

Displaced people from Ukraine Residing in Private Housing in Amsterdam

Prepared by
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INTRODUCTION

Displaced people from Ukraine who have found private housing represent a significant portion of the Ukrainian population that has sought refuge in the Netherlands since February-March 2022. In Amsterdam alone, there are still more than 1800 displaced people from Ukraine registered as residing in private residences. This underscores the remarkable willingness of over a thousand Amsterdam residents who have opened their homes to those fleeing the conflict.

While these hosting initiatives were well-intentioned and played a crucial role in immediate crisis response, they often operated under the assumption of temporary stays. Unfortunately, this temporary nature does not always align with the long-term needs of displaced people from Ukraine, both on a governmental and municipal level. The effectiveness of efforts to institutionalize private housing, such as initiatives like Refugeehome and TakeCarebnb, as well as the future of self-organized initiatives beyond institutional control, remains relatively unknown. Therefore, gaining insights into the private housing phenomenon becomes vital for shaping effective, evidence-based policies.

Individuals residing in private shelters tend to live more autonomously, which can lead to municipalities being less informed about their specific needs and their duration of stay in the Netherlands. Consequently, the Municipality of Amsterdam has tasked the Opora Foundation with conducting research on displaced people from Ukraine living in private accommodations within the city.

This research endeavors to provide a comprehensive understanding of the housing situation of displaced people from Ukraine living outside of temporary municipal facilities. It aims to explore the backgrounds of these displaced individuals, their housing arrangements, employment needs, educational requirements for their children, and the challenges they encounter. This, in turn, will enable us to gain insights into the future plans of displaced individuals in private housing, taking into account the ongoing uncertainty in Ukraine. The study's objectives encompass developing recommendations for midterm solutions and evaluating the sustainability of private housing as a refuge for displaced individuals. While living in private accommodation may initially seem advantageous for displaced individuals, preliminary research indicates that this is not always the case. Therefore, it is important to thoroughly examine various factors to enhance our understanding of their situation. Furthermore, considering the diverse types of housing arrangements, including households with Dutch, Ukrainian, or European hosts, as well as rented accommodations where displaced people from Ukraine have procured their own flats or rooms, while assessing the long-term viability of housing and access to employment and future prospects, has provided us with valuable insights.

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METHODOLOGY

Quantitative Data



2 general Amsterdam-based chats, 1 general Telegram channel with housing offers



2 focus groups with Ukrainians in Amsterdam



The district chats (Noord, West)



Through the Ukrainian activists and NGOs focusing on private houses (Orthodox Church, NL4Ukraine



Through expat Ukrainian communities hosting their families



Municipality of Amsterdam distributed 1800 personal letters to Ukrainian households in private housing in Amsterdam

Snowball Sampling



231 respondents collected between Nov 2022 and Mar 2023 (12.8% of general population in private housing in Amsterdam) covering 423 people.

Qualitative Data

5 interviews with displaced people in non-governmental accommodations

Participant observations at the events in Amsterdam for Ukrainian Displaced People: English classes, volunteer gatherings.



5 interviews with Ukrainian community leaders who were assisting displaced people, including assistance with housing.



1 focus group with 5 participants each: 1) with Ukrainian expats/relatives; 2) with Dutch hosts through a self-organised initiative on Facebook (2 people); 3) re-housed with the RefugeeHome initiative.

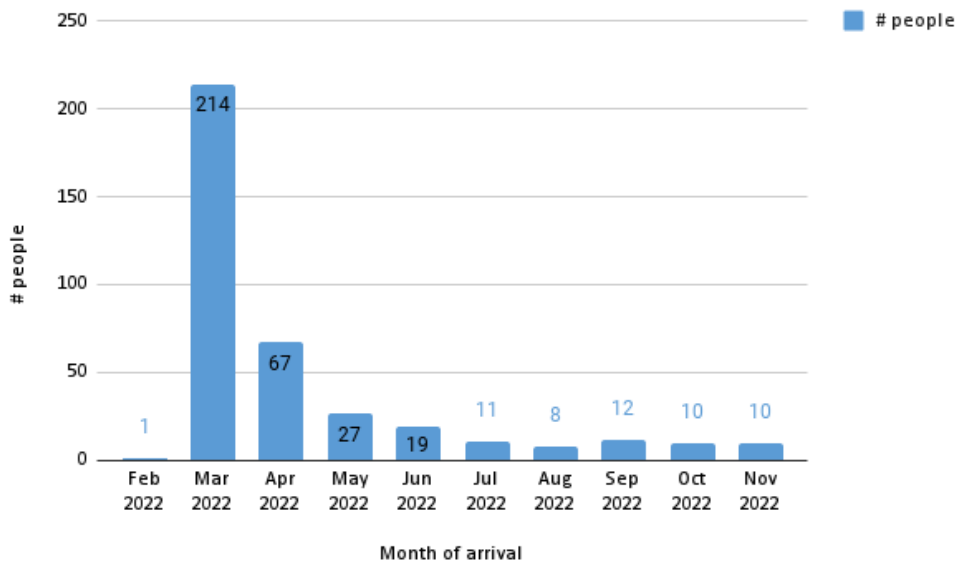


Basic facts

1. When did displaced people arrive?

Most displaced people from Ukraine who reside in private housing arrived in March 2022. This is unsurprising since, in March 2022, Amsterdammers were leading hosting initiatives. It was especially relevant and timely since municipal locations were not able to welcome displaced people in the beginning.

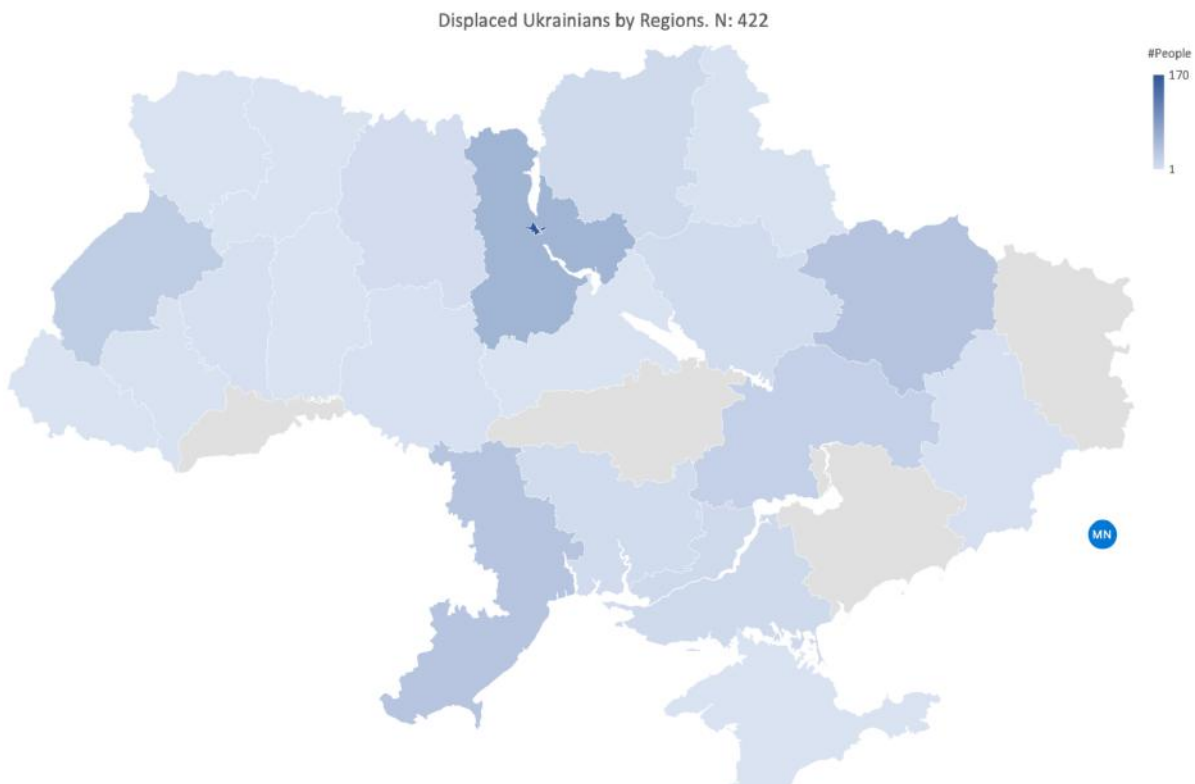
Graph 1. Arrival of displaced people by month. N: 379.



2. Where are displaced people from?

The biggest share of those who arrived were predominantly from Kyiv and Kharkiv oblast.

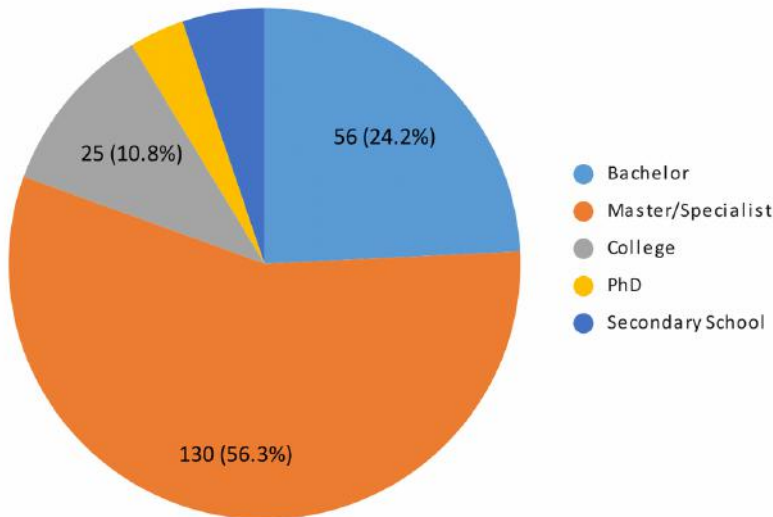
Graph 2. Origin of respondents by Regions. N: 422



3. Educational level of displaced people in private housing

As for educational levels, half of the people in the sample completed a Master's degree. Kyiv is the most prominent center for prestigious higher education. It explains why many displaced people from Kyiv reported completing Master's and Bachelor's degrees.

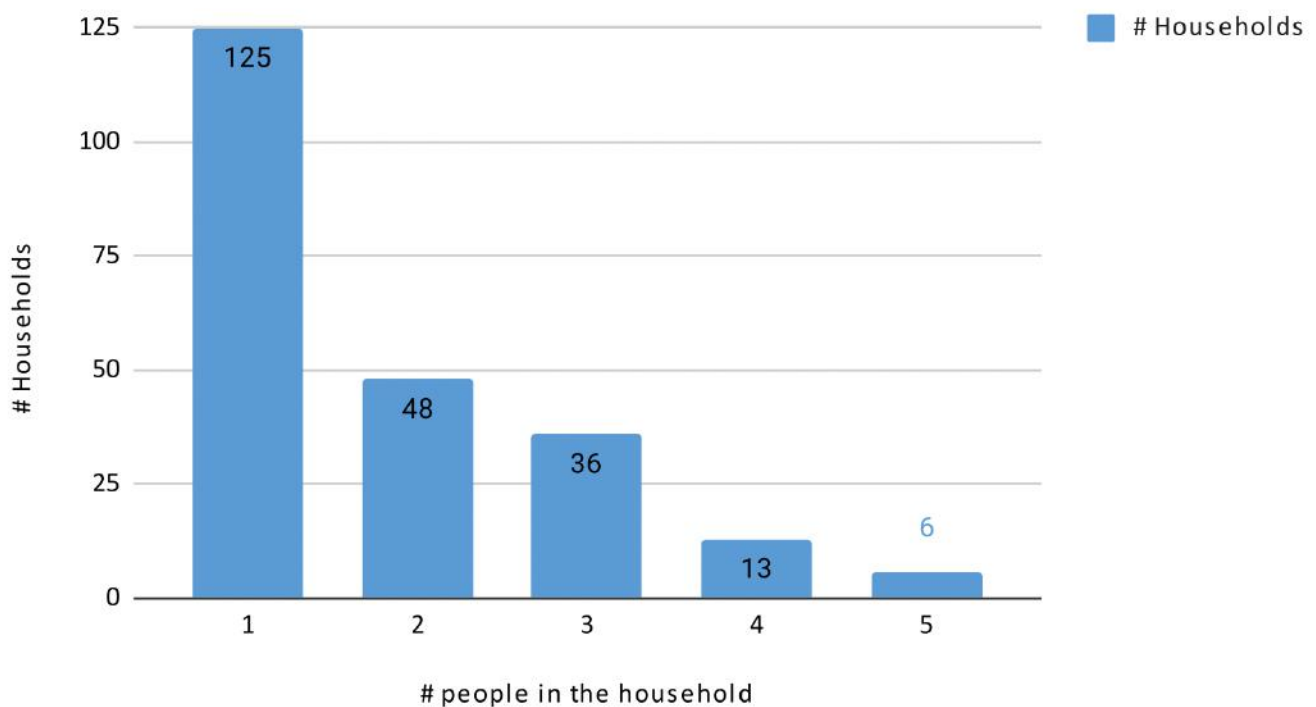
Graph 3. Level of Education of respondents. N: 231



4. How big are Ukrainian (living in private accommodation) households?

Ukrainian households in Amsterdam, in most cases, consist of one single adult person. Considering the number of people from one household in rented accommodation and host families - the data revealed no significant differences (with a median household size of 2 people).

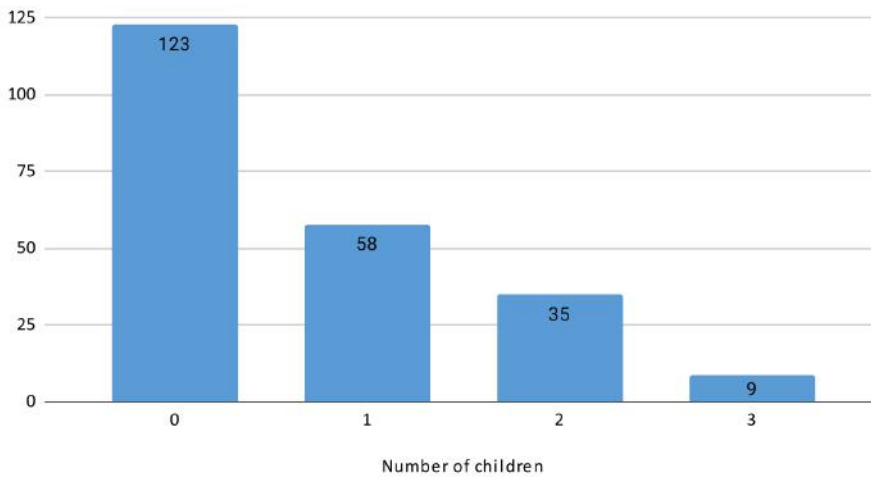
Graph 4. Number of residents per household. N: 230



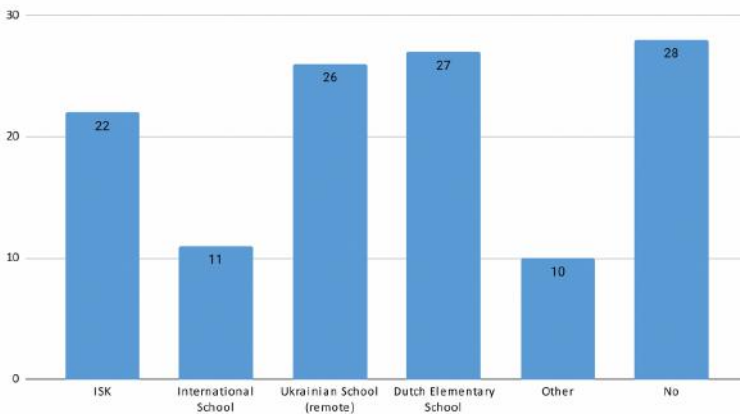
5. Children in private housing

According to governmental statistics, up to 20 000 children from Ukraine are currently enrolled in Dutch schools (March 2022).* In this study, 123 households reported not having children, while 58 had one child, and only 35 had two children. Most of the children are enrolled in Dutch elementary schools and so-called transition classes, but 28 children are not (yet) attending school due to their age. The majority of children in private accommodations are of a young age (pre-school, Dutch elementary school), and parents are satisfied with their educational process.

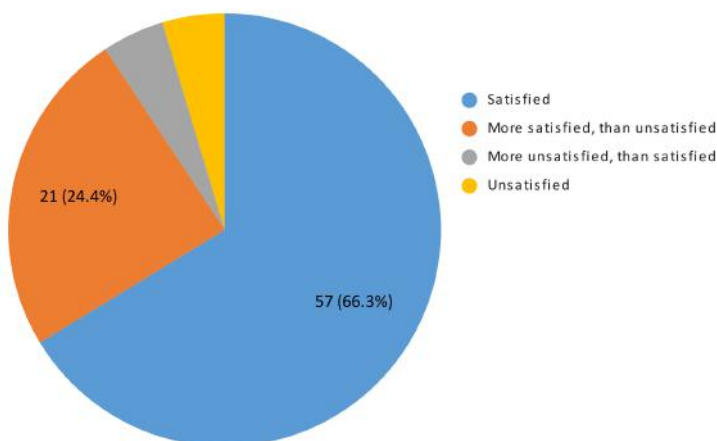
Graph 5. Number of children per household. N:225



Graph 6. Type of schools. N:124 (children)



Graph 7. Satisfaction level concerning the school. N:86 (children)



Housing situation

1. Type of housing within private accommodation

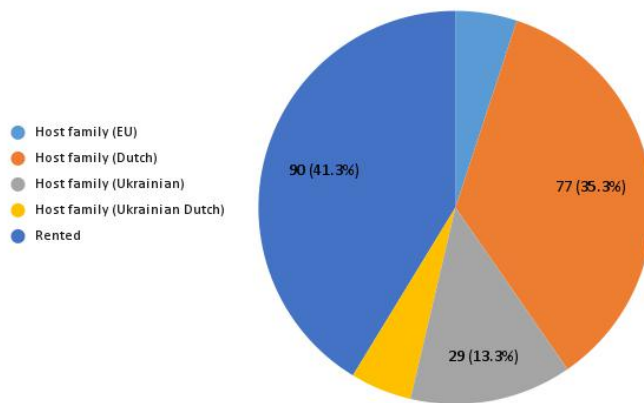
Our data reveals that during the initial two quarters of 2022, when the largest influx of Ukrainians occurred, the majority of displaced families in private housing were accommodated by Dutch hosts. However, as of the data collection period in March 2023, 35.3 percent were still residing with Dutch host families, while 41.7 percent had managed to secure their own rented accommodations.

It is noteworthy that the initial willingness of many Amsterdammers to host Ukrainians during the early stages of the conflict waned over time. Reports from NGOs and community leaders on the ground indicate a decline in the willingness to provide host accommodations. For example, Ukraine4NL had as many as 7,000 hosts in their system at the outset of the conflict, but this number dwindled to zero while the demand from Ukrainians for housing remained high, as of November 2022.

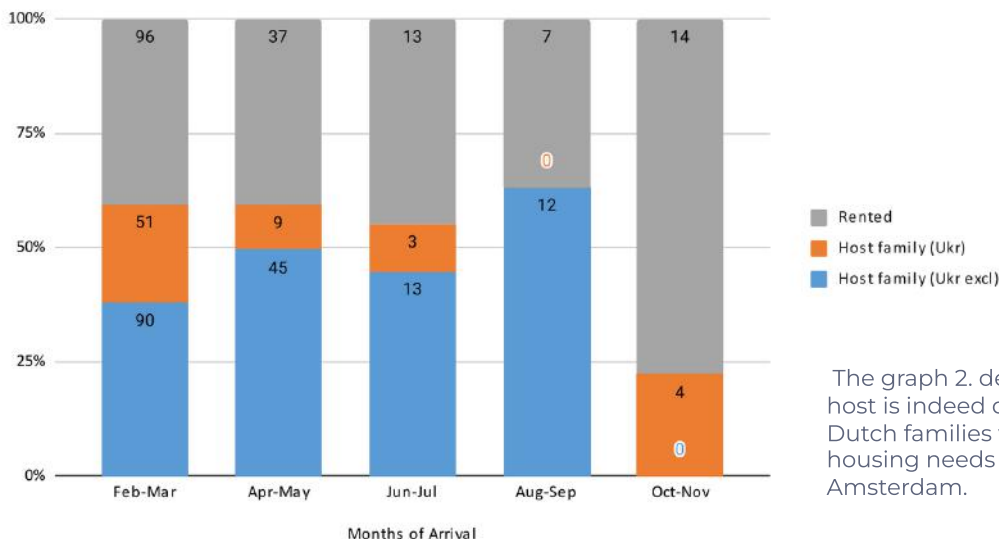
In their quest for accommodations, displaced individuals also turned to social media, particularly Facebook groups, to share their stories and connect with potential hosts. For instance, the "Oekraïne Vluchtelingen NL" group served as a platform where hosts from various cities could respond to housing requests. Thus, this method became a common way for Ukrainians to find host families in the Netherlands.

Initiatives like RefugeeHome, launched in May 2022, aimed to establish a more structured framework for individuals willing to offer housing to displaced people. However, it's important to note that many people had already found host families before the program's launch.

Graph 1. Type of housing. N: 218 (respondents). Both EU host families and Ukrainian Dutch host families represent each 5% of accommodations.



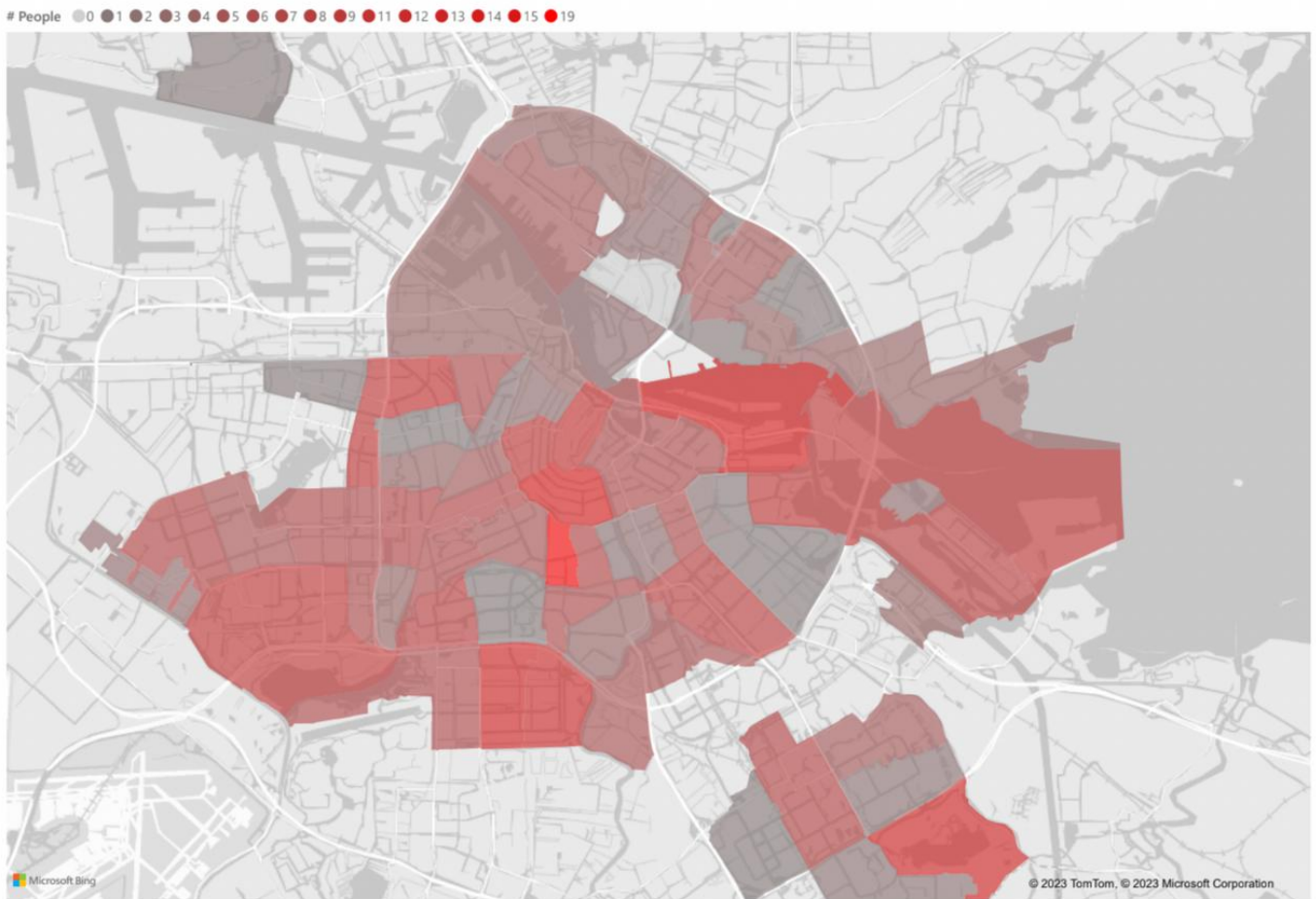
Graph 2. Accommodation type VS Months of Arrivals. N:379



The graph 2. demonstrates that the willingness to host is indeed decreasing, especially among the Dutch families which will potentially affect the housing needs of displaced people from Ukraine in Amsterdam.

2. Districts where displaced people reside with an analysis of the housing market in Amsterdam

Graph 3. Distribution of the addresses among respondents based on postal codes.



The data is visualized based on the self-reported postal codes of respondents.

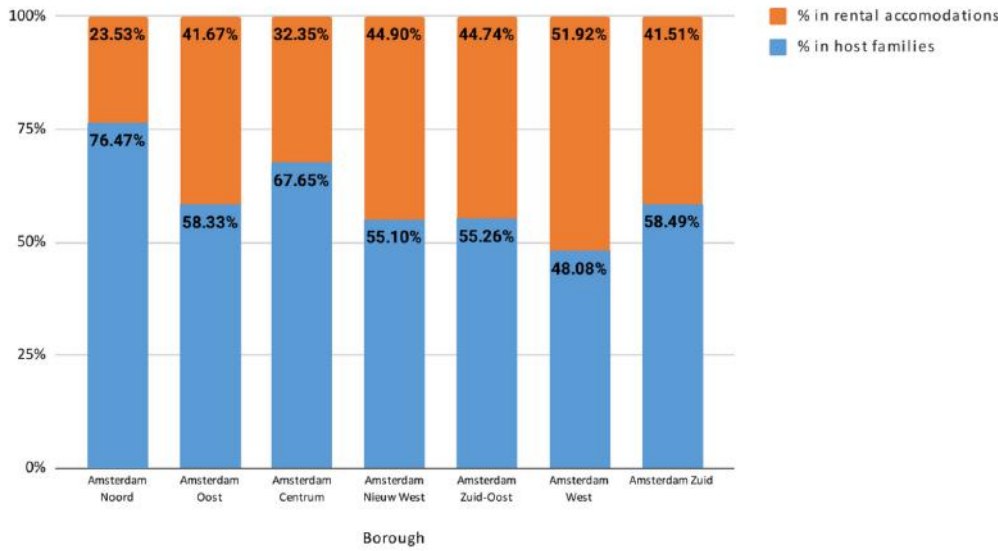
The majority of displaced people in private housing live in Centrum, Oost, West, and Nieuw-West districts (21.7%, 23%, 16.6% and 15.7% respectively) which coincides with the districts that have the most available housing.

Table 1. Price (EUR) per m2 in different districts of Amsterdam. N: 236.

	N	Min per m2 (EUR)	Median per m2 (EUR)	Max per m2 (EUR)
Centrum	29	10.96	29.66	70.83
Noord	24	10.44	15.09	42.42
Oost	50	9.88	20.79	44.64
Zuid	26	9.49	20.97	50.00
West	33	9.32	27.27	44.00
Nieuw-West	45	11.39	17.13	57.95
Zuidoost	29	8.08	16.25	29.55

To estimate the relative amount of accommodation available in districts we have collected data on available offers in the period from March 2022 to June 2023 from Telegram channels which provide general information on housing (this includes the location, prices, minimum deposits required, and number of rooms).

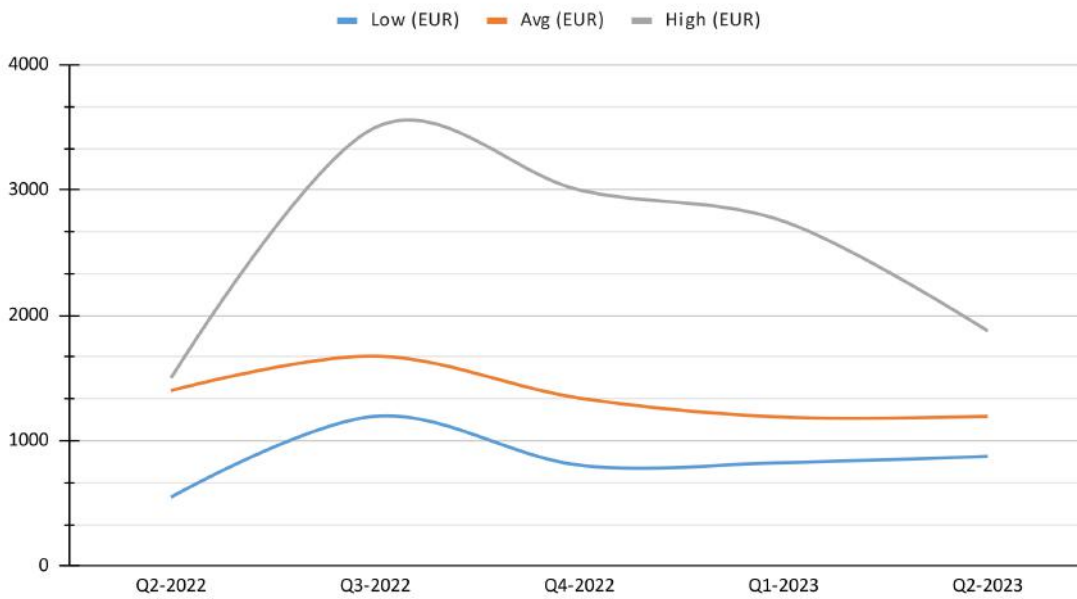
Graph 4. Housing situation in districts of Amsterdam. N: 423 (people)



To enhance our understanding of housing distribution trends, we conducted supplementary analysis. We systematically gathered data on available accommodations to assess housing price trends in Amsterdam. This data was collected from the public Telegram channel @housing_nl, which featured over 1000 housing offers from across the Netherlands, posted between May 2022 and June 2023. We then correlated this information with the residential addresses provided in our own questionnaire. Utilizing geographical locations, we accumulated a total of 238 data points specific to the Municipality of Amsterdam.

Since the second quarter of 2022, median housing offers in Amsterdam districts have ranged from 1200 to 1500 EUR, with an increase in housing prices in Q3 most likely caused by the start of the academic year. Displaced people from Ukraine tend to reside in Nieuw-West, West, and Oost, with the most affordable accommodations available (Table 1).

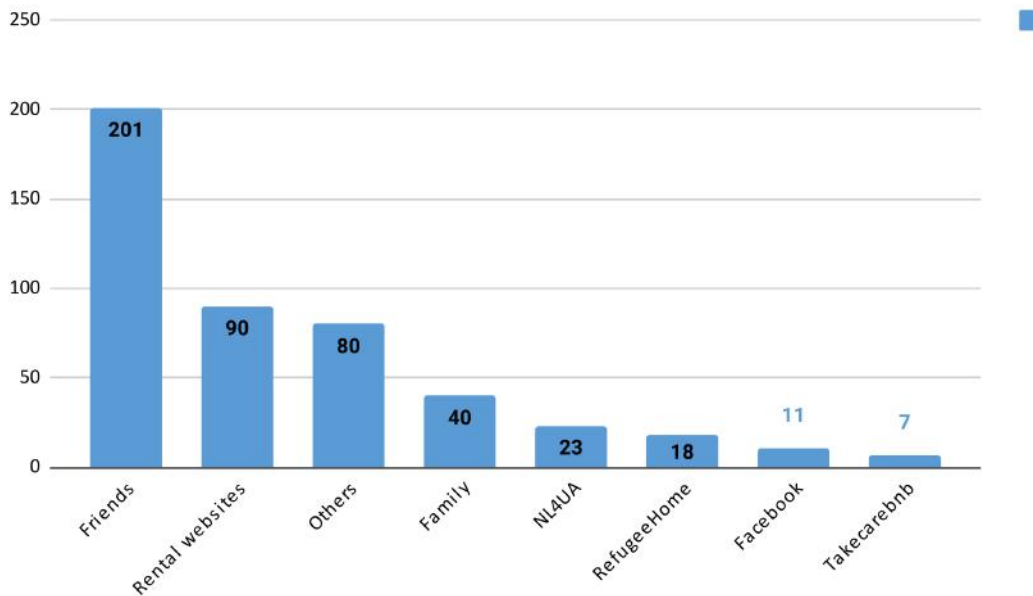
Graph 5. Rental prices in Amsterdam based on telegram data. N:238



3. What affects the duration of the stay?

When arriving in the Netherlands, and especially in Amsterdam, people mobilise their networks to find suitable accommodation. Our qualitative data revealed that even the displaced people staying in Dutch host families found accommodation by mobilising their networks of friends living in Amsterdam beforehand (students, expats). Our survey data also showed that 201 out of 470 people could count on their friends as the source for their current accommodation.

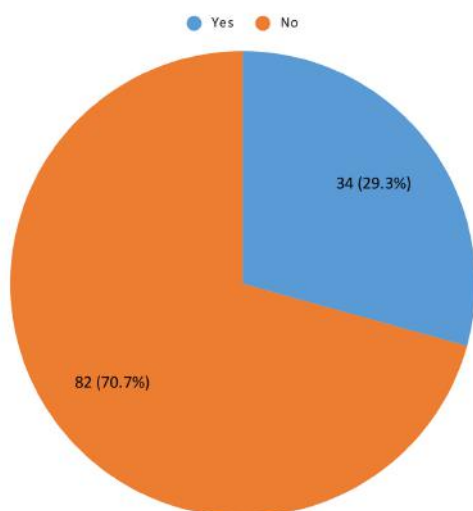
Graph 6. How did displaced people find accommodation? N:470



34 out of 127 respondents (29.3%) reported they have relatives in Amsterdam who are not under the European Temporary Directive. Nonetheless, relatives are not always those hosting displaced people from Ukraine, but their networks assist in finding hosts or other types of accommodation.

Although the houses of Dutch host families are the largest contributors to the pool of available non-governmental housing, the duration of the stay will mostly remain short-term. *While unlimited/long-term stays (1 year or more) are offered by hosts of Ukrainian origin (29.7% of long-term locations in comparison to 20.5% who are in Dutch residencies). Most long-term stays apply to those who have managed to find rented accommodation (47.5%).*

Graph 7. Relatives (not under TDP). N: 127



Experiences of displaced people in private accommodation

Following the analysis of over 200 qualitative responses in our questionnaire, we have pinpointed the primary challenges experienced by displaced individuals. It's important to note that, on the whole, the majority of respondents expressed satisfaction with their present circumstances and living arrangements. Nevertheless, they continue to grapple with certain difficulties.

1. Challenges

• Healthcare

When asked about their primary challenges in adapting to life in the Netherlands, a majority of respondents identified **healthcare-related issues as their foremost concern**. Notably, the most prevalent issue is the difficulty in finding a general practitioner, with 32.2% of respondents reporting that they were unable to secure one. Additionally, many respondents expressed a lack of familiarity with the Dutch healthcare system, which has led to challenges in comprehending certain healthcare procedures that differ from what they are accustomed to. For instance, extended waiting times and a strict triage process for specialized care were highlighted as aspects of the healthcare system that were unfamiliar and posed challenges for displaced people from Ukraine .

• Language barrier

The second challenge identified by displaced people is the **language barrier**. These challenges have been highlighted in different contexts:

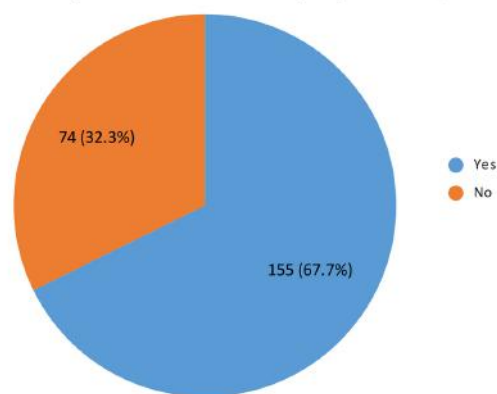
- In the context of socialisation and social integration (people cannot speak to their host families or to the friends of their children residing in the Netherlands before the war started).
- In the job market (this can create discrimination due to the lack of Dutch language skills).
- The need for affordable Dutch courses.

• Legal questions

People in private accommodation, especially those who are not renting a place, repeatedly mentioned the lack of institutional knowledge about how the variety of Dutch systems operate. More precisely:

- Labour rights
- Taxes (city taxes, for example)
- Tenants' rights
- Immigration rights

Graph 1. Do you have a GP? N: 229



2. Positive experiences

- Infrastructure
- Support by host families
- Structure in general
- Safety
- Quick registration processes by the municipality

3. What impacted these experiences?

To gain a more comprehensive understanding of the situation of individuals living in host families, our focus group discussions incorporated a diverse range of participants. This included those who fell into various categories: 1) Individuals residing with their families, primarily comprising retired parents of IT expatriates. 2) Individuals living with Dutch host families, although other family members were also present in the Netherlands. 3) Individuals who were living with Dutch hosts they had found through Facebook.

Our qualitative data revealed that within informal arrangements, the circumstances for both hosts and guests were notably uncertain. There was a clear need for more explicit agreements regarding the end date of the stay and other associated conditions. Additionally, there appeared to be a lack of mediation in cases where the families encountered difficulties.

For instance, NL4Ukraine made a single follow-up call to the host families only after one week. In situations where hosts were unable to continue providing housing and re-housing was necessary, NL4Ukraine encouraged displaced individuals to seek refuge in the facilities arranged by the municipality.

In more institutionalised forms of private housing, such as RefugeeHome and Takecarebnb - the agreements were very clear. The housing was offered for a maximum of three months. Every family had a middleman ready to listen to concerns or questions, although, as one woman emphasised:

"it is all wonderful, but a bit too late"

From our focus group discussions, it became clear that those displaced people who used the services of RefugeeHome previously had Dutch hosts. Sometimes, guests had to change to up to 3 families in one year.

More than 50 percent of qualitative answers in the questionnaire voiced the need to change their accommodation, but as we outlined earlier - the costs are too high to do so.

***"I ask the girl that hosts me every month for how long I can stay there and she says that I can stay as long as it is needed. It is my 3rd host family and all were very nice. I feel constantly uncomfortable about it, I think her parents are not so happy about my stay in her house. I try to be invisible and just give her space, but the apartment is quite small. So, I have no idea about my future and back in Kharkiv I had a three bedroom apartment".
(woman in her 50s, has a daughter in NL, who is working)."***

4. Fear of relocation

Our interviews and focus group discussions unveiled instances where individuals felt compelled to maintain a polite and accommodating demeanor toward their hosts, even when complications arose. Simultaneously, because no formal documents were signed, hosts were unsure of the appropriate channels to address these complications if they wished to report them.

Additionally, there was a prevailing fear of being relocated, which motivated people to make every effort to remain with private host families, especially when they faced challenges finding employment or when their children were attending school. As one of the respondents aptly put it:

“People are afraid to go to the Red Cross (humanitarian hub, authors) and such, there are many scary stories that they can place you in the middle of nowhere. So people try to change family or find solutions on their own, through their friends and acquaintances.”

Moreover, some grass root initiative leaders helping with housing shared that there have been some reports of sexual harassment. Additional research is required to understand how such issues are handled and whether women are aware of the channels to seek help. One of the focus group respondents mentioned:

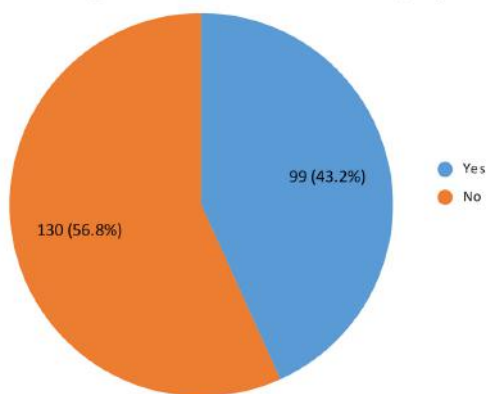
“hey [daughters] did not tell that this woman was drinking heavily and coming to their bed in the middle of the night hugging them. The woman was also having a very strange relationship with her boyfriend and the girls felt extremely unsafe. Only after several months did they tell all this to their mother and she took them away from there.”

Employment

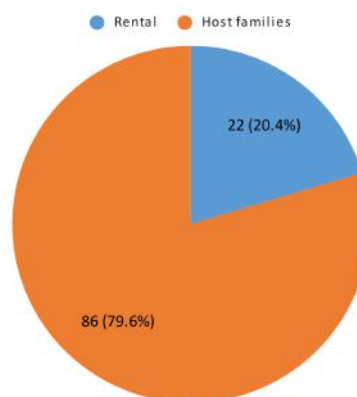
1. Employability within displaced people from Ukraine who live in private accommodation

According to the latest reports (Feb 2023) of the Dutch Bureau of Statistics*, most Ukrainian displaced people find work through an agency (43%), which puts them on payroll. Up to 45% have jobs in the Netherlands, but only 13% work full-time.

Graph 1. Are you working in the Netherlands? N: 229



Graph 2. Housing situation among people without employment. N:108



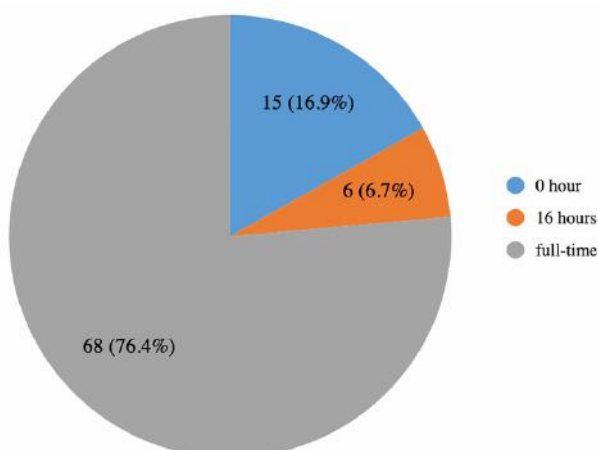
Among 229 respondents who replied to the question, only 43.2% found jobs in Amsterdam, and more than half of the respondents are not working. The biggest share of those who are not working (79.6%) are staying with a host family.

Individuals who were able to secure employment matching their skill set often had prior experience in information technology or engineering sectors. Conversely, business owners and individuals with managerial experience encountered challenges in finding work, a situation exacerbated by the current circumstances.

In many cases, older individuals assumed responsibilities for childcare or faced obstacles in their job search. Additionally, individuals with higher educational qualifications demonstrated a higher likelihood of finding employment.

Although people might have big households, not all members can work, which puts them in a precarious and insecure position. In addition, the absence of affordable language courses makes it almost impossible for older household members to find a job.

Graph 3. Contract Type. N:89

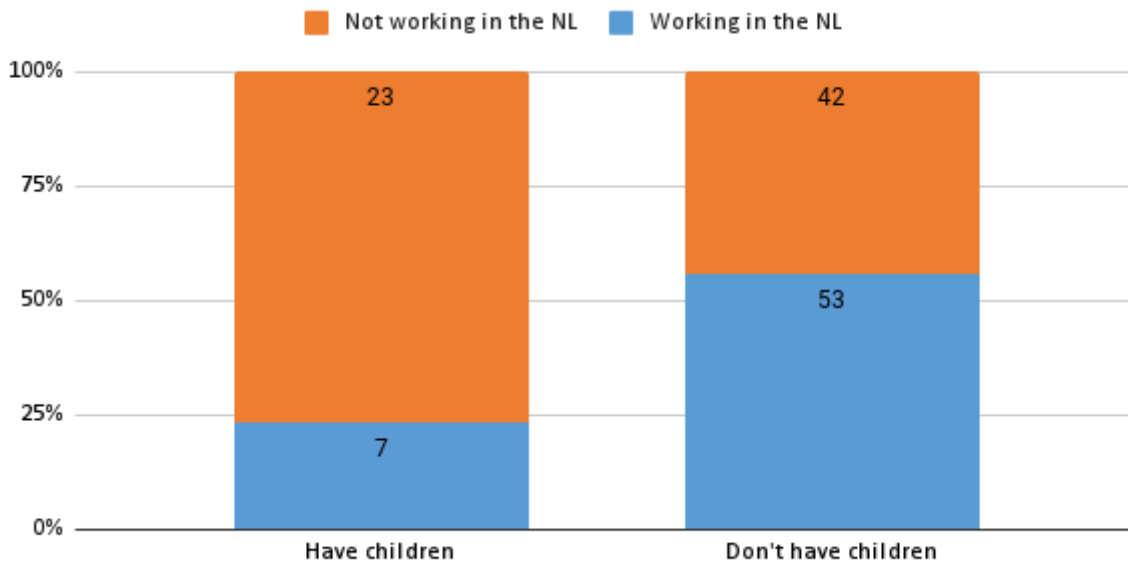


* <https://www.cbs.nl/nl-nl/nieuws/2023/05/aandeel-oekraiense-vluchtelingen-met-werk-toegenomen>

The presence of children in a household influences the family's ability to rent accommodation. The ability to rent is heavily related to the ability of a household to receive income within the Netherlands. According to our data, the more working adults there are in a household, the better the chances of renting accommodation are. Households without income tend to stay in host families.

Based on our survey, among single adult households, people without children are more able to find jobs (56% vs 23% of respondents) (Graph 4). And among single adult households with children, insufficient access to affordable childcare has been reported as one of the main reasons for not being to be employed.

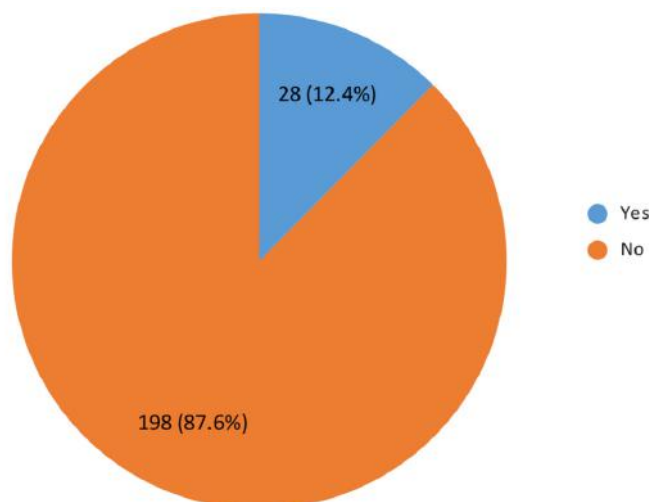
Graph 4. Working in the NL x Having children in the household (only in single adult households). N:125



2. Displaced Ukrainian still working in Ukraine

Only 28 (12.4%) respondents in our sample indicated that they continue working in Ukraine. Only 4 respondents (1.7%) indicated that they are working both in Ukraine and the Netherlands.

Graph 5. Are you working remotely in Ukraine? N: 226

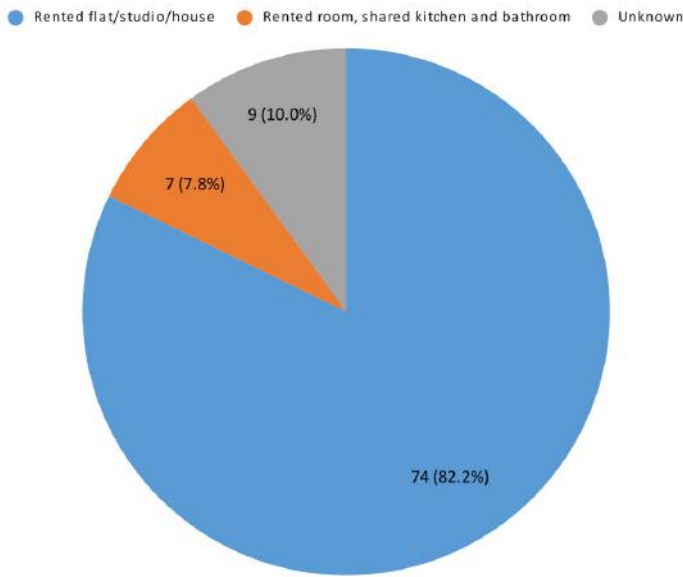


Rental capabilities

1. Type of rentals

Finding rental housing in Amsterdam is generally considered difficult, even for those who can cover rental costs. Nonetheless, most displaced people rent their accommodation in detached housing (studios, apartments). With the current market requirements (e.g., earning three times the price of the rent, having a permanent contract, showing payslips, providing bank and employment statements), not all working Ukrainians can fit the criteria.

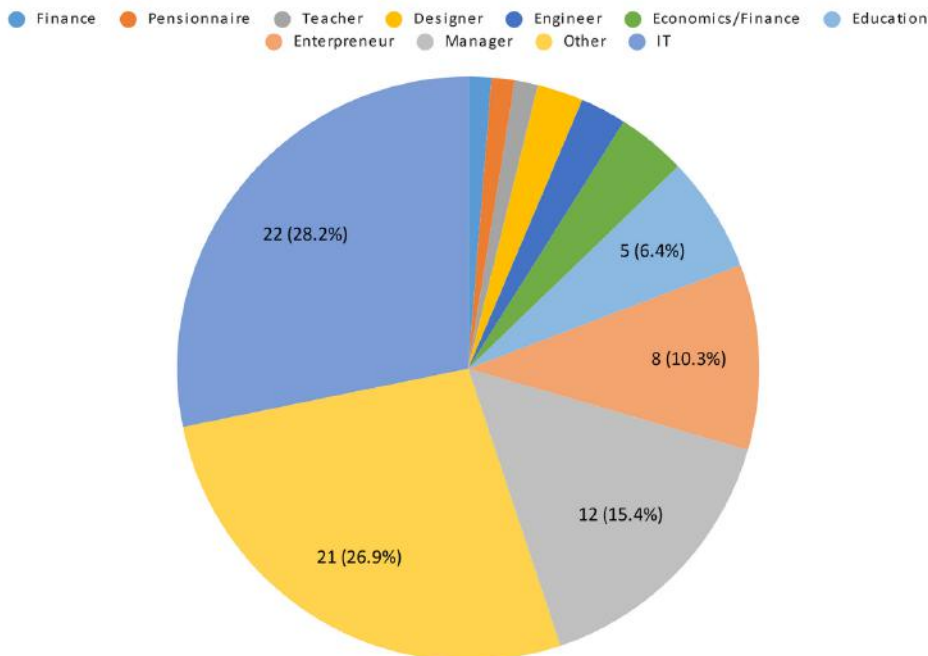
Graph 1. Rental accommodation by type (among those who rent). N: 229



2. Occupations of displaced people from Ukraine who live in rental accommodation

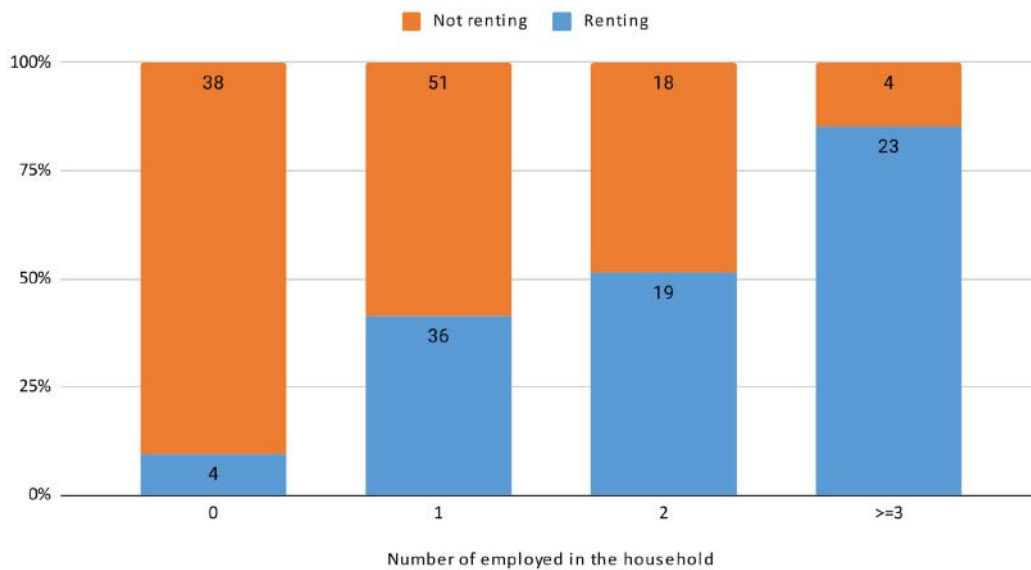
Our data shows that respondents who reside in rental accommodation also tend to be employed in high-skill jobs. Thus, 28.2% of respondents stated that they are working in the information sector, but a high number are working as teachers, managers and entrepreneurs.

Graph 2. Occupation of respondents who live in rental accommodation. N: 78



When there are several active adults within a household the chances to rent an apartment are higher.

Graph 3. Employment vs ability to rent. N: 193

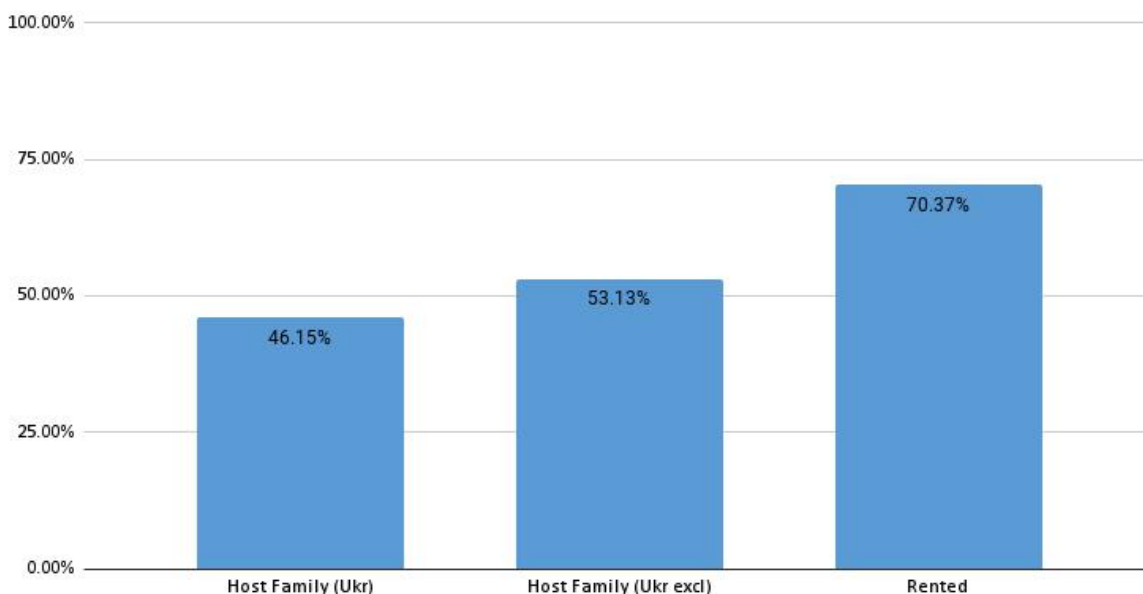


3. Comparative Assessment of Employment Opportunities Across Diverse Private Housing Categories

Interestingly, when we look at the share of displaced people who live in private housing *and* work, we can clearly point out that the smallest part of this sample are those who are staying with Ukrainian hosts (only 46% work). In comparison, 70% of those living in rented houses work either in the Netherlands or have maintained their jobs in Ukraine remotely.

This can also be explained from our qualitative interviews, where we found that the majority of those staying with host families of Ukrainian origin are retired people or those who find it difficult to find a job in the Netherlands. Family ties and family responsibilities are what pushes Ukrainian hosts to continue hosting despite all challenges, which puts them in quite a vulnerable position if no alternatives arise.

Graph 4. Percentage of active people in Ukrainian households. N: 131



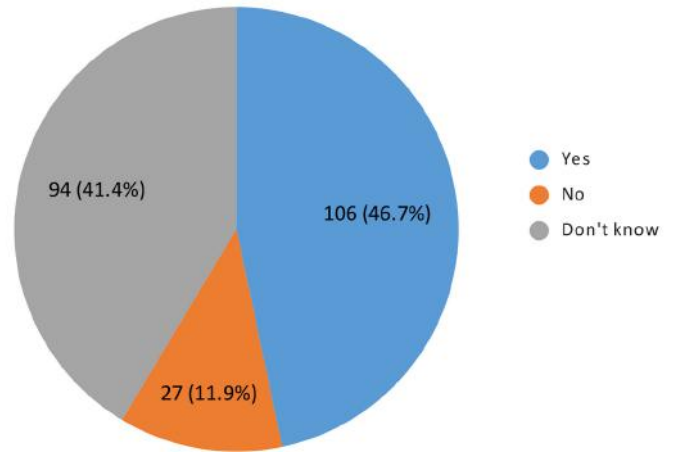
Future prospects

The question of whether displaced individuals plan to return to their home country is a recurring concern for policymakers tasked with developing long-term strategies and policies. However, responding to this question is far from straightforward, particularly during an ongoing conflict. When interpreting the data we've gathered regarding the future prospects of displaced individuals in times of uncertainty, it's crucial to recognize the emotional weight that these questions carry for respondents.

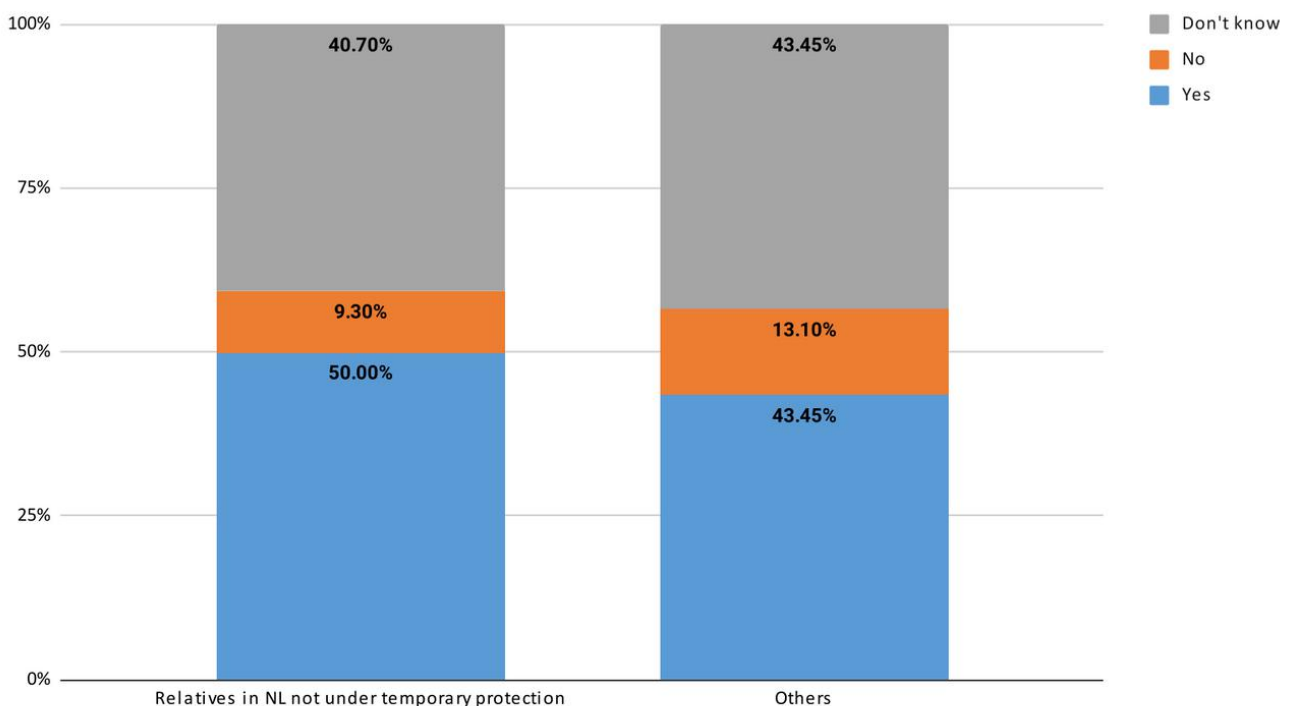
It is important to consider that the answers provided may be influenced by personal desires and sentiments rather than purely rational decisions about their plans. To mitigate this, instead of solely focusing on the immediate future, we asked our respondents about their intentions regarding return after Ukraine's successful reconstruction and their plans for the upcoming five years. As a result, almost half of the respondents expressed a desire to return, while 41.4% indicated that they were uncertain about their plans.

There are also some general assumptions about what would encourage people to return or instead pursue a life in the Netherlands. One assumption concerning the latter is having family members working in the Netherlands before the invasion. Yet, we did not find evidence of this in our data. **There is no significant difference between those with family and those without when it comes to the wish to return to Ukraine.**

Graph 4. Do you plan to return to Ukraine after its reconstruction? N:227



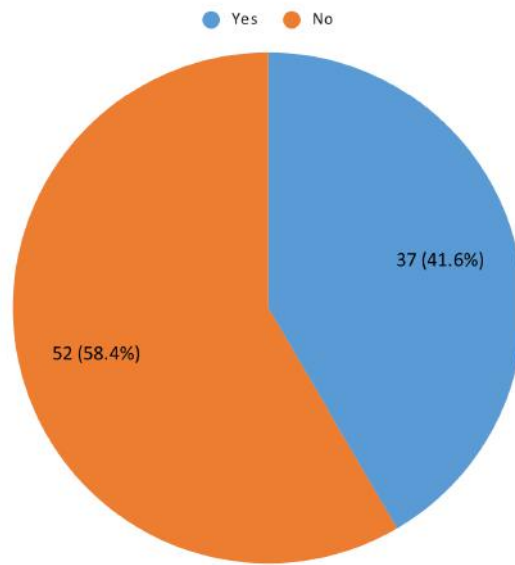
Graph 5. Do you plan to return to Ukraine after its reconstruction? N:231



Another significant observation pertains to the link between the desire to return and one's employment status. Among those individuals currently employed in the Netherlands, the majority (58.4 percent) expressed their intention to return within the next 5 years if the situation permits.

In an effort to discern which proportion of those currently employed might be more inclined to leave, we analyzed the connection between industries and the willingness to return. This analysis revealed that individuals employed in the hospitality and retail sectors exhibited a greater willingness to return compared to their counterparts in high-skilled IT professions.

Graph 6. Among employed. Do you plan to stay in the Netherlands for the upcoming five years? N: 89



Graph 7. Desire to stay in the Netherlands? Per employment sector. N:70



Conclusion

Residing in private accommodations presents both advantages and challenges for displaced communities. The majority of displaced individuals in our study were young residents originally from Kyiv and the Kyiv/Kharkiv regions, and many have successfully settled in Amsterdam in terms of housing and employment. However, owing to the uncertainty of their legal status or the temporality of their situation, they encounter discrimination in both the housing and labor markets. The inability to provide long-term employment contracts to potential landlords significantly hampers their access to the housing market. While these individuals may not be on the municipality's radar, they nonetheless require practical support. Their information needs have evolved as well. Initially focused on basic registration requirements, they now seek more information regarding taxes, parking fees, child benefits, medical care, labor rights, and tenant's rights. Lacking the typical social support and advice available in municipal locations, they often feel they miss out on crucial updates. Many of them struggle with the language barrier and express a need for additional language support to integrate into society and secure employment.

At the onset of the crisis, a significant number of individuals found refuge with host families, although this trend has been steadily declining over the past few months. To locate rental housing options or host families, these individuals leveraged their personal networks and, at times, utilized rental websites.

Given that many hosting arrangements were informal, displaced individuals and their hosts often lacked formal or legal agreements regarding the duration and conditions of their stay. This occasionally led to misunderstandings that required resolution. Nonetheless, displaced individuals preferred not to relocate to municipal housing and therefore sought to avoid confrontations. In the most extreme cases, they changed host families through their social networks.

Initiatives like RefugeeHome were employed as a re-housing option, but the availability and duration of such housing arrangements were limited to three months or less. Notably, the majority of unemployed individuals remained in host families. Unemployed individuals living in precarious conditions without defined housing arrangements constitute the most vulnerable group in our sample. Their hosts may also face challenges in establishing clear boundaries and agreements. Overall, all individuals expressed satisfaction with their living situations, and while they voiced a desire to transition from host families, they remained appreciative and positive about their experiences.

Individuals from Ukraine who are displaced and living with host families require increased support in their job search efforts and in managing their relationships with their host households. Even when some individuals do manage to secure employment, they often face housing market discrimination, related to their rental history and employment contract status, which hinders their prospects in finding suitable housing. However, the data suggests that having a greater number of household members employed increases their likelihood of securing accommodation.

Among the challenges expressed by survey respondents, healthcare needs, high rental costs, and language barriers rank among the top three concerns. Some individuals encounter difficulties in locating a general practitioner and navigating the healthcare system, particularly those with chronic illnesses and retirees.

Regarding their prospects in the Netherlands, it is evident that many individuals harbor uncertainty about what the future holds. Nonetheless, more than 40 percent of respondents have expressed a desire to return to Ukraine after its reconstruction. This group primarily consists of individuals engaged in low-skilled labor.

Policy recommendations

Due to the lack of control when it comes to private housing - it is a challenging task to develop effective policies for this group. Temporality of the status and the lack of space in municipal locations complicate the situation even further. Therefore, our policy recommendations are the following:

1. We advise to prioritize the most vulnerable groups, particularly those who have been staying with host families for an extended period (often due to difficulty finding employment). Consider planning visits with specialised NGOs to follow up on vulnerable groups living with host families, offer appropriate support and services they might need.
2. We encourage to enhance the provision of information through regular informational events, newsletters, or similar channels, addressing topics like labor rights, general legal rights, tax systems, and healthcare services. This will help ensure displaced individuals are well-informed about their rights and available resources.
3. We advise to establish social services within municipal locations or community houses, such as a Ukrainian community center, which would be open to migrants from host families. These services should include psychosocial support and social work services, creating a supportive environment for those in need. Alternatively, consider making these services accessible at the local district level to provide easier access.
4. Finally, we advise to explore options to assist displaced individuals in locating general practitioners to address their healthcare needs, making it easier for them to navigate the Dutch healthcare system and find adequate medical care.