

Displaced Ukrainians Mark Neville 2016-17

Produced by Maria Varenikova



At Kyiv Military Hospital, 2016, Mark Neville

Throughout 2016 I have been travelling through Ukraine (and also to Moscow) making new work focusing on the estimated 2.5 million internally and externally displaced Ukrainians resulting from the war in the Donbas. I first started to regularly visit Ukraine in response to offers to have my photo book *Battle Against Stigma*, a project about post traumatic stress disorder amongst returning troops, translated into Ukrainian. So my first visits to Ukraine involved working for two days at Kyiv Military Hospital.



At Kiev Military Hospital, 2, 2016, Mark Neville



Performance at Kyiv Military Hospital, 1, Mark Neville, 2016.

On the second day of my stay there a touring troupe of child performers visited the hospital. Some of the children sang or played instruments, some were acrobats, but almost all wore traditional Ukrainian national dress. It was immediately clear that the preservation of traditional Ukrainian culture seemed to played a significant role in the conflict.



Letishenko Oksana and family displaced from Pisky, Donetsk region, to IDP camp in Korosteshiv region, 2016, Mark Neville

During subsequent visits my focus turned to the huge demographic of Ukrainians displaced by the conflict. Though Kyiv may superficially appear to be like any other European capital city, the atmosphere is definitely one of unease. The whole country has been traumatized, de-stabilized and divided by the war. I began to travel throughout the country, regularly meeting, photographing and interviewing the displaced, families who had fled their homes to escape the shelling in Luhansk and Donetsk.



Displaced children at an IDP shelter in Korosteshiv region, 2016, Mark Neville

IDP shelters in Ukraine, which are depressingly similar in almost every regard, are frequently located in previously abandoned buildings, be they churches, sanatoria, hospitals, barracks, or schools, and it is the displaced themselves who find ways to make them habitable, as they struggle with extremely poor sanitation, lighting, and heating.

Families are often jammed into tiny rooms, and time and time again it became clear that displacement in Ukraine hits children, the elderly, and the most vulnerable hardest. These are people who often lack the means to access the medicines or treatments they need, who struggle to gain employment, for whom there is no way home and no way out of the camp or shelter. These are the key issues explored here and in the photographs and the video interviews and testimonies in the accompanying exhibition at the Centre for East European and International Studies (ZOiS).

Successive corrupt or inept governments and a continuing economic crisis mean that the quality of education and health provision for children and the elderly generally varies enormously anyway, and is sometimes based upon outdated Soviet models.

Through their displacement, individuals disappear from view in both academic and policy discussions about the impact of war on political attitudes and behaviour. They fall outside standard opinion polls, they do not figure in international media reports (and hardly figure in the Ukrainian media), and in policy circles they are primarily seen as a social policy or humanitarian aid issue. This is even more the case when the displaced person is a child.

Many displaced children are taken in by a variety of different organizations. A 'family type' orphanage, for example, is a children's home run by a family or a single, unmarried person who voluntarily takes charge of the education and care of at least five orphans or children deprived of parental care. The children live under the same roof as the host family.



'Family-type' Orphanage run by the Rodikovs, 2016, Mark Neville

I visited one such place run by Vladimir Rodikov and his wife outside Kyiv. The displaced children here seemed happy and well integrated into the existing family. A similar model is the *Father's House*, a charity organization founded by Roman Korniko in 1996, which was established in response to the problem of child homelessness in Ukraine.



Tatiana and her family at a 'Father's House' Rehabilitation Centre for Women and Children in Sviatopetrivske, Kyiv region, 2016, Mark Neville

These organizations offer programmes of complex rehabilitation, raising children who have survived dangerous experiences. After a period of living with a family, the ultimate aim of *Father's House* is to bring the children back to their biological families or, when this is not possible, to prepare them for adoption or for independent lives and integration into society.



'Father's House' Rehabilitation Centre for Women and Children in Sviatopetrivske, 2016, Mark Neville



Displaced Ukrainian, 2016, Mark Neville



Kharkiv Regional Special school for Blind Children, 2016, Mark Neville

All schools in Ukraine are now expected to accept IDPs. More and more boarding schools which were originally established to exclusively serve the deaf or the blind, are now taking in the displaced or orphans. Some schools in Eastern Ukraine still adhere to a Soviet-style “exclusive” system, such as the Kharkiv Regional Special school for Blind Children.



Kharkiv Regional Special school for Blind Children, 2, 2016, Mark Neville

Fully inclusive schools, which are rare, do not separate "general education" and "special education" programmes; instead, all students learn together. Recently, the Ministry of Education has prepared a general recommendation for the inclusive education of disabled children, but the topic is still controversial.



Serenading Masha at Zhytomyr Special Boarding School for Deaf Children, Ukraine, 1, 2016, Mark Neville

Zhytomyr Special Boarding School for Deaf Children no.2 is another “exclusive” school situated 130km from Kyiv, in the north-west of Ukraine. In addition to accommodating children from all over the region, the school is now also taking in children who have been displaced by the war in Eastern Ukraine, as well as children with Down Syndrome.



Zhytomyr Special Boarding School for Deaf Children, Ukraine, 2, 2016. Mark Neville



Zhytomyr Special Boarding School for Deaf Children, 2nd, Mark Neville, 2016



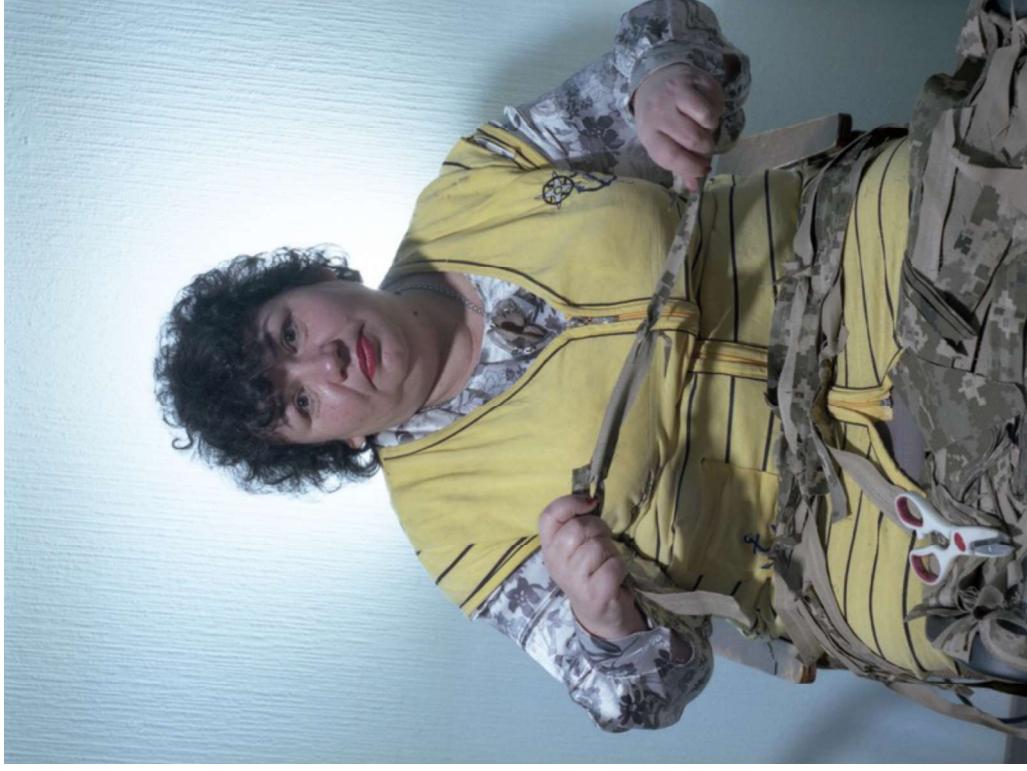
Galina, displaced from Donetsk, making camouflage netting in Kramatorsk with the "Bees", 2016, Mark Neville

One aspect of life in Ukraine which has taken greater significance during the conflict is volunteering. Many people either donate ten percent of their meagre wages to support the Ukrainian troops, or send food and clothing parcels directly to the frontline. An organization called "the Bees" in Kramatorsk is particularly remarkable.



Evgenia Avramova at 'the Bees', 2016, Mark Neville

Working away in the cramped basement space of a block of flats is a group of women, predominantly in their sixties, who have been making camouflage outfits and netting day and night since 2014. People send in old bits of clothing, material, and bed sheets, which are systematically cut up into strips of material and woven through a fishing wire frame - the "Bees'" own design - in order to produce camouflage nets.



Evgenia displaced from Donetsk, making camouflage netting in Kramatorsk, at 'the Bees', 2016, Mark Neville

One can see the results of their endeavour everywhere: it covers both playgrounds and checkpoints, tanks and power stations all over Eastern Ukraine. Most of the women working there were displaced from either Donetsk or Luhansk, and a few were native to Kramatorsk but had become patriots after its brief but dramatic occupation in 2014. My journeys to Eastern Ukraine to visit IDP shelters normally involved me flying to Kyiv and then continuing the journey by car.



'Stalingrad' checkpoint, Donbas, 1, 2016, Mark Neville

We would have to navigate a series of military checkpoints, which became increasingly frequent the closer to the frontline we got. The most easterly checkpoint in Donbas is referred to by the nickname “Stalingrad” to reflect the frequent shelling.



'Stalingrad' checkpoint, East Ukraine, 2, 2016, Mark Neville

When I visited 'Stalingrad' in September 2016 the forest surrounding the checkpoint was black, the pine trees broken in half and charred by the explosions.



'Stalingrad' checkpoint, Donbas, 3, 2016, Mark Neville



Billboard outside Kharkiv, 2016, Mark Neville

Long stretches of very poor road linking Central and Eastern Ukraine were interspersed by billboards, motorway cafes, stray dogs, and occasionally abandoned tanks.



Zinaida Vasilevna at Sviatohirsk IDP shelter 'Troyanda', 2016, Mark Neville

In December 2016 I visited Sviatohirsk, a village in Donetsk oblast', in order to interview people at three separate IDP camps: a converted sanatorium, a hospital and a school, all of which had been renovated by the IDPs themselves. Two typical residents, women in their seventies, were Zinaida Vasilevna and Raisa Semyonovna. Both were born during World War II and originally from the Donetsk region mining town of Gorlovka. Unrelated and unknown to each other before the displacement to Sviatohirsk, but now forced to share a tiny room, they were extremely pessimistic about their chances of returning home before they die.



Lazo and Anna Ludmyla at an IDP Camp in Sviatohirsk, Donetsk, 2016, Mark Neville

Lazo and Anna Liudmila left their home in Luhansk when the war began in order to take a rest in Odesa. Whilst in Odesa, the conflict escalated and it became clear that they could not return to their home. They ultimately found refuge in the same IDP camp as Zinaida and Raisa, “*Troyanda*” (it means “rose”).

According to the director of the local music school in Sviatohirsk, which gives free lessons to the displaced, the population of 4,000 in Sviatohirsk has doubled with the growing IDP demographic since the war began in 2014. Lazo said that there was little or no provision made for the disabled in Ukraine, and that displaced disabled children were even worse off.

Out of an estimated 1,785,740 internally displaced people in Ukraine (as of 2016), at least 169,756 are children, and 493,897 disabled and elderly. (State Emergency Service of Ukraine <http://www.dsns.gov.ua>)

A country in crisis clearly cannot offer accessible care for everyone in need, and many centres are maintained entirely by volunteers. Ukraine is now among the ten countries worldwide with the highest number of internally displaced, and the first one in Europe. The number of IDPs in Ukraine is greater than population of, for example, Montenegro or Estonia.



IDP modular camp outside Kharkiv, 2016, Mark Neville

On the outskirts of Kharkiv a modular camp has been funded and installed by the German Foreign Office in order to support IDPs in Ukraine. Housing about 400 people, it has successfully provided at least a temporary place of residence. The longer term goal was that these IDP's would ultimately be able to build a new life in Kharkiv, but sadly most have been unable to find financial means to leave the shelter.



Psychological rehabilitation camp 'Lisova Zastava', Dymyri Village, 2, 2016, Mark Neville

One of the very few psychological rehabilitation camps available to displaced children, *Lisova Zastava*, is located in a forest close to Dymyri Village in Kyiv region. It provides support and treatment, including a schedule of art therapy classes and horse riding for a limited two week period only, to children who normally live on the frontline, or who have been displaced or orphaned due to the conflict.



Psychological rehabilitation camp 'Lisova Zastava', Dyrmer Village, 1, 2016, Mark Neville

A group of one hundred children arrive, only to leave and be replaced by the next group two weeks later. I was present as one such group of children arrived and the distress was palpable.



Kristina in Luganke, Eastern Ukraine, hours after the shelling, 1, 2016, Mark Neville

Two of the villages I visited where these displaced children came from were Luganke and Avdiivka. A few hours prior to these photographs being taken in September 2016, Kristina and her mother had been sheltering in the basement of their home in Luganke, trying to escape the shelling.



Kristina hours after the shelling in Luganke, Eastern Ukraine, 2, 2016, Mark Neville

As soon as it stopped, Kristina insisted on going out to play in the garage, where she had set up a kind of impromptu theatrical stage with props. Within minutes she was playing to camera, apparently mimicking the screeching sounds of bombs exploding in her town, sometimes doing the splits.



Kristina hours after the shelling in Lukanke, Eastern Ukraine, 3, 2016, Mark Neville

Sometimes she would pose with a toy telephone in front of her home's green front gate which had been peppered with holes from flying shrapnel.



Kristina hours after the shelling in Luganke, Eastern Ukraine, 4, 2016, Mark Neville

Since the pictures were taken, Kristina has had to leave Luganke. According to UNICEF 580,000 children who live in the occupied territories or close to the frontline have been effected by the conflict, and at least one third of them needs psychological assistance. (https://www.unicef.org/ukraine/ukr/media_29096.html)



Kristina hours after the shelling in Luganke, Eastern Ukraine, 5, 2016, Mark Neville



The Lukinovy, Displaced from Crimea, 2017, Mark Neville

As of 2016, an estimated 22,000 Crimeans of different ethnic origins have left their homes after the Russian Federation annexed the peninsula in 2014. ([State Emergency Service of Ukraine http://www.dsns.gov.ua/](http://www.dsns.gov.ua/)). The current authorities have required Crimean residents to either become Russian citizens or, if they refuse, to be deemed foreigners in Crimea. Anna Lukinova, husband Andrej, and son Timofey felt increasingly uncomfortable and decided to leave their native Crimea and move to Kyiv shortly after the annexation.



Aleksandr Konokov and Sasha on the Goat Farm in Desiatny, Zhytomyr Oblast, 2017, Mark Neville

31% of Ukrainians reside in rural areas (according to the State Statistics Service of Ukraine), and as we travelled to IDP shelters throughout the country, we would sometimes make contact with displaced people who had successfully managed to earn their living from private farming. Aleksandr was displaced from Severodonetsk. He and his wife were captured by separatists while delivering food parcels and gifts to Ukrainian army troops in Donetsk region. Both were subsequently tortured. Aleksandr was released after six months and moved to Zhytomyr, where he currently runs a farm with sheep and over two hundred goats.

Many internally displaced Ukrainians have relations and friends living in Russia (according to a ZOIS survey of late 2016 about 38%). An estimated 1 million Ukrainian citizens have been displaced to Russia. In November 2016 I travelled to Moscow where I interviewed three displaced Ukrainians who had arrived at the Civic Committee, straight form Donetsk. The Civic Assistance Society was established in 1990 and remains the only charitable organization in Moscow which helps all refugees and forced migrants regardless of their ethnicity, religion and societal status. (Within hours of us arriving at the Moscow Civic Committee office they received a call that Amnesty International had been closed down.). People displaced by the conflict arrive from Donetsk on a daily basis. Svetlana Ganushkina, the head of the Moscow Civic Committee, said that they currently have 311,000 refugees from Ukraine, all with a temporary one year asylum seekers' status. Progressing from this one year asylum status, which is already extremely arduous to secure, is far from simple, and many fleeing the war in Eastern Ukraine feel that they are unwanted and unsupported by both the Russian and Ukrainian governments. Within two months of the interviews and photo sessions with these Ukrainian asylum seekers, all three had independently contacted me and urged me not to reproduce their stories or image, online or in an exhibition, for fear it would jeopardize their chances of obtaining official residency status in Russia.

Conversely, I also met some Russians who had moved to Ukraine in response to the conflict. Moscow born artist Nadya Mitskevitch moved to Kyiv in April 2014 because she felt she would have more freedom of expression in Ukraine than in Russia. When the war started, she said she found herself in a state of shock and disbelief, which cemented her resolve to stay in Ukraine. Despite spending much of her childhood in Ukraine, she speaks only Russian, but has decided to learn Ukrainian as a matter of respect for her new home.



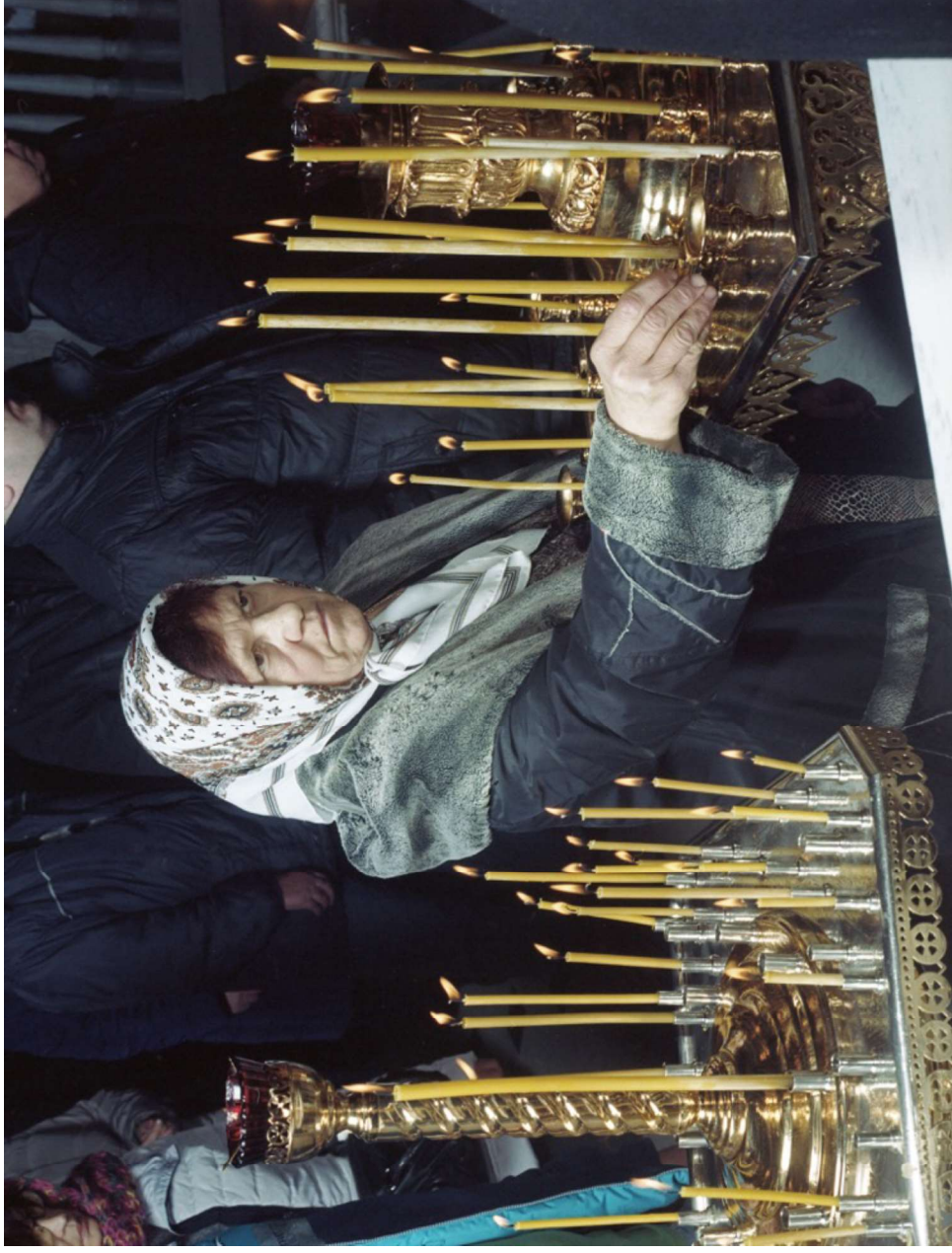
Russian born artist Nadya Mitskevitch moved to Ukraine fro Moscow in 2014, 2017, Mark Neville

The war highlights a complex interplay of cultural, national and political identities. Religion is an important part



The Choir at Kiev Pechersk Lavra Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate), 2017, Mark Neville

of Ukrainian society, and the churches play a role with regard to the displaced. Since Ukraine gained independence in 1991, the Ukrainian Orthodox Churches of the Kiev and the Moscow Patriarchates have been the country's largest confessions.



At Lavra Church, Kyiv, 2017, Mark Neville

Kyiv Lavra Orthodox Church belongs to the Moscow Patriarchate. Its website states that since 2016 it has provided one million kilograms of clothes and food to people impacted by the conflict through an organization called “Missions of Mercy without Borders”. It is estimated by the State Statistics Service of Ukraine that approximately 21 per cent of the population follow Orthodoxy according to the Moscow Patriarchate, and 44 per cent follow Orthodoxy according to the Kyiv Patriarchate.



37. Lent at Lavra, 2017, Mark Neville

Neither of the Patriarchates recognize the other as being legitimately Orthodox. Dr. Evgenia Kuznetsova writes: 'Since the outbreak of conflict, reports of religious persecution in the Donbas region have continued to emerge, and there have been cries to protect the Orthodox faith from the advances of decadent Europe. In Crimea, according to witnesses and human rights observers, members of every confession (except for the Russian Orthodox Church) have suffered harassment. Though Russia officially observes a distinction between church and state, the Orthodox Church has become a political player closely related to the regime.'



Lavra Christian Orthodox Church Kyiv, 2017, Mark Neville



Children who attend the Virskiy Choreography School in Kyiv, wearing national dress, 2017, Mark Neville

Virskiy School of Choreography invites young people who were studying folk dances in their native towns (before being displaced to Kyiv) to attend classes and concerts for free. The re-enforcement of Ukrainian cultural identity through symbols such as national dress, dances, songs and the use of the Ukrainian language seemed to promote a feeling of security among many of the displaced people we interviewed in Ukraine.

Many people said they never felt themselves to be specifically Ukrainian or Russian until the conflict started. In fact, a ZOIS survey shows that before the war "Ukrainian citizenship" rather than ethnicity or language was the most important identity of those who were displaced later on both internally and externally. This has changed in parts. A significant share of the internally displaced feels "more Ukrainian" now (30% according to the ZOIS survey, 2016-17), while about 50% of the displaced in Russia feel "more Russian" (ibid.).

At the same time, mixed identities remain in place or have even been strengthened by the conflict: about 30% of the surveyed displaced in Russia said they felt more strongly now that their identity was "both Russian and Ukrainian", compared to about 15% of IDPs stating the same.



Clubbing in Kyiv, 2016, Mark Neville



Mr and Mrs Lazarenko, displaced from Luhansk, Kyiv Subway, 2016, Mark Neville



Dancing in Kyiv subway on International women's day, 2016, Mark Neville

Life in Kyiv continues, and on the surface at least there is a sense of normality. People go to bars and nightclubs at the weekend. They go to work using its elegant and efficient metro system, and on international women's day couples carry bunches of flowers. They even hold dances inside selected metro stations wearing (once again) traditional Ukrainian dress. But talk to anyone and they will know of the displaced, have family members who have been displaced by the conflict, or have been displaced themselves.