Navigating Return: Understanding the Challenges and Well-Being of Ukrainians Coming Home Amid Conflict

Presenting research results

Skills Alliance for Ukraine

AGUNA collective

upinion

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Introduction

Navigating Return Migration in Wartime Ukraine

Russia's aggression has triggered the fastest and largest displacement of people in Europe since the Second World War (Vierlinger, 2022). As of today, an estimated 10 million Ukrainians remain displaced. Approximately 40 percent of them are internally displaced, while approximately 5.7 million people are residing outside of the country's borders, mostly in Europe (IOM, 2025; UNHCR, 2025) with the majority receiving protection in EU member states under the Temporary Protection Directive (TPD). This framework has granted access to housing, labour markets, education, and social support, enabling many displaced Ukrainians to rebuild their lives in relative stability. Yet as the war persists, the dynamics of mobility have become increasingly complex. While many continue to flee Ukraine to escape Russia's aggression, data indicate that nearly 1.5 million people have returned (IOM, 2025). Such large-scale return during an active conflict is highly unusual; few wars see such rapid and substantial movements back to areas where hostilities are ongoing.

This report examines these complex dynamics in depth. To investigate the factors shaping return decisions and assess returnees' emotional well-being and social reintegration, OPORA conducted an extensive mixed-methods study over a 14-month period. In collaboration with our partners Upinion and the Laguna Collective, we combined a large-scale survey – measuring economic stability, social reintegration, and well-being – with in-depth interviews that explored personal motivations, challenges, and long-term aspirations. The overarching aim is to develop a richer and nuanced understanding of how return affects the psychological well-being and social reintegration of displaced Ukrainians, while identifying implications for policy in both Ukraine and European host countries.

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Executive Summary

This study offers the first systematic analysis of Ukrainians who lived under the Temporary Protection Directive (TPD) and later returned to Ukraine during active conflict. It draws on a nationwide sample that includes front-line regions. Using three rounds of survey data (N = 340; 120+ questions; validated SWEMWBS and MHC-SF scales) alongside in-depth interviews, the project provides a focused assessment of the mental health and post-return conditions of TPD returnees.

Key Findings

Return is highly feminized and caregiving-driven.

60% of respondents care for children, elderly relatives, or both

Interviews confirm: parents often returned because their children struggled abroad, while others came back to support aging family members.

Return is often not voluntary.

Respondents describe being pushed back due to deteriorating support in Europe: loss of temporary housing, rising living costs, and restrictive or unclear rules around benefits and childcare.

Psychological well-being is fragile.

42% of respondents scored in the low well-being category on the SWEMWBS scale

33% were languishing according to the MHC-SF

Low well-being, poor economic reintegration, and the absence of institutional support create a clear pattern of "returning twice": people compelled to return due to pressures abroad may soon be forced to leave again, now under far riskier conditions.

Financial insecurity is the strongest predictor of poor mental health.

More than half of returnees cannot cover basic expenses. Employment does not guarantee stability; many work below their qualifications or in informal, low-paid roles.

Social reintegration is strained.

A significant number reported feeling unwelcome or judged by their communities, facing stigma such as being told they "had it easy in Europe." Children also experienced bullying and academic disruption during school reintegration.

Institutional support is minimal.

69% received no formal support after returning

Over half feel unsafe in their current location. Returnees rely heavily on NGOs, informal networks, and community groups.

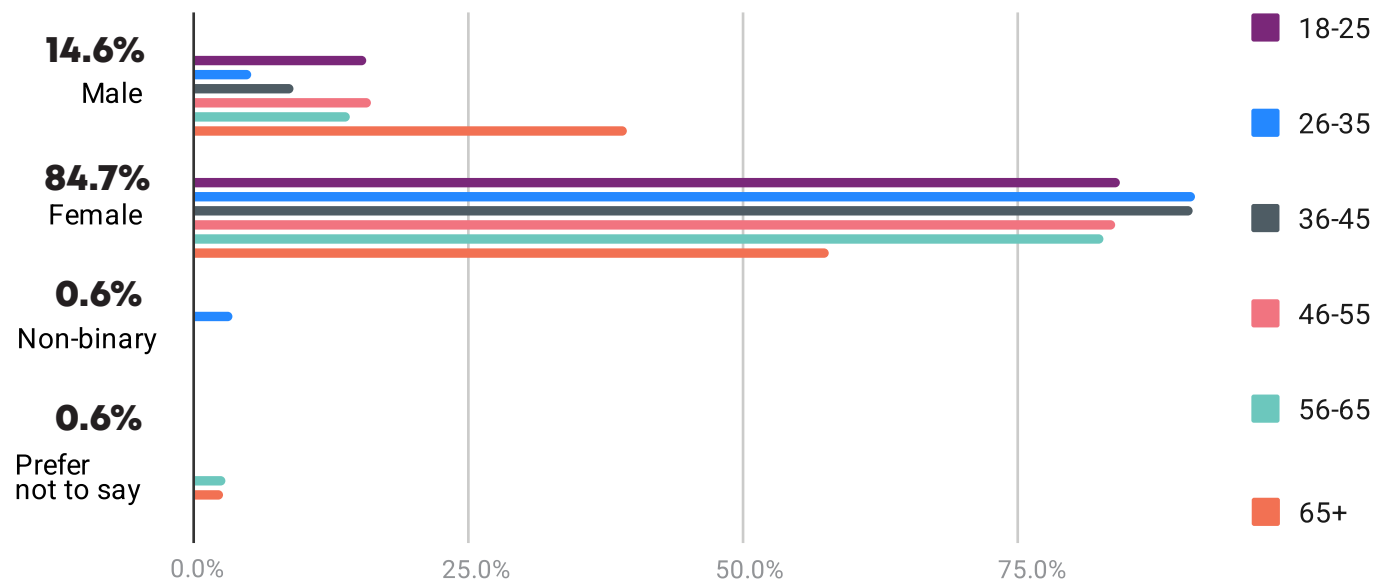**Recent returnees show the lowest mental well-being (SWEMWBS).**

Information gaps and unrealistic expectations contribute to deteriorating well-being among those who returned recently.
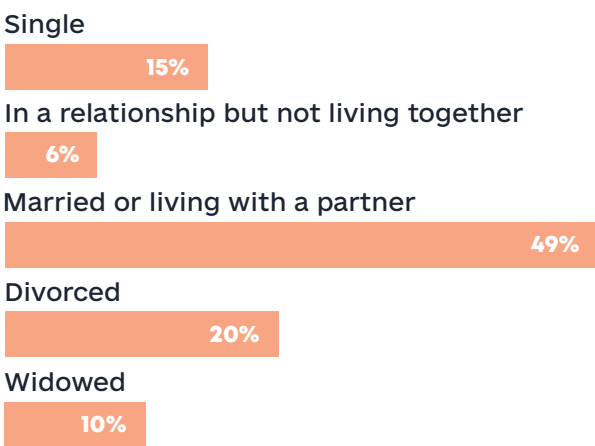
Overall Insight

Emotional and social well-being are especially low. Recent returnees may be at higher risk of moving again. This is based on patterns in well-being scores (SWEMWBS) and Temporary Protection status.
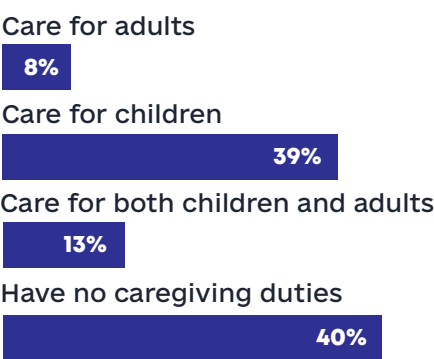
Socio-Demographic profile*

Who Returned?

	18-25
	26-35
	36-45
	46-55
	56-65
	65+

14.6% Male

84.7% Female

0.6% Non-binary

0.6% Prefer not to say

0.0% 25.0% 50.0% 75.0%

Marital & Relationship Status

Single
15%

In a relationship but not living together
6%

Married or living with a partner
49%

Divorced
20%

Widowed
10%

Care Responsibilities

Care for adults
8%

Care for children
39%

Care for both children and adults
13%
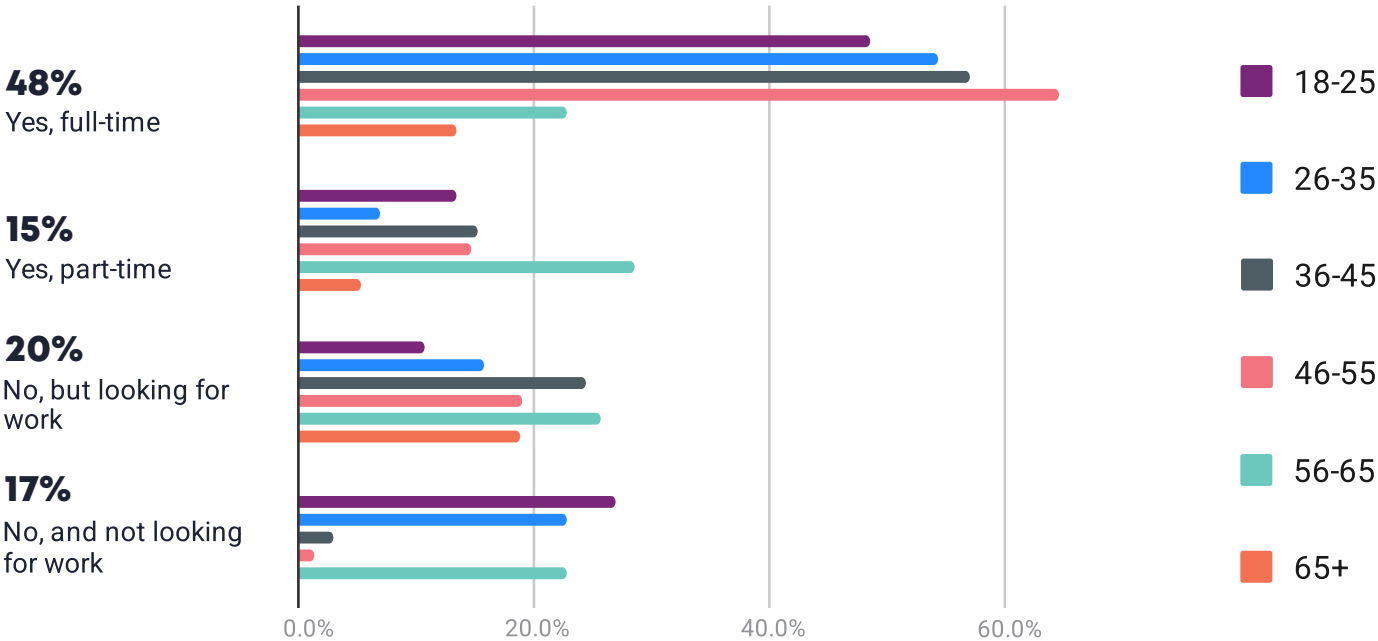
Have no caregiving duties
40%

Nearly 60% of respondents currently care for children, elderly relatives, or both. Parents described coming back because their children were struggling abroad: emotionally, academically, linguistically, or socially. Others returned to care for aging parents who had no one else to rely on in Ukraine. While women make up 85% of the sample — reflecting gendered patterns of displa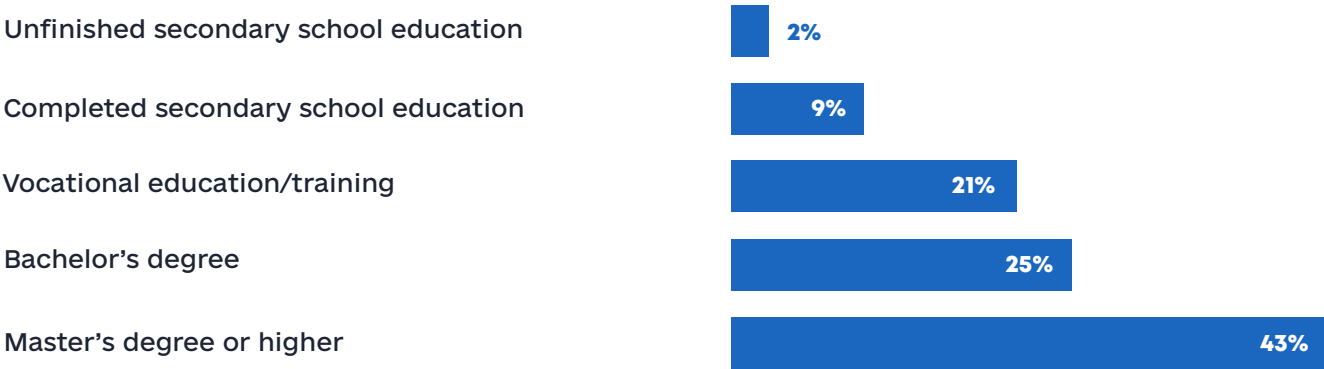cement under the TPD — the decisive factor is not gender alone, but the carework burden that shapes mobility decisions. Importantly, caregiving did not statistically predict mental health outcomes after return. This reinforces that caregiving is primarily a driver of movement, not a determinant of well-being once back in Ukraine. In other words, people do not feel worse because they are caregivers; they returned because they are caregivers.

Employment & Skills*

Employment Status Upon Return*

48%
Yes, full-time

15%
Yes, part-time

20%
No, but looking for work

17%
No, and not looking for work

Legend:
- 18-25
- 26-35
- 36-45
- 46-55
- 56-65
- 65+

X-axis: 0.0% 20.0% 40.0% 60.0%

Education*

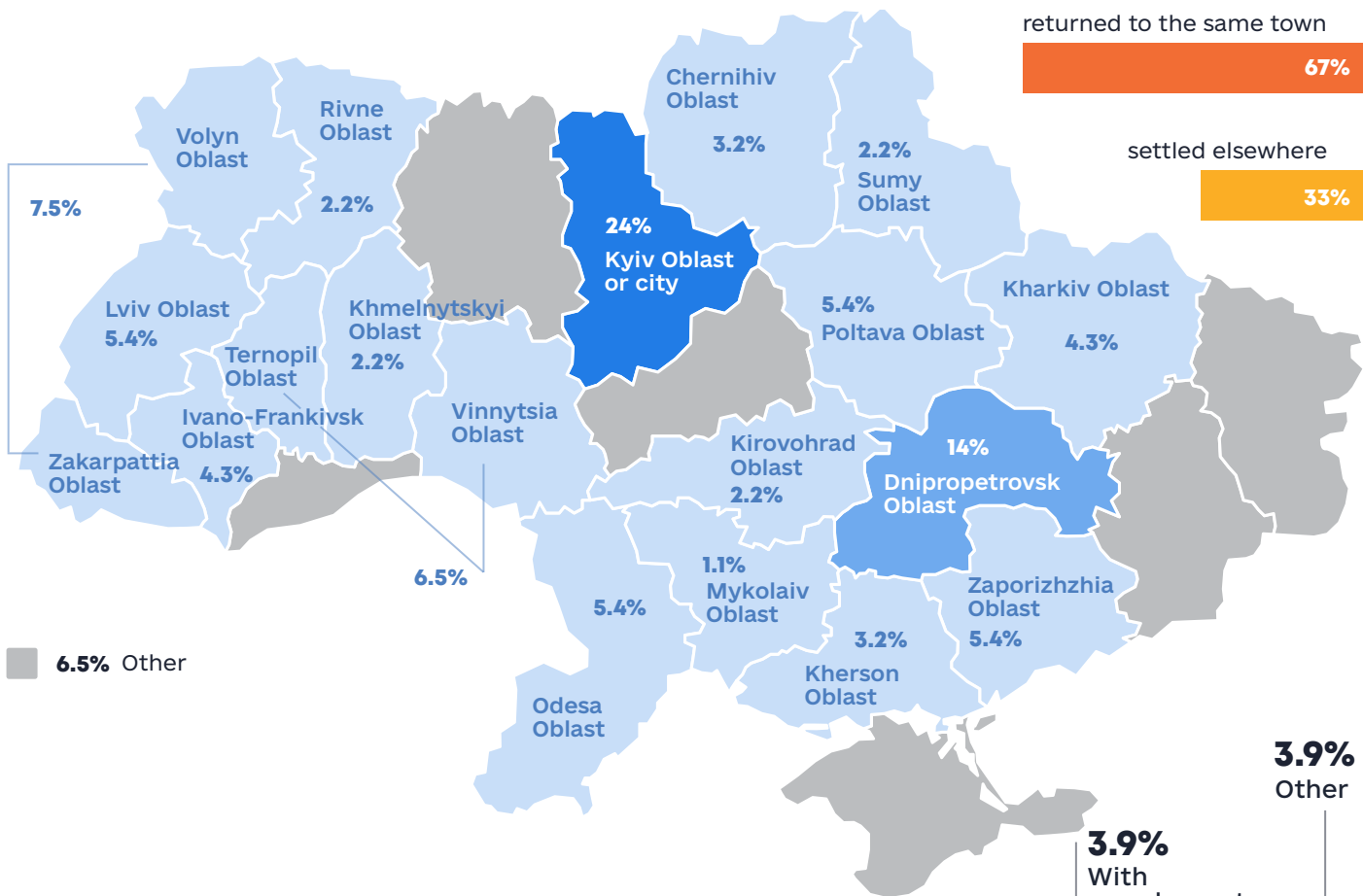|	
Unfinished secondary school education	2%
Completed secondary school education	9%
Vocational education/training	21%
Bachelor's degree	25%
Master's degree or higher	43%

Returnees are a highly educated group, with 70% holding a Bachelor's degree or higher, yet their economic reintegration is overwhelmingly unstable. Although many are working, nearly 40% report employment below their qualifications. Over 50% cannot cover basic expenses, and financial insecurity is a strong predictor of poor mental well-being in our regression models. Debt accumulated abroad and disrupted career trajectories—common among respondents—further undermine stability. Regional disparities intensify 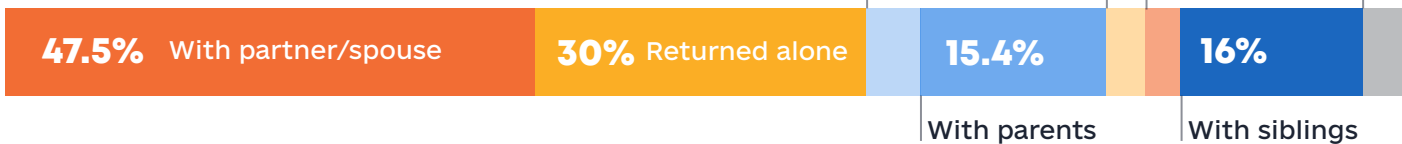these challenges: returnees from Luhansk, Donetsk, Kherson and Zaporizhzhia are far less likely to work in their home regions due to occupation or destruction, leaving them displaced in areas with saturated labour markets. Recent returnees, who show the lowest well-being scores (59% in low well-being on SWEMWBS), also report the highest employment instability. Interviews highlight a widespread sense of downward mobility, with skilled professionals taking survival jobs. This erosion of economic security contributes directly to heightened anxiety, weak plans to stay, and increased contemplation of re-migration.

Mobility Dimension*

The map shows the newly specified region of return

returned to the same town 67%

settled elsewhere 33%

Volyn Oblast 7.5%
Rivne Oblast 2.2%
Chernihiv Oblast 3.2%
Sumy Oblast 2.2%
Kyiv Oblast or city 24%
Lviv Oblast 5.4%
Khmelnytskyi Oblast 2.2%
Ternopil Oblast
Ivano-Frankivsk Oblast 4.3%
Zakarpattia Oblast
6.5%
Vinnytsia Oblast
Poltava Oblast 5.4%
Kharkiv Oblast 4.3%
Kirovohrad Oblast 2.2%
Dnipropetrovsk Oblast 14%
Mykolaiv Oblast 1.1%
Zaporizhzhia Oblast 5.4%
Odesa Oblast 5.4%
Kherson Oblast 3.2%

6.5% Other

Who Returned Together?

| 47.5% With partner/spouse | 30% Returned alone | 4.3% With grandchildren | 15.4% With parents | 3.9% With grandparents | 3.6% With children | 16% With siblings | 3.9% Other |

Survey data confirm regional inequalities that shape the stability of return. In front-line and occupied oblasts, only 7.1% of respondents from Luhansk, 17.6% from Donetsk, 33.3% from Zaporizhzhia and 40.9% from Kherson were able to return to their home towns, compared to nearly 90% in Kyiv, Dnipropetrovsk and Odesa. This indicates ongoing internal displacement for many from the east and south, who must rely on rental markets or temporary housing in unfamiliar regions. Although respondents from central and western oblasts more often access relatively stable housing, interviews show that missile and drone attacks in previously "safe" areas such as Kyiv, Ternopil, Dnipro and Lviv have eroded confidence. Overall, 57.1% of respondents feel unsafe or very unsafe, and perceived safety is significantly associated with mental well-being on both SWEMWBS and MHC-SF. Combined with high financial insecurity—50.6% cannot cover basic needs, the strongest predictor of poor mental health—these conditions undermine sense of durable return and are closely linked to intentions to re-migrate.

Mobility After Returning*

Yes, I have traveled
to another country (for less than a month)
21.2%

Yes, I have relocated
to another country (for less than 3 months)
2.9%

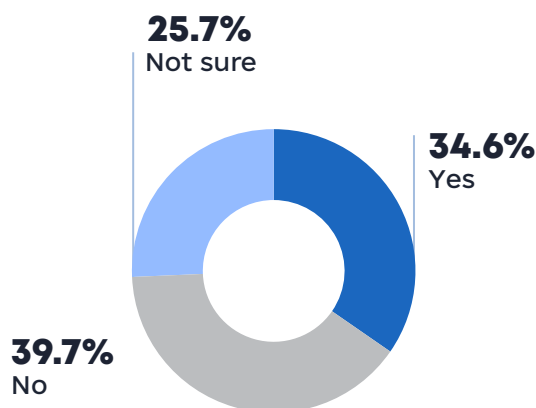Yes, I have relocated
to another country (between 3 to 6 months)
4.0%

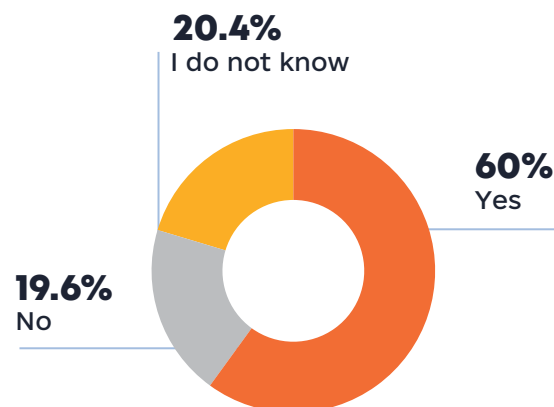No, I have not traveled or
relocated to another country
63.7%

I am planning to travel or relocate soon
8%

Are you considering moving back abroad?

25.7% Not sure

34.6% Yes

39.7% No

Did you close your Temporary Protection?

20.4% I do not know
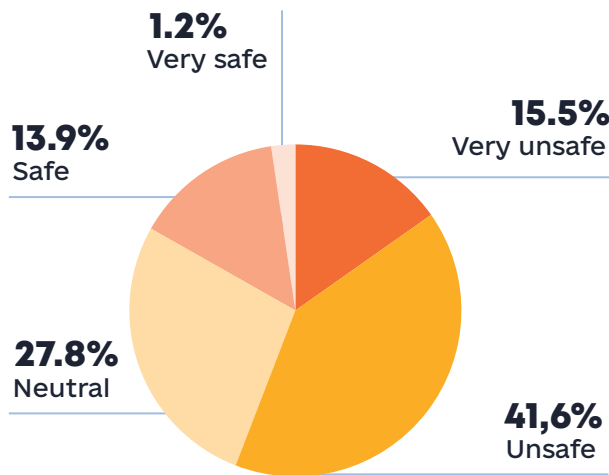
60% Yes

19.6% No

An unexpected finding in this study is that post-return mobility appears to be associated with better well-being. Moving again after return is typically interpreted as a sign of instability, yet the data show that returnees who travelled abroad after coming back to Ukraine report lower rates of distress: only 29.3% of mobile returnees fall into low well-being on the SWEMWBS, compared with 44.9% among those who did not move. A similar pattern—statistically significant in this case—emerges on the MHC-SF, w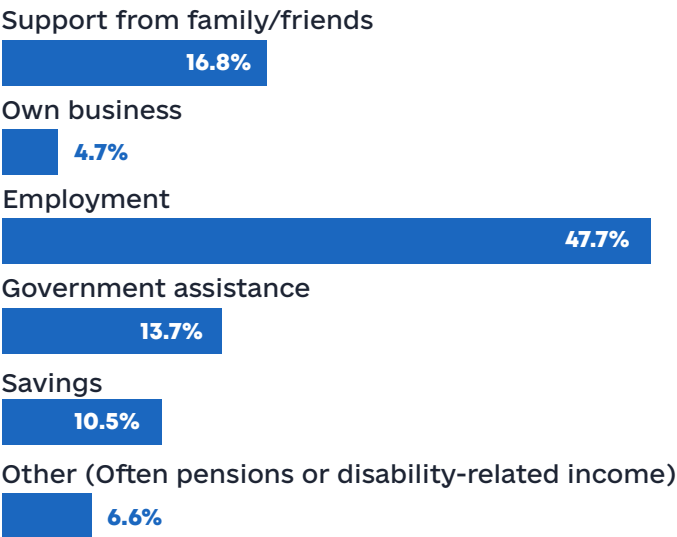here 17.9% of mobile respondents are languishing, compared with 36.5% of those who stayed put. Mobility thus signals agency, access to resources, and sustained transnational networks. Recent returnees—those back within the past three months—show the poorest well-being on SWEMWBS (59% low well-being) and among the highest rates of languishing on MHC-SF (40%). Interviews suggest these outcomes stem from returning under conditions of incomplete, contradictory, or absent information. Many felt unprepared for realities on the ground and unsure where to turn for support.

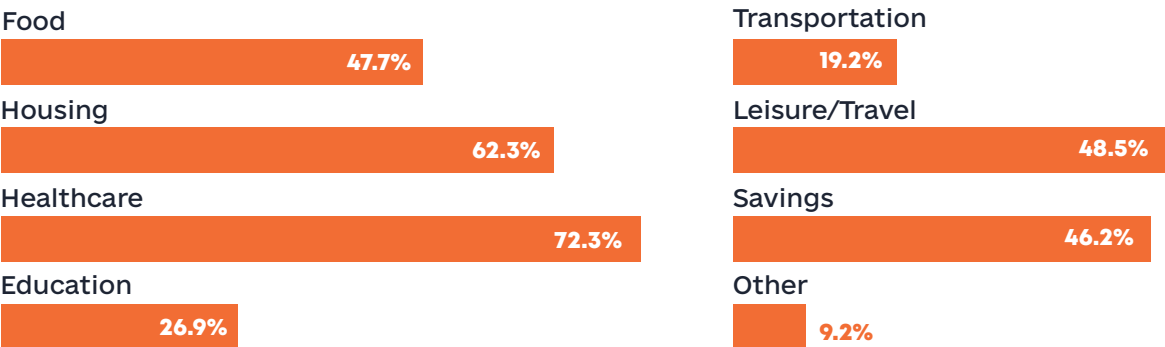# Daily Realities: Safety, Financial Security & Income

How Safe Do Returnees Feel?

1.2% Very safe
13.9% Safe
27.8% Neutral
15.5% Very unsafe
41,6% Unsafe

Primary Source of Income

Support from family/friends
16.8%

Own business
4.7%

Employment
47.7%

Government assistance
13.7%

Savings
10.5%

Other (Often pensions or disability-related income)
6.6%

What Do They Lack Resources For?

Food
47.7%

Housing
62.3%

Healthcare
72.3%

Education
26.9%

Transportation
19.2%

Leisure/Travel
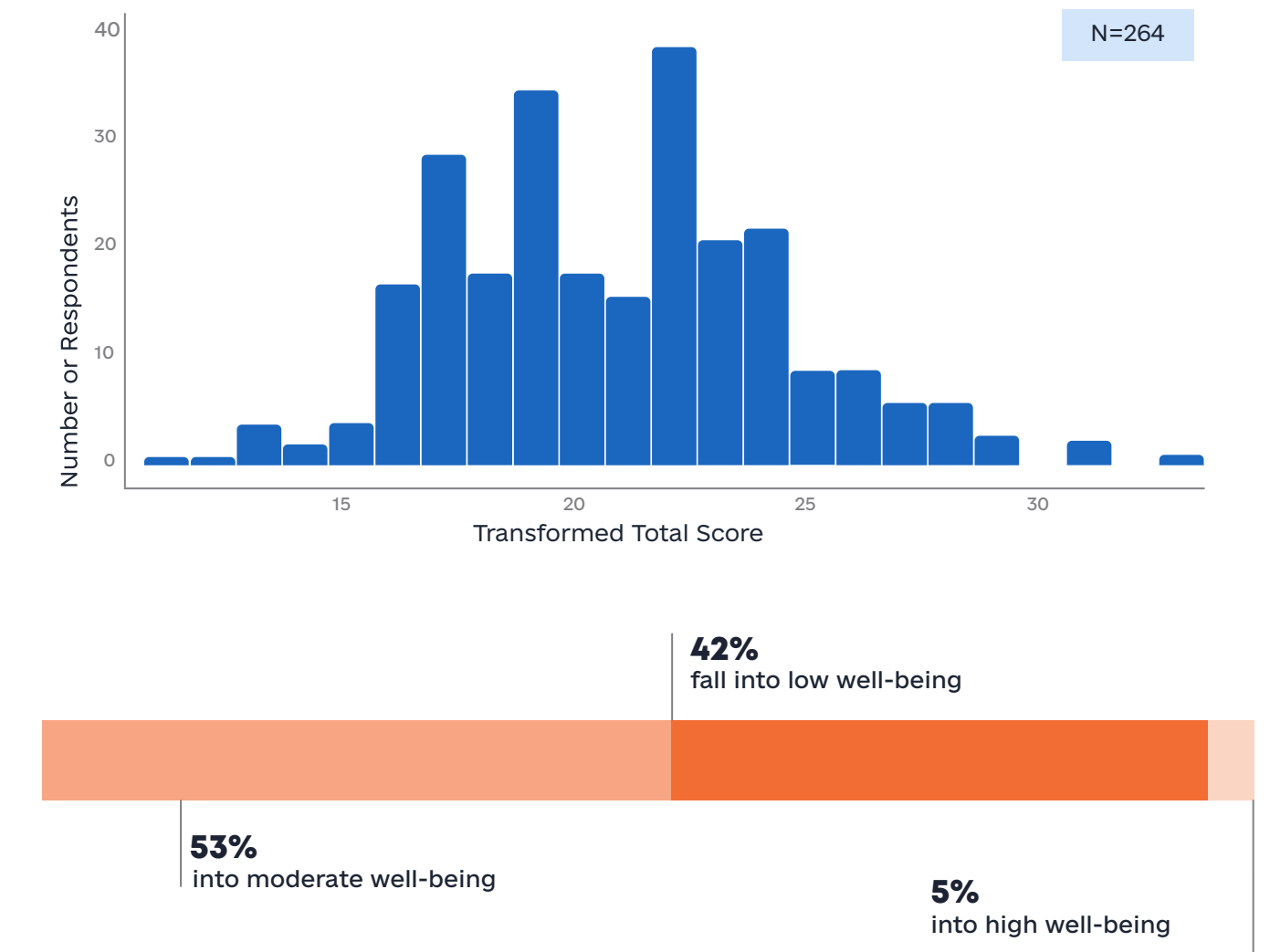48.5%

Savings
46.2%

Other
9.2%

Returnees face precarious living conditions shaped by insecurity, financial strain and limited institutional support. Safety is a major concern: 55.7% of respondents feel unsafe or very unsafe in their current environment, while only 16.8% feel safe. Both the SWEMWBS and MHC-SF show statistically significant associations between feeling unsafe and having lower mental well-being. Financial insecurity compounds this vulnerability. 50.6% of returnees do not have enough money to cover daily basic needs, and multivariate models identify financial security as the strongest predictor of mental health across both well-being scales (aOR = 0.31 for SWEMWBS; aOR = 0.22 for MHC-SF). Even among those who are employed, many rely on unstable, low-paid or informal work. Among respondents who reported not having enough money to cover basic needs, the following expenses were most difficult to afford: healthcare (72.3%), housing (62.3%), leisure or travel (48.5%), food (47.7%), savings (46.2%), education (26.9%), transportation (19.2%), and other costs (9.2%).

Well-Being

Everyday mental well-being after return (SWEMWBS)

N=264

Number or Respondents (y-axis, values 0, 10, 20, 30, 40)

Transformed Total Score (x-axis, values 15, 20, 25, 30)

42%
fall into low well-being

53%
into moderate well-being
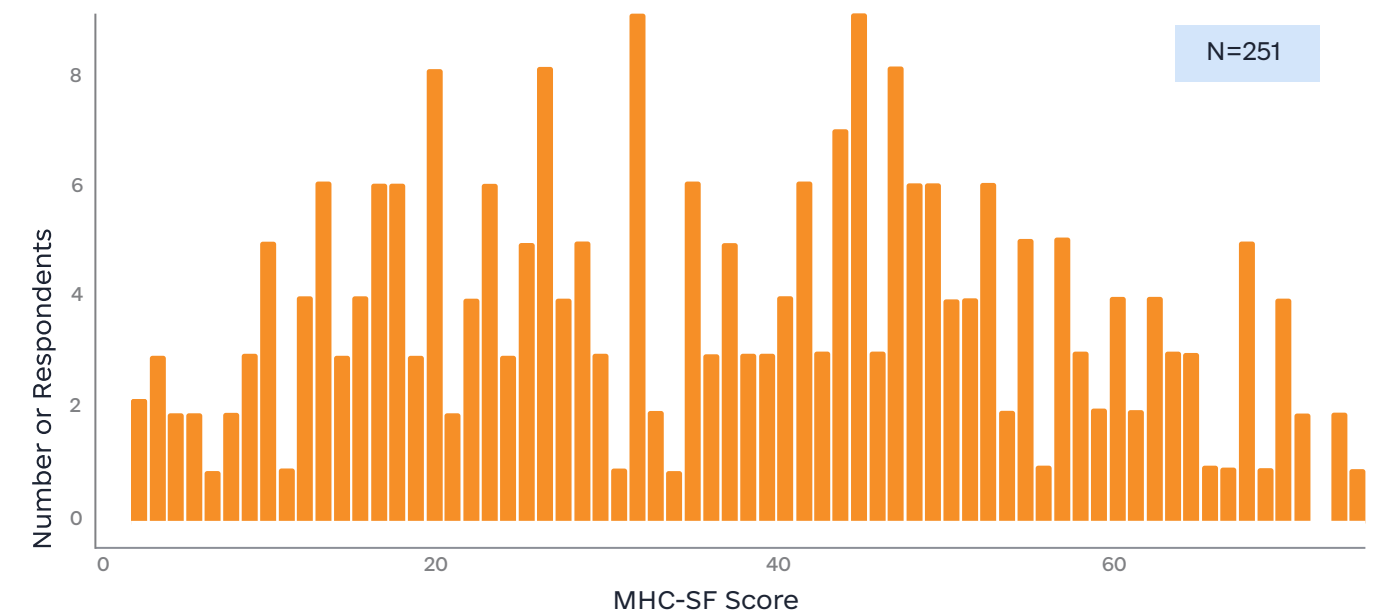
5%
into high well-being

This study used the Short Warwick–Edinburgh Mental Well-Being Scale (SWEMWBS) to capture how returnees feel and function in daily life. The scale includes seven statements, such as "I've been feeling relaxed" and "I've been dealing with problems well", each rated from 1 (none of the time) to 5 (all of the time). Among 324 eligible respondents, 264 completed this scale. Overall, scores show a picture of people who are coping but under strain. The average total score sits in the middle range (mean raw score 22.5, sd=4.9; mean transformed score 20.8, sd=3.8). Looking at the seven items separately, a clear pattern emerges. Returnees feel most confident about their own judgment and problem-solving. The highest scores are for: "I've been able to make up my own mind about things" (mean 4.17), "I've been thinking clearly" (mean 3.88), "I've been dealing with problems well" (mean 3.36). Scores are lowest for calm and optimism: "I've been feeling relaxed" (mean 2.28), "I've been feeling optimistic about the future" (mean 2.41). In short, many returnees function and take decisions, but they do so with little relaxation and limited optimism about what comes next.

(Technical note: the scale showed good reliability in this sample, Cronbach's α = 0.78.)

Well-Being

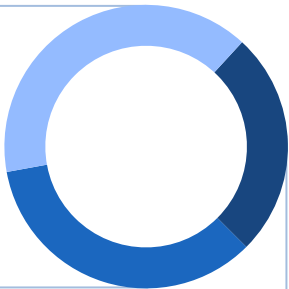## How Returnees Are Coping Emotionally, Socially, and Psychologically

While SWEMWBS captures how people feel and function day to day, the Mental Health Continuum–Short Form (MHC-SF) helps us understand whether returnees are flourishing, languishing, or somewhere in between across emotional, social and psychological life.

In our sample, 251 returnees completed the MHC-SF. Their scores show a population pulled in three directions. About one in three (33.5%) are languishing – rarely feeling happy, connected, or hopeful about the future. About one in three (37.5%) are moderately mentally healthy – neither doing very badly nor very well. Just under one in three (29.0%) are flourishing – they report frequent positive emotions, good functioning, and a sense of meaning. The total average score is 33.58 (sd=16.85), but the real story appears when we break the scale into its three dimensions. Emotional well-being –

happiness and life satisfaction – is modest: mean 7.2 (outof 15). Returnees are more often "interested in life"with life (mean 2.04). Curiosity and engagement survive, even when joy is scarce. Social well-being – feeling part of a community and trusting society – is the weakest area: mean 9.7 (out of 25). Scores are particularly low for items such as "Our society is becoming a better place for people like me" (mean 1.41) and "The way our society works makes sense to me" (mean 1.67). Many returnees live with a deep sense of social mistrust and disconnection, even when they manage at the individual level. Psychological well-being – self-acceptance, growth, direction – is relatively stronger: mean 16.8 (out of 30). Many feel they can manage everyday responsibilities (mean 3.4   5), are at least somewhat confident expressing their ideas (mean 2.86), and say their life still has some sense of direction or meaning (mean 2.87).

Interpretation of well-being levels

Who Is Struggling Most?

Education, employment, safety and money as fault-lines of well-being

When we look at scores on both well-being scales (SWEMWBS and MHC-SF), one pattern is unmistakable: material and structural conditions shape mental health more than individual traits. Age and gender make much less difference than we might expect. The average age of those with low well-being (44.4 years) is almost identical to those with moderate or high well-being (43.0 years). Men and women show similar proportions of low vs. moderate/high well-being in both scales. In other words: distress is not confined to a narrow demographic slice; it is widespread. Where the data do diverge sharply is along four lines:

1. Education
- Among those with master's degree or higher, 35% fall into the low well-being group (SWEMWBS).
- Among those with only secondary education, nearly 59% are in low well-being.

This gradient is even clearer for flourishing vs. languishing on the MHC-SF: 22% of those with a master's degree are languishing, compared to 48% among those with only secondary education.

Interpretation: Higher education appears to buffer against the worst mental health outcomes – likely through better access to jobs, networks, and information – but it does not guarantee good well-being. A substantial minority of highly educated respondents are still struggling.

2. Employment status
- On SWEMWBS, only about one-third (33.5%) of employed respondents fall into low well-being, compared with 57.4% of those unemployed.
- On the MHC-SF, 52.2% of unemployed respondents are languishing, versus 23.0% among those with a job.

Interpretation: Employment provides structure, social contact, and a sense of competence. Losing that anchor is strongly associated with slipping into low or languishing well-being.

3. Financial security
- Among those who do not have enough money for basic needs, 58.9% are in low well-being (SWEM-WBS); among those who do, that drops to 25.6%.
- On the MHC-SF, more than half (51.6%) of financially insecure respondents are languishing, compared with just 14.0% among those who can cover basic needs.

Interpretation: The inability to cover essentials like food, housing, and medicine is strongly linked to low mental well-being.

4. Perceived safety
- Among people who feel unsafe or very unsafe, almost half (47.9%) are in low well-being (SWEM-WBS). For those who feel safe or very safe, that drops to 32.4%.
- On the MHC-SF, 37.9% of those feeling unsafe are languishing, compared with only 18.9% among those who feel safe.

Interpretation: Feeling physically unsafe – because of shelling, alarms, or local conditions – doubles the likelihood of languishing mental health for some respondents. Taken together, the bivariate results tell a clear story: Well-being is structurally undermined where education is lower, jobs are unstable, money is not enough, and safety is fragile.

5. Absence of Support Systems
Most returnees navigate the challenges of return almost entirely on their own. Nearly 70% received no formal support after coming back to Ukraine — no financial, medical, housing, or psychological assistance. Another 76% did not know that any support for returnees even exists in their city or region.

Interpretation: Lack of institutional support leaves people dependent on savings, family networks, or NGOs. This amplifies the effects of unemployment, financial insecurity, and safety concerns. While support does not show a strong statistical relationship with well-being (likely due to low uptake), qualitative interviews suggest that its absence contributes to confusion, stress, and feelings of abandonment.

6. Overlapping Risks: How Multiple Stressors Compound Distress
Although each factor — low income, unemployment, unsafe environment, recent return, or displacement from frontline regions — harms well-being on its own, many respondents experience several simultaneously.
A person who returned recently, cannot cover basic needs, feels unsafe, and is uncertain about staying has a dramatically higher likelihood of low or languishing mental health.

Interpretation: This cumulative burden helps explain why moderate or high well-being remains achievable for some, while others face steep declines. It reflects a broader pattern seen in conflict and post-displacement research: the more domains of life that are unstable, the harder recovery becomes. This reinforces the need for integrated support — economic, psychological, and informational — rather than solutions addressing one issue at a time.

Place, Mobility and Time

How Context Shapes Well-Being

Well-being is not only about who you are, but also where you come from, when you returned, and whether you are still on the move.

1. Region of origin: frontlines vs. safer regions

Mental health outcomes vary by pre-war region, especially on the MHC-SF:

- Respondents from Donetsk and Kherson show some of the highest shares of languishing mental health (up to 64% in Donetsk; 53% in Kherson).

- Regions like Zaporizhzhia and Odesa show lower proportions of languishing respondents (around 25–29%).

- Kyiv City/Oblast and Dnipropetrovsk sit somewhere in between.

At the same time, region is deeply tied to patterns of return:

- In Luhansk, only 7% returned to the same town; 93% had to settle elsewhere.

- In Donetsk and Kherson, large majorities also could not go back to their original town.

- In contrast, around 88–90% of people from Kyiv and Odesa returned to the same town.

Interpretation: Returnees from heavily affected frontline regions are less likely to go "home" in a literal sense and more likely to report languishing mental health. Displacement, destruction of housing, and ongoing insecurity in these areas likely compound distress.

2. Time since return: the first months are hardest

Using the SWEMWBS:
- Among those who returned within the last 3 months, 59% are in low well-being.
- Among those who returned more than a year ago, that share drops to 36.5%.

This trend is statistically significant in the bivariate analysis: the longer people have been back, the slightly lower the proportion with low well-being. Interestingly, this pattern is not significant for languishing mental health on the MHC-SF. Emotional recovery appears to be slow and partial: some aspects of well-being improve with time, but deep languishing remains.

Interpretation: Short-term returnees face acute stress: navigating bureaucracy, unstable housing, employment gaps, and the emotional shock of "reverse displacement." Over time, some stabilize—but not everyone moves out of languishing.

3. Mobility after return: a surprising protective signal

Contrary to much of the refugee literature, mobility after return in this sample sometimes correlates with better well-being:
- For SWEMWBS, the proportion with low well-being is lower among those who have travelled abroad after returning (29.3%) than among those who stayed put (44.9%).
- On the MHC-SF, those who travelled abroad show a notably lower share of languishing (17.9%) compared with those who never travelled (36.5%).

Interpretation: Rather than signaling instability, mobility here may indicate greater resources and agency: the ability to cross borders, maintain networks, and adjust one's location in response to opportunities or safety concerns. In the Ukrainian context, moving back and forth can be a survival strategy rather than a marker of chaos.

4. Temporary Protection and the "in-between"

Temporary Protection status is closely linked to recency of return and mobility:
- Among those who returned within the last 3 months, 57.5% are still covered by Temporary Protection, versus only 12.9% among those who returned over a year ago.
- Those who have relocated abroad again since returning, and those planning to leave, are also more likely to retain Temporary Protection.
- People considering moving back to their previous host country are far more likely to still be under Temporary Protection than those who are not considering it.

Interpretation: A substantial subgroup of returnees live in an "in-between" legal state: physically in Ukraine but still administratively anchored in EU systems. This legal and psychological limbo is reflected in their unsettled intentions and, in some cases, lower well-being.

Regression Insights

What Protects Well-Being?

Regression models and what they tell us about returnees' lives

The bivariate analyses show many factors linked to low mental well-being. But which set of factors best predicts mental well-being in our sample of Ukrainian returnees? To answer this, we ran logistic and linear regression models using both well-being scales (SWEMWBS and MHC-SF). These models estimate how strongly each factor is associated with low or languishing well-being, after adjusting for other variables. Three findings stand out.

1. Financial security: the single strongest predictor
Across both scales and in both logistic and linear models, having enough money to cover basic needs is the most consistent and powerful predictor:

- Logistic models:
- SWEMWBS: respondents with enough money have about 69% lower odds of low well-being (aOR ≈ 0.31).
- MHC-SF: they have about 78–79% lower odds of languishing (aOR ≈ 0.22).

- Linear models:
- SWEMWBS: financial security is associated with a +2.06 point increase in the transformed score.
- MHC-SF: it adds +8.23 points on the total scale.

Interpretation: Regardless of age, time since return, or other conditions, being able to cover food, housing, and basic needs is the most crucial buffer against poor mental health. This fits what we know from Conservation of Resources theory: when basic material resources are missing or under threat, psychological well-being collapses.

2. Employment and "anchoring" in place
Employment and settlement intentions also emerge as important.

- Employment:
- In the MHC-SF logistic model, being employed reduces the odds of languishing by more than half (aOR ≈ 0.44).
- In the linear models, employment adds +1.41 points on SWEMWBS and +5.33 points on the MHC-SF total score.

- Plans to stay long-term:
- In the MHC-SF logistic model, people who plan to stay in their current location have substantially lower odds of languishing (aOR ≈ 0.38).
- In the linear model, plans to stay are associated with +8.00 points on the MHC-SF total score.

Interpretation: Having a job and having a place you plan to remain are two forms of "anchoring". They provide structure, predictability, and social ties. Even in a war-affected country, simply being able to say "I plan to stay here" and "I have work" is a strong protective factor for mental health.

3. Ambivalence about going back abroad: a red flag
The models also point to a more subtle risk factor: considering moving back to the previous country of residence.

- In the SWEMWBS linear model, those who are considering moving back score 1.43 points lower than those who are not, even after adjustments.
- In the SWEMWBS logistic model, the odds of low well-being are almost doubled for this group (aOR ≈ 1.86), though this is borderline significant.

Interpretation: This does not mean that wanting to re-migrate is unhealthy in itself. Instead, it signals unresolved instability: dissatisfaction with current life, uncertainty about where to belong, and often ongoing legal or financial entanglements abroad. Ambivalence about staying vs. leaving appears strongly tied to poorer well-being.

What the models do not show:

Importantly, some factors that were significant in simple comparisons drop out of the final multivariate models: Gender, caregiving status, and time since return do not remain strong independent predictors once money, employment, and settlement intentions are accounted for. Education remains important in bivariate analysis but is partly mediated through employment and financial security. The models explain a modest but meaningful share of variability in well-being (McFadden's pseudo R^2 ≈ 0.14–0.18). This is typical in real-world mental health research and reminds us that many unmeasured factors—personal history, trauma exposure, social support, personality—also matter.

In one sentence

Returnees who can cover basic needs, hold a job, and feel anchored in a place they plan to stay are less likely to be in low or languishing mental health — even amid ongoing war.

Methodology

The study employs a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative research to capture the full complexity of return migration during active conflict.

A large-scale survey of 340 respondents (324 eligible returnees) assessed economic stability, labour participation, housing, access to services, mobility, social reintegration, and mental well-being. The survey reached returnees across all regions of Ukraine — including frontline oblasts — offering rare national coverage during active conflict. It included validated measurement tools, notably the Short Warwick–Edinburgh Mental Well-Being Scale (SWEMWBS) and the Mental Health Continuum–Short Form (MHC-SF), enabling robust assessment of emotional, psychological and social well-being. Data were collected through Upinion's secure, GDPR-compliant platform and anonymised after analysis. In-depth qualitative interviews captured personal motivations for return, caregiving pressures, cross-border mobility, coping strategies, interactions with institutions, and long-term aspirations. Interviews were recorded, transcribed, coded and stored in protected environments, with emerging themes informing subsequent interview rounds. A targeted psychological well-being assessment explored how uncertainty, conflict exposure, financial strain and reintegration conditions shape stress and resilience. This component directly addresses the study's core objective: understanding the mental health of Ukrainians returning under wartime conditions.

Why a Mixed-Methods Approach?

1. Breadth: The survey provides wide coverage across all Ukrainian regions, including frontline areas. It identifies structural patterns — who returns, under what conditions, and how livelihood, safety, and financial stability vary across groups.

2. Depth: Qualitative interviews reveal the personal stories behind the numbers — why people return, how they navigate uncertainty, which supports they rely on, and what psychological and emotional challenges they face.

3. Triangulation: In active conflict, conditions change rapidly. By combining multiple data sources, the study cross-checks findings and reduces bias. Survey evidence, interview insights, and media/contextual analysis reinforce one another, producing more reliable and actionable conclusions.

Together, these methods provide a fuller picture of return during war — one grounded both in measurable trends and in real human experience.

The Authors of the Study

OPORA Foundation

OPORA Foundation – a Dutch non-profit organization based in Amsterdam, dedicated to researching and addressing challenges related to migration. OPORA is the author and lead initiator of the research Navigating Return: Understanding the Challenges and Well-Being of Ukrainians Coming Home Amid Conflict.

Laguna Collective

Laguna Collective is a platform organisation where international experts collaborate to advance knowledge and skills in humanitarian psychosocial aid. Within the Navigating Return project, Laguna Collective conducted desk research on the well-being of returnees, led the development of survey measurements on well-being, took part in data analysis, and provided expert consultation on the findings. The team also contributed to the preparation of research outputs.

Upinion

Upinion specialises in digital, two-way engagement with communities in hard-to-reach areas, enabling real-time insight gathering through its secure platform. In Navigating Return, Upinion hosted the survey environment, ensured data protection during data collection, and was responsible for analysing the quantitative dataset, supporting the interpretation of return patterns and post-return conditions.

Note: sections marked with an asterisk (*) refer to the full sample of 340 respondents. In subsequent parts of the analysis, 16 respondents were excluded based on answers indicating that they did not meet the criteria to be considered part of the source population.

Research results "Navigating Return: Understanding the Challenges and Well-Being of Ukrainians Coming Home Amid Conflict"

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