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“Refugees from Ukraine face considerable uncertainty about their future”

2. March 2023 | Christiane Keitel, Jutta Winters



More than one million people have fled Ukraine to find refuge in Germany. But how are they doing in the meantime? Between August and October 2022, the IAB together with three project partners interviewed more than 11,000 of these people about their living situation in Germany. The institutes participating in the project have now presented the long version of a joint study which contains detailed information on the results of the survey. The editorial team of IAB-Forum has interviewed Herbert Brücker, Yuliya Kosyakova and Silvia Schwanhäuser about the key findings of the study.

Ms Kosyakova, Ms Schwanhäuser, Mr Brücker, what are the key factors affecting the living conditions of Ukrainian refugees in Germany?



Dr Yuliya Kosyakova is head of the research department "Migration, Integration and International Labour Studies" at the IAB since January 2023 (together with Herbert Brücker).

Yuliya Kosyakova: In a nutshell: The situation in Ukraine and in Germany both impacts the living conditions of the Ukrainian refugees in Germany. Many refugees face considerable uncertainty about their future. Both further development of the war in Ukraine and its outcome remain largely open. This situation, of course, induces massive uncertainty. Correspondingly, more than a quarter of Ukrainian refugees saying they do not know yet whether and how long they wish to stay in Germany. One third would like to stay here until maximum by the end of the war, another third, however, for several years or even for good. So, it is quite a mixed picture.



Silvia Schwanhäuser is a researcher at the department "Migration and International Labour Studies" (INTER) at the IAB.

Silvia Schwanhäuser: Moreover, the separation of families due to the conflict has also impacted the refugees' living conditions: many of them fled the country without their spouse or partner. This particularly applies to women and mothers. In fact, many families were torn apart. More than one in ten Ukrainian families with minor children in Germany has more children abroad. Refugees who had to leave their family members behind, have a lower level of life satisfaction and are plagued by worries about their relatives in Ukraine. This is especially the case, when they had to leave their spouse, partner or children behind.

Herbert Brücker: The legislative and institutional framework also affects the living conditions of refugees. By activating the Temporary Protection Directive for Ukrainian citizens, time-consuming asylum procedures with uncertain outcomes have been done away with. This facilitates integration into the labour market and society. However, the Directive expires in March 2024 and a new road map will then be needed to provide a legal stability and planning security for those affected.

> The intentions to stay play an important role in establishing social contacts.

This massive uncertainty coupled with big differences regarding the intentions to stay – how do these factors impact the integration of refugees?

Yuliya Kosyakova: Of course, intentions to stay or return affects the integration and participation opportunities in Germany. Those who are planning to remain in Germany permanently or for several years have higher participation rates in language courses compared to those who wish to go back soon. This is correspondingly reflected in the German language: Ukrainian refugees who wish to stay in Germany longer also have a better command of German.



Prof Dr Herbert Brücker is head of the research department "Migration, Integration and International Labour Studies" at the IAB (together with Yuliya Kosyakova).

Herbert Brücker: Interestingly, refugees who wish to quickly return to Ukraine or migrate to another country boast higher employment rates than those planning to stay in Germany for a longer period or permanently. This is because those who participate in language and integration programmes are temporarily not available on the labour market, and a higher-than-average number of them are planning to stay longer. In contrast, people who are not planning to stay here too long and do not take part in programmes can get a job and start earning money faster – be it to make their living in Germany or to support their family members in Ukraine.

Silvia Schwanhäuser: The refugees' intentions to stay also play an important role in establishing social contacts: Those who wish to stay in Germany for a longer period, spend more time with the Germans than those who have no such intention. It can, however, work the other way round as well: Conversely, spending more time with Germans can increase the refugees' willingness to stay in Germany if they feel well-integrated into society.

We also observe that the refugees wishing to stay in Germany forever have a higher level of life satisfaction as compared to those wishing to return to Ukraine. A possible reason for this: They might have clearer prospects in life and are could be affected by the war and separation from their family members to a lesser extent.

> The refugees who were free to choose their place of residence are more likely to be employed than those whose place of residence was assigned by the authorities.

How are the Ukrainian refugees generally settling into the German labour market?

Herbert Brücker: At the time of our survey, 17 percent of refugees of working age were employed. However, the average duration of stay was only five months back then. It is expected that the current employment rate must be much higher. Of those who were employed, about half had a full-time job, about one third were working part-time and 14 percent worked in marginal employment. The remaining people were undergoing vocational or practical training.

As expected, educational attainments, language skills and previous employment in the home country increase employment chances in Germany. In addition – and this is highly important for integration policy – the refugees who were free to choose their place of residence were more likely to be employed than those whose place of residence was assigned by the authorities.

Silvia Schwanhäuser: And the refugees who are not yet in employment actually wish to have a job: The vast majority said that they definitely or probably want to take up employment in Germany. Many of them were registered as unemployed or seeking employment at the time of the survey; some had been actively searching for a job in the past weeks.

> There is a striking polarisation in the most frequent occupational groups of refugees.

In which occupational positions and sectors have they managed to find a job?

Herbert Brücker: The majority of Ukrainian refugees work in the service sector, which is consistent with their previous employment in Ukraine. The job qualification structures, however, are more interesting:

In Germany, most Ukrainian refugees have a qualified or highly qualified job, i.e., perform skilled, specialist, or expert tasks. The number is, however, somewhat lower than prior to migration; so, what we observe with the Ukrainian refugees is quite typical in the context of migration: They are employed below their qualification level. Nonetheless, a significant proportion of these people have been able to transfer the human capital acquired in Ukraine through education, vocational training and professional experience to the German labour market.

Yuliya Kosyakova: If you take a look at the most frequent occupational groups of refugees, there is a striking polarisation: On the one hand, 21 percent of refugees work in occupational groups such as cleaning, catering or postal delivery, i.e., in the occupations often associated with low qualification levels and low earnings, but where we also observe labour shortages. On the other hand, 23 percent are active in fields such as teaching and research, business strategy and software development, all

of which often require an academic degree or other high-level qualification. However, there is lower representation in medium-skilled occupations, such as office work and secretarial roles.

80 percent of refugees are women. Which obstacles in particular are they faced with?

Yuliya Kosyakova: The women who fled Ukraine are less likely to be employed than men do. At the same time, they are less likely to have full-time jobs. The reason for that is very simple: One in two female refugees from Ukraine has at least one minor child in her household and most of them are in Germany without their spouse or partner. This is why the integration of children and adolescents in day care centres, nurseries and schools, coupled with the expansion of care infrastructure, is crucial to promote these women' labour market integration.

The experience with previous arrival cohorts of refugees revealed another important explanation for the gender-specific differences: Women seem to invest less in language acquisition, education and training than men. They are less likely to use labour market counselling as well. Already now, we observe a similar situation with the Ukrainian refugees: For instance, women with children under the age of seven take part in language courses later than those without children or with older children. A possible solution here is to link integration offers and other programmes to the provision of childcare places.

> From mid-2023, the survey will be integrated into the major IAB-BAMF-SOEP Refugee Survey.

How shall the survey continue?

Silvia Schwanhäuser: We are currently in the field with the second wave of the survey. In order to observe their integration progress and other developments, we conduct interviews with the same persons. This will allow us to learn a lot about the processes of integration and the effectiveness of measures. From mid-2023, the survey will also be integrated into the major IAB-BAMF-SOEP Refugee Survey, which will provide opportunities for comparative analyses, for instance, with other refugees, other groups of migrants or people without migration background. In the current survey, which will be running until early March, we also interview return migrants and onward migrants. This will allow us to get some information about people who have already left Germany again.

Herbert Brücker: The central research interest in the context of the IAB-BAMF-SOEP Refugee Survey is to find out how the uncertainty about the further course and outcome of the war and affects the intention to stay, the return migration and the integration chances. Additionally, we want to examine the influence of the war on the composition of refugees. Together with our partners from the SOEP and Free University Berlin, we managed to secure funding from the Deutsche

Forschungsgemeinschaft (*DFG, German Research Foundation*) to finance the survey until 2026 and to support the research based on it. We see it as a huge success.

Ms Kosyakova, you have Ukrainian roots yourself and last year you were personally helping some members of your family cope with the challenges you highlight in this study. What has been done so far and what moved you most of all?

Yuliya Kosyakova: That is true, my sister Natalia with her meanwhile 16-year-old son Maksym fled to Germany in March 2022. It was a really tough time for all of us, with long waiting periods and a lot of uncertainty. In the meantime, they both live in their own flat. Natalia has accomplished a BAMF integration course and is waiting for a place in an advanced learners' group to acquire further language skills. At the beginning of the year, we already had the first contact with the Jobcenter. It was very positive. We discussed my sister's expectations and her experience in the labour market. Based on that, we set up a plan that outlines her additional qualification steps to find a job in the field of childcare. Maksym attended a regular class in a *Realschule* intermediate secondary school at first. However, after the summer holidays he was unfortunately sent to another school and put into a so-called bridging class with other Ukrainian children. I am highly critical of this concept, because there is absolutely no contact to German children in these classes, so the process of integration is virtually put on hold.

Along with Natalia and Maksym, my niece Hanna – Natalia's elder daughter – also fled to Germany together with her 11-year-old son Artem after the death of her husband. They both are staying at my place now. And unfortunately, I must admit that we have to spend a long time in uncertainty again this time. First, we had to wait for a residence permit, then the decision regarding application for basic benefits. If you are not covered by the basic benefits scheme, it is also pretty hard to get access to language courses or other measures. Artem attends a bridging class just like Maksym does and has therefore hardly any possibility to learn German. All in all, I would say that the rules and options for the refugees from Ukraine have meanwhile become much clearer. But it would be very beneficial to the people if the waiting times were shorter and the bureaucratic red tape less complicated.

Herbert Brücker: The personal experience of Yuliya's family is living proof of the problems faced by refugees in Germany: Red tape, solutions to fundamental problems such as finding accommodation and schooling for children and, last but not least, learning the German language. It takes time to achieve social participation, even with good support. This is why, despite quite favourable prerequisites, the labour market integration will be a long process. It would be a great improvement if the administration and politics offered the refugees better support by means of more efficient

registration as well as accommodation and job placement services. The number of refugees taking part in BAMF integration courses and further language programmes must become higher, too.

But despite all the criticism over details, we must not lose sight of the big picture: Germany has taken in about one million people from Ukraine within a short period of time, and that without any significant upheavals. Most of these people have meanwhile been accommodated, included into the basic social security system and children as well as young people attend schools and childcare facilities. The process of labour market integration has started as well.

Silvia Schwanhäuser: All in all, it is a big success, especially on the part of the refugees themselves, of course. But on the part of all those who did their bit as well – be it politics, educational institutions, providers of language courses, enterprises and, last but not least, job placement agencies. In addition to this, many refugees received vigorous support from their relatives, friends, volunteers and other players of civil society. And we can see it once again: Along with political measures, these networks are the key factor that helps the refugees settle in here in Germany.

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