BULGARIA

LABOUR MARKET INTEGRATION OF REFUGEES FROM UKRAINE

OCTOBER - DECEMBER 2023

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Cover photo: Ukrainian refugee participating in labour market counselling held by IOM staff in Bulgaria © IOM 2023

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KEY FINDINGS

DEMOGRAPHICS

1,164 Ukrainian respondents ("stayers")

84% Female

16% Male

LABOUR MARKET

57% active working-age stayers

40% inactive working-age stayers

3% unknown activity

ACTIVE POPULATION

51% employed

34% unemployed and looking for a job

9% daily workers

6% self-employed

EMPLOYMENT

30% in professional roles

24% in services and sales

13% in elementary occupations

OCCUPATIONS

Professional roles* (34%)

Services and sales (27%)

Elementary occupations (13%)

Clerical support (8%)

Craft related trades (19%)

Professional roles* (15%)

Managerial positions (15%)

Elementary occupations (15%)

LANGUAGE

75% of working-age stayers do not know the local language

EDUCATION

61% of respondents have completed tertiary education

16% have completed upper secondary education

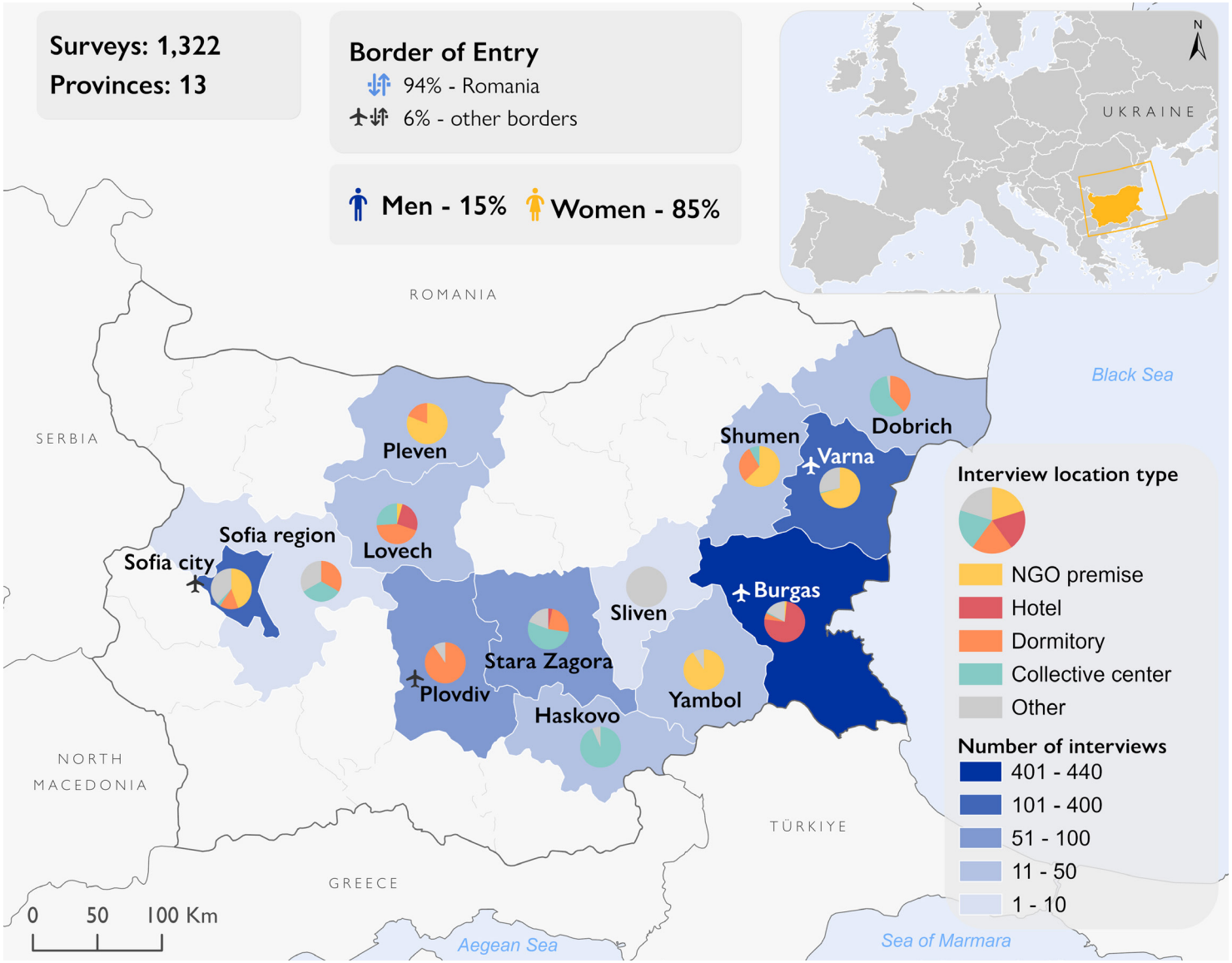
JOB SATISFACTION

71% of male respondents were satisfied

67% of female respondents were satisfied

**Professional roles include those in physical sciences, mathematics, engineering, technology, life sciences, medical and health services, social sciences and humanities, among others.*

Overview: number of surveys and locations of data collection in Bulgaria during October - December 2023 period



This map is for illustration purposes only. The boundaries and names shown, and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by IOM.

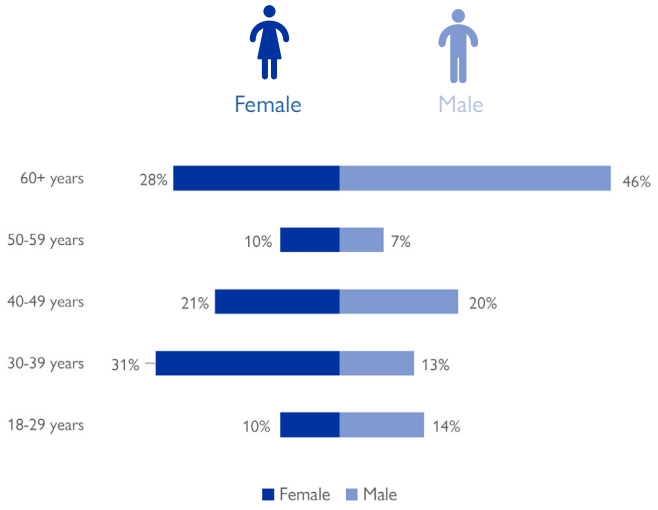
INTRODUCTION

The IOM's DTM collected data on the Needs, Intentions, and Integration Challenges of Ukrainian refugees in Bulgaria during the final quarter of 2023, interviewing a total of 1,322 individuals. This report explores the employment backgrounds and future prospects of adult survey participants (18-64 years old), with a specific focus on those who either intend to or have already settled in the country (n= 1,164). These individuals are considered as "stayers" for the purpose of this study, as they are actively investing human and social resources to fully participate in the host communities.

GENDER AND AGE

Among stayers of working age, women account for 84 per cent, whilst men account for the remaining 16 per cent. Among women, the majority of respondents are distributed across the 30 – 39 age group (42%) and the 40 – 49 age group (30%). Comparatively, among the men, the largest proportion falls within the 40 – 49 category (37%) and the 18 – 29 category (26%).

Figure 1. Stayers by age and gender (%) n=1,164



Furthermore, within this group, the study will concentrate on those who are of working age (18 – 60 years old, n=804) in order to provide insights into their participation in the labour market and detailing their experiences, needs, and intentions related to employment in Bulgaria throughout the duration of their displacement.

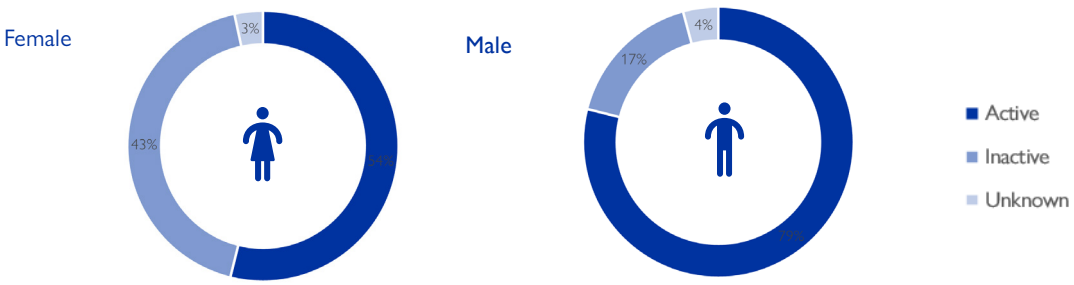
The majority of interviews were conducted in Burgas (33%), Varna (26%) and Sofia (21%), with the remaining 20 per cent collected in 10 other regions.[1]

LABOUR MARKET PARTICIPATION

At the time of interview, 57 per cent of working-age stayers were engaged in the labour force. Forty per cent of working-age stayers were inactive and the remaining three per cent was unknown. Among active stayers generally, the highest share was within the 30 – 39 age group, whereas the highest percentage of inactive individuals was within the 60 + age group.

The proportion of stayers who were active in the labour market in Ukraine prior to displacement is larger than the proportion who were active in Bulgaria in the final quarter of 2023. Among the working-age stayers in Bulgaria, 67 per cent were engaged in the labour force before displacement, where 87 per cent was accounted by women and the remaining 13 per cent by men. Hence, there was an 11 per cent decrease in the share of those active in the labour market before and after displacement in Bulgaria.

Figure 2. Stayers of working age, by employment status, by gender (%), n=804



[1] The remaining 20 per cent of surveys were collected in Plovdiv (6%), Stara Zagora (5%), Dobrich (3%), Shumen (2%), Lovech (2%), Pleven (2%), Haskovo (1%) Yambol (<1%), Sofia (<1%), Sliven (<1%). rHajdú-Bihar county (0.5%).

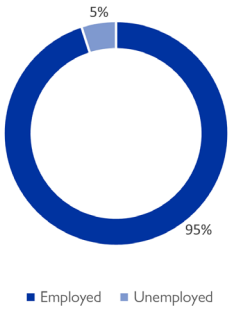
ACTIVE POPULATION

EMPLOYMENT

Within the active population (n=457), 49 per cent are employed, 35 per cent are unemployed and looking for a job, 9 per cent are daily workers and 7 per cent are self-employed. Although they represent a small portion of the sample and of those active in the labour market in Bulgaria, men report to be less frequently unemployed than women (21 versus 35%).

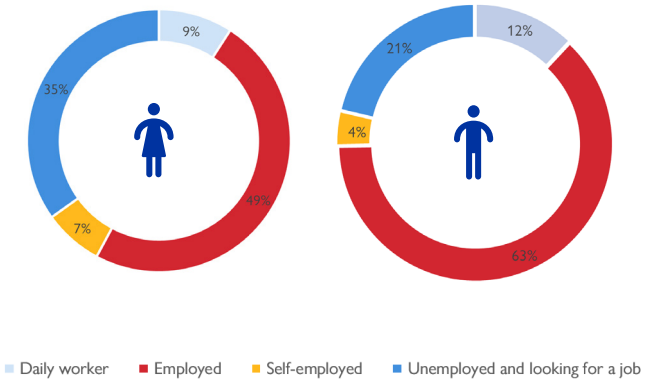
Among respondents who were part of the labour force in Ukraine (n=541), 95 per cent were employed, while five per cent were unemployed before displacement. This represents a significant decline in the rate of employment, which dropped from 95 per cent in Ukraine to 67 per cent after displacement.

Figure 3. Employment status of working age stayers, active before displacement (%) n=541



Among the active respondents prior to displacement, 84 per cent held regular employment, nine per cent were self-employed, and two per cent were involved in daily work. Meanwhile, five per cent were unemployed and sought employment. Before displacement, within the active population, the share of employed was comparable for both genders (95% for women and 93% men). A greater proportion of women were involved in regular employment (84%) compared to men (80%). Additionally, a higher percentage of men reported being self-employed (11%) compared to their female counterparts (9%).

Figure 4. Employment status of active stayers of working age in Bulgaria, by gender (%), n=457



JOB MATCHING

Overall, amongst working-age stayers who are employed in Bulgaria, only 68 per cent indicated that their job in Bulgaria corresponds to their educational background and professional experience. Notably, men exhibited higher satisfaction with job alignment (71%) compared to female respondents (67%).

Among those whose educational and professional background did not align with their employment after displacement, disparities were evident, with a significant proportion of those who were not satisfied having tertiary education (77%), a smaller percentage with upper secondary education (11%), and respondents with post-secondary education accounting for eight per cent.

Among employed working-age stayers, 30 per cent are working in professional roles, 24 per cent are services and sales workers (e.g., cooks, hairdressers, protective services) and 13 per cent are in elementary occupations.

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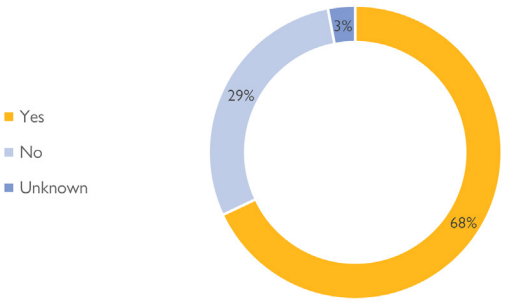
Figure 5. Employed working-age stayers job satisfaction, total (%), n=307



EDUCATION

The study found that higher educational attainment is not linked to the reported employment rates among respondents. However, variations emerge when considering the specific occupations and sectors of those employed after displacement.

Individuals with advanced education tend to be more likely to hold managerial roles (e.g., directors or senior officials) or be categorized as professionals (e.g., teachers, doctors, lawyers, accountants, etc.). Among active working-age stayers 71 per cent of those with tertiary education are employed, whereas for those who completed upper secondary schooling only 60 per cent are employed. Similarly, for those who completed lower secondary, 60 per cent are employed. Within those who completed tertiary education, 38 per cent are employed in professional roles and 11 per cent hold managerial positions. In contrast, those with secondary education or lower are noted to be working as services and sales workers or elementary occupations. For example, those with lower secondary education, 47 per cent are employed as service and sales workers and 21 per cent are in elementary occupations.

Generally, top occupations for men who are active and employed are in craft related trades (19%), and professional services, managerial positions, and elementary occupations, 15 per cent each. For women, the majority are employed in professional roles (34%). However, the main other occupation amongst the women are as services and sales workers where 27 per cent of women account for this.

DURATION OF DISPLACEMENT

The duration of displacement in Bulgaria could be linked to a higher likelihood of employment.

Among active individuals who have spent less than a month in the country, the employment rate is 30 per cent, followed by a rate of 34 per cent among those with a duration between one and one and a half year. Those who spent one and a half to two years in the country show a higher employment rate (39%). Whilst there is a high employment rate of 89 per cent for those who stay longer than two years, it must be noted that there are only a small number of respondents in this duration category. For example, there were 300 respondents for the 1.5 -2 years duration category but only eight respondents for the over 2 years duration category.

MONTHLY WORKING HOURS

Respondents who disclosed the number of hours they usually work predominantly indicate working between 160-168 hours per month (48% of women, 53% of men). A smaller subset of respondents (36%) report working fewer than 160 hours per month, with women more likely to fall into this category (41%) compared to men (11%). The study found that men are more prone to working overtime, above 168 hours per month (36%), where only 11 per cent of women, report working above 168 hours in a month.

Among respondents working more than 168 hours per month, it was discovered that 14 per cent were in single-headed households, while 73 per cent were in households with children. This suggests that the higher working hours among women may be attributed to factors such as limited alternative job options with less demanding schedules or workplace expectations necessitating longer working hours, and the responsibility of being the sole head of their households, leaving them with no other means to cover essential expenses.

Figure 6. Hours worked in a month by gender for working-age stayers (%), n=284

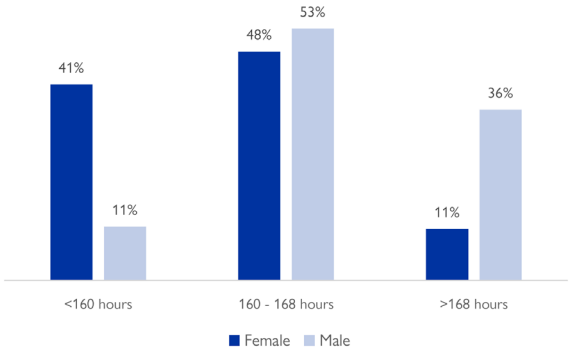
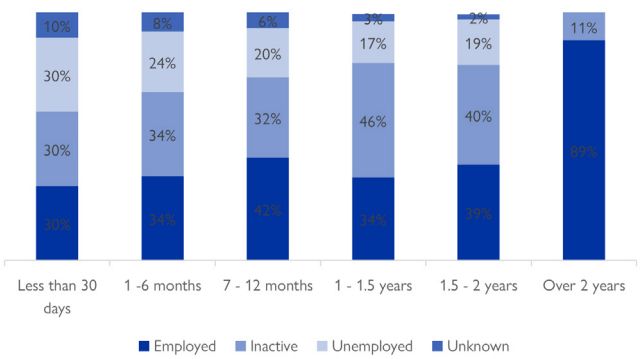


Figure 7. Employment rate of active individuals by length of stay (%) n=457



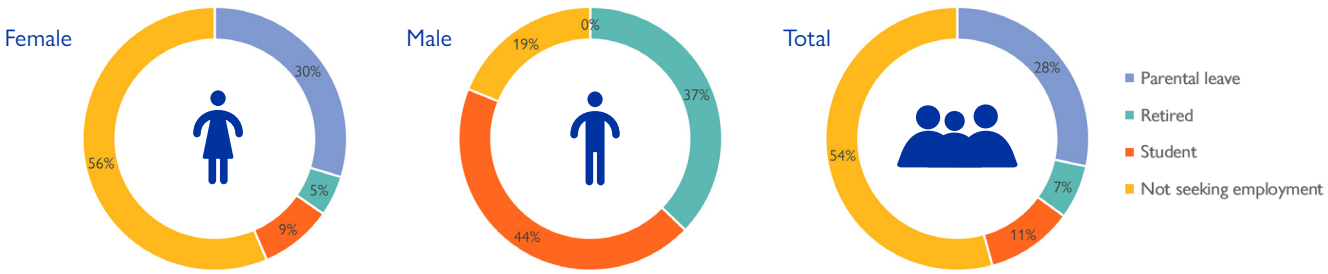
INACTIVE POPULATION

Mother and her son from Ukraine receiving help from IOM staff in Bulgaria. © IOM 2023

The inactive population comprises individuals who are not seeking employment, including individuals who are unemployed and not looking for a job (55%), individuals on parental leave (28%), students (11%), and retirees (7%). Notably, among the inactive working-age stayers, 57 per cent of women and 19 per cent of men indicate not searching for a job despite being unemployed. A significant 38 per cent of men are retirees whereas only 5 per cent of women are retirees.

This could be a result of Ukraine imposing a blanket ban on men of working age leaving the country through the imposition of martial law. Only women in the sample were unemployed due to being on parental leave (30%). Interestingly, among those not participating into the labour market, male respondents are more likely to have student status (44%) compared to women (9%).

Figure 8. Status of working-age stayers within inactive population in Bulgaria by gender and total (%) n=319



UNEMPLOYED AND NOT LOOKING FOR A JOB

Individuals who are unemployed and not actively seeking a job indicate that their absence from the labour market is primarily driven by family responsibilities (63%), such as caring for children, elderly family members, or persons with disabilities. Some identify their medical condition (11%) as a primary obstacle, while others mention the lack of a need for employment (10%), as other members in their households are already employed and cover necessary expenses.

The remaining 16 per cent cite various reasons, including plans to return to Ukraine soon (3%) or choose not to disclose their reasons (7%) or provided other reasons (7%). Notably, women are more likely to attribute their unemployment to family duties (63%), while men mention medical conditions (33%) more frequently than their female counterparts (11%).

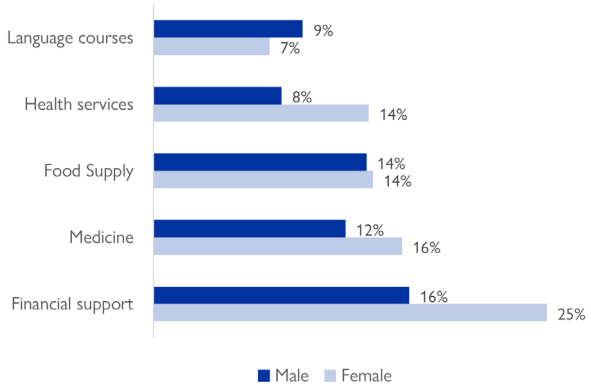
Figure 9. Reasons for not looking for a job, among stayers who are unemployed (%), n=174

PRIORITIES

Refugees from Ukraine participating in the survey suggested that employment assistance was not one of the top priority needs of working-age stayers (2%).

A large percentage of them were more concerned with the need for financial support (24%), medicine (15%), food supply (14%) and health services (13%). The need for financial support by almost a quarter of those intending to remain in Bulgaria and at their working-age could perhaps indicate that they are not earning enough income if working.

Figure 10. Priorities of working-age stayers by gender, n= 457



Elderly couple from Ukraine talking to IOM staff in Bulgaria. © IOM 2023

BULGARIAN LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY

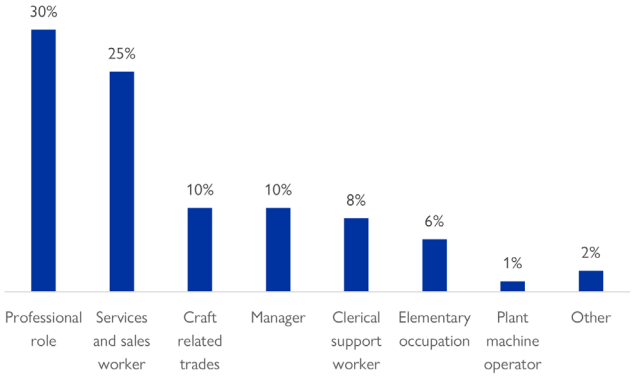
Among those who disclosed their priorities, language courses were only mentioned by eight per cent of active working-age stayers.

Having a certain level of proficiency in the Bulgarian language could be linked to higher employment levels. Among working-age stayers without any knowledge of the local language (76%), 37 per cent are employed and 59 per cent are unemployed (4% unknown). On the other side, those who have knowledge of the local language demonstrate higher employment levels, where 42 per cent are employed. However, only eight per cent of working-age stayers identified language courses as a priority.

Among the employed individuals with knowledge of the local language, 30 per cent are engaged in professional work, 25 per cent are employed as service and sales workers, 10 per cent are employed in craft-related trades. Similarly, for those who do not speak the local language, 30 per cent are also employed in professional roles and 23 per cent as services and sales workers. However, for those who do not speak Bulgarian there is also a high percentage working in elementary occupations (16%) compared to those who do speak Bulgarian, where only 6 per cent are in this occupation sector.

Among working-age stayers respondents who do not speak Bulgarian and disclosed information on class attendance, 61 per cent and enrolled in language classes. For those who speak the local language, 43 per cent are still enrolled in Bulgarian language classes. Respondents who take language courses, the majority opts for classes with agencies (55%), online lessons (25%), private classes (17%). Among individuals who are not fluent in the language, 34 per cent do not partake in language classes.

Figure 11. Occupations of working-age stayers who can speak Bulgarian, n=307



Refugees from Ukraine receiving help from IOM staff in Bulgaria. © IOM 2023

METHODOLOGY

IOM's Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM) is a system to track and monitor displacement and population mobility. It is designed to regularly and systematically capture, process and disseminate information to provide a better understanding of the movements and evolving needs of displaced populations, whether on site or en route.

Since April 2022, IOM Displacement Tracking Matrix has been regularly surveying people who are residing in the eleven countries included in the Regional Refugee Response Plan for Ukraine. The aim of the survey is to improve the understanding of their profiles, displacement patterns intentions and needs. The survey is deployed in 6 countries neighbouring Ukraine – Belarus, Hungary, Poland, the Republic of Moldova, Romania, and Slovakia, and other 5 countries in Europe, particularly impacted by the arrivals of refugees from Ukraine, including Bulgaria, Czechia, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania.

Face-to-face surveys were conducted by trained enumerators, with adult refugees from Ukraine (18+ years-old). Surveys were collected at selected locations (information centres, humanitarian aid distribution points, accommodation centres, transit points and IOM premises). The survey is anonymous and voluntary, administered after obtaining consent from the respondent. Respondents can stop the survey at any time. The questionnaire was available in English, Ukrainian, Russian and the enumerators were fluent in Bulgarian. The preferred language of the questionnaire is determined by the interviewee. Only fully completed surveys are into account for analysis. Prior to the start of the survey, all enumerators were trained by IOM on DTM standards, the use of Kobo application, IOM approach to migrants' protection and assistance, the ethics of data collection and the provision of information and referral mechanism in place.

ABOUT THE SURVEY

Aim

To improve the understanding of the profiles of Ukrainian refugees residing or transiting through Bulgaria, including their displacement patterns, intentions and needs.

Target Population

The present analysis focuses on the labour market integration and employment prospects of working-age (18-64 years-old) Ukrainian refugees who have already settled or intend to settle in Bulgaria.

Location and Execution

Face-to-face surveys were conducted by trained enumerators stationed at selected locations in Bulgaria . Surveys are conducted in English, Ukrainian and Russian with the help of a mobile application.

Regional Data Collection and Analysis

The survey is deployed in 11 countries: 6 neighboring countries (Belarus, Hungary, Poland, the Republic of Moldova, Romania, Slovakia), and 5 other countries (Bulgaria, Czechia, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania) impacted by the arrival of refugees from Ukraine.

LIMITATIONS

The sampling framework was not based on verified figures of refugees from Ukraine entering through all land border points or staying in the various regions where the surveys are conducted, due to the lack of baseline information. The geographic spread of enumerators deployed captures a wide range of locations. Whilst the overall results cannot be deemed as representative, the internal consistency of data collection in each country and at the regional level suggests that the current sampling framework produces findings of practical value.

While every attempt was made to capture all types of locations, the operational reality of fieldwork was confronted with different levels of accessibility to transit and stay locations, including the different availability of possible target individuals to comfortably spend 10-20 minutes responding to the questionnaire depending on a mix of personal conditions. Other factors more related to the conditions at a specific location and period, such as organizational changes in the entry and transit areas from national authorities, or weather conditions, also play a role.

DTM

Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM) is a system to track and monitor displacement and population mobility. The survey form was designed to capture the main displacement patterns of refugees of any nationality fleeing from Ukraine because of the war. It captures the demographic profiles of respondents and of the group they are travelling with, if any; it asks about intentions relative to the intended destinations and prospects in the country of displacement; it gathers information regarding a set of main needs that the respondents expressed as more pressing at the moment of the interview.

Since the onset of the war in Ukraine, several IOM's DTM tools were deployed in countries neighbouring Ukraine and in other countries particularly impacted by the new arrivals of refugees from Ukraine.

For more information, please consult:

https://dtm.iom.int/responses/ukraine-response

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