

# Local Impacts, Global Consequences

## Assessing the Mass Displacement and Migration Tied to Russia's Invasion of Ukraine

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### ABSTRACT

Since Russia's February 2022 invasion of Ukraine, the region's dynamics have shifted considerably calling for an interdisciplinary assessment of the reverberating effects of violence and forced displacement at home and abroad. This special issue of *Canadian Foreign Policy Journal* contributes to contemporary public affairs, refugee, migration, and diaspora studies by offering an overview of the broad impacts underway. The issue's international authors give readers an opportunity to listen to voices addressing all levels of the invasion's challenges—socially, politically, and economically—uniting thematic and regional expertise on this urgent topic while making linkages between Canada and the region. Their contributions bridge the disciplines of history, geography, political science, sociology, public policy, and philosophy. This introductory text provides an initial reflection on the pressing issues, summarizing the broad consequences of Russia's invasion of Ukraine while outlining each author's distinct contribution. In addition to discussions of the broad consequences, it also begins to frame the resultant openings—and challenges—of greater regional pluralism moving forward, as refugees and internally displaced persons leave their homes and interact with new host societies, both domestically and internationally. This special issue looks across the affected region while offering a unique view overseas into the distinct impacts here in Canada.

**Keywords:** Governance, Refugee, Migrant, Pluralism, Ukraine

### Introduction

Since Russia's most recent invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, millions of Ukrainians have fled their homes, finding shelter in ad hoc converted buildings, staying with friends and family across the country, or journeying farther afield to major European cities or overseas. Around 40% of Ukraine's children under the age of 15 have already left the country and researchers estimate Ukraine could lose over a third of its population by 2052 (European Commission et al., 2023). Cities have become the primary frontline absorbing refugees and Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs). In turn, the strain on municipal resources has been tremendous (Muggah & Abdenur, 2018). This stress on urban areas suggests a rescaling of the salient sites of governance away from the national level toward that of municipalities. On the socio-cultural front, mass displacement and migration are altering established place meanings near and far, dramatically affecting historical, environmental, and demographic landscapes globally (Mhlanga & Ndhlovu, 2023; Pereira et al., 2022; Rawtani et al., 2022; Sereda, 2023; Strassman et al., 2022; Wolfe et al., 2023).

Since February 2022, the region's dynamics have shifted considerably, prompting us to take stock of both the local impacts and global consequences. Our focus as guest editors to this special issue of *Canadian Foreign Policy Journal* (CFPJ) is on sharing empirical research relevant to a broader understanding of current events and public debates, contributing to contemporary public affairs, refugee, migration, and diaspora studies. In addition to discussions of the broad policy implications of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, this special issue provides an initial investigation into the openings—and challenges—of greater regional pluralism, as refugees and IDPs—themselves not undifferentiated masses—leave their homes and interact with new host societies.

Beyond Ukraine's borders, host societies in nearby countries have witnessed incredible population influxes (Haase et al., 2023; Machin, 2023; Weissner, 2023). Warsaw, Poland, for example, received over 200,000 Ukrainian refugees in the months following the invasion, and Polish officials claim the country cannot accommodate any more (Wądołowska, 2022). Russians are also leaving their own country in

significant numbers as it imposes forced military conscription and operates under tight authoritarian rule and foreign sanctions. There are additional, broader streams of regional movement, including that of labor migrants and international students who have fled Russia and Ukraine for other countries, or who have returned home (Al Gharaibeh et al., 2023; Yaroshenko et al., 2023), as has been the case for many from Central Asia (Ratha & Kim, 2022). Amidst the uncertainty, labor migrants and international students risk being trapped in foreign countries as borders tighten and visa regimes change. High-skilled migrants leaving Ukraine and Russia may do so to avoid conscription or to continue their lucrative careers away from economic sanctions. Russians who oppose the invasion, and/or fear the effects of sanctions, make complicated choices on where to migrate and how long to remain. They may risk acting in a way that makes it impossible for them to return home. How these individuals mix with local populations who are critical of Moscow's pervasive hegemony, as well as with newly arriving Ukrainian refugees, is a process in great flux and will remain an important area of ongoing study.

The articles in this special issue illustrate many of these themes. Important theoretical, empirical, and policy-related questions frame their conversations, including:

- What factors inform the decision-making of displaced persons as they leave their homes?
- How do those who have been displaced relate to their host societies, and where do we see the fostering of—or affronts to—pluralism?
- How can we evaluate the capacity of cities and host communities to adapt to substantial population movements occurring in the shadow of violent conflict?
- What roles do we see for relevant actors at different levels; from the extranational (e.g. European Union, UNHCR) to the state (e.g. neighboring countries, foreign host societies), the municipal, and, finally, relative to 'the everyday,' such as community organizations and individuals?

Broadly speaking, this special issue seeks to unite thematic and regional interdisciplinary and international expertise on these urgent questions, bringing together those in academia, NGOs, and government institutions while making linkages between Canada and the region. Our hope is to better grasp the full spectrum of impacts from migration and displacement currently underway. The international authors cross disciplines that include history, geography, political science, sociology, public policy, and philosophy. They have published extensively on migration and displacement, as well as on the socio-political characteristics of the region. Several have worked on the ground directly with those displaced, have sat on the boards of refugee organizations, have affiliations with relevant NGOs, or are Ukrainian scholars at risk, themselves acutely impacted by the violence.

Together, these contributions offer Canadian Foreign Policy Journal readers an opportunity to listen to voices addressing all levels of the invasion's challenges – socially, politically, and economically. We feel their dialogue on diverse thematic areas and different impacted localities fosters the interdisciplinarity crucial to understanding contemporary issues in refugee, migration, and diaspora studies – relative to Ukraine but also broader geographic contexts. The contributing authors look across the affected region while offering a unique view overseas into the distinct impacts here in Canada.

### **Towards a Greater Emphasis on Pluralism and the Diverse Experiences of Those Migrating and Displaced**

Pluralism has worked in multiple and sometimes unexpected ways relative to the mass displacement and migration tied to Russia's invasion of Ukraine. LGBTQI+ Ukrainians who have chosen to remain in Ukraine are being welcomed by allies in Kyiv, Odesa, and L'viv, even as those crossing borders face a mixed—and at times hostile—reception (Carlisle, 2022). Beyond Ukraine, Russians who left their homes for cities like Tbilisi, Georgia and Astana, Kazakhstan find both tensions with locals as well as

common ground as fellow civilians. At a more existential level, the invasion has been framed relative to societal values (Akaliyski & Reeskens, 2023). Russia has used the discourse of neo-traditionalism to argue for actions against progressive, purportedly ‘Western’ or ‘European,’ influences in Ukrainian society (Kratochvíl & O’Sullivan, 2023).

The distinct demographic nature of displacement from Ukraine—with those assigned female at birth largely being the ones fleeing alongside children, while those assigned male at birth remain for military duty—also has important consequences, including for people who identify as gender non-conforming, non-binary, and gender fluid (Shevtsova, 2022). Care for older adults left behind, as well as Ukraine’s everyday informal economy, have been affected significantly since both sectors were previously highly gendered (Nikolko et al., 2021). Receiving societies have expressed concerns over the arriving individuals’ vulnerabilities to sex trafficking (Brzezinska & Logvinenko, 2022). Children, too, face incredible obstacles. UNICEF estimates the invasion has led to more than 2 million Ukrainian children fleeing the country, with over an additional million becoming IDPs (UNICEF, 2023). This has important consequences not only domestically for Ukraine but also for receiving societies, including ensuring unaccompanied minors are provided with appropriate host families and social support, like trauma and psychological counselling (Matiashova et al., 2022; Schwartz et al., 2022), in addition to accommodating foreign language education.

Existing research frameworks consider pluralism as an integrative concept based on different social practices and governance institutions working toward diversity and the realization of the maximum potential of all individuals (Wolff, 2020). Across this special issue, authors seek to understand pluralism in other facets, examining the reception of those from diverse backgrounds who might not fit the hero-victim narrative and who have confronted hostile behavior from elements of their host societies.

### **Broad Spanning Impacts: A View from Canada**

While violent conflict continues to unfold in Ukraine, the strain of mass displacement on host societies is being felt much farther afield. Russia’s invasion has echoed far beyond the country’s borders, also stretching to here in Canada. The Canadian government has intervened through offers of supplies and funding for Ukraine, including provisions for refugees. Canada has also been at the forefront of condemnations of the Russian invasion (Trudeau, 2022)—and has stated a strong desire to accept refugees, uniting Canadians across the political spectrum (Government of Canada, 2022a). Now, Canada must gear up its already overburdened immigration system to accommodate an ongoing flow of potentially long-term—or even permanent—Ukrainian arrivals and decide how to treat them vis-à-vis other refugees and migrants.

Ukrainians arriving in Canada do so through the Canada-Ukraine Authorization for Emergency Travel (CUAET) Program, introduced mid-March 2022 (Government of Canada, 2022b). This visa program can be understood as a temporary residence pathway allowing Ukrainian citizens and their families to reside in Canada for a period of up to three years, during which they are eligible to both work and study. Notably, individuals are not granted refugee status and there is no maximum quota set for the number of people who may arrive in Canada through this program (ibid.). While CUAET has expedited their re-settlement on some fronts, it has also come with challenges, including Ukrainian students facing international fees when enrolling in higher education (Anand, 2023) and family members being confronted with separation due to uneven visa processing times and a failure to process households visas together (Ki Sun Hwang, 2023).

Displacement, and the effects of violent conflict, have also mobilized the Ukrainian and Russian diasporic communities in Canada. Canada’s active Ukrainian diaspora—and its growing number of allies—are working to ease the settlement of new arrivals, doing so amidst a domestic housing crisis. Some Russian-Canadians have protested the invasion of Ukraine and feel a deep sense of shame and responsibility. Conversely, others in the Russian diaspora actively support Russia’s military effort.

Many Russian-Canadians with no ties to Putin have seen their assets overseas frozen. As a result, these individuals cannot access their life savings or receive pension funds (McGregor, 2023). How will these individuals maintain or shift their Russian identities based on the western reaction to the invasion, and how are they dealing with those with divergent views in Canadian society?

### **Author Contributions to the Special Issue**

The contributing authors to this special issue put forward several new conceptual frameworks while advancing longer-standing theories and considering the latest developments on the ground. A broad view of how the recent events in Ukraine connect to larger, deeply entrenched world order systems and geopolitics is provided by **Ilia Kononov** (2023) who draws from Ukrainian state statistical sources on population movement to quantify the sheer magnitude of change underway. Kononov argues these developments are not only about the specific events unfolding domestically in Ukraine but also wider global power struggles and diplomatic relationships between superpowers like Russia, China, The United States, and European Union (alongside the EU's individual constituent countries). Also looking at the longer arc of regional dynamics and their contemporary legacies, **Dani Belo** (2024) examines language policy in Ukraine, Latvia, and Estonia, seeing it as a non-military issue worthy of attention in contemporary geopolitics. While acknowledging that such language policies may be aimed toward reversing historical Russification in these countries, Belo argues for the fostering of linguistic pluralization—both for its propounding of minority human rights and its potential to discredit the Kremlin's efforts toward minority mobilization.

Examining the large flows of displaced people from Ukraine, several authors center their discussions on journeys toward safety—both inside and outside the country. They show how existing civilian infrastructures and state institutions might better accommodate this mass movement as the violence wears on. **Suzanne Harris-Brandts** (2024), for example, narrows in on the correlated domestic housing crisis, offering an overview of the various forms of rapid response shelter, from prefabricated modular dwellings to adaptively reused vacant buildings, and how they may fare in the long-term, as well as connect to broader re-construction and re-development concerns. **Marta Pachocka and Joanna Fomina** (2024) travel across the border to neighbouring Poland to demonstrate how individual and ground-level encounters by displaced communities—with family, with border guards, diaspora members and assistant organizations—frame the waves of movement, which are more than ever concentrated in cities. International aid agencies, city officials, and local communities confront the challenges of displacement at the ground level as they deal with the contingencies of conflict and wartime governance.

Also zooming into the specific conditions in Poland as a host country, **Olena Malynovska** (2023) foresees the positive likelihood of displaced persons from Ukraine being integrated into Polish society, in part due to these individuals' socio-demographic characteristics (young, highly educated), and strong support from Poland's existing Ukrainian diasporic communities. At the same time, Malynovska acknowledges the possible causes for concern in Ukraine due to the prospect of losing both labour and intellectual resources from this mass movement—something particularly worth paying attention to in light of the abovementioned future needs for state re-construction and re-development. She draws from several statistical sources in Ukraine to provide an analysis of the socio-demographic characteristics of those displaced, aiming to gain foresight into possible long-term impacts and future trends from the current mass movement.

The above set of authors all underscore how Ukrainians in the grip of violence face existential choices: to stay or go? To relocate within their existing city or country, or to travel across borders? These impossible choices are felt palpably while reading the special issue.

In her contribution, **Milana Nikolko** (2023) challenges existing research frameworks on pluralism in an effort to more deeply understand the pluralist practices underway in the region. She traces democratic development and pluralism both before and after the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine and reveals that the decline of national support for pluralistic institutions was partially compensated by the emergence of a new loci of pluralism in transnational networks. War-triggered migration has thus undoubtedly influenced existing practices of pluralism and the adoption of novel practices into new locations.

Offering a view from outside Ukraine, **Jennifer Hyndman** (2023) brings the vast range of global impacts back to a local Canadian context, drawing attention to the recent CUAET Program. Advancing theories on ‘banal nationalism’ first introduced by Michael Billig (1995), Hyndman proposes the novel term ‘humanitarian nationalism’ to capture the unprecedented Canadian support for Ukraine and Ukrainians, and the correlated mobilization of military and humanitarian assistance. At the policy level, Hyndman juxtaposes the offerings of the CUAET program with other special refugee and protection programs for Syrians and Afghanis over the past eight years.

Turning our attention to the impacts of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine on talent mobility and the attractiveness of Canada as a settlement destination, **Juanita Molano, Olivia Dale, and Martin Geiger** (2023) trace the experiences of Ukrainian Information Technology (IT) professionals who are working in Canada under the provisions of the CUAET Program. Amidst a growing STEM talent gap in Canada, the authors consider what arrivals through CUAET might mean domestically. With an eye on pluralism, they argue that the longstanding gender divides in IT, coupled with the vast majority of those coming to Canada from Ukraine identifying as women, means that the local demand for tech talent will continue to outweigh supply. At the same time, it could lead to significant brain-drain in Ukraine as those educated in the IT sector head overseas with no fixed plans to return.

## **Conclusion**

This special issue responds to the urgent need for an assessment of the redrawing of Eurasia’s demographic maps and socio-political futures, precipitated by Russia’s February 2022 invasion of Ukraine. For the foreseeable future, the ongoing crisis of displaced communities, asylum seekers, migrant workers, students, and trafficked persons—from Ukraine and Russia—will preoccupy policymakers at the state and local levels. The impacts will have long-term bearings on domestic and international policies while chronically impacting ordinary civilians. The articles included herein delve into the many facets of these pressing topics, exploring a wide range of geographies, timescales, and positionalities.

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