

Temporariness vs. Integration of Internally Displaced Persons under Uncertainty: The Case of Border Territorial Communities in Zakarpattia

*Nataliia Provotar*¹

PhD (Geography), Associate Professor, Department of Economic and Social Geography,

¹Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv, Kyiv, Ukraine,

e-mail: provotarnat@ukr.net,  <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2211-6509>;

*Halyna Shchuka*²

DSc (Pedagogy), Professor, Department of Geography and Tourism,

²Ferenc Rakoczi II Transcarpathian Hungarian University, Berehove, Ukraine,

e-mail: halina.shchuka@gmail.com,  <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4368-5081>;

*Kostyantyn Mezentsev*¹

DSc (Geography), Professor, Department of Economic and Social Geography,

e-mail: mezentsev@knu.ua,  <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1974-7860>

ABSTRACT

Introduction. The integration of internally displaced persons (IDPs) into host communities has become a pressing issue in Ukraine due to ongoing war and large-scale displacement. Understanding the factors that facilitate or hinder integration is critical for designing effective policies and interventions that support IDPs' social, economic, and cultural adaptation. This study examines IDP integration in the border communities of Berehove District, Zakarpattia Region, with a focus on community participation, satisfaction with basic needs, and the role of host community authorities and residents. The main objective is to identify determinants of integration under conditions of uncertainty and temporary displacement.

Methods. The study employed a survey-based approach targeting registered IDPs across several border communities, combined with comparative cross-contextual interpretation. The questionnaire included thematic blocks on demography, self-assessment of satisfaction with key needs (housing, employment, social assistance, education, and health services), migration intentions, evaluation of local authorities' activities, and participation in community life. Participation in community life was used as the primary indicator of integration. The data were analyzed to identify patterns of basic needs satisfaction, barriers to participation, and the influence of local institutional and socio-cultural factors on integration.

Results. Findings show that IDPs vary in their readiness to integrate, depending on employment conditions, satisfaction with basic services, and socio-cultural and institutional contexts of host communities. Employment satisfaction emerged as a key factor facilitating participation, while informal employment and lack of stable jobs hindered integration. Housing satisfaction, while relevant to well-being, did not directly determine community participation. Institutional mechanisms, such as local IDP councils and integration strategies, created structural opportunities for engagement, but actual integration depended strongly on the attitudes of local residents and authorities. Social media and community organizations were found to be the main channels for socio-cultural integration. Perceptions of temporary displacement and migration intentions further shaped integration pathways.

Conclusions. IDP integration is multidimensional, combining access to resources with the openness of host communities. Satisfaction with employment and health services strongly underpins engagement, whereas informal employment represents a barrier. Institutional support alone is insufficient: local attitudes, socio-cultural interaction, and opportunities for participation play decisive roles. The study highlights the importance of tailoring integration policies to local contexts and addressing both structural and socio-cultural dimensions to enhance the integration of IDPs.

Keywords: internally displaced persons, IDP integration, territorial community, engagement, war, temporariness, migration intentions, Zakarpattia, Ukraine.

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Introduction

Russia's military aggression has prompted a re-examination of many issues of Ukraine's development, particularly in its regions and cities [1]. The post-war recovery of Ukrainian territorial communities will largely depend on their capacity to rebuild population levels, maintain demographic balance, retain local residents, integrate internally displaced persons (IDPs), and facilitate the return of migrants. In other words, recovery will be shaped by the demographic and migration resilience of communities.

The demographic challenges that have persisted in Ukraine since the 1990s have significantly intensified during the war.

Even increased investment appeal of communities and the rising financial capacity of households do not guarantee a reduction in outward migration from Ukraine, especially among young people [2]. Addressing this challenge requires local governments to implement effective development strategies [3] focused on job creation, housing support, social assistance, and building the legal, institutional, eco-

conomic, and social foundations necessary for the successful integration of IDPs into host communities.

Active combat and forced population movements further exacerbate the asymmetry of migration and demographic resilience. This, in turn, has affected population size, dynamics, and age-sex structure in regions and individual communities, as well as local labor markets, socio-economic indicators of living standards and quality of life across social groups, and broader factors shaping regional development.

Amid a shrinking labor supply in local labor markets, driven by mass emigration of Ukrainians and their mobilization into the Armed Forces, IDPs can serve as – and are increasingly serving as – a vital source of human capital for host communities. Moreover, coordinated efforts of local governments, volunteer organizations, and international donors [4], aimed at realizing the employment, entrepreneurial, educational, and cultural potential of displaced people, can support communities in addressing local challenges and in designing and implementing recovery strategies. Under such conditions, IDPs represent a “community development resource,” offering competitive advantages and acting as drivers of qualitative change within territorial communities [5].

IDP status in Ukraine and core registration procedures are regulated by the 2014 Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine “On the Registration of Internally Displaced Persons” [6]. Guarantees for the protection of rights and freedoms, access to temporary housing, healthcare, education, and social support are defined in the 2014 Law of Ukraine “On Ensuring the Rights and Freedoms of Internally Displaced Persons” [7]. At the same time, practical mechanisms for integrating displaced persons into host territorial communities lack a unified framework and largely depend on local context and conditions.

The adaptation of IDPs to new realities occurs in diverse ways and is strongly influenced by age, gender, place or region of origin, socio-economic status, income, disability [8], and other personal characteristics such as tolerance and adaptability to new environments. Another key dimension is the readiness and willingness of host communities to integrate displaced people, which is expressed through the information environment, especially social media, interpersonal communication, and community outreach regarding economic, social, cultural, educational, medical, legal, and other forms of support available to IDPs during both the adaptation and integration stages.

Under conditions of uncertainty, predicting the prospects of integration or return of displaced people is challenging. IDPs are “ordinary people” embedded

in specific social, political, and historical contexts [9]. Their migration patterns are likely to differ depending on whether displacement occurs during a short-term emergency or a prolonged war. Nevertheless, it is possible to identify factors that clearly influence integration and return intentions, primarily the duration of the war and the security situation in both places of origin and host communities.

Ferris & Kerwin [10] emphasize that it is time to let go of the assumption that displacement is a short-term phenomenon and accept that displacement is part of the new normal, noting that protracted displacement has become the norm. It is predictable that the longer the war continues, the larger the share of IDPs that will remain in their current places of residence or move abroad, given the economic support and opportunities offered to Ukrainian refugees by different countries. Typically, IDPs receive significantly less international attention than refugees [11]. Although, unlike refugees, IDPs generally do not move into radically different socio-cultural environments and face no formal legal barriers to employment, healthcare, or political participation within their own country, “the reality is more nuanced” [12]. Integration can be hindered by regional stereotypes, stigmatization, cultural biases, lack of institutional support, and local institutional barriers. Therefore, IDPs should be viewed not only through the lens of forced displacement as an anomaly, but also in terms of understanding new forms of normality [13], “abnormal normality”.

The case of IDPs in border communities is particularly distinctive. Uncertainty about the future, combined with proximity to the national border, creates conditions for changes in status, including potential transformation into refugees. At the same time, delayed or postponed decisions on deeper integration of IDPs in host border communities increase uncertainty in local policy, hindering the development of sustainable strategies for their inclusion and support.

This article aims to highlight the local specificities of IDP integration in border territorial communities. It analyzes the extent to which forced displacement is experienced as a temporary phenomenon in community life, and whether displaced people can become a resource for community development amid uncertainty about both migration behavior and local integration strategies. The study addresses the following research questions: (1) To which resources in the host community (housing, jobs, healthcare, etc.) does restoring or gaining access most effectively contribute to the integration of IDPs? (2) What is the relationship between host community openness to integration, IDP participation in community life, and perceptions of temporariness under conditions of uncertainty?

Internal Displacement in Ukraine: The Contemporary Discourse

Forced displacement is not a new phenomenon in Ukraine. Natural and technological disasters have previously prompted internal movements within the country. The 1986 Chernobyl nuclear disaster triggered what was, at the time, an unprecedented scale of relocation. However, due to Soviet censorship and the official policy of silence, studies on the integration of displaced persons into host communities were limited and not incorporated into the theoretical discourse. Research on forced displacement caused by destructive floods also tended to be predominantly descriptive and case-based.

The Russian aggression in 2014 led to significant shifts in Ukrainian studies of forced displacement, both in terms of methodology and theoretical contribution. On one hand, this was due to the scale of the phenomenon; on the other, it reflected the increasing integration of Ukrainian researchers into international projects, particularly after 2022. While the number of IDPs after 2014 exceeded 1.3 million, and the armed conflict affected 10 million people [14], by early 2025 the number of IDPs is estimated at 3.7 million, and the war has impacted virtually all Ukrainian citizens.

Research on forced displacement in Ukraine can be broadly categorized into three main strands:

- Quantitative-descriptive studies of the spatial and temporal aspects of forced displacement, including analyses of the number of displaced persons by region, trends over time, reasons for relocation, choice of resettlement, assessment of return factors, and identification of IDP migration behavior patterns;
- Mixed-method studies (quantitative and qualitative) addressing a range of challenges faced by IDPs – legal, economic, social, and psychological – including housing, access to healthcare and education, employment opportunities and unemployment levels, possibilities for learning new professions, socio-cultural differences, territorial identities, and territorial and regional variations.
- Predominantly qualitative studies focusing on the adaptation and integration of IDPs into host territorial communities, local attitudes toward displaced persons, the institutional readiness of communities to integrate IDPs, and the impact of integration on the socio-economic development of host communities.

Tracking the number of IDPs and their accommodation became the initial focus of the Ukrainian academic community. Researchers analyzed the spatial and temporal aspects of forced displacement in Ukraine after 2014, focusing on regional distribution, changes in IDP numbers, and the pressure on host communities [15, 16]. Analysis based on data

from IOM rounds of displacement assessments in Ukraine conducted between 2022 and 2024 revealed patterns in IDP dynamics and regional registration trends [17]. The spatial pattern indicates that IDPs predominantly concentrate in regions with one of Ukraine's five metropolitan centers – Kyiv, Kharkiv, Odesa, Dnipro, and Lviv – which are regional hubs, major socio-economic centers, and key nodes in the country's economic system [18].

A substantial body of research has examined the characteristics and determinants of internal displacement in individual regions of Ukraine, particularly those that received the largest numbers of IDPs, including Kharkiv [19], Odesa [20], Lviv [16, 21, 22], and other western regions [23].

Issues of IDP integration into the socio-economic life of host regions, and the adaptation of local social services and labor markets to IDP needs, are closely linked to the impact of relocated enterprises on regional economies [22]. However, studies indicate that enterprise relocation only partially addresses the problem. Not all territories are suitable for accommodating large military-industrial or engineering enterprises; consequently, attention has focused on the need for intensive housing construction and the accelerated development of social infrastructure, particularly in consideration of public attitudes and social sentiment [24].

Research confirms that the cultural and social diversity of a region shapes levels of tolerance, which in turn promotes openness to and acceptance of IDPs from different regions of Ukraine [20]. In this context, in the Western macro-region, the adaptation of displaced persons has been analyzed not only in terms of economic conditions but also through the lens of linguistic and mental landscapes [16].

Forced displacement in Ukraine has emerged as a new urban phenomenon, with significant concentrations of IDPs in large cities [25, 26]. Consequently, urban displacement has clearly localized effects, and municipal administrations have become “front-line actors” [27]. At the city level, a specific micro-geography of displacement has formed: compact housing for IDPs is often situated on city peripheries, whereas overall higher concentrations of IDPs are found in districts offering higher residential comfort [18, 25].

Studies of IDP integration into territorial communities typically focus on specific aspects of integration – economic, social, or planning-related. Economic aspects include training in professions in demand within the community, grant support for new business startups, and the relocation of small enterprises. Social aspects primarily concern social assistance, the physical and economic accessibility of services, psychological support, participation in cultural and sports events, and the creation of com-

munication platforms. Planning aspects involve engaging IDPs in decision-making processes and implementing micro-grants for joint tactical urbanism initiatives between IDPs and local residents (e.g., creating a park or riverside walkway). Such initiatives can be facilitated through participatory budgeting, enabling all city residents to contribute to the creation or renewal of public spaces [28].

Analyses of integration effectiveness have shown that it depends on the coordinated efforts of local governments, state authorities, and civil society institutions [29]. Active involvement of IDPs in developing programs for their multi-faceted integration is crucial for understanding the overall “happiness–pain map” of IDPs in each specific community [18]. A key indicator of successful integration is active engagement in community life and participation in development and local problem-solving initiatives [29].

Successful adaptation depends not only on material support but also on access to information, particularly through local social networks and daily interactions with host communities. Local media, community social networks, and street art can serve as tools to promote a positive image of IDPs, especially when highlighting their contributions to the local economy and cultural life, including cultural traditions they bring. Positive examples include murals dedicated to IDPs or initiatives led by displaced persons to create new public spaces in host cities, thereby fostering diversity and inclusion [30, 31].

Research on the framing of IDP-related issues in local media shows that leading topics include housing, jobs, and social support (so-called “ordinary frames”), while charitable initiatives by leading business figures often receive exaggerated attention. Local media tend to portray IDPs primarily as a group in need of assistance, largely overlooking “peripheral frames” – deeper issues such as “permanent temporariness” and “double temporariness”, their hybridity and “shuttling” displacement, everyday emotional-affective impacts of trauma, and the lack of opportunities for invisible IDP voices to be heard [26].

Studies on the adaptation and potential pathways for integrating displaced persons into host territorial communities in Ukraine take into account regional characteristics of their accommodation [32]. In the western regions, research has examined the effects of involving IDPs through public and volunteer organizations in creative activities, such as painting, crafts, or music therapy, to expand social networks and reinforce a sense of belonging [33]. Positive examples of IDP integration in the city of Uzhhorod include the use of social networks and local chat groups for collaboration, as well as initiatives based in religious and humanitarian centers [4].

A 2018 study examining IDPs’ self-assessed integration into host territorial communities in Ukraine found that 50% considered themselves fully integrated, while 34% viewed themselves as partially integrated. However, over time, challenges intensified in the absence of long-term solutions, and integration levels increased with greater distance from conflict zones – the lowest level (43%) was observed in regions adjacent to temporarily occupied territories [34].

Data and Methods

This study employs a methodology of comparative cross-contextual interpretation of survey results from internally displaced persons in the territorial communities of the border Berehove District in Zakarpattia Region. The empirical data are analyzed not in isolation but in conjunction with patterns and findings from research on IDP adaptation and integration in other regions and countries. This approach enables a deeper interpretation of the results through the lens of diverse socio-cultural and security contexts, highlighting how local border conditions interact with broader displacement experiences.

Since March 2022, local governments have been tracking IDPs through registration mechanisms in the territorial communities where they arrive. These data are complemented by periodic assessments of actual residents (primarily within urban agglomerations) conducted by mobile network operators. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) in Ukraine regularly monitors and carries out baseline assessments (rounds) of IDP numbers and distribution across territorial communities using rapid telephone surveys. The first baseline assessment (Round 1) was conducted in six administrative districts of Zakarpattia Region in April 2022, and to date, IOM has completed 39 rounds [35].

Since March 2022, local governments have been recording IDPs through registration mechanisms in the territorial communities to which they arrive. These data are supplemented by periodic assessments of actual residents (primarily within urban agglomerations) conducted by mobile network operators. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) in Ukraine regularly monitors and conducts baseline assessments (rounds) of the number and distribution of IDPs across territorial communities using rapid telephone surveys. The first baseline assessment (Round 1) was conducted across six administrative districts of Zakarpattia Region in April 2022, and by now, IOM has conducted 39 rounds [35].

According to IOM estimates, there are 3,665,000 IDPs in Ukraine [35]. IOM data show that by July 2025, 1.1 million Ukrainians who had left the country following the full-scale Russian invasion returned, of whom 340,000 remain regis-

tered as IDPs [36]. Survey results indicate that returns most often involve individual family members, with the primary motivations being the desire to return home or reunite with family (cited by 70% of returnees; among IDPs, 34%) [36].

According to the Information and Computing Center of the Ministry of Social Policy of Ukraine, as of 7 August 2025, 4,569,000 IDPs were officially registered [37]. Estimates by the M.V. Ptukha Institute of Demography and Social Research of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine suggest that by mid-April 2022, 5.0–5.5 million people had been forcibly displaced within Ukraine due to Russian military aggression, the majority residing in western regions [24]. Moreover, the highest proportion of IDPs who have fully integrated into their new environments is located in the western regions [5], providing a strong rationale for studying IDP integration in the border communities of Zakarpattia.

Within the framework of the project “Joining Together: Strengthening the Capacity of Coordination Councils on IDPs in Zakarpattia Region”, in February 2025 the Berehove District Council on IDPs under the Berehove District Military Administration conducted a needs assessment of IDPs. The assessment followed the Methodological Guidelines for Conducting Needs Assessments of Internally Displaced Persons at the Local Community Level issued by the Ministry for the Reintegration of Temporarily Occupied Territories [38].

Berehove District is located in southern Zakarpattia, directly on the border with Hungary. The district is traversed by international highways and contains three border checkpoints, enabling high daily population mobility. Its favorable socio-geographical and geopolitical location, combined with the historical development of the Ukrainian-Hungarian cross-border region, has fostered intensive integration processes in socio-economic and

cultural dimensions [39]. This is a multiethnic space, where Hungarians constitute the majority (76%), alongside Ukrainians (19%) and Roma (4%). In 2022, the district population numbered 206,700, with declines due to depopulation and labor out-migration. Average wages were almost 7% lower than the regional average. The district economy traditionally relies on agriculture (viticulture, horticulture, processing of agricultural products), small border trade, logistics, services, and tourism based on historical-cultural heritage and thermal waters (thermal resorts, rural and wine tourism). Population decline, labor migration, youth outflow, and comparatively low income levels were key development challenges for Berehove District in early 2022 [39].

The survey covered 175 displaced persons, of whom 88.6% were women and 11.4% men. The largest age group was 36–65 years (68.6%), youth aged 18–35 constituted 22.3%, and older adults (65+) 9.1%. Almost 60% of respondents were married or in long-term relationships. Regarding education, 47.4% held higher education degrees, 27.4% vocational or pre-tertiary professional education, 21.7% secondary education, and 3.4% primary education or none. Refusal rates were low – only 2.3% of IDPs who were approached declined to participate.

According to the Department of Social Protection of the Zakarpattia Regional Military Administration, in February 2025, 14,449 IDPs were registered in Berehove District, although their distribution across territorial communities was uneven. Similarly, survey participation by IDPs from different communities was disproportionate. Four territorial communities (Berehove, Vynohradiv, Batiovo, and Vylok) accounted for 88.6% of respondents and 79.0% of all registered IDPs in the district. This justified selecting these four communities as the focus of the analysis (Table 1).

Table 1

Distribution of IDPs by Territorial Communities in Berehove District, Zakarpattia Region

Territorial Community	Registered IDPs		IDP Respondents		Berehove District Map
	N	%	N	%	
Berehove	103	58.9	5 471	37.9	
Vynohradiv	21	12.0	4 741	32.8	
Batiovo	17	9.7	514	3.6	
Vylok	14	8.0	672	4.7	
Korolevo	6	3.4	1 000	6.9	
Pyiterfolvo	0	0.0	545	3.8	
Velyka Byihan	1	0.6	510	3.5	
Koson	0	0.0	378	2.6	
Kamianske	9	5.1	349	2.4	
Velyki Berehy	3	1.7	269	1.9	
Refused to answer	1	0.6			
Разом	175	100.0	14 449	100.0	

The survey comprised five thematic sections:

- Demographics: community of registration, region/community of origin, sex, age, marital status, education, and material status;
- Self-assessment of needs satisfaction: housing, employment, social, psychological, legal assistance, medical, educational, and administrative services;
- Non-return factors and migration intentions;
- Assessment of local authorities' activities regarding IDP issues, local residents' attitudes, and sources of information on available opportunities for displaced persons;
- Participation in community life.

Main Findings and Discussion

The primary indicator of integration considered in this study is IDPs' participation in community life. As noted by Chuiko & Fedorenko [40], the more actively IDPs engage in community life without external assistance or government support, the higher their level of integration. Among respondents, roughly equal shares – about 15% – were actively involved in community life and those who did not wish to participate. Another 22% expressed potential interest in participation but were not currently engaged. Less than 2% reported non-participation due to age and/or disability. A notably high proportion, over 46%, found it difficult to answer, indicating those who have not yet decided whether they are interested in deeper community engagement or intend to remain in the community long-term.

Although previous studies have shown that female IDPs tend to integrate more quickly and deeply into host urban communities than males [41], the results of this study revealed a higher share of community-involved men than women (25% versus 13.5%). This is partly explained by the significant imbalance between men and women among respondents (men accounted for only 11.4%) and among registered IDPs overall, as well as by the specific context of the host communities, where men traditionally play a more central role. The highest potential integration by age is observed among those aged 35–65 (17.5%), followed by youth aged 18–35 (10.3%), and older adults (65+) (6.3%).

Education level does not significantly affect participation in host community life, which aligns with Mishchuk et al. [5], who found no significant disparities in self-assessed integration among IDPs with different educational backgrounds. However, IDPs with no formal education or only primary education are the most polarized, showing both the highest share of active participation and the highest share of non-participation. Economic well-being similarly does not serve as a reliable indicator of integration into the host community.

Participation in community life tends to incre-

ase with the length of time since displacement: among those displaced between 2014–2021, 40% participate; 2022 – 17%; 2023 – 10%; 2024 – 5%; and 2025 – 0%. Conversely, none of those displaced before 2022 expressed unwillingness to participate, whereas 50% of those displaced in 2025 reported non-participation.

Previous studies have shown that integration into host communities depends on both connections to the place in the past and to present location [42]. Our study found substantial differences in participation across communities. In Batiovo Community, 35.3% of IDP respondents reported active participation, compared to 14.3% in Vylok, 13.6% in Berehove, and only 4.8% in Vynohradiv. The reverse pattern was observed for those unwilling to participate: Vynohradiv – 19.0%, Vylok – 14.3%, Berehove – 13.6%, Batiovo – 5.9% (Fig. 1).

Differences also appear depending on the region of origin. IDPs from Kyiv city and region (50%) and from southern regions (31%) engage most actively in community life, while those from Donetsk and Luhansk (15%) show lower engagement, and the lowest participation comes from Dnipropetrovsk, Zaporizhzhia, Kharkiv, and Sumy regions (5–6%).

Adaptation and integration of IDPs is a process in which individuals strive to meet their needs and reorganize their lives to align with the requirements of a new society after displacement [43]. These processes can be understood through resource-based and socio-cultural approaches. From a resource perspective, adaptation is viewed as adjusting to the loss of significant assets that IDPs held prior to displacement (housing, movable and immovable property, jobs, family and other social ties) and regaining partial or full access to these resources in the new location. Integration in this context implies shared use of resources with host community residents and therefore depends on the community's willingness to provide access and support. The socio-cultural approach considers adaptation as overcoming the shock of changing familiar socio-cultural environments and finding ways to coexist with host community members [43]. Integration, in this sense, entails building social ties between IDPs and locals, engaging displaced persons in daily community life, and providing them with the same rights and opportunities as residents.

Based on these two approaches, we consider IDP integration both in terms of meeting basic resource needs – housing, jobs, and social support – and in terms of openness and hospitality from residents and local authorities of host communities. From the perspective of combining these approaches, Zewude & Siraw [44] emphasize that the key factors motivating IDPs to favor local integration

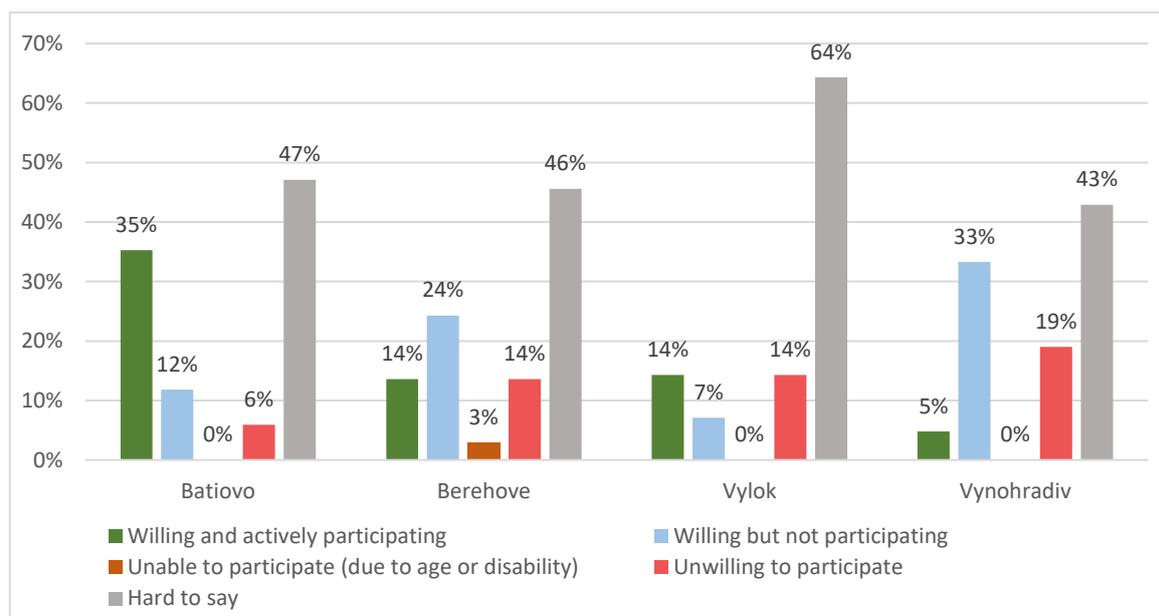


Fig. 1. Responses to the question: “Would you like to participate in the community life where you currently live and in decision-making regarding its development?”

involve both dimensions: access to sources of livelihood (such as job opportunities) and the sharing of similar social identities between IDPs and host communities.

Self-assessment of Needs Satisfaction: Housing, Employment, Education, and Health Care

Forced displacement generates precarious living conditions for IDPs, who face enormous difficulties in meeting their most basic needs, such as access to decent housing, livelihoods of sufficient quality and quantity, health care and sanitation, education, and more [45]. However, host communities can help mitigate the negative impacts of uncertainty and precariousness, primarily by addressing these basic needs. In the conceptual framework of integration developed by Ager & Strang [46] and reproduced in many subsequent studies, four core variables – markers and means – are highlighted: employment, housing, education, and health. This aligns with the “ordinary frames” in local media coverage of IDP issues, which traditionally receive the most attention and, in turn, influence decisions regarding integration [26]. Accordingly, we undertake our assessment of IDPs’ (readiness for) integration into host communities by evaluating their satisfaction with key areas: housing, employment, social assistance, preschool and school education, and health care.

The general assumption, based on previous research, is that IDPs who lack their own housing, face employment challenges, and require state support have lower levels of integration [40].

As shown in Table 2, IDPs in the border communities of Zakarpattia are most satisfied with educational and health services, and least satisfied with

social assistance. Satisfaction with housing and employment also slightly outweighs dissatisfaction. Thus, the basic conditions for IDP integration are relatively conducive. However, at the level of individual communities, differences are notable for certain indicators, contributing to the formation of local “landscapes” of favorable conditions for integration. For example, dissatisfaction with housing and social assistance is particularly pronounced in the Berehove Territorial Community, while dissatisfaction with employment is highest in Vylok Community. In contrast, the host community does not substantially affect satisfaction with health or educational services.

Since Ukraine has traditionally been considered a “homeowner society,” housing is seen as a key prerequisite for integration into host communities [47]. It creates a clear divide between locals and displaced persons in terms of property ownership. At the same time, housing constantly reminds IDPs of the loss of their home and native city. As Zavisca notes [47], homeownership is both a material and symbolic marker of incomplete integration for IDPs.

Our research in border communities shows that willingness to participate in community life, as an indicator of integration, does not depend on housing satisfaction. Among IDP respondents, those actively engaged and those unwilling to participate are equally represented, regardless of whether they are satisfied or dissatisfied with access to housing. (Table 3).

Unlike housing, employment is a key factor for integration. IDPs who wish to and actively participate in community life are higher among those satisfied with their employment situation (18.8% versus 5.5% among those dissatisfied), and vice versa. Dissatisfaction with employment effectively signals

Table 2

Self-assessment of IDPs' Needs Satisfaction in Host Communities of Berehove District, Zakarpattia Region

Basic Needs / Territorial Community	Needs Satisfaction Breakdown (% among respondents who had this need)				Do Not Have This Need (% of all respondents)	Refused to Answer (% of all respondents)
	Completely Satisfied	Rather Satisfied	Rather Dissatisfied	Completely Dissatisfied		
Housing	14.3	37.1	20.6	28.0	-	-
Batiovo	0.0	58.8	29.4	11.8	-	-
Berehove	9.7	29.1	23.3	37.9	-	-
Vylok	21.4	50.0	0.0	28.6	-	-
Vynohradiv	33.3	47.6	9.5	9.5	-	-
Employment	17.6	36.1	25.2	21.0	32.0	-
Batiovo	37.5	31.3	6.3	25.0	5.9	-
Berehove	13.2	41.2	32.4	13.2	34.0	-
Vylok	0.0	14.3	28.6	57.1	50.0	-
Vynohradiv	33.3	20.0	13.3	33.3	28.6	-
Social assistance	8.6	29.4	31.3	30.7	6.3	0.6
Batiovo	7.1	50.0	14.3	28.6	17.6	0.0
Berehove	3.2	22.1	38.9	35.8	6.8	1.0
Vylok	28.6	21.4	21.4	28.6	0.0	0.0
Vynohradiv	25.0	30.0	25.0	20.0	4.8	0.0
Preschool education	53.3	40.0	6.7	0.0	82.9	-
Batiovo	100.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	88.2	-
Berehove	57.1	38.1	4.8	0.0	79.6	-
Vylok	-	-	-	-	100.0	-
Vynohradiv	25.0	50.0	25.0	0.0	81.0	-
School education	63.3	29.1	6.3	1.3	54.9	-
Batiovo	83.3	8.3	8.3	0.0	29.4	-
Berehove	59.0	30.8	10.3	0.0	62.1	-
Vylok	50.0	33.3	0.0	16.7	57.1	-
Vynohradiv	62.5	37.5	0.0	0.0	61.9	-
Health care	18.6	44.3	27.5	9.6	4.6	-
Batiovo	25.0	62.5	12.5	0.0	5.9	-
Berehove	12.4	45.4	32.0	10.3	5.8	-
Vylok	38.5	38.5	7.7	15.4	7.1	-
Vynohradiv	28.6	28.6	33.3	9.5	0.0	-

Table 3

Relationship between IDPs' Participation in Community Life and Satisfaction with Basic Needs in Berehove District, Zakarpattia Region (share of responses by category, %)

Basic Needs	Satisfaction	Participation in Community Life				
		Willing and actively participating	Willing but not participating	Unable to participate (due to age or disability)	Unwilling to participate	Hard to say
Housing	Satisfied	12.5	20.5	2.3	12.5	52.3
	Dissatisfied	17.6	23.5	1.2	17.6	40.0
Employment	Satisfied	18.8	23.4	0.0	15.6	42.2
	Dissatisfied	5.5	25.5	0.0	18.2	50.9
Social assistance	Satisfied	16.1	19.4	3.2	17.7	43.5
	Dissatisfied	12.9	24.8	1.0	14.9	46.5
Preschool education	Satisfied	7.1	28.6	0.0	17.9	46.4
	Dissatisfied	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	100.0
School education	Satisfied	11.0	21.9	0.0	20.5	46.6
	Dissatisfied	0.0	16.7	0.0	16.7	66.7
Health care	Satisfied	14.3	21.0	1.9	10.5	52.4
	Dissatisfied	17.7	25.8	1.6	21.0	33.9

a lack of interest in community life. This aligns with Ager & Strang (2008), who emphasize the importance of employment for successful integration of resettled persons, even though they often face barriers in finding jobs [48].

IDPs are not a homogeneous group, varying in their employment needs and readiness to integrate [24]. Some have retained previous jobs and intend to return home, and therefore do not plan to integrate into the host community. Others aim to move abroad and similarly consider the host community only a temporary stop. In contrast, those who have lost their homes and see opportunities to resolve housing issues are motivated to seek permanent employment and pursue deeper integration into the community. Consequently, employment challenges differ across communities [24]. Our study highlights these variations – for example, satisfaction with access to jobs in Batiovo Community (68.8% of respondents) is considerably higher than in Vylok Community (14.3%) (Table 2).

Aysa-Lastra [49] emphasizes that access to the labor market may be treated as an indicator of integration in the case of formal employment. However, studies show that IDPs in post-socialist countries

often face long-term disadvantages in the labor market and are more likely to work informally [12]. This trend appears consistently across regions, where informal or illegal employment sometimes becomes a coping mechanism for survival [48]. In the case of Berehove District communities, 43.4% of respondents reported having formal jobs (an additional 5.1% remain formally employed but are currently on unpaid leave), while 14.9% identified as unemployed and 9.1% as informally employed. Thus, the overall share of formal employment among surveyed IDPs can be considered comparatively high. Regarding participation in community life, the highest level appears among formally employed IDPs (21.1%), a smaller share among those employed informally (12.0%), and the lowest among unemployed respondents (7.7%) (Table 4). Unwillingness to engage is particularly common among informally employed individuals (18.8%) and peaks among those who reported facing a lack of formal job offers and receiving only or predominantly informal employment options (30.8%). The results therefore support the conclusion that informal employment acts as a barrier to local integration for displaced persons.

Table 4

Relationship between IDPs' Participation in Community Life and Employment Status in Berehove District, Zakarpattia Region (share of responses by category, %)

Employment status	Participation in Community Life			
	Willing and actively participating	Willing but not participating	Unwilling to participate	Hard to say
Formally employed	21.1	22.4	17.1	39.5
Informally employed	12.5	18.8	18.8	50.0
Unemployed	7.7	30.8	7.7	53.8

A less pronounced, yet still noticeable, influence on community integration is linked to satisfaction with health care provision. However, the negative side of this effect is stronger: a considerably larger share of respondents dissatisfied with health services express unwillingness to engage in community activities. Satisfaction with social assistance does not substantially influence community integration. A similar pattern appears for preschool and school education, though here it is largely due to the small number of respondents who reported dissatisfaction with educational services.

Community Integration: Host Community Residents, Local Authorities, and IDPs

Meeting basic needs (housing, jobs, social assistance) is a necessary, but not sufficient, condition for full IDP integration, as highlighted by [47]. Under severe challenges caused by war, occupation of communities, and urbicide, differences between IDPs and local residents often recede into

the background [48], yet tensions may intensify over time. Integration is more likely to strengthen when communities actively involve IDPs in social, political, and cultural life, providing them with equal rights and opportunities for full participation in community affairs [5, 46, 47, 50]. Unlike the approach once taken by the Georgian government, where concerns that integration could reduce incentives for return and weaken territorial claims limited support for IDP inclusion [51], Ukraine develops institutional pathways to enable integration. However, their effectiveness depends on local authorities' capacity and, more broadly, on each community's institutional ability to engage IDPs and prevent social isolation [29, 33].

Berehove District established the Council on Internally Displaced Persons in November 2023 as an advisory body [52]. The Council prioritizes supporting territorial communities in building effective adaptation and integration mechanisms and encour-

ages IDP participation in local decision-making by involving displaced persons in working groups, commissions, and advisory bodies that develop local programs protecting IDP rights and interests, including social protection, employment, housing, and property rights. In June 2025, the Council approved the Strategy for IDP Integration in Berehove District through 2030 [53]. The Strategy aims to integrate IDPs into economic, social, and cultural life so they become an essential part of the community, meet their own needs independently, and take an active role in local development. Key priorities include: long-term housing solutions that ensure dignified living conditions; stable employment and support for entrepreneurship and self-employment; equal access to quality health, educational, and social services, and mental-health and legal support that help displaced families cope with war-related stress and trauma. The Strategy also advances IDP inclusion in civic life and local governance, strengthens community communication, and reduces discrimination and social tensions through awareness-building and institutional cooperation.

Thus, the case-study communities have created institutional foundations for IDP integration, but actual community attitudes remain equally critical. As noted by Havryliuk [18], integration challenges include not only unemployment, financial hardship, and housing shortages, but also conflicts between IDPs and local residents, along with social stigmatization.

When asked whether they had faced biased treatment due to their IDP status, 52.6% reported no such experience. However, about a third (32.6%) acknowledged encountering bias, while 14.9% found it difficult to answer. Respondents most often experienced bias in the areas of housing rental or purchase (12.6%), social protection (10.9%), health care (10.3%), everyday social relations (9.7%), civic

and political participation (8.0%), employment (7.4%), and education (4.0%). Compared to other areas, jobs and education show lower levels of perceived bias, which aligns with earlier findings indicating that job satisfaction supports stronger community involvement.

Among those who experienced bias due to their IDP status, 17.5% actively engage in community life – slightly more than among those who did not report bias (14.9%). Conversely, the share of respondents unwilling to participate in community life is higher among those who did not experience bias (17.0% versus 14.0%). These results suggest that experiencing bias can, to some extent, motivate IDPs to engage in community life to influence local perceptions and drive positive change.

Respondents evaluate local authorities' efforts to address IDP needs almost evenly: 38.2% express positive assessments and 41.7% negative ones. Among those who evaluate local authority efforts positively, 19.4% actively participate in community life, compared to 13.6% among those who express negative evaluations.

At the community level (Table 5), assessments of both resident and authority attitudes toward IDPs further support the conclusion that local openness influences integration. The highest community participation level, as previously mentioned, is recorded in Batiovo Community, where over 82% of respondents reported no discrimination experiences and 59% positively evaluate local authorities' actions. Berehove Community shows the highest proportion of respondents reporting discrimination and negative authority assessments. These findings illustrate meaningful differences even among neighboring border communities within the same district.

Integration patterns also relate to respondents' places of origin: IDPs from Donetsk and Luhansk regions predominate in Vylok (85.7%), Berehove

Table 5

Assessment of Attitudes Toward IDPs and of Local Authorities' Efforts to Address Their Needs in Berehove District, Zakarpattia Region

Bias experienced by IDPs	No		Yes		Hard to say	Refused to answer
All communities	52,6		32,6		14,9	-
Batiovo	82,4		5,9		11,8	-
Berehove	42,7		39,8		17,5	-
Vylok	50,0		35,7		14,3	-
Vynohradiv	57,1		28,6		14,3	-
Assessment of local authorities' efforts in addressing IDPs' issues	Very good	Rather good	Rather poor	Very poor	Hard to say	Refused to answer
All communities	17,1	21,1	15,4	26,3	19,4	0,6
Batiovo	35,3	23,5	0,0	5,9	29,4	5,9
Berehove	10,7	6,8	22,3	37,9	22,3	0,0
Vylok	21,4	42,9	0,0	7,1	28,6	0,0
Vynohradiv	14,3	61,9	9,5	9,5	4,8	0,0

(52.4%), and Vynohradiv (47.6%) communities, while respondents from Kherson and Mykolaiv regions constitute the largest group in Batiovo Community (47.1%).

The findings therefore support the view that the pathway to integration is largely shaped by local authorities and the ways in which they portray IDPs in local media [54]. Given that host communities may share socioeconomic and cultural commonalities with the places IDPs come from, this can lower friction in adaptation and potentially facilitate inclusion, yet it may also amplify misunderstandings or (mutual) non-acceptance [47].

Another dimension of integration through sociocultural interaction is inclusion in the local information space. Elareshi et al. [55] find that social media platforms (particularly Facebook), online news sites, along with word of mouth are the most accessible and convenient information channels for IDPs. Traditional media (TV, radio, newspapers) continue to be used, but gradually lose prominence. Social media enables IDPs to present their own narratives within host communities [56], while sustaining emotional connection with their home communities. This reliance on social media fosters hybridity, where ties with home society remain strong while relationships with host communities also deepen [57].

Our study confirms these observations. IDPs living in the border communities of Zakarpattia identify their primary information sources as social media platforms (Facebook, Instagram, YouTube) – 56.6% of respondents; messengers and group chats (Viber, Telegram, WhatsApp) – 53.7%; and interpersonal communication (via relatives, friends, and neighbors) – 52%. Traditional media play a marginal role: printed press – 5.1%; television – 2.9%; radio – 1.1%. Personal communication with government officials (7.4%) and information materials or bulletin boards in social or administrative institutions (4.0%) also show limited reach. Meanwhile, NGOs and charitable organizations act as a meaningful information mediator between IDPs and local communities – 25.1% of respondents cite them as a source. The highest levels of community participation are observed among respondents who rely on social media platforms and civic or charitable organizations, indicating that sociocultural integration is primarily facilitated through social networks and civic initiatives.

Differences between communities are also significant. Social media platforms are cited as an information source by 94.1% of IDPs in Batiovo Community, compared to 57.1% in Vylok, 52.4% in Vynohradiv, and 47.6% in Berehove.

Integration into host communities is also influenced by how IDPs perceive temporariness, by their migration intentions, and by whether they plan to

return, relocate within Ukraine, or move abroad. Previous studies identify multiple narratives around IDP visions of (non-)return to occupied home cities [58]: absence of return intentions due to perceived lack of prospects for change; non-return due to safety concerns; intent to return only to restore justice or legality; or conditional return aspirations that focus not on the city itself but on “home” as a symbolic space (“if only it were possible to return to a home untouched by war” or “if home could be carried along”). Integration is also shaped by the perceived short- and long-term prospects of home communities: intact or slightly damaged housing supports return intentions, while home destruction forms a critical obstacle to return [24].

IDP respondents from Zakarpattia’s border communities most often cite direct threats to life and health as the reasons for not returning: ongoing hostilities (62.9%) and occupation (34.9%). Those displaced by active hostilities show lower motivation to integrate (only 11.8% participating in community life; 16.4% unwilling to engage). In contrast, respondents whose home communities are under occupation demonstrate stronger integration intentions, with 24.6% actively participating and 13.1% not wishing to do so.

Access to basic resources in host communities is rarely cited as a key reason for not returning: housing – 5.1%; children’s education – 5.7%; specialized medical care – 4.6%.

Respondents who plan to relocate within the next six months (only 4% of the sample) show no substantial difference in integration levels compared to those who do not plan to move. In practice, many IDPs postpone final decisions between local integration and further resettlement [10]. This condition of protected temporariness and incomplete or postponed integration can increase tension between IDPs and local residents, particularly local authorities who seek greater certainty.

Conclusions

IDP integration into host communities can be conceptualized through multiple indicators and corresponding integration dimensions – economic, social, cultural, and emotional. Under conditions of uncertainty, including ongoing war and unclear prospects for home communities, identifying IDP integration intentions remains methodologically challenging. One productive approach is to examine IDP involvement in host community life and local development decision-making. For the Berehove District border communities examined here, we consider this approach appropriate. Although only 15% of respondents clearly report active community involvement, almost half found it difficult to assess their own level of participation, making this uncertainty an important finding. The strongest determi-

nants of community participation are displacement duration, current place of residence and past location, age, and gender.

Integration through access to basic resources (housing, employment, health care, education) and integration through favorable attitudes and openness from local residents and authorities represent two complementary sides of the same process. In these border communities, satisfaction (or lack thereof) with employment and health care provision emerged as the most meaningful integration preconditions, while housing satisfaction did not. Informal employment is identified as a tangible barrier to integration.

Despite institutional integration pathways being established in recent years, their impact is ultimately moderated by actual community attitudes. One-third of respondents report having experienced biased treatment, most often in housing, social protection, and health care. Employment-related bias, however, remains comparatively low, supporting its positive

integration influence. Local-authority performance assessments also correlate with different integration levels across host communities.

Perceptions of temporariness and uncertainty predictably slow integration. Respondents whose home communities are occupied show stronger motivation to integrate. At the same time, protected temporariness and incomplete or postponed integration contribute to tensions with host communities that seek more clear commitments.

In Ukraine, the research focus on IDPs issues is increasingly shifting from the regional to the local level. Local environments of access to integration resources, institutional openness, and authority and resident readiness to support new community members vary sharply even among seemingly similar neighboring border communities. These differences shape distinct local landscapes of opportunity, both in terms of access to essential resources for integration and in the openness of residents and local authorities to newcomers seeking a new sense of normalcy.

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Тимчасовість vs інтеграція вимушено переміщених осіб в умовах невизначеності: кейс прикордонних територіальних громад Закарпаття

*Наталія Проватар*¹

к. геогр. н., доцент, кафедра економічної та соціальної географії,

¹ Київський національний університет імені Тараса Шевченка, Київ, Україна;

*Галина Щука*²

д. пед. н., професор, кафедра географії та туризму,

² Закарпатський угорський університет імені Ференца Ракоці II, Берегове, Україна;

*Костянтин Мезенцев*¹

д. геогр. н., професор, кафедра економічної та соціальної географії

Стаття має на меті показати різноманіття локальних особливостей інтеграції ВПО у прикордонні територіальні громади Берегівського району Закарпатської області, проаналізувати наскільки вимушені переселення є тимчасовим явищем в житті приймаючої територіальної громади та чи можуть вони стати ресурсом для її розвитку в умовах невизначеності міграційної поведінки переселенців та стратегії громади щодо їх інтеграції. Дослідження базувалося на опитуванні зареєстрованих ВПО у прикордонних громадах у поєднанні з порівняльним крос-контекстуальним аналізом. Анкета включала тематичні блоки щодо демографії, самооцінки задоволеності ключових потреб (житло, працевлаштування, соціальна допомога, освіта та медичне обслуговування), міграційних намірів ВПО, оцінки діяльності місцевої влади та їх участі у житті громади. Показник участі у житті громади був визначений як основний індикатор інтеграції вимушених переселенців. Дані аналізувалися для виявлення закономірностей задоволеності базових потреб, бар'єрів участі та впливу локальних інституційних і соціокультурних чинників на інтеграцію до приймаючих громад. Результати дослідження виявили, що ВПО відрізняються за готовністю інтегруватися залежно від задоволеності потреб у працевлаштуванні та базових ресурсах, а також від соціо-культурного й інституційного контексту приймаючих громад. Задоволеність працевлаштуванням виявилася ключовим фактором, що сприяє участі, тоді як неформальна зайнятість уповільнює інтеграцію. Задоволеність житлом, хоча й важлива з точки зору добробуту, безпосередньо не визначає участі ВПО у житті громади. Не зважаючи на те, що в останні роки створено інституційні передумови для інтеграції ВПО, фактичне ставлення приймаючої громади до переселенців визначає їхню дієвість. Соціальні мережі та громадські ініціативи були основними каналами соціо-культурної інтеграції. Стан триваючих тимчасовості та незавершеної або відкладеної інтеграції посилює напруженість між переселенцями та приймаючими громадами, які прагнуть більшої визначеності. Інтеграція ВПО є багатовимірним процесом, що поєднує доступ до ресурсів та відкритість приймаючих громад. Локальні особливості на перший погляд подібних сусідніх прикордонних громад значно диференціюють інтегрованість ВПО. Формуються відмінні локальні середовища сприйнятливості як у доступі до базових ресурсів для інтеграції, так і відкритості мешканців та місцевої влади до нових мешканців, які шукають нової нормальності.

Ключові слова: *внутрішньо переміщені особи, інтеграція ВПО, територіальна громада, залучення, війна, тимчасовість, міграційні наміри, Закарпаття, Україна.*

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