

Refugees from South-Eastern Ukraine in Russia: Sociological Analysis

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Abstract

Objectives: The issue of refugees leaving their countries because of war, religious, ethnic or political factors is one of the greatest humanitarian problems of the present day. **Methods:** These refugees differ from migrant workers since any escalation of the conflict pushes them to the territory of more affluent countries on a mass scale. There are fewer reports about the refugees from the territory of South-Eastern Ukraine, the territory with a continuing armed confrontation, than about refugees from North Africa. This occurs due to the fact that most Ukrainian refugees fled to Russia, hardly affecting Eastern European countries. **Findings:** This article discusses the issue of Ukrainian refugees who decided to go to Russia, the country closest to them in linguistic and cultural aspects. In the course of conducted sociological research the authors considered plans of the refugees for their future life, mechanisms of adaptation, interaction with authorities and locals, sources of information on regularization of stay. **Application:** The study did not analyze the issues related to political evaluation or interpretation of the events, while its main focus was on humanitarian aspects.

Keywords: Adaptation of Refugees, Attitude Towards Refugees, Life Prospects, Migration, Refugees, South-Eastern Ukraine, The Federal Migration Service, Temporary Shelter

1. Introduction

According to the State Statistics Service of Ukraine, about 4 million people used to live on the territory of the people's republics, with more than two-thirds in the Luhansk region and a half in the Donetsk People's Republic. By the end of May 2015, according to the UN, more than 6,400 people were killed and more than 15,900 were injured. The forced migration is one of the leading humanitarian problems of our time¹. The complexity of this problem is determined by its multidimensionality and strong connection to politics. In addition, this problem cannot be solved by the efforts of one country only as it requires the coordination of efforts of many parties. In today's world we can see different groups of migrants: economic, labor, climatic, political and religious ones². It is often impossible to clearly distinguish between these groups of migrants, since military conflicts in their homeland inevitably lead to economic difficulties, making it more difficult to earn money to support their family, as well as aggravate ethnic

and religious differences. The migrants from the regions affected by military operations are followed by economic migrants, including those from neighboring countries. Migrants head for the countries with a better humanitarian law, developed social policy, a high level of tolerance from local residents, jobs available for migrants, and a low risk of deportation³. Thus, the migration load is unevenly shouldered on a number of states, while many other countries with a stable political situation are unattractive for migrants.

Currently, there are large flows of forced migrants from the territory of Syria, Libya, Iraq, these countries experiencing dramatic events with many people affected by the conflict and with no good prospects for the conflict solution. These migration flows are apparent; they are discussed in the media and became the focus of attention of politicians and public figures of various views. However, the public fails to notice another hotbed of tension in the world today – the south-east of Ukraine, where during the military conflict starting in June 2014 a large group

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of refugees emerged. The conflict affected two Ukrainian regions: Donetsk and Luhansk with a high density of population before the outbreak of hostilities, after which many people were forced to flee their homes, becoming refugees or temporarily displaced persons, according to the UN estimates, the Ukrainian and Russian authorities⁴.

The armed conflict has led to the formation of two strategies the refugees use. The first one is going further into the territory of Ukraine. The other one implies leaving for the Russian Federation. The choice between these strategies is determined by the refugees' political views, having relatives in those areas, financial abilities and other factors.

Many branches of science consider the issues of refugees and Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs). They are studied by demography, economics, migration sociology and migration law. Given the intensity of migration processes in the modern world, the theoretical consideration of migration aspects is constantly improving.

According to economic theory, migration is primarily seen as the movement of labor force and the most important factor for economic growth and development of the countries and regions. Forced migration also has a significant labor potential, particularly when migrants are highly qualified. On the other hand, forced migration weakens the economy of their country of origin which loses its most active and qualified people⁵⁻⁷.

Demographers consider the migration, on the one hand, as a demographic process itself, directly influencing the reproduction of the population through changes in the reproductive and epidemiological behavior, its age and sex structure and other demographic changes⁸. Others focus on the impact of demographic processes on the culture of the host country, depending on the choice of migration policy⁹.

Sociologists consider migration as a complicated phenomenon, which combines the adaptation of migrants, attitudes towards migrants of the citizens in the host countries, along with the conflicts accompanying the adaptation and integration of migrants¹⁰. European studies more and more often emphasize the flow of illegal migrants, both labor ones and refugees¹¹.

Over the past 20 years many authors have considered the migration processes in particular former Soviet republics which preserved certain economic and cultural ties¹²⁻¹⁴.

The legal science focuses on the acquisition of citizenship, obtaining the legal status on the territory of the host country^{15,16}.

It should be noted that Russian legislation differentiates IDPs on the basis of the specific legal status they obtain which entitles them to different rights and obligations. The Russian Federation, as a member to several international agreements on migration, assumes responsibility for the protection of certain categories of forced migrants, including asylum seekers from various persecution threats in their home countries. The legal framework for the state aid activities to these categories is stated in the international agreements signed by the Russian Federation and its national law (table 1).

As it could be seen from the presented data, the smallest number of applicants received the legal status of "a refugee". This can be explained by the fact that this status may be granted only to people upon confirmation of the fact of their suffering from political, ethnic and religious harassment. Therefore, the majority of forced migrants apply for other types of the legal status which allow their legal stay in the territory of the Russian Federation^{17,18}.

In addition to the presented statistics, we should also keep in mind that some IDPs have not chosen their status and are staying in the territory of Russia illegally. Besides, it should be mentioned that about 1.5 million Ukrainians are employed in Russia at present moment.

The focus of our attention in this article is the largest group of refugees – the ones who came to Russia. These refugees can be divided into two categories: organized and unorganized refugees. Organized refugees arrived in the Russian Federation in an emergency and on a mass scale, in the situation that posed a real threat to their lives and health. In most cases their goal was just to cross the Russian border and report themselves to the authorities which provided them with accommodation, food and temporary settlement. Later, due to the overcrowdedness of the border regions, the organized refugees were transported further into the territory of Russia to other regions.

Table 1. Distribution of refugees from Ukraine according to their legal status in Russia (pers.)¹⁷

	Applied	Granted
Refugee	6000	292
Provisional asylum	355000	340000
Temporary residence permit	209000	172500
Member of a state program for resettlement of compatriots	114000	74000
Residence permit	43600	34000
Citizenship	95800	27400

Unorganized refugees arrived in the Russian Federation by themselves, mostly to their relatives or friends. As a rule, they were not entitled to any state aid programs, and solved their problems themselves, including the acquisition of legal status. Most refugees fell into unorganized category, as many citizens of Ukraine have relatives in Russia, and some were even born in the USSR in the territory of the present-day Russia.

2. Method

The findings of this applied research are based on the conducted theoretical analysis of the publications and statistical sources.

The primary adaptation of refugees from Ukraine was studied by means of questionnaires which allowed us to obtain empirical data on the following criteria: the selection and acquisition of the legal status in the Russian Federation; life prospects (action plan) in the territory of the Russian Federation; aspects and challenges of adaptation; interaction with the authorities and local residents.

According to the chosen study area of refugee adaptation, we selected the following empirical indicators: refugees' perspective about adaptation in Russia; share of refugees who want to obtain permanent residence permit or citizenship in Russia; evaluation of the performance of the Federal Migration Service (FMS); refugees standard of living and welfare; the sources of information the refugees used.

The quantitative method in the form of a questionnaire was chosen by us as a research method. This questionnaire allowed us to interview the refugees from the territory of South-Eastern Ukraine within a small period of time (1.5 months). The strong point of this method is the opportunity to conduct a mental simulation when detecting subjective opinions and assessments of the respondents^{18,19,20}.

The study was conducted in November and December of 2014. We interviewed 640 people, among these 126 women and 514 men, with the average age of respondents totaling 31.3. The respondents were interviewed in 62 regions of Russia, in all seven federal districts. The survey was conducted through the refugees help groups in social networks and communities. The actual sample size of the survey totaled 668 respondents, 28 questionnaires were rejected. The sample was random and considered such features as: region, place of residence, gender, age, education, marital status, time of arrival in Russia.

As for the level of education, 5 people had elementary education, 147 people – general secondary education; 187 – vocational secondary; 284 – higher education; not specified – 17 people. By marital status: married women – 354, married men – 75; single women – 76; domestic partnership – 36; widows – 6; divorced – 47; single men – 37; not specified – 9. By arrival time in Russia: February–April of 2014 – 2.5%; May–July of 2014 – 42.9%; August–September of 2014 – 43.5%; October–November of 2014 – 11.1%. General totality of the study included refugees from the territory of South-Eastern Ukraine aged 18 years and older who arrived in the Russian Federation.

3. Results

When studying forced migration, one should realize that nowadays migrants or refugees, unlike the ones in the past, have better access to information sources that help them to plan how they are going to leave the county. Even in war zones there may be TV broadcasts and mobile Internet, while social networking sites can provide latest information on possible ways to leave the area, necessary documents, safe places to cross the border, refugee camps and other relevant data. This is also true for the refugees from the territory of Ukraine.

In this study, the respondents were asked to identify the sources of information from which they learned about how to cross the border and obtain the legal status in the Russian Federation (table 2).

Table 2. Sources of information on ways to legalize their status in Russia*

Sources of information	% of respondents
From informal groups and refugees assistance sites on the Internet	40.2
From the official Internet sources (FMS website, the Ministry of Internal Affairs)	43.4
Directly from the official bodies (FMS, Ministry of Emergency Situations, Ministry of Internal Affairs)	46.5
From friends, neighbors, relatives	27.5
Directly from volunteers	7.7
From the governments of DPR and LPR	0.4
Other sources	1.8

* The sum is greater than 100 % as each respondent chose several options.

Refugees used both official and unofficial sources of information. The unofficial sources can provide the latest updates, but there is a risk of disinformation and deliberate distortion of information. For instance, many refugees were assured that they were entitled to social security benefits or a lump sum payment, but it was not to be granted to foreign citizens with no legal status of a refugee. It took more time for official Internet resources to publish the materials, but the information was authentic and in a more reader-friendly format. Those sites made special sections designed especially for refugees from Ukraine. We deliberately removed the media from the list of information sources, since our goal was to analyze the influence of other channels of information. The considered unofficial sources of information enabled the communication of the refugees who had already arrived in Russia, those planning to come and volunteers working with refugees.

To stay legally in another country, a refugee should select a certain legal status or apply for a change of citizenship. At the beginning of the mass forced migration from Ukraine, many people ignored the issue of the status registration, as they expected that the fighting would soon be over and they would be able to return back home. However, along with the conflict escalation and later with its preservation, most of the refugees were forced to legalize their status. The refugees we interviewed reported the following legal status in the territory of the Russian Federation: 59.1% – gained or in the process of obtaining a temporary shelter; 16.3% – gained or in the process of obtaining a residence permit; 9.5% – gained or in the process of obtaining a refugee status; 11.2% – did not apply for a special status; 5% – did not define their legal status. Thus, about 80% of the refugees have registered their status in the territory of the Russian Federation, with only 20% who have not yet done so.

Prolongation of the armed conflict, deterioration of living standards in their home country, the fear for their life and health – all this encourages the refugees to plan their course of action in the host country. It is worth noting that, unlike migrants from Central Asia and the Caucasus, Ukrainian refugees do not create diasporas or fraternities, therefore, when making plans for the future, each refugee relies only on himself. In the course of study, we obtained the following distribution of the refugees' plans (Table 3).

Thus, the bulk of the refugees wanted to prepare the documents to obtain Russian citizenship. A large share

(23.2%) of those unsure of their plans apparently hoped to return home when the situation improved. Many people left their property, other assets and relatives in Ukraine.

The Federal Migration Service is the official body that works with refugees, that is why its accurate and efficient operation is of such a great importance for refugees. We asked our respondents to evaluate the work of the migration service and problems arising when interacting with it. It should be noted that many of the problems occurred due to the scale and intensity of the refugees' inflow, changes in the legal framework, the lack of sufficient experience of the FMS staff on how to deal with the issues of refugees, rather than migrant workers (table 4).

Based on the data, we can conclude that the problems of refugees interaction with the FMS can be classified into three groups. The first group includes the issues dealing with information and communication aspects. The second group encompasses problems with work organization.

Table 3. Plans of the IDPs

Plan details	% of respondents
Join the program "Compatriots" with subsequent gaining of the Russian citizenship	46.0
Apply for permanent residence independently, without participation in any special programs	14.5
Confirm the status of temporary asylum	6.1
Return to Ukraine	6.8
Don't know/No answer	23.2
Other	3.4

Table 4. Problems the refugees faced when interacting with the FMS*

Problem details	% of respondents
Lack of clear, understandable and accessible information	41.5
Long lines	34.4
Long time of the application processing	5.7
Poor organization of work	21.2
Long time of issuing a decision	14.1
Indifferent staff	15.0
Inconvenient hours	16.7
Don't know/No answer	1.7

* The sum is greater than 100 % as each respondent chose several options.

The third group deals with professionalism and bearing of the FMS employees. However, one should not forget that apart from assisting refugees, the FMS works with labor migrants from other countries whose number is also large.

When solving their problems in Russia, the refugees face the reality that may be very different from their expectations. For example, registration of citizenship is quite a long process, while the refugees counted on the opposite. For many of them there is no big difference between Russia and Ukraine, as for a long time these countries were part of the Soviet Union. Arriving in Russia, the refugees expected their issues to be addressed as top priority that would enable them to adapt to living in a new country in no time. Respondents were asked what assistance they wanted to obtain from the Russian authorities. The distribution of the answers is presented in Table 5.

The forms of expected priority assistance can be divided into several groups. *The first group* deals with regulatory measures: simplified procedure of obtaining the legal status and cancelation of the refugees attachment to a particular region. For example, the admission of refugees was officially stopped in Moscow, St. Petersburg and some border regions. This occurred due to the overcrowding or excessive number of refugees in those areas. And just the other way around, some measures were taken to accommodate the refugees in the regions of Siberia and

Table 5. Expectations for priority assistance from the Russian authorities*

Details on expectations for priority assistance from the Russian authorities	% of respondents
Simplified procedure of obtaining a residence permit and citizenship	40.9
Assistance in solving the housing problem	14.0
Assistance in employment	37.9
Cancelation of regional quotas specifying the refugees place of stay	22.7
Places for children in kindergartens and schools	15.5
Obtaining free medical care	7.4
Provision of minimum food basket	13.1
Assistance in moving to other regions, localities	6.6
Other	0.7

* The sum is greater than 100 % as each respondent chose several options.

the Far East. *The second group* aims to facilitate the solution of social problems. Based on actual practice, it should be noted that some of the social problems were solved quite efficiently: medical assistance was provided on an equal basis with the citizens of Russia, all children of the refugees got a place in school, and many of them – a place in kindergarten. The employment centers offered jobs, and some employers provided jobs with accommodation. The total sum allocated for the needs of refugees in 2014 amounted to 10 billion rubles, approximately²¹.

The data on the real assistance provided by the Russian authorities of various levels to refugees are given in Table 6.

Comparing the data in Table 5 and Table 6, the expected and actually received aid to the refugees in 2014, we can see that the ideal and the real coincide. The maximum assistance is provided to organized refugees. Those who left Ukraine on their own and went to their relatives and friends, as a rule, either did not receive help or did not apply for it.

The government of any country which faced the inflow of refugees cannot take full responsibility for their adaptation and support during the initial period. Some of these functions are usually taken by volunteers. In 2014, when the first refugees arrived, the first volunteers emerged, and the number of volunteers was rapidly increasing along with a dramatic increase in the inflow of refugees. It began to decline only in 2015. Assistance to refugees was provided by both ordinary citizens and volunteers

Table 6. Assistance provided by the Russian authorities according to the refugees estimates

Assistance from the authorities	% of respondents
Admission to MAC	8.1
Assisted with clothes, personal items	18.5
Provided with a small amount of money	10.2
Helped to find a place in school	12.2
Provided medical assistance	14.2
Helped to find a place in kindergarten	4.7
Brought them further from the border	4.1
Assisted with obtaining tickets	3.6
Assisted with finding a job	12.2
Assisted with solving the housing problem	18.0
Did not receive any help	46.9

* The sum is greater than 100 % as each respondent chose several options.

who used to work in other types of charity (helping the disabled, children, animals). Volunteers from various religious groups also joined this trend.^{22,23} Therefore, we asked respondents about the help they received from ordinary citizens and volunteers. The answers about the assessment of this assistance formed the following distribution:

- significant – 35.9%;
- insignificant – 34.3%;
- did not ask for help – 22.4%;
- asked, but did not receive any help – 4.3%;
- did not answer – 3.1%.

As we can see, more than a third of respondents rated the assistance as significant. This is a large figure that shows considerable kind-heartedness of ordinary people. Basically, volunteers' assistance covered the following aspects: providing information, clothing, purchase of food and personal hygiene products, help with employment and search for rental housing. We can say with certainty that adaptation of refugees would be more difficult without volunteers support.^{24,25}

One of the most important issues the refugees had to solve after gaining legal status was finding the employment. The Ukrainian refugees had certain advantages in Russian labor market, among which the absence of language barrier, qualifications similar to the Russian standards. The downside was that many refugees did not get accustomed to the new status; they expected to take a similar position as in Ukraine, and they expected higher wages. In many cases, higher wages and better employment positions were sought by those who did not have those in Ukraine. It was easier for manufacturing workers, doctors, service workers. Civil servants, lawyers and teachers faced more serious difficulties. We asked the respondents about their employment and obtained the following data (see Table 7).

Table 7. Employment of refugees

Could you find a job?	% of respondents
Yes, quite fast	21.7
Yes, but it took a while	21.7
No, I'm looking for a job, but haven't found it yet	26.4
No, and I'm not going to	0.5
No, I cannot work due to objective reasons (age, maternity leave, health condition, etc.)	21.4
Other	8.3

Thus, these data do not confirm the image of refugees' selfishness. They simply have to find work to survive and proceed with either citizenship acquisition or return to Ukraine. For example, one of the conditions for granting a residence permit in Russia is the official employment or having savings. The data collected prove that every second refugee has already found a job; one in four is searching for, but have not found it yet and one in five cannot work for some objective reasons. The number of those not going to work for subjective reasons is less than 1%. It should be noted that the level of refugees income is low, which stems from the fact that many of them were employed as menial workers, including temporary work. The level of refugees' monthly income at the time of the survey (calculated per family member, including minors) amounted to:

- less than 1000 rubles – 17.6%;
- 1000-3000 rubles – 17.1%;
- 3000-5000 rubles – 19.7%;
- 5000-8000 rubles – 16.3%;
- 8000-12000 rubles – 12.2%;
- 12000-15000 rubles – 9.3%;
- more than 15000 rubles – 7.7%.

Initial level of income is quite low in any host country, but it tends to increase along with a better adaptation. Besides, some of the refugees confirm their qualifications and receive the required professional certificates, allowing them to do better paid and higher skilled work.

The refugees' impressions before coming to Russia were largely formed under the influence of the media and official visits to relatives before the conflict. However, moving to Russia, often with no money and personal items, made them see the host country from a different angle. We asked the refugees about their impressions of Russia, and the following distribution was obtained (Table 8).

Most of the impressions dealt with low wages and high cost of living in Russia. It was particularly emphasized by refugees who arrived in small towns and rural areas. Refugees who found themselves in large cities tend to point out the complexity of bureaucratic procedures. The refugees divided roughly into two equal groups according to their perception of the Russians' attitude towards them. The refugees arriving in the Russian regions bordering with Ukraine felt more negative emotions. Less negative attitude was reported by refugees in Siberia, the Urals and the Far East. Negative attitude towards refugees can be explained by the following reasons, mentioned by

Table 8. First impressions of refugees about Russia*

What surprised you most in Russia?	% of respondents
High housing rent	5,0
Expensive food and clothing	22,8
High level of bureaucracy of official bodies	25,9
Kindness and sympathy of ordinary people	14,9
Low wages	37,2
Negative attitude of ordinary people to refugees	16,7
Corruption when issuing documents	9,1
Good education, healthcare	2,8
Climate	4,6
Poor infrastructure (roads, social facilities)	7,8
Low prices for goods and services	8,3

* The sum is greater than 100 % as each respondent chose several options.

the refugees who faced it: 44% – due to spreading false information about the high level of refugees support; 14% – due to a declining living standard in Russia caused by the events in Ukraine and sanctions; 14% – due to the fact Russians are afraid of increasing job competition because of refugees; 14% – could not answer this question.

We agree that the attitude towards refugees is undergoing significant changes, the ones for the worse, to be more exact. This occurs due to several reasons. First, it is connected with the deterioration of living standard in Russia which its people associated with Russia's participation in the Ukrainian conflict. Second, the media focused on the issues of refugees, and as a result, the citizens got the idea that the state was caring about them too much. Third, Russians got tired of the news from Ukraine. In addition to that, the media changed the tone of their reports about refugees, broadcasting more negative stories, focusing on unattractive features of some members of this group. The leading factor influencing the forming negative attitude towards refugees in general was also due to the assistance the authorities provided for settling immigrants, their financial support, which on the background of general poverty of the Russian population is not always understood in a positive way.

4. Conclusion

Our study has shown that most problems with the primary adaptation of refugees are associated with legal aspects.

Despite the fact that Russia' migration legislation has changed under the influence of a large flow of refugees, successful settlement of refugees is hindered by the requirement for their mandatory registration in the host country, which is difficult to obtain for people who do not have relatives in Russia or do not have sufficient funds to purchase it through intermediaries. But, in general, the refugees were receptive to some drawbacks in the operation of the Russian official bodies. However, changes in immigration legislation in some cases led to refugees misunderstanding their rights and responsibilities. This refers to the requirement not to leave the area of registration or to live in the selected region for several years after obtaining Russian citizenship.

Quite many refugees who arrived in Russia are going to gain a residence permit with the subsequent registration of citizenship. This is hindered by the difficulties with selling their property in the south-east of Ukraine – the territory the official Ukrainian authorities do not control, since the registration procedure required for the sale of real estate has actually been terminated. Some of the refugees are waiting for the cessation of hostilities to return to their homeland. However, coming back bears certain risks such as the loss of the Russian legal status of temporary asylum. Despite the fact that Russia continues to support refugees, the state authorities are trying to regularize this procedure, to eliminate the chaotic movement of refugees all over the country. It can be stated that there has formed a stable group of refugees in Russia who did not register their legal status and in some way or another violate the rules of stay in the country. First of all, it refers to people who, despite closing some regions for refugees, came there or those who do not extend their status of temporary asylum.

Refugees had overestimated the standard of living in Russia and how fast one could obtain a residence permit and citizenship, these expectations having been mainly formed by the media. The real picture was disappointing for many of them, particularly the low living standard in provincial towns and villages and high prices for goods and services.

Some of the refugees, especially those living in Ukraine in the areas unaffected by shooting, are gradually returning to their homeland, despite the prospect of a low standard of living and the threat of a possible escalation of the conflict. Not all refugees could get used to the difficulties of living in a new status in Russia and prefer to deal with difficulties at home.

Both ordinary people and volunteer associations demonstrated a high level of support when they quickly responded to the arrival of refugees. Most volunteer

help was provided in the summer and autumn of 2014, when the refugees needed maximum support. Volunteers helped to deal with some shortcomings of the authorities.

The bulk of the refugees are waiting when the situation in Ukraine will improve, but at the same time they would like to either get Russian citizenship or work here. However, there are obstacles hindering the full use of the labor potential the refugees have.

It can be stated that the primary adaptation of the Ukrainian refugees has finished. But refugees are just beginning to integrate in the Russian society, especially considering their life prospects.

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