


UKRAINIANS AND THIRD-COUNTRY NATIONALS CROSSING BACK TO UKRAINE – 2022 OVERVIEW

I. INTRODUCTION

Extended Regional Report
Available Here

 Over **24 thousand** surveys conducted in 2022

 **5 Countries**
Hungary, Poland, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Slovakia



Starting on 24 February 2022, the Russian full-scale invasion in Ukraine triggered an unprecedented humanitarian crisis and generated large scale displacement, both within Ukraine and to the neighbouring countries. As of 23 January 2023, 5.4 M persons were internally displaced in Ukraine ([IOM](#)). Moreover, by mid-January 2023 nearly 8 M refugees from Ukraine were recorded across Europe ([UNHCR](#)). According to available administrative data, more than 17 M border crossings of refugees and Third-Country Nationals (TCNs) were reported from Ukraine into the neighbouring countries since February 2022.¹

At the same time, around 5.2 M persons were estimated to be returnees including both from other locations within Ukraine and self-reported from abroad as of 5 December 2022 ([IOM](#)). Nearly 9 M cross-border movements were registered from Poland, Romania, Slovakia, and the Republic of Moldova among the neighbouring countries into Ukraine as of the end of January 2023.

To survey the reasons for crossing back to Ukraine, and the intentions and immediate needs of the populations returning or only visiting for short periods, IOM deployed its Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM) since April 2022 and interviewed Ukrainians and TCNs in neighbouring countries prior to exiting towards Ukraine.

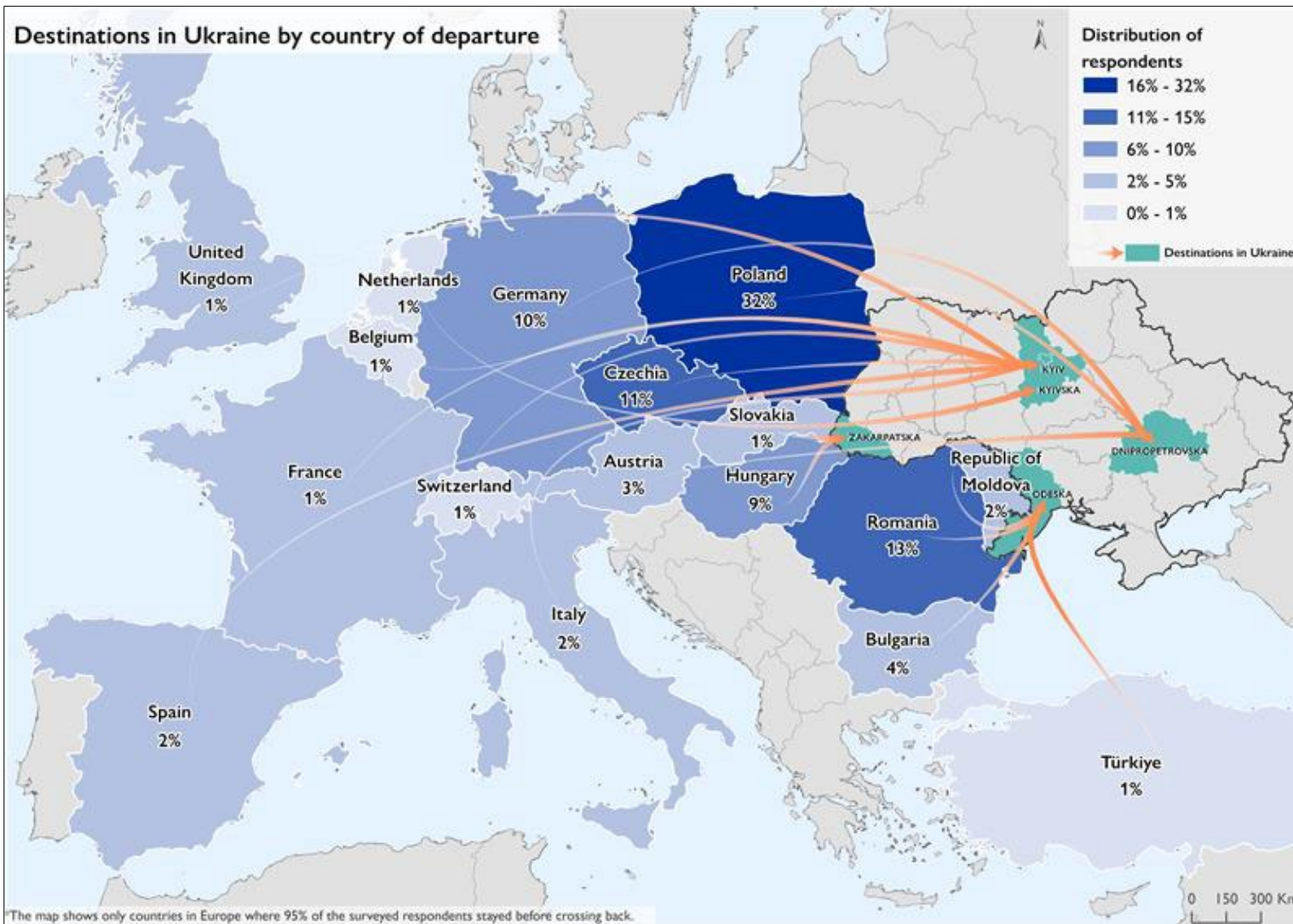
This report is based on **24,393 valid surveys** collected by IOM's DTM in five countries with adult refugees from Ukraine and TCNs, that were crossing back into the country between 16 April and 31 December 2022: 8,743 in Romania, 7,131 in the Republic of Moldova, 6,807 in Poland, 1,037 in Hungary, 675 in Slovakia.

Total results are weighted as per the number of border crossings from each country of the survey, during the afore-mentioned period. Movements back to Ukraine can be pendular, and do not necessarily indicate intentions to stay as the situation across the country remains volatile and unpredictable.

For a complementary discussion on returnees within Ukraine, after internal or international displacement, please check the latest DTM [Ukraine Return Report](#) (January 2023) and the [Factsheet Conditions of Return Assessment](#) (February 2023).

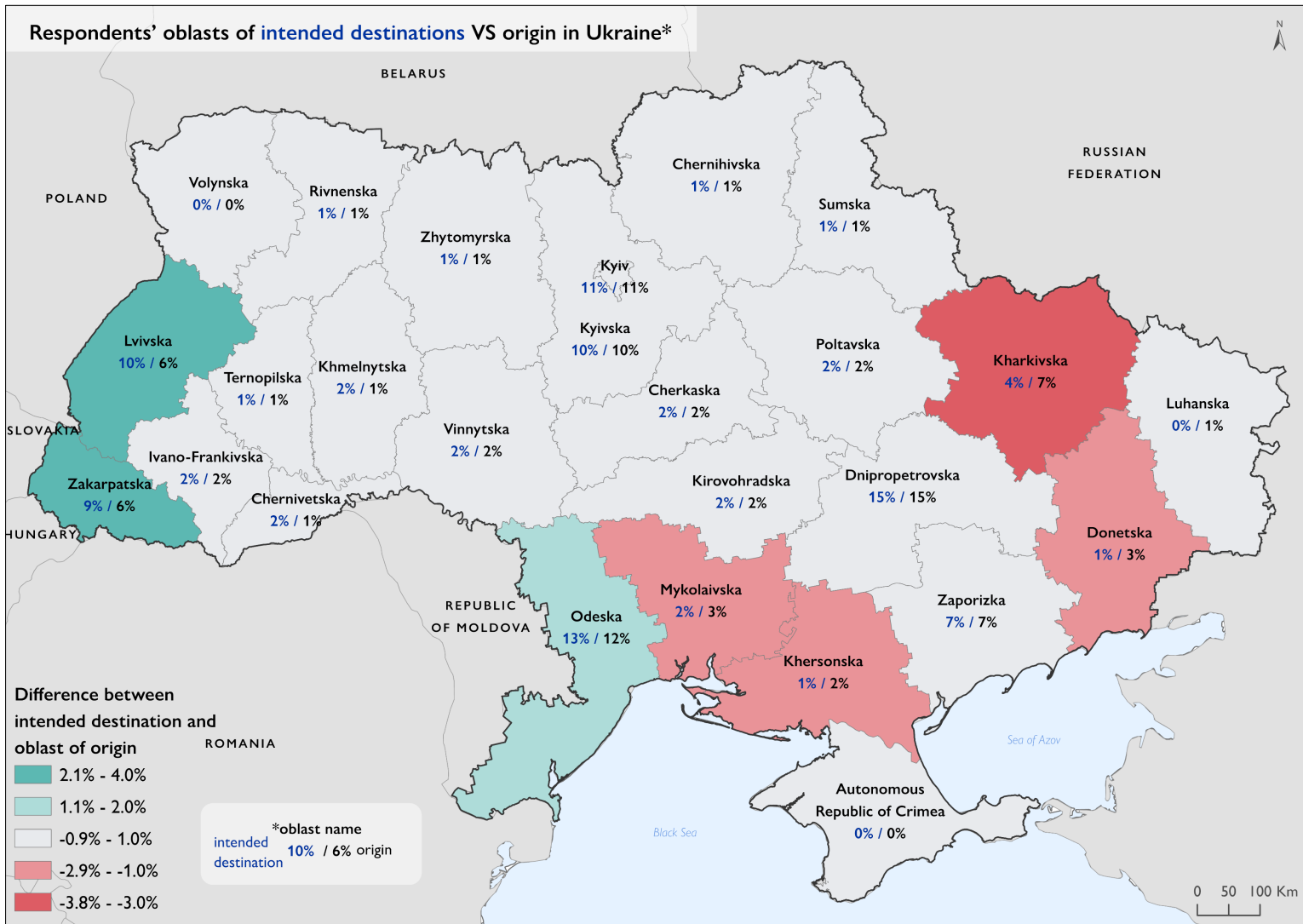
¹ No data on border crossings from Hungary to Ukraine is available for 2022, see [UNHCR](#).

Map 1: Oblasts of destination in Ukraine, by country of stay abroad, total (%).



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.

Map 2: Comparison of oblasts of intended destination and oblast of origin in Ukraine. total (%)



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II. TIME OUTSIDE UKRAINE

Half of the Ukrainians and the TCNs surveyed (50%) spent most of their time outside Ukraine in one of the 5 neighbouring countries prior to cross back.

- 54% that crossed from Hungary stayed in Hungary,
- 67% that crossed from the Rep. of Moldova stayed in Moldova,
- 56% that crossed from Poland stayed in Poland,
- 51% that crossed from Romania stayed in Romania,
- The exception is Slovakia, where 82% of respondents who were crossing to Ukraine, previously stayed in Romania.

4 months stay abroad in 2022

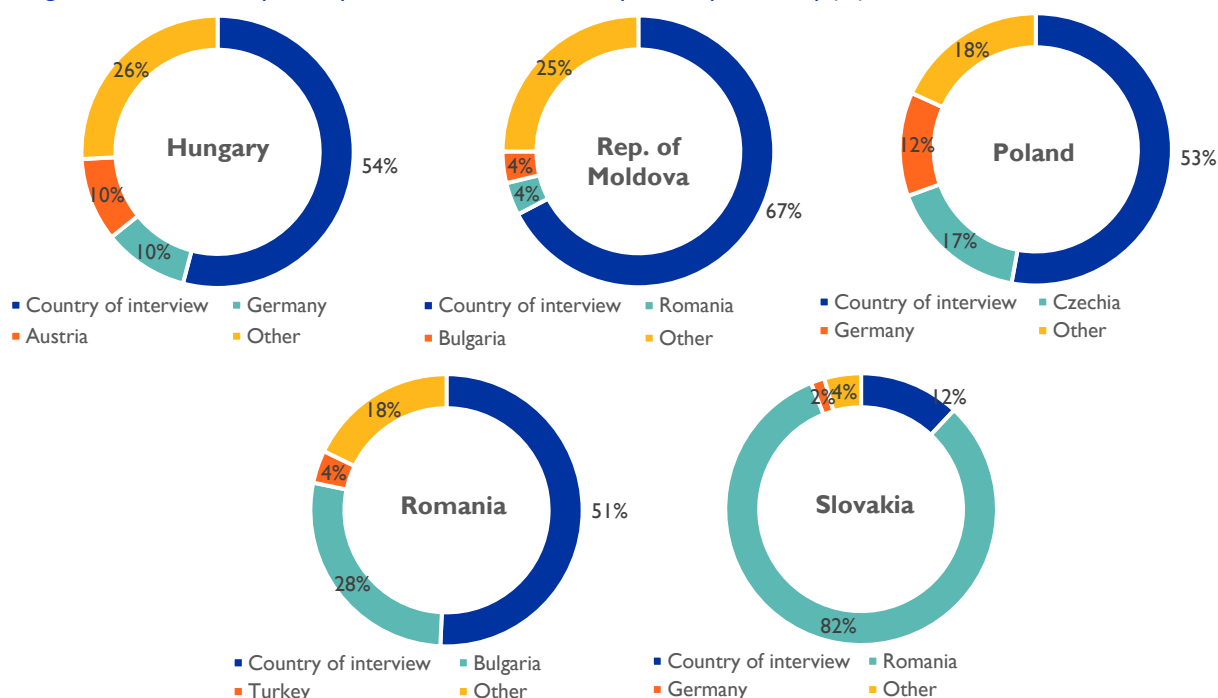
Average time spent out of Ukraine before crossing back

Similarly, 28 per cent of these who crossed from Romania previously stayed in Bulgaria, and were surveyed on the way back to Ukraine, transiting and crossing back through Romania.

Other non-neighbouring countries where respondents stayed the most were: Czechia (11% of the surveyed sample), Germany (10%), Romania (6% among those interviewed not in Romania), Bulgaria (4%), Austria (3%), Spain (2%) and Italy (2%).

Forty-four per cent had only crossed the Ukrainian borders at least once since the beginning of the war. The border was crossed at least twice by 15% or more than twice (14%) since Feb 2022. Interestingly, about 27% of those surveyed were abroad at the start of full-scale war and were returning for a first time since. The remaining respondents did not answer (1%).

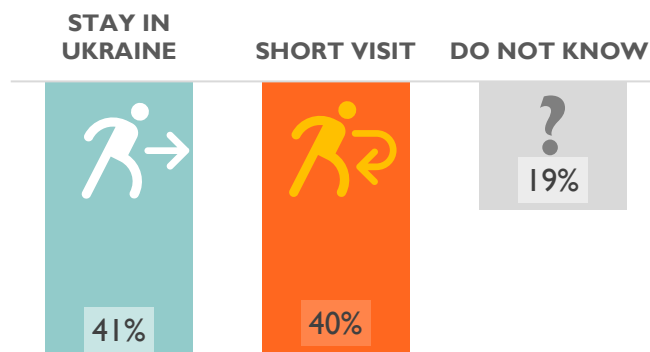
Figure 1: Main country of stay while outside Ukraine, by country of survey (%)



III. INTENTIONS AND REASONS TO CROSS BACK

Overall, 41% of the respondents intended to stay in Ukraine, while 40% to only pay a short visit in the country. Another 19 per cent were not sure. The share of those intending to go to Ukraine for a short visit tended to increase towards the end of 2022, after prolonged months of displacement abroad and with lower expectation.

Figure 2: Intention to stay or do a short visit, total (%)



STAY IN UKRAINE

Among those saying they were returning to Ukraine for the foreseeable future, more than half of the respondents (59%) intended to stay in Ukraine to reunite with family and friends.

Twenty-three per cent felt that the situation was improving at home, and 8 per cent were returning because they were working in essential services. Interestingly, some of the main reasons for going back to Ukraine were linked to the conditions found abroad in the country of displacement: lack of enough financial resources (11%), lack of employment (8%), lack of shelter (4%) and of education services (4%) abroad were mentioned.

SHORT VISIT

Amongst those going to Ukraine for a short visit only, the top reasons given were to meet family members (65%), to collect personal belongings (35%), to help family/friends in Ukraine (11%), to help family/friends to get to the border (11%) and to bring supplies in Ukraine (11%).

Also, 11 per cent reported the need to obtain the issuance or the renewal of identity documents (biometric passport and others) and at least 5 per cent mentioned the intention to undergo medical examinations (paediatricians, dentists and gynaecologists, in particular) as a reason for the short visit.

Figure 3: Top 10 reasons - respondents intending to stay in Ukraine, total (% , more than one answer possible)

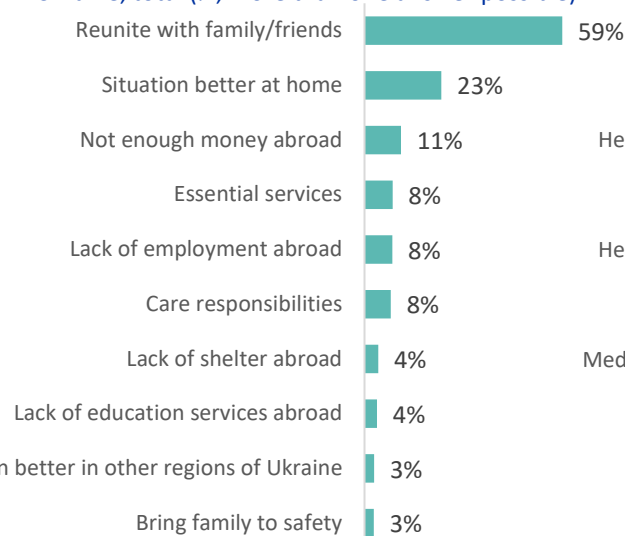


Figure 4: Top 10 reasons - respondents intending to do a short visit, total (% , more than one answer possible)



* Answers re-categorized from open comments by respondents.

IV. OBLASTS OF ORIGIN AND OF DESTINATION

Eighty per cent of respondents lived in only ten oblasts before leaving Ukraine. The top mentioned oblasts of origin on average were Dnipropetrovska (15%), Odeska (12%), the city of Kyiv (11%), the Kyivska region (10%), Zaporizka (7%), and Kharkivska (7%). Looking at TCNs in the sample only, the main oblasts were the capital city of Kyiv and Dnipropetrovska.

Overall, the respondents crossing back to Ukraine were more frequently originating from oblasts in the central and western part of Ukraine, which are the least affected by the war. Ukrainians from eastern oblasts, who are a larger number amongst the refugees from Ukraine in Europe (DTM [Needs and Intentions surveys](#) in the region, DTM Ukraine [Internal displacement report](#)), seem to be less willing or able to cross back to their place of origin, and hence less surveyed in this exercise.

Dnipropetrovska was the second most populated oblast in Ukraine with a bit more than 3 M inhabitants² as of the beginning of 2022. It is located close to the regions with active fighting. Therefore, Ukrainians originating from that oblast and who fled at the beginning of the war, may be induced to go back together with those originally from the affected war thorn regions who would like to stay in a safer place, but as close as possible to their places of residence.

Another factor would be the relatively stable economy of Dnipropetrovska oblast that is ranked fifth in terms of average salary levels (UAH 14,479, or \$ 392).³

Eighty-four per cent of respondents intended to return to their region of origin, while another 16 per cent stated their intention to go to another region. Overall, top oblasts of destinations are similar as those of origin.

Among those who intended to reach a different oblast, most mentioned as destinations were the most western regions in Ukraine or the capital city and the surrounding region: 24 per cent stated their intention to reach Lvivska oblast, 18 per cent – Zakarpatska oblast, 11 per cent – Odeska oblast, 10 per cent - Kyiv city, and 10 per cent to reach Kyivska oblast.

Figure 5: Intention to reach the oblast of origin or not, total (%)

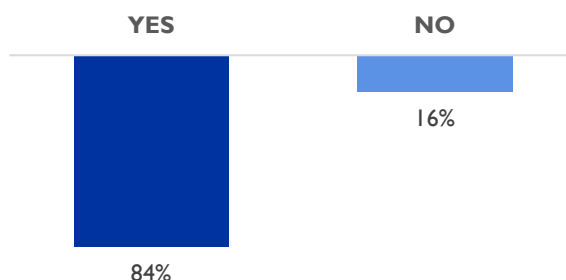


Figure 6: Top 5 oblasts of destination as pointed at by the whole surveyed sample, total (%)



² State Statistics Service of Ukraine, [Number of present Population of Ukraine](#), 2022

³ Ministry of Finance of Ukraine, [Average Salary in Ukraine in 2022](#)

The reason **Odeska** region is the second destination of the surveyed populations might be fact that it is the nearest to the countries where they stayed before crossing back: Romania, Bulgaria, Republic of Moldova, and Türkiye. Another factor would be the closer cultural ties⁴ of the region with these countries, where a big number of Ukrainians sought refuge in the beginning of the conflict.

Kyiv city is the country capital and could offer better employment opportunities in comparison to other regions of Ukraine – it is ranked number 1 by average salary levels (UAH 21,347, or USD 578, for 2022), and it is considered safe and protected, although a total 32 security incidents related to the ongoing war were registered only in November and December 2022 (these were 78 in the February and March 2022).⁵

The surrounding **Kyivska oblast** is ranked eighth in terms of population (1,8 M),⁶ and third by average monthly remuneration levels⁷ (UAH 15,152, or USD 410). Additionally, the levels of hostilities and Russian attacks on the region decreased significantly from 55 (in the last week) of February 2022, and 430 in March 2022, to a total of 10 in November and December 2022.⁸ Kiyvska oblast was seriously impacted by the first waves of the Russian military invasion in late February and March 2022.

The western **Lvivska oblast** (5th by population – 2,5 M)⁹ borders Poland and it is chosen as destination by these who cross back to Ukraine but cannot return to their regions of origin. Also, a possible exit from Ukraine, and return to the European Union countries remains an easy and fast option in case of need. Lvivska oblast can be considered the safest amongst the top 5 of declared destinations – the highest monthly number of security incidents was registered in May 2022 (8), and gradually decreases afterwards to only one in December 2022 (a total of 44 for the entire year 2022).¹⁰

Among those not intending to reach their region of origin, more than half (53%) stated that their origin region was unsafe. Another 16 per cent were going somewhere else due to their family being displaced there. This was followed by 13 per cent who stated that their home was damaged or destroyed, and another six per cent whose region of origin was not under Ukrainian control. Another two per cent needed to obtain new documents at the intended destination, while one per cent were intending to reach relatives or friends. Finally, some cited health issues (0.5%), and discrimination in the location of origin (0.2%) made them travel to a different oblast. The remaining respondents had other reasons (3%), did not know (3%), or did not to answer (2%).

⁴ According to the Ukraine Census of 2001, 6 per cent of the citizens are of Bulgarian origins, and 5 per cent declare to be Moldovans; [All Ukrainian Population Census of 2001](#)

⁵ Source: Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project ([ACLED](#)).

⁶ State Statistics Service of Ukraine, *ibid*

⁷ Ministry of Finance of Ukraine, *ibid*

⁸ ACLED, *ibid*

⁹ State Statistics Service of Ukraine, *ibid*

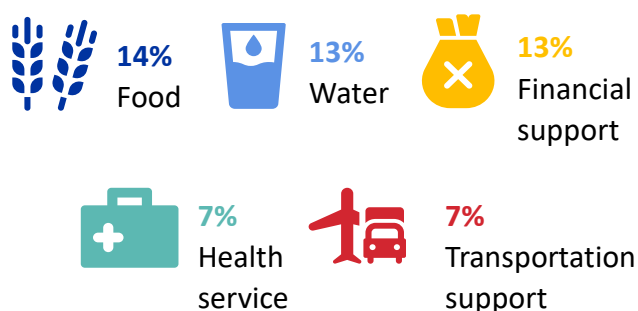
¹⁰ ACLED, *ibid*

V. IMMEDIATE NEEDS AT CROSSING

Overall, people crossing back to Ukraine reported a lower level of immediate needs than refugees and TCNs leaving from Ukraine. This may be due to the respondents' perception that they were leaving a country and that assistance was not available after entry to Ukraine.

The top immediate needs declared by the respondents while crossing the border with Ukraine were (on average): food (14%), water (13%), financial support (13%), health (7%), and transportation support (7%).

Figure 7: Top 5 needs, total (% more than one answer possible)¹¹

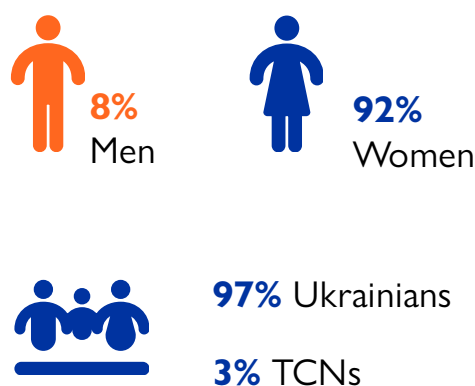


Nevertheless, the top needs are not the same in each of the neighbouring countries, reflecting different individual profiles and different conditions of reception and humanitarian assistance abroad. In Hungary, the top reported needs were financial support (27%), health services (19%), legal services (16%), support with accommodation (16%), and transport support (14%). In Poland, the most frequently reported need was financial support (10%), followed by support with accommodation (4%), transportation support (4%), return support (3%), and psychological counselling (3%). In the Republic of Moldova, the top reported needs were financial support (14%), health services (8%), food (4%), non-food items (3%), and employment support (3%). In Romania, the top reported needs were food (74%), water (73%), non-food items (18%), and health services (6%). In Slovakia, the main needs were transportation support (28% of respondents), water (26%), food (24%), and financial support (20%).

VI. PROFILES AND REPORTED CHALLENGES

Women were about 92% of the whole sample of 24,393 respondents, while men represented about 8%. The average age of respondents was 42 years old. Men were about 10 years older than women on average (50 vs 40 years of age).

Out of the overall sample, 97 per cent of respondents were Ukraine nationals, while only three per cent were TCNs. Top 5 nationalities include India (27%), Nigeria (24%), Russian Federation (5%), Republic of Moldova (3%), and Morocco (3%). About 5% of all respondents stated they and/or their family experienced unfair/ unequal treatment based on nationality, ethnicity, or gender since they left Ukraine.



¹¹ Respondents were asked to say what were the main needs out of a list of options/items. The reported values represent the share of positive replies ("yes") to each item. The sum can therefore be lower or higher than 100 per cent.

VII. METHODOLOGY

This report is based on a survey of displacement patterns, needs and intentions conducted by IOM's Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM) in 5 countries neighbouring Ukraine between 16 April and 31 December 2022 through a network of more than 80 enumerators. The total results are weighted as per the number of border crossings into Ukraine from each country of the survey, during the surveys period.

Face-to-face surveys were conducted by trained enumerators with adult refugees from Ukraine and TCNs (18 years of age and above) while crossing back into Ukraine. Respondents were approached in a simple random sample by enumerators at selected exit points and transit locations close to the border points with Ukraine. In border crossing point areas, persons moving by car, by bus and by foot were interviewed.

Prior to the start of the survey, all enumerators were trained by IOM on the DTM methodological framework, the Kobo application, IOM approach to migrants' protection, ethics of data collection and provision of information. The survey was anonymous and voluntary. Surveys were administered only if consent from the respondent was given. The respondent could stop the survey at any time. Only fully completed surveys were taken in account for this report.

The questionnaire was available in Ukrainian, Russian Romanian, and English, and the preferred language was determined by the interviewee. All responses were checked for any systematic issues by enumerator and this process did not identify any problems.



IOM's DTM enumerators conducting surveys in Hungary, 2022 ©IOM Hungary.