

Ukrainians are slowly adapting to life in Germany

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According to the Central Register of Foreign Nationals (AZR), 1,081,457 war refugees from Ukraine were registered as resident in Germany (as of 1 August 2023). By mid-July, around 243,000 of the Ukrainians who came to Germany after 24 February 2022 had left the country. This is the data received from the Federal Ministry of the Interior in response to a query by the Mediendienst Integration website (a project of the Migration Council, a national association of migration researchers). The share of Ukrainians in German society rose from 0.2% before the Russian invasion to 1.2% by the end of last year; they were the second largest foreign national group in the country after Turkish nationals (1.33 million, or 1.6% of the population).

The study *Ukrainian Refugees in Germany. Part II* published in August reveals that only 18% of Ukrainian refugees of working age (aged 18–64) have found employment. 39% of economically active Ukrainian refugees work full-time, 37% part-time, 18% take odd jobs, and 5% are learning a trade. 93% of those who do not have a job in the working age group have declared their willingness to take up employment, including 81% immediately or within a year, and 19% within 2–5 years.

The survey also shows that almost 79% of all refugees from Ukraine are living in rented apartments (compared to the answers given by respondents in autumn 2022, this percentage has risen by 5 p.p.), 13% use 'other forms of accommodation' such as hotels, and only 8% live in refugee shelters. The largest number of Ukrainians live in North Rhine-Westphalia (224,000), Bavaria (152,000), Baden-Württemberg (136,000), Lower Saxony (111,000) and Hesse (81,000). The report is a continuation of the 2022 study which had the same title (see '[Ukrainian refugees will stay in Germany for longer](#)'). Both surveys were carried out jointly by several institutions dealing with migration and the German labour market, including the Federal Office for Migrants and Refugees (BAMF), the Institute for Employment Research (IAB) and the German Institute for Economic Research (DIW). The second part of the survey was conducted between January and March this year on a sample of 6700 respondents.

The EU directive on the mass influx of displaced persons from Ukraine of 4 March 2022 (which Germany implemented as Section 24 of the Act on the Residence, Economic Activity and Integration of Foreigners on the Federal Territory) guarantees that refugees can enter the country without a visa, and do not have to go through a long bureaucratic asylum-seeking procedure. They are also granted residency status valid for one year, which can be automatically extended twice for six months. Refugees from Ukraine have the right to work, access to education, medical care, social benefits (depending on their family situation,

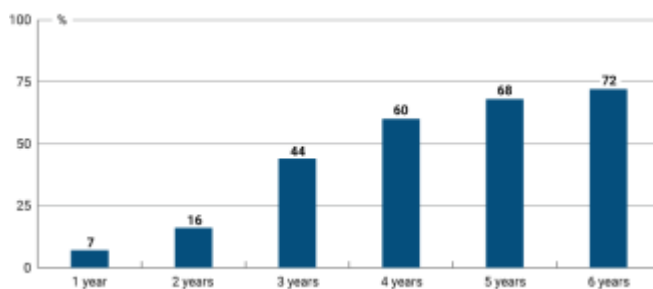
among other factors; the basic civic allowance is €501 per person, and the lowest child benefit is €250) and financial support for accommodation. In total, from 24 February 2022 until the end of this year, Germany will have spent around €13.4 billion on public aid for Ukrainian refugees, around €6 billion of which will be allocated to social support, and another €6 billion to support local governments whose prerogatives include care for refugees.

The vast majority (76%) of Ukrainian refugees felt welcome upon arrival in Germany, and only 7% had the opposite impression (study *Refugees in Germany. Part I*). The country does not carry out comprehensive surveys on the attitude of Germans towards refugees from Ukraine. The survey focuses on attitudes towards the government's asylum policy and the public's readiness to accept more refugees, which is most often identified with asylum seekers from other directions than Ukraine.

Commentary

- Although the number of Ukrainian refugees in Germany has fallen by 20% over the past few months, there are no detailed data on why they have left Germany. The main reason is usually the normalisation of the situation in some regions of Ukraine and the desire to return home. They also leave Germany due to the very difficult conditions on the German housing market and the shortage of places in childcare and educational institutions, which seriously impedes the economic activation of mothers of small children (see Figure 1). Women account for about 80% of Ukrainian refugees of working age, and almost half of them live with children of pre-school or primary school age. Currently, only 3% of women with children up to three years of age have found employment in Germany. This combines with the excessive bureaucratic procedures concerning, for example, setting up one's own business, the complicated tax system and the recognition of Ukrainian diplomas, as well as the German approach that prioritises social adaptation over taking up a job (emphasis is placed above all on participation in integration and language courses, and only then on looking for employment). All this has disappointed some refugees, and those who were able to return to their homeland for a short time are more likely to think about going back on a permanent or semi-permanent basis. Unlike last year's study, no correlation was observed between a willingness to remain in Germany and the respondent's region of origin. In the previous survey, people from the east and south of Ukraine more often declared their readiness to stay in Germany for longer than those from regions that had not been affected so severely by the Russian invasion.

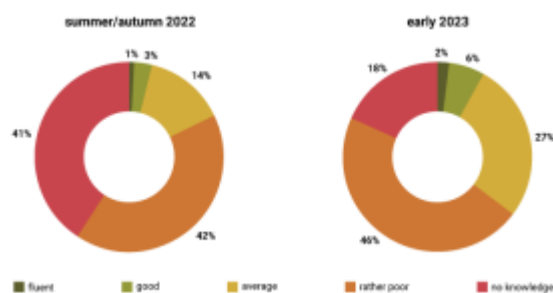
Chart 1. Percentage of Ukrainian refugee children receiving care from childcare and education institutions (by age)



Source: author's own estimates based on the survey *Ukrainian Refugees in Germany, 2022/2023*.

- Despite these difficulties, 44% of Ukrainians (+5 p.p. compared to last autumn survey) intend to stay in Germany after the war (29% permanently, and 15% for a few years). 30% of those who want to leave after the end of hostilities want to maintain close contact with Germany, including 'temporary residence in Germany', 38% want to return to their homeland permanently, 29% have no specific plans yet, and 3% intend to emigrate to other countries. A desire for a longer or a permanent stay in Germany is mainly expressed by people who hope to continue their education there, are better speakers of German (see Chart 2) and who are renting apartments.

Chart 2. Self-assessment of German language skills by Ukrainian refugees living in Germany



Source: author's own estimates based on the survey *Ukrainian Refugees in Germany, 2022/2023*.

- Since the German government is convinced that a large part of the Ukrainians will remain in the country after the end of the war, some *Länder* (such as Saxony and Saxony-Anhalt) have chosen not to offer preparatory groups dedicated only to children from Ukraine from the start of the new school year. Instead they will learn in regular classes, which is supposed to speed up integration and language learning. In total, there are about 347,000 Ukrainian refugees under the age of 18 in Germany, 38% of whom are 6–11 years old (primary-school age). About 213,000 children and youth from Ukraine (97% schoolchildren) are attending general education and vocational schools (see '[Obowiązek szkolny ukraińskich dzieci w Niemczech](#)'). 27% of pupils take additional online classes at schools in Ukraine. At the same time, since 2022 German schools have employed around 3000 Ukrainians, mostly not as teachers but as language mediators or educational

guides; these people are paid less than local teachers.

- Germany is hoping for a rapid increase in employment among Ukrainian refugees in the near future. Currently, about 70% of the economically inactive Ukrainian refugees are attending language or integration courses (62%) or vocational schools (8%). When they join the labour market, this will allow local employers to partially fill the country's labour shortage, which according to estimates from IAB will rise to 7 million people by 2035. In Ukraine, a relatively large number of women used to work as academic, technical or medical staff, and it is these market segments which are suffering serious staff shortages in Germany. Currently, 49% of economically active Ukrainians are employed below their qualifications (this is more often true of women); this is mainly due to the lengthy process for recognising professional qualifications and their insufficient command of German.
- There are more and more voices in Germany demanding that the current status of Ukrainian refugees be extended after 2024. Non-governmental organisations supporting migrants (for example, Pro Asyl), some researchers and the German Association of Towns and Municipalities, amongst other institutions, insist that the legal situation of refugees be permanently regulated and that rules for financing their stay be established. The latter issue in particular is a source of increasing tension between the federal government and the local governments, which are responsible for guaranteeing appropriate conditions to asylum seekers (see ['Dispute over funding refugees' residence in Germany'](#)). One example of this is the significant increase in the number of applications for protection. Since the beginning of the year, 175,000 asylum applications from areas other than Ukraine have been submitted in Germany (78% more than a year ago). Most of the asylum seekers came from Syria (51,000), Afghanistan (31,000) and Turkey (23,000). The main problem is the shortage of places in refugee shelters. Migration and asylum policy are the most important topics in public debate in Germany, and a large proportion of citizens believe that the state is not coping well enough with these challenges. This will be used as an argument for imposing more restrictions on the status of Ukrainians in Germany after 2024.
- Most Germans still want to help the refugees. They are more willing to support Ukrainians than immigrants from Africa or the Middle East. According to a survey conducted by the Expert Council on Integration and Migration (*Sachverständigenrat für Integration und Migration*) in July this year, there is a link between the readiness to help and the gender of the refugees (Germans are more willing to support women and children), their religion (Germans prefers Christians), education (higher education encourages them to help) and the prospects of refugees' returning to their homeland (the higher the likelihood, the greater their readiness to offer support). The survey shows that 75% of respondents are willing to help Ukrainians financially or materially, 67% would offer them support in contacting the German authorities, and 65% would like to guarantee them permanent protection status in Germany.
- There is a debate in Germany on distinguishing between two kinds of refugee status: a preferential one for Ukrainians and a worse one (as manifested in the protracted and bureaucratic asylum granting process) for all others. Die Linke, some representatives of the Greens, as well as non-governmental organisations supporting migrants, are

demanding equal rights for all refugees, whereas the pro-Russian AfD, in particular, wants to limit aid for Ukrainians. A similar stance has been adopted by members of the FDP in Thuringia; local elections will be held there in 2024, and the AfD is currently leading in the polls. It should be expected that as the economic slowdown in Germany progresses and funds for the state budget shrink, similar opinions will be voiced more frequently in the public debate, especially before the elections in the eastern federal states in autumn 2024.