

## NEED ASSESSMENT OF UKRAINIAN REFUGEES IN NORTH MACEDONIA

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**Abstract:** Between mid-May and mid-June 2022, 10 students from the Faculty of Philosophy, supported by 3 Ukrainian language interpreters, conducted 49 interviews with refugees from Ukraine, overall covering 244 individuals in Skopje, Ohrid, Stip and Bitola. This report presents the main findings relating to refugees' profiles, intentions, and needs, aiming to provide an evidence-based document to support advocacy interventions that will be most beneficial to these refugees, complementary support to the one to be provided by the government as well as individual assistance when/if needed.

### Key findings

- The majority of refugees from Ukraine are women and children, with high levels of education and diverse professional skills among adults
- While most refugees hope to return to Ukraine one day, for the time being, the majority plan to stay in their current host country

**Keywords:** refugees, need assessment

### Background

More than three million people have fled Ukraine since Russia launched its invasion in February 2022. Therefore, most of the persons leaving the country are women with children or elderly.

The Government of North Macedonia has not decided to grant temporary protection to Ukrainians in the country. Currently, Ukrainians are allowed to stay in the country for 90-days without a visa, and based on the provisions of the Law on Foreigners they may apply for a residence permit for humanitarian grounds valid for one year. Should be noted that under this status, they cannot enjoy the protection they would receive if they had temporary protection or international protection in accordance with the Law on International Protection.

In December 2019, North Macedonia attended the First Global Refugee Forum (GRF) in Geneva, where it pledged, inter alia, to establish a system of protection against sexual or gender-based violence, in line with the Istanbul Convention, strengthen the asylum case

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management through updating the asylum module of the database for aliens, and resolve the protracted situation of refugees from Kosovo<sup>3</sup>. According to MFA, 153 persons are with subsidiary protection status (all from Kosovo) but there are still 111 persons whose international protection in the Republic of North Macedonia has ceased and their status is still not solved.

The legal assessment of the enabling environment illustrates that, on one hand, stateless persons in North Macedonia do not have access to basic rights such as medical or social assistance, economic opportunities, and as a result, live at the margins of society. On the other hand, asylum-seekers have limited options for inclusion due to their status and those granted international protection face limited access to integration opportunities leading to self-reliance.

According to Article 5 of the national Law on Prevention and Protection of Discrimination<sup>4</sup>, discrimination on the grounds of "gender, race, skin colour, national or ethnic origin, disability, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, citizenship, social origin, education, religion or belief, political belief, other beliefs, age, marital status, property status, health status, social status, or any other grounds" is prohibited. This means that persons without citizenship are covered by the provisions of the law. The Republic of North Macedonia ratified the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees in January 1994 and its 1967 Protocol in January 1994, the 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless persons in January 1994 and the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness (the 1954 Convention and the 1961 Convention respectively) in January 2020, as well as a large number of international human rights conventions, that are part of the national legislation, but the alignment of the national legislation and practices with the international standards should be further improved.

According to the Law on International and Temporary Protection (2018)<sup>5</sup> and the Law on Social Protection (2019),<sup>6</sup> refugees and asylum seekers are granted access to primary and secondary education. As a matter of fact, the right to education is established in Article 44 of the Constitution of The Republic of North Macedonia, where it is stated that education will be available to everyone on equal footing. According to the Law on Primary Education, every child has the right to education. Also, the Law on Secondary Education states that foreign nationals and stateless persons can be included in secondary education according to the conditions provided by the law. According to the Law on Asylum and Temporary Protection, asylum seekers and persons granted subsidiary protection are entitled to education, and thus, are provided with assistance to be included in the national educational system. However, there are a number of practical barriers to effectively realize the right to education for stateless

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.unhcr.org/5dfa1d374.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> Law on Prevention of and Protection Against Discrimination ("Official Gazette" nos. 50/2010, 44/2014, 150/2015, 31/2016, 21/2018, 127/2010) <https://www.refworld.org/pdfid/5aa12ad47.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> Law on International and Temporary Protection (Official Gazette of the RoM, no. 64 from 11.4.2018) [https://www.legislationline.org/download/id/9672/file/NMAC\\_Law%20on%20International%20and%20Temporary%20Protection.pdf](https://www.legislationline.org/download/id/9672/file/NMAC_Law%20on%20International%20and%20Temporary%20Protection.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> Law on Social Protection („Official Gazette" no. 79/2009; 36/2011; 51/2011; 166/2012; 15/2013; 79/2013; 164/2013; 187/2013; 38/2014; 44/2014; 116/2014, 180/2014, 104/2019) [https://www.mtsp.gov.mk/content/pdf/zakoni/2019/28.5\\_zakon\\_SZ.pdf](https://www.mtsp.gov.mk/content/pdf/zakoni/2019/28.5_zakon_SZ.pdf)

persons, for example, children without a birth certificate cannot access the education system, or they are not issued a certificate proving attendance, and thus cannot enrol in exams.

In this context and considering that a number of Ukrainians are willing to stay in North Macedonia the need for a better understanding of their protection profiling arose. This research is meant to provide more information about the profile and the needs of these persons. This exercise was also conducted at a very appropriate time, especially considering that access to rights to ensure self-reliance is very important.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The integration of refugees into host societies has been widely studied in migration and social policy literature. According to Castles, de Haas, & Miller (2014), migration governance often reflects both national interests and international obligations, which can lead to discrepancies in protection and integration efforts. Ager and Strang (2008) propose a conceptual framework for refugee integration that highlights key domains such as employment, education, housing, and social connections, all of which are crucial for fostering self-sufficiency and social inclusion.

The psychological well-being of refugees is also a major concern. Studies indicate that forced migration often results in significant psychological distress, with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and depression being common conditions among refugee populations (Silove, Ventevogel, & Rees, 2017). Access to mental health services is therefore a critical component of refugee integration policies.

Economic participation plays a key role in the long-term integration of refugees. According to the OECD (2021), employment opportunities for refugees are often hindered by legal restrictions, language barriers, and lack of recognition of qualifications. Programs that offer vocational training and language acquisition support have been shown to improve employment outcomes for refugees (Bloch, 2008).

### **Methodology of the Research**

The development of a methodology, as well as a questionnaire, was produced in close cooperation with the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy and the UN entities operating in the country. A standard UNHCR template that had been adjusted to the national context was used to create a Rights-Based Rapid Need Assessment Questionnaire for this purpose.

Fieldwork was carried out under the direction of the project focal points at the Faculty of Philosophy and faculty students.

Even though the survey was expected to be conducted on 250 people from Ukraine with names and addresses intended to be obtained by the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection in close coordination with the Ministry of Interior and Red Cross, in the process of the survey, the names of the interviewees were obtained in close cooperation with the Ukrainian community in the country and MYLA.

Analysis of the data and key findings were conducted, focusing on:

- Profile of the surveyed
- Movement and intentions
- Priority needs
- Vulnerabilities and threats

## Research Data

The number of respondents in the sample was based on the official number of Ukrainian in North Macedonia (on 31 May 2022)<sup>7</sup>.

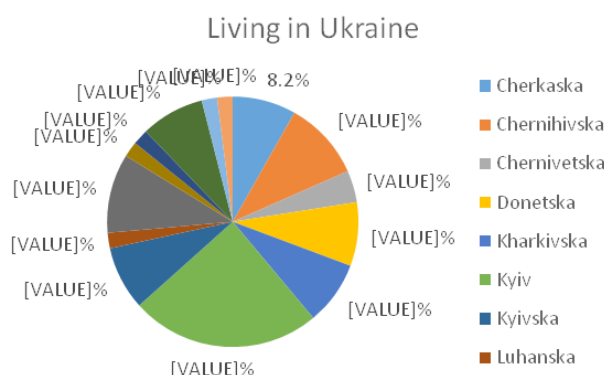
The survey included, as part of its design, mapping of the locations where Ukrainians reside, to ensure surveys were completed in most of the relevant locations. The target sample size was increased to address the representativeness of the sample which was achieved by interviewing 49 respondents that covered 244 extended family members.

### Respondent's profile

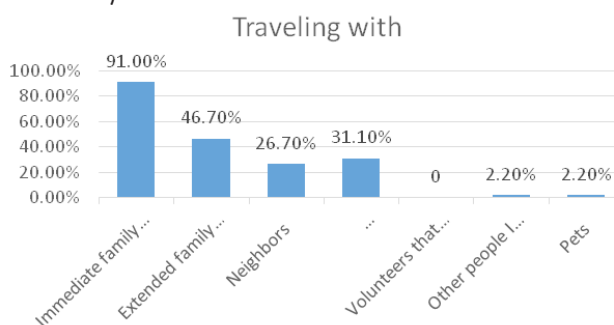
There are 49 Profiling / Individual Interviews conducted in total, with 43 females<sup>8</sup> and 6 males. In addition, to the 49 interviews (individual people interviewed), the research reached additional 244 persons (immediate family members/ extended family members), so 293 people were reached in total.

The average age is 39 (from 22 to 69). Most of the participants in the survey were living in Skopje (83,7%), Ohrid (12%), Stip (2%), and Bitola (2%).

Regarding the places of habitual residents in Ukraine, 24,5% of the respondents used to live in Kyiv, 10% in Chernihivska and Lvivska, as well as 8% in Cherkaska, Donetsk, Kharkivska, Kyivska, and Ternopilska before the war started.



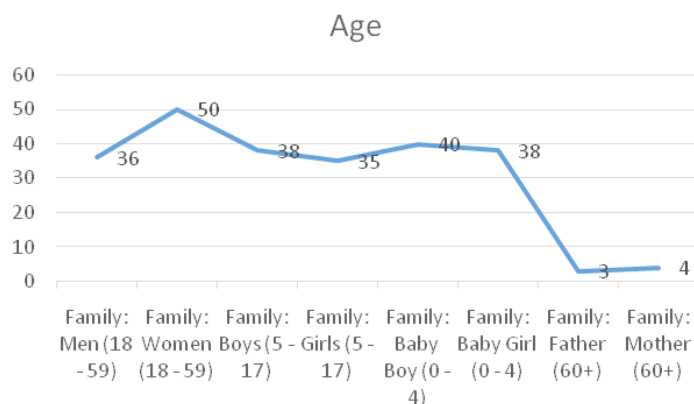
91% of the respondents travel with immediate family members (partner/spouse, children dependents) and 46.7% with extended family members (relatives other than immediate family members).



<sup>7</sup> Numbers received by UNHCR and IOM

<sup>8</sup> Average age of the males is 50 years, and on the females 37 years

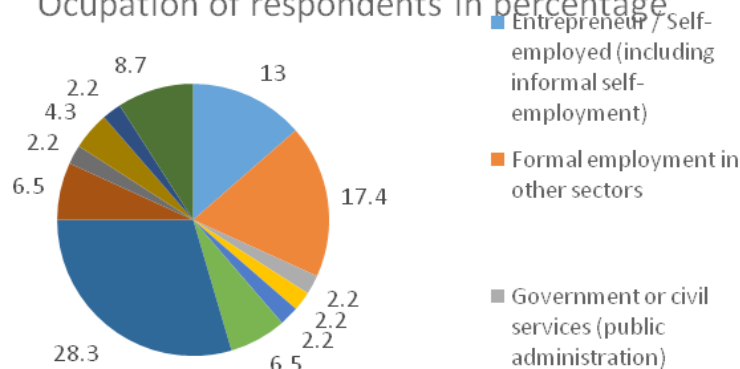
Also, it is worth mentioning that 10% are traveling with children who were not related to them.<sup>9</sup>



When it comes to nationality, 95% are Ukrainian, and 2% are Russian or have Multiple Nationalities.

Regarding the jobs held in Ukraine, most of the respondents (28.3%) were working in the IT sector<sup>10</sup>, and 17.4% were formal employees in other sectors.

Occupation of respondents in percentage



Regarding the level of education, half of the respondents have a university degree, and 33% have a postgraduate university degree.

<sup>9</sup> 4 of people interviewed declared that they are taking care of the neighbor's children who decided to stay behind

<sup>10</sup> 28.3% working in IT sector are employed in international companies that have offices in North Macedonia (ex. Endava)

Secondary University			Education				Total
			Post Uni- versi- ty	Tech- nical or Voca- tional			
Occupation	Construction	Count	1	1	0	0	2
		% of Total	2.6%	2.6%	0.0%	0.0%	5.1%
	Entrepreneur / Self-employed (including informal self-employment)	Count	1	3	1	1	6
		% of Total	2.6%	7.7%	2.6%	2.6%	15.4%
	Formal employment in other sectors	Count	1	1	2	0	4
		% of Total	2.6%	2.6%	5.1%	0.0%	10.3%
	Government or civil services (public administration)	Count	0	1	0	0	1
		% of Total	0.0%	2.6%	0.0%	0.0%	2.6%
	Government or civil services (security forces)	Count	0	1	0	0	1
		% of Total	0.0%	2.6%	0.0%	0.0%	2.6%
	Housekeeping	Count	0	1	0	0	1
		% of Total	0.0%	2.6%	0.0%	0.0%	2.6%
	Informal employment	Count	0	1	2	0	3
		% of Total	0.0%	2.6%	5.1%	0.0%	7.7%
	IT	Count	0	2	8	0	10
		% of Total	0.0%	5.1%	20.5%	0.0%	25.6%
	Medical and health activities (medical doctor, nurse, paramedic, medical worker, etc)	Count	0	3	0	0	3
		% of Total	0.0%	7.7%	0.0%	0.0%	7.7%
	Retired	Count	0	1	0	0	1
		% of Total	0.0%	2.6%	0.0%	0.0%	2.6%
	Student	Count	1	1	0	0	2
		% of Total	2.6%	2.6%	0.0%	0.0%	5.1%
	UN/NGOs staff	Count	0	1	0	0	1
		% of Total	0.0%	2.6%	0.0%	0.0%	2.6%
	Other	Count	0	3	0	1	4
		% of Total	0.0%	7.7%	0.0%	2.6%	10.3%
Total		Count	4	20	13	2	39
% of Total		10.3%	51.3%	33.3%	5.1%	100.0%	

Interestingly, the Chi-Square test<sup>11</sup> shows that there is no statistical difference between occupation and education.

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	36.418	36	.449
Likelihood Ratio	38.279	36	.366
Linear-by-Linear Association	.240	1	.624
N of Valid Cases	39		

Also, the respondents were asked to answer which documents they were carrying with them. Thus, 97.9% are traveling with a passport (only 2 of them without an international biometric passport), 57.4% with a birth certificate as well, 40% with a temporary protection certificate issued in another country, and only 1 person with a short-term resident permit issued by a different country.

Of note, is that 80.9% of the participants in this survey have been separated from immediate family members. As illustrated in the graph below, the main reason for separation for more than half of the respondents was that family members did not wish to leave Ukraine, and for 23.7% the main reason was mandatory military recruitment.

Of the surveyed Ukrainians in North Macedonia, 40% are staying with host families and 60% are in rented accommodation. Only 27.7% have stated that have relatives outside of Ukraine, mostly in the USA, Canada, Serbia, Bulgaria, Russia, UAE, Slovakia, South Africa, Romania, Kuwait, and Azerbaijan.

None of the respondents have been back to Ukraine after they initially left, and 45% have traveled through other countries to get to North Macedonia. For most of them, the first country of arrival was Moldova and Poland, then Romania, and Hungary, and the third country before arrival to North Macedonia was usually Serbia and Albania.

When respondents were asked if they are planning to stay in North Macedonia or move elsewhere, almost 1/3 stated that they will stay here, but also, almost the same percent (26%) are planning to return to Ukraine, while 22% don't know what they will do. 13% of the respondents are planning to go to another country, but all of them are uncertain when they will go. Greece, Serbia, and Sweden have been indicated as potential destination countries.

		Frequency	Valid Percent
Valid	Stay here	15	32.6
	Go elsewhere to another country	6	13.0
	Return to Ukraine	12	26.1
	I don't know	10	21.7
	Prefer not to answer	3	6.5
	Total	46	100.0
Missing	System	3	
Total		49	

<sup>11</sup> A chi-square ( $\chi^2$ ) statistic is a test that measures how a model compares to actual observed data. The data used in calculating a chi-square statistic must be random, raw, mutually exclusive, drawn from independent variables, and drawn from a large enough sample.

Interestingly, community ties motivated 26.7 % of respondents to come and stay in North Macedonia, while 20% which were motivated by employment.<sup>12</sup> Partner relations were stated as other reasons for staying in North Macedonia.

Regarding the reasons for leaving North Macedonia, 33% answered that it is because of a lack of employment or being advised by an unrelated person to leave the country. Most of them have answered that they will stay with family members who live in the country of destination, mainly prepared to travel by car or they still do not know how.

Also, when surveyed about returning to Ukraine, 10 respondents stated that they want to go back to Ukraine, but 90% of them are uncertain about the timing for returning.

The respondents claim that the main reason for returning would be the improvement of safety in the country (33%).

### Reported Priority Needs

The survey participants were asked to list their priority needs. They were asked to choose three top priority needs. Employment and accommodation were listed as priority needs, followed by accommodation and cash. It should be noted, however, that 30% of the respondents have had more than 3 urgent needs at the moment of the interview.

Importantly, priority needs did not vary significantly between locations or between those hosted by families vs. non-hosted by families. The top three needs listed were the same for all groups (no difference between age, gender, employment status, or place of living) and they are economic-related needs. The first, by far, was employment, which can be aligned with the need for cash/income. During the survey discussions, respondents also noted that while finding a job (income) was a top priority, this was something that they could not do without stable housing and access to childcare.

When asked why cash is the top need, most of the respondents declared that it is needed to be able to spend on accommodation, food, basic needs, and to send back to Ukraine.

According to the survey, the majority of children displaced from Ukraine who are accessing education, are doing so via distance learning in Ukraine. When asked about educational priorities for their children, some parents intend to keep their children in the Ukrainians distance learning program, but others are planning to register the children in Macedonian schools and kindergartens if there are any possibilities. Several parents repeatedly listed internet and laptops for children who are still trying to access distance learning in Ukraine as an important need.

After economic needs, health (including psychosocial support and medicines) was the fourth most common type of need mentioned especially by older respondents. Forty-five percent of respondents noted that they or a family member with them in North Macedonia has medical needs; 15% of respondents noted at least one family member with them had a form of disability; 10% of respondents noted at least one family member was pregnant or lactating, and 15% of their family members were over the age of 65.

Information needs and legal assistance reported in the survey largely mimicked overall needs with prioritization of information about employment, education, and healthcare.

<sup>12</sup> This 20% are those who were actually relocated and work in the IT sector with foreign companies, not locally hired.



In addition to their needs, all the respondents had the opportunity to share what topics they would like to receive more information about. Most of them are interested in receiving information about their legal status in North Macedonia (83%) and mainly are interested in receiving information from governmental websites.

Additionally, 14 unaccompanied children were traveling together with the respondents, and 13 children that are separated in the household. Also, in the households where the survey has been conducted, there are 7 families with single parents. 14 people are with serious medical conditions, and 17 are people with disabilities (from which, 8 with a physical disability and 3 with a mental disability).

Also, there are 5 persons over 65 years old who face specific protection risks, 5 pregnant women in the household, and 7 lactating women in the household.

## **Recommendation and conclusion**

### Economic Recovery and Development

Economic needs were the highest priority for those displaced from Ukraine. As a result, the following should be considered:

- Partnering with municipalities and legal aid organizations to improve and increase single service points.
- Exploring opportunities to support displaced people with Macedonian language classes and linkages to livelihoods, either through a partnership or direct service provision.
- Direct cash assistance to impacted households as a stop-gap intervention for vulnerable families.
- Investigating pairing livelihoods assistance with education/protection/child-care support activities, as many of the affected persons seeking employment are the sole caregiver for their children.

### Access to Education and Early Childhood Development

Prioritization of access to education was clear in the assessment. As a result, the following should be considered:

- Working with select service points to provide access to the technology and internet required for distance learning in Ukraine.

### Health

- Partnership with select service providers to ensure access to healthcare (including specialized mental health services, such as psychiatric services) onsite, particularly for new arrivals, older adults, and special needs cases.
- Consider partnering with the Ministry of Health to develop a strategy to improve the provision of care to Ukrainians by better provision of language support either via translators, translation sheets, or other innovative modalities.

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