

## Regional Analysis

# Ukrainians and Third-Country Nationals Crossing back to Ukraine



01 April – 30 June 2023

Data collected in  
Hungary, Latvia, Poland, Republic of Moldova,  
Romania, Slovakia, and Ukraine

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## KEY FINDINGS

- Overall, between April and June 2023, there are more “short-time visitors” (47%) than “prospective returnees” (42%) among Ukrainians crossing back from neighbouring countries, while a minority (11%) is unsure on the length of their visit. Women (91% of the sample) more frequently intend to pay a short visit than men (47% vs 42%). Prospective returnees are older than short-time visitors by 8 years on average (47 years versus 39 years old).



- For both, short-time visitors and prospective returnees, reasons related to the desire to visit or reunite with family members are prevalent. Moreover, one third of short-time visitors mentioned the need to go to the doctor’s, have a surgery or take a specialist exam, and another third aimed at obtaining or renewing identity documents (biometric passport, diplomas, licenses).
- 52% of Ukrainians interviewed stayed in one of the neighbouring countries, for an average

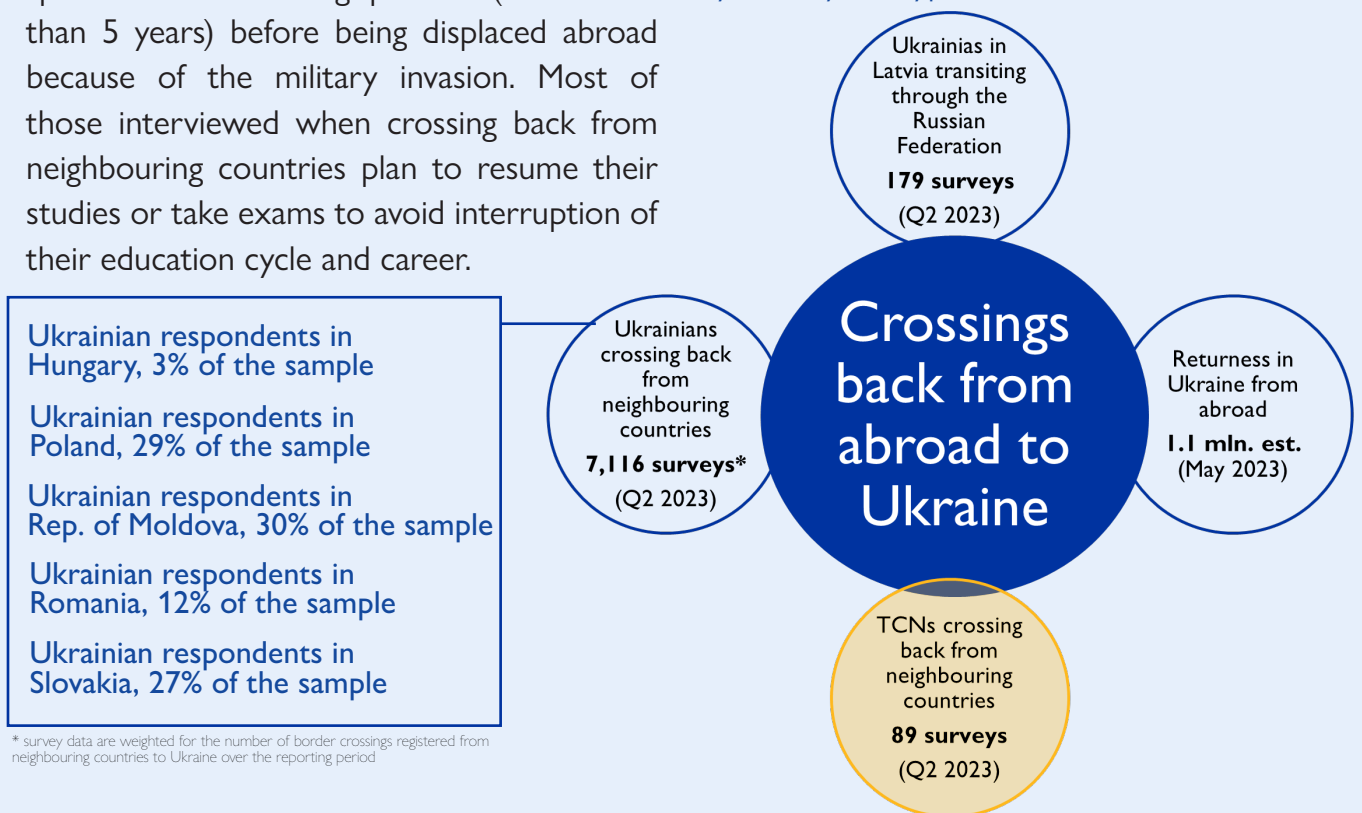
Since April 2022, IOM Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM) regularly collects individual surveys in countries neighbouring to Ukraine with persons who cross back with the aim to improve the understanding of their profiles, displacement patterns, intentions and needs.

period of 10 months before crossing back. The rest stayed mainly in Germany, Czechia, and the UK.

- The period since initial displacement is longer for short-time visitors (407 days), who also have already crossed in and out of Ukraine twice or more since February 2022 in most cases (54%). Prospective returnees (220 days) have spent less time abroad on average and have less frequently travelled in and out of Ukraine before returning than short-time visitors (55% only once or zero).
- The Top 5 needs are: financial support (20%), health support (17%), medicines (12%), food supply (11%) and general information (10%). Short-time visitors report a higher level of needs overall (linked to issues that they aimed to solve during the visit in Ukraine) than prospective returnees. The latter report no needs in more than half (55%) of the cases, as they may be already more focused on the conditions of return rather than on what was not achieved successfully abroad.

- Ukrainians, transiting from Latvia through the Russian Federation to reach eastern areas of Ukraine have a different profile than those crossing from neighbouring countries into western Ukraine. Most originate from areas which are temporary not under Ukraine’s government control in four oblasts – Donetsk, Luhanska, Khersonska and Zaporizka. Among them, there are more prospective returnees than short-time visitors, with the desire to reunite with their family members, and with a widespread need of more information about Ukraine and recent developments on the grounds than anything else.
- Third-Country Nationals (TCNs) have often spent in Ukraine long periods (even more than 5 years) before being displaced abroad because of the military invasion. Most of those interviewed when crossing back from neighbouring countries plan to resume their studies or take exams to avoid interruption of their education cycle and career.
- The profiles and needs expressed by Ukrainians crossing back from neighbouring countries and surveyed between April and June 2023 mostly match with those of the actual returnees from abroad surveyed in Ukraine in May 2023 ([IOM Ukraine Return Report Round 13](#)).
- Trends in terms of profiles, intentions and needs from Ukrainians crossing back from between April and June 2023 are in line with what observed in the previous reporting period (January-March 2023), with small variations (+/-2%) between the two consecutive periods on the main quantitative findings.

Fig. 1: Crossings back to Ukraine, survey data used by country and type.



## 1. INTRODUCTION

About 5.1 million persons were internally displaced in Ukraine as of May 2023 ([IOM Ukraine Internal Displacement Report Round 13](#)) and about 5,8 million refugees were recorded across Europe as of mid-Aug 2023 ([UNHCR](#)). Also, as of May 2023, almost 4,8 million persons were estimated to be returnees in Ukraine after a period of previous displacement; of them, about 22 per cent or slightly more than 1 million were returnees from abroad ([IOM Ukraine Return Report Round 13](#)).<sup>1</sup>

The number of total border crossings from Ukraine into neighbouring countries from February 2022 until July 2023 reached about 22 million, and at the same time about 15 million border crossings were registered in the opposite direction by Ukraine's border authorities. While some persons returning to Ukraine from abroad intend to remain, others may be engaging in short visits to Ukraine or pendular movements between border areas for a variety of reasons

This report presents evidence on persons crossing back to Ukraine from abroad distinguishing between those who aim at remaining in Ukraine for the foreseeable future (prospective returnees) and those who pay a short visit (short-time visitors). It is based on 7,386 surveys collected by DTM between April and June 2023 with adult individuals going to Ukraine. Almost 99 per cent of them were Ukrainians, and slightly more than 1 per cent Third-Country Nationals (TCNs).

Sections 2 to 7 focus on the 7,116 surveys with Ukrainian nationals met at the border areas of neighbouring countries to Ukraine: Hungary (188), Poland (2,034), Republic of Moldova (2,135), Romania (856), and Slovakia (1,903). Results are weighted for the number of border crossings into Ukraine from each country during the data collection period. Evidence on persons interviewed while crossing back is complemented with data on returnees from abroad collected by DTM in Ukraine (Section 8).<sup>2</sup>

The report also discusses the different profile of Ukrainian nationals surveyed in Latvia (179) while crossing to the Russian Federation with the aim to reach areas of Ukraine which are under the temporary military control of the Russian Federation (Section 9). Additionally, it contains a section dedicated to TCNs crossing into Ukraine from abroad on 388 interviews (Section 10). The report ends with a short Methodology section.

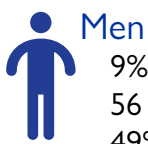
<sup>1</sup> The [IOM glossary](#) defines return as “the act or process of going back or being taken back to the point of departure”, which can take place within a country's territorial borders, or between a country of destination or transit and a country of origin.

<sup>2</sup> For a more comprehensive discussion on returns from abroad and from within the country, please check the DTM [Ukraine Return Report Round 13](#) (June 2023) and the [Conditions of Return Assessment Factsheet](#) (June 2023), which cover the same period of the present report (April-June 2023).

## 2. SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE

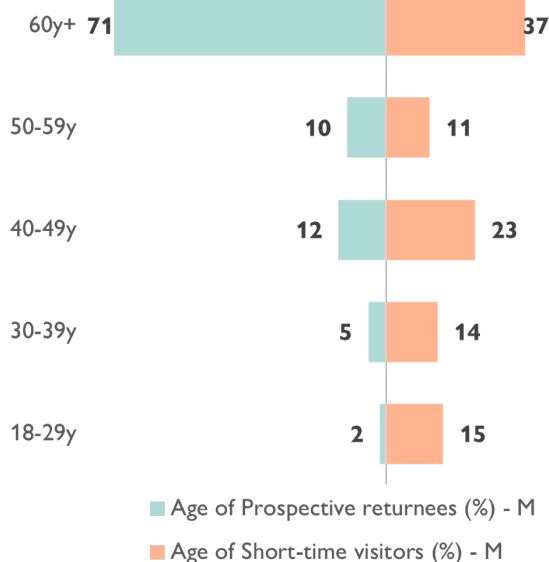
**42%** **PROSPECTIVE**  
**RETURNEES**  
of the sample Intend to stay in Ukraine

**47%** **SHORT-TIME**  
**VISITORS**  
of the sample Intend to do a short visit



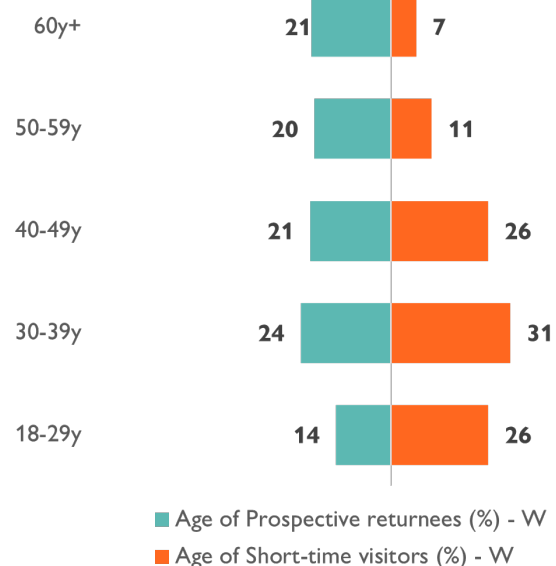
Men

9% of the total  
56 years old on average  
49% are prospective returnees



Women

91% of the total  
42 years old on average  
42% are prospective returnees



**51%** travel alone

**49%** travel in group

**26%** with at least one older person in the group (including respondents)

**27%** with at least one child in the group

**55%** travel alone

**45%** travel in group

**9%** with at least one older person in the group (including respondents)

**30%** with at least one child in the group

**Top 3 origin oblasts:**  
Dnipropetrovska (17%), City of Kyiv (1%), Kharkivska (13%)

**Top 3 origin oblasts:**  
City of Kyiv (15%), Dnipropetrovska (13%), Odeska (12%)

### 3. INTENTIONS AND REASONS TO CROSS INTO UKRAINE

#### Short visit or stay

Overall, 42 per cent of Ukrainian respondents intend to stay in Ukraine (prospective returnees), while 47 per cent would only do a short visit (short-time visitor). Another 11 per cent are unsure on the length of their visit.

The share of those intending to return to Ukraine is higher among men than among women (49% vs 42%). On the contrary, women are more likely intending to pay a short visit than men (47% vs 42%).

Most respondents plan to stay at their own houses

in Ukraine (86% overall), while others report to be going at their relatives' place (6%), or that they would find other private solutions or stay with friends (8%). The share of those planning to be hosted by relatives is higher among short-time visitors (9%) than among prospective returnees (3%).

**42%**  
PROSPECTIVE  
RETURNEES

**47%**  
SHORT-TIME  
VISITORS

#### Reasons to cross back to Ukraine

Out of all prospective returnees, more than half (56%) would stay in Ukraine as they miss their own place of origin and one fourth (25%) want to reunite with family members. On the other side, short-time visitors are aiming at visiting some family members in almost three quarters of the cases (72%).

Additionally, one third (34%) want to go to the

doctor and have a medical examination (paediatricians, dentists, and gynaecologists among them) and another third (33%) need to obtain or renew identity documents (biometric passport, diplomas, licenses).

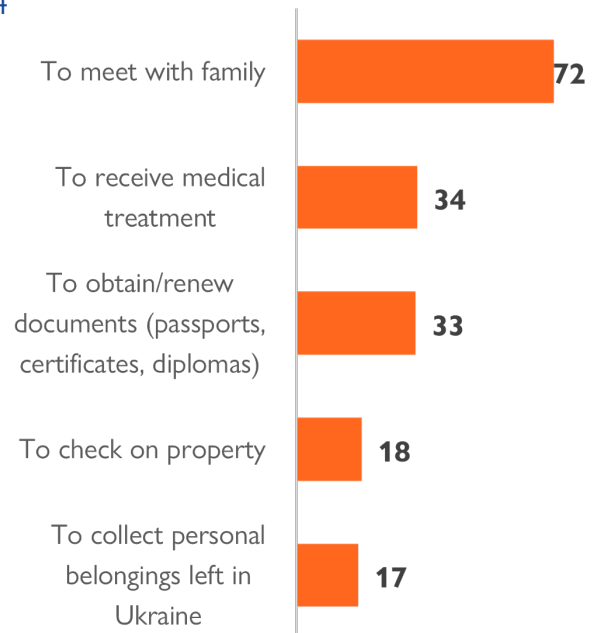
*"I'm taking my son for a surgery in Lviv"*

*Ukrainian woman, 45 years old, crossing back from Poland*

Figure 2: Top 5 reasons to stay in Ukraine, prospective returnees (w, %) (more than one answer possible), N= 2,800



Figure 3: Top 5 reason to do a short visit, short-time visitors (w, %) (more than one answer possible), N= 3,724





## 4. TIME OUTSIDE UKRAINE

### Displacement abroad

More than half (52%) of all respondents spent most of their time outside Ukraine in one of the five neighbouring countries where they are surveyed.

The rest stayed in other countries in Europe (41%), and only 7 per cent spent their time in displacement outside Europe. Germany (10%), Czechia (8%), Italy (3%), Spain (3%) and Türkiye (2%) are the main displacement countries among the prospective returnees. Germany (12%), the United Kingdom (5%), Czechia (4%), Bulgaria and Austria (3% each) the top countries of displacement among those intending to pay a short visit.

Overall, persons who are displaced in neighbouring countries to Ukraine are more likely to do periodical, short-time visits back to Ukraine, than Ukrainians who are displaced in countries farther away in Europe and outside Europe (Türkiye, Egypt, Israel, the USA).

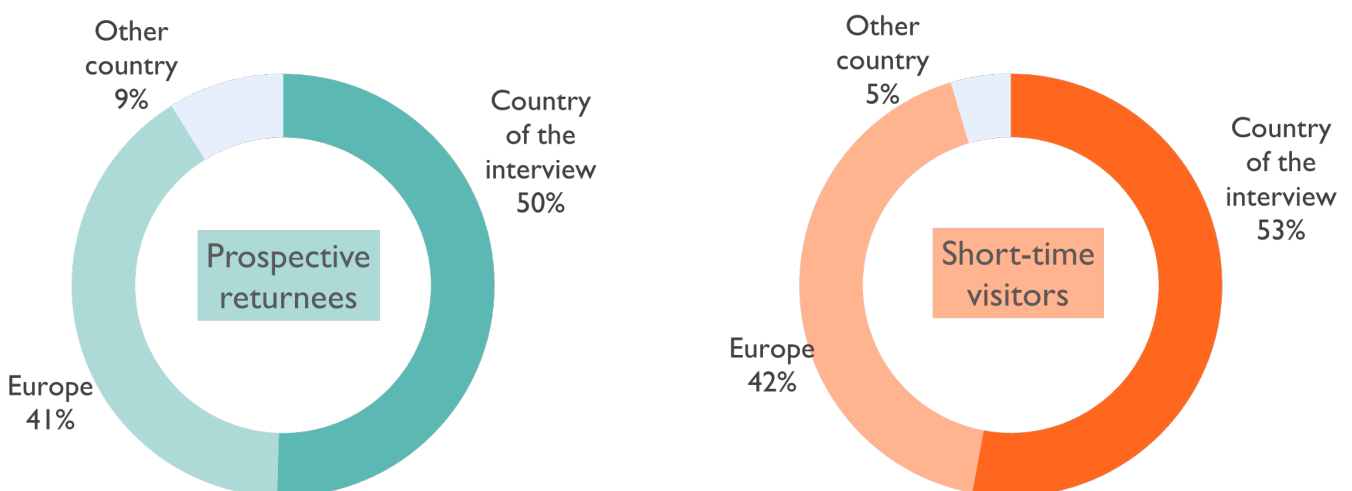
The average time since first displacement abroad among Ukrainian respondents is of 300 days (about 10 months). This is higher for short-time visitors (407 days, or more than one year), and lower for prospective returnees (220 days, or about 7 months).

This difference is also reflected on the frequency of crossings to Ukraine since February 2022 among respondents: most short-time visitor report to have crossed the border already twice or more than twice (54% of them), while prospective returnees not only have spent less time in total outside Ukraine, but they made fewer entries and exits since then (55% only made one or zero crossing since February 2022).

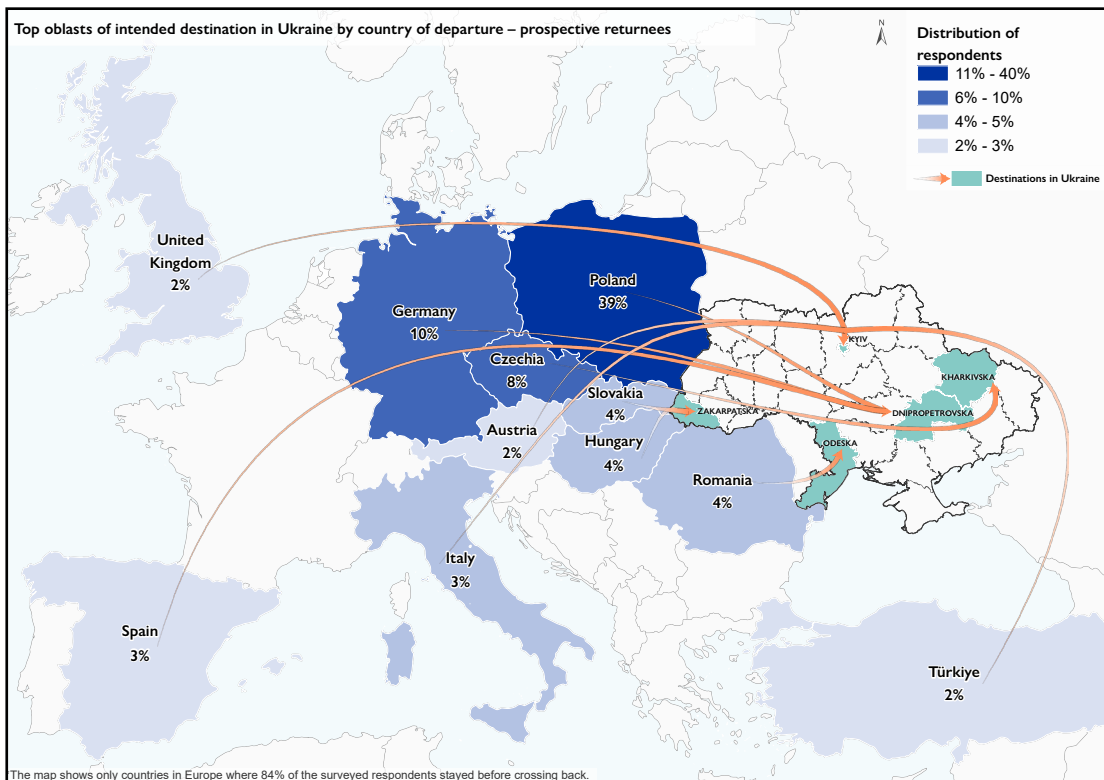
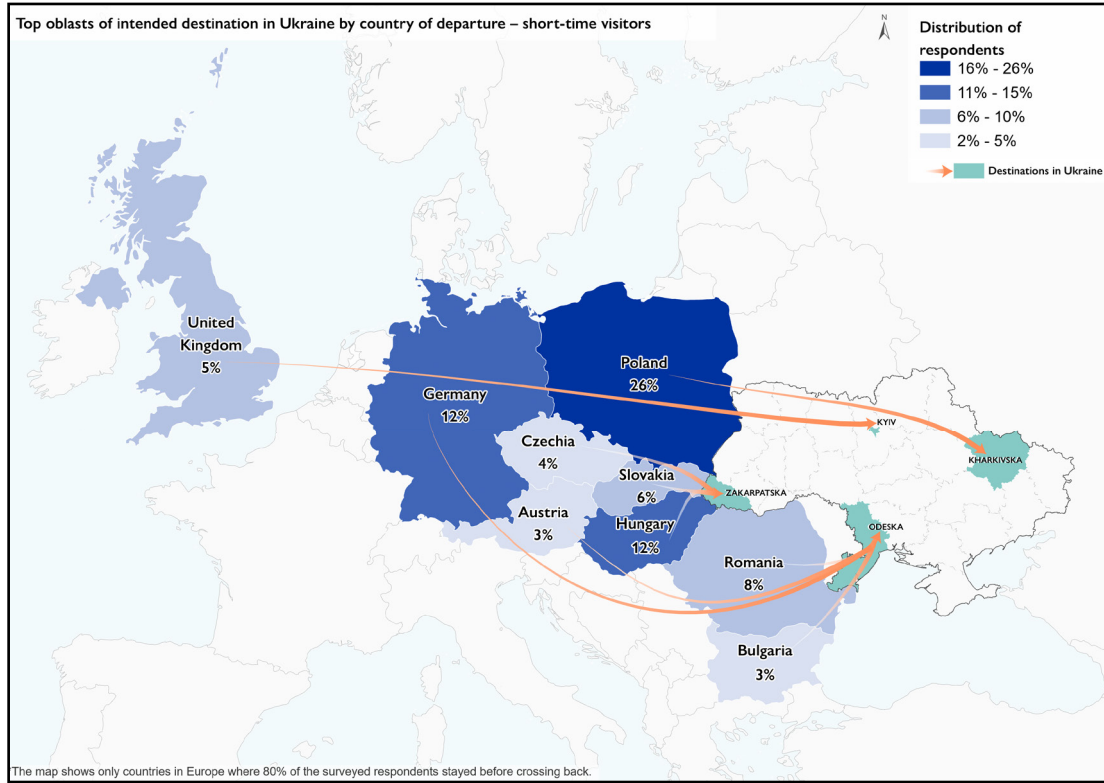
*“I got 7000 HUF monthly (about 200 USD), for more than 12 hours a day of work without contract”*

*Ukrainian woman, 38 years old, crossing back from Záhony, Hungary*

Figure 4: Main country of displacement while outside Ukraine, for prospective returnees and short-time visitors (w, %) N=7,116



Map1 & 2: Oblasts of destination in Ukraine, by country of stay abroad by return intention (w, %)



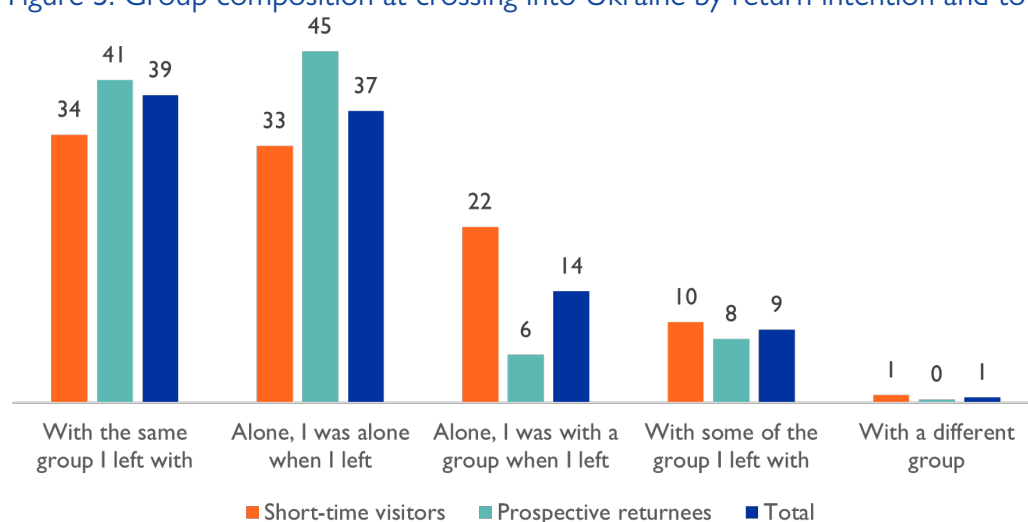
*These maps are for illustration purposes only. The boundaries and names shown, and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by IOM.*

### Group composition when crossing back

About 51 per cent of respondents travel alone, while 49 per cent move in a group. Prospective returnees are more likely to be travelling with the same group they left Ukraine than short-time visitors (45% versus 33%), while short-time visitors cross to Ukraine alone while they left the country with others more frequently than prospective returnees (22% versus 6%).

Less than a third (30%) of all Ukrainian respondents cross back with at least one child (<18 years old), with no noticeable differences between prospective returnees and short-time visitors (27% versus 30%) but with significant differences between women and men: 32 per cent of women are with at least one child when interviewed, compared to 6 per cent of men.

Figure 5: Group composition at crossing into Ukraine by return intention and total (%), N=7,116



## 5. OBLAST (REGION) OF ORIGIN & DESTINATION

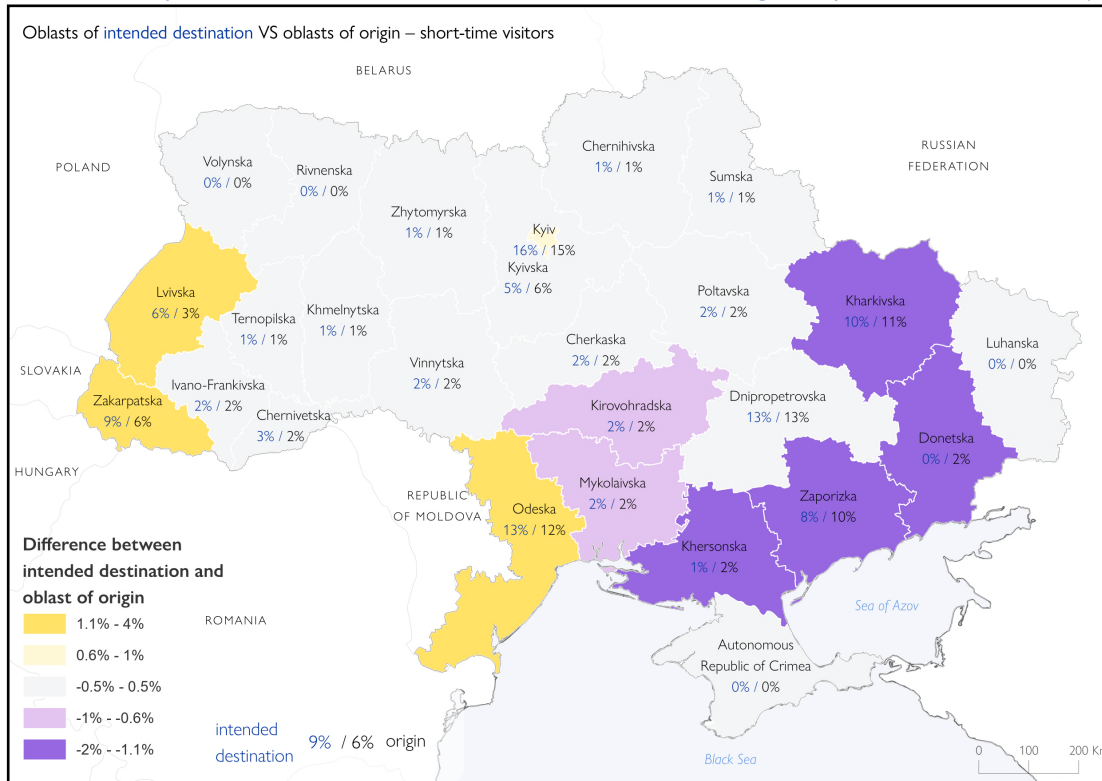
The share of respondents from each region of origin in Ukraine vary widely across the countries of the survey, but overall, 62 per cent of respondents lived in only 5 regions before being displaced outside Ukraine: Dnipropetrovska and the city of Kyiv (15% each), Kharkivska (12%), Odeska (10%), and Zaporizka (10%).

Hence, they more frequently originate from oblasts in the central and western part of Ukraine, which are the less affected by the war. Ukrainians from eastern oblasts, who are a larger share of the refugees from Ukraine in Europe ([IOM Europe, 2023](#); [IOM Ukraine GPS Round 13 Report, 2023](#)), seem to be less willing or able to return to their place of origin, and hence less represented among those surveyed while crossing into Ukraine.

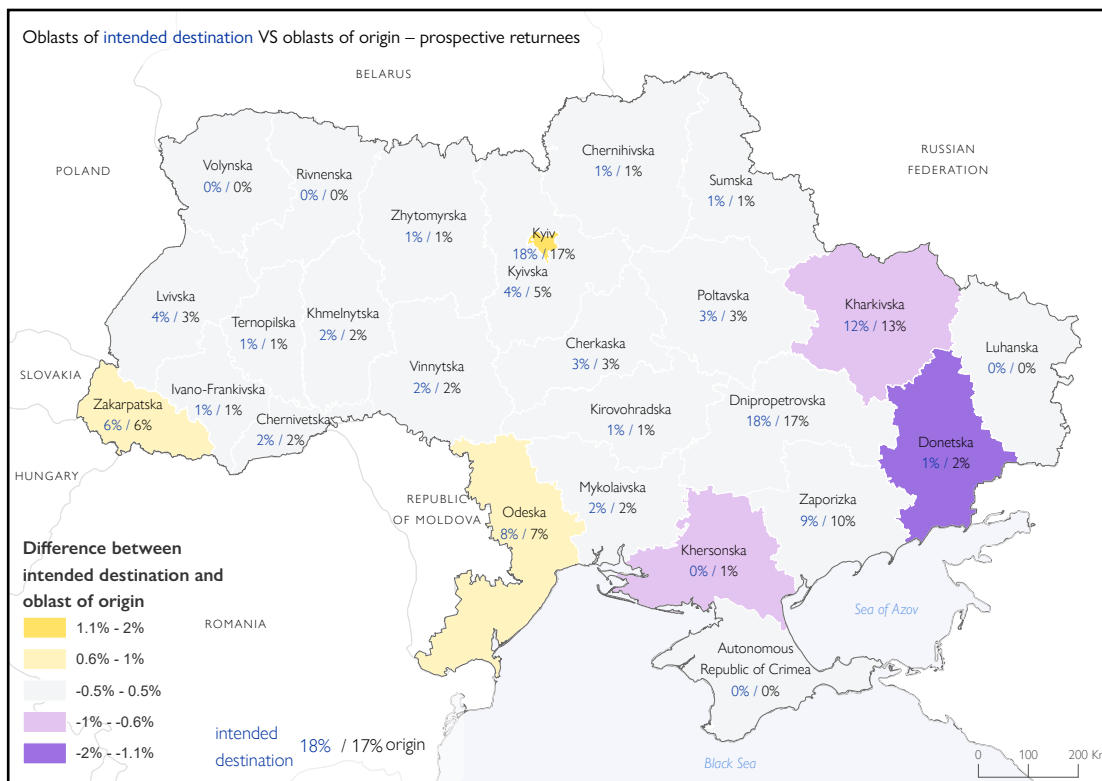
Ninety-one per cent intend to reach their oblast of origin, while the remaining 9 per cent are traveling to a different oblast. The share of those going to a different oblast than that of origin is higher among short-time visitors than among prospective returnees (13% versus 5%).

Among those who do not go to their oblast of origin, Zakarpatska (24%), the city of Kyiv (19%) and Lvivska (15%) are the top 3 destinations: 42 per cent state that their origin oblast is unsafe, 26 per cent go somewhere else due to their family being displaced there. This is followed by 12 per cent whose home is damaged or destroyed, and another three per cent whose oblast of origin is temporarily not under Ukrainian government control.

Map 3 & 4: Comparison between intended destinations and origins, by return intentions (w, %)



Oblasts in purple: more respondents originating from these oblasts, less going back there (negative difference).



Oblasts in yellow: less respondents originating from these oblasts, more going back there (positive difference)

These maps are 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.

## 6. NEEDS AND ASSISTANCE

### Top needs

Overall, the level of needs reported by respondents while crossing back is lower than that reported by those who are interviewed when leaving Ukraine or during their displacement outside of the country.<sup>1</sup>

Financial support is overall the primary need reported (20%). Respondents point also to health support (17%), medicines (12%), food supply (11%) and general information (10%).

Country by country results differ widely in the and the frequency of reported needs among Ukrainian respondents: these variations – besides sampling differences due to field constraints – could be due to factors pertaining to the personal characteristics of the refugee populations in each of the neighbouring countries on one side, and to factors linked to the national context in terms of rights and services granted to refugees from Ukraine under the national temporary protection schemes, to the pre-existing level of public infrastructures (in terms of health services, for example), and to the local labour market structure, on the other side.

- In **Hungary**, the main reported needs are support with transportation (52%), general information (43%), financial support (39%).
- In **Poland**, health services are mentioned by 17% of respondents as priority need, followed by financial support (15%), medicines (13%).
- In the **Republic of Moldova**, main needs are financial support (38%), food supply (17%), employment support (15%).
- In **Romania**, food supply is the top need mentioned by 22 per cent of respondents, followed by general information (19%) and financial support (13%).
- In **Slovakia**, top identified needs are health services (22%), financial support (15%) and support with employment (14%).

<sup>1</sup> Check the IOM's DTM [Regional Dashboard on Needs, Intentions and Integration Challenges survey results](#) (Jan-Jun 2023).

**48%** of respondents

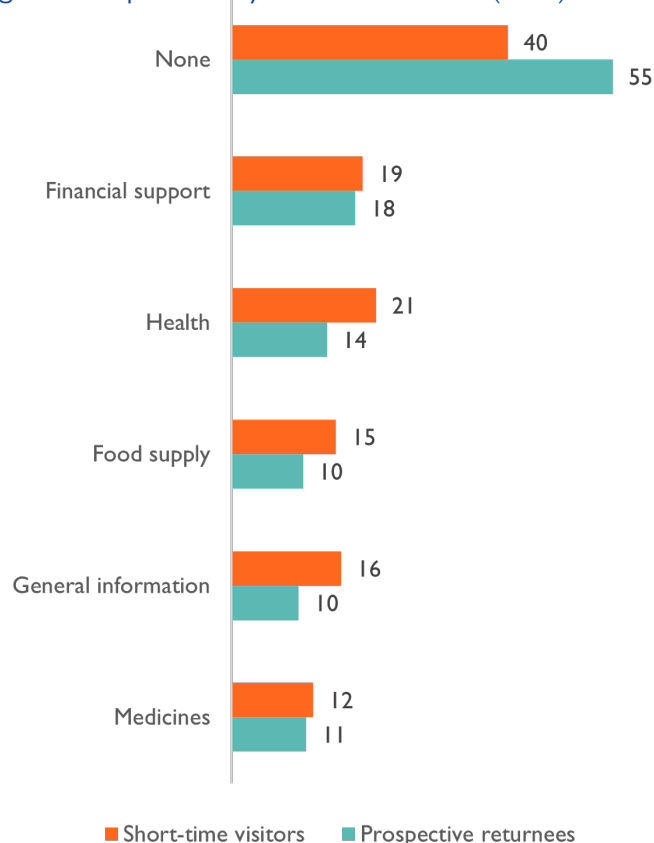
do not have any specific need at crossing back

Moreover, short-time visitors report higher level of needs overall – which can be linked to issues that they aim at solving during the visit in Ukraine (such as the access to health services or the renewal of expired documents). On the other side, more than half (55%) of the prospective returnees report no needs, as they may be already more focused on the conditions of return rather than on what was not achieved successfully in the country of displacement.

*“We thank you for the help and assistance for the support provided to us in a difficult time for us”*

Ukrainian man, 39 years old, lived in Germany, crossing back from Tulcea, Romania

Figure 6: Top needs by return intention, (w, %), N=7,116



## Received assistance

About 59 per cent of the Ukrainian respondents received humanitarian assistance while being abroad. The share is higher than the average among those in Romania (77%) and Hungary (69%), close to the average in the Republic of Moldova and Poland (61% and 55% respectively), and lower than the average in Slovakia (37%).

Prospective returnees, aiming at returning and remaining in Ukraine, seem to have been reached by humanitarian assistance much less than those who cross for a short visit: prospective returnees reported to have received humanitarian assistance in 41 per cent of the cases only, compared to 73 per cent of short-time visitors.

## 7. DISCRIMINATION

Around 8 per cent of the Ukrainians crossing back say they and/or their family members experienced unfair or unequal treatment based on nationality, ethnicity, or gender since they left their usual place of residence in Ukraine.<sup>1</sup> About one per cent does not know or prefers not to answer, while the majority do not report such experience (92%).

Experiences of discrimination are virtually not reported

<sup>1</sup> These involved episodes of harassment and discrimination due to citizenship, ethnic group or language used in public places (i.e., public spaces, in restaurants and shops), or in accessing services provided by national and local authorities (welfare services, education institutions such as schools and universities).

## 8. RETURNEES TO UKRAINE FROM ABROAD



The main profiles and needs expressed by actual returnees from abroad, surveyed within the [Round 13](#) of IOM's General Population Survey (GPS) in Ukraine,<sup>1</sup> match quite substantially with those expressed by Ukrainian respondents crossing from neighbouring countries into Ukraine presented in Section from 2 to 7 of this report and especially with prospective returnees intending to remain in the country.

Among Ukrainian returnees from abroad surveyed while in Ukraine, women represented 89 per cent and men 11 per cent.

<sup>1</sup> In May 2023, as part of GPS Round 13, IOM estimated about 4.8 million returnees in Ukraine: 78 per cent were returnees after internal displacement while the remaining 22 per cent (1.1 million) was returning from abroad.

This is not necessarily due to a short reach of humanitarian actors to those in need of support, as only a minority (4% of respondents) had difficulties receiving support when they asked for it.

Rather, prospective returnees may have higher income overall than short-time visitors, hence not requiring humanitarian assistance as frequently as short-time visitors do. Among issues most frequently reported are delays in receiving financial support or social benefits foreseen in the country of displacement, together with queues and congestion when accessing basic health services.

by respondents in the Republic of Moldova and Romania (less than 1% each), while are reported by 12 per cent of respondents in Slovakia and almost 10 per cent of respondents in Poland and 5 per cent in Hungary.

*"In the bus, older people said that all the problems of Slovakia come from us Ukrainians"*

Ukrainian woman, 47 years old, crossing back from Kosice, Slovakia

On average, they spent around 119 days (appr. 4 months) abroad around 119 days since February 2022, and about 132 have passed since they have returned to Ukraine.

Eighty-four per cent of returnees reported to be currently living in their own original apartment/house, while the rest was living in a rented dwelling (13%) or at family member's home (3%), because someone else was there, because it was not safe or to stay together with other family members.

Similarly, to what reported by Ukrainians surveyed while crossing into Ukraine, most actual returnees stayed in EU countries before going back to Ukraine, and almost half of them (46%) in countries neighbouring Ukraine. The main countries of displacement were Poland (38%) and Germany (10%), followed by lower shares of persons who stayed in Italy, Czech Republic, Romania, Lithuania, Slovakia, Türkiye, Finland, France, the Republic of Moldova (between 9% and 2% each).

Most reported to be willing to remain (79%), while some were considering the possibility to move again from their area of residence (13%), and others were not sure (7%). All those considering moving again were intending to go abroad.

More than half (52%) of returnees from abroad originated from and returned to the capital city of Kyiv and the oblasts of Kyivska, Dnipropetrovska, Odeska and Kharkivska.

Main needs reported by returnees in Ukraine are the same as those mentioned by Ukrainian respondents while crossing back: financial support is the top priority mentioned by more than half of them (59%), followed by medicines and health services (21%), and food supply (18%).

For more granular data on conditions of return for some selected hromadas in Ukraine please see the CORA Factsheet ([IOM Ukraine 2023 July](#)).

## 9. UKRAINIANS TRANSITING THROUGH THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION

Between April and June 2023, 179 surveys were collected in Latvia with Ukrainian nationals moving towards the Russian Federation with the intent to reach Ukraine's locations which are currently in conflict areas or areas not under the government control ([IOM Latvia 2023](#)). Sample of Ukrainians surveyed at two main border areas between Latvia and the Russian Federation is more balanced in terms of gender breakdown than sample of Ukrainians in neighbouring countries: women are 59 per cent of the total, while men are 41 per cent. Most of them travel alone (70%), with the rest mainly going towards the Russian Federation with the same group with whom they left (27%) or with others (3%).

For most of them, Latvia was mainly a transit country rather than their country of displacement when abroad. Their main countries of stay outside Ukraine were Poland (36%), Germany (23%) and the Russian Federation (17%), Lithuania (6%), Czechia (5%).

Differently from Ukrainians surveyed in neighbouring countries, nearly three quarters of Ukrainians heading

towards the Russian Federation are from only four eastern oblasts: Donetska (26%), Luhanska (18%), Khersonska 18 (%) and Zaporizka (16%). Moreover, they intend to stay in Ukraine for the foreseeable future more than to do a short visit (47% versus 38%). For both prospective returnees and short-time visitors, the main motivations for moving are mainly sentimental reasons: prospective returnees want to reunite with family members (51%), and miss their home place (47%), while short-time visitors want to meet family members (71%) and collect some personal belongings (41%).

Contrary to what is observed among Ukrainians crossing into Ukraine from neighbouring countries, Ukrainians in Latvia express a very high need of general information about Ukraine and most recent developments on the ground (89%), while only a minority report other needs such as with food supply (11%), accommodation support (3%) and financial support (3%).

## 10. TCNs CROSSING BACK TO UKRAINE

Alongside Ukrainian nationals, also TCNs are observed while crossing into Ukraine. The share of TCNs interviewed in the second quarter of 2023 is lower than that of the previous quarter (from about 5 to 1 per cent of the total respondents). All 89 TCNs interviewed between April and June 2023 had previously left Ukraine because of the war and almost two thirds of them (65%) had resided in Ukraine more than 5 years prior to displacement.

Many TCNs were surveyed at BCPs with Ukraine in the Republic of Moldova (44%), but others were also met in Hungary (16%), in Poland (14%) and, less so, in Romania and Slovakia (12% each).<sup>1</sup>

The Top 5 nationalities are: Russian Federation (27%), India (7%), Armenia and Georgia (6% each), Azerbaijan (5%). Out of the total – 49 per cent are men while 51 per cent are women.

Most (93%) intend to reach the same place of habitual residence they had before displacement abroad. Almost two thirds of TCNs interviewed are going to the city of Kyiv (37%), and to Odeska oblasts (9%), Kyivska and Zakarpatska oblasts (7% each). Most (56%) intend to do a short visit, while almost one third (31%) plan to return to Ukraine and the remaining 13 per cent is uncertain.

More than half of TCNs travel to Ukraine to take exams, resume their study path or just take one exam in presence, while almost one fourth also is intending to visit family members left behind.

<sup>1</sup> This is due, among other things, to the language skills of DTM enumerators deployed in different countries. While most enumerators speak Ukrainian and Russian beside the local language, others use English, Arabic, and other languages that would be needed to interview TCNs.

## 11. METHODOLOGY

Since March 2022, IOM Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM) regularly collects individual surveys in countries neighbouring to Ukraine with persons who cross back, with the aim to improve the understanding of their profiles, displacement patterns, intentions and needs. The survey is deployed in 5 countries neighbouring Ukraine – Hungary, Poland, the Republic of Moldova, Romania, and Slovakia.

Face-to-face surveys are conducted by a network of more than 70 trained enumerators deployed at selected exit points and transit locations close to the border points with Ukraine. The survey is anonymous and voluntary, administered only after obtaining consent from the respondent. Respondents can stop the survey at any time. The questionnaire is available in Ukrainian, Russian, Romanian and English, and the preferred language is determined by the interviewee. Only fully completed surveys are taken in account for this analysis.

Since March 2023, the survey is also deployed in Latvia to collect information from refugees from Ukraine who were met at border areas and moving through the Russian Federation to reach occupied eastern areas of Ukraine.

Please check the online [dashboard](#) for summary results of collected surveys in 2023.

### Country-level implementation and limitation

The sampling framework could not be based on verified figures of refugees from Ukraine and TCNs exiting towards Ukraine through all land border points surveyed, which are not available and comparable for all neighbouring countries. The geographic spread of enumerators deployed captures a wide range of locations and modes of travel. Nevertheless, the operational reality of fieldwork was confronted with different levels of accessibility of border crossing points and other transit locations and the different availability of potential respondents to spend 10-20 minutes responding to the survey. For example, it is easier to interview persons travelling by bus and other types of group transportation than those in private vehicles who tend to be faster in transiting through BCPs and travel onwards. Whilst results cannot be deemed representative, the internal consistency within the data within each country and at the regional level suggests that the findings of the current sampling framework have practical value.



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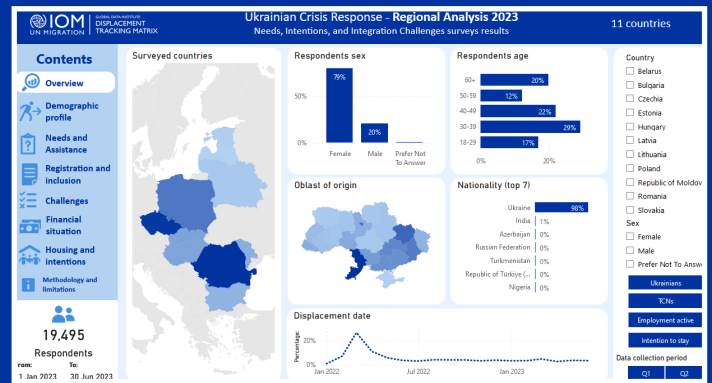
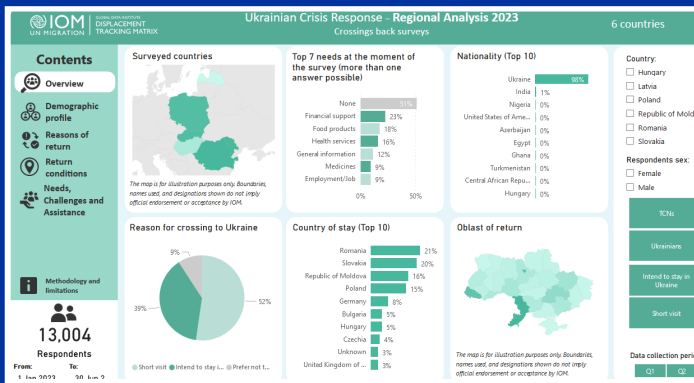
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Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM) is a system to track and monitor displacement and population mobility. The survey form was designed to capture the main displacement patterns – origin country and region – for refugees of any nationality fleeing from 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 final destination and prospects of permanence in the country of the survey/first reception; it gathers information regarding a set of main needs that the respondents expressed as more pressing at the moment of the interview.

DTM is part of IOM's Global Data Institute.

