

# Population Loss Through Migration and Internal Displacement as a Risk Factor for Stronghold Territorial Communities in Post-Invasion Ukraine

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## Abstract

This article examines the potential risks of permanent population loss in Ukraine on account of Russian military actions dating back to 2014, which has hindered the ability of the stronghold territorial communities to recover. It outlines the context of displacement in Ukraine over the past eight years, assesses displaced people's direct needs and considers both national and local policies to meet them. Finally, it forecasts factors that will impact the reluctance of displaced persons to return to the stronghold territories and details the necessary national and local responses.

## Keywords

internal displacement, migration, Ukraine, Russian aggression, stronghold territories, post-war recovery

## Introduction

The full-scale invasion of Ukrainian territory in February 2022 not only dealt a severe blow to the country's economy, infrastructure, ability to exercise sovereignty and territorial integrity but also caused significant social disruption. As a major asset of the state, the people—including their social attitudes and needs—have undergone a significant transformation. It is important to note the effect of the Ukrainian nation's strengthening and the consolidation of its aspirations towards democracy and European integration, which primarily manifested in widespread citizen support for the actions of state authorities and political forces aimed at hastening the country's accession to the European Union.

Ukraine has been subject to Russian aggression for over eight years, with some of its territories having been annexed or occupied as early as 2014. One could even argue from a historical perspective that Russian pressure has had a long-term influence on Ukraine since it became independent in 1991, though this pressure was primarily political rather than militaristic. Considerable research has already been conducted on the topic of internal displacement within the realm of domestic doctrine. Among the diverse array of actors who have contributed to this body of knowledge, state (the Verkhovna Rada, profile ministries) and local governments, municipalities, international organisations (Council of Europe, OSCE), and non-governmental organisations (IOM Ukraine, Caritas Ukraine, Danish Refugee Council) stand out as having played a significant role in identifying essential priorities and developing long-term programs aimed at addressing the multifaceted challenges associated with this phenomenon.

Notably, Ukraine had never faced migration and displacement on a scale comparable to the early spring of 2022. Although active hostilities continue, it is necessary to look ahead – to forecast, analyse and prepare Ukrainian legal, institutional and financial systems to address the looming problem of permanent population loss from the stronghold territorial communities.

This article's emphasis on Ukraine's legal context ensures that the wide range of relevant issues – both previously explored and unexplored – is reflected through the lens of local self-government and regional capacity to address fundamental humanitarian issues, internal displacement and post-war reconstruction.

Thus, this article aims to achieve the following objectives: summarise the relevant recent history (Section 4.1); review the current situation (Section 4.2); identify problems (Section 4.3); develop damage-control proposals (Section 5); and ensure the continued operation of the recently reformed local self-governing system in specific areas of Ukraine (the so-called stronghold territories or strongholds) by applying the recommendations and results of related research to legislative considerations.

This article's principal objective is to assess Ukraine's territorial communities as crucial elements of the country's local self-governing system (in certain regions). The article considers new types of relationships and characteristics inherent in these communities that are affecting modern Ukraine and will affect post-war Ukraine.

## Literature Review

As mentioned earlier, various Ukrainian and foreign scholars have complemented the study of migration and internal displacement in Ukraine since 2014. The works of Ivashchenko-Stadnik (2017) and Bulakh (2017) offer relatively detailed accounts of the social struggles of host communities and the problem of integration in cases of non-return. Drawing parallels with the current situation, one can note specific changes stemming from the comprehensive nature of the Russian invasion. While host communities rarely perceived the problem of hosting IDPs as a priority in the past, the political and social preconditions have changed significantly. This paper supplements studies on migration and displacement by analysing previous experiences and projecting them onto the current overarching nature of events, including socioeconomic elements, placing an additional financial burden on host communities' budgets and increasing social fatigue.

Social context in Ukraine has been viewed through the prism of human rights by Khrystova and Uvarova (2022) as well as Mykhnenko, Kuznetsova, Mikheieva, Gulyieva and Dragneva (2018) in their works on marginalisation, social exclusion and gender. These studies detail societal issues, which this study considers but does not prioritise, as the social views of Ukrainians in the current environment have shifted toward consolidation. Despite the adoption of common European standards of human rights (e.g., the ratification of the Istanbul Convention), gender-sensitive issues are likely to be pushed to the sidelines moving forward in favour of primarily humanitarian ones, though the former could certainly return to the spotlight in the future.

Studies with a broader legal orientation covering the areas of state and legal theory, constitutional law and public administration were also considered in preparing this article. Missteps in state regulation, state-level (and region-level) execution and the adaptation of post-Soviet social policy have been reflected in the works of Albert (2016) and Niemets, Husieva, Pohrebskyi, Bartosh and Lohvynova (2019), among others. These works explored issues related to the provision of basic needs using a model approach, including issues pertaining to registration, housing, employment, education and reintegration into host communities. Special attention will be paid in this article to the introduction of temporary changes to the system of administrative-territorial division, which has yet to be studied, as fundamental guidelines for post-war recovery.

Rohach and Mendzhul (2017) studied the state-level regulatory and legal management of internal displacement and highlighted the formalisation and declarative nature of the secured rights of IDPs in Ukraine. Comparing the situation in 2017 to the current situation, one can draw subjective conclusions about the continuation of the state's general policy toward legally mandating obligations that cannot be fulfilled. This issue is deeply rooted in traditional post-Soviet postulates of the state's dominance over the individual. In recent years, academic research in Ukraine has increasingly focused on the rule of law. It is reasonable to doubt that, in a full-fledged war, state procedures and guarantees would be limited to maintaining national security. However, one should not neglect the state's inability to fulfil its obligations, particularly in terms of social, economic and cultural rights, which lack sufficiently stringent guarantee mechanisms at both the domestic and international levels.

For this article, the research conducted by the Council of Europe in Ukraine is particularly valuable. The 'Internal Displacement in Ukraine: Building Solutions' project has been running since 2018, extended past its original end date of 2020. The project's primary goals included providing

legal and informational assistance to and analysing the needs of IDPs. Grants for non-governmental organisations and research institutions produced practical results furnishing IDPs with additional tools for the protection of their rights, as well as creating humanitarian opportunities for them. The information base that enabled this article was supplemented by this project's data on the involvement of local self-governing bodies and municipalities. The author's active participation in the implementation of this project supplements the theoretical side of this study with practical experience, broadening the investigated issues and breathing life into its conclusions.

Ukraine's Recovery Plan Blueprint (2022), presented at the Ukraine Recovery Conference in Lugano, Switzerland on 4–5 July 2022, was an essential source for this study. The document features several issues explored in this paper. However, its focus is national, meaning it does not address the issues in municipal contexts. Notably, however, it does consider potential population loss as an aggravating factor and proposes some measures to minimise its impact (e.g., social protection).

## Materials and Methods

This article makes use of standardised tools of scientific inquiry adapted to the circumstances of martial law. It applies methodological approaches (e.g., phenomenological, hermeneutic, axiological, systemic) to the process of scientific cognition underlying the nature and purpose of the local population (as the main asset of a territorial community) and, in this way, contributes to the definition of the local population's role in the post-war recovery of specific regions and the state as a whole.

It employs historical and comparative methods to provide context and identify the distinct features of the processes behind both external and internal movements following the occupation of certain regions in eastern Ukraine and the annexation of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea in 2014–2015 as well as the full-scale military invasion that began on 24 February 2022. Still, it identifies the fundamental differences in the processes of population displacement and the connection between the events and the consequences.

Existing research on internal displacement in Ukraine includes scholarly articles, monographs, reports and grant studies carried out by international governmental organisations and NGOs. The information base of this article comprises data from the United Nations and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) combined with data from the Ukrainian state. Given that information from state actors, especially during times of conflict, may not be entirely accurate due to various factors, this article takes the necessary precautions to prevent the distortion of information.

This article focuses on the regions of Ukraine considered to be strongholds, i. e. regions where hostilities are occurring or that represent significant objectives for seizure and/or advancement into the interior of the country and uses the most likely outcomes (based on an analysis of the public sphere and the background information available on the military capabilities of the states involved in the conflict) of future events as its forecasting foundation. The article's practical component (applicable to understanding the present demands and needs of internally displaced persons) is supplemented by observational data from the author's personal experience as an internally displaced person—by monitoring the situation, conducting surveys and collecting information from 70 employees of the SRI of State Building and Local Government of the NALS of Ukraine and Yaroslav Mudryi National Law University.

Table 1. Internal audit of the SRI of State Building and Local Government of the NALS of Ukraine: Professional activities by academic staff under martial law

Employees	Quantity	Intent to return	No intent to return
Internally displaced	38	29	9
Migrated abroad	7	2	5
Remained	25	–	–
Total	70	31	14

Source: SRI of State Building and Local Government of Ukraine.

The data from the Ministry of Education and Science survey (in the part of the Institute and the University) illustrate the magnitude of internal displacement and raise concerns over the eventual return of persons to their former places of residence. While the number of individuals who do not intend to return is rather low, considering the possibility of a protracted conflict, and the risks posed to the populations residing in the studied areas, as well as the incremental integration of displaced individuals, the situation may undergo changes over time.

Although the survey was not conducted with sufficient statistical rules and principles, it provides a general understanding of the situation and is important for the study because it reflects (albeit in a limited way) the mood of researchers who vary in age and level of accomplishment as well as a portion of the technical staff.

The author's contribution is presented in the form of the summarisation and analysis of the above literature using the general scientific methods described. In addition, the practical recommendations prepared by the author should be implemented in the future as legislative proposals within the framework of the academic institution with which the author is affiliated.

## Research Results

### Post-2014 Displacement Context

A territorial community's most valuable asset is its residents. As enshrined in Ukraine's constitution and relevant legislation, the primary social task of the state is to provide an adequate standard of living, meet citizens' needs, opportunities for self-realisation and prosperity and facilitate their ability to influence local decision-making processes. When, amid the unstable sociopolitical situation against the backdrop of the 2014 Revolution of Dignity, residents of certain communities were deprived of their guaranteed rights under external pressure, effectively ending the realisation of state sovereignty in their respective territories, they were also deprived of their ability to influence local-level decision-making processes. As a result, many able residents of occupied and annexed territories were forced to make the tough decision to relocate to safer and more socially stable regions, those often being the closest major cities under Ukrainian control.

According to the Ukrainian Unified Information Database on Internally Displaced Persons, 1,476,148 internally displaced persons were registered as of 31 December 2021, including 1,211,165 families (NSSU, 2021). This data does not fully reflect the scale of displacement; according to some estimates, the number of displaced persons is nearly three million. However, considering the current state of affairs, the latter figure can be considered reasonably accurate, as the registration situation has deteriorated significantly since 2022 despite opportunities provided by the state in terms of registration expansion. The primary factor contributing to the reduced efficacy of counting IDPs is the widespread unwillingness of men of conscription age (and sometimes entire families) to register for fear of being drafted, though other chaotic and bureaucratic complications have also played a role.

Migration abroad has been tightly controlled due to various factors, though it has not even come close to the migration figures stemming from the Syrian conflict (another modern example of a large-scale refugee crisis). Despite a significant number of applications from Ukrainian citizens, most were denied based on their ability to remain safe in Ukrainian-controlled territory. In comparison, prior to the escalation of the Kyiv protests and the events in Crimea and the east, according to migration specialists Fitsova and Solodko, 'Ukraine was not even one of the top 30 countries of origin for asylum seekers in the EU. Since October 2014, when the number of asylum-seeker applications peaked at 2,170 per month, their number has remained stable at around 1,700–2,000 applications per month, eventually declining' (Solodko and Fitsova 2016).

According to data from the Council of Europe (2020), residents of Luhansk Oblast were mainly forced to relocate to Kharkiv Oblast. Residents of Donetsk Oblast mainly chose cities like Zaporizhzhia, Dnipro, Kherson, Mykolaiv and Mariupol, though Mariupol has been far from a safe haven since the Russian invasion (Davies, 2022). Public information indicates that three-quarters of displaced persons chose major cities as their final destination.

Table 2. Displaced persons in Ukraine

Region	Persons	Families	Children under 18	Employable	Persons with disabilities
Vynnytsia	11 294	8 202	2 157	4 604	615
Volyn	3 140	2 135	699	1 500	128
Luhansk	284 637	253 525	22 015	37 901	8 278
Dnipropetrovsk	71 744	53 643	11 708	26 549	3 039
Lviv	11 344	7 892	2 365	4 788	356
Donetsk	514 259	437 186	61 493	79 459	17 814
Poltava	22 718	16 496	3 624	7 791	1 360
Zhytomyr	7 099	4 863	1 482	2 694	442
Zakarpattia	3 382	2 205	778	1 702	148
Zaporizhzhia	56 660	45 525	7 659	16 750	2 370
Ivano-Frankivsk	3 928	2 579	922	1 752	176
Kyiv city	166 309	125 667	26 725	90 559	5 011
Kyiv region	67 663	47 099	13 887	26 538	2 295
Kirovohrad	6 590	4 563	1 314	2 295	425
Mykolayiv	8 379	5 578	1 923	3 724	388
Odesa	39 194	27 625	8 037	17 402	1 580
Rivne	3 043	1 978	750	1 315	152
Sumy	11 254	8 151	1 968	3 700	706
Ternopil	2 168	1 475	499	915	128
Kharkiv	136 816	110 694	17 620	49 063	4 130
Kherson	14 814	11 092	2 698	6 603	538
Khmelnyskyi	6 633	4 361	1 443	2 213	336
Cherkasy	10 815	6 685	2 151	4 119	646
Chernihiv	7 347	5 044	1 373	2 616	409
Chernivtsi	2 420	1 417	594	1 188	116
Total	1 473 650	1 195 680	195 884	397 740	51 586

Source: Council of Europe 2020.

For a more practical understanding of people's essential needs (as a precondition for a proper state response), we should follow the priority internally displaced persons' requests for legal aid, which was reflected in the 2014 situation (i.e., the most frequent issues for which IDPs sought legal assistance after 2014). These requested aspects of legal aid include: 1) pension processing; 2) targeted assistance payments, social guarantees and benefits; 3) registration assistance; 4) civil-legal issue (e.g., inheritance, credit relations) assistance; 5) family assistance (e.g., alimony, registration of birth, death); 6) labour relations (e.g., dismissal from enterprises in uncontrolled territory, recovery of wages); 7) compensation for lost property; 8) education (e.g., placing children in kindergartens, higher education); 9) medical services; and 10) means of entry into and exit from uncontrolled territories. Importantly, this list is not exhaustive.

The state's assistance can be roughly divided into several categories: 1) payments (welfare); 2) housing; 2) employment (access to work); 3) access to education; 4) integration of displaced people into the administrative system in controlled territory. Due to the international component (and the pandemic), the state has not adequately addressed the mobility issues between controlled and occupied (annexed) territories.

Looking back at 2014–2021 dynamics, we can conclude that the state quickly delegated the responsibility to meet the needs of internally displaced peoples to local self-governing bodies and officials. In this context, Ukraine's decentralisation and territorial organisation of power reform, which

have been in effect since 1 April 2014 (Pro skhvalennia kontseptsii 2014), secured supplementary financial resources to bolster local support in the aforementioned categories.

The legal framework has been adopted or amended as a priority, including in the Ukrainian laws 'On Ensuring the Rights and Freedoms of Internally Displaced Persons' (Pro zabezpechennia prav i svobod 2014) and 'On Social Housing' (Pro zhytlovyi fond 2006), as well as decrees of Ukrainian cabinet ministers, such as 'On the Registry of Internally Displaced Persons' (Pro oblik vnutrishno 2014) and 'On the Implementation of Social Payments to Internally Displaced Persons' (Pro zdiisnennia sotsialnykh vyplat 2014). However, the state's policy has changed, shifting toward decentralisation.

Subsequent regulation has exemplified the gradual loss of the state's interest and engagement in the sustained assistance for internally displaced persons. In 2018, Ukraine adopted the Strategy for the Integration of Internally Displaced Persons and Implementation of Sustainable Solutions for Internal Displacement until 2020 (Pro zatverdzhennia planu zakhodiv, 2018). After nearly a year-long hiatus, the state adopted an updated strategy at the end of 2021, wherein the provisional outcomes of antecedent programs were comprehensively delineated. According to the post-action analysis available in the new program, the number of internally displaced persons living in rented housing peaked at 60 per cent, and the employment rate among them reached just 46 per cent (as of June 2020). The prime conditions for successful integration specified by the surveyed internally displaced were housing (89 per cent), permanent income (80 per cent) and employment (48 per cent).

Eventually, registration and the provision of administrative services were improved as part of the reform of the administrative service. In May 2014, the Cabinet of Ministers issued Order No. 523-p on 'Certain Issues of Providing Administrative Services Through Administrative Service Centers' (Deiaki pytannia nadannia 2014), which regulated the list of the most popular (essential) services to be provided through administrative service centres.

Within the framework of decentralisation reform, the operation of local self-government was impacted by both the increased burden on housing reserves and the additional funding provided by the increase in local budgets. According to First Deputy Minister of Finance of Ukraine, in 2018, the revenues of local Ukrainian budgets (excluding inter-budgetary transfers) collectively amounted to 234.1 billion UAH – 41.4 billion UAH or 21.5 per cent higher than in 2017. Since the onset of fiscal decentralisation, local revenues have been rising drastically. In 2018, there was a 21.9% augmentation compared to 2017, amounting to UAH 42 billion. Subsequently, in 2019, the growth rate reached 17.6%, equivalent to UAH 41.1 billion. During the first half of 2020, the increment constituted 2.1%, translating to UAH 2.7 billion. (Uliutin 2020). Of course, the figures here are presented in Ukraine's national currency; given the devaluation of this currency, the country's dependence on imports presents a serious problem.

Access to education was addressed at the ministry level through the establishment of special quotas for internally displaced persons and siblings of participants in anti-terrorist operations (Navchannia 2020). Access to healthcare put displaced people on the same level as ordinary citizens, who were adapting to the new mechanism of healthcare provision due to the healthcare reforms (i.e., the introduction of personal attending physicians). Employment, civil-legal issues, compensation for destroyed or damaged housing and the processing of state welfare for internally displaced persons have resulted in mixed successes.

Special emphasis should be placed on the creation of a complex bureaucratic system aimed at reissuing pension benefits to those in occupied territories; the lack of such a system (despite the fact that it would be a desperate move) has perhaps been the state's greatest misstep (Sokolova 2018). A politicised situation has emerged centred on the state's breach of its obligations regarding social support for its citizens in non-controlled territory, especially for those who could not properly maintain their IDP status procedurally due to their inability to communicate with Ukraine's state officials.

In 2014, the host communities endured the internally displaced persons' problems but also benefited from a larger and stronger labour market. Simultaneously, special local employment programs for internally displaced persons were implemented in many territorial communities. Some displaced persons relocated their small businesses as well (Kanivets and Novash 2017). Local

budgets have felt the influx of displaced people due to the impact of fiscal decentralisation (a higher share of local taxes remained in local budgets). Most major host cities' educational institutions could cover the educational needs of internally displaced persons, enabled by special quotas and the online transcendence stemming from the global pandemic.

The initial reaction of the state to the situation can be subjectively characterised as adequate. Following the initial shock, those who were forced or voluntarily decided to move were eligible for services and guarantees from the state. However, the state of affairs following the full-scale invasion on 24 February 2022 has been borderline catastrophic, and the state has yet to fully assess the consequences of attempts to implement temporary priority measures under martial law.

### **Mid-June 2022 Displacement and Government Intervention**

According to the UNHCR, 5,493,437 Ukrainians have been recorded as refugees across Europe since the beginning of the war (as of 5 July 2022; UNHCR 2022). Around 90 per cent of these refugees have been women and children, as males between 18 and 60 years old (with some exceptions) have been prohibited from leaving the country under martial law. Most Ukrainian refugees arrived in Poland, though a significant number were also received by Moldova, Romania, Hungary and Slovakia. Here, the more severe figure of 8,402,336 border crossings should require a special note.

Almost 500,000 refugees registered on the aggressor's own territory. The information space is saturated with reports on the forced displacement of the occupied territories' population (particularly the city of Mariupol) to the territory of the Russian Federation. However, it is impossible to independently confirm this information. As it is impossible to establish the legal status of such persons, the aforementioned restrictions and international guarantees still apply to them. The withdrawal of Russia from international treaties, including in the field of human rights, created a situation in which refugees were deprived of international protection and faced with a lack of respect for their personal dignity under Russian national legislation. No exact data is available at this time, but a portion of these people are presumed to have later returned to Ukrainian territory.

The number of internally displaced persons is only approximately estimated for many reasons, including registration problems under wartime conditions. According to various estimates, the number of internally displaced persons in Ukraine ranges from 7 to 8 million. Up to 1,476,148 persons can be considered potentially double-displaced, as the regions that received the most significant numbers of displaced people after 2014 have become unsafe.

Refugees constitute a long-term loss of human capital, as they are often unable to return to their original country of residence. When providing temporary protection to refugees, registration, welfare, employment and housing are all the responsibility of EU Member States on account of Council Directive 2001/55/EC. While the minimum necessary standards are generally observed, provisions often vary in implementation. Most refugees who left Ukraine used the temporary protection mechanism (3,574,485 have registered for temporary protection or a similar national protection scheme in Europe as of 5 July 2022 according to the UNHCR), as refugee status is only relevant to those who do not see returning home as a possibility due to occupational or other reasons.

The introduction of an electronic registration channel through a mobile application and the ability of displaced persons to register at public service centres and local councils have partially resolved the registration and record-keeping issues that have persisted since 2014. However, the magnitude and composition of the displacement caused new registration issues. Internal software inconsistencies and local representatives' inability to access pertinent databases frequently result in bottlenecks. Electronic registration methods may imply military enlistment, which prevents men (and sometimes entire families) from registering as internally displaced persons. Additionally, re-registering individuals who obtained the IDP status after 2014, which is required for receiving financial aid, is incredibly complicated.

The provision of state-provided financial assistance is also problematic. The monthly per-person allowance varies between USD 65 and USD 100 at the current exchange rate. However, prices for almost all goods have increased dramatically due to the fuel crisis (stemming from the destruction of critical infrastructure by Russian forces) and other logistical problems, significantly worsening the

financial situation of these individuals, especially when considering men's reluctance to register as displaced.

A significant number of internally displaced persons have lost their employment and, due to various circumstances, are unable to find work in their places of temporary residence. State support, in this case, comprises the provision of additional payments of 6,500 hryvnias monthly (approximately USD 215) per hired worker. This has expanded opportunities for employers in host communities, though it does not guarantee employment for specialised professionals). At the same time, the ratio of the number of workers to available positions has shifted – but not in favour of job-seekers.

The state was able to develop a new economic strategy based on non-reimbursable grants and co-financing opportunities thanks to financial assistance from its partners (Ukrinform 2022). The primary criterion was the generation of new jobs. Relocating businesses and industries that attract a workforce, on the other hand, poses risks for the departing communities. Due to a lack of housing and employment opportunities, small, occupied and partially destroyed communities with one or more founding businesses may not see the return of their residents. Under martial law, such action is justifiable, but it undoubtedly poses risks to post-war reconstruction in the war-affected regions and imposes additional costs on the state to create conditions for return.

The housing context of the problem of internal displacement has its shortcomings. Some displaced persons reside in rented housing units on a paid-for or free-of-charge basis (temporarily and subject to appropriate financial capacity). Some reside in the facilities of schools, hospitals and other communal institutions provided by host communities that have been repurposed for the duration of martial law. In several regions of western Ukraine, projects for the rapid preparation of temporary housing are already being implemented. This is particularly true in the Lviv region, in which several temporary modular housing projects are being deployed with the support of the Polish government. Given the general nature of the problem, each case is unique. Despite the understandable urge of each person to return home, this war may result in such modular housing becoming permanent. Meanwhile, the strain on the social infrastructure of host regions is increasing.

Issues pertaining to wartime education have been addressed to a certain extent in the face of the global pandemic, with most education taking place in an online setting. At the same time, large higher education institutions located in the strongholds are not likely to expect applicants' return following the end of hostilities, especially given that such institutions have begun to suffer increased competition from higher education institutions in safe territories.

Looking at the intermediate results, we can note the joint work of the state, municipal authorities, partner countries, international organisations and volunteers in the context of containment. Most implemented measures remain temporary and are designed to work under martial law. This approach reflects the comprehensive nature of martial law as a special legal regime that will undoubtedly be abolished at some point. However, when and the conditions under which this will occur remain unclear, though the most probable scenarios should be considered to allow for adequate preparation.

### **Expected Post-War Challenges and Governmental Response under the Realisation of the Most Plausible Scenarios**

At this point, the most realistic scenarios for the end of active hostilities are as follows: 1) a freeze in the conflict in the aggressor's attempt to impose a passive trench war of attrition (while retaining the captured territories); and 2) the successful de-occupation of most Ukrainian territories by the Ukrainian armed forces and the restoration of Ukraine's territorial integrity within the borders in place prior to the Russian invasion. Both scenarios would result in the end of active hostilities. Ukrainian sovereignty will inevitably be reinstated across the entire territory that makes up the independent state of Ukraine. However, doing so will require a significant amount of effort and time. As a result, this scenario is not being considered from a short-term perspective.

The regions marked green on the map of hostilities as of 1 July 2022 (Figure 2) are to be considered strongholds in the context of this study: 1) Kharkiv; 2) Dnipropetrovsk; 3) Zaporizhzhia; 4) Kherson; 5) Odesa; 6) Poltava; 7) Sumy; and 8) Mykolaiv.



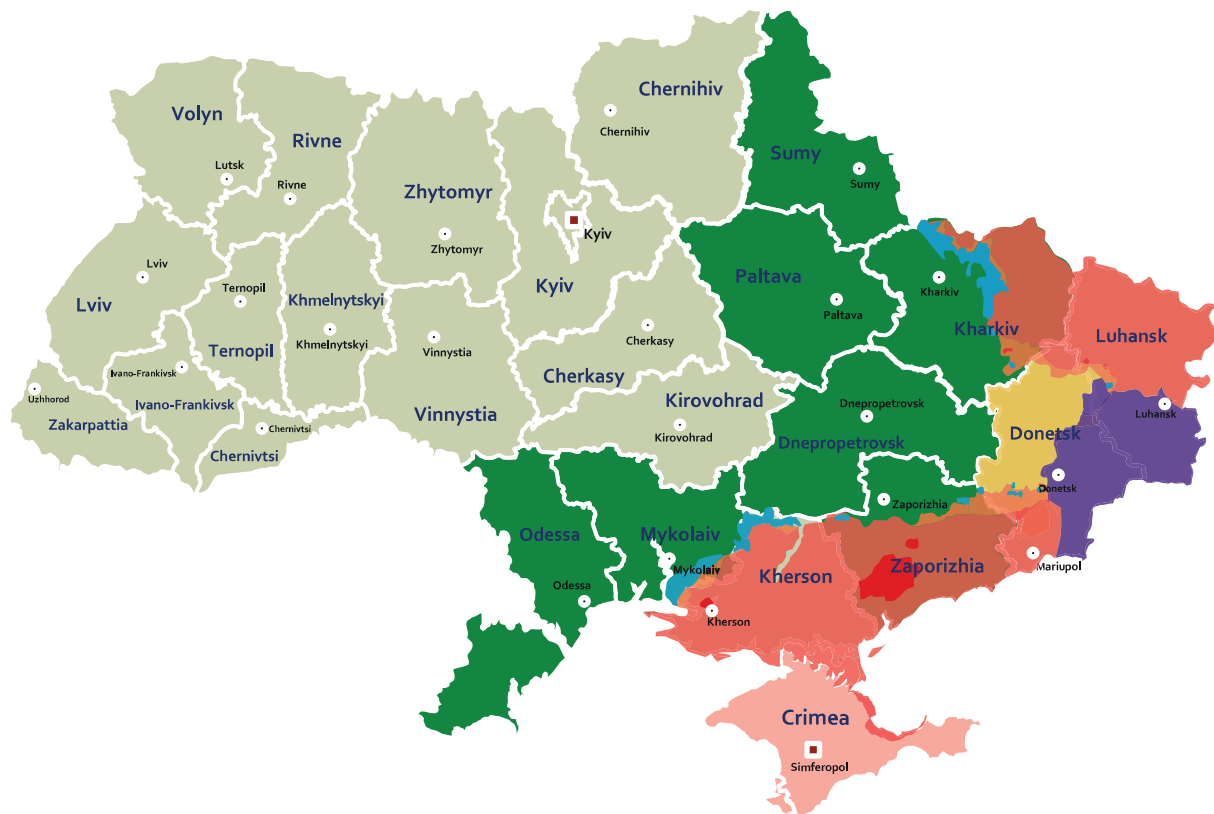


Figure 2. Map of hostilities as of 1 July 2022

Source: [www.ukrainewarmap.live](http://www.ukrainewarmap.live).

After the end of the active phase of hostilities, the highlighted regions (except for Kherson due to its volatility) will be elevated to stronghold territories, regardless of which scenario (outlined above) is put into action. This will result in the establishment of a buffer zone along the line of demarcation (wherever it is drawn) as well as the emergence of potential risks that reduce the population's tendency to regularly return to these territories.

The aggravating temporal factor is central to understanding subsequent problems. This factor, unrelated to the potential scenarios, will strongly influence people's ability and willingness to return to abandoned areas (in this case, strongholds). The longer that terrorist bombings of civilian sites continue, the more likely the populations of affected regions are to stop considering a return, be it due to the destruction of their homes and essential infrastructure facilities, the lack of employment opportunities or the inability to maintain an acceptable way of life.

The provisional economic support programmes in the safe territories outlined in this article may worsen the situation in the future. The economic potential of post-war reconstruction in the communities marked green on the map (Figure 2) is being jeopardised by the relocation of businesses and the generation of new labour. The most instructive illustration of this phenomenon is evident in the exodus of people who lived in the temporarily occupied territories of Donetsk and Luhansk. It is possible that these people either left the country or relocated once more in the wake of a full-scale invasion. However, in the case of the 2014–2015 Russian aggression, the vast majority of the residents who fled these communities have not returned. One can argue that life in occupied territory under a proxy state and life on de-occupied frontline territory are very different. However, given the listed needs and demands of a depersonalised Ukrainian, this example can be considered valid.

In the context of the territorial communities being discussed, human resource training centres, such as those in Kharkiv (a city of 1.5 million people often called the 'forge of education and science' in Ukraine) are under threat. Judging from their own experience as a teacher and scientist, the author has observed a significant loss of interest among applicants and postgraduates, including those from abroad, in entering universities in Kharkiv and continuing their education. At the

same time, educational institutions in partner countries that support students from Ukraine unknowingly contribute to the exacerbation of this problem. The economies of these states may yield economic dividends in the form of highly qualified workers in the future while reducing the chance of Ukrainians returning due to the lack of local employment opportunities in Ukraine.

It is essential to mention the developing IT sector in Ukraine, as the workers in this sector are not tied to their specific places of employment and, therefore, have more opportunities for labour migration. However, recent tax reforms in this industry did not instil confidence in the Ukrainian IT sector – and given the current state of the war and the high demand for IT labour in Europe, such a social asset may be lost for many years if this trend continues.

Changes that are expected to accompany militarisation and bolster the country's defence capabilities may significantly impact the educational system across Ukraine. If this occurs, the young population will have no choice but to leave the country permanently and continue their search for work elsewhere. The departure of qualified specialists to other countries alongside concerns regarding the conscription of young men (and women) is already compelling Ukrainian families to consider the possibility of higher education and employment abroad in the EU. This sentiment has been exacerbated by public discussions about compulsory military service prior to entering higher education and statements made by officials regarding the need to register women.

Post-war reconstruction presents additional concerns. On the one hand, the reconstruction plans that some states have presented do not leave any room for uncertainty regarding the amount of available financial support. On the other hand, it is necessary to understand the fears that investors have (even private-sector companies motivated by their governments) regarding investment in the reconstruction of housing and infrastructure in the strongholds, which have been the most affected. At this point, it is evident that this invasion is not likely to be the last act of Russian aggression. Given the proximity of the stronghold regions to the border and, consequently, to the aggressor's artillery, we can consider the inhabitants of communities in such regions as likely to permanently remain in safer territories.

The challenge of relocating small businesses brings with it potential disruptions in the delivery of essential services. Kharkiv Mayor Ihor Terekhov claims that several of the city's major transportation companies abruptly withdrew from the region following the Russian invasion (Mer Kharkova 2022). The same predicament holds true for other spheres of service provision that are not under the jurisdiction of local authorities or the state. There is also the issue of monopolisation, which occurs when, after the war, there is a necessary reduction in the degree of local control, resulting in the potential for service markets to be monopolised. The problem of corruption, the level of which was high even before the full-scale Russian invasion, has the potential to make an already difficult situation even more challenging. Moreover, with the required militarisation of state control at the local level and the organisational decentralisation that has taken place as a direct result of the reform, it will be possible to eliminate chains of control, making it easier to establish monopolies.

The above trends further reduce the chance of the population returning to their pre-war places of residence in the stronghold territories. As time passes and the war drags on, Ukrainians who have established themselves in safer regions in Ukraine and abroad will view their long-term return to the strongholds as increasingly unlikely. If the state does not quickly work to develop a plan with foreign partners to socially revitalise its strongholds (and de-occupied areas), the future of Ukraine in the European family will be in jeopardy. Currently, scraps of information are available regarding the patronage of various countries over the reconstruction of different regions, but a balance must be struck between a regional and a national approach. Otherwise, the results of the involvement of such states will be fundamentally different for each territory.

## Conclusions and Practical Recommendations

It may seem premature to contemplate a plan for post-war population preservation; of course, it is first necessary to consider means of temporary support under martial law. However, it is vital to develop and publicly disclose the proposed measures now to control the current situation and give citizens confidence in the possibility to restore the aspects of their lives that have been destroyed by war. In the event of a military standstill (something akin to the Israeli–Palestinian

conflict), residents must remain in their temporary circumstances while maintaining the possibility of returning to their previous place of residence and standard of living. Thus, at the legislative level, at the level of ministries and departments, it is necessary to outline the following measures for the strongholds through dialogue with local self-governments and other stakeholders:

- 1) Develop, organise and finance (with international partners) additional opportunities for internally displaced persons, including through privileges, deregulation and simplified interactions with state bodies and local authorities upon returning to their place of residence (potentially through changes in the structure of the administrative-territorial system, especially in stronghold regions). Additional benefits from the state should include a temporary moratorium on state business inspections (except anti-corruption inspections), the further digitalisation of administrative services, new secure channels for state registration (conversion of IDP status to a special post-war status) and the simplification of entry into civil relations.
- 2) Introduce long-term financial support programmes in cases of expected long-term unemployment. It is necessary to adapt active temporary programmes to support the creation of new jobs (and, as a result, fill local budgets). Additional funding from foreign partners would attract more unemployed persons to the strongholds' post-war recovery, serving as both a temporary solution to the problem and a measure to increase the overall capacity of future workers. The continuation of the international travel ban for men of conscription age (despite being an unpopular measure) could help to contain labour migration (which increased following the introduction of visa-free travel). Notably, public discussions about the mandatory nature of registration when changing residence may indicate an attempt to retain males within the stronghold territories.
- 3) Subsidise higher education institutions and simplify the mechanisms of interaction with the state regulator (the Ministry of Education and Science). There may be a need to suspend the implemented reforms in education to ensure its accessibility and, in the future, to align it with European standards. Additional opportunities should be established to facilitate the return of specialists who have received education abroad. Legislative guarantees of exemption from conscription for those involved in the post-war restoration of the country's scientific potential should be considered. Unfortunately, the travel ban for men of conscription age, justified under martial law, will have to be extended to the post-war period. Only through this approach would it be possible to encourage families to return to Ukraine and the stronghold territories in particular (except for cases of termination of support from member states, which are not yet in question—though the potential of them occurring is high).
- 4) Support private business within the framework of the reinvented public-private partnerships, which should temporarily improve the situation by providing priority services to the people in the stronghold territorial communities. These services include healthcare, which may not withstand another full-scale reform amid the need to adapt to the seasonality of COVID-19), especially given the destruction of state-owned healthcare facilities in these regions. The deregulation and relaxation of supervision (except for anti-corruption measures) must also be pursued.
- 5) Create special transparent conditions and provide additional guarantees for the free development of the IT sphere in the stronghold regions. In the current environment, this sphere would help to attract foreign investment, boosting the country's post-war economy. Currently, some safer regions are already pursuing development in this sphere; in the long term, however, they may prove disruptive when it will be necessary to implement a policy of remunicipalisation and regional capacity equalisation. A tax-equalisation program for the regions may be a necessary follow-up, as the more heavily affected regions may struggle to recover, especially under the patronage of the partner states. As a number of countries have declared their intention to share responsibility for, and hence invest in, specific regions' reconstruction assistance.

The above measures are only a few aspects of what ultimately needs to be envisioned and delivered. Still, at this stage, it is necessary to develop general guidelines (including changes in the administrative-territorial division) and prioritise the recovery of stronghold territories. As time passes, when the second scenario is implemented with sufficient military support from partner countries, these measures can be adapted to the needs of each Ukrainian regions under study.

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