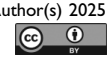
Original Research Article

IMR

International Migration Review
1-28



DOI: 10.1177/01979183251359172
journals.sagepub.com/home/mrx
Sage

The Uncertainty of Forced Displacement: How Language and Violence Shaped Displacement Trajectories During Russia's Invasion of Ukraine

Brienna Perelli-Harris
University of Southampton—Highfield Campus, Southampton, UK

Orsola Torrisi
New York University Abu Dhabi, Montreal, Canada
McGill University, Montreal, Canada

Abstract

Launched by President Putin to ostensibly "protect" the people living in the predominantly Russian-speaking Eastern regions, Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 produced the largest population displacement in Europe since World War II. Using unique data from a rapidly deployed online survey conducted throughout Ukraine and Europe from April to July 2022 (N = 7,974), this study examines how language and exposure to violence may have influenced trajectories of forced migration shortly after Russia's invasion. By exploiting the timing of the

Brienna Perelli-Harris and Orsola Torrisi contributed equally to the manuscript and the order of authorship is alphabetical.

Corresponding Author:
Brienna Perelli-Harris, Social Statistics and Demography, University of Southampton—Highfield Campus, Southampton, UK SO17 1BJ.
Email: b.g.perelli-harris@soton.ac.uk

survey, it examines how contextual and conflict-specific factors shaped the (un)certainty of migration movements and beliefs about return. Results show that exposure to conflict in the form of witnessing or being injured by a blast explosion was associated with shorter-distance moves within Ukraine. Findings suggest disparate trajectories of displacement by language identities. Although the survey was only available in Ukrainian, and did not include those who fled (or were deported) to Russia, Ukrainian respondents who reported speaking Russian as both their "native" and "home" language (25% of the sample) had the highest probability of relocating to nonbordering countries such as Germany and the United Kingdom. Independent of their origin and destination, Russian-speakers were also more likely to be in transit or uncertain about their destination, and less hopeful about a potential return. Thus, Russia's invasion created profound uncertainty for Russian-speaking Ukrainians and appears to have pushed them even farther away.

Keywords
displacement, Ukraine, forced migration

Introduction

Russia's full-scale aggression against the sovereign territory of Ukraine shocked the world and created existential uncertainty for millions of Ukrainians. Initially presented as a lightning-fast "special military operation" intended, among other pretexts, "protect" the people living in the predominantly Russian-speaking Eastern regions (Putin 2022), the invasion has turned into a long war of attrition, and a global security and humanitarian catastrophe. Within weeks of its onset on February 24, 2022, nearly 6 million people fled abroad and 5.3 million were internally displaced (IOM 2025). The scale and speed of such population movement—unparalleled in recent European history—raises questions about how civilians under threat of violence navigate their migration journeys (Braithwaite, Cox, and Ghosn 2021; Kaplan 2017), including how far to go. As they negotiate their routes, different constraints and opportunities lead some to flee farther, crossing international borders, while others stay closer to the combat zone (Schon 2019). The migration experience is fraught with uncertainty (Horst and Grabska 2015), including about whether to stay in the new destination, move on, or return home (Schiltz et al. 2019; Bijak and Czaika 2020).

Even in the context of violence, migration can be a selective process dependent on resources, capabilities, and characteristics (Aksoy and Poutvaara 2021; FitzGerald and Arar 2018; Guichard 2020; de Haas 2021). In the context of Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine, studies have found that social networks and economic opportunity (Hierro and Maza 2024), as well as education and financial resources (Kohlenberger et al. 2023; van Tubergen et al. 2023) can influence whether individuals flee abroad or settle in certain countries. However, migration decision making in times of conflict is complex and can be further shaped by contextual, cultural and conflict-specific

factors (Williams 2015). For example, ethnolinguistic factors often intertwine with local conflict dynamics in directing migrant journeys (Adhikari 2013; Capstick 2020).

In Ukraine, the linguistic ecosystem represents one contextual element that may contribute to explaining early migratory responses (O'Brien 2018). The country has historically been characterized by a multilinguistic landscape, where the two major languages[1]—Ukrainian and Russian—coexist, but their usage depends on an array of factors, including geography, social position, generational differences, and circumstance (Krouglov 2002; Nedashkivska 2010). Although this has led to a mixed and changing set of identities (Kulyk 2023; Pirie 1996), language has been important for explaining civic and ethnic identification (Shulman 2004), political attitudes and cleavages (Kulyk 2011; 2023). The use and protection of Russian-language was cited as a reason for the Russian-backed separatist uprising in 2014 (Arel 2018; Korostelina 2014), and in 2022, Putin invoked the so-called "protection of Russophone citizens in Ukraine" as one of the main pretences, among others, for invading. Since Russia launched the invasion through the predominantly Russian-speaking territories of Ukraine, a disproportionate number of Russian speakers fled their homes, and indeed 2.5 million homes have been destroyed (World Bank 2025). Thus, language emerges as a lens whereby questions about where and how far to go may be framed and understood.

Although all displaced Ukrainians were "obliged to flee or to leave their homes […] as a result of or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalized violence" (Deng 1999), exposure to violent events varied across the country. This raises questions about how exposure to violence triggered different migration trajectories. Indeed, while fear for personal safety is the key determinant of conflict-induced migration (Davenport, Moore and Poe 2003; Engel and Ibáñez 2007), the perception of threat can already explain emigration decision making early in the conflict (Adhikari 2013; Turkoglu and Weber 2023). Some may flee in anticipation of violence without directly witnessing aggression, while for others, migration decisions may depend on the observation of violence (Schon 2019) and the intensity of these experiences (Price and Bohara 2013). In turn, those experiences may influence beliefs about return (Ghosn et al. 2021).

Our study capitalizes on a large ($N = 7{,}974$) rapidly deployed, online health survey conducted during the initial crisis period (April–June 2022) when forced migrants were navigating their route to safety. The timing of the survey allows us to investigate how language and exposure to violence produced disparate trajectories of forced migration, when the mass mobility of the Ukrainian population was at its peak (Maidanik 2023; IOM 2025). Note, however, that the survey sample did not

[1] People in Western Ukraine also speak languages such as Hungarian and Romanian; however, here we focus on the two main languages which have been at the centre of the language debate in Ukraine.

include those who fled (or were deported) to Russia, which means the findings are specific to displacement occurring in Ukraine and Europe.

We examine three intertwined dimensions of the migration journey. First, we focus on distance fled, which is important for understanding how far migrants go in their journey, and the selection process associated with cross-border and internal migration. The second dimension incorporates the concept of uncertainty by asking respondents whether were at their final destination or likely to move again within the next few weeks. Uncertainty is theorized as a key component of forced migration (Schiltz et al. 2019; Baláž and Williams 2012; Bijak and Czaika 2020) and frequently discussed in qualitative studies (e.g., Lapshyna 2025; Tarkhanova and Pyrogova 2023), but is rarely operationalized in quantitative research. The final dimension captures respondents' belief about returning home, which is important to receiving communities as they develop policies to define the rights of refugee populations and successfully integrate them (Dadush and Weil 2022). It also matters for origin communities, which may be concerned about loss of human capital and labor supply (Dadush 2018). Providing insights into how displaced individuals think about forced migration in the early months of war, and to what extent they expect to settle into their new location, matters for ensuring their human rights are upheld, and their agency and autonomy is recognized (Ruben, Van Houte and Davids 2009).

This study makes key contributions to the study of migration behavior and intentions in times of conflict. First, it provides empirical evidence about which migrants were most likely to experience uncertainty during a critical period. Most survey-based studies of displacement occur after individuals have completed their migration journey, not during the process of fleeing, when the path to safety may be unknown. By documenting how different factors influence feelings of uncertainty *during* the migration process, the study adds to the theoretical literature conceptualizing transit, displacement and refugeeness as contexts of unpredictability and insecurity (Horst and Grabska 2015), as well as the individual, contextual and conflict-specific factors of (un)certainty (Schiltz et al. 2019).

It also adds to the scarcer literature on expectations about return among displaced populations (Ghosn et al. 2021; Al Husein and Wagner 2023) by providing a unique perspective at a time when forced migrants had only recently arrived at their place of refuge, or were in mid-flight. Importantly, our data allow us to examine these aspects for both migrants who crossed international borders and those who remained closer to the conflict zone. This latter group constitutes the majority of those who, globally, are beset by conflict and violence (Williams, O"Brien and Yao 2021), and yet remains underrepresented in all forms of narratives—from international discourses and advocacy to humanitarian policy and academic research (Polzer and Hammond 2008; UNOCHA 2020).

Finally, by examining how language and direct exposure to violence shape behavior, the study contributes to research on selection processes in forced migration. While existing literature has typically focused on variables such as gender, age or education, it has paid comparatively less attention to the role of direct exposure to

violence (Aksoy and Poutvaara 2021; Guichard 2020; Welker 2022). When considered, exposure to violence has been addressed with respect to the timing of migration (Adhikari 2013; Schon 2019), not the distance moved. Furthermore, prior studies on displacement in Ukraine (e.g., Kohlenberger et al. 2023; van Tubergen et al. 2023) did not investigate cultural identity traits as potential drivers of destination choices. Given that the war was waged in the name of Russian-speakers and claims of "genocide" based on language and ethnic identity (Putin 2022), understanding selection in terms of language profiles can give a sense about whether the "protected" may have instead become victims.

Background

Destination, Uncertainty About Future Moves, and Return

War produces existential, or radical, uncertainty which can spur people to act with a sense of overwhelming urgency (Horst and Grabska 2015). It can also arrest people's agency and lead to inaction, particularly when lacking a plan for evacuation from combat zones (Martinez et al. 2022; Hagen-Zanker, Rubio, and Bivand Erdal 2024). Nonetheless, an increasing number of studies indicate that even when faced with violence or violent threats, people exert at least some form of agency in making decisions about whether to stay or leave, and how far to go (Randell 2016; Carling and Schewel 2018). Thus, the dichotomy between "forced" and "voluntary" migration is becoming increasingly accepted as a continuum (de Haas 2021; Crawley and Skleparis 2018).

Within this continuum, decision making can be complex, composed of interlinked decisions and uncertainty about where to go, how to get there, and whether to return (Erdal and Hagen-Zanker 2022; Horst and Grabska 2015). In the general framework proposed by van Naerssen and van der Velde (2016), this decision-making process requires individuals first to cross a "mental border threshold," that is, a set of psychological barriers that prevent individuals from even conceiving of leaving home. They also need to have a destination (a "locational threshold") and a route to get there (a "trajectory threshold"). Mentally crossing each of these "thresholds" provides those who are forced to flee with some degree of agency, even if their exact route or future destination remains uncertain.

With regard to decisions about destination, most of the forced migration literature focuses on selection processes, suggesting that the "thresholds" are more likely overcome by migrants with the greatest resources such as education or social connections. These migrants often move sooner and farther away from conflict zones (Schon 2019; McAuliffe and Jayasuriya 2016). For example, past research showed that across Europe, refugees who fled conflict are more likely to have secondary and tertiary education compared to irregular economic migrants (Aksoy and Poutvaara 2021) or fellow nationals who fled shorter distances (Welker 2022). However, selection processes may operate differently depending on origin of refugees, and for internally displaced persons who do not cross international borders (Welker 2022). In the context of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, two recent studies have confirmed selection

patterns in destination choices with regard to education, financial resources, and social networks, as well as language in the new country and perceived economic opportunity (Hierro and Maza 2024; Kohlenberger et al. 2023). Focusing on largely similar variables, van Tubergen et al. (2023) further documented systematic differences between Ukrainian refugees and those displaced internally.

Although these studies provide important insights into patterns of selection, none has considered the role of uncertainty in migration decision making. When faced with violent threats, the time horizon of action for overcoming the "mental border threshold" may shrink to a few days or even moments, and long-term planning may become impaired (FitzGerald and Arar 2018). While crossing a "mental border threshold" may prepare people for leaving home, goals can still be flexible, temporary, and transitory. Such unpredictability has been well-illustrated by a recent qualitative study of Ukrainians who fled after February 2022 (Tarkhanova and Pyrogova 2023). Many crossed the "mental border threshold" and decided to leave quickly but left their homes without a clear destination or path. Those who had a plan or were presented with an official evacuation strategy were more likely to leave for safety (Martinez et al. 2022), but a stable destination, the length of stay, and ability to return home still remained unknown. Thus, in addition to examining where migrants "are" and what characteristics are associated with their destination, it is important to understand whether they consider themselves to be at their final destination, uncertain, or likely to move again (Schiltz et al. 2019).

A related question for understanding uncertainty in forced displacement trajectories concerns beliefs around return. In contrast to the ample literature on the drivers of forced migration, research on preferences and expectations about return is recent and focuses on a few specific cases. These studies document that uncertainty, for example in relation to perceived safety, political, and economic conditions at home, shapes views around the possibility of returning home (Alrababah et al. 2023; Ghosn et al. 2021; Beaman, Onder and Onder 2022; Hoogeveen, Rossi and Sansone 2019; Eastmond 2006; Stefanovic and Loizides 2017). The sparse research conducted among Ukrainian refugees similarly suggests that return expectations depend on perceived security, in addition to material concerns (e.g., housing, employment opportunities, and resources) (UNHCR 2022), while intentions to remain at the destination tend to be selective, for example, with respect to education or having school-age children (Kohlenberger et al. 2023). Little is known about how other contextual factors, including language and direct experience of violence, may shape beliefs around return, particularly when the threshold for safety has not yet been met. Next, we discuss these factors in turn, describing how they might shape uncertainty in forced migrants' journeys and return considerations.

Exposure to Violence

Intuitively, the greater the violence, the greater the mobility (Adhikari 2013; Hagen-Zanker, Rubio, and Bivand Erdal 2024). However, within a country at war,

the degree and intensity of exposure to violence during conflict can vary dramatically across regions, especially as an invading army advances and seizes territory (Schon 2019; Schutte and Weidmann 2011). Seeing an explosion first-hand (e.g., a missile hit a residential building) produces fear, adrenaline, stress, and a flight response (Tarkhanova and Pyrogova 2023). Studies from Ukraine's recent war have demonstrated that witnessing a blast is strongly associated with anxiety and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Brackstone et al. 2024), which may explain longer distances moved by those who directly experienced violence. Moreover, personal exposure to violence may make individuals less likely to believe that they will return home, having witnessed disruptions directly and perceiving little hope of rebuilding their lives in occupied or devastated territories (Ghosn et al. 2021). These psychological mechanisms lead us to hypothesize that direct exposure to violence would be associated with moves to farther-away destinations, lower uncertainty about final destination, and lower expectations of return.

However, actual exposure to violence may differ from the perceived threat of violence, which may be even more powerful for triggering migration (Adhikari 2013; Turkoglu and Weber 2023). Certain people who face the risk of an invading army may feel greater anxiety and fear about the impending danger and need less prompting to cross the "mental border threshold" (Tarkhanova and Pyrogova 2023). They may flee in anticipation of aggression without personally witnessing any attacks themselves (Schon 2019). Early movers would have, mechanically, more time to go farther away from areas where attacks occur. As mentioned above, they may also have greater economic resources and social networks, which facilitate departure, support relocation and reduce overall uncertainty (Schon 2019; McAuliffe and Jayasuriya 2016). Therefore, it is equally plausible to hypothesize that migrants who do not directly experience violence travel longer distances, are less uncertain about their final destination and have lower expectations of return.

Language and Identity

Language is an important topic in the migration literature, particularly its role in migrants' destination choices, residential sorting (e.g., Bauer, Epstein, and Gang 2005; Bredtmann, Nowotny, and Otten 2020) and integration in the host country (e.g., Capstick 2020; Adserà and Pytliková 2015; Borjas 2001). Although language is rarely considered as a push factor during displacement, it can be a source of oppression, persecution, and instability, and thus, indirectly, a driver of forced migration (Kingston and Seibert Hanson 2022; Bormann, Cederman, and Vogt 2017). However, this literature typically conceptualizes language as one aspect of ethnocultural identity and operationalizes it with other characteristics such as religion, race, descent, and/or nationality. Increasingly, political scientists, sociologists, and linguists have argued against such an approach (e.g., Anderson and Paskeviciute 2006; Wimmer, Cederman, and Min 2009; Posner 2004), showing that language represents a distinct characteristic that does not always map onto ethnicity or nationality

and may have different implications for behavior, including migration decision making (Dubinsky and Starr 2022).

In the case of Ukraine, the construction of ethnic, national and language identities has been complex (Arel 2018; Kulyk 2023). The meaning of Ukrainian nationality has shifted over time, requiring a re-conceptualization of ethnonationality (Arel 2018). As the population of Ukraine has become more "Ukrainian," particularly since 2014 (Arel 2018), a greater proportion of survey participants have indicated that their "nationality" is Ukrainian, while their ethnicity may be more varied. In our survey, when we asked respondents to identify their "nationality" (not ethnicity), nearly all (96%) selected the option "Ukrainian.". Approximately 69% identified exclusively as "Ukrainian,", about 13% as both "Ukrainian and Russian," and around 14% as "Ukrainian and Other." Only 2% identified solely as Russian "nationals." This relative lack of variation in nationality indicates that among Ukrainians, language may capture a unique dimension of identity, important for understanding responses to conflict and migration.

Over the past decades, the use and acceptance of Ukrainian and Russian has remained complicated (Barrington 2022). Everyday communication depends on preference, context, and interlocutor. Ukrainians have continued to speak both Russian and Ukrainian in their personal lives, as a matter of convenience and/or a link to heritage and family (Kulyk 2024; Barrington 2022). Increasingly, Ukrainians have become bi-lingual, mixing the two languages during conversation, and speaking *Surzhyk*, a hybrid form of the two languages. Pre-war surveys show that nearly half of Ukrainians spoke only Ukrainian in everyday life, a quarter spoke only Russian, and another quarter spoke both (Kulyk 2024). Nevertheless, language has become an increasingly divisive political issue in Ukraine's struggle to break free from Russia's influence (Kulyk 2011; Arel 2018). After Russia annexed Crimea and the far eastern territories seceded in 2014, debates intensified over protecting the Ukrainian language. In 2019, laws were passed to strengthen the role of Ukrainian in public life and reduce the influence of and attachment to Russia. Putin then used the Ukrainian government's preference for Ukrainian as a pretext for invading in 2022, suggesting that the Russian-speaking population was being persecuted.

Hence, language identity can produce specific vulnerabilities as migrants negotiate their routes towards safety. It might create unease about moving toward certain destinations (e.g., due to fears of linguistic isolation or discrimination), while fostering preferences for others (e.g., locations where language retention is possible due to similar linguistic communities (Pendakur and Pendakur 2002; Lindemann 2014). Within Ukraine, Ukrainian language proficiency may have driven some to relocate internally, to the western part of the country where most of the population speaks Ukrainian. At the same time, language may be associated with sorting in cross-border migration, with Ukrainian-only speaking refugees preferring to move to, for example, neighboring Poland due to linguistic similarity and historical ties, particularly with Western Ukraine (Łesiów, De Lossa, and Koropeckyj 1998; Grenoble

2010; Murphy et al. 2023). In addition, 1.35 million Ukrainians, compared to around 30 to 34,000 Russians, were already residing in Poland before Russia's full-scale invasion (Duszczyk et al. 2023; Duszczyk and Kaczmarczyk 2022; Kubiciel–Lodzińska et al. 2024). Ukrainian-speaking refugees may have also wanted to join families already living in Poland or Polish-Ukrainian communities (Duszczyk et al. 2023; Gońda 2024). These factors, including language similarity, historical proximity, and networks, lead us to hypothesize that speaking Ukrainian is associated with moves to neighboring countries or Western Ukraine.

These strong linguistic and cultural ties may, in turn, shape certainty about destination as well as the ability or desire to remain there. Ukrainian-speakers who settled in nearby locations—whether internally, where Ukrainian is the majority language, or in neighboring countries where linguistic proximity facilitates adoption of the host language—may be more likely to consider they are currently located in their final migration destination. However, Ukrainian-speakers may also feel closer to Ukraine, due to proximity and linguistic identity. Thus, we also hypothesize that Ukrainian-speakers may hold more positive beliefs about returning home someday.

Russian speakers may have had different experiences which shaped their migration trajectories. Many Russian speakers had already directly witnessed violence during the 2014 Russian-backed separatist conflict, which led to the displacement of 1.8 million people from the far east of Ukraine. The vast majority of the people who lived in the eastern part of the country and were displaced spoke Russian (Kulyk 2024). Among those who moved to government-controlled Ukraine at that time, the majority settled in Central or Eastern regions close to the frozen conflict line (Mykhnenko, Delahaye, and Mehdi 2022). Since 2022, Russia's army has threatened and eventually occupied these areas. As a result, many of Russian-speakers who had already observed armed conflict (or became IDPs) may have decided to move even further away, leaving the country permanently to avoid losing their homes and livelihood again (Tarkhanova and Pyrogova 2023). As Russia's war of aggression intensified, even more Russian-speakers were exposed to violence, and those who finally decided to leave may have been less certain about their destination or transit to safer areas. Finally, because of current exposure and prior experiences, Russian-speakers may also have developed more skeptical views about returning home. Thus, altogether, we expect speaking Russian to be associated with moves to non-neighboring countries, greater uncertainty about final destination, and lower expectation of returning home.

Data

Data for this study comes from the *Health Needs of Ukrainian Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons Survey* (https://www.the-ciru.com/resin-ukraine) (Head et al. 2022; Perelli-Harris et al. 2023), an online survey launched in early April 2022 and closed in July 2022 with the aim of understanding the immediate health needs of the displaced population. The target population consisted of all

individuals over the age of 18 who, before February 24, 2022 lived in Ukraine, but were now either currently abroad or in Ukraine, and not in their usual place of residence. Due to a lack of existing survey framework, the ongoing armed conflict, and the mobility of the target population, we could not use a representative sampling approach. Instead, the survey was disseminated through target advertisements on social media platforms, predominantly via Facebook/Meta advertising. Since Facebook/Meta's advertising platform required us to target specific countries and the health-needs survey aimed to provide information to refugee agencies in Europe, outside Ukraine, the survey targeted all European countries, including Turkey but excluding Russia. This means we do not have information on those (likely Russian speakers and nationals) who moved to Russia during the invasion. The survey was also disseminated via snowball methods, including sharing the post by over 1,400 active social network users. No incentives were offered for completion of the survey. After discussions with Ukrainian collaborators, we fielded the survey only in Ukrainian language, since all Ukrainians would have a working knowledge of the language (Kulyk 2023), and we expected Ukrainian-only speakers to be less likely to answer the survey in Russian due to animosity to Russia.

Given that respondents were not selected based on a sampling framework, the survey is not representative of the Ukrainian population, either pre- or postinvasion. Facebook/Meta use in Ukraine is biased towards better-educated middle-aged women who live in Western or Central oblasts (Leasure et al. 2023). Because the survey was advertised as a health survey, those with health problems may have been more likely to respond. Respondents needed access to an electronic device and a stable internet connection. Despite these limitations, sampling through social networking sites is a common approach in the absence of sampling frames (Pötzschke 2022; Rocheva, Evgeni, and Ivanova 2022) and is frequently used in studies of mobile, hard-to-reach and conflict-affected populations (e.g., Elçi, Kirisçioglu and Üstübici 2021; Reichel and Morales 2017), including in the Russian invasion of Ukraine (van Tubergen et al. 2023).

In total, 10,201 respondents completed the survey. Because the survey targeted all household members and respondents were encouraged to complete it on behalf of others, we excluded duplicates based on IP addresses ($n = 595$) and dropped respondents who said that they or another household member had previously completed the survey ($n = 524$). We also excluded respondents with missing values on key sociodemographic characteristics, for a final sample of 7,974 individuals.

Measurements and Methods

Dependent Variables

Our first outcome variable—*destination of forced migration*—measures respondents' location at the time of the survey. We constructed a five-level indicator that categorizes respondents as currently in (i) a nonbordering country (e.g., Germany, Spain,

the United Kingdom, etc.), (ii) a bordering country (e.g., Poland, Moldova, etc), (iii) North and Central Ukraine or Kyiv, (iv) West Ukraine, or (v) South-Eastern Ukraine. Refugees belong to the former two groups, whereas IDPs to the latter three.

Our second outcome variable incorporates the concept of uncertainty and is drawn from the survey question "*Thinking about your journey so far since leaving your home in Ukraine, have you reached your final destination?*". Respondents could answer (i) yes, I am at my final destination, (ii) no, I am likely to move again within a few days, (iii) no, I am likely to move again within a few weeks, and (iv) I am unsure. We collapsed these options into a three-level indicator combining (ii) and (iii) into a single category.

Third, we use the question asking whether respondents agreed with the statement "I believe that I will return home, in Ukraine" to construct a variable with three potential outcomes: "I agree or somewhat agree," "I categorically disagree or somewhat disagree," or "I neither agree nor disagree."

Independent Variables

To measure and test hypotheses related to *exposure to violence*, we constructed two variables. First, we classified *region of origin* to reflect the early developments of the conflict. This indicator differentiates between (i) the Centre-West regions, (ii) the Northern front, including the capital Kyiv, and (iii) the South-Eastern front. The Northern Front includes regions threatened in February to April when the Russians were invading through Northern regions and heading toward Kyiv and Kharkiv. By April to July, the South-Eastern fronts experienced the most intense episodes of violence.

Second, *witnessing a blast* is a dichotomous variable derived from questions asking respondents whether they personally witnessed and/or were directly injured by a blast. Although nearly all respondents who were injured also witnessed a blast, a few reported only being injured by a blast; however, the number of injured respondents was too few to support a separate analysis.

To identify and investigate hypotheses about *language profiles*, we relied on two survey questions. The first asked respondents "Which language do you consider to be your native language?" (*Яку мову Ви вважаєте рідною*). The second asked "Which language do you speak at home?" (*Якою мовою Ви розмовляєте вдома?*). As explained above, the meaning of these two questions is complex. "Native" could refer to first language or the language of one's homeland. "Home" could refer to the language spoken daily or with family members, including parents. For each of these language questions, only one category could be chosen, although respondents were provided the opportunity to write-in their own answer. We excluded 173 respondents who reported speaking "Other" languages (e.g., Armenian), but retained 26 respondents who, after selecting the option "Other," provided textual responses that included either Ukrainian or Russian for both language questions and/or who wrote-in "Surzhyk." To best capture these complex meanings and categories, our main language variable takes three values: (i) "Ukrainian native & home speakers";

(ii) "Ukrainian native & Russian home speakers" or "Russian native & Ukrainian home speakers"; and (iii) "Russian native & home speakers." We included anyone who wrote-in "Surzhyk" in the middle category.

Finally, we generated variables for sociodemographic controls, including residence type (urban/rural) before the invasion, current age, gender, marital status, educational attainment, and number of underage children for whom respondents reported having caring responsibilities. Unfortunately, information on the date at which respondents first left home was not collected, but we include indicators for the month in which the survey was taken as a proxy. We also include a variable for recruitment method (Meta/Facebook, other social media, snowball).

Methods

Given the categorical nature of our dependent variables, we use multinomial logistic models with robust standard errors to examine the influence of our focal independent variables and other individual sociodemographic factors on:

(i) Destination of forced migration (nonbordering countries; bordering countries, North/Center, West, South-East);
(ii) (Un)certainty about being at the final destination and future migration steps; and
(iii) Beliefs about returning home.

Since our key independent variables (region of origin, witnessing a blast, and language) pick up experiences of the war in different ways and are correlated (e.g., region of origin is highly correlated with language, as those in Northern and South-Eastern Ukraine are more likely to speak Russian), we run models in a stepwise manner, starting with language and sociodemographic controls only, and progressively include region of origin and witnessing a blast. When modeling beliefs about return, our full model also includes respondents' current location to provide insights into whether refugees or IDPs were more likely to say they believed they would return home.

Results

Descriptive Statistics

Table 1 presents descriptive statistics for the total sample and by displacement status, differentiating between IDPs and refugees who moved to bordering and nonbordering countries. Note that the demographic profiles of our overall sample are similar to nationally representative data and surveys on Ukrainian refugees conducted more recently. For example, the share of tertiary educated Ukrainian refugees in nonbordering countries in our survey was a little higher (79%) but aligned with figures (72%) from the nationally representative "Refugees from Ukraine in Germany

Table 1. Survey Descriptive Statistics by Displacement Status.

	Refugee—nonbordering country	Refugee—bordering country	IDP	Total	
Focal variables					
Language					***
Ukrainian native and at home	43.5%	48.9%	41.8%	44.1%	
Both Ukrainian and Russian	28.8%	28.9%	31.2%	29.8%	
Russian native and at home	27.8%	22.2%	27.0%	26.1%	
Area of origin					***
Northern front	46.4%	34.2%	21.8%	33.6%	
Central-West	19.3%	32.2%	4.8%	16.7%	
South-Eastern front	34.3%	33.7%	73.4%	49.7%	
Destination					***
South/East	-	-	14.5%	5.8%	
North, Center and Kyiv	-	-	49.0%	19.5%	
West	-	-	36.5%	14.5%	
Bordering country	-	100.0%	-	24.5%	
Nonbordering country	100.0%	-	-	35.7%	
Witnessed or injured by a blast					***
No	38.2%	43.0%	20.9%	32.5%	
Yes	61.8%	57.0%	79.1%	67.5%	
Reached final destination					***
No	13.7%	18.4%	21.2%	17.8%	
Yes, at final destination	59.8%	47.6%	32.1%	45.8%	
Unsure	26.5%	34.0%	46.7%	36.4%	
Beliefs about return home					***
No return will be possible	11.1%	9.6%	5.1%	8.4%	
Yes, I will return	79.0%	82.6%	90.6%	84.5%	
Unsure	9.9%	7.8%	4.3%	7.1%	
Sociodemographic variables					
Age					***
18-24	3.5%	3.2%	2.0%	2.8%	
25-34	19.3%	22.8%	18.7%	19.9%	
35-44	38.5%	41.8%	37.5%	38.9%	
45-54	23.4%	20.9%	25.8%	23.7%	
55+	15.4%	11.4%	16.1%	14.7%	

(continued)

Table 1. (continued)

	Refugee—nonbordering country	Refugee—bordering country	IDP	Total	
Respondent's gender					***
Male	7.6%	5.2%	15.4%	10.1%	
Female	92.4%	94.8%	84.6%	89.9%	
Education level					***
Elementary/basic secondary	4.1%	6.7%	9.2%	6.8%	
Secondary/ incomplete higher	16.1%	21.1%	23.6%	20.3%	
Higher (BA/BSc+)	79.8%	72.2%	67.2%	72.9%	
Marital status					***
Never married	12.6%	10.3%	8.1%	10.3%	
Married/cohabiting	62.9%	66.6%	72.4%	67.6%	
Separated, divorced, widowed	24.5%	23.1%	19.5%	22.1%	
Number of children					***
0	36.3%	25.6%	41.7%	35.8%	
1	35.9%	38.9%	32.6%	35.3%	
2+	27.8%	35.5%	25.7%	28.9%	
Residence type before invasion					***
Urban	91.4%	90.0%	81.8%	87.3%	
Rural	8.6%	10.0%	18.2%	12.7%	
Survey-related variables					
Month of survey					***
April	46.4%	44.0%	24.0%	36.9%	
May	37.5%	40.2%	41.9%	39.9%	
June	12.1%	12.1%	24.6%	17.1%	
July	3.9%	3.7%	9.4%	6.1%	
Survey recruitment					
Meta/Facebook	97.0%	98.6%	97.7%	97.7%	***
Other social media platforms	1.5%	0.8%	1.0%	1.1%	
Snowball	1.5%	0.7%	1.3%	1.2%	
Observations	2,845	1,956	3,173	7,974	

Chi-square tests for binary and categorical variables. *$p < 0.05$, **$p < 0.01$, ***$p < 0.001$.

(IAB-BiB/FReDA-BAMF-SOEP Survey)." Likewise, 54% of respondents in the German survey were married (vs. respectively. 63% and 67% among refugees in non-bordering and bordering countries in our survey), 48% had at least one minor child with them (vs. respectively 63% and 74% among refugees in nonbordering countries and bordering countries in our survey), and 46% were from Eastern or Southern regions of Ukraine (50% in our total sample and 34% among refugees, regardless of their destination). As expected, our sample also comprises a high share of women (92%

among refugees compared to 80% in Germany).[2,3] Our survey also has the same median age (41 years) as the total Ukrainian population (UNDESA 2022). Approximately 60% (n = 4,801) of respondents in our sample were refugees. And 44% reported that Ukrainian was both their native language and the language they speak at home, whereas about a quarter reported Russian. The remaining 30% reported speaking both.[4]

About 6% of the total displaced sample was still in the South-Eastern regions at the time of the survey, representing 14% of sampled IDPs. Nearly half of IDPs were in the Center of the country (including Kyiv). Among refugees, the majority (59.3%) were in nonbordering countries (e.g., Germany or the United Kingdom). Nearly 60% of refugees in non-neighboring countries reported being at their final destination, compared to about 48% of those in bordering countries. While over 36% of the whole sample was uncertain about being at the final destination in their migration journey, refugees in non-neighboring countries were the least likely to be uncertain. By contrast, IDPs were the most uncertain, with nearly half unsure. While almost 68% of respondents reported witnessing and/or being injured by a blast, among IDPs, the share was close to 80%. Overall, 85% of displaced persons believed they would return home, but IDPs were considerably more likely to have such expectation compared to refugees. About 7% of all displaced people did not believe they would return home. As to other sociodemographic characteristics, the sample comprised mostly highly educated, female, and married respondents.

Destination of Forced Migration

Figure 1 shows the average marginal effects from stepwise multinomial models predicting the probability of moving to different destinations, thus capturing distance fled (Supplemental Table A1 for full tabular results in exponentiated form (Relative Risk Ratios, RRR)). Models first include only language and sociodemographic controls (Model 1a—blue squares). Next, we add region of origin (model 1b—red triangles) and witnessing a blast (model 1c—green circles).

[2] Note that the Facebook/Meta advertising algorithm targets users likely to click the advert link. About 3 weeks into the survey, we observed a gender imbalance favoring female respondents, prompting the creation of a separate advert targeting men. However, due to enlistment, increased fighting, and a general decline in response rates, the survey remains biased toward females.

[3] Also note that we observed very similar shares for our subsample of refugees in Germany. For example, 78.9% of refugees in Germany reported having tertiary education, 92.5% were females, 63% to be married or in a cohabiting union, 64% had at least one minor with them and 31% were from the South-Eastern regions.

[4] These results are similar to May 2017 survey, which found that 49% of respondents spoke only Ukrainian, 25% spoke both languages, and 26% spoke only Russian. By December 2022, these proportions had shifted to 57%, 24%, and 15%, respectively, reflecting greater use of Ukrainian and/or the displacement of Russian speakers abroad (Kulyk 2024).

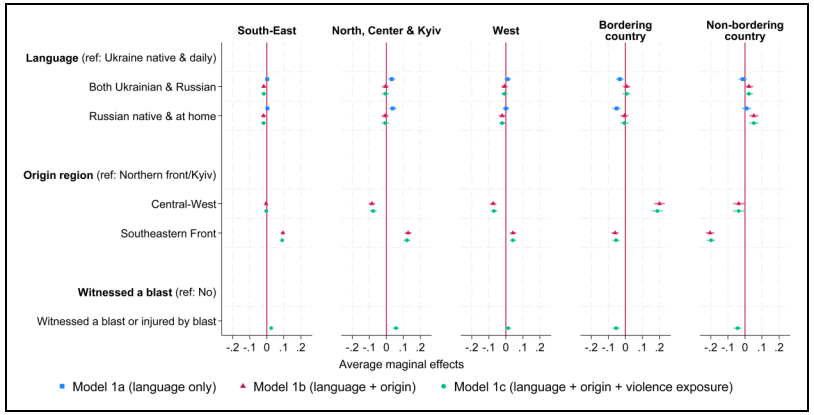


Figure 1. Destination of forced migration (average marginal effects). Symbols represent point estimates for each model, along with 95% confidence interval. Models control for socio-economic characteristics and survey-specific factors. Tabular estimates in Supplemental Table A1.

Estimates in model 1a show the average marginal probabilities for each language group compared to Ukrainian-only speakers for each level of the outcome variable (e.g., the difference in probability of moving to the South-East between a Ukrainian-only speaker (reference) and a Russian speaker). Controlling for sociodemographic characteristics only, respondents speaking any Russian—whether as a native language or at home—were more likely (about 3–4 percentage points) to make short-distance moves to North/Central Ukraine, which is closer to the conflict zone, and less likely to move to bordering countries (about 3–5 percentage points) compared to respondents speaking Ukrainian only.

However, once we enter region of origin into the equation (model 1b)—a variable that is highly correlated with language—we no longer observe differences by language for the likelihood of migrating to North/Central Ukraine or bordering countries. Region of origin picks up most of the associations previously explained by language. Estimates from model 1b suggest that residents from the South-Eastern front are significantly more likely to stay in this macro-region, or within Ukraine. These associations remain largely identical once exposure to blasts is added to the equation (model 1c). Thus, in line with our hypothesis that speaking Russian is associated with longer-distance moves, adjusted estimates show that Russian-only speakers have about a five percentage point higher probability of moving to nonbordering countries than Ukrainian-only speakers.[5]

[5] In separate logistic models estimating the likelihood that the respondent moved to Poland vs. elsewhere, we found that among those who fled Ukraine, Russian speakers were significantly less likely than Ukrainian speakers to have moved to Poland, a country that has for long hosted Ukrainian refugees and where Ukrainian is well-understood and spoken (Table A2).

Model 1c also shows a positive association between exposure to blasts and the probability of moving within Ukraine, particularly to the South-East and North/Central regions. Thus, contrary to the idea that direct exposure drives individuals to move farther, these results indicate that exposure to violence—whether through pre-war residence in highly impacted regions or direct experiences of blasts—are associated with shorter-distance moves.

As for other characteristics, we find that rural location, older age, and low-education are associated with nearer destinations; being female, childless and single are associated with moving farther away (Supplemental Table A1).

(Un)Certainty About Final Destination and Future Migration Steps

Figure 2 plots the average marginal effects from models estimating (un)certainty in final destination and future migration (see also Supplemental Table A3). Again, we start with a model including language and socio-economic controls only and enter other variables later in a stepwise manner (models 2a–c).

Across all models, we find evidence in support of the hypothesis that speaking Russian is associated with greater uncertainty about final destination. Specifically, the probability of being at final destination is three percentage points lower for Russian-only speakers compared to Ukrainian-only speakers. This represents an 8% relative decrease compared to the sample average probability of 0.36. We observe no differences between Ukrainian-only speakers and mixed language speakers once we include variables capturing exposure to violence (models 2b–c).

With regard to exposure to violence, those originating from the South-Eastern front are more likely to either be unsure about next migration steps or not at their final destination relative to those moving from the Northern Front (model 2b). The relationship does not change once we control for exposure to blasts (model 2c). Exposure to blasts is itself positively associated with uncertainty and negatively associated with the probability of being at final destination, indicating that those exposed to violence are more likely to be in transit. Broadly speaking, these results suggest that exposure to violence—whether measured through region of origin or direct experience—relates to greater uncertainty about being at final destination.

Among other factors, uncertainty is positively associated with the month of the survey, with the coefficients increasing over time. This likely reflected an increase in apprehension as Russia's army forced more initially reluctant individuals to flee. Older age tends to be associated with greater uncertainty about the current destination and future migratory steps. By contrast, women are more likely to be at their final destination, possibly because they left the country early on (Supplemental Table A3).

Beliefs About Returning Home

In Figure 3, we show average marginal effects from models estimating respondents' expectations about return (Supplemental Table A4). Again, it is striking that 85% of

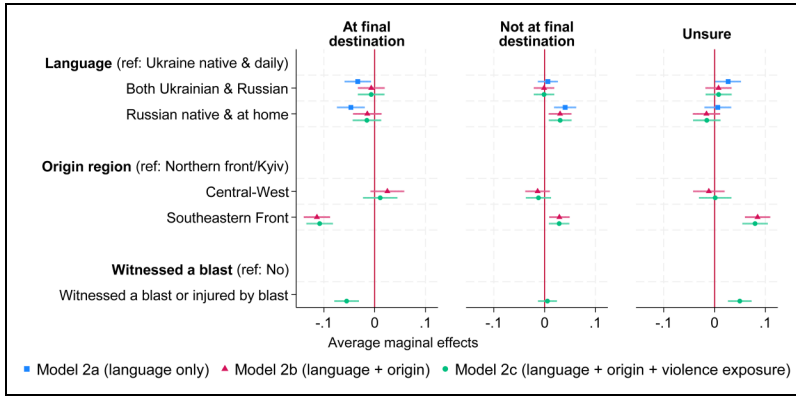


Figure 2. (Un)certainty about final destination and future migration steps (average marginal effects). Symbols represent point estimates, along with 95% confidence interval. Models control for socio-economic characteristics and survey-specific factors. Tabular estimates in Supplemental Table A3.

respondents believed they would return home someday. However, although the sample produces little variation in answers, its large size allows us to better understand the characteristics of the approximately 1,300 respondents who reported they did not believe they will return home or are uncertain.

In line with our hypothesis, across all models, Russian-only speakers are considerably more likely than Ukrainian-only speakers to have lower expectations of return or to be uncertain. In the full model (model 3d, Supplemental Table A4), Russian-only speakers have a four percentage points higher probability of stating that no return is possible and a three percentage points higher probability of being uncertain, relative to Ukrainian-only speakers. Respectively, these represent a 50% and 43% relative increase compared to the sample average probability of 0.08 for no return and 0.07 for uncertainty about return. We also observe that uncertainty about return is moderately associated with speaking both languages, compared to speaking only Ukrainian.

Moreover, fully adjusted estimates indicate that refugees, particularly those in non-neighboring countries, are significantly less likely to believe in the possibility of returning home than IDPs in the South-East, and the least likely overall. We find no association between return expectations and having witnessed a blast, except when we stratify the analyses by displacement status. That is, in the subsample of IDPs, those who witnessed a blast are more likely to believe that no return will be possible, even after controlling for region of origin (Supplemental Figure A1).

In addition to relationships with our focal variables, we also observe an association between expectations about return and education, but only for the highest educated. In all models, this group reports greater uncertainty compared to the

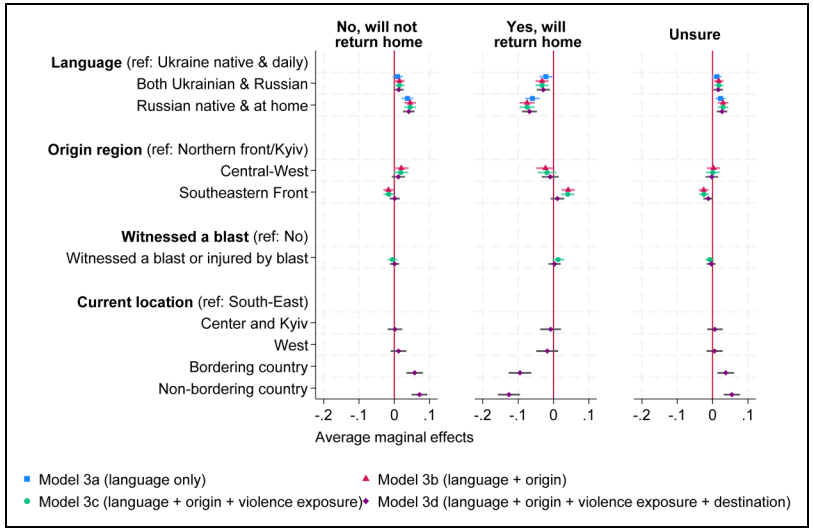


Figure 3. Beliefs about returning home (average marginal effects). Symbols represent point estimates, along with 95% confidence interval. Models control for socio-economic characteristics and survey-specific factors. Tabular estimates in Supplemental Table A4.

low-educated. Older individuals, females, and those in a partnership are less likely to state that no return will be possible, compared to the prospect of returning.

Discussion and Conclusion

This study demonstrates how the complex interplay between language, region of origin, and witnessing violence produce disparate trajectories of forced migration, shape the (un)certainty of migration movements and delineate return expectations. With regard to language identity, we found support for the hypothesis that Russian-speakers were significantly more likely to move farther away from their homes, especially to nonbordering countries such as Germany, Austria, or the United Kingdom. Conversely, those who spoke any Ukrainian were more likely to move to the neighboring countries or stay within Ukraine. This finding emphasizes how the role of language—often conflated with ethnicity or nationality in the study of political violence (Dubinsky and Starr 2022) and typically analyzed exclusively from the "destination" perspective in migration literature (Adserà and Pytliková 2015)—shapes patterns of forced migration, alongside factors such as social networks, education, and employment (Hierro and Maza 2024; van Tubergen et al. 2023). In this sense, these results suggest that language similarity as well as prior experience of armed conflict influence choice of country.

Our findings also provide insights into how language shapes beliefs about returning home. This is a crucial issue both for Ukraine, since any reconstruction will depend on the availability of human capital (Gorodnichenko, di Mauro, and Sologoub 2022) and for host countries as they develop policies for refugee integration. In our survey, 85% of respondents stated they believed they would return home. This percentage, higher than in recent surveys (e.g., UNHCR 2022; Kohlenberger et al. 2023), may be the combined result of how the question was worded and a prevailing sense of optimism during the first phases of the war, when the question was asked.[6] In the early phases of the conflict, displaced Ukrainians appeared to be more optimistic about returning home, and indeed, over 4.5 million Ukrainians did return home within the first year of the war (IOM 2023). Nevertheless, our results indicate that Russian-speakers were consistently less likely to believe they would return home, even after controlling for both region of origin and witnessing a blast. As hypothesized above, Russian-speakers' prior experiences with armed conflict, a higher likelihood that their homes were destroyed, and discomfort at returning to areas that were primarily Ukrainian speaking if displaced internally, may have negatively colored their beliefs about returning home.

Moreover, our findings point to an association between exposure to violence and the probability of staying closer to the war zone or still in transit away from it, not of fleeing farther away (Adhikari 2013). Specifically, we found that those who did not witness a blast were more likely to have left Ukraine. While this finding may be partially due to a mechanical relationship—people who stayed longer had "more time" to be exposed to violence compared to those who fled immediately after or in anticipation of Russia's invasion—it also points to the role of threat perception versus actual exposure to violence in considerations about staying or leaving, moving internally or internationally (Hagen-Zanker, Rubio, and Bivand Erdal 2024). The results also suggest that some migrants, particularly those with resources, are more likely to flee at the onset of the threat of violence (Schon 2019).

Although it should be self-evident that exposure to violence produces deep uncertainty, these results counter the narrative that forced displacement is a "choice," operating mainly through self-selection. Those who lingered longer and became internally displaced were still often on the move and uncertain about where to go. While we found that typical socio-economic and demographic variables shaped migration destination (Kohlenberger et al. 2023; van Tubergen et al. 2023), our results show no differences by education in the certainty of being at final destination.

[6] Kohlenberger et al. (2023) asked respondents if they planned to stay in Poland/Austria, and long-term considerations about conditions needed to return to Ukraine. The UNHCR "Lives on Hold" survey (2022b) asked whether displaced persons were planning to return home in a given time frame (the next 12-months, someday, had no plans or hope to return), or were undecided. Because of these differences as well as the different timeframe of these surveys, we avoid making direct comparisons with our results.

The highly educated were also more likely to be unsure about returning home. Thus, although educational selection may operate with respect to destination, it does not necessarily entail less uncertainty about the future.

This study has several limitations. As it was conceived as a rapid-health needs survey, it did not gather data on employment, social networks, house damage or destruction, or other factors known to influence migration (Hierro and Maza 2024). The survey did not ask about month of leaving home, and our proxy for survey month may be too crude to capture the timing of migration. The lack of this variable makes it difficult to investigate differences in those who left early versus later in the war. Importantly, the online survey was not based on a representative sampling framework and the results should be considered in light of a bias toward highly educated and middle-aged women who were more likely to use Facebook/Meta. Thus, it may not have captured the most vulnerable, elderly, and low-income individuals and may not be representative of male IDPs. Although over half of our sample indicated they speak Russian, the survey was available only in Ukrainian and may have missed Russian speakers from eastern Ukraine or those who identified as Russian nationals. The results must be interpreted specifically for this sample of Russian-speakers, as the sample did not include those who fled (or were deported) to Russia and who may have different selection characteristics.

Overall, this study advances our understanding of the dynamics of forced migration by highlighting how cultural factors and exposure to violence shape migrants' journeys during the early months of a mass forced migration. Our results on language have implications for refugee integration policies, suggesting that countries may need to provide refugee services in multiple languages. For example, refugee services should be provided in Russian as well as the official language of Ukrainian, especially in countries further away from Ukraine, such as Germany and the United Kingdom. Our findings are also a reminder that refugees may be more likely to flee due to the perception of threat, rather than witnessing violence first-hand. IDPs, on the other hand, are more likely (and continue) to be directly impacted by aggression. This has implications for the aid provided, including the provision of mental health support to cope with PTSD (Brackstone et al. 2024).

In conclusion, uncertainty is inherent to the forced migration process (Tarkhanova and Pyrogova 2023). Although migrants in crisis situations may cross the "mental border threshold" and make a concerted decision to leave (Velde and Naerssen 2016), our findings suggest that the "locational threshold"—that is, deciding where to go—and the "trajectory threshold"—that is, determining how to get there—may be more difficult to overcome. The ability to cross these thresholds is shaped by cultural and contextual factors such as language and region of origin. Moreover, the association between witnessing violence and migration pathways seems to be counter-intuitive, with those who witness violence remaining closer to the conflict zone and more likely to experience uncertainty. International agencies dealing with displacement should recognize the strain of protracted journeys riddled with uncertainty, but they also need to distinguish between groups that follow different

paths. As forced displacement increases around the world, more research is needed to understand the factors shaping uncertainty in migration trajectories.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The authors received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

ORCID iDs

Brienna Perelli-Harris https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8234-4007
Orsola Torrisi https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1760-679X

Supplemental Material

Supplemental material for this article is available online.

References

Adhikari, P. 2013. "Conflict-Induced Displacement, Understanding the Causes of Flight." *American Journal of Political Science* 57 (1): 82–9. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-5907.2012.00598.x.

Adserà, A., and M. Pytliková. 2015. "The Role of Language in Shaping International Migration." *Economic Journal (London, England)* 125 (586): F49–81. https://doi.org/10.1111/ecoj.12231.

Aksoy, C. G., and P. Poutvaara. 2021. "Refugees" and Irregular Migrants" Self-Selection into Europe." *Journal of Development Economics* 152 (September): 102681. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jdeveco.2021.102681.

Al Husein, N., and N. Wagner. 2023. "Determinants of Intended Return Migration among Refugees: A Comparison of Syrian Refugees in Germany and Turkey." *International Migration Review* 57 (4): 1771–805. https://doi.org/10.1177/01979183221142780.

Alrababah, A., D. Masterson, M. Casalis, Dominik Hangartner, and Jeremy Weinstein. 2023. "The Dynamics of Refugee Return: Syrian Refugees and Their Migration Intentions." *British Journal of Political Science* 53 (4): 1108–31. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0007123422000667.

Anderson, C. J., and A. Paskeviciute. 2006. "How Ethnic and Linguistic Heterogeneity Influence the Prospects for Civil Society: A Comparative Study of Citizenship Behavior." *The Journal of Politics* 68 (4): 783–802. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2508.2006.00470.x.

Arel, D. 2018. "How Ukraine has become More Ukrainian." *Post-Soviet Affairs* 34 (2–3): 186–89. https://doi.org/10.1080/1060586X.2018.1445460.

Baláž, V., and A. M. Williams. 2012. "Migration, Risk, and Uncertainty: Theoretical Perspectives." *Population, Space and Place* 18 (2): 167–80. https://doi.org/10.1002/psp.663.

Barrington, L. 2022. "A New Look at Region, Language, Ethnicity and Civic National Identity in Ukraine." *Europe-Asia Studies* 74 (3): 360–81. https://doi.org/10.1080/09668136.2022.2032606.

Bauer, T., G. S. Epstein, and I. N. Gang. 2005. "Enclaves, Language, and the Location Choice of Migrants." *Journal of Population Economics* 18 (4): 649–62. https://doi.org/10.1007/s00148-005-0009-z.

Beaman, L., H. Onder, and S. Onder. 2022. "When do Refugees Return Home? Evidence from Syrian Displacement in Mashreq." *Journal of Development Economics* 155 (March): 102802. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jdeveco.2021.102802.

Bijak, J., and M. Czaika. 2020. "Assessing Uncertain Migration Futures: A Typology of the Unknown." *Changes (Hove, England)* 1 (5): 1–29. http://quantmig.geodata.soton.ac.uk/res/files/QuantMig%20D1.1%20Uncertain%20Migration%20Futures%20V1.1%2030Jun2020.pdf.

Borjas, G. J. 2001. "The Economics of Immigration". In *The New Immigrant in the American Economy*. London: Routledge.

Bormann, N., L. Cederman, and Manuel Vogt. 2017. "Language, Religion, and Ethnic Civil War." *The Journal of Conflict Resolution* 61 (4): 744–71.

Brackstone, K., M. G. Head, and B. Perelli-Harris. 2024. "Effects of Blast Exposure on Anxiety and Symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) among Displaced Ukrainian Populations." *PLOS Global Public Health* 4 (4): e0002623. https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pgph.0002623.

Braithwaite, A., J. M. Cox, and F. Ghosn. 2021. "Should I Stay or Should I Go? The Decision to Flee or Stay Home during Civil War." *International Interactions* 47 (2): 221–36. https://doi.org/10.1080/03050629.2021.1835890.

Bredtmann, J., K. Nowotny, and S. Otten. 2020. "Linguistic Distance, Networks and Migrants" Regional Location Choice." *Labour Economics* 65 (August): 101863. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.labeco.2020.101863.

Capstick, T. 2020. *Language and Migration*. 1st edition. New York, NY: Routledge.

Carling, J., and K. Schewel. 2018. "Revisiting Aspiration and Ability in International Migration." *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 44 (6): 945–63. https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2017.1384146.

Crawley, H., and D. Skleparis. 2018. "Refugees, Migrants, Neither, Both: Categorical Fetishism and the Politics of Bounding in Europe's "Migration Crisis"." *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 44 (1): 48–64. https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2017.1348224.

Dadush, U. 2018. "The Economic Effects of Refugee Return." *Economics* 12 (1): 20180033. https://doi.org/10.5018/economics-ejournal.ja.2018-33.

———, and P. Weil. 2022. "Will Ukraine's Refugees Go Home?" Research Report 16/2022. Bruegel Policy Contribution. https://www.econstor.eu/handle/10419/270509.

Davenport, C., W. Moore, and S. Poe. 2003. "Sometimes you Just have to Leave: Domestic Threats and Forced Migration, 1964-1989." *International Interactions* 29 (1): 27–55. https://doi.org/10.1080/03050620304597.

de Haas, H. 2021. "A Theory of Migration: The Aspirations-Capabilities Framework." *Comparative Migration Studies* 9 (1): 8. https://doi.org/10.1186/s40878-020-00210-4.

Deng, F. M. 1999. "Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement." *International Migration Review* 33 (2): 484–93. https://doi.org/10.1177/019791839903300209.

Dubinsky, S., and H. Starr. 2022. "Weaponizing Language: Linguistic Vectors of Ethnic Oppression." *Global Studies Quarterly* 2 (2): ksab051. https://doi.org/10.1093/isagsq/ksab051.

Duszczyk, M., A. Górny, P. Kaczmarczyk, and A. Kubisiak. 2023. "War Refugees from Ukraine in Poland – One Year after the Russian Aggression. Socioeconomic Consequences and Challenges." *Regional Science Policy & Practice* 15 (1): 181–99. https://doi.org/10.1111/rsp3.12642.

———, and P. Kaczmarczyk. 2022. "The War in Ukraine and Migration to Poland: Outlook and Challenges." *Intereconomics* 57 (3): 164–70. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10272-022-1053-6.

Eastmond, M. 2006. "Transnational Returns and Reconstruction in Post-War Bosnia and Herzegovina." *International Migration* 44 (3): 141–66. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2435.2006.00375.x.

Elçi, E., E. Kirisçioglu, and A. Üstübici. 2021. "How Covid-19 Financially Hit Urban Refugees: Evidence from Mixed-Method Research with Citizens and Syrian Refugees in Turkey." *Disasters* 45 (S1): S240–63. https://doi.org/10.1111/disa.12498.

Engel, S., and A. M. Ibáñez. 2007. "Displacement Due to Violence in Colombia: A Household-Level Analysis." *Economic Development and Cultural Change* 55 (2): 335–65. https://doi.org/10.1086/508712.

Erdal, M. Bivand, and J. Hagen-Zanker. 2022. "Migration Decision-Making." 2nd ed. In *Routledge Handbook of Immigration and Refugee Studies*, edited by Anna Triandafyllidou, 62–73. Routledge, London.

FitzGerald, D. Scott, and R. Arar. 2018. "The Sociology of Refugee Migration." *Annual Review of Sociology* 44 (1): 387–406. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-soc-073117-041204.

Ghosn, F., T. S. Chu, M. Simon, Alex Braithwaite, Michael Frith, and Joanna Jandali. 2021. "The Journey Home: Violence, Anchoring, and Refugee Decisions to Return." *American Political Science Review* 115 (3): 982–98. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055421000344.

Gońda, M. 2024. "Settlement Intentions of Ukrainian Pre-War and Forced Migrants in Poland: Challenges for Migrant Integration Policy at the Local Level." *Journal of International Migration and Integration*. December. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12134-024-01211-3.

Gorodnichenko, Y., B. Weder di Mauro, and I. Sologoub. 2022. *Rebuilding Ukraine: Principles and Policies. Report 1*. Paris: CEPR Press. https://cepr.org/voxeu/columns/rebuilding-ukraine-principles-and-policies.

Grenoble, L. A. 2010. "Contact and the Development of the Slavic Languages." In *The Handbook of Language Contact*, 581–97. New York: John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

Guichard, L. 2020. "Self-Selection of Asylum Seekers: Evidence from Germany." *Demography* 57 (3): 1089–116. https://doi.org/10.1007/s13524-020-00873-9.

Hagen-Zanker, J., M. G. Rubio, and M. Bivand Erdal. 2024. "How Do Perceptions, Fears, and Experiences of Violence and Conflict Affect Considerations of Moving Internally and Internationally?" *Journal of Refugee Studies* 37 (2): 416–37. https://doi.org/10.1093/jrs/feae021.

Head, M., K. Brackstone, K. Crane, I. Walker, and B. Perelli-Harris. 2022. "Understanding Health Needs of Ukrainian Refugees and Displaced Populations." In *Clinical Informatics Research Unit (CIRU)*. Southampton: University of Southampton. https://doi.org/10.6084/m9.figshare.20231346.v1.

Hierro, M., and A. Maza. 2024. "How Social Networks Shape Refugee Movements in Wartime: Evidence from the Russian Attack on Ukraine." *International Migration Review*, March, 01979183241240712. https://doi.org/10.1177/01979183241240712.

Hoogeveen, J. G., M. Rossi, and D. Sansone. 2019. "Leaving, Staying or Coming Back? Migration Decisions During the Northern Mali Conflict." *The Journal of Development Studies* 55 (10): 2089–105. https://doi.org/10.1080/00220388.2018.1510119.

Horst, C., and K. Grabska. 2015. "Introduction: Flight and Exile—Uncertainty in the Context of Conflict-Induced Displacement." *Social Analysis* 59 (1): 1–18. https://doi.org/10.3167/sa.2015.590101.

IOM. 2023. *DTM Ukraine—Returns Report—General Population Survey Round 14 (September–October 2023)*. Ukraine: International Organization for Migration (IOM).

———. 2025. "Ukraine—Displacement Tracking Matrix". 2025. https://dtm.iom.int/ukraine.

Kaplan, O. 2017. *Resisting War: How Communities Protect Themselves*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Kingston, L. N., and A. E. Seibert Hanson. 2022. "Marginalized and Misunderstood: How Anti-Rohingya Language Policies Fuel Genocide." *Human Rights Review* 23 (2): 289–303. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12142-022-00654-4.

Kohlenberger, Judith, I. Buber-Ennser, K. Pędziwiatr, B. Rengs, I. Setz, J. Brzozowski, Bernhard Riederer, O. Tarasiuk, and E. Pronizius. 2023. "High Self-Selection of Ukrainian Refugees into Europe: Evidence from Kraków and Vienna." *PLoS ONE* 18 (12): e0279783. https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0279783.

Korostelina, K. V. 2014. "Conflict of National Narratives of Ukraine: Euromaidan and Beyond." *Die Friedens-Warte* 89 (1/2): 269–90.

Krouglov, A. 2002. "War and Peace: Ukrainian and Russian in Ukraine." *Journal of Language and Politics* 1 (2): 221–39. https://doi.org/10.1075/jlp.1.2.04kro.

Kubiciel–Lodzińska, S., K. Golebiowska, M. Pachocka, and A. Dąbrowska. 2024. "Comparing Pre-War and Forced Ukrainian Migrants in Poland: Challenges for the Labour Market and Prospects for Integration." *International Migration* 62 (1): 236–51. https://doi.org/10.1111/imig.13213.

Kulyk, V. 2011. "Language Identity, Linguistic Diversity and Political Cleavages: Evidence from Ukraine." *Nations and Nationalism* 17 (3): 627–48. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1469-8129.2011.00493.x.

——— 2023. "What have we Learned about Ethnonational Identities in Ukraine?" *Nationalities Papers* 51 (5): 975–90. https://doi.org/10.1017/nps.2023.41.

——— 2024. "Language Shift in Time of War: The Abandonment of Russian in Ukraine." *Post-Soviet Affairs* 40 (3): 159–74. https://doi.org/10.1080/1060586X.2024.2318141.

Lapshyna, I. 2025. "Forced Migration, Uncertainty and Transnationalism of Ukrainians in Germany." *Mobilities* 0 (0): 1–19. https://doi.org/10.1080/17450101.2024.2445806.

Leasure, Douglas R., Ridhi Kashyap, Francesco Rampazzo, Claire A. Dooley, Benjamin Elbers, Maksym Bondarenko, Mark Verhagen, Arun, et al. 2023. "Nowcasting Daily Population Displacement in Ukraine through Social Media Advertising Data." *Population and Development Review* 49 (2): 231–54. https://doi.org/10.1111/padr.12558.

Łesiów, M., R. De Lossa, and R. Koropeckyj. 1998. "The Polish and Ukrainian Languages: A Mutually Beneficial Relationship." *Harvard Ukrainian Studies* 22: 393–406.

Lindemann, K. 2014. "The Effects of Ethnicity, Language Skills, and Spatial Segregation on Labour Market Entry Success in Estonia." *European Sociological Review* 30 (1): 35–48. https://doi.org/10.1093/esr/jct020.

Maidanik, I. 2023. "The Forced Migration from Ukraine after the Full Scale Russian Invasion: Dynamics and Decision Making Drivers." *European Societies* 0 (0): 1–12. https://doi.org/10.1080/14616696.2023.2268150.

Martinez, S., M. Pompeo, R. M. Sheremeta, V. Vakhitov, M. Weber, and N. Zaika. 2022. *Civilian Evacuation during War: Evidence from Ukraine". Social Science Research Network (SSRN) Scholarly Paper*. Rochester, NY.

McAuliffe, M., and D. Jayasuriya. 2016. "Do Asylum Seekers and Refugees Choose Destination Countries? Evidence from Large-Scale Surveys in Australia, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Pakistan and Sri Lanka." *International Migration* 54 (4): 44–59. https://doi.org/10.1111/imig.12240.

Murphy, A., L. Whalen, S. Dubinsky, M. Gavin, J. F. Bailyn, and J. Ginn. 2023. "On "Historical Unity" of Russian and Ukrainian: A Linguistic Perspective on Language Conflict and Change." *Proceedings of the Linguistic Society of America* 8 (1): 5467.

Mykhnenko, V., E. Delahaye, and N. Mehdi. 2022. "Understanding Forced Internal Displacement in Ukraine: Insights and Lessons for Today's Crises." *Oxford Review of Economic Policy* 38 (3): 699–716. https://doi.org/10.1093/oxrep/grac020.

Nedashkivska, A. 2010. "Symbolic Bilingualism in Contemporary Ukrainian Media." *Canadian Slavonic Papers / Revue Canadienne Des Slavistes* 52 (3/4): 351–72.

O"Brien, M. L. 2018. "Migration as an Adaptive Response to Ethnic Nationalism in Russia." *Migration Studies* 6 (2): 187–204. https://doi.org/10.1093/migration/mnx039.

Pendakur, K., and R. Pendakur. 2002. "Language as Both Human Capital and Ethnicity." *International Migration Review* 36 (1): 147–77. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1747-7379.2002.tb00075.x.

Perelli-Harris, B., O. Torrisi, M. Head, and K. Brackstone. 2023. "Demographic and Household Composition of Refugee and Internally Displaced Ukraine Populations: Findings from an Online Survey." *International Organization for Migration Migration Research Series (N° 74)*, 1–22.

Pirie, P. S. 1996. "National Identity and Politics in Southern and Eastern Ukraine." *Europe-Asia Studies* 48 (7): 1079–104. https://doi.org/10.1080/09668139608412401.

Polzer, T., and L. Hammond. 2008. "Invisible Displacement." *Journal of Refugee Studies* 21 (4): 417–31. https://doi.org/10.1093/jrs/fen045.

Posner, D. N. 2004. "Measuring Ethnic Fractionalization in Africa." *American Journal of Political Science* 48 (4): 849–63. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0092-5853.2004.00105.x.

Pötzschke, Steffen. 2022. "Using the Innovative to Improve the Established: The Employment of Social Networking Sites as Recruitment Tools in Migrant Surveys." *International Migration* 60 (2): 261–65. https://doi.org/10.1111/imig.12987.

Price, J. I., and A. K. Bohara. 2013. "Maternal Health Care Amid Political Unrest: The Effect of Armed Conflict on Antenatal Care Utilization in Nepal." *Health Policy and Planning* 28 (3): 309–19. https://doi.org/10.1093/heapol/czs062.

Putin, V. V. 2022. *"On Conducting a Special Military Operation" (Russian: О Проведении Специальной Военной Операции)*. Moscow, Russia. https://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67843.

Randell, H. 2016. "Structure and Agency in Development-Induced Forced Migration: The Case of Brazil"s Belo Monte Dam." *Population and Environment* 37 (3): 265–87. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11111-015-0245-4.

Reichel, D., and L. Morales. 2017. "Surveying Immigrants without Sampling Frames—Evaluating the Success of Alternative Field Methods." *Comparative Migration Studies* 5 (1): 1. https://doi.org/10.1186/s40878-016-0044-9.

Rocheva, A., V. Evgeni, and N. Ivanova. 2022. "Targeting on Social Networking Sites as Sampling Strategy for Online Migrant Surveys: The Challenge of Biases and Search for Possible Solutions." In *Migration Research in a Digitized World*, edited by Steffen Pötzschke and Sebastian Rinken, 35–57. Cham: Springer International Publishing. IMISCOE Research Series.

Ruben, R., M. Van Houte, and T. Davids. 2009. "What Determines the Embeddedness of Forced-Return Migrants? Rethinking the Role of Pre- and Post-Return Assistance." *International Migration Review* 43 (4): 908–37. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1747-7379.2009.00789.x.

Schiltz, J., S. Vindevogel, I. Derluyn, and W. Vanderplasschen. 2019. "Uncertainty in Situations of Forced Displacement: A Critical Interpretative Synthesis of Refugee Literature." *Population, Space and Place* 25 (3): e2194. https://doi.org/10.1002/psp.2194.

Schon, J. 2019. "Motivation and Opportunity for Conflictinduced Migration: An Analysis of Syrian Migration Timing." *Journal of Peace Research* 56 (1): 12–27.

Schutte, S., and N. B. Weidmann. 2011. "Diffusion Patterns of Violence in Civil Wars." *Political Geography* 30 (3): 143–52. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.polgeo.2011.03.005.

Shulman, S. 2004. "The Contours of Civic and Ethnic National Identification in Ukraine." *Europe-Asia Studies* 56 (1): 35–56. https://doi.org/10.1080/0966813032000161437.

Stefanovic, D., and N. Loizides. 2017. "Peaceful Returns: Reversing Ethnic Cleansing after the Bosnian War." *International Migration* 55 (5): 217–34. https://doi.org/10.1111/imig.12382.

Tarkhanova, O., and D. Pyrogova. 2023. "Forced Displacement in Ukraine: Understanding the Decision-Making Process." *European Societies* 26 (2): 481–500. https://doi.org/10.1080/14616696.2023.2280680.

Turkoglu, O., and S. Weber. 2023. "When to Go? A Conjoint Experiment on Social Networks, Violence, and Forced Migration Decisions in Eastern and Southeastern Turkey." *International Studies Quarterly* 67 (2): sqad033. https://doi.org/10.1093/isq/sqad033.

UNDESA. 2022. "World Population Prospects 2022." *United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2022)*. https://population.un.org/wpp/Download/Standard/MostUsed/.

UNHCR. 2022. “Lives on Hold: Intentions and Perspectives of Refugees from Ukraine”. #2. United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/95767.

UNOCHA. 2020. “Global Humanitarian Overview 2020”. UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/3977976.

van der Velde, M., and T. van Naerssen. 2016. *Mobility and Migration Choices: Thresholds to Crossing Borders*. London: Routledge.

van Tubergen, F., I. Kogan, Y. Kosyakova, and S. Pötzschke. 2023. “Self-Selection of Ukrainian Refugees and Displaced Persons in Europe.” *Journal of Refugee Studies* 37 (1): 72–96. December, fead089. https://doi.org/10.1093/jrs/fead089.

Welker, J. 2022. “Relative Education of Recent Refugees in Germany and the Middle East: Is Selectivity Reflected in Migration and Destination Decisions?” *International Migration* 60 (2): 65–80. https://doi.org/10.1111/imig.12853.

Williams, N. E. 2015. “Mixed and Complex Mixed Migration during Armed Conflict: Multidimensional Empirical Evidence from Nepal.” *International Journal of Sociology* 45 (1): 44–63. https://doi.org/10.1080/00207659.2015.1005434.

———, M. L. O”Brien, and X. Yao. 2021. “How Armed Conflict Influences Migration.” *Population and Development Review* 47 (3): 781–811. https://doi.org/10.1111/padr.12408.

Wimmer, A., L. Cederman, and B. Min. 2009. “Ethnic Politics and Armed Conflict: A Configurational Analysis of a New Global Data Set.” *American Sociological Review* 74 (2): 316–37. https://doi.org/10.1177/000312240907400208.

World Bank. 2025. *Updated Ukraine Recovery and Reconstruction Needs Assessment Released*. World Bank. 25 February 2025. https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2025/02/25/updated-ukraine-recovery-and-reconstruction-needs-assessment-released.