



POLICY BRIEF

Scenarios of War and Forced Migration from Ukraine: How many more Ukrainians could flee if Russia wins?

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This is the third Prague Process Policy brief on the topic of forced migration from Ukraine as the direct result of Russia's military aggression. In this iteration, the brief deliberates forced migration flows from Ukraine under four potential war scenarios, ranging between a stalemate situation to a hypothetical victory of Russia. These scenarios are informed by observed migration patterns to date. The brief utilises the methodology developed by the author in 2021, which allowed to predict the number of forcibly displaced in early 2022 with a high degree of accuracy. Subsequently, this method has been continually refined to account for newly available data.

The invasion of Ukraine by Russia has precipitated a significant displacement crisis, resulting in millions of Ukrainians and hundreds of thousands foreign residents and immigrants fleeing the country. At its peak, the number of forcibly displaced persons amounted to nearly 14 million. As of early 2024, between 9.6 and 10.8 million persons remain displaced either internally or internationally, while an estimated 31.1 million people reside in the government-controlled parts of Ukraine.



In the event of Ukraine falling entirely under Russian occupation, an additional 9.44 to 19.05 million people could be compelled to flee. Of these, between 7.7 and 16.3 million (83,3%) could move west, approximately 1.55 to 3.3 million destined for Poland, a similar number for Germany, and between 847,000 to 1.7 million (11%) potentially leaving for North America. The scale of such an exodus and the substantial influx to the EU would be unprecedented in recent history. The potential ramifications of such a scenario vary, but all should be carefully considered in discussions surrounding allies' support for Ukraine, or any potential lack thereof.

RECAPITULATION OF EVENTS

In spring 2022, Russia invaded large swathes of Ukraine targeting the northern, eastern and southern provinces including most of the largest cities and the capital Kyiv. By summer 2022, the Ukrainian army managed to halt and partially repel the invasion, notably in the northeast. A counteroffensive in autumn 2022 allowed to liberate the partly occupied province Kharkiv and the western half of Kherson. However, another counteroffensive in Zaporizhzhia, Donetsk and Luhansk in summer 2023 largely failed, with Ukrainian forces reclaiming control only in the western parts of the Black Sea. As of winter 2023/24, Russia gained the upper-hand, slowly expanding the occupied territory, though at the expense of high losses of personnel and equipment. Meanwhile, the Western support is waning, notably of the US, and the Ukrainian army lacks ammunition and soldiers.

By October 2022, **4.6 million** people from Ukraine sought protection in the EU. Up to 2 million, as was claimed initially, moved to Russia, whereas around **6.54 million** were displaced internally. Since autumn/winter 2022, the migration situation has been fairly stable, prompting return of several million Ukrainians, mostly IDPs, and return of third-country nationals who resided in Ukraine before the war to their origin countries. By the end of 2023, there were about **3.9 to 4.2 million** displaced persons from Ukraine in the EU, and some **700,000** in other western countries (USA, Canada, the UK) and Türkiye. Possibly only around **one million** or even less are still in Russia due to the war. Another **3.7 million to 4.8 million** remain displaced within Ukraine. As of early 2024, 9.6–10.8 million persons remain displaced internally or internationally.

Launching the invasion, Russia, it appeared, was hoping to take over control of Ukraine and its people within a few days or weeks. Conversely, Ukraine largely united to defend its sovereignty. Most Ukrainians still believe that Ukraine can win this war. At the same time, staying in the Russia-occupied territories is rather unviable for many, since the occupied territory is “plundered” by Russia, living conditions are extremely precarious and severe human rights violations are reported, including up 122,000 suspected war crimes. It appears that Russia still aims to bring the entirety of Ukraine under its control though not necessarily its entire population, given that millions of Ukrainians are either displaced or deported, while the occupied territories are partly repopulated by individuals from Russia.



IMPORTANT CONSIDERATIONS AND METHODOLOGICAL REMARKS

To date, Russia occupies 17% of Ukraine, roughly all of Luhansk, half of Donetsk, two thirds of Zaporizhzhia and three quarters of Kherson. The situation is extremely volatile and could be at a watershed. **How many more Ukrainians could be displaced in case Russia gains more ground or if Ukraine loses the fight for its sovereignty?** Some German government sources recently suggested that up to 10 million more people could be displaced. Given the observed high propensity of Ukrainians to flee from Russia-controlled territories (up to 75%), the numbers could be twice as high.

To address this question a dedicated method has been developed. First, four scenarios of the possible outcome of the war are sketched. Second, displacement due to the 2022 invasion and partial occupation of Ukraine is analysed and the key migration patterns identified. Third, the results serve as precedence and the patterns observed since 2022 are applied to the scenarios of the war. For the purpose of this brief, the second stage is presented first, while scenarios of war and forced migration come in a joint section.

The method was developed in 2021 to discuss the potential forced migration in case of a Russian invasion. Initial projections from this methodology suggested that approximately 10 million people could face displacement, a figure that closely mirrored the actual displacement in 2022. This alignment validated the efficacy of the method. In the interim period, a wealth of additional data has become available leading to the enhancement of the method's complexity while also rendering it more transparent and accurate.

Before proceeding with the analysis, the population and migration data must be adjusted to several limitations:

- (a) Ukrainian population statistics are flawed because the last census in Ukraine was conducted in 2001, resulting in all subsequent population data being derived from estimates. The substantial levels of internal and international (forced) migration distorts all population data. Therefore, most data on the whereabouts of people in Ukraine come with a caveat.
- (b) The baseline population statistics applied below predominantly reflect pre-war conditions. Hence, it is imperative to deduct the population that has already left Ukraine, estimated at around 6 million or 15.38% from the total. However, recent generic estimates of the total population by Libanova (2023) are applied where appropriate.
- (c) Data of Ukrainians who have fled or been deported to Russia are both unreliable and scarce; for example, a breakdown by province (oblast) of origin or gender is not available.
- (d) On the other hand, IDPs from Russia-occupied provinces and the warzone who moved to the eastern provinces, still remaining under Ukraine's control, offset people who left these areas by 60%-80%¹.

¹ While 6 million Ukrainians left the country, mostly government-controlled territory, there are 3.7-4.8 million IDPs, an equivalent to 60-80% of those who went abroad.



(e) Varied responses to Russian occupation exist within Ukraine, particularly evident between the predominantly Russian-speaking and partly Russia-leaning east welcoming Russian occupation, and the partly Ukrainian-speaking and largely Ukraine-leaning centre and west, which need to be accounted for.

(f) The characteristics of the population that has already left differ from those who remain within Ukraine. Those who left are mostly aged between 18 to 44 years, most of them are female. In 2021, their share in the population was 40%, totalling 17.2 million. In 2023, approximately 45% of the remaining population, totalling 14.1 million, fall within the age group of 45–90, a group that has been only half as likely to migrate compared to 18–44 year olds. Many of those who stayed are thus less mobile, notably the elderly and those with care responsibilities, people from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, the less educated, those with fewer resources, individuals with disabilities and people in isolated villages. Therefore, separate calculations for migration propensity are required for each age group. Consequently, generic prospective migration estimates for the entire population should be reduced by one quarter, reflecting the fact that half of the affected population has been only half as likely to migrate, resulting in a 25% adjustment factor.

(g) Additionally, the gender and family composition of the population has changed due to the disproportionately high level of migration among women with their children. There is now a higher proportion of men in the country, often separated from their families². It is essential to acknowledge that the migration pattern of women with children fleeing under conditions of war cannot be applied to the men left behind. Instead, it can be assumed that, for three reasons, the propensity of men to flee Ukraine if it comes under Russian control might be higher than that of women. First, men are more likely to seek to join their families already abroad. Second, men may be more inclined to escape expected Russian repression, persecution, and reprisals. Thirdly, there could potentially be a reverse effect of martial law, as men aged 18–60 are currently restricted from leaving the country. If martial law were to become unenforceable, such as in case of occupation and subsequent breakdown of Ukrainian authorities, it is conceivable that more men might seek to leave the country.

(h) Finally, only the population residing in the territories still under the control of the Ukrainian government is considered.

² Of all Ukrainian refugees in the EU, 37,6% are male, only 20% are adult men (about 862,000), while the majority is female. Hence, there are still 9,28 million men in the age group 18–60 in Ukraine.



DISPLACEMENT DYNAMICS AND PATTERNS AS OF 2022 TO DATE

In 2022, a staggering 13.8 million Ukrainians experienced displacement, with around half (7.14 million) displaced within the country and the other half (6.8 million) forced to seek refuge abroad. This figure represented 36% of the total population of Ukraine or roughly equivalent to 75% of the population of the provinces (oblast) directly affected by fighting or occupation. Within 24 months, about 4.24 million displaced people returned. In early 2024, around 6 million people were still displaced internationally and 3.7 million were displaced internally. More than half or 1.99 million IDPs reside in the provinces bordering Russia-occupied territories³.

Among the estimated 3.7 million IDPs, the majority are from Donetsk (814,000), Luhansk (814,000), Zaporizhzhia (440,000) and Kherson (440,000) provinces (see Table 1, IDPs in government-controlled territories). Additionally, individuals deported or relocated to Luhansk, Donetsk, and Crimea should be included in this count. The share of displaced persons from the same four provinces among Ukrainians seeking temporary protection in the EU range between 8.1% (340,000) originating from Donetsk, 3.9% (163,000) from Kherson, 3.2% (134,400) from Zaporizhzhia and 1.4% (58,000) from Luhansk. To this we need to add the number of people who relocated to non-EU countries – at least another 1.7 million people fled to Russia, North America, the UK, Türkiye or elsewhere – representing an equivalent of 40% of all relocations. This means that the total number of internally and internationally displaced persons from these four regions could be up to 40% higher⁴: Donetsk 1,29 million, Luhansk 896,000, Zaporizhzhia 616,000 and Kherson 669,000. Moreover, 668,000 Ukrainians, supposedly mostly from Donetsk and Luhansk, moved to Russia already as of 2014. Due to various unknowns – such as the number of IDPs in Russia-occupied territory, male IDPs not registered and not responding to surveys, under-coverage in surveys of IDPs in and from certain regions – these estimates likely understate the real numbers and levels of internal and international displacement.

Figure 1: Total estimated shares of displaced population from the four provinces

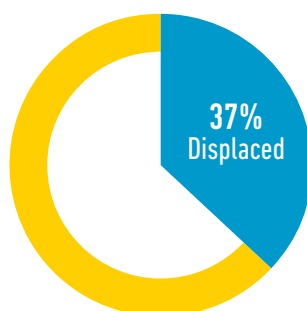


³ Kyiv, Chernihiv, Sumy, Poltava, Kharkiv, Dnepropetrovsk and Mykolaiv

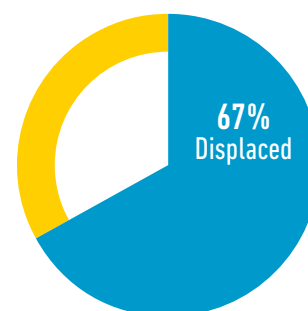
⁴ At least 1.7 million Ukrainians relocated to Russia, the UK, US and Canada, equivalent to 40% of all relocated Ukrainians. Because all calculations are based on data on Ukrainians in the EU these 40% are added to the total.



Zaporizhzhia oblast



Kherson oblast



Furthermore, all statistics other than those from Luhansk pertain to the entire territory of each province, while only parts of them are occupied. Since the exact proportion of displaced persons from the occupied territories cannot be determined based on the data analysed here, the calculations are triangulated with various other reports.

Table 1: Displacement from Russia-occupied territories and attacked provinces

	Donetsk	Luhansk	Zaporizhzhia	Kherson
Population estimates before occupation	4,380,000 (2013)	2,260,000 (2013)	1,700,000 (2021)	1,000,000 (2021)
Displaced to the EU	340,000	58,000	134,000	163,000
Internally displaced to government-controlled Ukraine	814,000	814,000	440,000	440,000
Possibly displaced to non-EU countries	137,700	24,000	54,000	66,300
Displaced to Russia as of 2014	500,000 ⁵		n/a	n/a
Share of displaced of total population	37,1%	46,9%	36,9	66,9%

It is claimed that only 70,000, mostly the elderly, remain in Russia-occupied Kherson city, which represents 25% of its pre-war population of 290,000. Similarly, in the largely destroyed city of Mariupol in the Donetsk oblast, only 120,000 or 25% of the original 480,000 residents still live in the city. Only some 1.5 million people, or 67% of the pre-occupation population, remain in Luhansk city whereas up to 33% left it. Meanwhile, in the occupied parts of Zaporizhzhia oblast still seem to live some 250,000 of its pre-war population, whereas “around half the region’s population have left voluntarily, in addition to those deported or kidnapped”, accordingly to some sources. Consider the case of the occupied city of Melitopol in the Zaporizhzhia oblast: presently, only 60,000 to 70,000 remain in the city, which is 39-45% of its pre-war population of 155,000 people. Ukrainians are said to be actively deported under the guise of ‘evacuation’. In contrast, in the

⁵ According to the size of the population of the two provinces, two thirds of those who moved to Russia were from Donetsk (333,000), and one third from Luhansk (166,000).



Donetsk region, which has been occupied since 2014, the population has decreased by one third,⁶ with the Russia-occupied parts now hosting only around 2 million inhabitants or less. Whereas the working-age population has probably decreased by 65% those who have chosen to stay are thus likely predominantly the elderly. However, Donetsk and Luhansk, being largely Russian-speaking and leaning towards Russia, represent exceptions. In contrast, Kherson, an average Ukrainian city⁷, is more likely to represent an example of the average effect of Russian occupation on the central part of Ukraine. Meanwhile, the western part of Ukraine is an entirely different matter.

The examples examined above suggest that between 33% and 75% of the pre-war Ukrainian population has either left or fled from the Russia-occupied provinces and cities. Excluding the exceptional case of Donetsk, the main pattern suggests that between 50% and 75% of the remaining population could flee from Russian occupation, with fewer people leaving from the eastern provinces and more from the western provinces. “Eastern residents brace for Russian advance” BBC reported, “Russia slowly destroys Ukraine’s cities as it tries to take them”; only a “small minority” holds out or might even welcome Russian control while most will want flee.

One to two thirds of Ukrainians fled the Russia-occupied territories.

In case more parts of eastern or even central Ukraine come under Russian control, the capacity of the remaining government-controlled parts of Ukraine – the smaller, poorer, and less densely populated oblasts – to accommodate more IDPs is limited⁸. It is very likely that their capacities are already partly exhausted. This means that, unlike in 2022 and 2023, most displaced persons, many of whom would relive their second or third displacement, will need to move abroad. In case Ukraine loses the war, rendering martial law ineffective, a significant exodus of men aged 18-60 can be anticipated. Notably, up to one million men and women who have served in the Ukrainian army will need to flee, as they are at risk of persecution by Russia.

On the other hand, Russia brings in thousands or tens of thousands of people, including military personnel, workers, some civilians and their families to populate the occupied and partly depopulated territories, as reports from Zaporizhzhia and Luhansk claim. In Mariupol, Russia has reportedly resettled several tens of thousands new residents from Russia. This could suggest that Russia might prepare for some population exchange strategy through dispersal and colonisation tactics.

⁶ In 2010, the entire Donbass, including Donetsk and Luhansk provinces, had an estimated pre-war population of 6.2 million. Due to the 2014 events, 1.5 million moved to other parts of Ukraine and 600,000 migrated or were deported to Russia (550,000) and Belarus (60,000). Hence, around 33% remained the region.

⁷ 14.1% identified themselves Russian in the last 2001 census.

⁸ There is no data on the absorption capacity of IDPs in government-controlled Ukraine; however, various reports on the situation of IDPs suggest that means are insufficient to cater for all of them, and the situation is deteriorating.

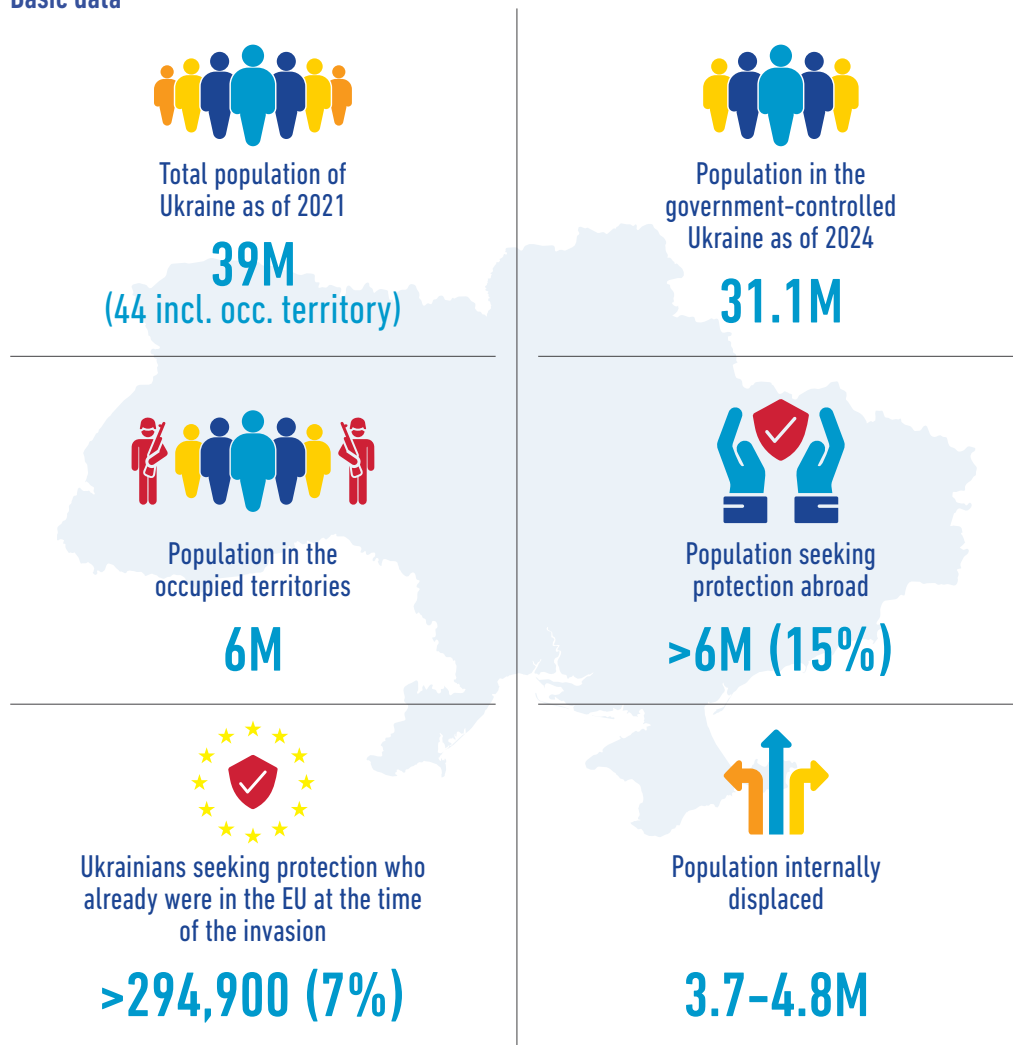


SCENARIOS OF THE WAR AND SCENARIOS OF POSSIBLE FORCED DISPLACEMENT

There exist multiple scenarios regarding the potential trajectory of the war, some of which were discussed in publications predating Russia's large-scale invasion. Several were discussed in the [first Prague Process policy brief](#) on this topic, released in spring 2022. These scenarios stem from research developed by a range of institutes. Present policy brief only considers scenarios that foresee the continuation of the war.

Each potential outcome of the war lends itself to the development of corresponding scenario regarding the type and magnitude of forced migration. However, a large number of variations is possible depending on the extent of Russian occupation and/or control. For the purpose of developing these scenarios, the lower figures of displaced people in 2023/24 were applied, rather than the higher figures observed in 2022. Utilising the latter would yield even higher estimates.

Basic data





IDPs in the Eastern regions

1.99M



Total number of displaced internally and internationally

9.7–10.8M
(max. 27.7%)



Proportion of people fleeing the occupied territory

35–75%
(ex. Donetsk 50–75%)



Propensity to migrate among the age group 0–44 (10.7M, 55% of remaining population)

35–75% = 3.78–8.03M



Propensity to migrate among the age group II, 45–95 (8.78M, 45% of remaining population)

17.5% – 37.5% = 1.5–3.3M



Men in the age group 18–60, conscription age (men in the armed forces)

9.28M (1M)

Scenario 1

A stalemate persists. Russia does not gain additional territory, and Ukraine does not liberate more territory. The conflict becomes frozen. Fighting and bombing might continue along the frontline, but it diminishes. The security situation stabilises, reconstruction gains pace and the economy recovers.

A portion of the currently internationally displaced Ukrainians will return, with estimates ranging between 33% and 45%, as indicated in the [previous Policy Brief](#) derived from recent surveys. As a result, around 1.2 million to 2.058 million of the 3.9–4.2 million Ukrainians currently residing in the EU aspire to return, along with potentially 312,000 to 483,000 individuals of the currently undecided. Those who choose to stay abroad will likely be joined by family members currently still in Ukraine, mostly husbands and other close relatives, amounting to another 330,000 to 366,000 Ukrainians.



Scenario 2

The war continues. Russia achieves further but minor territorial gains in Donetsk, Luhansk, Zaporizhzhia and Kherson. Neither side makes major advances. The security situation remains volatile, with sporadic reconstruction efforts underway, yet the economy shows sluggish signs of recovery, if any at all.

Few more Ukrainians will be displaced from the smaller newly occupied parts of Donetsk, Lugansk, Kharkiv and Zaporizhzhia. Many individuals near the frontline have already left or been evacuated. Given that those remaining in the region are mostly the elderly and their close relatives (carers) – thus the least mobile group – they are more likely to stay or seek protection within Ukraine. Meanwhile, much fewer Ukrainians who currently reside abroad will return, as the ‘end of the war’ is the main precondition for their return, according to surveys. Finally, the longer the war takes, and the slower the economic recovery, the more people will opt to leave, and if only temporarily. Hence, forced migration is anticipated to slowly though, albeit moderately, increase over time.

Scenario 3a

The war continues. Russia makes significant gains in northern, eastern, and southern Ukraine, notably in Donetsk, Kharkiv, Dnipro, Zaporizhzhia and potentially even Kyiv, Mykolaiv and Odesa. In the west, an independent rump-state of Ukraine remains, though on Russian terms. While, under scenario 3b, less territory comes under Russian control.

The scope of displacement depends on the territory – oblasts and cities – that come under Russian control. If it is actual occupation or even annexation by the Russian military, forced migration can be expected to be significantly higher depending on the level of suppression of Ukrainian culture. Meanwhile, if a puppet regime is installed but no Russian occupation forces deployed, the level of forced migration might be lower.

In the affected provinces and cities, some 33% to 75% of their remaining population (but rather 50% to 75%) are likely to flee Russian occupation or annexation, more among the youth and fewer among the elderly. According to largely outdated population data, the affected provinces had a pre-war population of approximately 19.5 million. However, this figure must be adjusted to account for those who have already left the country, thus 15.38% should be deducted. This brings the actual population in the affected provinces down to 16.5 million. Of these, 6.47–11.58 million people may flee,⁹ including IDPs who are already in the affected areas¹⁰. Because the

⁹ Age group I, 1–44, 9.08 million (55% of population), propensity to migrate 35% – 75% = 3.18–6.81 million; age group II, 45–95, 8.78 million (45% of population), propensity to migrate 17.5% – 37.5% = 1.3–2.78 million.

¹⁰ There are already about 1.99 million IDPs in the affected regions. Most IDPs will probably flee again as they already demonstrated once that they are unwilling to live under Russian occupation.



government-controlled areas are saturated with IDPs, the majority would probably be departing Ukraine west-bound.

Scenario 3b

Above scenario must be adapted to reflect the actual Russian advances and any subsequent occupation. For instance, if Kyiv and/or Odesa and/or Mykolaiv (et cetera) remain unoccupied, the number of displaced persons will likely be lower. Conversely, if cities like Cherkassy and Kropyvnytskyi (previously known as Kirovograd) are also affected, the number of displaced persons would correspondingly increase.

Table 3: Cities and Provinces (oblasts), level of displacement, 50% to 75% (minus 15%, rounded, of the pre-war population who already left)¹¹

	City	minus 15%, in mil.	Province (oblast)	minus 15%, in mil.
Kyiv	1,500,000 – 2,000,000	1,3 – 1,7	2,400,000 – 3,600,000	2,1 – 3,1
Kharkiv	700,000 – 1,050,000	0,6 – 0,9	1,300,000 – 1,950,000	1,1 – 1,7
Dnipro	490,000 – 735,000	0,42 – 0,63	1,550,000 – 2,330,000	1,3 – 2
Zaporizhzhia	355,000 – 480,000	0,3 – 0,4	850,000 – 1,270,000	0,72–1,1
Sumy	127,000 – 190,000	0,11 – 0,16	550,000 – 775,000	0,47 – 0,66
Poltava	150,000 – 225,000	0,13 – 0,19	700,000 – 1,050,000	0,6 – 0,89
Chernihiv	140,000 – 210,000	0,12–0,18	500,000 – 750,000	0,43 – 0,64
Odesa	490,000 – 735,000	0,42 – 0,63	1,200,000 – 1,800,000	1 – 1,5
Mykolaiv	240,000 – 360,000	0,2 – 0,31	650,000 – 975,000	0,55–0,83
Cherkassy	140,000 – 210,000	0,12 – 0,8	600,000 – 750,000	0,5 – 0,64
Kropyvnytskyi (Kirovograd)	115,000 – 172,000		450,000 – 675,000	

Other regions, including the government-controlled parts of Donetsk, as well as major cities such as Kryvyi Rih, Melitopol, Berdyansk or Kramatorsk, are not listed separately here.

Scenario 4

Ukraine loses the war. The Ukrainian army surrenders and may even disintegrate. The entire country comes under Russian control, with large parts facing annexation and Russification. In the remaining territory, the government will be replaced by a puppet regime. Due to guerrilla warfare, the security situation will be precarious.



An estimated 31.1 million Ukrainians still live in the territory controlled by the government. Precedence shows that on average, between 35% and 75% of Ukrainians, or rather 50% to 75%, would be unwilling to live under Russian control or even occupation. This suggests that between 8.4 million (taking the lower estimate) or rather 12 million (medium estimate) to 18.5 million (higher estimate) Ukrainians (corrected by age groups) would leave the country¹². In addition, the figure needs to be corrected for the higher propensity of the remaining 9.3 million men to migrate, notably among those in the age group 18-60, specifically those in the army and with their families already abroad¹³. There is no further correction needed for IDPs as they are already included in above population estimate of 31.1 million. As a result, between 9.44 to 13 to 19.05 million people could potentially leave Ukraine¹⁴. If current migration patterns persist, roughly 15% could move to Russia, while 85% could move westward, with 20% leaving for Poland, another 20% for Germany, 8-10% for the Czech Republic, 11% for the US and Canada, and the rest dispersing across other EU member states.

Table 4: War vs Migration scenarios

	Scenario 1	Scenario 2	Scenario 3	Scenario 4
War	No change	Small Russian gains	Russia occupies eastern Ukraine	Russia controls or occupies all Ukraine
Migration	1.5-2.9 million return	Less return, moderately increasing migration	min. 6.47, max. 11.58 million	min. 9.44, max. 19.05 million

CONCLUSION & DISCUSSION

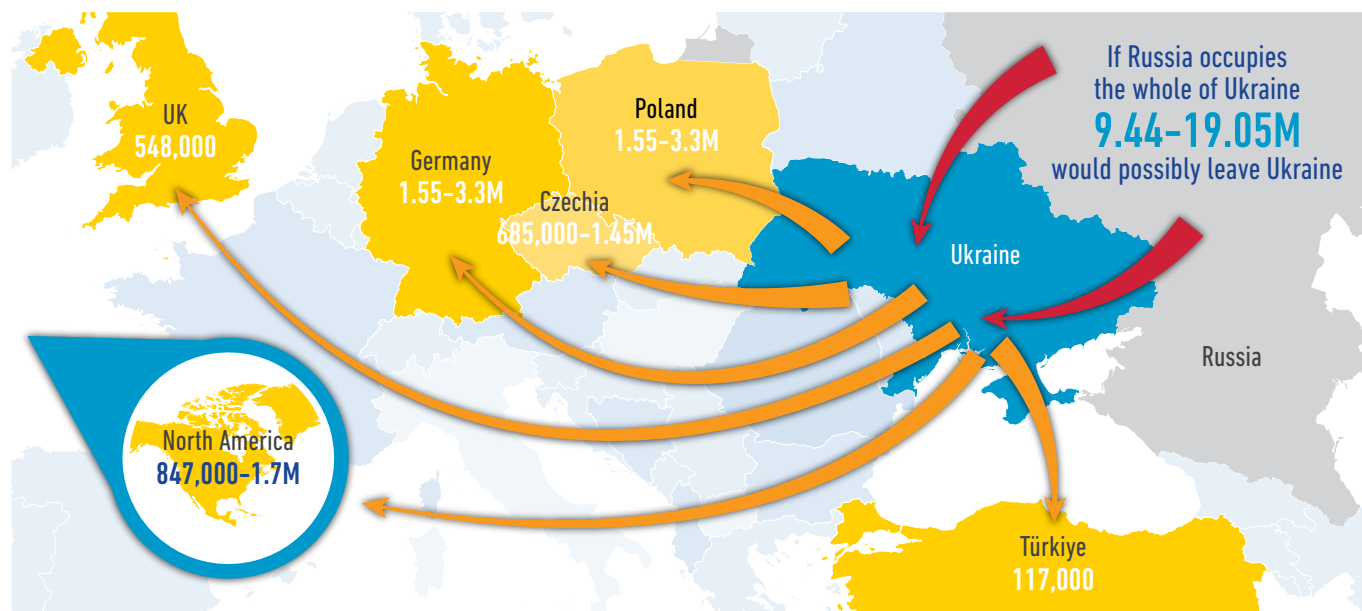
The war of Russia against Ukraine extends into its third year. There are no signs that it will end any time soon. The situation is volatile. Currently Russia seems to have the upper hand and still strives to win the war. If Russia takes under control or occupies the eastern part of Ukraine, accommodating 18.5 million or 63% of the Ukrainian population, including most of the current IDPs¹⁵, around 6.47-11.58 million people might flee, with over 80% or 5.4-9.7 million moving to the west. In the extreme case, where Russia occupies the whole of Ukraine, twice as many, 9.44-19.05 million would possibly leave Ukraine. Of these, 7.7-16.3 million (83,3%) could move west, 6.85-14.5 mil. to the EU – 1.55-3.3 million to Poland and another 1.55 to 3.3 million to Germany – while 847,000 to 1.7 million (11%) might want to move on to North America. The actual numbers might be lower because a larger proportion of the population remaining in Ukraine falls into the less mobile or immobile category.

¹² Age group I (1-44), 55% of the population (17.1 million), propensity to migrate 35%-75% = 5.99-12.8 million
Age group II (45-95), 45% of the population (14 million), propensity to migrate 17.5%-37,5% = 2.45-5,25 million

¹³ One million extra refugees are added here randomly.

¹⁴ Developing a mean value is not helpful as the migration behaviour of western Ukrainians is not and cannot be accounted for by these scenarios as considerably more might leave the country.

¹⁵ Because they are currently mostly residing in the eastern provinces which could possibly come under Russian occupation.



These scenarios exclusively consider the drivers within the origin country, without accounting for individual-level factors, as well as conditions in destination countries of forced migration. The actual migration levels also depend on individual capability to migrate, such as the existence of social networks and financial resources. Furthermore, migration is determined by the legal opportunities and the social conditions in target countries. If migration is restricted or reception conditions are harsh, fewer people will endure risks and hardship.

Regardless, the projected numbers would likely amount to many millions, and the scale of such an exodus and the substantial influx to the EU within such a brief timeframe would be unprecedented in recent history. It can only be compared with the displacement levels witnessed at the end of World War II, where some 12.5 million were displaced in Western Europe, 22.5 million across all of Europe, along with 12 million displaced Germans. Although the total figures could be similar to immigration from third countries to the EU, which was recorded at 23.8 million in 2022, the rapid pace at which this forced migration would occur represents a unique challenge.

On the other hand, the current labour shortage of approximately 6 million vacancies in the EU, coupled with rapid population ageing¹⁶ and an anticipated decline of seven million in the working age population over the next seven years implies that in numerical terms labour market integration might not be the key challenge. Nevertheless, with over 4 million displaced Ukrainians already being in the EU, around one million refugees coming annually from other countries, and with growing reluctance to accept more migrants and refugees, the arrival of several million more Ukrainians could shift public attitude and lead to social unrest and political instability. These potential consequences should also be considered when discussing the allies' support for Ukraine, or the lack thereof.

POLICY BRIEF

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