

## ISSUE BRIEF

# Ukraine's Internally Displaced Persons Hold a Key to Peace

OCTOBER 2017

LAUREN VAN METRE, STEVEN E. STEINER,  
AND MELINDA HARING

**A**s Ukraine nears the end of the fourth year of conflict, the national government, local governments, and international community must begin to take Ukraine's large internally displaced persons (IDP) population more seriously. Ukraine's almost 1.7 million displaced persons can be a powerful constituency for peace. They are contributing to local economies, advocating for each other, and supporting local reconciliation efforts; many are building bridges between east and west; and some are advancing the peace process through their activism. One-third of the IDPs plan to integrate into local communities rather than return.<sup>1</sup> As a result, Ukraine has developed a unique model of local support and integration in the midst of conflict.<sup>2</sup>

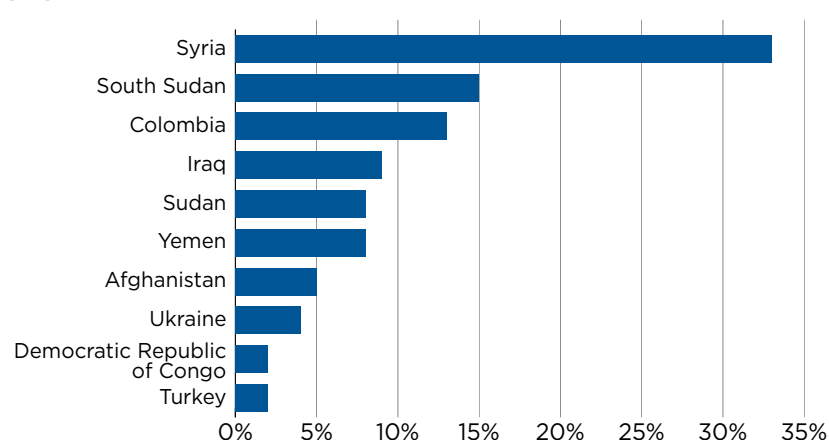
This paper examines Ukraine's IDP policies in the context of the larger crisis between Moscow and Kyiv, and is based in part on extensive field work with displaced persons who have settled in Kyiv and Vinnytsia. We argue that Ukraine's displaced persons can and should play a role in a sustained peace process, and many are already building bridges and fostering local reconciliation. Their successful integration into local communities, while still preserving their right to return, strengthens the legitimacy of local governance, creates respect for national government, reduces socially and economically dependent populations, and creates constituencies for peace and democracy. Empowering Ukraine's displaced persons also contributes to the country's democratic development, social cohesion, and reconciliation, thereby undermining Russian President Vladimir Putin's strategy for regional destabilization.

In the initial phase of the conflict, the government passed several legislative acts to both provide targeted assistance for six months to internally displaced persons and enable IDPs to register to receive social and administrative services in their place of resettlement.

The Dinu Patriciu Eurasia Center's mission is to enhance transatlantic cooperation in promoting stability, democratic values and prosperity in Eurasia, from Eastern Europe and Turkey in the West to the Caucasus, Russia, and Central Asia in the East.

- 1 World Bank, "Ukraine: Survey of the Socio-Economic Impact of the Movement of Citizens and the Return of ATO Participants," March 2017, <https://www.ostro.info/news/1970/>, found that 34 percent of Ukraine's 1.7 million IDPs do not plan to return.
- 2 Elizabeth Ferris, Suleiman Mamutov, Kateryna Moroz, and Olena Vynogradova, "Off to a Shaky Start: Ukrainian Government Responses to Internally Displaced Persons," Brookings Institution and HIAS, May 2015, <https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Ukrainian-Govt-Responses-to-Internal-Displacement-May-2015.pdf>.

Figure 1. Share of internally displaced people out of population



Source: Spiegel.

However, IDPs have not generally been educated on their access to government support, and there is little transparency and great inequality in the distribution of benefits. The government has not addressed critical issues for IDPs, such as their rights to vote and to compensation.<sup>3</sup> With no infrastructure or process in place to facilitate IDP resettlement, a new breed of civil society organization has stepped in to provide IDPs assistance upon arrival and information on their new communities, and to advocate for local funding and support. Kyiv should be recognized for not forcing policies and funding that pressure IDPs to return and not resettle, as other countries have done. However, its current minimalist approach of letting local governments and civil society organizations handle the crisis is a serious concern in light of the protracted conflict. Kyiv could be model for an enlightened policy on resettlement by engaging local governments on funding and programming for IDPs, starting a national discourse on stereotyping and IDPs, and beginning to catalogue IDPs' loss of property and assets to facilitate their potential return and seek war reparations from Russia. In doing so, Kyiv would be recognized for assisting IDP resettlement, while preserving the right to return. This approach would strengthen social cohesion and Ukraine's democratic development, while undermining Putin's influence in the Donbas.

3 Protection Cluster Ukraine, "Overview on State Assistance for IDPs," January 2016, [http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/protection\\_cluster\\_overview\\_on\\_state\\_assistanceeng.pdf](http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/protection_cluster_overview_on_state_assistanceeng.pdf).

## IDPs in Ukraine (statistics from April 2016)

**52%** in unoccupied parts of Donetsk and Luhansk regions

**1,586,724** registered IDPs

**239,737** children (15%)

**808,153** pensioners (51%)

**58,468** disabled (3.6%)

Source: Ministry of Social Policy

## Overview

Ukraine has the world's ninth largest population of displaced persons, after Colombia, Syria, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Iraq, Nigeria, South Sudan, Sudan, and Yemen.<sup>4</sup> Despite the enormity of the displacement in Ukraine, the crisis has drawn little international attention and humanitarian support. In 2017, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs has received only 11.5 percent, or \$24.6 million, of the \$214.1 million it needs to run its operation in Ukraine. Even worse, donor support has significantly flagged since the conflict began.<sup>5</sup>

Ukraine has nearly 1.6 million officially registered IDPs out of a population of forty-three million.<sup>6</sup> To understand the enormity of that figure, one should remember that Germany, whose population is double that of Ukraine, accepted one million refugees in 2015. Fifteen percent of IDPs are children, 63 percent are women, and 51 percent are pensioners.<sup>7</sup>

4 "Database," Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC), <http://www.internal-displacement.org/database/>.

5 "Ukraine Humanitarian Response Plan 2017," Financial Tracking Service, <https://fts.unocha.org/appeals/531/summary>.

6 Since 2014, Ukraine's Ministry of Social Policy has registered nearly 1.6 million IDPs. This number includes people who are not permanently displaced by the conflict to the government-controlled areas, but forced to register as IDPs since the law links pensions to IDP status. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) estimates that the real figure of those who are permanently displaced is around 0.8-1 million higher.

7 Data from the Ministry of Social Policy, April 2016, and UNHCR, "Ukraine," Fact Sheet, October 2015, <http://www.unhcr.org/en-us/news/updates/2015/10/5614d38e3/ukraine-fact-sheet.html>; "Housing Land and Property Rights of Displaced and Conflict-Af-



IDP in front of her destroyed house in Eastern Ukraine, March 2015. *Photo credit: UNHCR/Y. Gusyev.*

## Current State of Play: Government and Societal Responses

Facing these shortages in international support for the country's large IDP population, the government has struggled to mount a coordinated response. Much of the burden has fallen to local communities and civil society organizations.

The Ukrainian government has passed a number of laws and the Cabinet of Ministers has issued several resolutions that apply to Ukraine's displaced persons, but the approach has been piecemeal. There is little appetite to do anything more, a sentiment that former Prime Minister Arseniy Yatsenyuk captured well when he said in 2016, "The situation is more or less under control."<sup>8</sup>

---

ected Communities in Eastern Ukraine," Norwegian Refugee Council, January 2016, <https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/operations/ukraine/document/housing-land-and-property-rights-displaced-and-conflict-affected>.

8 Melinda Haring, "Worried about Brexit? No, Scared, Says Ukraine's Former Prime Minister Arseniy Yatsenyuk," *UkraineAlert*, June 30, 2016, <http://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/ukrainealert/worried-about-brex-it-no-scared-says-ukraine-s-former-prime-minister-arseniy-yatsenyuk>.

In April 2016, the government set up a ministry dedicated to IDPs, but it has a weak mandate and lacks necessary enforcement mechanisms. It is understaffed and frequently bypassed by other line ministries, notably the Ministry of Social Policy.

The government's response to the crisis has been "largely inadequate," according to Aleksandr Galkin, director of the Ukrainian nongovernmental organization (NGO) Right to Protection.<sup>9</sup> The government does not have sufficient resources or the political will.

"There is no national strategy in Ukraine as far as IDPs are concerned," said Dr. Hryhoriy Nemyria, a member of parliament and chair of Ukraine's parliamentary Human Rights Committee. "Yes, there are policies . . . but they look like improvisations."<sup>10</sup>

---

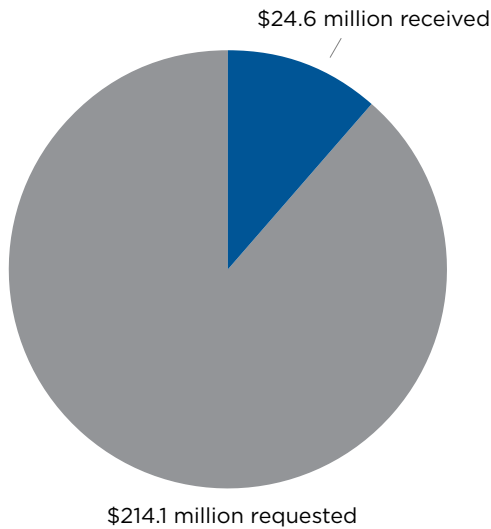
9 Melinda Haring, "Europe's Short Memory and Ukraine's Long Crisis," *Atlantic Council*, June 22, 2016, <http://www.atlanticcouncil.org/component/content/article?id=30971:eu-rope-s-forgotten-crisis>.

10 The overview section has been taken and updated from Haring, "Europe's Short Memory and Ukraine's Long Crisis."

The Ukrainian government had provided social assistance and pensions to some IDPs, but those payments were suspended in February 2016 due to “inconsistencies in legislation,” leaving 350,000 IDPs without pensions.<sup>11</sup>

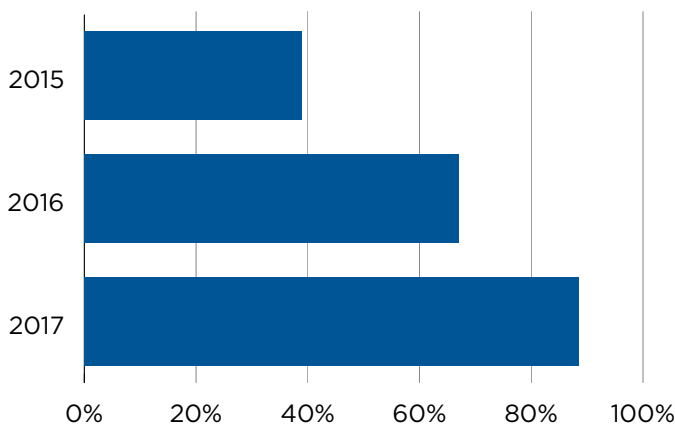
11 “In Ukraine, 350,000 Do Not Receive Pensions – Ministry of Social Policy,” Hromadske, June 17, 2016, <https://hromadske.ua/posts/v-ukraini-350-tys-pereselentsiv-ne-otrymuiut-pensii-min-sotspolityky>.

**Figure 2. The 2017 United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs request for Ukraine funding**



Source: UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.

**Figure 3. Unmet Humanitarian Need in Ukraine**



Source: United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.

Calling it “the most outstanding issue,” Nemyria noted that a lack of access to pensions has a severe impact on the survival of the elderly.<sup>12</sup> Older IDPs suffer not only from denial of their pensions but also from significant employment discrimination stemming from both their status as IDPs and employers not wanting to hire those who might not be in the workplace for long.

There are other unresolved issues. IDPs were not able to vote in the 2016 local elections without losing their status as internally displaced, and therefore their rights to government support.<sup>13</sup> Discrimination is also commonplace; many job advertisements state that people from the Donbas will not be considered, which may stem from a persistent stereotype of persons from the east as “not being sufficiently Ukrainian.”<sup>14</sup>

But despite the government’s shortcomings and lack of international support, a new generation of first-rate NGOs that delivers relief and legal assistance in the Donbas—including Right to Protection, Donbas SOS, Euromaidan SOS, and the Center for Civil Liberties—has formed, including many organizations led by women. A number of local initiatives that have sprung up to support the integration of IDPs across the country show just how resourceful, remarkable, and resilient Ukraine’s displaced persons are.

### Five Ways Ukraine’s IDPs Are Transforming Ukraine

Ukraine’s internally displaced are furthering peace and democratization in five ways: IDPs are contributing to local economies, advocating for each other, and supporting local reconciliation efforts; many are building bridges between eastern and western regions of Ukraine; and some are advancing a peace process through their activism.

### The Agency of Ukraine’s IDPs

In the former Soviet space, Russian intervention in conflicts has produced large displaced and refugee populations. Russia has then benefitted from these

12 Haring, “Europe’s Short Memory and Ukraine’s Long Crisis.”

13 Ukrainian law bases voting rights in local elections on residency. IDPs can vote in a local election in their place of resettlement if they declare residency there; however, they would then lose their status as internally displaced.

14 Eurgenia Andreyuk, *Relationship between Host Communities and Internally Displaced Persons in Ukraine, CrimeaSOS, Monitoring Report, 2015*, <http://krymsos.com/files/5/9/59137aa-----eng.pdf>.



Internally displaced children in Kharkiv, Ukraine, January 2015. *Photo credit: UNICEF Ukraine/Flickr.*

populations feeding destabilization in the region. Yet, governments in the region have also played a role in prolonging ethnic conflicts by isolating IDPs in collective centers and camps. For example, maintaining large displaced groups in the 1990s allowed Georgia and Azerbaijan to preserve territorial positions.

The governments of Georgia and Azerbaijan commanded international attention to the continued suffering of IDPs, which strengthened government territorial claims and demonstrated the persistent need for international humanitarian assistance.<sup>15</sup> As “political footballs,” displaced persons in the South Caucasus developed hardened identities, became dependent upon international and national assistance, thereby drawing criticism from host communities, and nurtured nostalgia for their pre-conflict homes,

which undermined their ability to create a future in relocation.<sup>16</sup>

While the government of Ukraine has largely neglected its IDPs, it has not manipulated their situation for political and international gain. Discussions with IDPs resettled in Kyiv and Vinnytsia showed that many from Crimea and the Donbas had made a choice to leave, and they chose Ukraine, rather than Russia, because they consider themselves Ukrainian and thought it provided a better future for their families. They emphasized that this was not a forced displacement, but a chosen displacement. The idea of choice and the emphasis on agency is critical. Many of these IDPs do not look back; they are already building their new lives. Ukraine’s IDPs are engaged entrepreneurs making vibrant contributions to community economic and political life, as highlighted by the following story.

15 Kenneth Bacon and Maureen Lynch, “Lost in Purgatory: The Plight of Displaced Persons in the Caucasus,” *World Policy Journal* 19, no. 4, 2002.

16 Ibid.; Catherine Brun, “Active Waiting and Changing Hopes: Toward a Time Perspective on Protracted Displacement,” *Social Analysis* 59, no. 1, 2015.



In July 2015, a student smiles at Donetsk National University's first graduation after relocating from eastern to central Ukraine. *Photo credit:* Donetsk National University.

### *From Crimean Tatar to Carpathian Tatar*

Before Russia illegally annexed Crimea in 2014, only twenty Crimean Tatars lived in Lviv. Now more than two thousand live in Lviv oblast. One Crimean Tatar family, Dilyara and Abderrakhman Dzhepparov, moved to the village of Borynia near the Polish border. Dzhepparov had made his living by farming cattle in Crimea. After moving west, he attended business courses organized for IDPs in Lviv and started a small creamery. He buys cow's milk from his neighbors, and his wife boils it and then puts it in a mold for several weeks to make cheese. He sells the cheese at markets and fairs in Lviv, and ships some abroad. Dzhepparov bought a creamery machine to keep up with demand. He is planning to expand and start producing smoked meat. While the Dzhepparova are part of the strict orthodox Sunni Muslim Salafi sect, residents in Lviv oblast have been welcoming. Locals who had never seen Muslims before initially thought Abderrakhman with his long beard was an Orthodox priest. But the Dzhepparov family

likes the area. In 2016, their son Abdalmuin was born in Borynia, and they now call him a Carpathian Tatar.<sup>17</sup>

### **IDPs as Advocates**

Many of the internally displaced fleeing Crimea and the Donbas had been active members of civil society who recognized that the newly installed Russian regimes would crack down on them, and crack down violently. Seeking employment, housing, education, and a voice in their new communities, they are advocates for transparency and good governance. Representing IDP interests, they engage and help create local civil society. Their displacement has coincided with a significant political reform process in Ukraine—the devolution of political power to local authorities, including control over local revenue and budgets. This has allowed IDPs to leverage political power locally at a time when local officials hold increasing authority and funds. The story

<sup>17</sup> Anastasia Vlasova, "Crimean Tatars Find New Home in Lviv Oblast," *Kyiv Post*, December 16, 2016, <https://www.kyivpost.com/ukraine-politics/crimean-tatars-find-new-home-lviv-oblast.html>.

below shows how IDPs have made an impact locally, improving their access to local funding.

### *The Voices of Seven Women*

More than 14,400 IDPs live in Vinnytsia oblast in central Ukraine. With funding from a small grant from the US Institute of Peace (USIP), the Ukrainian Women's Fund brought to life in a play the stories of seven women displaced by the conflict and now living in Vinnytsia and its surrounding towns. Local civic activists, deputies, journalists, businessmen, and other opinion leaders, including Member of Parliament Mustafa Nayyem, performed the play in five communities in Vinnytsia oblast and more than 250 people attended. The play's effect has been powerful: after the show in Khmilnyk, the city council there increased the city budget for IDPs.

### **IDPs and Local Reconciliation**

False perceptions of people from eastern Ukraine are one of the greatest obstacles to local integration. IDPs have recounted stories of local discrimination—discrimination that has denied them housing and employment by casting them as Russian supporters, sympathetic to populations in the east and Crimea who voted to separate from Ukraine. IDP dependency on government assistance also fuels the animosity of locals who themselves are experiencing significant economic dislocations from price adjustments. In discussions, IDPs from the Donbas and Crimea emphasized their loyalty to Ukraine and their stake in its future in Europe; a significant portion of IDPs do not plan to return to the east or Crimea for ideological reasons.<sup>18</sup> They express their determination to engage their new compatriots in efforts to reconcile locally, as seen in the approach below.

### *Keep Your Balance*

In Severodonetsk, a catamaran is changing attitudes. Nearly two hundred people gathered on Park Lake every weekend for two months in the summer of 2016 to learn how to sail. Paddling a catamaran is not easy; it requires a team working together in concert. If one member does not paddle at the right moment, the boat will not move forward. The participants, 71 IDPs and 120 local residents, learned how to work together

without a thought to their differences. The unique project, funded by a small grant from USIP, caught the attention of the local media and politicians. Olga Lyshyk, deputy governor of Luhansk oblast, was on the water with the participants. The IDPs and locals who were originally involved, plus new people, still meet on a regular basis.

### **IDPs as Bridges between East and West**

Ukraine's internally displaced maintain strong, regular contact with family and friends who remain in occupied territory through social media, phone calls, and, in the case of the Donbas, arduous visits across heavily guarded checkpoints. Those IDPs who have settled in the unoccupied areas of Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts, and who prefer to eventually return rather than integrate, keep in close contact with family who stayed behind to monitor conditions (usually the older generation chooses to remain in occupied territory, while younger couples with children in school choose displacement). As told by IDPs in Vinnytsia and Kyiv, whose current preference is to integrate, their conversations with the "left behind" can be difficult. Bombarded by Russian disinformation and fake news and isolated by Russian-controlled local authoritarian governments, their family and friends often call them traitors or fascists for resettling in democratic Ukraine. Yet, many IDPs are dedicated to maintaining these ties, even while committing to a life in resettlement.

In cases where parts of organizations from Crimea and the Donbas have migrated together, as seen with eighteen universities in exile, including Donetsk National University, they still maintain connections with the rump organizations that stayed behind. Organizing for a smooth resettlement, the universities have formed a Council of Displaced Universities.<sup>19</sup> These universities bridge Ukraine's east-west divide on a daily basis. Their potential role in a larger national reconciliation effort is obvious and should be strengthened.

### *Donetsk National University: The University Putin Could Not Kill*

On July 7, 2014, Russian-backed separatists entered Donetsk and occupied four dormitories at Donetsk

<sup>18</sup> Interviews took place in May and December 2016 with IDPs from the Donbas and Crimea by staff from the US Institute of Peace. Interviews were held in Kyiv and Vinnytsia.

<sup>19</sup> "Displaced Universities: 18 Ukrainian Colleges Are Exiled in Their Own Country," *Euromaidan Press*, February 25, 2017, <http://euromaidanpress.com/2017/02/25/displaced-universities-how-18-ukrainian-colleges-from-donbas-and-crimea-are-living-in-exile-in-their-own-country/>.

National University; armed gunmen expelled students from their rooms in the middle of the night. Nine days later, the separatists seized the entire university. During that summer, separatists stole at least seventeen university vehicles and converted student dorms into barracks for their fighters.<sup>20</sup>

Remarkably, three years after the invasion, the university has reestablished itself in Vinnytsia while maintaining contacts with the faculty and students who chose to remain behind. People in Vinnytsia responded to the arrival of the university in a variety of ways. “Many simply walked up to us and asked how they could help our students and administration. They offered potatoes and canned goods, and other things. We are very thankful to the community for their warm and gracious welcome,” said Maria Drobot, a master’s degree student in the university’s journalism program and an assistant in the registrar’s office.

Others greeted the university with a mix of skepticism, fearing that the Donetsk residents might be sympathetic to the separatists. “They didn’t understand that we had nothing to do with what’s going on in the occupied territories,” said Ekaterina Glushchenko, a graduate of Donetsk National University’s journalism faculty.

The arrival of Donetsk National University contributed to increased rents across Vinnytsia, and student housing has been the university’s Achilles’ heel; there is still a shortage of affordable housing in the city. A majority of students rent two-room apartments they share with five or six people. The university recognizes that housing is a big problem. “If we are allocated land for construction, we will focus all our efforts on building dormitories for students,” Rector Roman Grynyuk and Vice Rector Tetyana Nagornyak wrote in an email to the authors.

A majority of students were unable to move to Vinnytsia for financial reasons, so they continued their education remotely in the occupied zone during the first semester of the 2014-2015 academic year, which began in November. By the second semester, the university had begun to operate normally, and the number of students studying remotely dropped as they resettled in Vinnytsia. By the end of its first year in exile,

the university had acquired three buildings and 2,500 students had signed up for the 2015-2016 academic year. Many were also local Vinnytsia residents.

“In one year, we were able to build a fully functional university,” said Drobot. In 2015, Donetsk National University was recognized as the best university in central Ukraine and named one of the top ten universities in the country.

“[The university] is already . . . playing a great role in resolving the conflict,” Drobot said. The university started the Donbas Ukraine Education Center, which helps new arrivals from eastern Ukraine complete their student documentation, take state exams and evaluations, and receive copies of their high school diplomas.

And perhaps more important, the university, celebrating its eightieth anniversary in 2017, is serving as a living example of what resilience, determination, and creativity in the face of destruction looks like.

#### IDPs and the Advancement of a Peace Process

IDPs in Vinnytsia and Kyiv noted that Ukraine was now a conflict country and needed to learn from other conflicts—such as those in Northern Ireland, Liberia, and Colombia—how to implement successful peace processes. From Liberia, Ukraine can learn how women advanced social and political reconciliation and provided momentum when male-dominated peace negotiations stalled. From Northern Ireland, Ukraine can learn the important role civil society plays in informing formal peace processes, advocating for the rights of and compensation for victims of violence and embedding mechanisms for social reconciliation into the peace agreement.

The examples these countries offer highlight the important role played by women, who often have firsthand knowledge of the effects of conflict and how to address them, and who often work across conflict lines for a better future for their families. Women can be powerful change agents in society, as can be seen among women IDPs in Ukraine. Responsible for the daily tasks of family caretaking, they integrate more quickly in local communities, while the men are often marginalized because of prejudiced assumptions that they are separatist supporters or dodging the war. An example of IDP women’s engagement in Ukraine is described in the following story.

20 This section was originally published by the Atlantic Council and has been updated. Melinda Haring, “How One University Defied Putin and His Armed Mob,” Atlantic Council, August 26, 2017, <http://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/ukrainealert/how-one-university-defied-putin-and-his-armed-mob>.





Kharkiv Center for internally displaced children, February 2015. *Photo credit: UNICEF Ukraine/Wikimedia.*

### *From IDP to Peace Activist*

“For two years, I’ve felt like I’m living in a horror movie, waiting for it to end,” said Iryna Stepanova. Before the occupation, she worked as an engineer at a local plant in Slovyansk and was a regular churchgoer. She and her family belonged to a Protestant community that a pro-Russian militia targeted, considering them sectarians.

Combatants converted her church into an armory and a firing point. Her children went to school twenty meters away from an armed barricade. She had had enough. In early May 2014, Stepanova’s church evacuated women in the Protestant community with children. “There were about twenty of us,” she recalls. “When we were about to leave, some women came to stop us. They yelled at us and rocked the bus. The route to Dnipropetrovsk (about 231 kilometers) took us twenty hours. When I finally saw Ukrainian flags, we started crying.”

From Dnipropetrovsk, Stepanova moved to a small town near Kyiv where she settled in a hostel. She was part of one of the first waves of IDPs fleeing occupied

areas. She cried recalling how generous everyone was. “Once a local pastor came to our hostel,” she said. “He asked if we had children and pregnant women. We did. The next day at 6:00 am, the pastor brought us fresh milk and cheese; he did so every day for two months.”

Stepanova began meeting representatives from local volunteer organizations, NGOs, and regional administrations and councils to offer help. Soon, members of the Ukrainian parliament, ministers, and representatives of international media became her friends.

Returning to destroyed Slovyansk immediately after its liberation on July 5, 2014, she got involved in volunteer activities and the social life of her town. The Right to Protection, a Ukrainian NGO, hired Stepanova to be an advocate for other IDPs.<sup>21</sup>

21 Adapted with permission from Kateryna Moroz, “The Painful Journeys of Ukraine’s IDPs,” Atlantic Council, June 20, 2016, <http://www.atlanticcouncil.org/component/content/article?id=30922:the-painful-journeys-of-ukraine-s-idps>.

## Challenges

### The Lack of a Peace Process to Support Ukraine's National Survival

To counter Putin's strategy of rolling back Ukraine's democratic development, the West has supported Ukraine's reform efforts with financial, political, and technical assistance. However, hardened conflict attitudes, the marginalization of large numbers of internally displaced persons, and the creation of an activist community to support Kyiv's negotiating position are critical issues that must be addressed. IDPs play a central role in creating a constituency for peace in Ukraine that can advance both short- and long-term policies. Key to their engagement is a changed narrative. When the conflict is cast as a separatist movement or civil war, IDPs are often stereotyped as pro-Russian or anti-Ukrainian. Naming the conflict for what it is, a Russian-instigated war, identifies the displaced as heroes (such as Dnipro's volunteer supporters of Ukraine's army) and victims of foreign aggression and manipulation.

### A Differentiated Strategy

Data from a recent survey of social cohesion in Ukraine show that the farther IDPs settle from the conflict, the more they prefer to remain in their host communities, and that those near the line of contact prefer to return to their homes in the Donbas.<sup>22</sup>

It is critical that IDPs who prefer integration have the right to return when there is a just peace settlement. Their return would create a constituency for peace, ensure strong ties with the rest of Ukraine, and bring economic and business capacity back to the region. Preserving their right to return also secures their right to compensation.

At the same time, IDPs residing near the contact line, who see their living situations as temporary, must, as the war continues, be offered avenues for integration, even if their preference to return to the Donbas remains. Lessons from the region's frozen conflicts caution against the pitfalls of protracted conflict and humanitarian intervention—such as using IDPs to create national and local dependencies on humanitarian

assistance and as a visible symbol of the conflict in order to buttress national claims for compensation or territory. These missteps can drive policies that prevent IDPs from integrating into their new communities and generate conflicts with the local populations that, in turn, lead to further isolation and dependency.

As the conflict in the east nears the end of the fourth year of conflict, Kyiv, local governments, and international humanitarian agencies need to continuously evaluate their IDP policies, emphasizing integration with local communities while also preserving the right to return.

With a protracted conflict, IDPs need to play an active role in their new communities.

### Isolation

It is imperative that Ukraine does not isolate IDPs, who have a tendency to self-isolate. Local community members, who see IDPs as the "other" and are either complicit in the Donbas conflict or are avoiding fighting in it, also do not engage with them. Furthermore, the manipulation of rents by local landlords and the denial of voting rights alienate IDPs who seek integration. As seen in other conflicts, protracted isolation, whether physical or social, could have serious consequences—economic strain on local governments struggling with the national government policy of devolving certain authorities to local governments; nostalgia for pre-conflict existences and a turning away from Ukrainian values and culture; and no entrepreneurial investment in their new communities.<sup>23</sup> In practical terms, this means that IDP programs must reinforce IDPs' positive, proactive outlooks and identify community spaces for displaced persons and community members to interact. Recent surveys have shown that when locals interact with the internally displaced in their communities, their perceptions of IDPs become more favorable.<sup>24</sup>

22 Social Cohesion and Reconciliation Index/SCORE for Ukraine, 2016, <http://www.scoreforpeace.org/?country=17>.

23 Peter Kabachnik, Joanna Regulska, and Beth Mitchneck, "Where and When Is Home?," *Journal of Refugee Studies* 23, no. 3 and *Ethnopolitics* 11, no. 2, 123-140.

24 Kateryna Ivashchenko-Stadnik, "The Social Challenge of Internal Displacement in Ukraine," *E-International Relations*, April 13, 2017, <http://www.e-ir.info/2017/04/13/the-social-challenge-of-internal-displacement-in-ukraine/>.



OSCE SMM monitoring the movement of heavy weaponry in eastern Ukraine in March, 2015.  
*Photo credit: OSCE/Flickr.*

## Policy Recommendations

While the national government has failed to craft a comprehensive strategy for the country's IDPs and numerous problems—from social payments to voting rights—remain unresolved, civil society and local governments have stepped in to fill the gap. To ensure that Ukraine's IDPs do not fall to the same fate as others in the post-Soviet space, we offer the following recommendations to the US government, the national government of Ukraine, local governments, and the international community.

### US Congress

- Maintain a strong commitment to Ukraine by maintaining fiscal year (FY) 2017 funding levels at \$410.5 million.
- Support the shift in emphasis in strategic programming to anticorruption, democracy, and

governance at the State Department and US Agency for International Development (USAID).

- Insist that US funding for democracy and governance be inclusive of IDPs at both the local and national levels of government. With the transfer of budgetary authority to local governments in Ukraine, and the lack of a national policy on the internally displaced, funding for IDPs is inconsistent and depends on local politics.
- Designate that future appropriations fund programs that build IDP capacity to advocate at the national and local levels for their democratic and human rights, including access to services, suffrage (without loss of IDP rights), and compensation for their war-time loss, including property and savings.
- The State Department's and USAID's democracy and governance programs should preserve IDP

choice to integrate into their current places of residence or return to the east and Crimea should there be a cessation of hostilities. Specifically, this includes providing assistance for media and legal programs that counter IDP discrimination and exclusion, and a national database to record IDP loss of territory, property, and savings to reinforce their right to compensation from Russia.

- In meetings with Ukrainian officials, members of Congress should bring up the issue of IDPs and remind them that the country's democratic aspirations hinge on how the country treats its most vulnerable.

### US Executive Branch

- Maintain FY 2017 levels of funding for Ukraine in future budgets.
- In conversations with President Petro Poroshenko and the presidential administration, demonstrate that the United States cares about the IDP issue, and that in exchange for US democracy and governance assistance, the United States expects Ukraine to remedy the pension and voting issues for IDPs.

### Ukraine's National Government

- Give the Ministry on IDPs the power and funding to develop a national strategy on IDPs, implement it, and coordinate the process.
- De-link the payment of pensions and social assistance from IDP registration; specifically overturn Cabinet of Ministers Resolutions 637 and 365, which violate the Ukrainian constitution and laws on IDPs adopted by the Verkhovna Rada. These resolutions are discriminatory.
- Reinstate all social payments, including the pensions that were suspended in February 2016 for 350,000 people registered as IDPs.
- Eradicate discriminatory policies by giving IDPs the right to vote in local elections; change license plates so that one cannot determine another's place of origin; and prosecute landlords who charge inflated rents to IDPs and post discriminatory job advertisements.

- Ensure IDP property rights and introduce a long-term program for compensation for destroyed housing and lost properties.
- Authorize funds for a large public awareness campaign. Most Ukrainians get their information about IDPs from the media. The Ukrainian government should embark on an "I am an IDP, and I am Ukrainian" campaign (television, radio, social media) that features women, men, old, young, and Crimean Tatars to promote positive stories about IDPs, particularly in western Ukraine where more negative stereotypes prevail.
- Recognize the reality of protracted conflicts and the need for all IDPs to both integrate locally and preserve the right to return.

### Ukraine's Local Governments and Civil Society

- Set aside community spaces and create organizations to encourage IDPs and community members to interact.
- Adopt gendered approaches to IDP programming in Ukraine: increase women's access to the community through schools, health care, and shopping, thereby creating greater opportunities for integration; address the particular psychological stresses faced by numerous displaced men.
- Identify opportunities to shape and disseminate positive perspectives on the displaced, such as providing coverage in local newspapers and documentaries on IDP experiences.

### International Community

- Canada, the United States, France, Germany, Japan, and the European Union should increase financial and program assistance targeted to the specific needs of IDPs, such as skills training, housing, and counseling for psychological stress, taking into consideration the different needs of men and women.
- Canada, the United States, France, Germany, Japan, and the European Union should encourage the government of Ukraine to adopt robust national IDP policies as part of a comprehensive political strategy to overcome Russian destabilization

efforts through social inclusiveness, good governance, and democratization.

- The UN High Commissioner for Refugees should evaluate Ukraine's experience with local integration to inform international IDP policy and practice in protracted conflicts.
- Avoid humanitarian assistance efforts that create national and local dependencies.

**Dr. Lauren Van Metre** is the former vice president for research at the US Institute of Peace.

**Ambassador Steven E. Steiner (Ret.)** is a gender advisor at the US Institute of Peace.

**Melinda Haring** is the editor of the UkraineAlert blog at the Atlantic Council and a fellow at the Foreign Policy Research Institute.

Brian Mefford, Dr. Hryhoriy Nemyria, Natasha Lysova, Olena Vynogradova, Kateryna Moroz, Natalia Karbowska, Dawn Calabria, Michael Druckman, Leslie Ochreiter, and Bohdan Kantor contributed to the issue brief.



# Atlantic Council Board of Directors

## CHAIRMAN

\*Jon M. Huntsman, Jr.

## CHAIRMAN EMERITUS, INTERNATIONAL ADVISORY BOARD

Brent Scowcroft

## PRESIDENT AND CEO

\*Frederick Kempe

## EXECUTIVE VICE CHAIRS

\*Adrienne Arsht

\*Stephen J. Hadley

## VICE CHAIRS

\*Robert J. Abernethy

\*Richard Edelman

\*C. Boyden Gray

\*George Lund

\*Virginia A. Mulberger

\*W. DeVier Pierson

\*John Studzinski

## TREASURER

\*Brian C. McK. Henderson

## SECRETARY

\*Walter B. Slocombe

## DIRECTORS

Stéphane Abrial

Odeh Aburdene

\*Peter Ackerman

Timothy D. Adams

Bertrand-Marc Allen

John R. Allen

\*Michael Andersson

David D. Aufhauser

\*Rafic A. Bizri

Dennis C. Blair

\*Thomas L. Blair

Philip M. Breedlove

Reuben E. Brigety II

Myron Brilliant

\*Esther Brimmer

R. Nicholas Burns

\*Richard R. Burt

Michael Calvey

James E. Cartwright

John E. Chapoton

Ahmed Charai

Melanie Chen

Michael Chertoff

George Chopivsky

Wesley K. Clark

David W. Craig

\*Ralph D. Crosby, Jr.

Nelson W. Cunningham

Ivo H. Daalder

Ankit N. Desai

\*Paula J. Dobriansky

Christopher J. Dodd

Conrado Dornier

Thomas J. Egan, Jr.

\*Stuart E. Eizenstat

Thomas R. Eldridge

Julie Finley

Lawrence P. Fisher, II

\*Alan H. Fleischmann

\*Ronald M. Freeman

Laurie S. Fulton

Courtney Geduldig

\*Robert S. Gelbard

Gianni Di Giovanni T

homas H. Glocer

Sherrri W. Goodman

Ian Hague

Amir A. Handjani

John D. Harris, II

Frank Haun

Michael V. Hayden

Annette Heuser

Ed Holland

\*Karl V. Hopkins

Robert D. Hormats

Miroslav Hornak

\*Mary L. Howell

Wolfgang F. Ischinger

Deborah Lee James

Reuben Jeffery, III

Joia M. Johnson

\*James L. Jones, Jr.

Stephen R. Kappes

\*Maria Pica Karp

\*Zalmay M. Khalilzad

Robert M. Kimmitt

Henry A. Kissinger

Franklin D. Kramer

Richard L. Lawson

\*Jan M. Lodal

\*Jane Holl Lute

William J. Lynn

Wendy W. Makins

Zaza Mamulaishvili

Mian M. Mansha

Gerardo Mato

William E. Mayer

T. Allan McArtor

John M. McHugh

Eric D.K. Melby

Franklin C. Miller

James N. Miller

Judith A. Miller

\*Alexander V. Mirtchev

Susan Molinari

Michael J. Morell

Richard Morningstar

Georgette Mosbacher

Thomas R. Nides

Franco Nuschese

Joseph S. Nye

Hilda Ochoa-Brillembourg

Sean C. O'Keefe

Ahmet M. Oren

Sally A. Painter

\*Ana I. Palacio

Carlos Pascual

Alan Pellegrini

David H. Petraeus

Thomas R. Pickering

Daniel B. Poneman

Arnold L. Punaro

Robert Rangel

Thomas J. Ridge

Charles O. Rossotti

Robert O. Rowland

Harry Sachinis

Rajiv Shah

Stephen Shapiro

Kris Singh

James G. Stavridis

Richard J.A. Steele

Paula Stern

Robert J. Stevens

Robert L. Stout, Jr.

\*Ellen O. Tauscher

Nathan D. Tibbits

Frances M. Townsend

Clyde C. Tuggle

Paul Twomey

Melanne Verveer

Charles F. Wald

Michael F. Walsh

Maciej Witucki

Neal S. Wolin

Mary C. Yates

Dov S. Zakheim

## HONORARY DIRECTORS

David C. Acheson

Madeleine K. Albright

James A. Baker, III

Harold Brown

Frank C. Carlucci, III

Ashton B. Carter

Robert M. Gates

Michael G. Mullen

Leon E. Panetta

William J. Perry

Colin L. Powell

Condoleezza Rice

Edward L. Rowny

George P. Shultz

Horst Teltschik

John W. Warner

William H. Webster

\*Executive Committee Members

List as of September 18, 2017



The Atlantic Council is a nonpartisan organization that promotes constructive US leadership and engagement in international affairs based on the central role of the Atlantic community in meeting today's global challenges.

© 2017 The Atlantic Council of the United States. All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means without permission in writing from the Atlantic Council, except in the case of brief quotations in news articles, critical articles, or reviews. Please direct inquiries to:

Atlantic Council

1030 15th Street, NW, 12th Floor,  
Washington, DC 20005

(202) 463-7226, [www.AtlanticCouncil.org](http://www.AtlanticCouncil.org)