

Regional Distribution, Mobility and Housing of Ukrainian Refugees in Germany

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Russia's attack on Ukraine, starting in late February 2022, led to one of the largest refugee movements within Europe since the mid-20th century. For the majority of Ukrainian refugees arriving in Germany, Berlin and other major cities such as Frankfurt, Hamburg and Hanover were the first ports of call. Especially in the first months after the beginning of the war, Ukrainian refugees – in contrast to other groups of refugees – were hardly affected by residence restrictions and governmental allocations.

Given this fact, the first part of our talk outlines the legal framework regarding residence and housing. Then, on the basis of aggregated data from the Central Register of Foreigners (AZR – Ausländerzentralregister), the regional distribution of Ukrainian refugees in Germany is examined at the level of independent cities and counties (NUTS-3 level), and explanatory approaches to the spatial patterns that have emerged are discussed. In detail, we consider the proportion of previous Ukrainian migrants living within those regions as well as economic, demographic, and geographical factors. The results show that, on the one hand, the governmental distribution system plays a negligible role for the observed spatial pattern of refugees. On the other hand, there is a strong positive correlation between the regional distribution and places of residence of Ukrainian nationals who already lived in Germany before the beginning of the war. Furthermore, affordable housing and lower rents are important explanatory variables.

In the second part of our talk, the mobility and housing situation of Ukrainian refugees is presented on the basis of individual data from the IAB-BiB/FReDA-BAMF-SOEP survey "Refugees from Ukraine in Germany". In a first step, the first survey wave is used to describe the housing situation of Ukrainian refugees who arrived in Germany between February 24, 2022 and June 8, 2022. Subsequently, the second wave of the survey will be used to examine how the housing situation of the refugees has developed. In this context, it will be shown how often they have changed their place of residence, what distinguishes mobile from immobile refugees, and how Ukrainian refugees currently live. The study also examines which characteristics are associated with the transition to private accommodation. Preliminary results suggest that one fifth of the refugees changed their place of residence within Germany between late summer 2022 and early 2023, mostly within the same city or municipality. From that, one half of the mobile refugees stated that they moved because they found more suitable accommodations. In contrast, official assignments play, again, a rather subordinate role (most likely to be significant for people without social networks). The type of accommodation occupied (shared or private) seems to depend in particular on whether social networks were already available upon arrival: People who chose Germany as destination country for their flight, because they already had family members or friends living here, are significantly more likely to live in private accommodation. Besides, they have more living space available. In conclusion, our results indicate a large influence of pre-existing ethnic networks on the regional distribution and housing situation of Ukrainian refugees in Germany. The further development of these spatial patterns must be kept in mind when considering short-term regional burdens as well as long-term integration effects.