

Ukrainian Displaced Persons in Canada post 2022: Making Home in Times of Peace and War

A Project by the **Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies** and the **Huculak Chair in Ukrainian Culture and Ethnography**, Faculty of Arts, University of Alberta

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CANADIAN INSTITUTE OF
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Research questions

What does home mean to an individual in time of peace? What becomes of one's home when one is forced to flee the war? What becomes of the idea of home in times of crisis? How do people, forced to leave their homelands find the way to restore their sense of being homed? These are central questions the Making Home project explores, by means of in-depth interview methodology.

Home—homing, homeliness—is perhaps one of the most studied and examined conditions of human life. Nicola Frost and Tom Selwyn, in their book *Travelling towards home: Mobilities and Homemaking* (2018, Berghahn) highlight a few core assumptions many have with respect to the idea of home:

- that home is inexorably associated with place of birth,
- that homes made and/or remade by people on the move are thought to be in some way less than fully rightful or authentic, and
- that migration is inherently destabilizing.

Can we rely on these assumptions in our highly dynamic and at times highly volatile times? Are our assumptions reliable, especially as crisis-driven human mobility and displacement continue to define and redefine what modern 'normal and stable life' means?



The project

The full scale invasion of Ukraine by the Russian Federation on February 24, 2022, unleashed an unprecedented migration crisis of global proportions, displacing close to 15 million Ukrainian citizens and residents, both internally and externally, in the course of less than one year. Even though over the next couple of years the number of displaced Ukrainians somewhat fell, displacement has continued to define millions of Ukrainian lives in ways they could not even imagine.

As a result of this human crisis, 298,128 displaced Ukrainians arrived in Canada between March 17, 2022 and April 1, 2024 under the **Canada-Ukraine Authorization for Emergency Travel (CUAET)**¹, and 50,532 settled in Alberta as of February 2024^{2,3}.

Our project was set up to document experiences of wartime un-homing and rehousing of Ukrainian displaced persons in Canada. What strategies of maintaining a sense of home and belonging did CUAET holders develop for themselves while already in Canada? How do their narratives of displacement and rehousing in Canada reflect the evolving and changing notions of home?

The stories project participants shared contained much emotional reflection on losses and trauma people experienced fleeing the war. Their stories at the same time followed a particular narrative trajectory, defined by a familiar framing of many immigrant stories — “departure — transit — arrival and settlement.”

The stories also followed the same line of reflection, pointing to an overall shared experience of fleeing the war.

— Life before February 24, 2022 — **February 24, 2022** — Departures — The road — The 'suitcase of anxiety' or the 'alert suitcase' — Transit through a temporary location, temporary residence (Western Ukraine, Poland, Moldova, etc.) — Decision to go to Canada (social media) search for answers — Arrival and settlement — Interaction with the host country

Yet all stories documented by our project share the same important sentiment — that war-driven displacement, trauma, and the sense of loss are accompanied and/or followed by resilience and agency. Human resiliency and the drive to overcome unfolding predicaments also mobilize new understandings of what home means to a person.

Making Home therefore documented **core changes in the notion of home** as practiced by Ukrainians.

The idea that home “is a stable place to which one comes back” gave way to an idea that home is “a mobile and transportable space.” Home is quite adjustable.

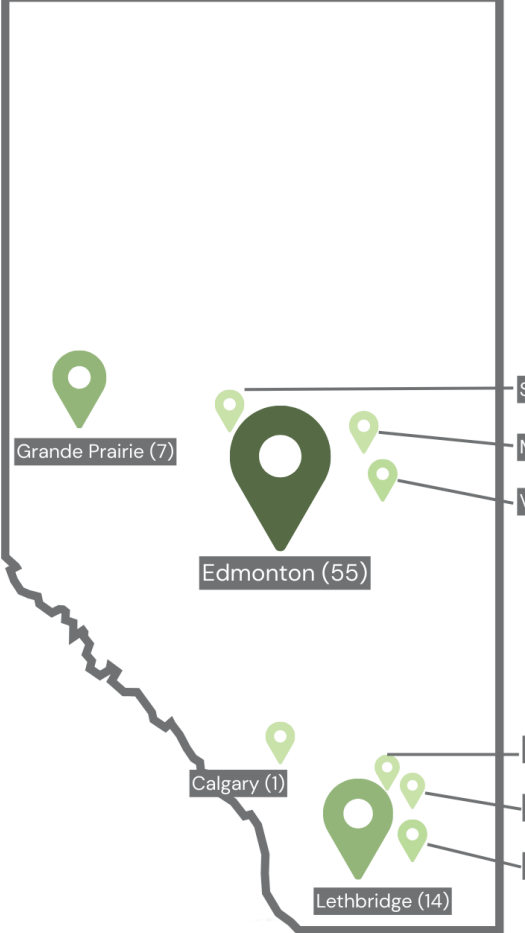
Thus, the project documented a fundamental shift in values — from home as place to home as an **emotion** and **social haven of family**. Home has ceased to be about location, geography, or some physical proximity to important sites or social networks. Instead, it became inverted and of symbolic and social value.

And most importantly, provided that the crisis still unfolds as the war is not resolved, the notion of home as shared by project participants is not at all about **destination**: it is an **unfolding journey**.

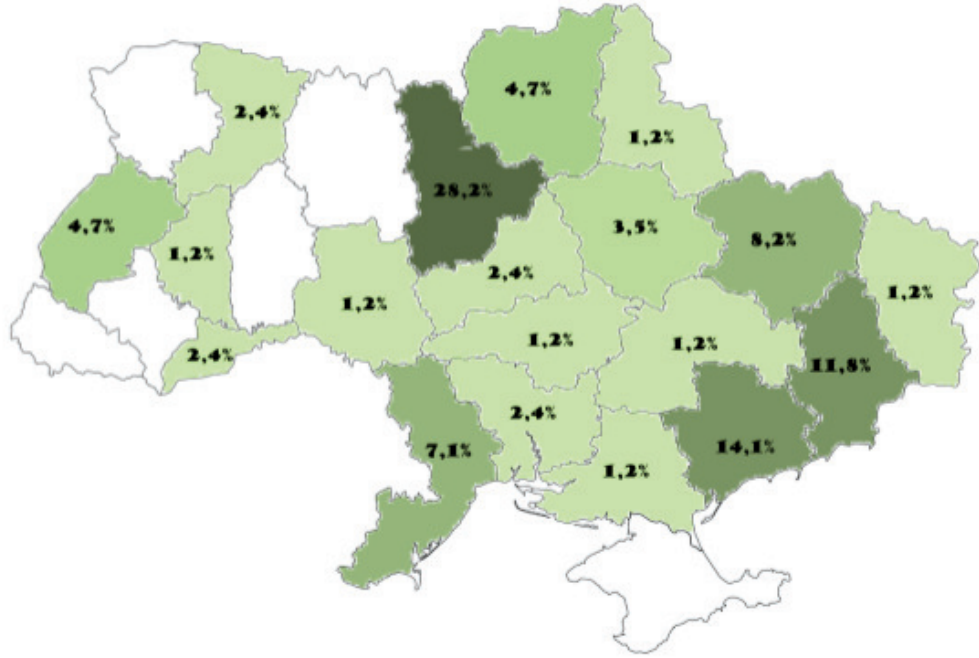
Project details

The Making Home Project documented the experiences of Ukrainian citizens and residents who arrived in Canada under CUAET visas since spring 2022. The project relied on in-person video documentation and was based on biographical interview methods and in-depth life story oral history. Data intake, organization, and databasing continue.

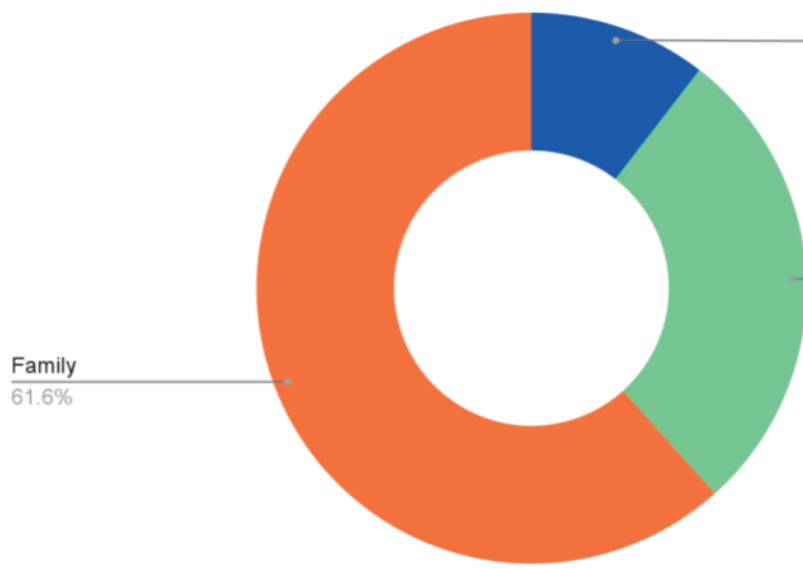
The total number of interviews is 89. The ages of our interviewees ranged from 19 to 82, with the majority of people interviewed being in their 30s-40s, with 82% of all respondents women and 18% men.



Town/city of residence (at time of interview)
Alberta: Edmonton - 55; Lethbridge - 14; Calgary - 1; Mundare - 1; Taber - 2; Grande Prairie - 7; Vegreville - 4; St. Albert - 2; Enchant - 1; Vauxhall - 1
*** Other:** Montreal - 1



Place of origin of respondents



Family status in Canada

Stories and voices

Interview clips

Making Home Project short clip playlist on YouTube



Taras L. (Chernivtsi)



Home is where one's ancestors are laid to rest

Alla V. (Chernihiv)



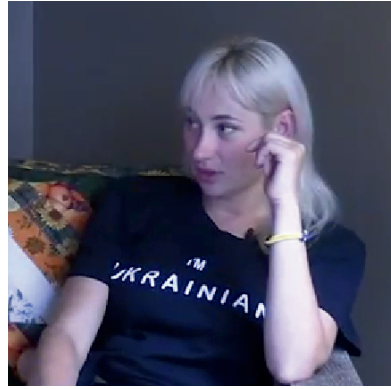
I bring my home wherever I go

Karina C. (Mariupol)



The shellings were endless

Yana M. (Zaporizhzhia)



Home is where your children's futures are

“What did you take with you to remind you of home?”



“Two motanka dolls from Ukraine”
(Tetiana A., Mykolaiv)



“The toy my younger son took from Chernihiv”
(Alla V., Chernihiv)



“The key to the lock on my grandfather's and father's village house (it still has an Austrian lock, which works perfectly)”
(Taras L., Chernivtsi)



Silver Icon
(Oleksandra K., Ternopil)

Endnotes:

1. Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada. (2024). Canada-Ukraine authorization for emergency travel: Key figures. Retrieved from Government of Canada website: www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/services/immigrate-canada/ukraine-measures/key-figures.html
2. Ukrainian Evacuees in Alberta: Heat Map – Ukrainians In Alberta. (n.d.). Retrieved 24 September 2025, from <https://ukrainiansinalberta.ca/finalresidencies/>
3. The deadline to apply for a visa under the Canada-Ukraine Authorization for Emergency Travel was July 15, 2023, and the deadline to enter Canada to benefit from the CUAET measures was March 31, 2024. Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (2025). Immigration measures and support for Ukrainians and their families. Retrieved from Government of Canada website: <https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/services/immigrate-canada/ukraine-measures.html>

The Making Home Project is a sister project to *Sharing Home*, an outcome of the graduate-level course "Oral History: Theory and Praxis" offered by the Department of Modern Languages and Cultural Studies at the University of Alberta.

makinghomeproject.ca

