

Migration and the Ukraine Crisis

Written by Greta Uehling

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GRETA UEHLING, APR 18 2017

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Scholars of migration are well accustomed to probing the factors that prompt and inhibit human migration. The scholarship in this volume provides a thorough exploration of the motivations and directions, as well as the volume and composition of what might aptly be called 'the other European migrant crisis.' Much less often, scholars take advantage of migratory processes as a vantage point for understanding broader social, economic, and political processes. The contributions to this volume do this admirably, illuminating the migratory patterns emanating from conflict within Ukraine and shining light on how migration intersects with issues of global significance including:

- The power of migration policy to change migratory flows (Fomina, Oleinikova, Denisenko, Schenk)
- Xenophobia and the propensity to demonise migrants (Bulakh, Mukomel, Kuznetsova and Kingsbury)
- Citizenship and access to rights and resources (Fomina, Uehling, Kuznetsova, and Schenk, Ivashchenko-Stadnik)
- The role of official propaganda disseminated through news media in influencing prevailing narratives (Bulakh, Gentile, Morozov, Kuznetsova, and Kingsbury)
- Remittances as strategy of self-reliance in the absence of state support (Fomina) and economic growth (Denisenko),
- Labour migration as a driver of development (Denisenko)
- Supranationalism and integration (Schenk, Morozov, Kuznetsova)

Thus, it is possible to say the topic of migration, as treated by these authors brings together what are conventionally seen as diverse and separate areas of scholarship. In addition to generating a large number of migrants, war and conflict in Ukraine has had an impact on the way these societies see both themselves and the West in addition to (more predictably) changing migration policy and law, and affecting the economies in the region. These issues are pressing in light of the erosion of the post-Cold war order in the wider Europe.

There are three features that, particularly in combination, distinguish this volume. First, the arguments are strengthened by the authors' well-grounded use of mixed methods. In the chapters above, analyses of statistics are enhanced by ethnography, focus groups complemented by elite interviews, and financial data illuminated by first-person perspectives. Second, the volume is enriched by a decidedly international cadre of scholars, something worth noting considering the authors lacked a single disciplinary home or even conference venue in which to convene. This is to say the authors in this volume come from both Eastern and Western academic institutions, and carry out their research from the Russian Federation, Ukraine, Poland, Finland, Estonia, Turkey, Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States. On a humorous note, the contributors have also had the good fortune not to replicate any of the geopolitical conflict that is the subject of their study! Third and perhaps most importantly, the perspectives on 'the other migrant crisis' presented here are based on primary, original and independent research. This brings authoritative insight to the topic at hand.

Migration and the Ukraine Crisis

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New approaches

Each of the chapters is, in its own way, theoretically and/or methodologically innovative. The volume is thus in close dialogue with contemporary social science theorising. Gentile breaks new theoretical and methodological ground by bringing human geography into close articulation with political ideology and social memory. This 'triangulation' enables Gentile to identify the mechanisms through which conflict is generated where none previously existed. This author amply demonstrates the explosive potential of fault-line cities. Ukraine is only one example how controversy over signifiers without firmly established or deeply seated meaning can be used to disrupt quotidian existence. Using this approach may prove useful for thinking about other locations where conflict is likely.

Ivashchenko-Stadnik picks up on the theme of alienation (later also explored by Bulakh). She questions the term 'civil war,' and sees the denial of external aggression as a factor that complicates resolution. She suggests (like Bulakh in the following chapter) that the treatment of IDPs as quasi-citizens does not bode well for the future. Only by providing IDPs with greater civil and political rights can social tension be avoided and human development achieved. Ivashchenko-Stadnik's methodological intervention is to disaggregate not just the migrants (typical of most migration studies) but the hosts, in this case into neighbours and friends; employers and employees; and civil society.

Bulakh brings classic anthropological theories concerned with purity and danger (Douglas 1966) successfully applied to the context of Africa's Great Lakes crisis (Malkki 1995) into Eastern Europe to analyse the aftermath of Ukrainian migration. This theoretical approach makes vivid how the categorisation of migrants from Donbas as unpure percolates into the way they are treated, not just on the street but also by state workers and policy makers. Importantly, this work suggests that stigma may become self-perpetuating through mechanisms of bureaucratic marginalisation. Thus Ukraine's xenophobia with respect to IDPs represents not just a temporary problem to be overcome, but a considerable tear in the social fabric.

If Bulakh is concerned with the reception of IDPs, Uehling focuses more on the IDPs themselves. This chapter seeks to uncover some of the unintended positive effects of the occupation of Crimea inherent in the invention of traditions (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983) that carry the potential to hold Ukraine together in the future. Another consequence is a growing sense of political agency that manifests itself in the myriad ways the IDPs reject the notion they are victims and insist on their ability to act and choose for themselves. Given these and other distinctions, it is likely that in future studies, IDPs from Crimea will be in a separate analytic category from IDPs from the Donbas region.

This is not to say that IDPs have benefitted from their displacement. In fact, the irony is that even as the people displaced are suspected to have betrayed Ukraine, it is the Ukrainian state that has 'betrayed' displaced people first by failing to defend Crimea against Russian incursion, and second by delaying the provision of a full set of rights. The tropes of loyalty and betrayal used against the indigenous Crimean Tatars after the Great Patriotic War have been inverted with this conflict – it is now the Ukrainian state that has let down its indigenous people.

Using elite interviews, and expanding the focus further westward, Fomina maps the changes in the flow of migrants from Ukraine to Poland. This author has used official migration and banking data to identify a striking disconnect between official statements and the volume of the flows. This finding is especially significant considering how the Polish response to migrants from Ukraine is directly connected to the refugee crisis in Europe: Polish officials claim to be unable to accept Syrian refugees on the grounds that they are accepting Ukrainian ones.

Just as remittances from Russia to the three poorest Central Asian states are important, Fomina shows how remittances figure into Ukrainian migration to Poland. Fomina suggests that while it may not be highly significant macro-economically (as they are in Central Asia), impacts are felt at the level of the household. Taken together we have evidence of a true financescape (Appadurai 1991) in which capital is being redistributed (largely unofficially) from more to less wealthy countries across the region, a component of larger global flows of people and capital.

Data from in-depth interviews fills out the picture obtained from financial data and official statements to reveal that a Ukrainian-Polish civil society has been strengthened by the Ukraine crisis. Mirroring dynamics observed by Uehling (this volume) in government-controlled Ukraine, the Ukrainian émigré community in Poland has been refreshed, and

Migration and the Ukraine Crisis

Written by Greta Uehling

Poles have had an opportunity to correct erroneous stereotypes held about Ukrainians.

While Fomina takes us westward to Poland, Oleinikova takes us south and east to Australia. Combining rich ethnographic data gathered in Australia with data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics and the State Statistics Service of Ukraine, Oleinikova analyses the structural variables influencing migration to Australia over a much longer time period than considered in any of the other chapters, beginning with dynamics around the time of the First World War. She also provides deep insight into the thoughts and feelings of different cohorts of migrants.

Oleinikova's intervention is to show how the intersection of Australian migration policy with Ukrainian's political and economic trajectory has shaped successive waves of migrants between these two countries. The latest flow is survival oriented and not surprisingly disillusioned by the Ukrainian dream of reform. Like the migrants Fomina describes in Poland, these migrants are a symptom that exposes political and economic disarray, urgently in need of further study. In these analyses, migrants are markers that provide a barometer of public sentiment.

Just as the Russian patent system increased access to the Russian labour market (Schenk, Denisenko this volume), Australia controlled the volume and composition of migrants from Ukraine through the types of visas it made available. As seen in migration to the United States and to the European Union, migrants who do not fit the desired categories are using other channels like study, training, internships, and asylum.

In the second half of the volume, Mukomel combines media monitoring with sociological studies to explore how the response to the flow of migrants from Ukraine to Russia became polarised. Just as Bulakh demonstrated how the reception of migrants cooled within Ukraine over time, Mukomel shows how the initial enthusiasm faded as concern about jobs, an attitude of entitlement on the part of the migrants, and the inability of state structures to mediate these concerns gradually led to tension. This is particularly poignant considering the tight relationship that Russia and Ukraine once enjoyed. Mukomel's exploration provides an important baseline for studies in the future by suggesting that if tensions between refugees and local population are not resolved, and low levels of integration continue, we can expect to see problems ahead.

Some of the more undesirable outcomes of new migration patterns are also apparent in the work of Morozov. Whereas Uehling and Fomina point to something of a silver lining in the form of stronger civil identities and societies, Morozov suggests civic identity has been in retreat in the Russian Federation. This author intervenes in the existing literature with a valuable corrective to narratives about the current crisis that prevail, especially in the mass media. From the Russian perspective of course, the West destabilised important geostrategic relationships with an irresponsible and expansionist agenda. If Morozov is correct about how the Ukrainian revolution is perceived in Russia, then the United States and Western Europe cannot distance themselves from the Russian aggression. This is crucial to understanding the crisis in its larger context – and finding diplomatic solutions.

Using the most recent statistical data (from Russian Central Bank and Federal Migration Service), Denisenko explores the size and demographic composition of migration flows to Russia. As for Fomina and Oleinikova, using multiple sources of data provides a productive starting point. However, the relative weakness of the data on migration makes disaggregating policy changes, economic trends, and geopolitical dynamics challenging. Denisenko's intervention is to track twin dynamics: with an outflow of migrants, there is a corresponding influx of remittances. Without a healthy Russian economy, however, the attraction for Central Asians is less, and remittances back to the Uzbek economy in particular are affected. This demonstrates how migration processes are not only impacted by economic changes like the price of oil, but themselves have the ability to shape subsequent economic developments. Whereas remittances from Poland to Ukraine do not comprise a large share of the Ukrainian economy, Russia is a primary source of funds for Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan where remittances exceed international aid.

Kuznetsova uses a discourse analysis of in-depth interviews to trace how the myth of migrants as dangerous arises. Kuznetsova's analysis provides a basis for future comparisons: that dynamics in the Russian Federation bear resemblance to migrant receiving states further West that also seek to lower crime, decrease social tension, and prevent the rise of extremism. There is another noteworthy parallel as well. The management of migrants in the Russian Federation has not just been securitised at the level of discourse: as Kuznetsova points out, the Federal Migration Service was closed in 2016 and its functions moved to the Ministry of Internal Affairs. In some respects,

Migration and the Ukraine Crisis

Written by Greta Uehling

this mirrors the transformation of the Immigration and Naturalization Service into the Department of Homeland Security after terrorist attacks in the United States. Kuznetsova exposes the dark shadow cast on migrants by danger and risk-laden discourse, even though a positive outcome (explored by Denisenko) is that patents successfully reduced the number of irregular migrants.

Schenk's contribution to the literature is to delve more deeply into the central contention that led to the Ukrainian crisis in the first place, namely the choice to seek greater integration with Europe through the Association Agreement. This was a decisive fork in the road as Russia moved in the opposite direction with the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU). It may come as a surprise that the EEU, which is modeled on the European Union, has even more ambitious goals with regard to common labour market than the European Union. This chapter provides a source of comparison for anyone with interest in supranational governance and economic policy.

Schenk takes an approach that is replicable and could provide insight as events unfold: a gap analysis that identified the disjuncture between EEU treaty text, domestic laws and procedures with regard to migration, and migrant experiences with both. She uses government and legal texts, interviews with officials, diaspora leaders, and official immigration statistics. This is a significant accomplishment considering, as also noted by Denisenko, data on migration are missing.

The regional expression of a global phenomenon emerges here in the lack of alignment between law and practice; formal policy and actual behavior between the Russian Federation and Kazakhstan. And as elsewhere, the securitisation of migration in relation to fears leads to policies that work to encourage patterns of irregular migration.

Kingsbury takes us deeper into theories of xenophobia to elucidate a fascinating shift. The Russian state had been using xenophobia to distract attention from internal issues. With the Ukraine conflict, this was no longer a viable approach and the official rhetoric shifted away from demonising these particular migrants to blaming something else: the West. Kingsbury's intervention in the literature is to synthesise the competition hypothesis and the cultural hypothesis used to explain xenophobia. She formulates political explanation that links xenophobia to political leaders who work to construct negative attitudes that serve their purposes. This explanation resonates with chapters by Kuznetsova, Mukomel, and Morozov.

New Questions

The chapters in this volume open up new questions that can serve as a point of reference for future studies. Here are ventured some questions for future exploration that emerge from the arguments made here.

In the first half of the volume, an empirical question is when and how, if at all, internally displaced persons will be granted the equal civil and political rights in Ukraine? Another is what will be the long term effect on Polish civil society and by extension Poland's European neighbors as a result of the incorporation of Ukrainian migrants? Third, the authors seem to concur that it would be simplistic to take the ineptitude with which the Ukraine crisis is being dealt with and ascribe it to a Soviet legacy. If this is the case, what new theoretical frameworks will help future scholars periodise the complex political and economic dynamics in the country? A methodological question this half of the volume opens up is how geography in general and borders in particular can be brought into a closer analytic relationship with the fields of social memory and political ideology.

The chapters in the second half of the volume also raise interesting questions for future explanation. While the theme of Russian propaganda is already quite prevalent in the literature today, the contribution of these authors is disaggregating propaganda effects from public opinion and official discourse without ontologising any one of them. A more wide-ranging question here concerns the European and Eastern European integration projects. When do official discourse and news media generate narratives that widen gaps (between people and countries), and exactly how much common ground is available?

Policy Relevance

Migration and the Ukraine Crisis

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The contributions to this volume also contain insights that have considerable policy relevance. First, a theme dealt with in many of the chapters is integrating migrants. All of the entries that explore integration-gone-wrong are clear: state policies with regard to access to housing, work, and social support must be meticulously calibrated to local needs.

A second theme in the volume with policy relevance is the many ways that the economies in the region have become interdependent through labour migration and remittances. It follows that a migration policy change in, or economic sanctions on one of these countries (namely Russia) is likely to affect many other (and sometimes quite distant) countries. In other words, the effects of Western sanctions will be felt not just in Moscow, but Dushanbe, Bishkek, and Tashkent. In light of evidence that some of the countries affected are also politically unstable, the interconnections should be of interest in policy making.

A third theme is the power of migration policy to shape human behavior. This volume is notable because it makes Eastern Europe visible to scholars of migration. Somewhat familiar will be the ways in which states manage and mold their citizenry through sorting and ranking by means of patents, permits, and migrant categories. Sorting is often legitimised by a concern for protecting national security. This is important because it is not simply a consequence of a world partitioned into territorial nation-states: these migratory flows are actively involved in making the world we know today.

A fourth theme that unites the contributions and has policy relevance is that the narratives and discourse surrounding migrants has, to a greater or lesser extent, a profound effect on how newcomers are received, whether by bureaucrats or citizens. To quote J.L. Austin (1955/1962), people 'do things' with words. Attention to the stories that are told about migrants is therefore not for scholars alone.

In closing, it is interesting to reflect for a moment on the relationship between this crisis and the West. There are many perspectives on why this 'other' migration crisis has come about. While Western analysts often demonise Russian Federation as the aggressor, this volume adds the additional perspective that from the Russian point of view, the territorial aggression on the part of Russian Federation was a reaction to what was understood, by Russia at least, as a crisis of the international system. In other words, the system had already lost its balance when the territorial incursions occurred. If there is a path to resolving the crisis, it might be found in the common ground: as Morozov points out, it is in Russia's interest, and Russians may even prefer to have good relations with Ukraine, the European Union, and the United States. It follows that even subtle policy shifts with respect to the Russian Federation could yield traction for improvements that would be meaningful for the migrants described in these chapters.

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