many cultural practices are shared. As Natalia describes below – being in Poland it is not that different to being at home.

> In Poland it is easier, the mentality is similar and the language. I do not distinguish between Kyiv and Warsaw at all. Everything is so similar. There is such a pleasant atmosphere here, there is loyalty ... Probably, the Poles understand us better than anyone. The children are very kind, everyone is friendly and supportive. There was this boy – he was first a little shy, but after a little while he came up to us, took my child by the hand and said: "Slava Ukraina! (Glory to Ukraine)!" We were a little stunned – in a good

[17] We have not seen any statistics of numbers of Ukrainian schools, but it appears that these are only available in some areas of the country.

[18] Understanding the written language is a bit more challenging, as they do not use the same alphabets.

way. That is, the parents had explained everything to him, it is very touching. (Natalia, 38. In Poland since March 2022)

After the February 2022 invasion, the eastern EU-countries have displayed particularly strong support for Ukraine – the shared history as East bloc countries and geographical proximity to Russia has possibly contributed to this strong mobilisation of support both officially and in the general populations. As Natalia illustrates above, this also contributes to the Ukrainians feeling welcome in Poland.

Many refugees in Poland still depend on money from Ukraine

In Poland, we met quite a few women with children, who relied mainly on income from Ukraine. They had husbands who were still there working and sending them money monthly. Some also had jobs themselves, that they could attend to from a home office in Poland.

These refugees are depending on incomes from Ukraine. This means they probably do not want to move to countries where living expenses are higher, as they then would be dependent on assistance. It also implies that they are vulnerable to the economic development in Ukraine. If the situation deteriorates – the value of the Hryvnia, the Ukrainian currency, goes down or job market retracts further – some of the women who now are able to stay in Poland in spite of not having a job there or economic support as refugees, may need to look for other solutions.

5.2 Factors that make staying in Poland more challenging

Finding a place to stay

As we describe in the previous chapter, the large influx of refugees has created strong pressures on the housing market in the larger cities in Poland. For newly-arrived refugees, it is very difficult to find a place to stay. In our interviews, we spoke with Ukrainian refugees in Poland desperately looking for a place to stay. Several had been housed in hotels and summer houses when they first arrived, but as the summer and tourist seasons approached, they had to move out. Alla (26) and her mother were in this situation. She came to Poland with her mother in

March. For the first couple of months they stayed in a hotel in the countryside for free, but in June tourist season started, and they had to move out. Apartments have proven impossible to find, even though they could afford one. Now they stay in a shelter, taking up two of 38 beds in the same hall.

Elena (29) was in a relatively similar situation. She was frustrated and did not see how she would ever be able to get into the labour market. She did not have a stable income, and because of this, nobody would give her a lease for an apartment. To get a job and a stable income, she needs to get a place in a nursery for her child. But in order to get a nursery place, you need to have a fixed address. She is staying with relatives, but it is a two-room apartment and with her two children it is definitely crowded. She feels she has long overstayed her welcome.

There are many such examples, and the problem is well known to NGOs working with refugees in Poland. Some NGOs are still able to match some newly-arrived refugees with Polish families who have opened their homes, but often the refugees are told they only get help for the first couple of weeks, and then they have to find something on their own. This was the case for Nina (45) and her daughter. When they finally left Ukraine, they arrived in Poland with an intention to stay. They asked the volunteers at the railway station for help and were put up in a lovely apartment in central Warsaw for two weeks. After this they were on their own, they were told – and then strongly recommended to move on. It was difficult to find work and a place to live in Poland now – if they went to Norway or Denmark, they would get more help, they were promised.

As we described in the previous chapter, there are some shelters for those who are not able to find private housing on their own, provided by the city. It has been difficult to assess what kind of housing this is, as the descriptions given from the city on one hand and the refugees and NGOs on the other, do not match. The city government describe shelters with free language classes, three meals a day and individual rooms – some of the rooms also with private bathrooms. This stands in contrast to the way researchers and NGOs talk about the shelters provided by the city government; they talk about the shelters as a last resort for

those who have no other place to stay, and hardly a long-term solution. Susanna (48), one of our respondents in Oslo, had arrived in Warsaw without any money or networks. She is originally from Irpin and had not had any income since the factory she used to work in was bombed in March. When she arrived in Warsaw at the end of August 2022, she did not have any money for accommodation, and ended up staying in the shelter for nine days.

> Where did you go first?
>
> We first arrived in Poland and were there for nine days – in the camp for refugees. In Warsaw, on [anonymised] Street. A large hall full of beds – several halls. We slept there.
>
> What was it like – staying in the shelter?
>
> Well, you know, you can get used to anything [laughs]. There were about 200 beds in a huge room. The light was on – even at night. And the people there did not treat us well. In the middle of the night the people working there would start playing music very loud – rock music. I asked if they could turn it down because we wanted to sleep. And he answered, 'as if you guys wake up from this – you all sleep all day anyway' … I didn't like the way they were treating us. They were treating us like dogs in a way. They didn't like us – the Poles. (Susanna, 48)

We have no way of knowing if Susanna's experience is representative for those sleeping in city centres in Poland, or if the respondents from the city government talk of a different set of shelters that none of our respondents were familiar with. It is possible that there are higher quality shelters for the refugees (than that which Susanna describes), but that the NGOs and refugees we have been in contact with do not know about them.

What we do know, however, is that the NGOs in Warsaw report large groups of refugees in need of housing that they are not able to help, and that they recommend either moving out of the cities to the rural areas of Warsaw, or on to other countries. A significant share of the refugees we interviewed who had come to Norway during the summer or autumn

of 2022, had first tried to stay in Warsaw, but had moved on due to lack of housing.

Finding a job

As we described in the previous chapter, Poland does not have an economic support system that makes it possible for the Ukrainian refugees to stay for a long time in Poland without a job. Some of the refugees remain in Poland because they believe it will be easier for them to find a job there; there has been extensive labour migration from Ukraine to Poland since the dissolution of the Soviet Union, and the numbers of labour migrants have increased substantially in the last decade (Duszczyk & Kaczmarczyk, 2022). Because of this, the Poles are used to employing Ukrainians in many sectors of the economy, and Ukrainians are often familiar with the conditions in the Polish labour market – either through their own experiences from labour migration or through people they know. As the languages are relatively similar, communication with employers will often be simpler in Poland than in other European countries, for those who do not speak English. However, the jobs that are available to Ukrainians are often unskilled, manual, and low paid. Some respondents say that working in agriculture, for instance, is out of the question, because it is hard manual work and poorly paid compared to what they are used to. But as there are few alternative ways of securing a decent income in Poland, those who are not provided for by husbands in Ukraine, or able to live on savings, have to have a job in order to live in Poland. For Irina, a specialist medical worker from Eastern Ukraine, this was a reason for not choosing Poland when she decided where to seek protection.

> -Why did you choose Norway?
>
> There was no point in going to Poland, Germany or Austria. These countries were already crowded with Ukrainians. Finding a place to live is difficult. Then the search for a job … In Poland it is only possible to find work as a labourer, for instance to pick mushrooms or raspberries. The Ukrainians who arrived a long time ago, have taken all the decent jobs. And I did not want to go to a farm or other rough work. And then it would have been a problem to provide for my child. (Irina, 42)

In Poland we have talked to persons with university education working in cleaning, and skilled specialists working in warehouses. They often say that these jobs are okay – because they think of their stay in Poland as temporary. They still hope the war will soon be over, and that they can return to Ukraine and their old professions. If the refugees start giving up hope of being able to return, we can also expect that some of these refugees will start looking for alternative ways of securing an income. It is not certain that they will find this in Poland.

5.3 "Poland is full – it is no longer accepting refugees"

As we mentioned above, several of the refugees who have arrived in Norway in the last months say their initial plan was to stay in Poland, and only moved on because they were told that Poland "is full now", and that they had better move on to other countries to seek protection. Some of the refugees we talked to understood the notion of Poland being full literally – that Poland was not accepting any more refugees. Others interpreted this as referring to the pressures on the labour and housing markets, and that they were less likely to find a job or place to live if they stayed in Poland. Elena is leaving for Germany the same evening that I talk to her. I try to figure out why Germany, and ask why she just does not simply stay in Poland. "I was told Poland was full", she answers, "that it is no longer accepting refugees. Have you heard something else? Is it possible to stay?"

In July 2022, we visited a shelter in the border town, Przemysl, where refugees who do not have any plans or a place to stay come. We talked to several women who had recently arrived, and most of them had already made arrangements for travelling further, after recommendations from the volunteers at the railway station. Some were going to the UK; others were going to Germany. We asked the volunteers if they had a coordinated strategy for the kind of advice they give the refugees. We were told they build their advice on the information they gather themselves – from various visitors representing various countries and stories they have heard from others. What country they recommend does not

appear to be the outcome of a systematic strategy or training – but rather based on the volunteers' personal assessments and preferences.

5.4 Ukrainians remain surprisingly uninformed about refugee rights in Europe

As we describe above, many refugees are told that Poland is "full". Several respondents talk of friends and family in Ukraine who call around to people they know in Europe, asking if the country they are in still accepts refugees – if it is still possible to come. Tatjana was told in April, by a Norwegian friend, that Norway had more or less filled its quota, and that she had better go somewhere else. After this it took Tatjana several months before she dared leave Ukraine, without having a place to go. Tatjana does not know that countries that have ratified the refugee convention cannot turn away refugees. Like many other refugees we have met, she believes that there are quotas, and that there is no guarantee that they will be granted the right to stay. When Susanna "chooses" to go to Norway, it is because the is told by a fellow traveller that "you can safely go there – they will not let you sleep on the street and you will not go hungry". She does not know that this would be the case for most countries in Europe. We do not know if this poor understanding of refugee rights is common in Ukraine, but if it is, it is understandable that many may be reluctant to leave Ukraine. The lack of awareness of refugee rights also creates vulnerabilities, as refugees tend to rely on individual helpers instead of seeking support through formal assistance structures. I met Alina and her family in a Polish town close to the Ukrainian border.

> It was most important for me and my daughter to take the children out. We booked tickets and went to Poland. Tomorrow, we leave for Germany.
>
> Tomorrow, right? Do you have acquaintances there?
>
> No, we don't know anyone. But my daughter wrote about us on some help site … And there were some people who responded who are ready to help us.
>
> You will be living with a German family?

> Not really, they seem to give us an apartment. We can stay there for free in the beginning. It is not an organisation or a state. This is an ordinary private person. We're a little afraid to go …
>
> Well, there are different people, good and bad … [I try to explain to them that they are entitled to get assistance from the German government if they go there and register as refugees].
>
> I think everything will be fine.
>
> Why did you want to go to Germany?
>
> Well, it's just because in Germany, someone responded and offered help. As I said, we did not know where to go. (Alina, 57)

It is likely that Alina and her family will end up getting assistance from a kind and helpful German person. The war in Ukraine has mobilised massive private initiatives all over Europe, of private individuals wanting to help. However, the boundaries between assistance and exploitation can sometimes be blurred. While some helpers can be eager to assist, there is also a chance of them offering conditions that would be regarded as exploitative according to European labour law.

Anastasia (19) came to Norway after friends of friends heard of a couple that needed a babysitter for their children. Anastasia was lonely and needed a safe place to stay. Her father was killed in the first days of the war, and after that her mother moved to relatives in Russia. Anastasia did not want to live in Russia and headed for Europe. The family that has taken her in has become her new family. They take care of her and give her emotional support, practical assistance, drive her if she needs to go somewhere, and they eat all their meals together like a family. She is, however, not paid any wages for the babysitting. She babysits several hours every day – she does not want to tell me how many and appears embarrassed when I ask. She is aware that she probably should receive some kind of pay, especially now that she is attending full-day language courses, and the babysitting makes it difficult to find time for the homework – as she works the whole evening after she returns from school. She hopes the municipality will soon give her her own place to live. We can assume there are others in similar situations to Anastasia across Europe – who feel grateful to their individual helpers for giving them

assistance at a time when they were desperately in need of a place to live, but who have been expected to work for free in agriculture, business, or private households.

The Ukrainian refugees we have interviewed in Poland and Norway know very little of the economic support systems for refugees in European countries. This stands in clear contrast to the Syrian refugees we interviewed in Jordan and Lebanon in 2019. Eight years after the first Syrians refugees left for Europe, and four years after the large refugee movements of 2015, all the Syrians we met in Jordan and Lebanon knew someone in at least one European country. And, through regular video calls with these contacts and social media interactions, they know quite intimately the integration and immigration policies of European countries. The Syrian refugees talked about the Scandinavians insisting that women work and children are sent to kindergarten, about Belgians having restrictions on wearing the niqab, about free healthcare, and about how difficult it is for Syrians to find a proper job – and that many end up living on welfare (Tyldum, 2021). Such narratives are still more or less absent when the Ukrainian refugees talk about opportunities in Europe. Many Ukrainian refugees leaving Ukraine don't appear to know that in western Europe all countries will offer economic assistance, a place to live and some language training to refugees. And because they do not know this, they eagerly look for places to stay and ways of securing an income before they go abroad.

We asked most of our respondents how their friends and family were doing – living in Germany, Poland, England or France. Some say the refugees get a lot of assistance, others say there is no assistance there. The experiences recounted to friends and family back home are not coherent, giving the impression that what kind of assistance people get is somewhat random. This may also have been the case in the first phase of refugee movements into Europe. While the refugee reception systems in Europe should secure refugees a basic income and a place to live, there have been challenges in many regions of Europe to accommodate the large numbers of arrivals. As many have stayed in private houses – or even come through employers – they are not necessarily registered as refugees, and thus not entitled to assistance. We cannot say anything about how the different European countries have coped with the high

numbers of refugee arrivals based on this study, but our interviews with refugees in Poland and Norway indicate that the information that the refugees get about refugee assistance varies greatly – even for refugees in the same country. Some say refugees in Germany get a lot of assistance, others say they barely get any assistance at all. The same goes for all other European countries.

> In England I heard that there is no help. These are the words of my girlfriend … There is no housing, no benefits, they have to pay for everything themselves. (Olena, 42)

We know that there are refugee reception systems in Europe, and although support for refugees is generally higher in some of the Northern European countries than in the south, Ukrainian refugees should be entitled to both economic and hosing support across Europe. However, six months into the war, many refugees still don't appear to be aware of this. Even in Norway, when we meet refugees who have been settled in municipalities and have been given temporary protection in Norway, they still don't seem to have understood the rights-based system that is available to refugees. One respondent asked us, during the interview, if Norway is still accepting more refugees – she is wondering because she has a friend considering leaving Ukraine now, and she promised to check if there were still an opportunity to come to Norway. She had heard most other countries in Europe were no longer accepting Ukrainians.

Without knowing if you will be given legal residency and economic support when you flee, leaving Ukraine for a strange country is scary. When Nina talks about the day she came to the shelter for refugees in Norway, and they were taken in, given clothes, hugs and a place to stay, she starts crying – remembering how extremely stressful the journey had been, and how relieved she was to arrive at a place where they would be taken care of. It was not something she was certain would happen.

The conflict in Ukraine is new, and due to the large numbers of arrivals across Europe, refugee assistance has often relied on preliminary arrangements and private initiatives – and, it seems likely, many Ukrainians figuring out how to manage on their own. Thus, the Ukrainians still in Ukraine do not know about the protection systems that await them if

they come – many still think they have to find a job in order to manage, and oppose coming as they don't speak the language. If the conflict continues into 2023, knowledge about the support systems for Ukrainians in Europe will most likely be better among those wanting to leave, making the decision to go a little less frightening.

5.5 Chapter summary

In this chapter, we describe the strong preference many Ukrainian refugees have for remaining in Poland. The near proximity to Ukraine makes it possible to go back and forth to visit relatives or check on property and businesses. The large diaspora provides psychological and practical assistance and the cultural and linguistic proximity between the two countries means that language barriers are small. For women with husbands and sons in Ukraine, being in Poland means being physically close to them, and for persons dependent on salaries from Ukraine, the living expenses in Poland are lower than in Western Europe. However, the large number of refugees arriving at the same time in Poland has made it difficult for some refugees to get by in Poland. Finding a place to live is increasingly difficult and refugees with an education struggle to find jobs where they can use their skills.

The refugees who struggle to find a source of income or a place to live in Poland either have to move on to other countries in Europe or return to Ukraine. At the time when we conducted our fieldwork, it seemed that many of those who struggle to get by in Poland choose to return rather than move on. They seem to be unaware of the more extensive economic support systems for refugees in other countries of Europe. They worried that they will not get by in other European countries without a job and without speaking the languages. As more people get settled in Western Europe, and they start sharing their stories on social media, this information might perhaps spread more rapidly. It is possible that this also will lead to more of the refugees moving on, rather than returning, if they are not able to make ends meet in Poland.

6 Returning to a Ukraine still at war

> If I don't go home now, I will not have anything to return to. I can still go back to my job. If I stay, I will never be able to rebuild what I had in Ukraine here. It is not safe – but it is safe enough. (Marina, 54)

The longing for return to the homeland is central to the lives of refugees everywhere (Kuschminder, 2017; Omata, 2013) and the dream of return can still be strong in refugee populations several decades or even generations after they first had to flee (Farah, 2006). However, some refugee groups have stronger return ambitions than others. In this chapter, we present some of the refugees we met during our fieldwork who expressed strong return ambitions and discuss if and how they differ from other subgroups of Ukrainian refugees.

6.1 Strong return ambitions for some

Several studies suggest that return ambitions tend to be stronger among refugees who remain in neighbouring countries to a conflict zone. Refugees who no longer think return to their home country will be possible tend to have stronger aspirations for secondary migration than those who still hold out hope for return (Tyldum, 2021; Tyldum & Zhang, Forthcoming). A survey among Ukrainians who arrived in Austria and Poland in the early phase of the conflict[19] indicates that already at this early phase of the conflict, the refugees who had moved as far as Austria

[19] Conducted by the Wittgenstein Centre and presented at a webinar on Wednesday, 21st September 2022, 14:00-15:00

were less motivated to return to Ukraine than those who stayed in Poland (Kohlenberger et al., 2022).

In our qualitative interviews with refugees in Poland, we find clear support for this trend. When asked if they want to move on to other countries where support systems may be better than in Poland, our respondents usually answer that they do not wish to move further away, as they intend to go back soon. They left Ukraine for some stability and to feel safer but have no intention of starting a new life abroad. They are still waiting for peace to come – or at least a more peaceful situation.

> Do you sometimes think that you might stay here forever?
>
> No!!! I never thought that, and I really hope that I will never think that in the future. There are very good and kind people here, we were well received. I can't say anything bad about Poland. Poland really extended a helping hand to us, and we will always be very grateful to them. But there is no place like home.
>
> And what would you need in order to return? Are you waiting for the war to end?
>
> I understand that the war will not end in a few days, and that most likely it will last for a long time. But at least I want there to be no missiles coming in … But, everyone wants to go home, and the children too. (Hanna, 41)

Some of the Ukrainian refugees we met in Norway also talk of return as the only acceptable long-term solution. One young mother settled in a small municipality in Norway initially turned down offers of language courses for herself, and kindergarten for her children, because she was convinced the war would soon be over, and that she would soon go back to her husband. After 5 months in Norway, she decided to accept the offer to send her child to kindergarten – but still did not want to attend any language classes.

Similarly, Anna (23) came to Norway to work when her husband volunteered to join the Ukrainian army. She wants to contribute to help her family at home, she told us. She is sending home money to help in a situation that is becoming increasingly dire. But she does not see the need to attend Norwegian classes, as she does not intend to stay.

The two examples above, however, do not appear to be typical for the Ukrainian refugees who have come to Norway thus far. In a survey distributed to Ukrainians in Norway in the early phase of the conflict, less than two percent of the respondents who know about the state sponsored introduction programme for refugees say that they do not wish to attend this course (Hernes, Deineko, Myhre, Liodden, & Staver, 2022). This can be taken to support our expectation that the refugees who have decided to relocate further away from Ukraine are more likely to start orienting themselves towards strategies for staying more long term. In the next chapter, we will come back to how refugees in Norway talk about their expectation for staying, while this chapter mainly presents findings from our fieldwork in Poland.

6.2 Why return to Ukraine now

In the train station in Przemysl, a Polish town close to the Ukrainian border, trains leave for Ukraine several times a day. As there is a no-fly zone in Ukraine, the refugees who want to return have to do so by train, bus or car. On the trains going back are both those who have arrived by plane or train from other countries, and those who have remained in the border zone until now. During our fieldwork in Poland, we visited the train station to talk to the people waiting in line for trains to Ukraine. Some came to the side with us and gave longer interviews, others we simply talked to in the line, or in the vicinity of the line – these were short conversations about where they had been and where they were going and their reflections on security and alternatives to returning. Some of these conversations turned into focus group discussions – as other people in the line would talk of their experiences and bring different perspectives to the table. In the following, we give a short overview of the main categories of groups who were returning to Ukraine on these trains.

Going back to quieter areas

Some of the people in the lines for the train back to Ukraine did not see themselves as refugees. They had simply been in Poland or elsewhere to visit family, on holiday or for work. Often, they came from areas they perceived to be relatively safe, and hardly impacted by the war. Some,

however, had visited family members who stayed abroad under temporary protection. For instance, Lidia, had been to see her sister in Germany and deliver two big suitcases with documents and important belongings which they did not bring when they left in a hurry at the outbreak of war. Lidia did not consider staying in Germany herself. She did not have children, she said, and she doubted she would be able to find a job as a psychologist if she did. Those we met here who did not think of themselves as refugees typically came from Western and Central parts of Ukraine, and did not have young children. Sandra, on the other hand, had brought her children to her sister in Poland. She lives in Kyiv and is not afraid for herself but does not want to let her children live with the insecurity and constant alarms. She said she had to go back to Kyiv – to keep her job.

Marina comes from one of the towns around Kyiv which was occupied by the Russians in the early phases of the conflict. Her husband has already returned home, and she is planning to do so herself. According to Marina, the previously occupied territories around Kyiv are now coming back to life again; the men never left, and now the women are returning to make the families whole again.

> A lot of people have already returned, because in my hometown everything is relatively calm. Do you know what the problem is? Many families are returning, no matter what … We have some friends in Bucha, their home was clearly marked by war – windows and doors broken. They've already returned. They have fixed both the house and garden and live quietly. Bucha is gradually coming back to life, Irpin is coming back to life. Don't forget that very often men stayed in Ukraine, they weren't let out. Only the wives and their children left. And not everyone can handle this separation. Many simply did not have enough resources, families are falling apart. And so the border is closed for men from 18 to 60 years. That's why people are coming back … (Marina, 54)

This is a defining time – return now or live the rest of your life as a refugee?

There were also numerous families with children in the line for the train going back to Ukraine. This was in late July and schools were about to start up. Several families we talked to said they were going back now to be in place when schools start. These were families from Western and Central parts of Ukraine who had left when the Russian invasion escalated, and now felt they had to make up their mind. Was the threat still so strong that they wanted to remain abroad – and start rebuilding their lives there? Or was it safe enough to go back to husbands and fathers – and the children's friends – and let the children start school at the end of the summer. If they did not return now – and enrolled their children in schools in Europe – the children would have to learn a new language and start adapting to a new culture and a new way of life.

For these families, the start of the school year thus became a defining moment – at which they had to decide if they were to live abroad as refugees or take the chance of returning. Some worry that the Ukrainian schools will not accept the education their children get elsewhere, and that if they do not return now, their children will have to retake the schoolyear when they return. These decisions to return for families with children were also strongly driven by the fact that they had husbands and fathers left in Ukraine. In the narratives of many of our respondents, leaving a loved one behind and starting a new life abroad was not perceived as an option. It was also decisive that the situation in Western and Central parts of Ukraine was relatively stable at the time.

Others had decided to return to Ukraine now because they had jobs waiting for them back home that they would lose if they did not return. Many had been able to keep working from abroad – from home offices in refuge – facilitated through experiences from the COVID-19 pandemic. However, several respondents talked about bosses who had become more impatient and now insisted that they should come home to keep their jobs. With increasing unemployment in Ukraine, and large groups of internally displaced looking for jobs, the Ukrainians who have left for Europe can no longer expect their jobs to be there for them much longer. The knowledge that unemployment is high – and that it will be difficult to find a new job if they return in a couple of months –

creates a defining moment. If they do not return now, it might be much more difficult to return later.

Some also mention a need to go back to Ukraine to take care of their homes and property. Houses have often been left empty while they were away and some worry about overgrown gardens and buildings in need of maintenance. Those who fled areas around Kyiv, where the Russian army entered but have now left, talk of houses that are largely intact but with broken windows or other damage that they need to go home to repair – if they want their home to still be there when they one day return. But those who left their houses far from the front line also talked of the need to return to take care of their home. Gardens and houses that are left empty for six months start decaying. And thus, for those with property in need of maintenance at home – as winter approaches and they have been away for more than 6 months – this also became a defining moment for them.

Returning because life as a refugee was too tough

Several Polish NGOs express concern that the conditions for Ukrainian refugees in Poland are so difficult that they feel forced to return to unsafe areas of Ukraine. And among the refugees we talked to waiting for the train to Ukraine, we also met refugees from areas on the front line or in occupied territories.

Olena (49) fled a city now occupied by the Russians. Since then, she had been staying with her sister in Poland together with her teenage son. They have lived well there – she said. But still, as she has struggled to find work, sitting around all day, spending money and not having anything to do has taken its toll on her – both emotionally and economically. It is cheaper to live in Ukraine she said, and in Poland, she no longer received any assistance. She also hopes it will be easier to find work if she goes home where she knows the language. In Poland, she was only able to find cleaning jobs – or picking raspberries. She has higher education and in Ukraine, she hopes there is a greater chance of her finding a relevant job. Her husband has found an apartment in Eastern Ukraine. He still has no job. “What about the security situation?” I ask, “Are you not a bit afraid to return?” “Very much so” she answers .

“They say you can get used to the constant sirens and the fear of missile attacks, but I don’t think I ever will”. But without an income, she says she cannot stay in Poland either. Moving on to other countries in Europe also frightens her – as she does not speak any foreign languages. She would not dare to do that without her husband, she tells us.

Some of the refugees who are in Norway also sometimes find their new life difficult. Nina arrived in Oslo in the beginning of September, having left a city in the frontline just a few weeks earlier. All the uncertainty makes it scary, Nina explains. And when it gets too scary she calms herself saying – it is always possible to go back.

> Right now I'm waiting for a settlement in a municipality in Norway, and I'm a little scared. What if there is no school for my child? If we are placed in a municipality that has no high school, but only middle school? What if we will end up in a situation where I will not be able to get a job – and we will not have money to live on? Deep down, I understand that I have documents, that I can leave anytime I want, if suddenly everything goes completely wrong. I always reassure myself like that. Deep down, I understand that everything will be fine, but I still reassure myself that it is possible to go back. We are in the unknown. You know, I have lost everything. I worked at the [anonymised]. Many people knew me. I had some kind of status, respect, a lot of friends everywhere and everyone was ready to help. If I had any issues, I called and very quickly resolved the issue. Here I am starting everything from scratch … My whole life is two suitcases and a child. (Nina, 42)

Going back to occupied territories

Several of our respondents in Poland considered returning to occupied territories. We met one of them in the train station in Przemysl. She had been staying with her son in Poland for some time, and when we met her, she was going back to live as internally displaced in Ukraine. It was not a life she was looking forward to. She missed her home greatly, and most of all wanted to go back there. Her son tells her not to – that she cannot live under the Russians. She is not so sure herself. She is born in Russia, she tells me. “Perhaps it doesn’t matter so much who the rulers

are?", the interviewer suggests, trying to show some understanding of a choice which is challenging to make sense of. "Of course it does!" she exclaims – quite annoyed. "I will never forgive the Russians for what they have done to my people, to my country – to my hometown. They tore up my family – we are now spread out everywhere in Europe. But still, [anonymised] is where my home is. All my photos are there – the photos of my children too. And all the places where I have lived my life. It's where my parents' graves are. I don't know if I can give up all of this". This longing for the home they have left behind is strong for several others who have left the occupied territories and who have been told their house is still there. Often there are also elderly relatives or husbands left behind that they also wish to return to. They know that life will be hard if they go back, but their experience of life as a refugee is hard as well.

Realising you will likely never again work in the field of your education if you stay

One group that is overrepresented in our data on refugees about to return are middle-aged refugees who have higher education from Ukraine. For while there is a great demand for labour across Europe, this demand is mainly for manual and unskilled labour or specialists with knowledge of the English language (or the ability to learn local languages). Refugees with higher education from Ukraine would need, at a minimum, some foreign language skills (English or other national languages). For many professions, they would also need to go through systems of certification and some re-education as well. This could mean years of schooling before they will be able to enter the labour market to work in their profession again.

Marina is one of them. She is 54 years old and has lived for five months in a medium-sized town in Norway with her daughter, granddaughter and mother. She is very happy with how they have been received – they have a nice apartment and a network of Norwegians who advise and assist them. Still, she is now preparing to return to her hometown – a town outside Kyiv, previously occupied by the Russians. Her daughter and granddaughter will remain in Norway, and her mother strongly opposes going back as she does not feel that it is safe. But her relatives are

not able to convince Marina to stay. She is aware that it is not totally safe, but she feels it is safe enough. She tells us that she does not think she has a future living as a refugee in Europe. In Ukraine, she has a job that she loves where she feels she is able to make a difference in people's lives. The job involves a lot of communication, and she has concluded that she will never be able to speak Norwegian, or any other language, well enough to be able to work in her profession abroad. She is too old to learn a language now, she feels. And if she wants to keep her job – she must go back now. And then there is the house – her home – and all the people of her life that they left behind when they fled. She doesn't really think she can have a good life without them.

> And if the war doesn't end … Will you return to Norway?
>
> You know, as long as the house is standing, I will not go anywhere … As long as there is not something coming aiming specifically at me. It's one thing when there are children, then it is understandable that people stay abroad until it's over. But for me, my whole life was spent in Ukraine. I'm not ready to start all over again in another country. I don't have the right resources – due to my age and character. I will not be able to integrate. It's hard to say what will happen next. Everyone is scared. Nobody knows anything. (Marina, 54)

Marina's position was echoed by several other refugee women with higher education and jobs that they loved and identified with in Ukraine. For them, life as a refugee meant losing an important part of their identity – and they felt too old and too exhausted to start the process of getting the relevant training to restart abroad. When they now return to Ukraine it does not mean that they are not scared of the war and possible missile attacks. They are. But they are equally scared of staying abroad, and not be able to work and never feel like a professional again.

Going back to prepare for a permanent exit

Some of the people going back to Ukraine from the train station in Poland were family members of persons who had fled in the early phase of the conflict and are living under temporary protection in Europe. The

people we met were fathers, sisters and brothers of refugees, who had been abroad to visit their loved ones, and while doing so, had brought the belongings and documents the refugees for various reasons were not able to bring when they fled in the spring. There were also some who were going back to collect documents themselves, or who had to go back temporarily to obtain the documents they needed. They had left children in the care of friends or relatives in their new country of residence while they were away. We interpret this an indication that these refugees in Western Europe had given up the thought of imminent return and were getting the documents and belongings they needed to continue their life abroad. In the return migration of visitors, we see that others have decided to stay more long term. We can see this as a migration to make the initial move more permanent.

6.3 Ambivalent narratives of staying and going

In this report, we do not aim to classify refugees according to their desires to return or not. Some of the refugees we talked to had already decided to go back, but most of them presented ambivalent narratives – in parts of the interview talking strongly about their homeland and all the things they missed and were not willing to give up, and in other parts talking about reasons for not going back – often tied to lack of jobs and poor economic prospects. The security situation was of course the main concern for many, but also economic aspects of both life in exile and life at home shaped how they talk about return. As we described above, many of our respondents felt that after 5-6 months abroad, they were at a crossroads. Some return to Ukraine because they had jobs they were afraid to lose if they did not return now. But there were also some who talked extensively about their desire to go back, and the importance of being in your home, but who could not see that they would ever do so for various reasons.

Nadia's husband was working in construction in Europe when the war broke out. Nadia brought the children with her to Poland, and her husband met her there. Now they are both working on short-term contracts. They both strongly want to go back home, but they also know that if they go back, her husband will not be allowed to leave again.

When I ask if they will go back after the contracts have ended, she answers "of course" the first time, and "probably not" the second. It is a difficult decision, and she probably does not know what they will end up doing.

> When your contracts are over – are you thinking you will return to Ukraine?
>
> Yes – of course!
>
> You don't think of staying here – as refugees?
>
> No.
>
> Why not?
>
> There is no place like home. You know, when you are home, you have all these things – and they belong to you. Your home, your land – but here it's all unfamiliar and it belongs to other people.
>
> […]
>
> Will it not be difficult for your husband if he returns to Ukraine?
>
> … if we go back, they will not let us out again … Well, for now, we are sitting here and do not know what will happen next. If he goes to Ukraine, then what is it there for us? No money, no income, no jobs … Here at least we have a job and a chance to earn a little. (Nadia, 36)

As the interview extract above illustrates, the economic conditions in Ukraine are something many refugees are concerned about. Refugees who have economic security in Poland or Norway, either through jobs or through access to welfare benefits, find it difficult to give that up, to return to Ukraine where they know the economic situation is challenging. Emotionally, they may yearn to go home, but the economic challenges, in combination with the uncertain security situation makes the decision to return or stay an extremely challenging one.

6.4 Chapter summary

In this chapter, we have looked at Ukrainian refugees who intend to return to Ukraine now, and the arguments they present for doing so. They

are returning or aspiring to return to a Ukraine still at war. Some return to areas in Western or Central Ukraine that have been less directly affected by the war. They left in the early phase of the conflict when no place in Ukraine felt safe, and return now because they feel the immediate danger of invasion is over in these areas. Others are returning to areas more affected by the war. Many talked of this period as a defining moment – where they had to decide if they wanted to return to their old life or start a new life as a refugee in Europe. Some feared that if they did not return now, they would lose their job, and would not have a job to return to if they wanted to return later. Others return to take care of dwellings and gardens that have been standing unprotected for months. Refugees from the areas around Kyiv that had been occupied by Russian forces in February/March talk of homes where windows and roofs are broken from bullets and missiles, and that will not survive the winter if they do not go back to save them now.

When we did our interviews in late July, some were also returning because the new school year was approaching and they wanted their children to continue their education in Ukraine. Some of our respondents have higher education from Ukraine and returned because they felt the process of being able to work in their profession abroad was too demanding. Some of those returning also suggested that they only went back to Ukraine to see what life was like there now, and were open to the idea of leaving again shortly if things did not work out. These respondents all said that they would move to a different country if they were to leave Ukraine again. Several studies suggest that return ambitions tend to be stronger among refugees who remain in neighbouring countries to a conflict zone. This is also indicated in our data – the respondents who have moved as far as Norway are less likely to express return-intentions compared with those who stay in Poland.

7 Reception of Ukrainian refugees in Norway

In this chapter, we present a snapshot of the systems in place in Norway for receiving Ukrainian refugees. Unlike the chapter on the reception of Ukrainian refugees in Poland, we have not based this chapter on qualitative interviews, but on written documents published by Norwegian government entities: laws, regulations and information provided on government websites. The chapter is not an assessment of the Norwegian system but meant as a short introduction to readers unfamiliar with the Norwegian context.

To the 6th of October 2022, 27,219 Ukrainians have been granted temporary collective protection in Norway (UDI, 2022a). This is the highest number of persons ever to be given protection in Norway in one year. The previous record was set in 2016 when 16,500 persons were given protection. In 2021, only 4,772 persons were granted asylum (UDI, 2022a)[20].

Ukrainians who apply for asylum in Norway are, similar to the practice in the EU, granted temporary collective protection for a year at a time. To a large degree, they have the same rights as other refugees in Norway, which includes acute housing in a first phase and settlement in a municipality, access to the job market and social benefits. They are also granted access to the Norwegian Introduction Programme for Refugees, which includes Norwegian or English classes as well as work-related

[20] We here present the numbers of refugees being granted protection. In 2015 a total of 31 000 persons applied for protection in Norway. Some of these were not granted protection.

training, that they can follow while receiving some economic support. Ukrainian children have the right and obligation to attend schools.

The large influx of Ukrainian refugees to Norway in 2022 led to temporary changes in some laws relevant for refugee reception. A summary of the law changes made can be found in Prop. 107L (2021-2022).

7.1 Access to housing

Upon arrival in Norway, Ukrainian refugees are given shelter in an asylum reception centre/ acute temporary housing. Acute temporary housing offers basic accommodation. Some places have catering and offer a minimum of four meals per day. Others are where refugees are provided with funding[21] to cover food and other expenses (UDI, 2022c). It is possible to apply to be hosted privately, and in these situations the refugees can contact relevant municipalities for financial support (UDI, 2022b). It has been outside the scope of this study to investigate if municipalities have successfully provided financial support for refugees who are hosted privately.

The refugees have the right to be offered more long-term settlement and housing within a reasonable time. The Norwegian regime for refugee resettlement is based on a principle where the central government petitions local municipalities to accept a certain number of refugees for resettlement. Historically, this has been done so that local authorities are better able to predict the numbers of refugees they will receive – therefore facilitating resettlement and integration efforts – as well as to ensure that refugees are settled in all regions of the country. To the 18th of October, 2022, 19,394 refugees with temporary status (Ukrainians) have been given residence in Norwegian municipalities, which accounts for 65% of the 29,921 who had applied for temporary protection (IMDi, 2022a). That said, refugees are free to find private housing anywhere in the country. However, to be eligible for participation in an Introduction Programme and the introductory benefit that refugees get while they

[21] 2,044 kr/day for single persons over 18; 881 kr extra per day for single persons with children; 3,287 kr/day for couples and 1,766 kr/day extra per child (UDI, 2022c).

participate in this programme, the settlement must take place through an agreement between a Norwegian municipality and the state (IMDi, 2022b, 2022c). It is up to municipalities to decide what kind of housing the refugees are offered, and municipalities vary in whether they offer public housing or housing in the private market (Prop. 107 L 2021-2022).

Ukrainians are currently housed in all 356 municipalities in the country (IMDi, 2022a). If provided settlement through the Directorate of Integration and Diversity (IMDi), the possibility of choosing where to be placed is limited. The IMDi collects information about each refugee's level of education and line of work, and can use this information to identify a suitable municipality.[22] There is no possibility to file an official complaint regarding where one is placed (Prop. 107 L 2021-2022: 14). Municipalities who accept refugees receive compensation from the government (IMDi, 2022b).

7.2 Introduction Programme with language classes

Ukrainians refugees between the ages of 18 and 55, who reside in a municipality by agreement with the IMDi, have the right to participate in the Norwegian Introduction Programme.[23] In practice, this means that if the refugee expresses a wish to take part in the Introduction Programme, the municipality is obliged to provide this. Contrary to other refugees, Ukrainians have no formal obligation to take part in the programme, which is a training programme aimed at preparing the refugee for work or education in Norway. The programme varies between municipalities, but should, according to the law, include preparation for work or education and include classes in Norwegian or English.[24] For

[22] For refugees who have not been granted temporary protection, this mapping is more extensive.

[23] People over the age of 55 are not entitled to participate in the Introduction Programme, however the municipality may choose to offer an introduction programme for persons aged between 56 and 67 (Prop. 107 L 2021-2022).

[24] Ukrainian refugees have the possibility of choosing to learn English instead of Norwegian, an option not given to other refugees.

those with children under 18, the programme also includes guidance about being a parent in Norway and the services that are offered for families in the country. The Introduction Programme can include shorter or longer periods of work training or work placements and can be offered part-time to allow for participation combined with employment. According to the Integration Law, the rest of the programme should be adjusted to meet the needs and goals of each individual refugee. The length of the programme depends on previous education or training, lasting from three months to four years. Refugees from Ukraine (who normally have completed secondary education) will mainly be offered introduction programmes that are between 3 and 12 months long (Prop. 107 L 2021-2022: 40-41).

7.3 Access to the labour market and to social benefits

Ukrainian refugees have full access to the Norwegian labour market (Prop. 107 S: 148). After being settled in a municipality, they have the right to receive a mapping of their skills, and to participate in career guidance. The goal of the skills mapping is to see whether they are eligible for vacant jobs in the municipality (Prop 107 L: 46). Norway has a highly specialised labour market where skills and competence in Norwegian and English is often required. In July 2022, 400 Ukrainian refugees were in work in Norway, part- or full-time (Senstad, 2022), making up 2 percent of the Ukrainians who had applied for temporary protection at that time.

The Norwegian government offers income support or social benefits to those among the refugees who are not in paid employment. Participants in the Introduction Programme receive the introductory benefit, currently 223,000 NOK per year (approximately 22,300 EUR).[25] The benefit is individual and is meant to cover basic living expenses while the refugee participates in the programme. Contrary to social assistance, which is discretionary and based on household income, the introductory benefit is an individual, set benefit. If two adults in the same household

[25] Persons under 25 years receive 2/3 the amount.

participate in the programme, they will each receive the same introductory support. The benefit is, however, contingent on participation in the introductory programme. Illegitimate (according to the programme regulations) absence from set programme activities is sanctioned with benefit deductions according to the hours of absence. The introductory support is designed to resemble the rights and obligations in Norwegian working life, according to taxation, sick leave, maternity leave and so on.

Living expenses in Norway are generally high, and as a reference point, the mean income level in Norway is 550,000 NOK per year (approximately 50,000 EUR) (Fløtre & Tuv, 2022). When settled in a municipality, refugees are generally responsible for paying their own rent. In particular in the big cities, housing is expensive. The fixed introductory benefit will therefore last longer for refugees who are settled outside the more pressed areas. For those who are not, supplementary social assistance can be offered on a discretionary basis (NAV, 2022).

Ukrainian refugees are so far not eligible to receive support under the National Insurance Act (folketrygdloven). They are thus not granted child and unemployment benefits. These are rights that one only gets after having stayed in Norway for more than one year (NAV, 2022; Prop. 107 L 2021-2022: 149).

When settled in a municipality, refugees are generally responsible for paying their own rent, but if financial benefits following participation in the Introduction Programme are not sufficient, they can apply for further financial assistance from the Norwegian Labour and Welfare Administration (NAV) and/or the Norwegian State Housing Bank. In the case of NAV, sums are subject to an assessment of individual needs (NAV, 2022; Prop. 107 L 2021-2022).

7.4 Access to education and kindergarten

All children in Norway have a right and obligation to free schooling from the age of six until they have completed primary and lower secondary education. This right also extends to refugees who reside in Norway, if it is likely that they are going to stay more than three months.

For Ukrainian refugees, municipalities are responsible for providing this education within three months.[26] Access to childcare and education is also provided to children who stay in asylum reception centres or acute temporary housing. The children have the right to specially adjusted Norwegian education until they are fluent enough in Norwegian to participate in ordinary classes (Prop. 107 L 2021-2022: 100). The Ministry of Education has stated that Ukrainian families who wish to follow the Ukrainian curriculum digitally can do so on a voluntary basis. Children are, however, still obligated to attend a Norwegian school full-time (Prop. 107 L 2021-2022: 115).

Youths who have completed lower secondary school have the right to free upper secondary education in Norway, but no obligation to participate (Prop 107 L: 99). As with children, youths have the right to specially adjusted Norwegian education until they are fluent enough in Norwegian to participate in ordinary classes (Prop 107 L 2021-2022: 100).

Children under the age of six, whose families have been settled, have the right to attend kindergarten in the municipality where they reside. All 2-, 3-, 4- and 5-year-olds who live in households with a low income are entitled to 20 free hours per week (UDIR, 2022).

7.5 Chapter summary

In this chapter, we have shown that Norway has a reception system for refugees which provides Ukrainian refugees with housing, access to training and access to an income. In comparison with Ukraine, Poland and many other European countries, the services and funds that are provided are relatively generous, partly reflecting the high cost of living. However, in a Norwegian context, the level of living that these benefits enable is relatively low. Of the Ukrainians who arrived after the February invasion, few are currently working.

[26] Other refugees have this right within one month, but the law has been temporarily altered to allow municipalities to adjust to the large influx of Ukrainian refugees (Prop. 107 L 2021-2022).

8 Long-term plans among Ukrainian refugees in Norway

> I love Norway. This is my country now. I will stay here and work and pay taxes. I hope I will not have to go back. (Susanna, 48. Three weeks after arrival in Norway – having chosen Norway more or less at random.)

After our interviews, the refugees we interviewed in Norway often wondered if they could ask us a question. The question was always the same: did we think the temporary residency permits they had now were going to be prolonged – and would they be able to stay permanently in Norway? In the chapter on return to Ukraine in the early phases of the conflict, we showed that numerous studies indicate that return intentions seem to be stronger among refugees who remain in border areas than among those who move further away. In this chapter, we ask how the refugees who have come to Norway think about staying in Norway if the war ends. We ask them what their hopes are – and some say they hope to be able to remain in Norway. This does not mean that they intend to stay illegally if their temporary protection and residency permit is revoked. Many explicitly say that illegal residency is not something they will consider. When they talk of reasons to remain in Norway, they often emphasise the well-organised society, predictability and economic security. This is not something they will have access to if they stay illegally.

Surveys indicate that large populations intend to stay

Several surveys have been conducted asking Ukrainian refugees in various countries about their intention to stay or return. These surveys report that most of the Ukrainian refugees do not intend to return to

Ukraine before the war is over, and many also hope to stay even if the war ends[27].

Return decisions are, however, challenging to map in a survey because it is rarely a simple either/or (some refugees wanting to return, and others not wanting to do so). As we describe in the previous chapter, many refugees talk with ambivalence about staying and returning. Most feel strongly for their country, their hometown and families left behind, and do not want to leave this for good. But at the same time, there are several factors that induce them to want to stay. "Are you asking if we want to return – or if we think we ever will?" Alexander asked when I posed the question to him and the others in his language class. "Of course we want to return – but I don't think we ever will". Others put it the other way around; because they have only temporary protection in Europe, they don't really think that they will be able to stay – but if there is a chance that they can stay legally, this is what they want. In other words, aspirations to stay and return are shaped by a mix of what the refugees think is possible and their guesses as to what the future will bring – with the outcome of the war in Ukraine foremost in their minds. In this chapter, we look at the factors that the refugees point to when they talk of reasons to stay in Norway or return to Ukraine when the war is over. For most of them – it is not a simple either/or, but it is a topic they clearly have given a lot of thought.

Instead of classifying the refugees as potential returnees or not, we will in this chapter look at the narratives they lean on when they consider staying in Norway. Thus, in this chapter we have gathered narratives about staying. However, these same refugees also draw on the narratives described in the chapter on return – the narratives about the strong desire to go back home. These narratives can be – and are –

[27] See, for instance https://www.schengenvisainfo.com/news/over-20-of-ukrainian-refugees-in-poland-intend-to-return-to-their-homeland-before-winter-survey-reveals/; and

https://ratinggroup.ua/files/ratinggroup/reg_files/rg_1200_ua_pcycho-markers_062022_%D1%85_v_press.pdf

drawn on simultaneously. This illustrates the ambivalent and difficult position the refugees are in when they think about their future.

8.1 It will take too long to rebuild the war-torn regions

Most of the refugees we have met in Norway come from areas that are now occupied territories or areas that have been on the front line of the war for a long time, and where massive shelling of civilian infrastructure has taken place. Sometimes they had neither a house nor a job to return to. Several respondents say they would like to return after the war – but that they do not have anything to return to. Ukrainians have lived through years of crisis before. As the quote below illustrates, many Ukrainians still remember vividly the hyper-inflation, unemployment, long queues and lack of products that marked the reform years of the 1990s. And they fear that post-war Ukraine will be a repeat of that period of their life.

> You know – we are old enough to remember the 1990s. We know what it costs to rebuild a country. We are not going to expose our children to a life like that if we can avoid it. (Danilo, 45)

Right now, some of the Ukrainians who come from the areas most damaged by the war do not think they will ever be able to return to their hometown, because the damage to infrastructure and dwellings is so massive. However, this might change when the war is over. Much will depend on the political and economic development of Ukraine, and what kind of support Ukraine will get when it is ready to rebuild its cities. And this in turns also depends on the security situation. If Ukraine is on its way to EU and NATO membership, and receives substantial economic and political support in the process of reconstruction, it is likely that more Ukrainians will wish to go home and contribute to the reconstruction of Ukraine.

8.2 The refugees who do not trust in peace

Some respondents also expressed a reluctance to return to Ukraine when the war ends because they fear new invasions in the future. One of

our respondents from Kharkiv, Ukraine's second largest city located in the northeast, talks about this fear as a part of his wish/intention to stay in Norway:

> Life in Kharkiv is slowly returning to normal now … We thought about returning to Kharkiv, but what if everything suddenly intensifies again? We are under that threat all the time … It could be a protracted conflict. Many of us are wondering if there is going to be a chance to return at all. We are driven by fear. You get so tired of living with this constant stress … (Maria, 38)

Victoria (39) goes even further – saying that it will take much more than a peace agreement for her to think it is safe to return to Ukraine. She is originally from the areas in Donetsk where the Russian-backed separatists gained control in in 2014. She had just established herself with a small family and a house when fighting forced them to flee to Kharkiv. She and her husband had just managed to start a new life in Kharkiv, get a new place to live and jobs, and then the Russians attacked again.

> This is the second time we are in this situation. When we lose everything and start completely from scratch … So we know how to lose it all and start all over again. We both know it's possible. We are not afraid of anything … But I will soon be 40 – I cannot take the chance of losing it all again. And because of this I will not go back to Ukraine – as long as we cannot be certain that Russia will not attack again. (Victoria, 39)

We have several respondents who are refugees for a second time – from either Crimea or Donetsk. They all say they hope to be able to stay in Norway (or Poland for the refugees we interviewed there) even if a peace agreement is reached. Some hope that there is a chance that they will be given permanent protection, but many are already now aware that they need to enter the labour market as soon as possible, to have alternative grounds to seek residency if their temporary protection is revoked.

8.3 Some have chosen Norway after systematic research

Most of our respondents appear to have ended up in Norway not because the Norwegian political system, nature or economic opportunities had a particular appeal, but more or less at random. Those who came in the first couple of months often came because this was where their closest family lived (siblings, children or parents). The numbers of Ukrainian refugees seeking protection in Norway in March and April was lower relative to population size, than in many other west European countries, and it is assumed that this was in part because Norway had a relatively small Ukrainian diaspora compared with many other European countries. Some of the other refugees we met in Norway – both those who came in the beginning and those coming now – came because this was what the volunteers they met after leaving Ukraine recommended they do. When we meet them in Norway, many still appear to have limited knowledge of the country and its various systems and benefits .

Among our respondents, however, there are a small group who say they chose Norway after meticulous research. Ukrainian refugees have the right to move freely within Europe to choose what country to seek protection in, and some use this opportunity to learn what different European countries can offer – and then seek protection not where they have friends and relatives but where they believe would be a good place for them to live.

The criteria they set out for choosing Norway differ. Volodymir (27) comes from a family of artists, and his family had settled in Germany when he left Ukraine in the summer of 2022. He and his girlfriend lived in Berlin for some time, but did not seek protection there. They had been to Berlin before and had friends there. However, he didn't think Germany would be the right country for them. Volodymir has a network all over Europe – including in Norway. And he liked what his Norwegian acquaintance told him about Norway. "I want to live in a rich country" he said. It is not the welfare benefits of living in Norway that he finds attractive; he comes from a wealthy family in Ukraine himself and has numerous ideas for types of businesses he can start up in Norway. Going on welfare does not appear to have ever crossed his mind. It is the well-

organised cities and infrastructure that he talks of as the benefits of being in a rich country. Clean streets, well-kept public offices, and that Norway has a good system for refugee reception.

Irina (42) also did some systematic research before leaving Ukraine. We met her at one of the reception centres, only a few weeks after she had arrived in Norway. She says she chose Norway because it was far away from Ukraine, in case there is a nuclear disaster of some sort in Ukraine. And Finland was ruled out because of its closeness to Russia. Norway felt safer.

> Why did you choose Norway?
>
> Firstly, it is far from Ukraine ... That is, I thought logically: if something suddenly happens to Ukrainian nuclear power plants, then the percentage of exposure will be less ...
>
> Did you really consider that?!
>
> Well, of course! If you have to leave Ukraine, then it had better be to a safe place! But I also chose Norway because the educational system is very good. My child will be able to continue studying at school, and then go to a higher educational institution, well, or as she herself decides. We were also completely okay with the climate. The climate is similar to ours, just a little more rain. There was no point in going to Poland, Germany or Austria. They are already too crowded ... I also did not consider Moldova, because there is Transnistria there. I don't want to move away from one conflict to another. Bulgaria will also not give my child prospects. It's warm, the sea, but no more. I was looking for good prospects for my child. I thought either Norway or Finland. But Finland is close to the Russian Federation ... What if the Russian Federation goes to free the Finns tomorrow? That's why we chose Norway.
>
> Where did you look for information?
>
> A colleague told me a lot of information about Norway. We worked together in the hospital. She left much earlier. She told me about the good social package we get here ... I asked her a lot of questions about why she had chosen this particular country. (Irina, 42)

Alexandra (37) says they chose Norway because her husband is in a wheelchair. She was highly sceptical herself – she is worried that it will be difficult for her to find a job here, as she has specialist university education from home. But her husband insisted, as his internet searches had indicated that Norway had the best systems for facilitating labour force participation for people with disabilities.

It is worth noting that these respondents often do not rely mainly on accounts from Ukrainians already in Europe but instead base their choice on their own assessments of what is important to them, and what they find in internet searches. Of all our respondents in Norway, only one respondent – who came in September 2022 – says she came to Norway because a fellow Ukrainian refugee recommended it.

Susanna fled from occupied territories in Eastern Ukraine in March. She left via Russia, Latvia and Poland but then went back to live with her daughter who was studying in central Ukraine. On the bus through Latvia she met a girl who was going to Norway, as her sister lived there.

> I didn't know much about Norway ... But she told me that this is a decent country, and that people live very calmly and in plenty. In Ukraine, people always come second. But in Norway, the people come first. That even the disabled are not treated as people with limited abilities, but as people with increased needs. She told me that the state helps everyone. And that people here feel protected. And, my travel companion told me a lot of other things. You can safely go there – they will not let you sleep on the street and you will not go hungry. She told me about the Introductory Programme, about courses, the social payments".
>
> Susanna moved in with her daughter and her son-in law in central Ukraine as she had planned and stayed there over the summer, but as time went on, she was not able to find a job, and she felt like a burden on the young couple – even though she initially had come to help them out. "And when I didn't find a job in Ukraine, I thought that maybe this [meeting the girl on the bus] was a sign ... And I decided to try it ... I'm only 48 years old. And if they help with training, it's worth trying. (Susanna, 48)

Susanna's story tells us about the importance of having knowledge of refugee rights for taking the chance to seek protection in Europe. Thanks to the information she got from her co-traveller, she took the chance of going to Norway all alone and with no money.

8.4 "We didn't know that Norway was going to be such a good country to live in"

Most of our respondents ended up in Norway mainly by coincidence – because the volunteers that assisted them when they crossed the border to Poland were from Norway, or because they know someone who lived here. In particular, those who came in the early phases of the conflict describe how they just left – without giving much thought to where they would stay. Some also say they knew very little about Norway before they came. After some weeks or months in Norway, what then, is their first impression?

We must begin this section with a methodological disclaimer. Although we explained to our respondents that we were researchers independent of any decision-making bodies in Norway, and that their stories would be treated anonymously, the narratives we present below must be interpreted in light of the fact that these refugees had just recently arrived, often knew relatively little about the Norwegian system, and were only granted permission to stay for one year. The refugees often felt a need to express their gratitude for the way they had been received and thanked the interviewer as a representative of Norway. The temporary permits, in combination with interviews being conducted either at the reception centres for newly-arrived refugees, or the schools offering the introduction programme courses, may have induced our respondents to refrain from criticising the system.

Many talk very positively about the Norwegian system for refugee protection and the general system for social protection. They often say they knew nothing about this before they came, and in most cases, this was not their reason for coming. But once they are here – some say it has become a reason to stay. Maxim chose to go to Norway when he left Ukraine, because he had been here on holiday before and liked the

people and the nature. He reflects upon the Norwegian system of social welfare:

> You know, I tell absolutely everyone that there is no better country for Ukrainian refugees than Norway. After all, there is full-fledged social protection, the provision of full-fledged housing, financial assistance, integration into the Norwegian system. At the end of the introduction programme, a person can fully work or study, and not feel superfluous or an outcast. So, we all [wife, brother with family, parents and parents in law] decided that we would not return to Ukraine … We have lost absolutely everything in Mariupol. My wife and I – we are young, we want children, we don't want to live in constant fear. (Maxim, 32)

Maxim hopes he will be able to stay in Norway and wants to build a life there and have children. He has a degree in finance, and ran his own highly successful company in Ukraine, and intends to start one again in Norway. When he is enthusiastic about the social benefits in Norway, it is not because he wants to live off welfare and not work. He is enthusiastic about the opportunities they create, for people like him who want to start their own business. He has told everyone he knows about the good conditions for refugees in Norway, and he claims that more than 100 Ukrainians have come to Norway through him. He knows that his residency permit is only temporary, but he is working hard to learn Norwegian fast and is set on finding a job that will enable him to stay, even if the permit is not prolonged.

Similarly, Lidia (72), came to Norway with her friend in late august 2022. She had been told that Norway is good at assisting refugees, and in our interview, she expressed that she is overwhelmed with all the assistance they are getting. "You know, we have never gotten anything for free our entire life," she tells me and starts talking about all the services and assistance she gets access to as an asylum seeker. "Nobody in Ukraine believes me when I tell them that we get all of this for free". She knows that the protection is only temporary – and all her children and grandchildren are still in Ukraine. But if the war does not stop soon, and living conditions deteriorate further in Ukraine, she is thinking it will be a good future for her grandchildren here in Norway. However, her children are not yet ready to leave Ukraine, she says.

Some reflect upon the Norwegian system in general, but others reflect upon how the system meets their specific needs. Volodymyr (31) has a child with severe disability and strong assistance needs. He came to Norway by coincidence. He had been on holiday abroad with his family and was driving home when the war broke out. He turned the car around and found a place to stay. In the early days of chaos and confusion, he ended up going to Norway where a colleague had an acquaintance that could take them in. They knew nothing about the services for children with disability. But now that he is here – and sees that his child gets adjusted equipment and assistance at school for free – he says that he does not think that he can ever go back – "it wouldn't be fair on my child". He asks the interviewer what she thinks is the best strategy – to find a job as soon as possible in order to be able to stay, or do the language courses and learn Norwegian first, and then find a job. He does not want to risk being sent back to Ukraine if the temporary protection is not prolonged.

The Norwegian social system – which is emphasised by many of our respondents as a reason to stay – also implies that Norway is a country which taxes its citizens heavily, compared to other European countries. Parallel to this, corruption is uncommon. In Ukraine, people pay extra to get access to basic services – including teaching and healthcare – and corruption is a feature of society. In their corruption index of 2021, Transparency International ranks Ukraine the second most corrupt country in Europe. Salaries are often paid in two parts – one official part that you pay taxes on, and one unofficial part under the table. Thus, the government receives less revenue from income tax, and as a consequence public services are poorly developed. In this context, it is interesting to see that many of the Ukrainians we have talked to express rejoice in paying taxes once in Norway. For example, Vera (24), who when told by the interviewer that healthcare workers in Norway will be offended if offered a bribe, exclaims that this is a situation where paying taxes is not a problem. Similarly, Susanna started out the interview saying: "This is my country. Norway is my country now". She had only been in Norway for a few weeks, and went to Norway upon recommendation by volunteers in Poland. When we interviewed her in September 2022, she had already understood that in Norway you must follow the rules.

When she gets the 100 kroner incentive for taking part in the interview, she asks if she should sign anything to make sure she pays taxes for it. She does not want to break any rules, she says, adding that she appreciates the order and predictability of the Norwegian society, and that most people actually follow the rules.

8.5 It is easier to start a new life abroad if your partner is with you

A key reason for the refugees who remain in Poland to do so is that their husbands and sometimes also sons are still in Ukraine. Amongst our respondents in Norway, the women are usually either unmarried, divorced, widowed – or in the company of their husbands. This underlines our previous point about how physical closeness to Ukraine seems to be more important for those who have husbands and sons in the country. We see this tendency in other research as well. The share of women arriving with their partners was much higher in Austria than in Poland by an unexpectedly high margin (Kohlenberger et al., 2022).

Among the Ukrainians who came to Norway in March and April 2022, the vast majority were women – more than 80 percent of applications for protection from Ukrainian refugees aged 18–60 were made by women (see Table 1 below). However, the share of male applicants has gradually increased, and in the period from June to October, men make up between 39 and 47 percent of the adult applicants.

Table 1 Number of applications for protection in Norway by refugees from Ukraine aged 18–60 (either applications for temporary collective protection or citizens from Ukraine applying for asylum), and the share of men among the applicants. Source: UDI.

Month (2022)	Total	Share of men
January	6	33 %
February	52	38 %
March	3,988	16 %
April	4,027	19 %
May	1,472	35 %
June	1,386	39 %
July	1,496	42 %
August	2,040	40 %
September	1,805	39 %
October	634	47 %
January-October	16,906	29 %

Among the women we have interviewed who have come to Norway alone, many are divorced, single or widowed. We have also interviewed a few who say they hope to stay long term in Norway if this becomes possible. However, when we ask if they have plans for their husbands to join them after the war, their answers are vague. According to one NGO worker in Poland, some Ukrainian women use the opportunity of the war to willingly put a greater distance between themselves and their husbands. These patterns strengthen the impression previously suggested, that moving to Norway and other countries further away from Ukraine is an action more often associated with a search for a long-term solution, while those most set on returning (to husbands in Ukraine) are more likely to remain in neighbouring areas.

8.6 We don’t feel we are welcome in other parts of Ukraine

Survey research conducted throughout the last decades has consistently shown that there is an overwhelming consensus in Ukraine that the

country should remain independent from Russia[28]. However, there has been a political division in Ukraine that partly overlaps with regional belonging in the question of the role of the Russian language. Since the independence of Ukraine in 1991, and in particular following the 2014 annexation of Crimea, the role of the Russian language in Ukraine has been a highly controversial issue. Opposition to speaking Russian has become even stronger following the February 2022 invasion, and it is not uncommon for Ukrainians in central and western parts of Ukraine to refuse to speak Russian out of principle – even if they do understand it. The proportion of Russian speakers is particularly high in eastern and southern parts of the country.

Some of our Russian-speaking respondents from Eastern Ukraine, argued that this was a factor contributing to them thinking that they will not return to Ukraine, if the region they are from is not liberated. Alexander (32) explains how he first came to Lviv to seek shelter there. He is a wealthy Ukrainian with higher education. He fled from Donbas after the outbreak of fighting in 2014 and lived and worked in Kiev after that. When the Russian army headed for Kyiv in 2022, he brought his family to Western Ukraine, where a colleague had a house he could rent.

> For some reason, Western Ukraine has long believed that we should speak only Ukrainian. And when the war began [2022], everyone was even more angry with each other. And when I arrived in Lviv and spoke Russian, everyone looked at me simply as an enemy of the people. As if I were a member of the Russian military. The day after we arrived, when I woke up in Lviv, a siren howled very loudly and they began to announce that men were needed in order to help first fill and then load sandbags. So the people of Lviv wanted to protect the substation so that it would not be hit by rockets. I went there, two hours of hellish labour, I worked like everyone else. And when I said goodbye to the guys, they shouted at my back, "Get out of here, [derogative term for

[28] See for instance https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2020/02/26/is-ukraine-caught-between-europe-russia-we-asked-ukrainians-this-important-question/ and https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2014/05/08/despite-concerns-about-governance-ukrainians-want-to-remain-one-country/

> Russians]". Only as you understand, it was said in very obscene language. Initially, I did not want to go to Lviv. It is very difficult to talk about – but I've been in similar situations before. For some reason, Western Ukraine believes that only they are patriots, and only because they speak Ukrainian. I came home and told my wife, pack your things – we are not staying here. (Alexander, 32)

Alexander's story is echoed by several respondents we have interviewed in Norway. They all come from territories now occupied by the Russians. They would not dream of returning to Russian-occupied territories – but they are not tempted to return to other areas of Ukraine. "They blame the war on us – the people of Donbas" Svetlana (54) exclaimed when we were sitting chatting with several refugees from different areas of Ukraine. And her accusation is partly confirmed – one of the refugees from Western Ukraine suggests that Ukraine wouldn't be in the trouble it is in now if it hadn't been for the people of Donbas inviting the Russians in. Afterwards, Svetlana complains that she always feels she has to defend herself – that her support for Ukraine is always questioned.

> Very often we hear that the people of Donbas are to blame for the fact that Russia entered and the war began. Ordinary people in this situation did not play any role. All the people that I know in my environment were for an independent Ukraine. A lot of people went to Maidan square in Kyiv … [anti-corruption and pro-democracy demonstrations in 2013-2014] Among my students (she teaches over the internet) they all want to go back to Ukraine. (Svetlana, 54)

These are not singular examples, but stories we hear in all areas we visited – and by respondents who tell them independently of each other. It does not appear to be something they want to make a fuss about – nobody wants to add fuel to the fire – and they say that the last thing Ukraine needs now is the population to start fighting between themselves. But it is an element that makes some of the refugees from Eastern Ukraine less inclined to consider returning to other areas of Ukraine – if the region they are from is not liberated.

8.7 Chapter summary

In this chapter, we have presented the long-term plans of the Ukrainian refugees who are currently in Norway. Most of our respondents ended up in Norway by coincidence because they had friends or relatives living here that they came to stay with, or because Norway was recommended to them by the volunteers they met when crossing the border from Ukraine. Some are set on returning to Ukraine as soon as possible. But most of the respondents we met during our fieldwork in Norway expressed an intention to stay in Norway, even if a peace deal were to be signed. Many came from areas now occupied by the Russians, or areas were dwellings, infrastructure and workplaces were heavily damaged, and feel that they have nothing to return to. Others do not trust in a peace deal with Russia, and fear they would just have to flee again in a few years. Some of our respondents from Eastern and Southern Ukraine also say that they do not feel welcome in Western Ukraine and therefore do not wish to return to other areas of Ukraine if they cannot return to their homeland due to occupation.

Our respondents often enthusiastically emphasise elements of the Norwegian system that make them inclined to want to remain; in particular that Norwegian society is well-organised, predictable and gives economic stability. They also see possibilities in Norway, for example, for establishing businesses and for good quality education for their children. When saying that they want to stay, however, this does not imply that they are willing to stay illegally.

9 Assessing future migration among Ukrainian refugees

In the chapters above we have asked what shapes the current migration flows of Ukrainian refugees in Europe, why some Ukrainian refugees return to Ukraine now, and if we can expect that the Ukrainian refugees currently in Europe will return to Ukraine when the war is over. To answer this we have used qualitative interviews with Ukrainian refugees and representatives of organisations and government officials involved in refugee reception in Poland and Norway. In this chapter, we draw on previous research on secondary migration and return among refugees and summarise some of the key findings and their implication for understanding future migration flows in light of this.

Across Europe governments and agencies are trying to prepare for future refugee arrivals from Ukraine. To predict how large the migration flows will be the next months or years if the war does not end, is a challenging task. The main factors influencing the arrival and return of Ukrainian refugees in Europe will be the development of the war, and how the war develops over the next months – and years – is challenging to predict. Naturally, if there is a lasting peace agreement between Russia and Ukraine, the arrival of new refugees from Ukraine will most likely stop. If such a peace agreement is accompanied with EU and NATO memberships for Ukraine – and the economic and security guarantees associated with this – we can also assume that a substantial number of the refugees who are now in Europe will choose to go back. In the following, we take a more pessimistic stance, asking what we can expect if the war in Ukraine continues more or less along the same lines as it does today.

A decision to flee, return, or remain in a country of refuge is rarely easily made, and in this report, we have tried to portray the ambivalence

that many refugees express when they talk of the future. For many, there are strong arguments for wanting to go back to Ukraine, but also strong arguments for moving on and starting a new life abroad. Some refugees would in the same interview talk convincingly about their homeland and all the things they missed and were not willing to give up, and in other parts talk about why they think they might not be going back – often tied to lack of jobs and poor economic prospects. With this report we do not aim to classify refugees according to return intentions, but rather point to the factors that may motivate or facilitate repatriation, and the factors that may induce them to want to stay.

9.1 Will the refugees relocate from neighbouring countries to Western European countries?

In a study of migration aspirations among Syrian refugees in Turkey, Balcilar and Nugent (2019) show that the more and better quality services the refugees had access to, the less likely they were to move on to Europe. It is a mechanism that is not difficult to understand – when basic needs are not met in the first safe country of refuge, the refugees are more likely to move on to other countries known to provide better services to refugees. A key question for predicting future migration flows to Norway and other Western European countries is therefore whether Poland is able to cover the basic needs of the Ukrainian refugees currently in the country.

The Ukrainian refugees we have interviewed in Poland often have a strong preference for staying in Poland. For some, this is mainly because of the geographical proximity to Ukraine, making it easier to return as soon as this is possible. For others, the desire to stay in Poland is tied to cultural and linguistic proximity. Because the languages are relatively similar, even refugees without foreign language skills are able to communicate with the locals. The likelihood of learning the language without too much effort is also a factor that make many want to staying. Similar food and cultural practices also make the refugees feel more at home. Poland has had a large Ukrainian diaspora since before the war, which implies numerous cultural institutions that are important for Ukrainians who choose to settle there – in particular churches and

schools. In other words – the Ukrainians have strong relational, cultural and network-based incentives to remain in Poland. However, the systems for assistance and support for refugees and the absence of viable long-term economic opportunities in Poland, makes the situation difficult for the large numbers of Ukrainian refugees in Poland who want to remain.

Acceptance of harsh conditions because they are temporary

Many of the refugees we met in Poland were satisfied with having a roof over their head, food, basic healthcare and, most importantly, security. They hope and assume the war will not last much longer, and their plan for the future is to return to Ukraine and their old way of life. They think of their current lodging and way of life as temporary – and are therefore prepared to endure some hardship.

But what will happen if the war does not end soon? We can expect that at some point, the refugees who are thinking their current way of life is temporary will lose faith in a future that involves repatriation. And at this point what was okay so long as it was a temporary solution may no longer be enough. We know from studies of other refugee populations, that when the belief that return will be possible fades, refugees who have been living in neighbouring countries are more likely to want to move on to other locations, and the longer they have stayed in first safe countries without finding long term solutions, the stronger the aspirations to move on (Tyldum & Zhang, Forthcoming). This introduces time as an important factor in our assessment of potential refugee arrivals. The longer the conflict lasts, and the less hope there is that the conflict will end soon, the higher the probability that refugees and internally displaced persons will start looking for long-term solutions.

We rarely see that the same countries are good at filling the refugees' needs in both the acute phase and when it comes to providing long-term solutions. Neighbouring countries to conflict zones are often the preferred destination in the acute phase – as geographical proximity keeps the dream of return alive, and cultural and linguistic proximity often make daily life easier. In these neighbouring countries, governmental, non-governmental and international organisations also join

forces to ensure that basic needs are met. But as the numbers of refugees in neighbouring countries is often high – these same neighbouring countries are rarely able to offer the same quality of long-term services to refugees, compared to what is possible if they move on. As we have demonstrated in this report, this is also the case for Ukrainians in Poland. Many are happy to stay in Poland, in spite of not having a proper place to live or a decent source of income, because they see their stay as only temporary. We can expect that as time goes, these refugees will increasingly start looking for long-term solutions.

Considerable assistance to Ukrainians in the acute phase in Poland

In the initial phase of the refugee crisis, Poland showed an impressive ability to assist the refugees. A massive mobilisation from Polish organisations, civilians and governmental organisations enabled 3.9 million Ukrainian refugees to cross the border into Poland in March, April and May 2022, and get emergency assistance, food and lodging. However, according to the organisations and governmental officials we have met in our fieldworks in Poland, the refugees arriving in Poland after the summer of 2022 no longer receive the same assistance and support as those who arrived in the early phase. This is partly because the initial mobilisation and ability in helping from civil society and private actors is not as strong, and partly because the refugees who came during the spring and summer now take up much of the capacity for housing, schools and the most attractive jobs. Refugees who arrived in Poland during the summer and autumn of 2022 often say they were told that Poland is "full" and is no longer accepting refugees. Finding a place to stay for more than a few weeks has become particularly difficult.

If events in Ukraine should lead to increased numbers of Ukrainian refugees arriving in Poland, will they be able to receive the same assistance in Poland now as they did in the first wave in March? We cannot know if private actors again will mobilise the same support and contribution as they did in the first weeks of the conflict. However, numerous international organisations are now on the ground in many Polish cities and border areas, and, if necessary, would likely be able to organise assistance in a new acute phase of refugee arrivals, in cooperation with

private actors and the Polish government. Still, refugees hoping to have their own place to live, a job, and perhaps a place to settle more long term, may need to move on to other locations.

Knowledge about opportunities for Ukrainians in Europe is often limited

The Ukrainian refugees that we have met in both Poland and Norway know surprisingly little about refugee rights and opportunities in Europe. Previous research among other refugee populations has suggested that refugees who come to Europe are normally well informed about opportunities in various European countries – and about what migration to other locations can bring (Brekke & Brochmann, 2015; Rottmann & Kaya, 2021; Tyldum, 2021). However, some of the Ukrainians we have met in Poland and Norway are unaware that the refugee convention stipulates that refugees cannot be turned away and that no country can set a limit on how many they will accept. And they do not know that most European countries have special provisions and economic support systems for refugees, meaning that they do not risk sleeping on the street if they leave Ukraine.

As the Ukrainian refugees are a highly educated and digitalised population, we expected them to have obtained a better overview of the opportunities of the refugee reception systems in Europe and to use this more actively when deciding where to go. There are, however, two factors that probably contributed to delaying this knowledge distribution. First of all, in many European countries, the support and reception systems for asylum seekers in the *initial* phase (before protection is granted) has been cut down – a process accelerated by the high arrival numbers of 2015 (Zaun, 2017). Because Western Europe has reduced the acute assistance for asylum seekers the differences between assistance given in various European countries in the initial phase might not be very large. These differences might however, appear larger if the refugees start comparing assistance provided for those seeking long term solutions.

Secondly, the large numbers of arrivals over the spring and summer of 2022 put extra pressure on the refugee reception systems across Europe. In some regions, it has taken more time to provide housing and other

assistance programmes to the refugees than it usually would have, while other regions in the same country have been able to provide more assistance to the Ukrainians than they normally do for refugees, due to the mobilisation of private initiatives. This creates large variation also within countries. Furthermore, as the refugees have been allowed to travel in Europe without seeking protection, many have come as labour migrants, and not even accessed benefits available to refugees. These factors work together to blur the picture, as two refugees who have moved to the same country can tell vastly different stories, when they tell their relatives back in Ukraine about their experiences abroad. We believe this is why our respondents appear to give random answers when we ask what countries give good support to Ukrainian refugees, and which countries do not give much support. They all know Ukrainians that have moved to numerous other countries in Europe - so they do not lack information. But it appears that in the information they have, there are not as yet any clear patterns. We expect that this will change as the Ukrainian refugees in Europe settle in, attend language courses and start accessing the various support systems available to them. Then knowledge on labour market access, language courses, schools, healthcare and social support in various European countries will be disseminated via social media to Ukrainians in Ukraine and across Europe. Most importantly, this will make more Ukrainians who are still in Ukraine confident that it is possible to leave Ukraine, even if they don't have savings, networks or a job offer abroad. Furthermore, it will enable the refugees who leave Ukraine, and who decide to move on from other locations, to be able to make more informed choices about where to go. In time, we can expect that the Ukrainians will be as well informed about refugee rights and assistance in Europe as we have seen for previous refugee groups. However, on some issues there is already broad agreement among the Ukrainian refugees we have interviewed – when we ask how the European countries compare, and where Ukrainian refugees get good help, they all agree that Poland is the country where conditions are most difficult right now.

9.2 Will the Ukrainian refugees return when the war is over?

Our Ukrainian respondents in Poland and Norway have been given temporary protection under the assumption that when the war is over, most of them will return to Ukraine. However, we know from former refugee movements that a substantial share of the refugees tend to remain in the country of refugee also after the war is over and it is possible to return. The question of return will of course depend on how long the war lasts – the longer refugees live abroad, the stronger ties they will get to their new country of residence, and the more likely it is that they will remain. It will also depend on the level of destruction in their home community, and the level of support they expect to get in rebuilding the country. These are factors we know little about yet, and we thus have to be careful in predicting future return aspirations in this population. However, there are some factors we can observe already that indicate that some of the refugees may not return when the war is over.

One of the main reasons presented by the Ukrainian refugees in Poland for staying in the country was that they hoped to return to Ukraine as soon as this was possible. Some of the refugees we met in Norway also expressed a strong intention of returning as soon as this was possible with regards to security. However, those who travel as far as Norway appear to be more inclined to talk about their move as a search for a long-term solution, and they often say they hope to settle long term in Norway.

The refugees in Norway that we talked to tended to fall into one of two categories. Some had ended up in Norway without giving much thought to what kind of society Norway is; either because they had friends or family living there that told them to come, or because they had met volunteers in Poland or other neighbouring countries who recommended it to them. They sometimes knew very little about Norway before they came. But once they were here, they expressed both surprise and gratitude about the system that they now had access to. For some, it is the educational system for children, and in particular for children with special needs, that they talk of as a factor that convinced them to want to stay. Others talk of the support system for immigrants who want to

enter the labour market or start-up their own businesses, or the benefits of having access to a healthcare system where you are not expected to pay bribes. For these refugees, the opportunities and benefits were not a reason to leave Ukraine and come to Norway in the first place, but now that they are here it has become a reason for them to want to stay. There are also some refugees who have done extensive research and chose Norway because they believe the system fits them and their family best. This group is still a minority among those that we have talked to.

With the refugee movements from Ukraine, it is the first time since the Balkan wars that refugees can leave a war zone with direct access to Europe and move freely within the European space before seeking protection. Since then, the birth of social media has dramatically changed how refugees access information and how quickly information travels. We expect that if refugees continue to leave Ukraine throughout the winter of 2022/23, they will be increasingly well informed about the opportunities and obstacles in various European countries, and the refugees who choose Norway or other European countries will have made more active choices about what country they want to live in. Thus their mobility will not only be driven by push-factors (getting away from a war zone) but also by pull factors, as part of a more active choice of where to live.

The development of these refugee movements will in the end depend on how long the war lasts, the level of devastation in the cities and communities the refugees would be returning to, and the level of support that Ukraine gets in the process of rebuilding the country. Whether or not the refugees feel it is safe to return will also depend on the security situation – if there are changes in the regime in Russia, and if Ukraine can start a process towards NATO membership that protects against future attacks. The chance of refugees returning will, naturally be greatly enhanced if they can return to a country where people are optimistic about the future, and if they feel that future attacks from Russia are highly unlikely.

9.3 What can trigger new large-scale refugee movements?

As we write this report, Ukrainian forces are making progress on the battlefield, and many Ukrainians are optimistic that return – and maybe even peace – might be possible within the not-too-distant future. We can assume that the internally displaced in Ukraine are equally optimistic. As long as they believe that peace and/or repatriation is possible, they are likely to be satisfied staying in Poland and Ukraine as long as they have access to basic services.

In the event that Russian forces are able to hold, and perhaps also regain their former positions, or push the Ukrainian forces back, the optimism among those internally displaced and on temporary protection in Poland may dampen, and some may start to lose hope that the war will end soon. And if the refugees and internally displaced stop believing in an outcome that makes it possible for them to return, it is likely that they will start looking for long-term solutions. Also, if basic needs are no longer met where they currently stay, for instance due to power shortages or problems obtaining an income, previous research on refugee populations (Balcilar & Nugent, 2019) indicate that more internally displaced persons and refugees in first safe countries of destination can start to move on.

Even if many Ukrainian refugees in Poland were to realise that they probably cannot return for a long while, it does not necessarily mean they will start moving away from Poland. Labour market participation is already high among Ukrainians in Poland, and some refugees already rent their own apartments and pay rent from their own income. We expect that many Ukrainians will wish to remain in Poland also if they give up on the idea of return. It is, however, unclear how many Ukrainian refugees will be able to find long-term solutions in Poland. In Poland, as in the rest of Europe, it is going to be a difficult winter, with energy shortages and high inflation leading to increasing food and energy prices. In such circumstances, it may be challenging for Polish authorities to provide the social assistance needed by those Ukrainians who are not able to enter the labour market – not least because the threshold at which even Polish citizens qualify for social assistance is still high in a

European context, and benefits are limited. And although many Ukrainians have been able to enter the labour market, the jobs available to Ukrainians in Poland are often unskilled and manual. Thus far, there have been few policies in place to assist Ukrainians who wish to use their formal education in Poland. A key indicator for predicting possible secondary migration from Poland will be how the experiences of the refugees remaining in Poland will be compared with those who have moved on to other countries.

If there will be secondary movements from Poland, other neighbouring countries and the internally displaced, when should we expect these movements to start? After the outbreak of the Syrian war in 2011, the major refugee movements out of Syria to neighbouring countries took place in 2012 and 2013 (Tiltnes, Zhang, & Pedersen, 2019), while the main "secondary movement" of Syrians leaving first safe countries for Europe came four years after the outbreak of war – in 2015. However, we know that some refugees start looking for long-term solutions immediately after leaving a war zone – as they, for various reasons, have decided/realised that they will probably never return. This has also been the case for Ukrainian refugees, as some of the refugees we have met in both Poland and Norway say they have already decided that they do not wish to return. This is typical for refugees from the regions that are now occupied by Russian forces, and where dwellings and critical infrastructure have been heavily impacted by the war. Also, some of the refugees that are fleeing for the second time – who first left their homes after the 2014 outbreak of war, and have now fled again, seem to have relatively quickly reached the conclusion that they will probably never return. On the other hand we know from other conflicts that some refugee populations can keep the dream of returning to their homes alive for years, and even decades, after they had to flee. Hopefully there will soon be peace again in Ukraine, making it possible for all Ukrainians to return to their homeland. If not, only time will show how long the Ukrainian refugees in neighbouring countries and internally displaced will keep their faith in a Ukrainian victory, peace and opportunities for safe returns, or if they will start looking for long-term solutions elsewhere.

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