

UKRAINE REFUGEE SITUATION

POPULATION MOVEMENTS | FACTSHEET #1

February 2024

The Russian Federation’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 uprooted millions of people who fled into neighboring countries and beyond as refugees, in addition to millions more who were displaced within the country. While the peak of the displacement occurred during the first four months of the full-scale invasion, population movements from and to Ukraine have continued ever since and become more complex. On the one hand, the ongoing full-scale war and hostilities across the country continue to force people to flee in search of safety. On the other, many refugees engage in pendular movements and short-term visits between Ukraine and host countries, and others have voluntarily returned to Ukraine on a more permanent basis.

This factsheet presents a general overview of recent trends around **border movements** (section 1), **pendular movements and short-term visits** (section 2), **voluntary returns of refugees** (section 3) and **new displacements** (section 4). The analysis brings together available evidence from different sources to build a comprehensive picture of the situation for informed decision-making, highlighting remaining data gaps.



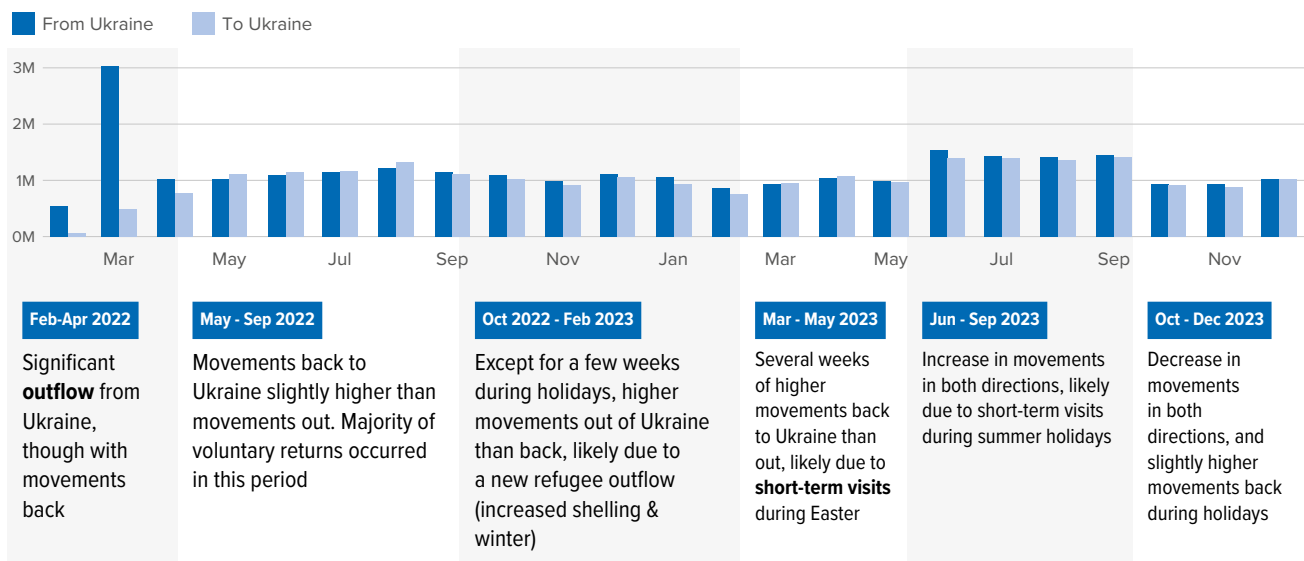
How have cross-border movements from and to Ukraine evolved over time?

After the massive flight of refugees in the first months of the full-scale war, border crossings from and to the western borders of Ukraine have tended to stabilize over time, with **more than 1 million monthly movements from and to Ukraine (each) during 2023**, according to data shared by national authorities in host countries neighboring Ukraine.¹

While in general the number of crossings from Ukraine has exceeded the number of crossings back into the country for most weeks and months, this has fluctuated in certain periods, particularly during winter or summer holidays.

EVOLUTION OF BORDER MOVEMENTS FROM AND TO UKRAINE

Number of monthly crossings along the borders with Hungary, Poland, Moldova, Romania and Slovakia



Source: Border authorities in Hungary, Poland, Moldova, Romania and Slovakia. Data does not include crossings of nationals of the bordering countries.

¹ Border movements along the western borders of Ukraine with Poland, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania and the Republic of Moldova. Border crossings reflects number of movements not individuals, as those engaged in pendular movements or short-term visits would be counted more than once. See UNHCR’s [Operational Data Portal](#) for more up-to-date information.



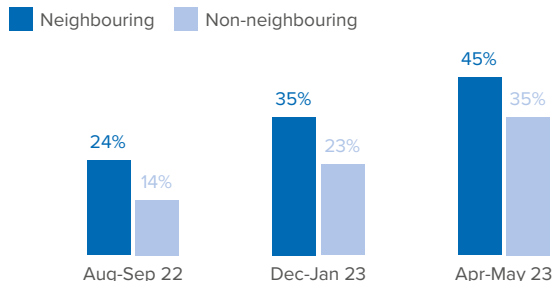
How many refugees are engaging in pendular movements and short-term visits?

Data from UNHCR's intentions survey indicates an increasing trend in short-term visits over time, with up to **39% of refugees (around 1.8 million refugees) reporting that they had visited Ukraine at least once** since their displacement². Similarly, border monitoring interviews show that the incidence of repeated movements has also grown over time, as **only 38% of individuals interviewed in the last quarter of 2023 were leaving the country for the first time**, compared to **64%** of those interviewed in last quarter of 2022.³

The Ukraine refugee crisis is characterized by high levels of family separation⁴. As expected in this context, the most frequent reasons reported by refugees for travelling back to Ukraine are to visit relatives or friends, followed by access to healthcare and to obtain documentation. Short-term visits are more frequent among refugees hosted in neighboring countries. Moreover, visits have been more frequent among refugees originating from the West, the Centre or the North of Ukraine, particularly among those with an undamaged home in Ukraine. Surveys have further highlighted that **40%** of refugees were unable to visit Ukraine even if they wanted to, due to security concerns or lack of funds, followed by caregiving responsibilities, a lack of documentation and the fear of losing their legal status in host countries.

TRENDS IN REFUGEES' SHORT-TERM VISITS TO UKRAINE

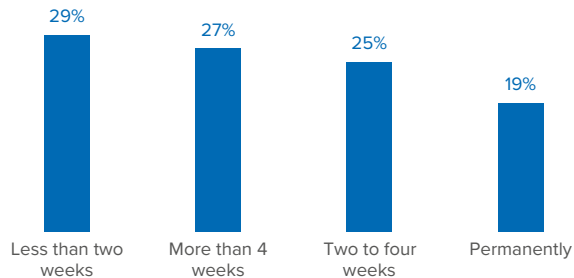
% of respondents who had visited Ukraine at least once, by date of data collection and location of host country



Source: UNHCR's Intention Surveys

CROSSING BACK TO UKRAINE: INTENDED DURATION OF STAY

Distribution of interviews with persons crossing back during 2023



Source: UNHCR's Ukraine Border Monitoring

As noted in [UNHCR's Position on Voluntary Returns to Ukraine](#), the ability of refugees to travel home for short periods can help pave the way for more durable returns in the future once conditions permit. UNHCR has urged host States to maintain a flexible approach to short-term visits to Ukraine, which can help facilitate fully informed decisions on longer term return and recommends that an individual's legal status and associated rights in a host country are not affected by a visit to Ukraine lasting less than three months. UNHCR additionally recommends that in the event of longer-term travel to Ukraine, hosting countries temporarily de-activate temporary protection (TP) and other legal status rather than withdrawing legal status or de-registering individuals, in order to avoid administrative burdens and facilitate renewed access to protection if required.

2 See [UNHCR Lives on Hold #4: Intentions and Perspectives of Refugees and IDPs from Ukraine](#). Estimated figure is based on total number of refugees from Ukraine recorded in Europe (excl. those in the Russian Federation, which are not covered in the survey).

3 See [UNHCR Ukraine International Border Crossing Points Monitoring Dashboard](#).

4 Almost 80% of respondents in [UNHCR's protection monitoring](#) reported being separated from at least one immediate family member.



How many refugees have returned to Ukraine?

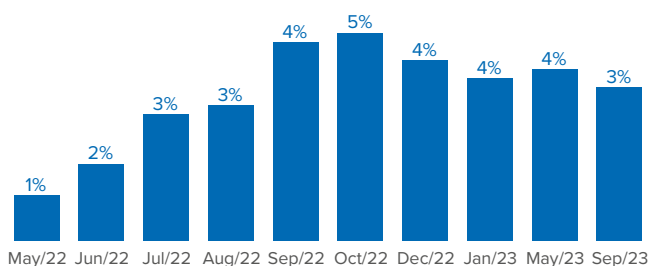
Based on data from IOM's General Population Surveys (GPS) inside Ukraine, it is estimated that by September 2023 over **900,000 refugees from Ukraine had returned to their places of origin and remained in Ukraine for at least three months**. Additionally, some **298,000 refugees are estimated to have returned to an area different from their former homes**.⁵

The survey also shows that the majority of returns occurred in 2022, particularly from **May to September**, following the retaking of control of territories in northern oblasts. While the share of refugee returnees out of the total estimated population in Ukraine registered a peak of **4.6%** in the surveys conducted in October 2022, it started to show a decreasing trend afterwards, reaching **3.4%** in September 2023. While methodology and coverage of the survey has changed over time which can affect the comparison, this decrease can be explained by returnees who experienced secondary international displacements afterwards, as well as refugees who were returning only for short-term visits.

Close to **three quarters** of returns took place toward Western, Northern and Eastern oblasts, and around half occurred from countries neighboring Ukraine, particularly from Poland (**close to 40%**), followed by Germany, Italy and the Czech Republic.

REFUGEES RETURNEES ESTIMATION BY ROUND OF DATA COLLECTION

Proportion of refugee returnees out of total estimated resident population in Ukraine at each round of data collection



Source: UNHCR calculations based on IOM-Ukraine General Population Survey, R4-R14



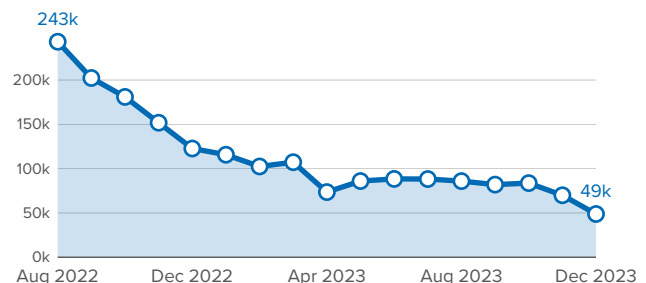
How many refugees arrived in host countries in 2023?

According to data published by EUROSTAT, between January and December 2023, over **1,032,000 individuals were granted Temporary Protection (TP) in EU+ countries**. While lower than in 2022, decisions granting temporary protection still average more than 87,000 per month, though with a decreasing trend during the year.⁶ Needs assessments recently conducted in ten refugee hosting countries show that around **14%** of refugees arrived in 2023 to their current host countries.⁷

Similarly to 2022, more than half of individuals granted TP in 2023 have been registered in Germany (**25%**), Poland (**23%**) and Czech Republic (**10%**). A slight change can be observed in the demographics compared to the beginning of the full-scale war, with an increase in the proportion of males of all ages among those granted temporary protection: from **34%** in 2022 to **43%** in 2023.

It is worth mentioning that not all temporary protection decisions correspond to newly displaced refugees, as the figure can include re-applications or re-activations of previously granted cases, following a temporary visit to Ukraine. In fact, the total number of active beneficiaries of temporary protection increased by **525,000 persons** between end-of 2022 and end-of 2023, which is around half of the total decisions granting TP during the year.⁸

MONTHLY DECISIONS GRANTING TEMPORARY PROTECTION IN EU+



Source: EUROSTAT

5 Calculations based on data included in [IOM's Returns Report – General Population Survey Round 14](#). These estimates do not include refugees who had returned for less than three months (around 18%), in line with [UNHCR's Position on Voluntary Return to Ukraine](#) recommending that a person's legal status and rights in host countries are not affected by a visit of less than three months.

6 See [EUROSTAT Temporary Protection Database: Decisions granting temporary protection – monthly data](#).

7 Based on data from inter-agency Multi-Sectoral Needs Assessments conducted in 10 host countries.

8 See [EUROSTAT Temporary Protection Database: Beneficiaries of temporary protection at the end of the month](#).



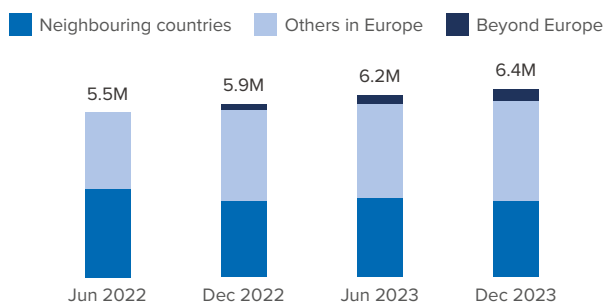
How many refugees from Ukraine are currently in Europe and globally?

As of the end of 2023, **close to 6.4 million refugees from Ukraine were recorded globally**, including some 6.0 million hosted in countries across Europe.⁹

The number of refugees from Ukraine recorded in Europe has increased slightly in 2023 (+5%) compared to 2022 (5.7 million). While additional applications for temporary protection or asylum have been registered this year, and some countries have also reported new arrivals under other forms of stay, authorities in Europe have also adjusted their population estimates for different reasons (including de-duplications and de-activations).

On the other hand, onward movements outside of Europe have increased significantly in 2023, with over **403,600 refugees from Ukraine recorded outside of Europe by December 2023**, compared to 230,000 by end of 2022. The majority of these refugees are hosted in Canada and the United States of America, who have set-up specific schemes for temporary stay.

REFUGEES FROM UKRAINE RECORDED GLOBALLY



Source: Figures compiled by UNHCR based on data provided by authorities.

As noted in [UNHCR's Position on Voluntary Returns to Ukraine](#), UNHCR does not consider that promotion or incentivization of return to Ukraine is appropriate at the current time, given the ongoing full-scale war and hostilities, and continues to call on States to refrain from forcibly returning nationals and former habitual residents of Ukraine. This does not preclude refugees from taking personal decisions to return, as returning to one's country is a fundamental right that needs to be respected; however, it is important that these decisions are truly voluntary, well-informed and without inducement to return. Given the ongoing full-scale war and general volatility of the situation, UNHCR does not consider that such voluntary decisions to return undermine the overall assessment that the vast majority of persons displaced from Ukraine are likely to have international protection needs.

⁹ See UNHCR's [Operational Data Portal](#) for latest data.



Data gaps and limitations

Although there are various sources available, there are persistent data gaps and challenges to accurately measure the different type of movements, including:

- Accurate **population movement estimates**, in a context of ongoing full-scale war and hostilities leading to continuous displacements, are very challenging to obtain with precision.
- **Border crossings data** can be useful to assess trends and changes in movements over time, but it is less useful to differentiate and quantify different types of movements (i.e. short-term visit vs. return, or new displacements vs. exits due to other reasons). Furthermore, data reported by host country authorities and that reported by Ukrainian authorities does not always match.
- There is a lack of official data on **refugee returnees**, both due to lack of data on deactivation of their protection status in host countries, as well as a lack of official tracking of refugee returnees inside Ukraine.
- Data on **new displacements or new arrivals** is limited, as figures of monthly decisions granting TP or asylum can include re-registration of individuals who lost their previous status (e.g. after short-term visits to Ukraine).
- **Population estimates** are affected by challenges in tracking refugees in a context of free movement for Ukraine nationals across most of Europe, and the fact that not all countries have undertaken verification exercises of the presence of TP beneficiaries in their territory.