



RETURN, REINTEGRATION AND RECOVERY

IOM's Position on returns
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Summary

- The time to plan and prepare for return and reintegration support is now, as relevant policy and programming discussions are ongoing, in Ukraine, in the European Union (EU), and in hosting countries.
- The commitments and decisions made at policy and programme level regarding return and reintegration must be coherent, evidence-based and in support of both potential returnees and the Ukrainian government and ongoing emergency response priorities and actions.
- The International Organization for Migration (IOM) is uniquely placed to convene and contribute to these policies and programmes due to our presence, extensive expertise in both humanitarian response and protection, and return and reintegration; as well as our ability to collect relevant data.
- Return and reintegration to Ukraine cannot be “business as usual”, not only due to the unknown numbers and profiles of those who might wish to return but be unable to do so without support, but also the ongoing conflict and future recovery and reconstruction context – individual assisted voluntary return and reintegration models must be adapted.
- IOM's position on returns to Ukraine includes:
 - Safe and dignified return support for potentially high numbers of returnees – both Ukrainian refugees and third country nationals (TCNs) with legal status at the start of the conflict – when this becomes possible, linked to advocacy for continued temporary protection during a transition period when they may need to move back and forth to Ukraine.
 - An integrated approach to reintegration across the economic, social and psychosocial dimensions, with adaptation of individualized reintegration to collective reintegration at the community level. This would take place through an area-based approach linked to specific communities with conditions for return where reintegration will be collectively provided together with local authorities and in line with local priorities and ongoing recovery and reconstruction efforts.
 - Protection of vulnerable returnees – such as unaccompanied or separated children (UASC), persons with special health needs, victims and survivors of trafficking and gender-based violence – who will be detected through screening which will then trigger targeted case management services and referrals to respond to their protection and assistance needs, in close coordination with relevant partners, throughout the return and reintegration process.

OVERVIEW

The war that followed the full-scale invasion of Ukraine by the Russian Federation on 24 February 2022 has triggered severe crisis across the country, characterized by, among other elements, the displacement of a considerable proportion of the Ukrainian population. As of July 2023, more than 6.2 million refugees¹ from Ukraine have been recorded globally, while over 5.1 million² people have been internally displaced in Ukraine.

The unpredictable situation across many areas of Ukraine drives complex mobility dynamics, and impacts return scenarios. However, as early as April 2022, IOM began observing significant returns of displaced people back to their habitual place of residence. Even as the war continues, with the previously occupied or frontline areas becoming more accessible, people have already started returning and rebuilding.

As of 25 May 2023, an estimated 4.8 million individuals returned to their place of habitual residence, of whom 1.1 million spontaneously returned from abroad, despite high levels of uncertainty and critical challenges such as inability to earn money, businesses not being resumed, destruction of residential houses, concerns regarding unexploded ordnance and mines in their area, and difficulties in accessing services in the country. Among those returning spontaneously from abroad, 87 per cent returned from EU countries, the majority of whom (95%) are Ukrainian nationals, and the remaining five per cent citizens of other countries residing previously

in Ukraine. While feasibility of sustainable reintegration and long-term intentions are subject to change and affected by conflict dynamics, 88 per cent of returnees expressed their intention to remain in their current location (est. 4.2 million individuals), with only a very small percentage (5%) of returnees considering re-displacement.³ Households that return from displacement continue to have displacement-related vulnerabilities and needs, with financial assistance (58%), reconstruction materials (27%), and medications and health-care services (23%), expressed by returnees as the most critical needs.⁴

Data⁵ on return as a durable solution shows that an estimated 4.2 million returnees (88%) are on a durable solutions pathway in Ukraine, actively reintegrating and intending to stay. However, security concerns, limited participation in public affairs, and difficulties in covering basic expenses were found to be significant obstacles to sustainable reintegration and achievement of a durable solution among returnees, potentially triggering further displacement.

Even amongst TCNs, while specific individual decisions cannot be ascertained, the survey shows that while 277,000 TCNs from non-OECD countries left Ukraine, over 160,000 TCNs from non-OECD countries have crossed into Ukraine since the start of the full-scale invasion. Ukraine thus remains a destination country for some migrants even as others have fled the war.

¹ [Situation Ukraine Refugee Situation \(unhcr.org\)](https://www.unhcr.org/situation-ukraine-refugee-situation).

² [Ukraine — Returns Report — General Population Survey Round 13 \(June 2023\) | Displacement Tracking Matrix \(iom.int\)](https://www.iom.int/publications/ukraine-returns-report-general-population-survey-round-13-june-2023).

³ [IOM, DTM Ukraine – Returns Report – General Population Survey Round 13 \(June 2023\)](https://www.iom.int/publications/ukraine-returns-report-general-population-survey-round-13-june-2023).

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ Returnees' situation is assessed along the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) Durable Solutions criteria. See *Ibid.*

1. IOM'S POSITION ON RETURNS TO UKRAINE

Fulfilment of the right to return is one of IOM's core principles, in support of refugee and migrant agency and informed decision-making. However, a pre-condition for IOM involvement in facilitating such return is the presence of suitable conditions for return so that it can be undertaken in a safe and dignified manner.

These conditions are not yet in place in Ukraine. As such, IOM is not currently engaged in providing return assistance to Ukraine and is instead focusing its efforts on contributing to suitable conditions for return and engaging with stakeholders to plan and prepare for eventual return efforts. On an exception basis IOM may provide movements assistance to individual who request assistance in travelling to and from Ukrainian territory for protection-related purposes. These requests are carefully assessed and reviewed on a case-by-case basis.

IOM'S POSITION ON RETURNS TO UKRAINE

2.1 Conditions of return and the most pressing needs assessment

In a constantly changing environment, real-time situational knowledge of the location, needs and intentions of people affected by the war continue to

be critical to response planning and delivery of services. Since mid-April 2022, IOM DTM⁶ has conducted more than 24,000 surveys with individuals crossing back to Ukraine from neighboring countries, to improve the understanding of main profiles, displacement patterns, intentions, needs and reasons to cross back into Ukraine. IOM systematically and regularly estimates the number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) who remain in displacement with the intention to seek return as a durable solution, at 2.95 million as of June 2023.⁷ IOM closely monitors conditions for return in different areas of Ukraine to support decision-making not only by IOM, but also individuals, government, and other humanitarian actors and partners.⁸ This includes through the Conditions of Return Assessment (CORA),⁹ but also IOM's General Population Survey, its conflict analysis, and various thematic surveys, among others. IOM will continue surveying those crossing back to Ukraine to understand their situation in hosting countries, intended regions of return, priority needs, and plans for the future, in order to better understand their needs and vulnerabilities regardless of their status and to assist them in Ukraine.¹⁰

As part of its Durable Solutions programming in Ukraine, IOM is regularly monitoring conditions of return and the needs among households who have spontaneously returned to their areas of habitual residence. The aim is to support the Government of Ukraine to sustain, restore or expand services to

⁶ [Home | Displacement Tracking Matrix](#).

⁷ [IOM, DTM Ukraine – Internal Displacement Report – General Population Survey Round 13 \(11 May - 14 June\)](#).

⁸ IOM has been providing regular updates to the EU and its Member States on the return situation in Ukraine, including sharing of key data on return intentions through the Directorate-General for Migration and Home Affairs (DG-HOME)-led Blueprint Mechanism.

⁹ IOM's CORA aims to i) provide a systematic evidence base on where returns have occurred, and are yet to occur, across the

country; and ii) provide analysis of how the rate of return in a location may relate to the conditions that are present or absent, to support an empirical understanding of return and reintegration dynamics in Ukraine. This data will also be aggregated to highlight geographic areas where the severity of certain conditions, such as security and access to primary and secondary health services, psychosocial support, and social services, makes return unlikely and hence inform partners' community selection and other targeting processes.

¹⁰ [IOM, Ukraine Crisis 2022-2023: 1 Year of Response](#).

assist displacement-affected people to access a spectrum of services and assistance to support solutions, whether through local integration, relocation, or return, and to ensure capacity is in place for people to return once it becomes possible.¹⁴ IOM's DTM surveys can facilitate evidence-based decision-making on strategic, technical, and programmatic aspects of the response and recovery efforts in Ukraine.

Host States developing return strategies can benefit from the research and monitoring of initial returns processes in Ukraine (as well as complementary research on labour markets, return intentions, assessments related to skills needs and skills mismatches, determining high-potential growth sectors, among others). This would contribute to plans that are aligned to the reality of returns, to better develop vulnerability criteria based on real-world examples occurring currently in country and use tools such as IOM's CORA to provide an improved awareness of the risks and realities of specific potential return locations. Improved registration for temporary protection and disaggregated data on home locations at the community (*hromada*) level will support states to assess the specifics of the population being hosted and likely timelines and assistance needs for return. IOM's DTM may also be a positive tool for supporting states to conduct surveys to determine this information and further details on the intentions of their hosted population.

2.2 Advocacy

IOM advocates and will continue to advocate for continuation of the temporary protection under

the EU Temporary Protection Directive (TPD), or similar alternative frameworks within other countries, to be renewed and/or extended to ensure protection of Ukrainian nationals and eligible TCNs while return is not safe and during a transition period. IOM welcomes the decision of the EU to prolong temporary protection under the EU TPD until March 2024 and its readiness for further prolongation, as necessary.¹²

2.3 Information provision

While returns are highly dependent on the evolution of the conflict and decision making by the Government of Ukraine, host governments and their mandated agencies, as well as refugees from Ukraine themselves, Ukrainian nationals and TCNs continue to require support through the provision of reliable, up-to-date information on the situation, legal issues, rights, and services for return. IOM will continue to work on **information provision** to allow migrants to make informed decision. Information regarding the general situation in Ukraine and community of origin will be regularly gathered and shared with returning migrants, so that informed, and rights-based decisions can be taken as to whether return to the country – or an area of the country – can take place without undue risk. **In-depth counselling and information or referral** to allow informed decision-making will consider psychosocial aspects and include information on legal pathways and temporary protection schemes, including on (dis)continuation of temporary protection in case of going home to Ukraine on a voluntary basis,¹³ information on return options and

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² European Commission, [Temporary protection for those fleeing Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine: One year on](#).

¹³ Article 21(1) of the Council of the European Union Directive 2001/55/EC provides that "Member States shall take the measures

conditions at the place of origin; as well as referral to available services.

2.4 Support to the Government of Ukraine in recovery and reconstruction and creating enabling environment for safe and dignified return and sustainable reintegration

IOM is **working closely with the Government of Ukraine, other United Nations agencies and partners** to improve conditions in areas experiencing high numbers of **spontaneous returns** and will continue to closely collaborate and undertake activities in Ukraine to support communities of return and increase social and economic absorption capacity, aligning its interventions with government priorities set forth in strategic documents and decisions to be made by the Government of Ukraine Sectorial **Working Group on Return led by Government of Ukraine, and co-chaired by IOM and UNHCR**.

IOM supports humanitarian, reconstruction, and recovery programmes,¹⁴ which contributes to overall safe and dignified conditions for returns and is committed to supporting returnees and their communities in a manner that ensures their safety, respects their human rights, and contributes to the long-term stability and development of the country. As part of creating enabling environments for safe and dignified return, IOM will increase its support to the Government of Ukraine on **recovery and reconstruction**, including reconstruction at border points, support to health and social service

provision and referrals, disease surveillance and monitoring. IOM will assist the Government of Ukraine with health system strengthening as well as enabling access to healthcare services for returnees. IOM will use an **area-based approach** to programming to support local authorities to assist returnees to access solutions pathways and to receive direct assistance. IOM is well placed to support the Ukrainian authorities to establish or reinforce multi-stakeholder coordination and support mechanisms/structures at central and local levels as well as to provide support to implementation required for recovery interventions through an area-based approach. IOM's support will be delivered in partnership with local **communities**, in line with accountability to affected populations (AAP) standards, utilizing development-focused community-based planning and delivering assistance while prioritizing **community-prioritized projects**. **Durable solutions programming** linked to **specific geographical locations** will align with local priorities and needs and prevent the provision of differentiated assistance to returnees, which has the potential to generate tensions. The area-based approach aims to support communities in Ukraine and help inform actions to support Ukrainians and TCNs prior to their return, through linking vocational training or skills development to actual needs on the ground (see below for specialized support to highly vulnerable cases). It will also allow for coordinated assistance to larger numbers of returnees

necessary to make possible the voluntary return of persons either enjoying temporary protection or whose temporary protection has ended." Persons enjoying temporary protection might need to go back to Ukraine for reasons other than voluntary return before Temporary Protection has ended (family visits, collecting papers or even to rescue their family members). Therefore, in the view of the European Commission services, any short return to Ukraine should not be considered by Member States as a decision to

return voluntarily, taken in full knowledge, justifying to revoke residence permits and to cease to ensure the rights attached to temporary protection. See: DG-HOME, [Frequently asked questions on going home to Ukraine on a voluntary basis in the context of the Temporary Protection Directive](#).

¹⁴ IOM has recovery and reconstruction programmes that go beyond humanitarian support. That support may include housing (including construction, recovery), business grants, etc.

in need (from within Ukraine and abroad) and their communities quickly.

Given that **over 4.8 million people have already returned**, including **1.1 million from abroad**, IOM's durable solutions pilots and community-level programming models, aligned with national and sub-national local actors, will provide **early evidence on returns targeting and support**. Initial support of returns, where it is requested, may take place internally at earlier stages and provide more in-depth data on necessary conditions for return, reintegration, and recovery as part of the larger durable solutions objectives.

IOM will use a needs-based approach in providing support to returnees, irrespective of their status. The focus of IOM's interventions at the individual level will be on addressing the specific needs and vulnerabilities of individuals and their families, with the community level initiatives that respond to the needs, vulnerabilities, and concerns of communities to which people return.

2.5 Individually tailored support for the most vulnerable returnees

While an area-based approach in Ukraine will help create an enabling environment that will support the reintegration of most returnees and the community at large, a sizeable caseload of highly vulnerable returnees with specific needs that require continuity of care and specialized support is expected. IOM will focus programming also on **the most vulnerable returnees** to ensure **individually tailored support** is provided. The return of survivors of trafficking, gender-based violence survivors, UASC,

and individuals requiring medical assistance for travel as well as referral for health care and rehabilitation after return, will be carried out in line with the relevant internal policies and entail specific measures, including specialized reintegration assistance programs, **in close coordination and cooperation with the Government and specialized civil society actors in Ukraine**, but also the host governments and specialized civil society actors in specific cases (e.g. UASC).

2. IOM'S OPERATIONAL CAPACITY

IOM has strong, **multisectoral operational capacity** with extensive field presence throughout Ukraine and all relevant impacted countries. This capacity is supported by multi-thematic expertise, with a capacity to quickly respond and scale-up operations. Thanks to its long-standing mandate and multisectoral expertise, IOM is in a strong position to successfully implement return and reintegration programmes in a rights-based manner and link them with wider transition, recovery, and development work in Ukraine. IOM will actively engage and work closely with the Government of Ukraine, host governments, relevant regional and international actors, specialised civil society organisations, to strengthen cooperation and partnerships to ensure coordinated response.

