



**ZOIS**

Zentrum für Osteuropa-  
und internationale Studien  
*Centre for East European  
and International Studies*

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# ZOIS REPORT

**THE DISPLACED UKRAINIANS:  
WHO ARE THEY,  
AND WHAT DO THEY THINK?**

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## Executive summary

A survey conducted by ZOiS in November and December 2016 provides the first comparative data on the attitudes and identities of the people displaced by the war in Eastern Ukraine both within Ukraine and to Russia. The main results from this survey are:

- The majority of the internally and externally displaced intends to stay where they are currently based.
- The vast majority of the internally and externally displaced had family members or friends living in the locations where they are currently based, and they remain in close contact with family members and friends in the war zone.
- A higher share of the displaced in Russia reports being in full-time employment; the mean income of the displaced in Russia is significantly higher than that of the internally displaced who report greater reliance on state support.
- The effect of war and displacement on personal identities has been mixed: an increased identification as “Ukrainian” or “Russian” is counterbalanced by an increase in mixed identities (“both Ukrainian and Russian”).

- The displaced are a politically interested group – about 40 percent in Russia and 20 percent in Ukraine report that they are more interested in politics now than three years ago.
- The political cleavage between the two groups of the displaced is most pronounced with regard to the status of occupied territories. Two thirds of the displaced in Russia see them as a part of Russia (with or without a special autonomy status), whereas for about 96 percent of the displaced in Ukraine they are an integral part of Ukraine (a third envisages a special autonomy status).
- 45 percent of the displaced inside Ukraine are against Ukraine’s EU membership (and 84 percent of the displaced in Russia).

## Introduction: Who are the displaced Ukrainians?<sup>1</sup>

Three years after the onset of the war in the Donbas, the number of the war dead in Ukraine is now approaching 10,000. The Minsk I and II agreements resulting from the Normandy negotiations (Germany, France, Ukraine and Russia) have contained but not stopped the fighting. One group severely affected by the war remains hidden from view: the displaced, internally and externally. By summer 2016 the Ukrainian Ministry for Social Policy had registered close to 1.8 million internally displaced people (IDPs) inside Ukraine (<http://en.interfax.com.ua/news/economic/351907.html>). Since 2015 Ukraine has been among the ten countries with the largest IDP population worldwide ([http://ec.europa.eu/echo/what-we-do/humanitarian-aid/refugees-and-internally-displaced-persons\\_en](http://ec.europa.eu/echo/what-we-do/humanitarian-aid/refugees-and-internally-displaced-persons_en)). Moreover, about another one million have fled from the conflict zone to the Russian Federation (<http://reporting.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/UNHCR%20Ukraine%20Operational%20Update%20-%20December%202016.pdf>).

Through their displacement, these individuals fall outside standard opinion polls, they do not figure in international media reports (and hardly

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<sup>1</sup> The author gratefully acknowledges the research assistance of Alice Lackner who helped with the data analysis and prepared the charts.

figure in the Ukrainian and Russian media), and in policy circles they are primarily seen as a social policy or humanitarian aid issue.

The overall number, territorial spread, and their extreme experiences make the displaced a constituency that the Ukrainian and Russian national and local governments – as well as the West more generally – need to take into account. The displaced are politicized, though not one cohesive political or social force. Many remain dependent on state or family support, while remaining in close contact with the areas and people they left behind. They are also an extreme case to test how the experience of war shapes attitudes and identities.

The newly founded Centre for East European and International Studies (ZOiS) in Berlin has just conducted the first two-part survey of IDPs in Ukraine (n=1000) and those who fled to Russia (n=1000). The ZOiS poll was conducted between 1 and 18 December 2016 among both registered displaced persons and persons who provide for themselves and their families independently without registering their status.<sup>2</sup> The survey of IDPs covered six oblasts in Ukraine: those with the highest concentration of registered IDPs, namely Donetsk, Luhansk, and Kharkiv oblast (jointly accounting for 60 percent of the sample), Dnipro oblast as a further region bordering the conflict, Kyiv city, Kyiv oblast, and Lviv oblast as an example of a western oblast known to have attracted a significant number of refugees. The quota sampling was based on official data on the location and socio-demographic profile of the IDPs (the majority is middle-aged, two thirds are women, see below).<sup>3</sup>

The ZOiS survey among the displaced in Russia covered Moscow city and eleven western and central oblasts with known concentrations of the displaced.<sup>4</sup> In the absence of information on the displaced in Russia, the quotas were aligned with the IDP sample. A priori there is no reason to believe that the profile of the internally and externally displaced should vary significantly.<sup>5</sup>

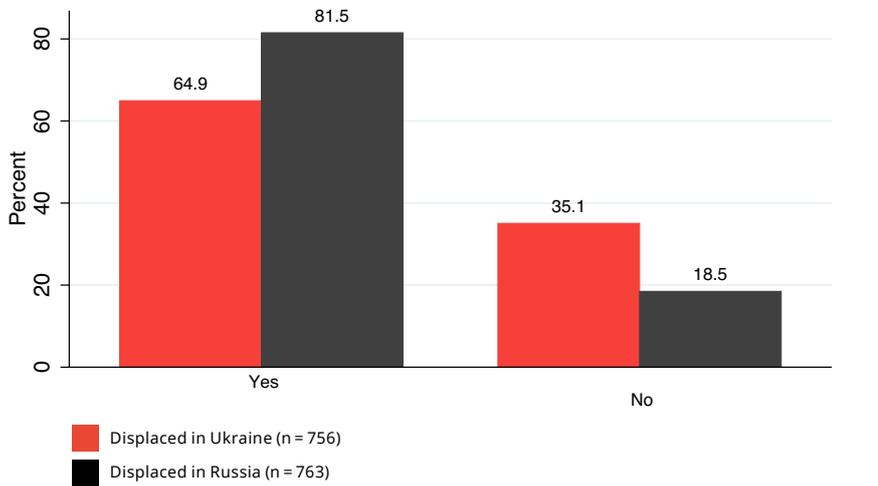
- 
- 2 The ratio of these two groups in the sample was: 90 percent of registered IDPs and 10 percent of non-registered IDPs. The survey was conducted in the following locations: organized IDP accommodation (halls of residence, camps, hostels, modular dwellings, etc.); settings where IDPs concentrate (e. g. NGOs, official agencies, banks); private homes of non-registered IDPs. All non-registered individuals were contacted using the referral method, with a registered IDP usually serving as the first contact person.
  - 3 According to official published data 62 percent of the IDPs are women and 38 percent men. In terms of the age groups, the breakdown for the whole of Ukraine is reported as follows: 15 – 24 years of age: 7.8 percent; 25 – 29: 14.3 percent; 30 – 34: 18.8 percent; 35 – 44: 29.9 percent; 45 – 54: 23 percent; 55+: 6.2 percent (<http://reporting.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/UNHCR%20Ukraine%20Operational%20Update%20-%20December%202016.pdf>; <http://voxukraine.org/2016/06/30/velyke-pereselennya-skilky-naspravdi-v-ukraini-vpo-ua/>) The actual distribution by region is not known; therefore, the ZOiS survey applied the quota to the overall sample.
  - 4 Moscow city, Belgorodskaya oblast', Vladimirskaya oblast', Voronezhskaya oblast', Kaluzhskaya oblast', Krasnodarskiy kraj, Nizhegorodskaya oblast', Orlovskaya oblast', Rostovskaya oblast', Samarskaya oblast', Tul'skaya oblast', Ul'yanovskaya oblast'. The ratio between registered and unregistered refugees in the Russia sample is 56 percent to 44 percent, reflecting the rate of camp closures and the more difficult access to the displaced in organized accommodation.
  - 5 The widening of the regional catchment area and the necessary re-allocation of interviews across regions in response to access difficulties have resulted in a slight oversampling of the younger cohort of the displaced in Russia compared to the quotas based on Ukrainian IDP data.

## What do the displaced Ukrainians think?

### Intention to stay and personal networks

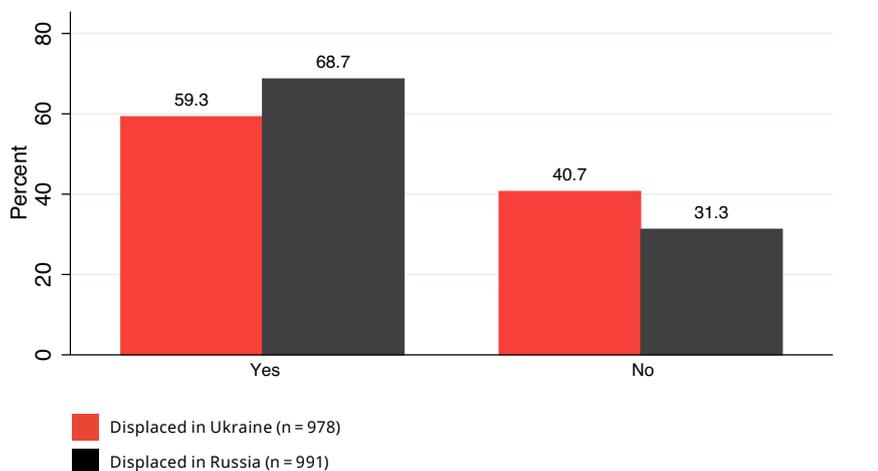
One finding that might come as a surprise to the Ukrainian and Russian authorities is that the majority of the displaced intend to stay where they are based at the moment – more so in Russia (about 80 percent), but also in Ukraine (about 65 percent). Personal networks have been an important factor in shaping the resettlement: according to the ZOiS survey about 70 percent of the displaced in Russia and 60 percent of the displaced in Ukraine had family or friends in the locations they moved to. These ties provide, at least in parts, a source of practical and emotional support and thereby facilitate a degree of integration. ► FIGURES 1 + 2

**FIGURE 1**  
Are you planning to stay here now?



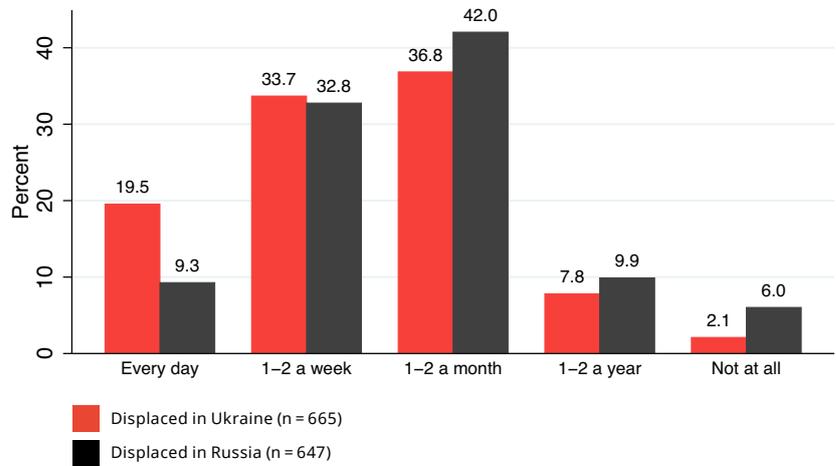
Source: ZOiS

**FIGURE 2**  
Did you have family members / friends living here before you arrived?



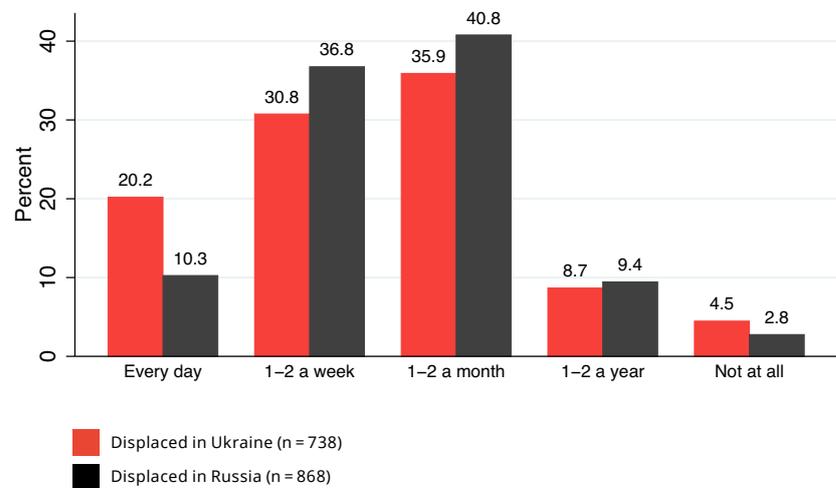
Source: ZOiS

**FIGURE 3**  
**How often are you in touch with your friends / family in Donbas?**



Source: ZOIS

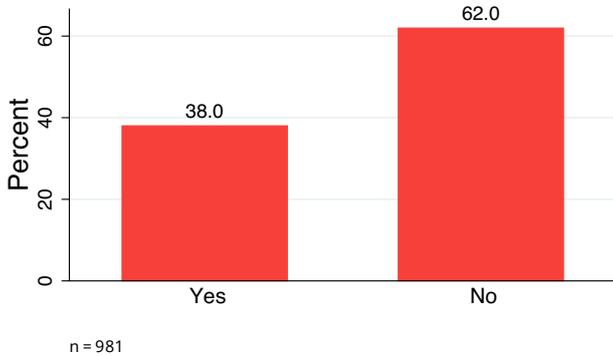
**FIGURE 4**  
**How often are you in touch with your friends / family in DNL / LNR?**



Source: ZOIS

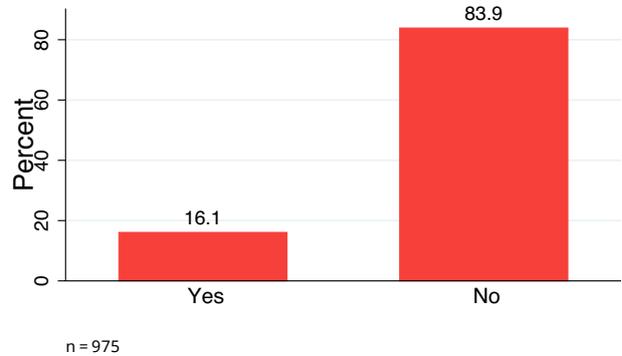
The survey also reveals the many strong ties the displaced in both Russia and Ukraine retain with family members and friends in both the occupied territories and the rest of the Donbas. Two thirds of displaced Russians have relatives or friends in the areas controlled by Kyiv; and just under 90 percent have relatives or friends in the occupied territories. Among the IDPs in Ukraine, two thirds have friends or relatives in the occupied territories and the government-controlled Donbas respectively. About half of the displaced in Russia and Ukraine are in daily or weekly contact with relatives or friends in the occupied territories. Thus, the fact that the density of contacts with the places and people left behind, seems to make an actual return appear less urgent and – due to first-hand reports about the situation on the ground – less appealing. ► FIGURES 3 + 4

**FIGURE 5**  
**Ukraine:**  
Do you have family / friends in Russia?



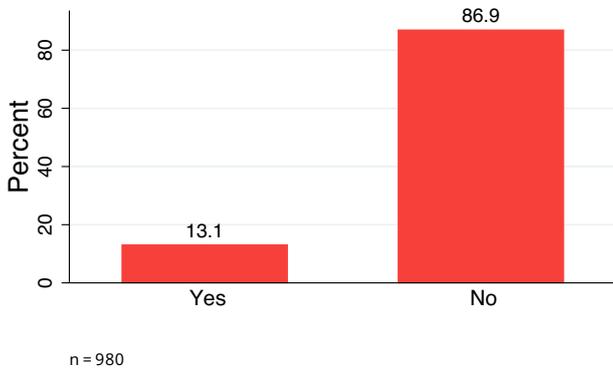
Source: ZOIS

**FIGURE 6**  
**Ukraine:**  
Do you have family / friends in other FSU countries?



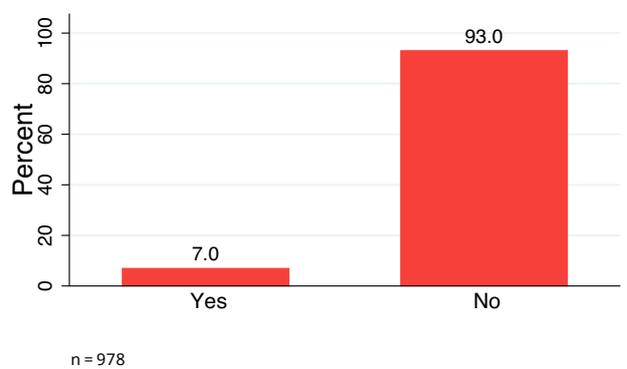
Source: ZOIS

**FIGURE 7**  
**Ukraine:**  
Do you have family / friends in the EU?



Source: ZOIS

**FIGURE 8**  
**Ukraine:**  
Do you have family / friends in USA or Canada?



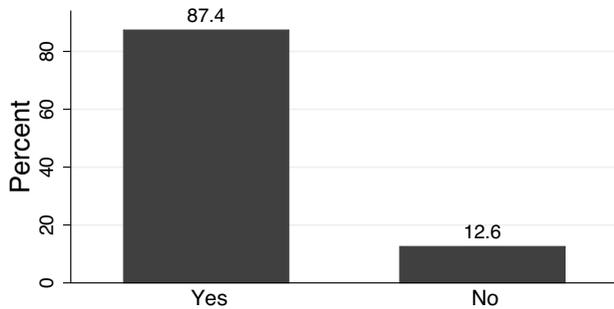
Source: ZOIS

Overall, about 40 percent of IDPs in Ukraine have friends or relatives living or working in Russia (and about 16 percent in other post-Soviet states). This density of interpersonal linkages made going to Russia a feasible perspective in the first place. It is also bound to guard against Ukrainian-Russian frontlines in personal relations. By comparison, the internally displaced have much more limited personal links to EU Member States (about 13 percent) and North America (about 7 percent). In this regard they are similar to the displaced in Russia of whom about 11 percent and 5 percent respectively report having family members or close friends based in the EU and North America. Thus, onward migration to the West is a more distant prospect, at least at present. ► FIGURES 5 - 12

**FIGURE 9**

**Russia:**

Do you have family / friends in Russia?



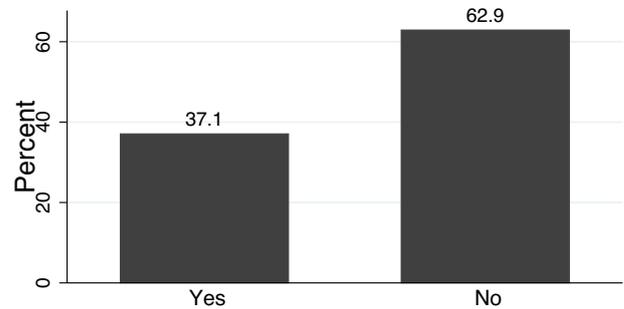
n = 1000

Source: ZOIS

**FIGURE 10**

**Russia:**

Do you have family / friends in other FSU countries?



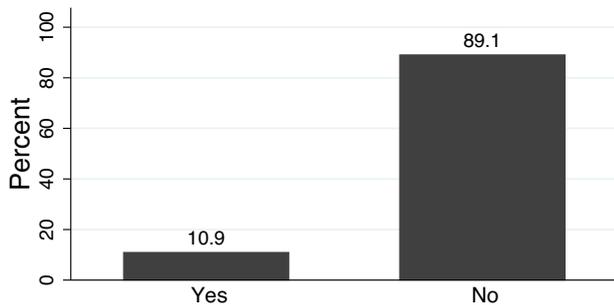
n = 995

Source: ZOIS

**FIGURE 11**

**Russia:**

Do you have family / friends in the EU?



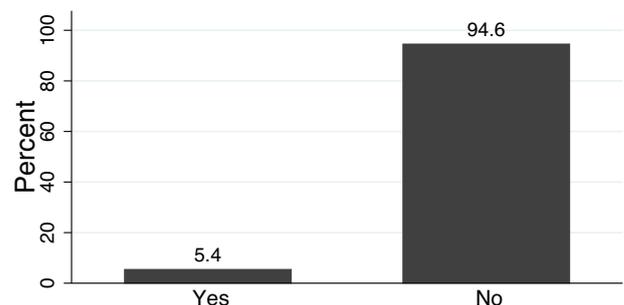
n = 987

Source: ZOIS

**FIGURE 12**

**Russia:**

Do you have family / friends in USA or Canada?



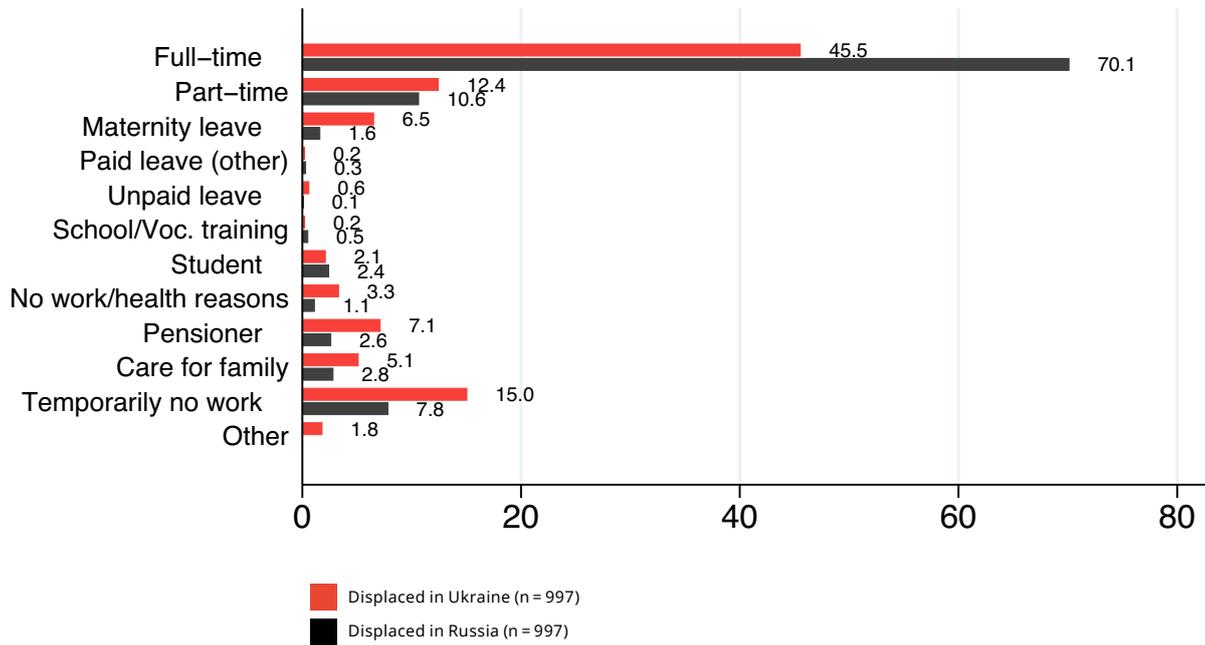
n = 992

Source: ZOIS

### Jobs and income

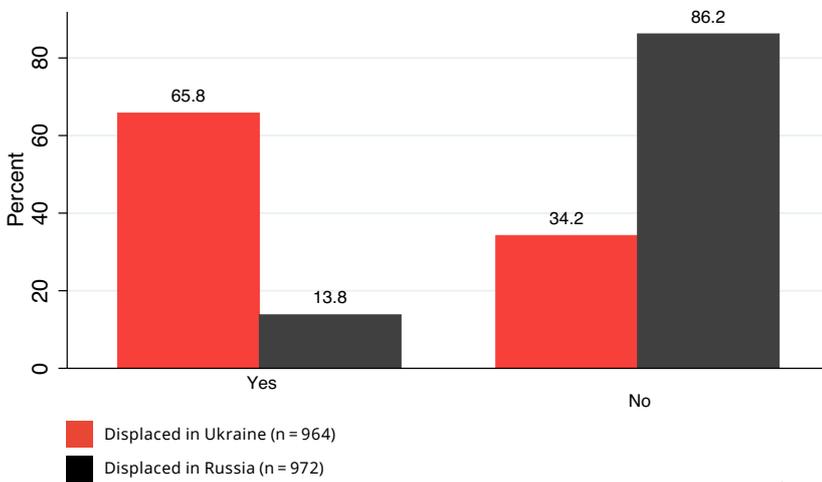
The self-reported current mean income is higher among the displaced in Russia (€470 or \$500 per month) compared to that of the IDPs (about €160 or \$170 per month). Average salaries have fluctuated significantly in Russia and Ukraine in recent years, but the mean income of the displaced in Russia roughly equals the average wage, whereas the mean income of the IDPs falls below the average salary in Ukraine. The discrepancy in the income levels of the displaced is, at least in part, linked to the fact that over 70 percent of the displaced in Russia report a full-time work status, compared to 46 percent of IDPs in Ukraine. Conversely, about 15 percent of the internally displaced describe themselves as “temporarily out of work” or “looking for work”, compared to only about 2 percent of the displaced in

**FIGURE 13**  
Which answer best describes your main employment status at this time?



Source: ZOIS

**FIGURE 14**  
Do you currently receive financial state support?



Source: ZOIS

Russia. ► **FIGURE 13** The share of non-working pensioners, those not working for health reasons, and those in charge of care duties in the family is higher among the displaced in Ukraine, – these groups are by definition less mobile, less inclined to move further afield and probably less risk-averse when it comes to giving up the state support they are accustomed to, even if it is limited and in decline. Only 14 percent of the respondents in Russia declare that they are receiving state support, compared to 66 percent in Ukraine.

► **FIGURE 14** According to the ZOIS survey, the majority of the displaced in

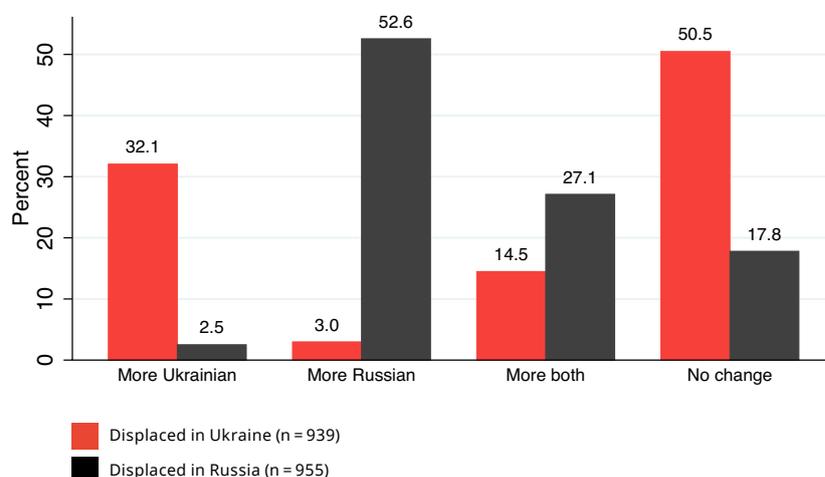
both Ukraine and Russia are fairly well educated with a 50:50 split between those with secondary and some higher education. Thus, the data suggests that the explanation for the higher employment levels of the displaced in Russia can on the one hand be explained by sheer necessity in the absence of state support and on the other hand by the comparatively better chances in the Russian labour market. For the displaced in Russia at least, this degree of economic integration and comparisons with their economic chances in Ukraine underpins the self-reported intentions to stay where they are.

### Shifts in identities

The ZOIS survey reveals a complex picture about the identities of the displaced that calls into question the common black and white media coverage and the analysis of identities in Ukraine. A one-off survey does not allow for the systematic comparison of views and identities before and after displacement. In the absence of such a comparative point of reference, the survey explicitly asked respondents to gauge whether their own identity had changed as a result of the events since 2013. This question was asked twice: first, as a more-open ended question that avoids references to ethnicity, language or citizenship; and second, as a two-part question with a detailed breakdown of identity categories asking respondents to compare their own identity now to their identity five years ago.

Both questions recorded the bigger identity changes among those displaced to Russia (only about 18 percent of respondents reported “no change”). Asked generally, whether their identity has changed as a result of the events 2013 to 2016, just over 50 percent said they felt “more Russian” now but interestingly, close to 30 percent said they felt more strongly than before that they were “both Russian and Ukrainian”. Among the internally displaced, half the respondents reported an identity shift – and the other half did not. Just over 30 percent of the IDPs stated that they now felt “more Ukrainian”, and 15 percent felt more strongly that they were “both Ukrainian and Russian”. Thus, mixed identities remain – or have become even more –

**FIGURE 15**  
As a result of the events 2013 – 16, do you feel...



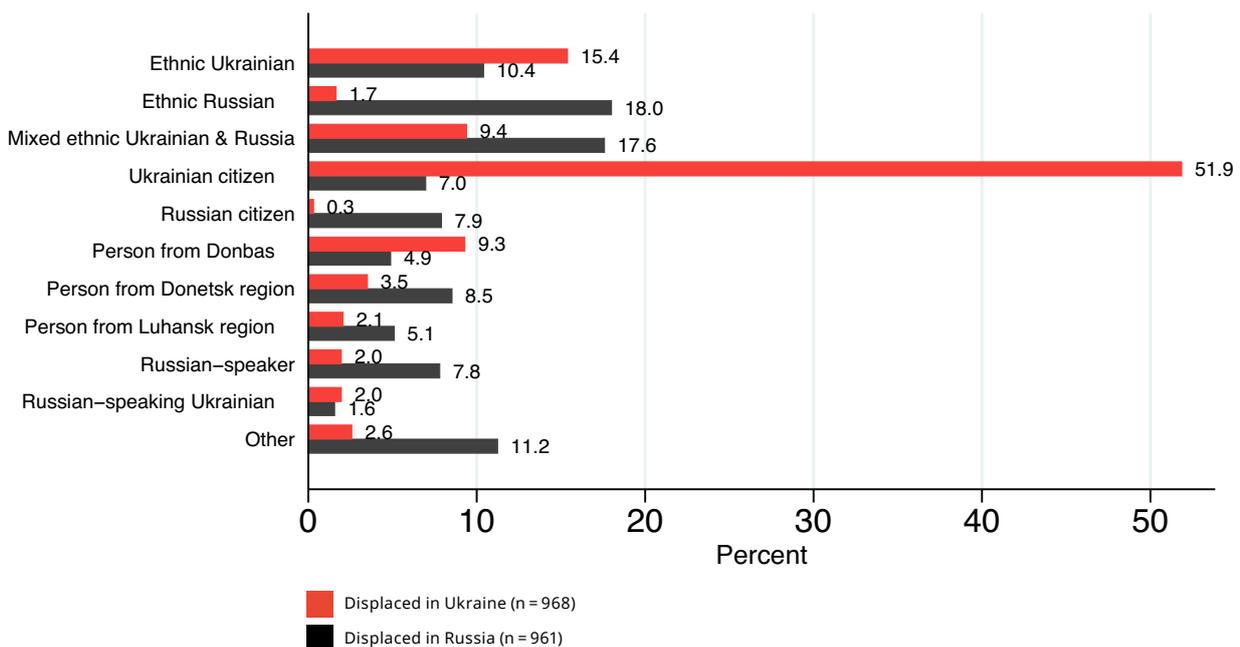
Source: ZOIS

important among those who are most directly affected by the war. ► **FIGURE 15** This salience of mixed identities stands in contrast to the polarizations characterizing much of the analysis of Ukraine. If mixed identities are apparent during a war, they are even more likely to be present in peaceful times as well.

The second two-part survey question about self-reported identities now as compared to five years ago reveals more nuanced patterns. Again, those displaced to Russia report the bigger shifts in their identities. The share of the displaced in Russia self-identifying as “ethnic Russian” (18 percent compared to 13 percent five years ago) and “ethnic Ukrainian” has gone up (from 8 percent in 2011 to 10 percent in 2016). The category “mixed ethnic Ukrainian and Russian” has increased in salience from 15 percent to 18 percent. This result confirms the pattern emerging from the first identity question discussed above, but it also shows that that question, as expected, was not simply reduced to ethnic identities by the respondents. ► **FIGURE 16**

Looking back five years, 27 percent of the displaced in Russia said that their most salient identity was “Ukrainian citizen” – the most significant identity category overall – compared to only 7 percent choosing this identity marker as the main one today. These figures amount to a retrospective illustration that the identification with the Ukrainian state (rather than Ukrainian ethnicity or language) was strong in Eastern Ukraine before the war.

**FIGURE 16**  
**What identity is most important to you personally today?**



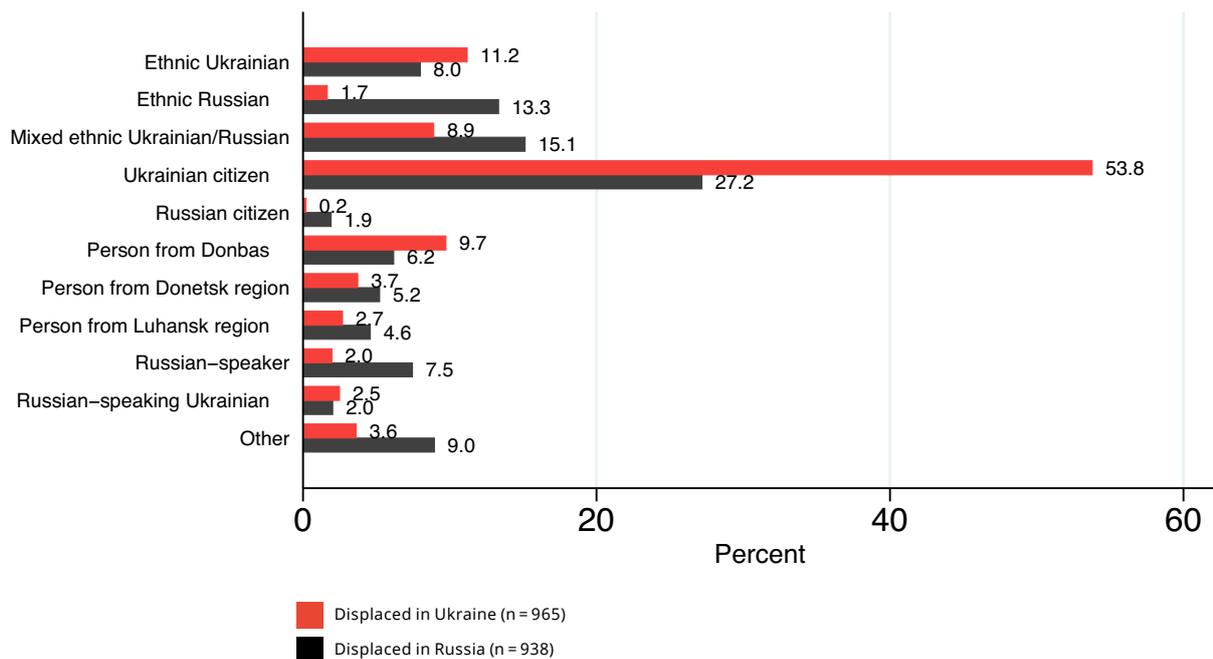
Source: ZOiS

Today “Russian citizen” stands at about 8 percent, compared to only 2 percent in the retrospective identity assessment. “Russian-speaker” was and remains the most important identity for about 8 percent of the respondents in Russia. Regional identification with the Donbas was named as the primary identity by only 6 percent of the respondents for 2011 and by 5 percent now. The more specific identification with Donetsk oblast has risen from 5 to 9 percent, and identification with Luhansk oblast has remained stable at 5 percent.

The IDPs in Ukraine report a much smaller change in their identities – a result that is in line with the open-ended first question discussed above. For the IDPs “Ukrainian citizen” was and is the most important identity (about 52 percent now compared to 54 percent five years ago). The changes to the other identity categories are similarly small: respondents report a slight increase in the category “ethnic Ukrainian” (from about 11 to 15 percent), a 0.5 percent increase in “mixed ethnic Ukrainian and Russian” (from 8.9 to 9.4 percent), a drop of 0.2–0.6 percent in various expressions of regional identity (now two, four and nine percent for Luhansk region, Donetsk region, and Donbas respectively), and a 0.5 percent drop in the category “Russian-speaking Ukrainian” (from 2.5 to 2 percent). Thus, overall the self-reported identity changes of the internally displaced are moderate. A degree of “ethnification” has taken place, but identification with the Ukrainian polity through citizenship has survived as the majority’s primary identity.

► FIGURE 17

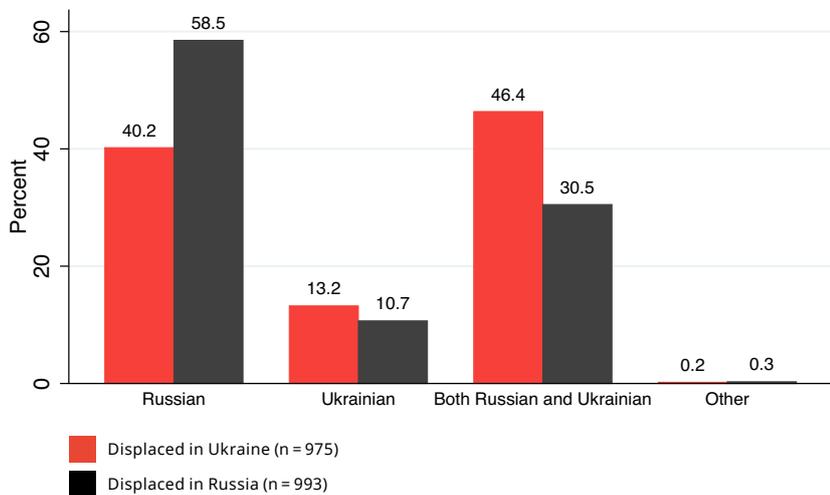
**FIGURE 17**  
**What identity was most important to you five years ago?**



Source: ZOIS

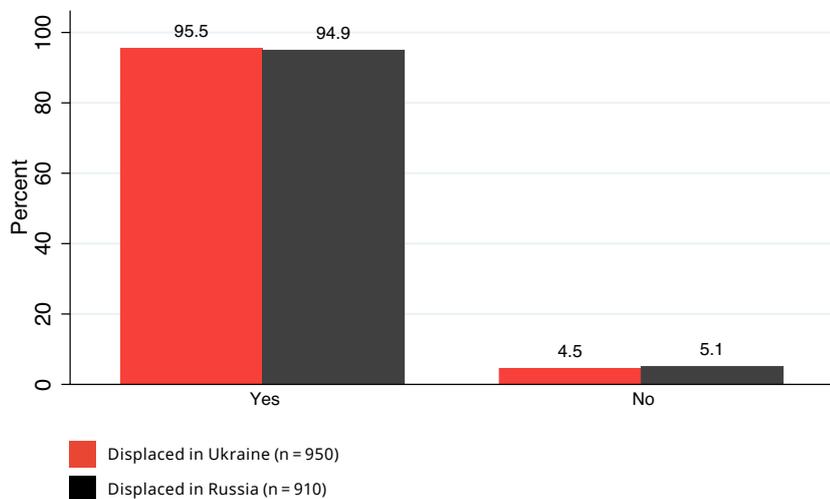
While a higher proportion of displaced in Russia than in Ukraine considers Russian their native language (about 60 percent compared to 40 percent), the more interesting results are once again the nuances usually hidden from standard polls. About a third to half of the displaced in Russia and Ukraine respectively describe both Russian and Ukrainian as their native languages and do not regard this as a change in recent years. The results show that bilingual identities have remained strong, that language does not equate with ethnicity, and that linguistic identities have remained by and large unchanged by the experience of displacement. ► FIGURE 18 + 19

**FIGURE 18**  
**What language do you consider your native language?**



Source: ZOIS

**FIGURE 19**  
**Would you have answered the same three years ago?**



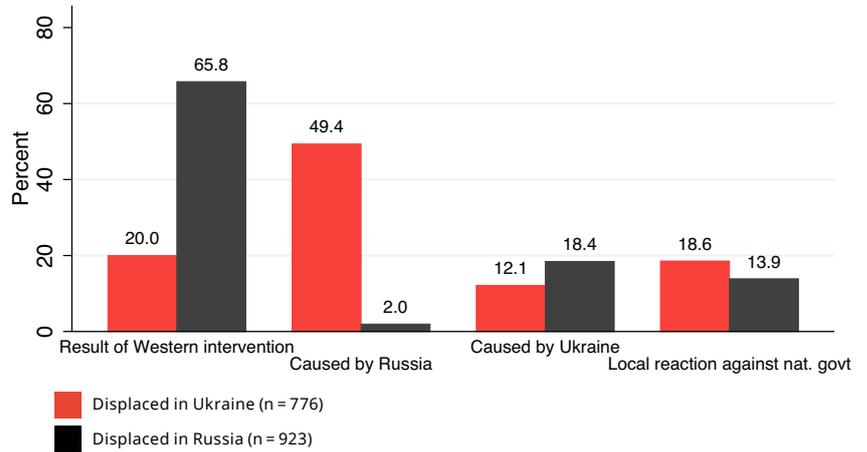
Source: ZOIS

### Views on the war and conflict-resolution

While the majority of IDPs in Ukraine blame Russia for the war, 20 percent see it as a result of Western intervention. This result suggests that the political attitudes of the IDPs are more sceptical vis-à-vis the West than one might have assumed. ► FIGURE 20

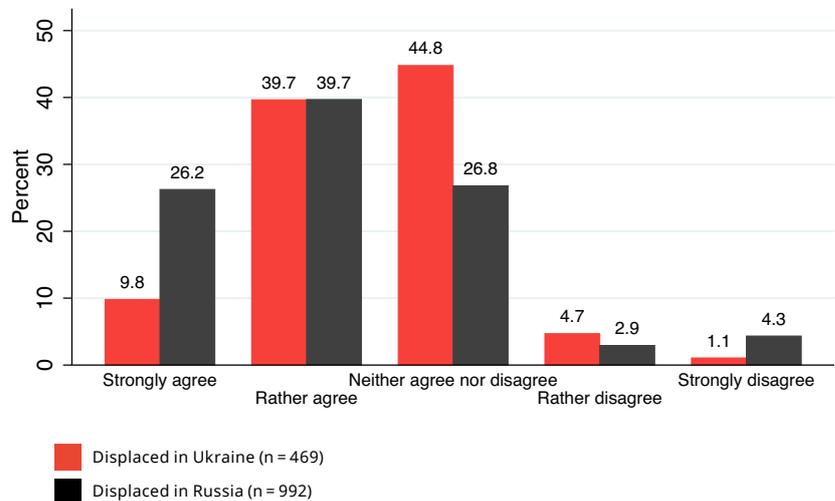
The displaced in both Russia and Ukraine are split evenly between those who expect the Minsk Agreement to be implemented and those who do not. However, a remarkable 70 percent of the displaced in Russia and 50 percent of the IDPs in Ukraine agree (“strongly” or “rather”) with the principles of the Minsk agreement. Thus, the survey results underpin the continued importance of Minsk as an overarching framework of commitment to conflict-resolution. ► FIGURE 21

**FIGURE 20**  
Which statement is closest to your opinion about the conflict in Donbas?



Source: ZOIS

**FIGURE 21**  
Do you agree with the Minsk Agreement?



Source: ZOIS

The political cleavages between the two groups of displaced are most pronounced when asked about their preference regarding the status of the self-proclaimed Donetsk and Luhansk People’s Republics. Two thirds of the displaced in Russia see the territories as a part of Russia, whether with or without a special autonomy status, whereas about 96 percent of the displaced in Ukraine think of the occupied territories as an integral part of Ukraine (of whom about a third envisages a special autonomy status). ► **FIGURE 22**

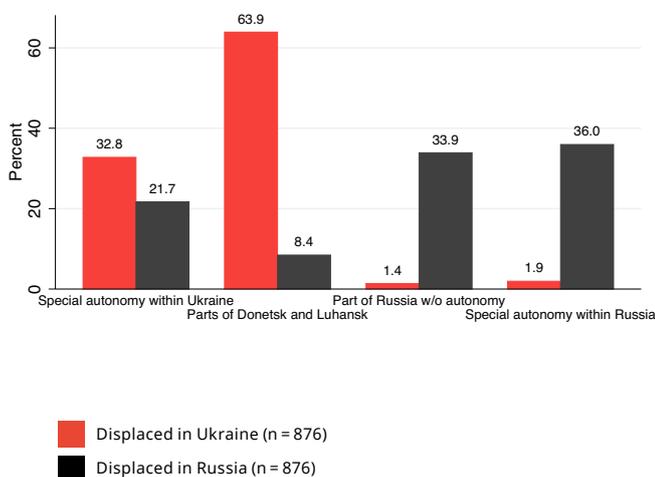
**Political and economic attitudes**

The survey results show that the displaced are a politically interested group – about 60 percent of the respondents in Russia are very or relatively interested in Russia, and about 43 percent in Ukraine. About 40 percent of the respondents in Russia and 20 percent in Ukraine state that they are more interested in politics now than three years ago. This makes them a political constituency neither the Russian nor the Ukrainian political leadership can ignore.

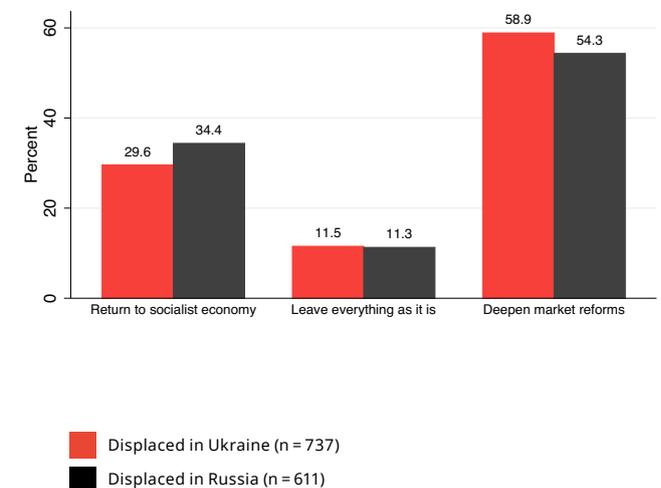
The economic preferences of the internally and externally displaced are very similar: the majority favours deepening the market system (59 and 54 percent respectively), while roughly a third (30 and 34 percent respectively) would prefer a return to the socialist system. Only a minority (12 and 11 percent respectively) supports the status quo, a finding that suggests that the displaced are a political constituency with expectations that politicians will have to address. ► **FIGURE 23**

The majority of the displaced – about 60 percent of the IDPs and about 57 percent of the displaced in Russia – agree (either “strongly” or “somewhat”) with the statement that “democracy is still the best form of government”. Only about 11 and 8 percent respectively of the internally and externally displaced disagree (either “somewhat” or “strongly”); with about a third undecided in

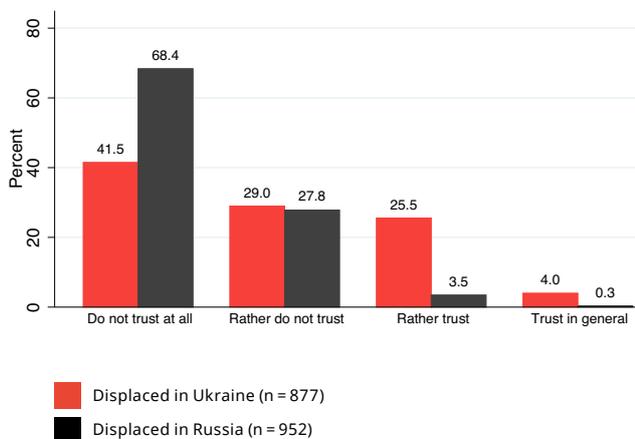
**FIGURE 22**  
In your view, what should the status of DNR / LNR be?



**FIGURE 23**  
What type of economy should exist in Ukraine?

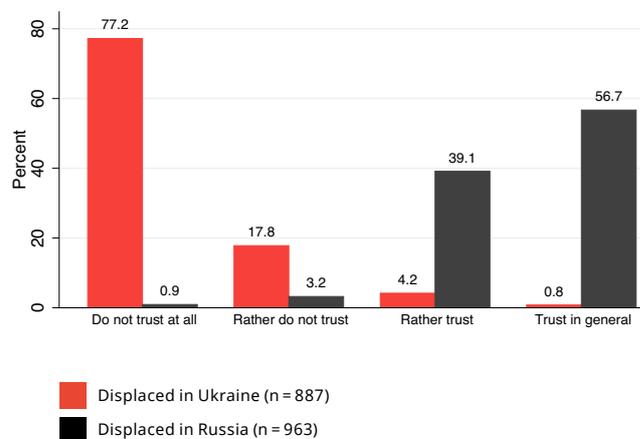


**FIGURE 24**  
**How much trust do you have in the Ukrainian President?**



Source: ZOIS

**FIGURE 25**  
**How much trust do you have in the Russian President?**



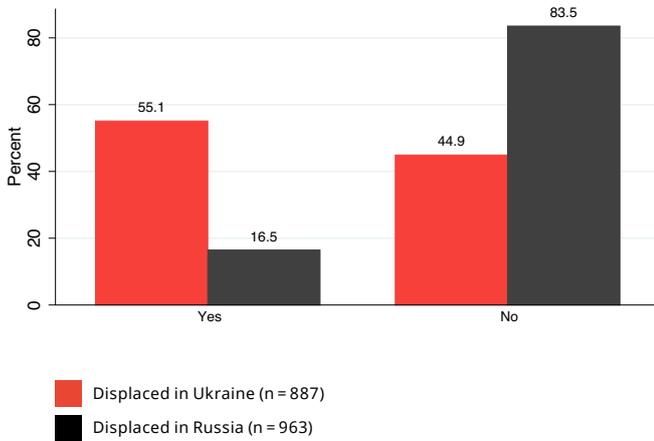
Source: ZOIS

both groups. This very general question, which typically features in opinion polls, does not allow for a detailed analysis, including the respondents’ understanding of democracy, but it serves as a baseline indicator. In this case it suggests that the political preferences of the displaced irrespective of their current location are unlikely to have diverged much on this issue prior to displacement and that there has been little scope for re-socialization in their new locations.

There is a marked difference in the trust the displaced have in “their” political leaders: an overwhelming majority of over 90 percent of the respondents in Russia “generally” or “rather” trust the Russian president – a sharp contrast to only about a third of the IDPs in Ukraine trusting the Ukrainian president. The key here is not the contrast in trust levels as such, but the fact that the displaced reflect the general mood around them. As for the IDPs, their trust in the Ukrainian president is, in fact, still relatively high compared to that of the overall Ukrainian population. The responses show that those who left Ukraine for Russia have rather quickly assimilated into the Russian mainstream, either out of conviction or out of fear that a different answer might pose a problem for them. ► FIGURES 24 + 25

While the small share of those displaced to Russia supporting Ukraine’s EU membership (17 percent) fits a similar pattern, the fact that 45 percent of the internally displaced are against EU membership may be more surprising. Current disappointment with the EU’s inability to change the situation, a perceived link between displacement and the Euromaidan, and an association of the EU with closer links with the even more unpopular NATO may jointly explain this result. ► FIGURE 26

**FIGURE 26**  
**Should Ukraine join the EU?**



Source: ZOiS

## Conclusion

A resolution to the conflict seems far off, and the displaced are likely to stay where they are, not least because the majority has family and friends close by. The displaced will become an issue of political and socio-economic integration, even more so for Ukraine than for Russia, judging by the survey results that show that the displaced in Russia are comparatively better integrated into the Russian job market. The displaced are a politically aware constituency that neither the Ukrainian nor the Russian political leadership can afford to ignore. For the time being, the internally and externally displaced maintain frequent links to relatives and friends in the conflict zone, though these personal linkages seem to mitigate against rather than strengthen the wish to return.

The survey has highlighted both an increased salience of ethnic identities (“ethnic Ukrainian” and “ethnic Russian”) resulting from the experience of war and displacement, but also the continued significance of mixed identities, defined either in general terms (“both Ukrainian and Russian”) or more specifically as dual ethnic or bilingual identities. If even those who have experienced something as extreme as displacement convey mixed identities, these identities are even more likely to characterize the population of Eastern Ukraine at large. Ukrainian politicians have to keep this reality in mind if they want to reconsolidate the Ukrainian state from within.

## Imprint

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