on digital spaces of migrants

Israel

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MINTE

This report identifies ways of successful communication with migrants and existing communication gaps. It assesses migrants' digital competencies and points to efficient ways to communicate with migrants. The report focuses on Ukrainian migrants (olim & refugees) who arrived in Israel after the war in Ukraine began on February 24, 2022, and examines their digital competencies and ways of communication. The analysis is based on data obtained from 20 semi-structured interviews conducted with Ukrainian migrants (mainly olim) in Israel. In addition, the conclusions are based on insights derived from Report 1, which examined and mapped sources of information and services available to Ukrainian migrants in Israel.

KEY FINDINGS

01.

Many of the Ukrainian immigrants (olim & refugees) who are highly educated and of working age have digital skills and competencies. The digital gap is slightly more apparent among elderly migrants and is manifested mainly in using various social network applications.

02.

Ukrainian migrants use social networks (mainly Facebook, Whatsapp, Youtube, and Telegram) to obtain information and to communicate with their friends and relatives in Israel. Communication with their friends and relative in Ukraine is also via social networks (mainly Facebook, Whatsapp, and Viber).

03.

The main information and service provider for Ukrainian olim is the Ministry of Aliyah and Integration, whereas the main information and service provider for Ukrainian refugees is a program (Tzav Hasha'a) operated by the Ministry of Welfare and Social Affairs in collaboration with NGOs.

04.

As Ukrainian olim are Israeli citizens, they have more access to governmental services (mainly through digital platforms or e-government services) as compared to Ukrainian refugees. Ukrainian refugees receive most of their information and assistance from NGOs.

05.

Municipalities play a significant role in providing information and services to Ukrainian migrants, both online and in person. The support and assistance of municipal coordinators is perceived by the migrants as very helpful.

06.

There are many initiatives and a broad range of information on the internet aimed at migrants from Ukraine, but this abundance may be confusing for migrants who are unfamiliar with the Israeli bureaucracy.

INTRODUCTION

In Israel, two main groups of Ukrainian refugees entered following the war: olim, who have Jewish ancestry and are eligible to immigrate to Israel and to obtain Israeli citizenship, and refugees who do not have a Jewish ancestry and enter on a humanitarian basis for family reunification. The description of the olim & refugees´; population in Israel and their legal status can be found in Report I.

METHODOLOGY

The interviews were conducted with 20 interviewees. Most of interviewees (18) are refugees from Ukraine with Jewish ancestry (olim), and only two of them are refugees, as they are less accepted and documented than olim. The interviews were conducted from September 2022 to February 2023, by a trained interviewer, with an MA degree in migration studies. The interviewees live or have lived in hotels operated by the Jewish Agency in the north part of Israel (Nof Hagalil or Haifa), and were addressed to the interviewer by the Jewish Agency representative. After the interviewees signed a consent form (approved by Ruppin's Ethic Committee), they were recorded and transcribed (from Russian to Hebrew). The interview's structure can be found in Appendix 2. All the interviews were thematically coded and analyzed (Braun and Clarke 2006).

The demographic information of the interviewees is specified in Appendix 1. The interviewees included 15 women and 5 men. Their age ranges from 25 to 70 and the average age is 42.2. Most of the interviewees are married (or in a steady relationship); 13 married, 6 divorced or separated, and 1 widow. The average number of children is 1.9. The interviewees are highly educated; 13 have an MA degree, 6 have a BA degree and 1 has a professional degree.

FINDINGS

Digital competencies of Ukrainian migrants

All the interviewees stated that back in Ukraine, they had access to the internet, had a computer at home, and a phone with an internet connection. In Israel, all interviewees have a smart phone with internet connection and internet access . Many also have a computer. According to the interviewees, they have digital skills that enable them to use these devices. They are also very active on social media (Facebook, YouTube, WhatsApp, Instagram, Telegram) and use it for communication channels and information sources. Ukrainian migrants use the social networks Facebook, WhatsApp, and Telegram to get information and to communicate with their friends and relatives in Israel. To communicate with their friends and relatives in Ukraine, they mainly use Facebook, WhatsApp, and Viber. Russian is the main language that the interviewees use and master. Many of them also speak Ukrainian and English. They did not speak Hebrew before their arrival and the olim attend Hebrew classes (Ulpan) provided by the Ministry of Aliyah and Integration.

Here are citations that demonstrate the digital competencies of Ukrainian immigrants:

Yes, I had everything there, including a computer, a notebook, and a tablet. was everything... (in Israel) I only have my smartphone here... a smartphone is enough for me here. Because in Ukraine I worked in account management, I always had to be in touch... These gadgets were indispensable means for my work. I don´t have it here. I don´t need it here... There is TV, but I don´t watch it... Telegram. Every morning I watch news from Israel and news from Ukraine, I don´t watch news from Russia. (Interviewee no. 10)

Ukraine is surprisingly a much more developed, advanced country than Israel. There I would only leave the house with my cell phone... Here I had to buy a bag for documents (laughs) and carry it everywhere. It´s really inconvenient, because if it gets lost there will be a lot of trouble. (Interviewee no. 2)

Differences in digital competencies among Ukrainian migrant groups

The education level of Ukrainian migrants in Israel, as well as of the interviewees in our study, is high, and most of them have an academic degree and a profession. Most Ukrainian migrants, like the interviewees in our study, are of working age (average age 42.2), thus the digital gap in the sample is not significant. This finding is congruent with academic studies in the field (Lissitsa and Chachashvili-Bolotin, 2014; Rosenberg, 2020; 2022). However, there is an age difference related to the use of certain social media applications; the older migrants in our sample tend to use Facebook and WhatsApp more often than other social media applications.

How do Ukrainian migrants access information?

According to the mapping presented in Report 1, most of the official Israeli information and governmental services addressed to Ukrainian immigrants (olim and refugees) are provided online (e-government services) and are available in Russian. However, Hebrew language proficiency is needed in many e-government services addressed to citizens in general, and thus relevant to Ukrainian olim.

For Ukrainian olim, the main source of assistance and information is the Ministry of Aliyah and Integration. This ministry operates at the national and municipal levels, and provides comprehensive assistance with integration: education and language acquisition, employment and economic support, housing, and more. The ministry operates through branch offices in main cities, employing Russian-speaking coordinators who provide information and assistance, and operating special programs for the olim living in the city. The interviewees obtain knowledge about their right to immigrate to Israel from Jewish community (Jewish Agency) representatives in Ukraine as well as Israeli government representatives (consuls). Many of them read about their rights on the websites of the Ministry of Aliyah and Integration. In addition, they obtain assistance and information regarding education, employment, and accommodation from the municipal coordinator. The migrants are connected to social media groups (WhatsApp and Facebook groups) operating in the city, which also serve as information channels. Health services are provided to olim by HMOs that operate in the cities. They obtain information on the situation in Ukraine mainly from the internet (many of them do not watch TV) and by communication with family and relatives living there (via social media). In certain cities, additional services are provided to Ukrainian olim and refugees by NGOs (for example, employment and information fairs organized y- TechForChanges in Haifa and Beer-Sheva).

Here is a citation that demonstrates the assistance of the coordinators for olim:

We even got the phone number of the coordinators. We called one of them, they spoke to us very nicely, said not to worry, that we would arrive and they would receive us…The coordinators helped us, showed us several apartments… In the Ramada hotel where we were, every day there were meetings with some representatives. Even a psychologist worked with us. (Interviewee no.7)

Ukrainian refugees get most of their information and assistance from NGOs. The main information and service provider for Ukrainian refugees is the Ministry of Welfare and Social Affairs in collaboration with NGOs, operating through the program Tzav Hasha'a. The Tzav Hasha'a website provides information regarding education, employment, health, food, psychological support, activities for children, temporary housing, clothing and equipment. Another NGO addressing Ukrainian refugees is HIAS, which handles the legal field, including commercial law, family law, status with the Ministry of the Interior, citizenship, and notary services. The migrants are also connected to social media groups (WhatsApp and Facebook groups) operating in the city, which also serve as information channels.

Here is a citation that demonstrates the assistance for refugees:

Well, we´ve already arrived...of course no one was waiting for me, didn´t meet me, of course...except for my mother of course. Because I came back, I´m a fourth generation...and Israel naturally doesn´t provide any aid. But they let me enter the country, thanks for that, and they gave me the right to work...I registered my son in a local school, but currently in coordination with the school I left him to study online at the school in Ukraine...And also because I have no right to stay here and at some point I will have to leave and he will have to study in Ukraine, so we decided that it would be right. (Interviewee no.2)

How do Ukrainian migrants communicate with different groups?

The interviewees keep in touch with their friends and family in Ukraine via social media, mainly Facebook, WhatsApp and Viber. They also use these social media channels to communicate with friends and family in Israel. Some of the interviewees stay in touch with their Ukrainian employers, but many of their co-workers have left their former workplaces and Ukraine. Refugees with children (who are not eligible for aliyah) keep in touch with their children´s schools, as some of the children participate online in classes in Ukraine.

Here is a citation that demonstrates the communication with different groups:

Our grandmothers who live in Ukraine are updating us and telling us what´s going on... We are in contact via phone, WhatsApp on Facebook. Not on a regular phone. They get along with Facebook... My brother is in contact with me on Telegram and WhatsApp - that´s how I can be in touch with him. It´s easier for my grandmothers through Facebook. (Interviewee no. 5)

How do the Ukrainian migrants evaluate the local administration in terms of providing information? Where did they meet any barriers?

The interviewees expressed satisfaction with the service provided by local authorities. Most of the olim interviewees in our sample come from the city of Nof HaGalil in the north of the Israel, which has received many Ukrainian migrants. The interviewees spoke about the positive attitude of the municipality representatives and the warm welcome they enjoyed. They provided the names of the coordinators who assist them in various issues and grant them continuous support.

The migrants point to several challenges and information gaps. Most of the services for citizens (olim) are e-government services and not all are provided in Russian. Thus, olim need assistance in communicating with government offices (other than the Ministry of Aliyah and Integration). Another challenge is communication with institutions such as banks and HMOs, and understanding common patterns and procedures in Israel. In those institutions, services are officially provided in Hebrew. Refugees face additional challenges, as they do not have an Israeli ID card and thus many of the services are not available to them. In general, both olim and refugees point to difficulties in handling the Israeli bureaucracy.

RECOMMENDATIONS

01.

Training should be provided to Ukrainian immigrants (and immigrants in general) for efficient use of e-government services, with an emphasis on improving digital and linguistic (Hebrew) skills for elderly immigrants.

02.

E-government services for citizens in general should be provided in immigrants´ languages.

03.

Migrants should be informed about the common procedures used in institutions such as banks and HMOs. If possible, initial use should be supported by representatives.

04.

The effectiveness of the initiative to deliver information and services to Ukrainian immigrants in one place through information fairs (TechForChanges) should be assessed. If proven successful, this method should be implemented in cities hosting immigrants.

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ATTACHMENTS

Appendix 1. Table of interviewees with demographic information
Appendix 2. Interview structure in English and other languages used in the interviews
Appendix 3. The consent form to participate in the study

Appendix 1. Table of interviewees with demographic information

number	Age	Gender	Country of birth	Country of immigration	family status	number of children	Academic degree	Profession in Ukraine	Profession in Israel	Date of Erasmus interview	Migration status
1	44	male	Ukraine	Ukraine	married	2	MA	dentist	Ulpan + dentist	16/10/22	ole
2	43	male	Ukraine	Ukraine	married	3	MA	engineer	works in a factory	12/10/22	ole
3	25	female	Ukraine	Ukraine	divorced	1	MA	lawyer	care giver	16/12/22	ola
4	33	female	Ukraine	Ukraine	married	2	MA	educator	care giver	18/12/22	refugee- tourist
5	38	female	Ukraine	Ukraine	married	2	MA	artist and architect	Ulpan	27/12/22	ola
6	41	female	Ukraine	Ukraine	married	1	MA	hair stylist (psychologist)	Ulpan	1/10/22	ola
7	55	female	Ukraine	Ukraine	married	2	MA	English teacher	Ulpan	1/9/22	ola
8	48	female	Ukraine	Ukraine	divorced	1	MA	medical beautician		1/10/22	ola
9	37	female	Uzbekistan	Ukraine	divorced	3	BA	teacher	Ulpan	15/1/23	ola
10	54	female	Russia	Ukraine	married	1	BA	accountant	Ulpan+ cleaning	15/1/23	ola
11	70	female	Russia	Ukraine	widow	2	BA	mental and fitness coach	Ulpan	15/1/23	ola
12	49	female	Ukraine	Ukraine	married	2	BA	bookkeeper accountant	Ulpan+ caregiver	22/1/23	ola
13	37	male	Ukraine	Ukraine	Live in a relationship	2	professional degree	technician	occasional jobs	24/1/23	refugee- temporary resident
14	36	female	Ukraine	Ukraine	married	1	MA	chemist	Ulpan	27/1/23	ola
15	41	female	Ukraine	Ukraine	married	3	MA	teacher	Ulpan	29/1/23	ola
16	27	female	Ukraine	Ukraine	separated	1	BA	manager	Ulpan	29/1/23	ola
17	34	female	Ukraine	Ukraine	divorced	1	MA	bookkeeper accountant	waitresses and catering	31/1/23	ola
18	33	female	Ukraine	Ukraine	divorced	3	BA	marketing	Ulpan	2/2/23	ola
19	50	male	Ukraine	Ukraine	married	2	MA	newspaperman, historian	Street cleaner	03/02/23	ole
20	49	male	Ukraine	Ukraine	married	3	MA	engineer	factory worker & Ulpan	07/02/23	ole

Appendix 2. Interview structure in English and other languages used in the interviews

Research introduction

Thank you for your willingness to participate in our research. We plan to interview several Ukrainian migrants to get a better view of their life in the Israel, what works out well, whether are there any obstacles, and what should or could be changed. These interviews are part of our broader research within a project called MINTE.

Oral consent form

The research is anonymous. We will never mention your name or other identifying information in our research, apart from general information such as age, and city of origin, which is used for categorization purposes. We will make some quotes from the interview in the subsequent reports of the results of the research, such as the article, but all information that could lead to your identification will be changed.

Your participation in the research is voluntary and you can withdraw from participation at any stage of the study. The interview will be recorded but only for the subsequent transcription of the text. Do you agree with recording and with participation in the research?

Interview structure

Could we start with some basic information?
(Note: If we know these questions, we do not have to ask them)

1) Destination place (country, city)
2) Place of origin (county, city)
3) Age
4) Sex
5) Citizenship
6) Education level
7) Family status (married? Or children?)
8) Languages (ability to speak and read)

  I. Migration experience

  1) When did you leave your country?
  2) It must have been a difficult decision. Was there some specific impulse that made you leave?
  3) How did you decide where to go when you left Ukraine? Why did you choose the Czech Republic?
  4) How did you come here?
  5) Did you travel alone?
  6) Is your family here? (Note: Ideally a short chat about his/her close family)

7) What did you know about the conditions for Ukrainian refugees in the Czech Republic before you came here?

8) How did you gather this information?

9) I guess that you had to arrange several things after your arrival....how was it? Where did you look for information? How did you get the information?

10) **Permit of stay** (information, assistance)

11) **Accommodation** (information, assistance)

12) Did you have to register with the employment office?

13) What was your job in Ukraine? Did you work in Ukraine?

14) How (if) did you find **work (study)** in the CR? (How was it? Who helped you?)

15) Did you need a **doctor**? (If so, how was it, how did you know where to go...)

16) Did you open a **bank account** in the CR? How did you manage to choose a bank? How was it? (Were they helpful there?)

17) If applicable - did you look for a **school or kindergarten** for your children? How did you look? Was it easy? Did you find it? Do your children attend school in Ukraine online?

18) Is there some **information you miss**? Which?

19) Is something regarding your stay in the CR that is troubling you?

20) Do you know where to turn to get help (e.g. regarding accommodation, job, labor office, etc.)?

21) Do you receive any help while you live here, which you have not mentioned yet? (What kind of assistance? Who provides it? How? How did you learn about it?)

III Digital skills/ information transmission

Thank you for all the information provided, I ask a lot, don't I? But we're getting to the last part, where I still need to ask more detailed questions about how you acquire information. And then we'll be done with the interview.

22) Which languages do you speak? Read?

23) Do you have a computer? Laptop? Tablet? Smartphone with internet access?

24) Did you have a computer, laptop, or smartphone with the internet before you left Ukraine?

25) Do you watch TV? Listen to the radio? (which – Czech, Ukrainian channels or English channels?)

26) When you need information about life in the Czech Republic, where do you look for it? (And are there any fora you follow regularly?)

- Mainly some friends (Czechs, Ukrainians? and Ukrainians living longer in the CR?)
- chat-bot
- FB group,
- news v Telegram, ...
- useful websites (governmental, NGOs...)
- NGOs
- Other (which?)

27) Do you follow some .... (mentioned FB group, news in Telegram, etc.) regularly? If so, which? For which reasons?

28) If you could think about it, where (from what sources) is the information most useful to you?

29) How do you communicate with your family? Friends? Those in Ukraine and those who are here?

30) Do you use any social media? If yes, which ones? Could you explain what you use it (mainly) for *(ask for each one they listed and then ask again if something was missed, especially ask if they use WhatsApp, FB, Instagram, Telegram, Twitter, Vkontakte, Odnoklassniki, LinkedIn, and TikTok if it was not mentioned by interviewee)*?

IV Future

31) I know that it is difficult to make any plans, but do you have some plans to stay here, return or move to some other place/country?

32) Would you like to add something that was important for your life in the Czech Republic and what has not been said yet?

V Concluding questions:

Thank you for the interview. I hope it was ok for you, was it? ... It was helpful for us. *(And in case the person mentions some issues in the interview(*

Appendix 3. The consent form to participate in the study

The consent form to participate in the study

Erasmus+ Project MINTE: *Migrant Integration Through Education"*.

The Israeli part of the study in conducted by Prof. Karin Amit from Ruppin Academic Center.

☐ I understand that I am participating in the study voluntarily and I have the right to withdraw from participation at any stage of the study without giving reasons

☐ I understand that I have the right to ask questions and obtain comprehensive answers about my situation as an interviewee

☐ I understand that my personal data will remain anonymous and that information that could lead to my identification will be changed

☐ I understand and at the same time consent to the use of the information provided by me as data in the research project. The information obtained may be (only in anonymous form) used during conferences, symposia, as well as in scientific and other publications and for teaching purposes

☐ I hereby give my informed consent to participate in the research project

....
Name Surname   Data   Signature