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Research Report

Intentions to stay and employment prospects of refugees from Ukraine

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Survey Insights:

Intentions to Stay and Employment Prospects of Refugees from Ukraine

Tetyana Panchenko, Panu Poutvaara

Key Messages

- We conducted two surveys of Ukrainian refugees in Germany.
- 63 percent of Ukrainian refugees plan to stay in Germany for at least 2 years.
- 22 percent of Ukrainian refugees in Germany are employed. The majority work below their self-reported formal qualifications.
- The share of Ukrainian refugees receiving social benefits has decreased from spring to fall.
- German skills are key to the integration of Ukrainians into the labor market.



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Intentions to Stay and Employment Prospects of Refugees from Ukraine

Tetyana Panchenko, Panu Poutvaara^{*}

Abstract

We conducted two waves of quantitative online surveys and qualitative interviews of Ukrainian refugees in Germany. We asked whether they plan to stay in Germany and whether they are already employed or plan to search for employment, as well as the factors that determine these. We report the results of the second wave of surveys in this policy brief. The second wave of the survey clarified the socio-demographic characteristics of refugees from Ukraine, the circumstances of their arrival and adaptation in Germany, and demonstrates the dynamics of changes in their plans and intentions.

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Russia's invasion of Ukraine has resulted in large numbers of Ukrainian refugees in Europe. Since February 2022, 7,824,440 Ukrainians have sought refuge in the European Union including 4,699,333 refugees from Ukraine registered for temporary protection or similar national protection schemes (as of November 8, 2022). The countries receiving the largest numbers are Poland (1,489,155) Germany (1,019,789) and Czech Republic (458,483) (UNHCR 2022). The refugees and their host countries face many challenges in this situation. Crucial for a good reception and integration are also the perspectives of the refugees themselves. For this purpose, we conducted online surveys in two waves among Ukrainian refugees in Germany. What are the socio-demographic characteristics of the refugees? What are the refugees' intentions about their prospects for staying? Do they want to take up a job and integrate into their host societies? The results reveal relevant insights into the intentions of the Ukrainian refugees with important policy implications for host countries in the EU.

Online Survey

The first wave of the survey was conducted in June¹, and the second in October 2022. The invitations to take part in the surveys were posted on Facebook in various Ukrainian- and Russian-speaking groups of Ukrainians in Germany, together with a link to the survey on the Qualtrics platform. 936 people participated in the survey's first wave, and 1461 in the second. Both samples were conducted independently of each other.

Since the participants of the study filled out the questionnaire online on their own, the number of answers received to different questions varies (figures indicate the number of respondents who answered each question). An important caveat is that the sample is not statistically representative, since respondents were recruited as a convenience sample using a snowball method. Therefore, the results should only be considered as indicative. At the same time, the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents and some of the results of both surveys (see Appendix, Figure A1) are comparable with each other, as well as with data that were obtained in a systematic survey, with 1,936 interviews, by INFO GmbH on behalf of the Federal Ministry of the Interior and Community (BMI) from March 24th to March 29th (INFO GmbH 2022).

¹ The results of the first wave were published in Panchenko (2022) and Giesing, Panchenko, & Poutvaara (2022).

Intentions of Ukrainian Refugees regarding staying in Germany

Official statistics show that the Ukrainians who arrived in Germany are mostly women with children whose husbands stayed in Ukraine.² Both survey waves show that they are generally of working age, well-educated and were employed in Ukraine (see Appendix, Figure A1). The second survey wave also shows that the vast majority of newly arrived Ukrainians felt financially stable in Ukraine and have their own housing, to which they can still return (see Appendix, Figure A2). Most of the above characteristics suggest that they have no particular reason to stay in Germany after the war. At the same time, the answers to direct questions about plans to stay in Germany demonstrate that a large share of Ukrainians will not be ready, or willing, to return for quite some time.

In both waves of the online survey, we asked the same question about respondents' plans for the next two years. Figure 1, which shows the distribution of respondents' answers about their plans, clearly shows that most refugees from Ukraine plan either «to stay in Germany» or «return to Ukraine». The number of those who plan on moving to another country is very small, at just 2 percent, same as it was with the INFO GmbH Survey (INFO GmbH 2022).

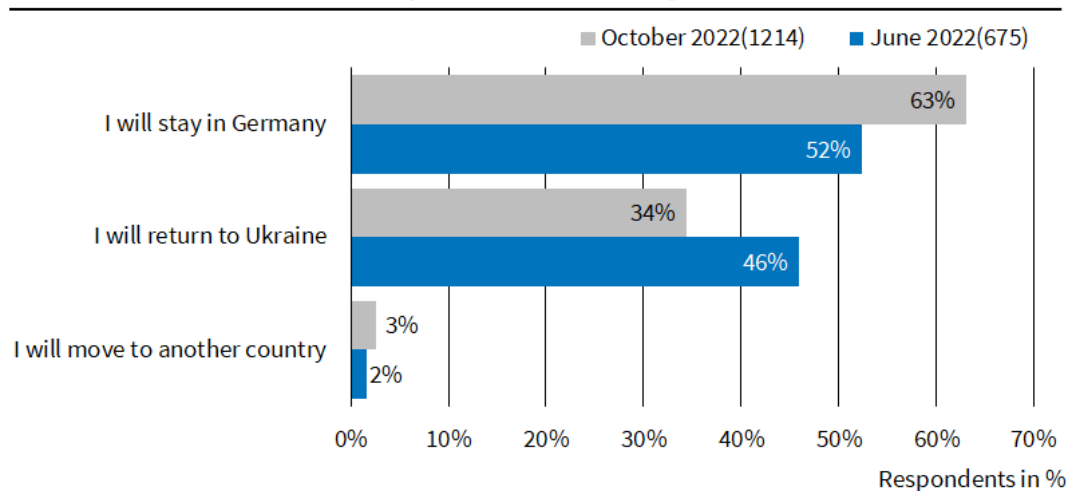
While in the first survey in June the share of those wanting to stay in Germany was only slightly higher than the share of those wanting to return to Ukraine, the share of those wanting to stay was considerably higher in October, suggesting that a protracted war affects the Ukrainian refugees' plans and intentions. In recent months, the share of those who expect a quick end to the war has decreased, although the belief in Ukraine's victory remains. Currently, about 60 percent of respondents expect the war to last at least another year, and more than 90 percent expect Ukraine to win. Both waves of the survey demonstrate that those who expect the war to end sooner are more likely to plan to return.

² According to the Federal Statistical Office, from February to the end of August, 616,000 women (65%) and 336,000 men (35%) entered Germany from Ukraine. If only people who were 18 years of age or older at the time of entry are considered, the proportion of women increases to 74%. Among the arrivals, there were also 348,000 minors (37%) (Statistisches Bundesamt 2022).

Figure 1:

Plans for the Next 2 Years of Ukrainians who Came to Germany after 24 February 2022

Answers to the ifo Question “What are your Plans for the Next 2 years?” in June and in October



Source: ifo Survey, June/October 2022.

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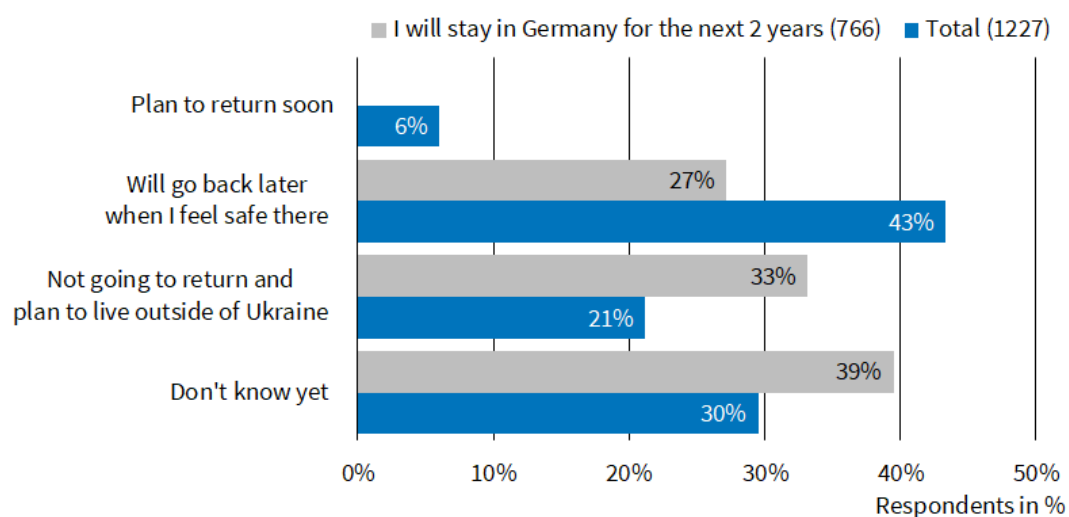
The second survey wave contained an additional question: “What are your thoughts on returning to Ukraine?” (Figure 2). The answers to this question were, as expected, distributed differently: 43 percent answered that they would return later, when they feel safe there, and 6 percent expressed the intention to return in the near future. At the same time, 21 percent of respondents intended not to return to Ukraine, and 27 percent said they did not know. Although the share of those who expect to return to Ukraine increases significantly with this alternative formulation of the question, we again see that about half of the respondents are not sure that they will return even in the long term. Among those who intend to stay in Germany for the next 2 years, less than a third (27 percent) would like to return to Ukraine in the future, a third (33 percent) expressed their intention to live outside Ukraine, and an even greater share (39 percent) do not know whether they are going to return to Ukraine even in the long term.

The distribution of answers to these questions among various socio-demographic groups and categories of respondents allows us to conclude that those whose partners are in Ukraine and those who have small children are the least willing to stay in Germany. Also, people from the east and south of Ukraine, where hostilities are most intense, intend to stay in Germany more often than their compatriots from other relatively calmer regions. Respondents from the west of Ukraine, many of whom had the opportunity to arrive in Germany in the first days of the war, are an exception: this group is also characterized by a high willingness to stay (see Appendix, Figure A 3). Among those who do not have an own house or apartment in Ukraine, a large share wants to stay in Germany. Similarly, those with low incomes in Ukraine are more likely to want to stay in Germany. As for representatives of various professions and types of employment, it is noteworthy that a high willingness to stay in Germany was expressed

by skilled workers, specialists in the field of culture, society, and the economy, and those who in Ukraine occupied the positions of middle managers, while among the technical specialists that are in high demand in Germany, the share of those willing to stay was much lower (see Appendix, Figure A4). Results of the qualitative survey show also other factors making it more likely for the respondents to want to stay in Germany: previous positive experiences of staying in Germany, intercultural skills acquired in the past (especially knowledge of German; similar result arises from the quantitative data), worries that Ukraine may not win the war, that the war could last long, and weak national identity.

Figure 2:

Answers to the ifo Question “What are your Thoughts on Returning to Ukraine?”



Source: ifo Survey, October 2022.

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Readiness to Work and first Success in the Labor Market

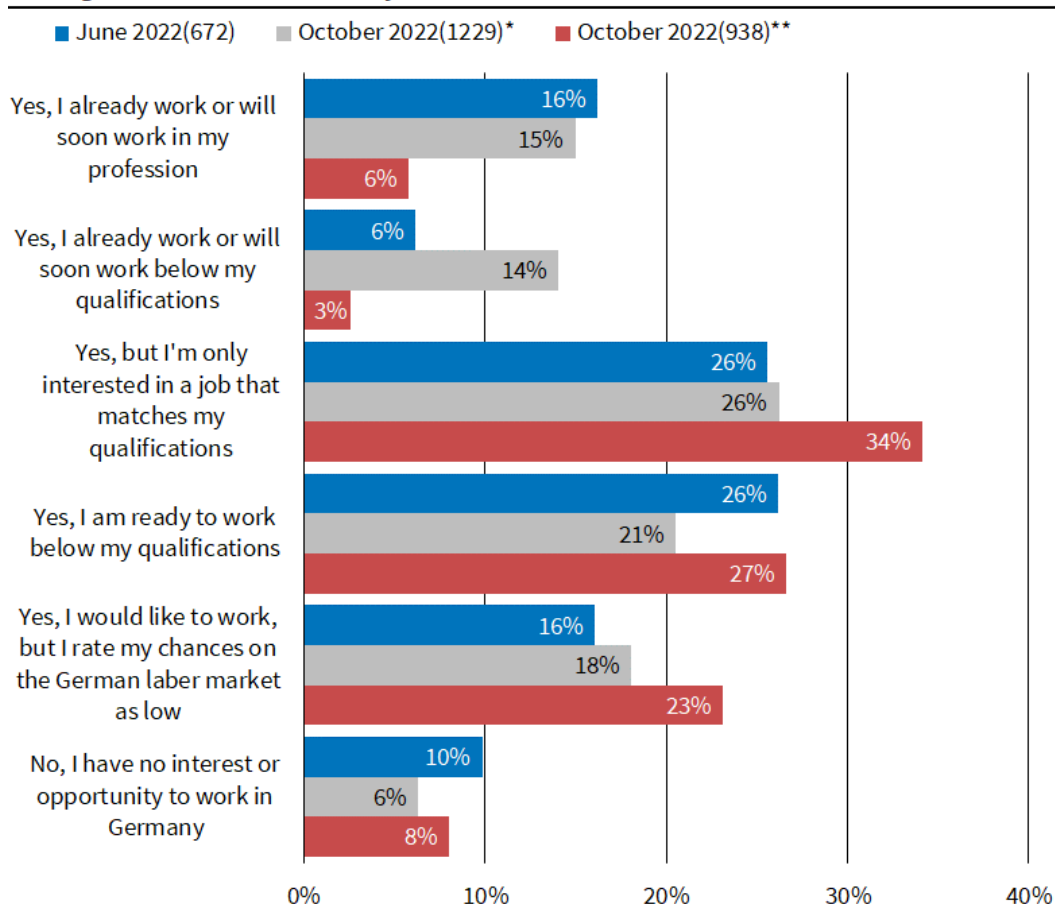
The question about Ukrainian refugees' willingness to work in Germany was asked in both waves of the online survey (Figure 3), with the difference that in the first wave it was asked of all respondents, while in the second wave it was asked only of those who answered the question “Do you work in Germany?”³ negatively. The fact that the answers to the question on working in Germany did not differ significantly between

³ A separate question “Do you work in Germany?” was asked only in October. 78% of those surveyed responded that they were not yet employed.

June and October indicates that the integration of Ukrainians into the German labor market has not yet been very successful.

Figure 3:

Willingness to Work in Germany



**in the second wave this question was asked only to those who answered that they were not yet working

*here added those who answered that they work

Source: ifo Survey June/October 2022.

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Also noteworthy is that the intentions of Ukrainian refugees in the June survey looked quite optimistic: fully 90 percent wanted to get a job in Germany, including 16 percent who said they were already working or will soon work in their profession, and 6 percent who said they were already working or will soon work below their (formal) qualification. The figure of 22 percent employed or close to employment three months after arrival in Germany was also very encouraging. After 3 to 4 months, we see the same or even higher percentage of those who are ready to work (92 percent among those who are not yet working and 94 percent among all respondents), but the number of those who assess their chances as low and those who are ready to work exclusively in their profession have increased, while the number of those who work in their profession (or will soon do

so) has not changed. It can be assumed that the growth of the working category was primarily due to those who work below their qualifications or perform unskilled work.

Figure 4:

Employment in Germany of Ukrainian Refugees and Their Selected Categories
Distribution of Answers to Questions “Do You Already Work in Germany?” (1229 Respondents)

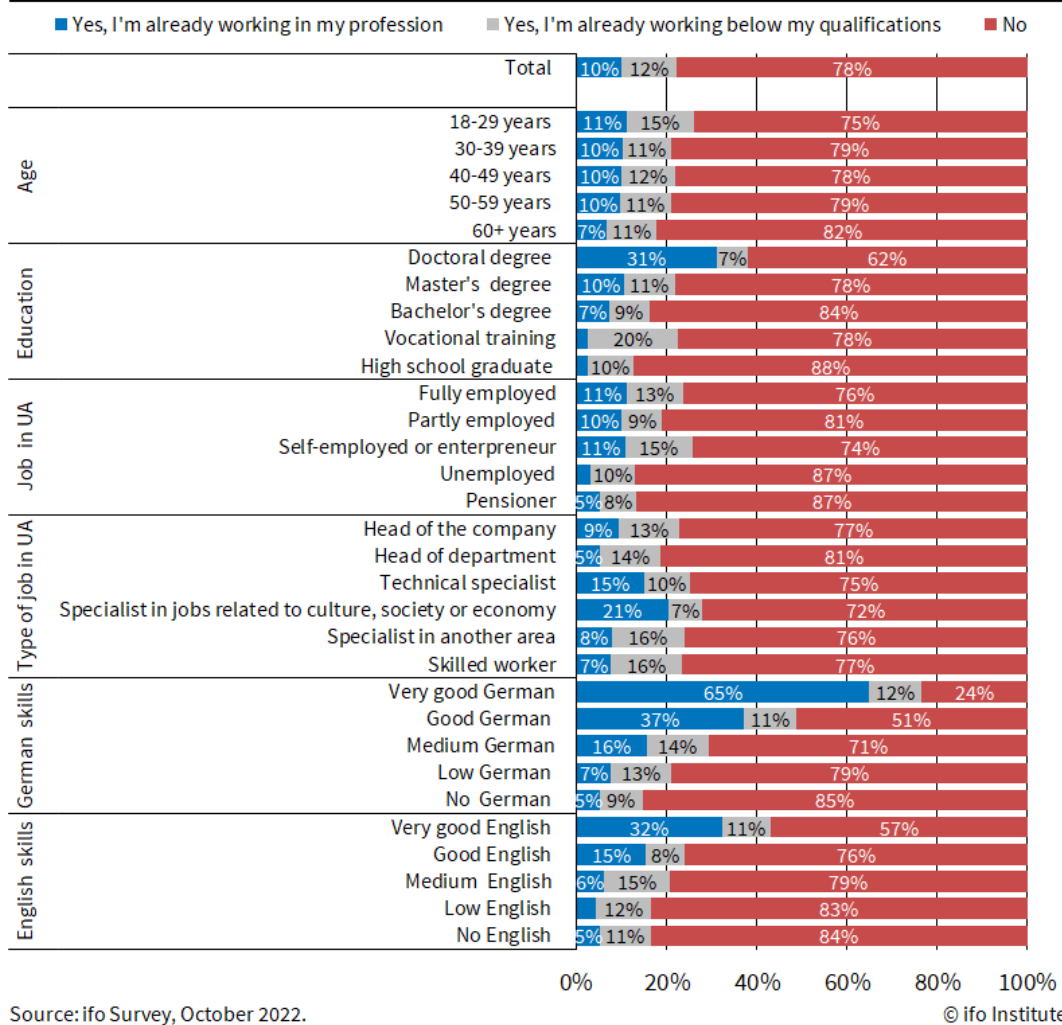


Figure 4 shows that only 22 percent of the respondents were employed in Germany, of whom 10 percent found jobs in their specialty and 12 percent below their self-reported formal qualifications. There was no such a question in the first survey sample in June, so we cannot track the dynamics of changes. At the same time, it is worth mentioning that the share of recipients who report receiving social benefits has decreased. Of those who reported to be employed in October, 49 percent worked full-time, 27 percent worked part-time, and 24 percent had (part-time) mini-jobs. Respondents were asked an open question about what type of job they have. In both waves, the largest number of respondents replied that they work as a teacher or in other educational activity, mostly in education of Ukrainian children. Other common activities among skilled

Conclusion

workers were scientific work or research, as well as IT, design, and office work. The most common unskilled work was cleaner. Jobs as assistant in various fields (catering, construction, manufacturing) and as a packer were also mentioned often.

Figure 4 also shows employment in selected groups. It clearly reveals that the most important success factor in employment is knowledge of German (unfortunately, only 6 percent evaluated their knowledge as good or very good, and 11 percent as medium). Conversely, lack of knowledge of German is the main barrier to employment, as shown by the results of qualitative interviews. Additional analyses reveal that the percentage of those working in their specialty is also higher among technical specialists, specialists in jobs related to culture, society, or economy, as well holders of a doctoral degree. The last two categories are often scientists who received fellowships at German universities, and teachers who work with Ukrainian children or teach German, and their employment may be short-term. The proportion of those who are employed is slightly higher among those who intended to stay in Germany.

Conclusion

Ukrainian refugees' plans to stay in Germany and their employment prospects vary widely. These two aspects are mutually dependent: those planning to stay are more likely to search for employment, while finding a job also tends to make staying more attractive, at least if the job meets one's expectations.

A major difference compared with previous refugee waves is that according to ifo-survey data a large proportion of Ukrainians do not want to stay in Germany. At the same time, as the war drags on, the number of Ukrainians wishing to return to their homeland has decreased (by 10 percentage points over 4 months) while the share of those wishing to stay in Germany for at least 2 years increased by the same amount, to 62 percent. One of the factors that can stoke intentions to stay in Germany is that some families have reunited, despite the fact that only certain categories of men can legally leave the territory of Ukraine. Should the rules for crossing the border for men be relaxed, an even greater influence of this factor can be expected. In addition, Ukrainians' perception of events in Ukraine and their assessment of the duration of the war, as well as its outcome, play an important role. Factors that influence Ukrainians' plans can also include place of residence, family, financial and housing situation in Ukraine, as well as previous international experience.

While Ukrainians' intentions to stay in Germany have increased over time, their labor market record is mixed. Although Ukrainians are ready and willing to work, after 7 months of war only 22 percent have found employment in Germany. Most Ukrainians

arriving in Germany are of working age and were employed in Ukraine, both factors that favor their integration into the German labor market. The high level of formal education of Ukrainians does not always facilitate rapid integration, however, since many educated Ukrainians do not want to work in jobs below their qualifications. A further hindrance is that, to work in their profession, they need knowledge of German (and sometimes English), which many lack. Successful integration into the labor market is easier for those with knowledge of German (or good proficiency in English), young age, or a technical profession. Also, those working in education or scientific activities have better employment prospects, at least while there is a need for integration classes for Ukrainian children and an acute need for German courses or fellowships for Ukrainian scientists.

Unlike previously arrived refugees, Ukrainians can freely choose where they want to live. Aksoy et al. (2021) show that initial conditions in terms of local unemployment levels and attitudes towards immigrants have a major impact on employment outcomes of asylum-seekers who arrived in Germany in 2013-2016, the fact that Ukrainians refugees are able to choose more favorable locations is a major advantage for them. Also, attitudes towards Ukrainian refugees are generally positive, giving them an advantage in economic and social integration compared with previous refugee cohorts.

According to Germany's Institute for Employment Research (IAB), Ukrainians in Germany before the war integrated into the labor market more slowly than some other migrant groups, but over time they achieved higher levels of employment than other migrant groups on average (Brücker 2022, 16). If we take into account Ukrainians' ambitions (high educational level and reluctance to do unskilled work) combined with little knowledge of foreign languages, this statement could well apply to Ukrainian refugees as well. The capacity of employment centers and accreditation agencies that recognize professional qualifications, as well as availability of German language courses, also play an important role in the process of integrating Ukrainians into the German labor market. Finally, difficulties in finding housing in big cities even after receiving a job offer pose a further challenge to labor market integration.

Policy Implications

Our results have several policy implications for countries hosting Ukrainian refugees. The first one is that the most urgent policy measures, both in Germany and elsewhere, concern the importance of language courses and the recognition of qualifications. This latter aspect calls for streamlining the processes for evaluating and accrediting qualifications, with supplementary training for those whose qualifications are partially accredited but could be upgraded to a level allowing full acceptance. To accelerate the integration of highly qualified Ukrainian specialists, special programs to ease entry into the German labor market must be quickly developed and implemented. They should be geared toward specific types of employment, include professionally relevant language courses, an introduction to German labor law, job application training, mentoring, and ample opportunities for internships and apprenticeships.

Parallel to this, it is important to invest in the education of children. Here, optimal policies depend on return intentions. For families planning to return to Ukraine relatively soon, keeping children in the Ukrainian school system is often more efficient than switching to the host country system. However, the longer the stay, the more important integration into the host country's school system becomes. An optimal compromise could be to integrate children into local schools, but provide them also with Ukraine-specific lessons, for example in Ukrainian language and history, according to Ukrainian school guidelines. Online tools could be used in schools where group size is not sufficient for an own class, or where teachers are not available. Our finding that a large share of respondents is uncertain as to whether and when to return highlights the importance of solutions that lead to a successful integration in the host country, but which at the same time keep the door open to returning to Ukraine.

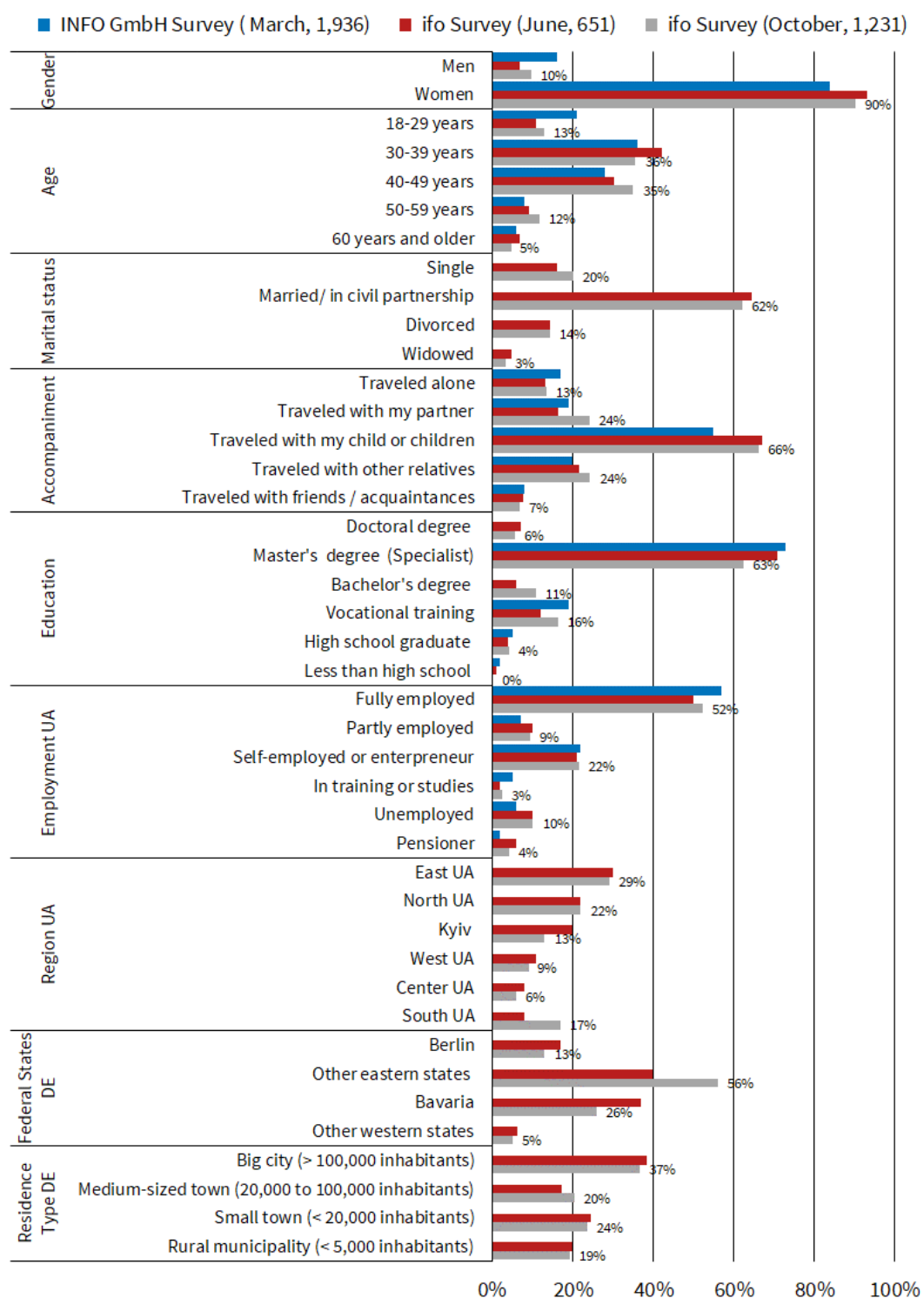
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Appendix

Figure A1:

Sociodemographic Characteristics of Refugees from Ukraine: Compared Survey Data

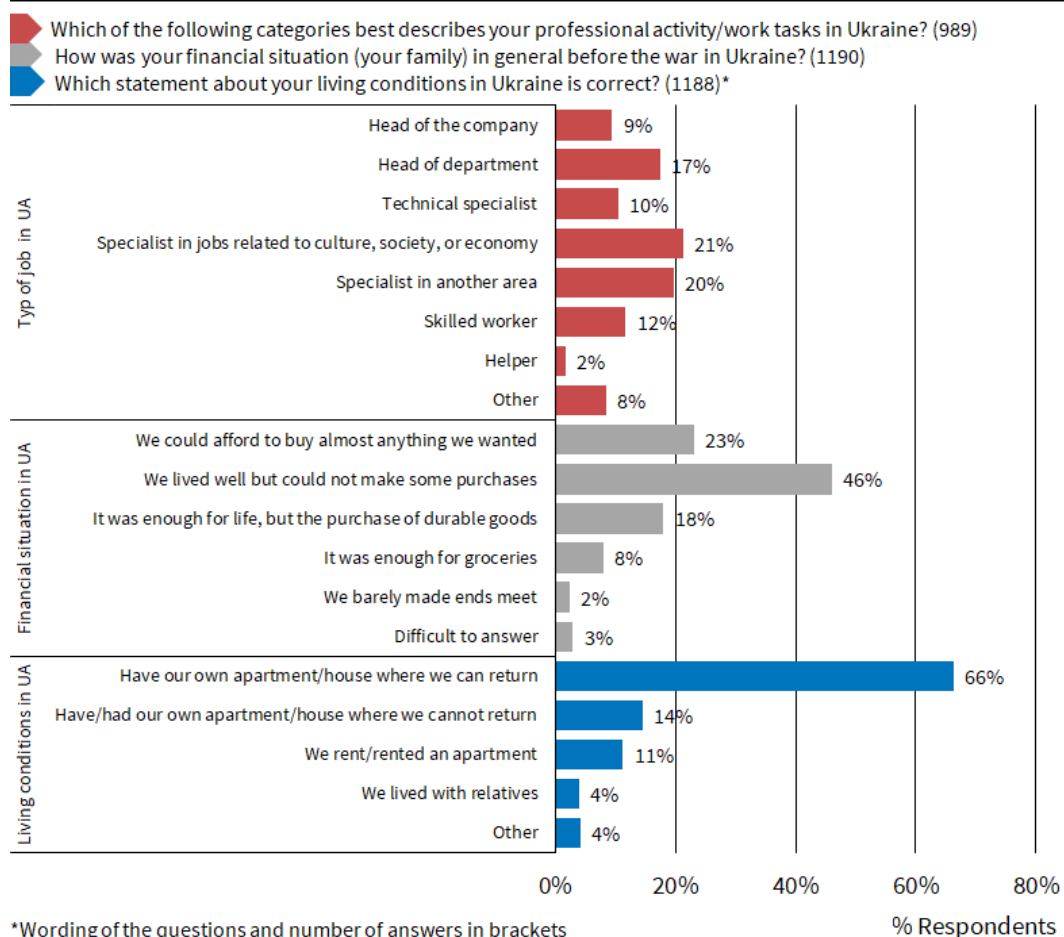


Source: INFO GmbH 2022; ifo Survey, June/October 2022.

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Figure A2:

Statements Characterizing the Social Status, the Financial Situation and the Living Conditions of the Respondents in Ukraine

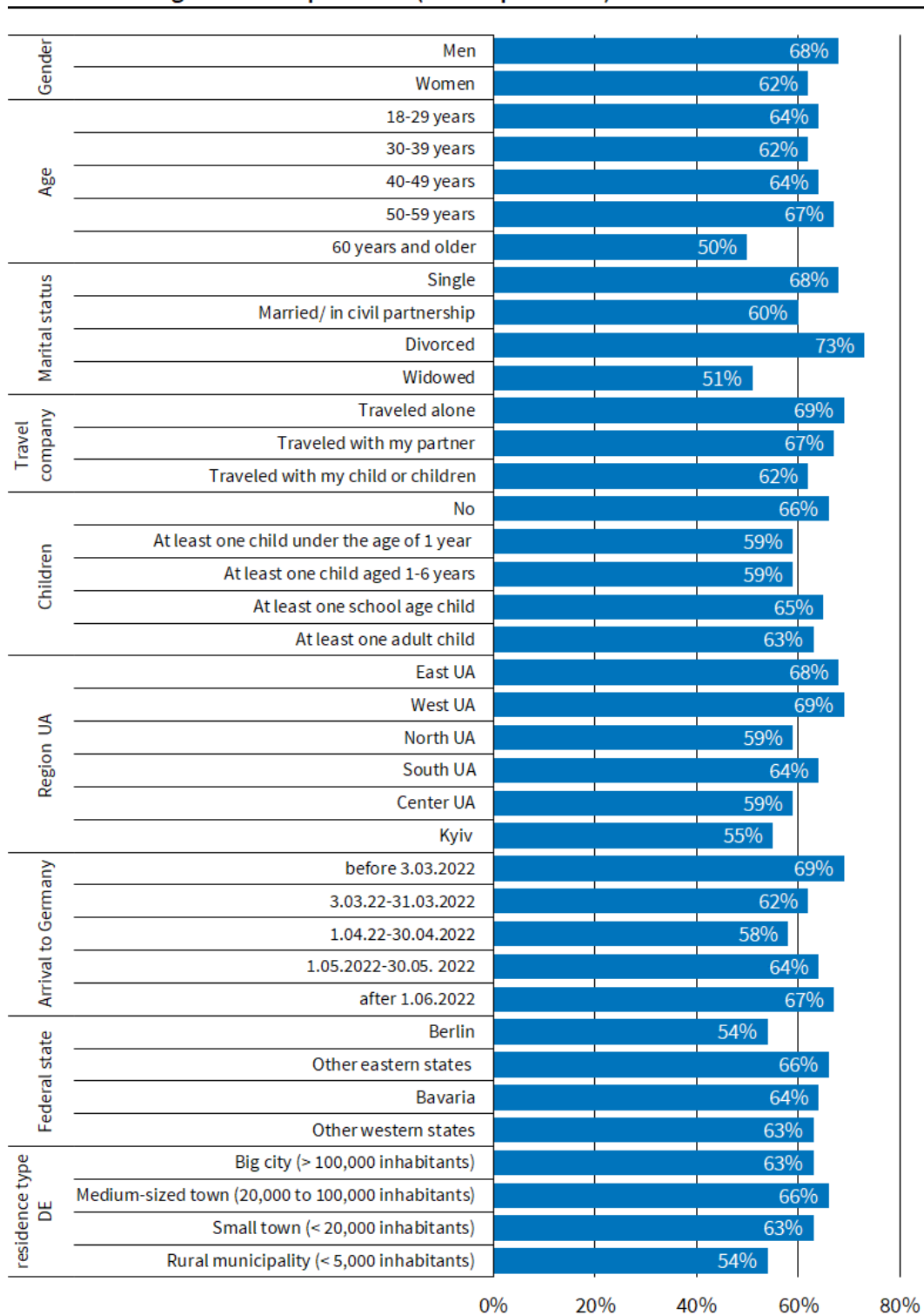


*Wording of the questions and number of answers in brackets

Source: ifo Survey, October 2022

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Figure A3:
Distribution of the Answers “I stay in Germany” among Socio-demographic Groups and Other Categories of Respondents (766 respondents)

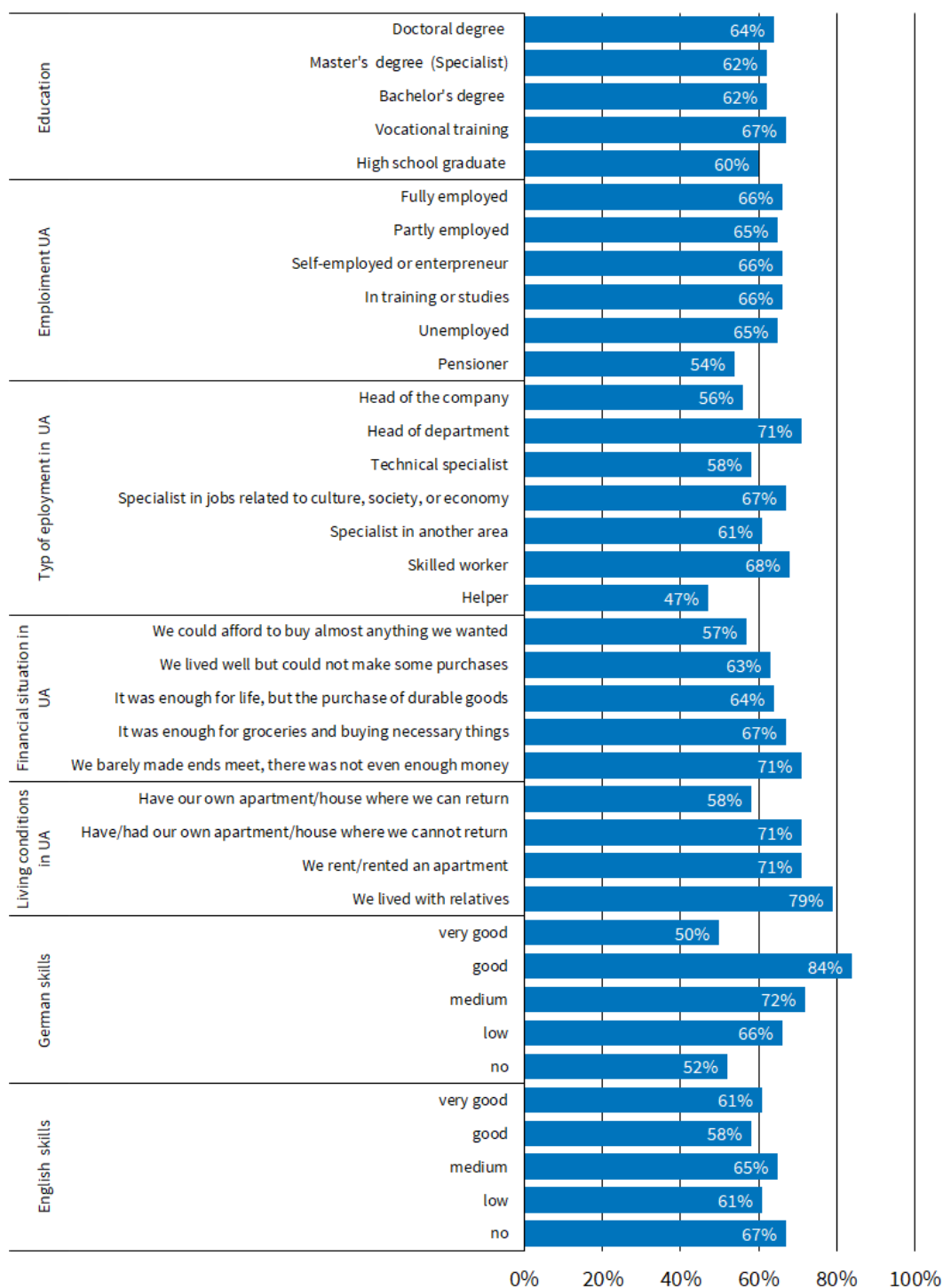


Source: ifo Survey, October 2022.

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Figure A4:

Distribution of the Answers “I stay in Germany” among Socio-demographic Groups and Other Categories of Respondents (766 respondents)



Source: ifo Survey, October 2022.

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