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Kuznetsova, Irina; Mikheieva, Oksana

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**Forced displacement from Ukraine's war-torn territories:  
intersectionality and 'power geometry'**

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## **Forced Displacement from Ukraine's War-torn Territories: Intersectionality and 'Power Geometry'**

### **Abstract**

The number of internally forcibly displaced persons is growing every year across the globe and exceeds the number of refugees. To date, Ukraine has the highest number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Europe with about 1.4 million people forced to flee from the conflict in eastern Ukraine and the annexation of Crimea in 2014. Employing Massey's 'power geometry' concept, modalities of borders and intersectional approach, this paper theorizes how internally displaced people are situated politically within a protracted conflict. It highlights the opportunities of this approach in analyzing how the reaction to the war brings authorities to see displaced people as a static category and reproduce war-lexicon in policies which fractures the space of everyday life. Drawing upon qualitative research in Ukraine, among IDPs, civil society, international organizations and public officials, the paper argues that intersections of displacement with gender and older age, and the lack of state recognition of these differing groups of IDPs, together with the lack of the economic resources for social policy, produces multiple forms of social exclusion.

**Keywords:** internally displaced persons; Ukraine; Donbas; intersectionality; elderly

**Word count:** 10,706

### **Forced displacement from war-torn territories in Ukraine**

While geopolitically the current crisis in Ukraine is near the top of the international policy agenda the lived experience of those displaced by the conflict receives much less attention. The armed conflict in eastern Ukraine was followed by significant declines in living conditions and the displacement of more than three million people, approximately 1.4 million internally and more than 1.3 million to other countries, including over a million to Russia (UNHCR 2016; UNHCR 2019). While the conflict's nature and socio-political origins are well presented in academic discourse (cf. Kuzio 2015;

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3 Sakwa 2014; Wilson 2014; Yekelchik 2015; Malyarenko and Wolff 2018 among others) there is a  
4 noticeable absence of discussion on policies towards internally displaced people (IDPs), and how this  
5 ensures they are seen as potential supporters of the separatists, and the impact that the conflict has on  
6 their everyday lives. Furthermore, in state thinking IDPs are constructed as a homogenous group  
7 rather than a diverse range of people, who face differing issues and who have a wide range of needs.  
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14 Employing an intersectionality approach this paper reveals the discourse that the state uses,  
15 inadvertently or not, to exacerbate the marginalization of many IDPs, especially the elderly who make  
16 up a disproportionately large share of this group in the Ukrainian controlled territories of Donetsk and  
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Given that the number of internally forcibly displaced people is growing every year across the globe and exceeds the number of refugees, internal displacement has received a special status in the international agenda in the last 20 years with the adoption of the UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement in 1998 (OCHA 2004). Principle 1 states, “Internally displaced persons shall enjoy, in full equality, the same rights and freedoms under international and domestic law as do other persons in their country”. For Ukraine, the mass forced population displacement due to the conflict, alongside the concurrent economic decline and political crisis, was a tremendous shock. This partly explained the delay of urgent actions needed to address the humanitarian needs of IDPs. At the same time, IDPs became increasingly dependent on the authorities’ discourse and relations between the national government and the non-government controlled territories. For example, they have to pass through exhausting long queues at checkpoints to move from non-governmental controlled areas (NGCA) to government controlled areas (GCA) (United Nations Ukraine 2019); their mental health is compromised as a result of war and displacement (see Makhshvili et al. 2017); they have to register as IDPs to receive their pension and be employed, which limits them in their access to many rights (Bulakh 2017; Kuznetsova et al. 2018 among others). For example, in 2017 over half a million people’s pensions were suspended, also IDPs in Ukraine cannot vote in local elections (Woroniecka-Krzyzanowska and Palaguta 2017, Durnyeva, Jepsen and Roberts 2018). From this perspective, the situation of IDPs in Ukraine echoes the way forced internal displacement might be understood in Sri

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3 Lanka, Colombia and Indonesia and other countries which highlight the issues of IDPs' access to  
4 citizenship rights and marginalization. For example, the Indonesian policy of 'labelling' displaced  
5 people as IDPs and relations with civil servants exacerbated tensions with host communities (Duncan  
6 2005), Tamil women in Sri Lanka found themselves in a controversial discourse of "fighters, victims  
7 or survivors" (Schrijvers 1999), and the IDP status in Sri Lanka also separates displaced people from  
8 other citizens, which in many cases restricts their rights (Brun 2003). The status of IDPs in the former  
9 Yugoslav space is described via the prism of 'uneven citizenship', the result of which may be an  
10 internally divided society and state, with various groups enjoying different degrees of rights and  
11 privileges within a pluralised, uneven citizenship (Krasniqi and Stjepanović 2015). Very often elderly  
12 and female IDPs became marginalized and support their own survival tactics as, for instance,  
13 Rekhviashvili's (2012) research on Georgia shows. In Colombia, the people affected by the protracted  
14 displacement were 'banalised' by the government which were unable to provide the protection of  
15 IDPs and recognize their rights; this situation has been contested by the civil society and the  
16 Constitutional Court (Oslender 2016).

17 Pensioners, in comparison with the Ukraine's general population, constitute a disproportionately large  
18 share of IDPs.<sup>1</sup> While international think tanks, international development organizations and charities  
19 note that often the situation among the elderly, women and children IDPs is the most critical (see  
20 Ferris at al. 2015; UNHCR 2016; HelpAge International 2018 among others) academic discourse  
21 rarely addresses the issues they face. This is especially true in relation to the situation in Ukraine. A  
22 search of the literature in Scopus on published academic works on Ukraine between 2014 to 2018,  
23 using the key words 'security', 'nationalism', 'gender', 'elderly' and 'disability' (within Social  
24 Sciences, Arts and Humanities), revealed that much of the literature concerns security (449 results)  
25 and nationalism (105 results) rather than gender (73), disability (8) and elderly (2).<sup>2</sup> One can suggest  
26 that the prevalence of security and ethnonationalist approaches in academic research on contemporary

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<sup>1</sup> See Online Maps and Dashboards: Map of Ukraine with Internally Displaced Persons registered by Oblast – August 2019

[https://www.unhcr.org/ua/wp-content/uploads/sites/38/2019/08/2019-08-14\\_Map\\_IDP\\_ENG.pdf](https://www.unhcr.org/ua/wp-content/uploads/sites/38/2019/08/2019-08-14_Map_IDP_ENG.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> The search was conducted on 3<sup>rd</sup> of December 2018.

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3 Ukraine could explain why there still has been little discussion about the age, gender and disability  
4 aspects of displacement and policies towards IDPs in Ukraine. At the same time, as some research  
5 demonstrated, the displacement and war has a significant intersectional impact. A survey of female  
6 IDPs and non-IDPs across Ukraine in 2016 demonstrated the high vulnerability of displaced women  
7 in terms of employment and income opportunities, for example the average salary for displaced  
8 women was half that of non-IDP women, and unemployment rates were twice higher (45.1% for IDP  
9 women) (Gerasimenko 2016). In addition, Nidzvetska et al. (2017) identified that the maternal and  
10 child health of IDPs in Ukraine is compromised because of the long-term structural issues of the  
11 country's health care system, such as the need to often make informal payments to receive treatment,  
12 and the difficulties IDPs face in registering to receive a health care. This is compounded by the low  
13 incomes levels, meaning that many endure a poor diet and lack any form of 'safety net'. Furthermore,  
14 Makhashvili et al. (2017), based on a national survey of IDPs, note the high level of post-traumatic  
15 stress disorder and anxiety among forced displaced people and highlighted that among women and the  
16 elderly there are significant increases in levels of mental health issues. Women have to use different  
17 tactics living in occupied territories, and they simply "do not fit in the ideological framework or a  
18 division on 'us' and 'others', and been forced to completely revise the configuration of Ukrainian  
19 society both in the territorial sense and in the socio-cultural context" (Mikheieva 2015, 9). Therefore,  
20 understanding the social consequences of war is vitally important beyond the ethnonational  
21 framework. This echoes with the growing body of literature that moves theory and methods away  
22 from the ethnonationalist approaches (see Meisser and Vertovec 2015; Grzymala-Kazłowska and  
23 Phillimore 2018 among others).

24 Drawing on intersectionality (Crenshaw 1991; Anthias and Yuval-Davis 1983 among others), power  
25 geometry (Massey 2009) and **modalities of borders (Paasi 2013)**, this paper argues that political  
26 rhetoric towards IDPs in a context of protracted conflict contributes to the construction of space  
27 which is divided between the IDPs, people who reside in non-government controlled territories and  
28 the general population. **It bases the argument on the analysis of both political rhetoric towards IDPs  
29 and the experiences of elderly displaced people.**

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3 To date, in the academic literature there has been little attempt to examine the intersectional  
4 experiences of IDPs within the power geometry. This paper aims to advance understanding of the  
5 impact of armed conflict and forced displacement on the intersectional experiences of IDPs, and their  
6 coping tactics and agencies. It demonstrates that in the Ukraine the state constructs IDPs in the same  
7 way despite the multiple experiences of IDPs and their needs depending on their gender, age, health  
8 and other characteristics; moreover, it is ‘othering’ them, increasing the risk of marginalization and  
9 social inclusion which is aggravated by the social-economic context.  
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### **Intersectionality, forced displacement and power geometry**

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22 Intersectionality, originating within anti-racist feminism (Anthias and Yuval-Davis 1983; Crenshaw  
23 1991; Nash 2008), has been used in Social Sciences to address the relationship between different  
24 social categories as gender, race, age, sexuality, ability and others. As McCall (2005, 1780) stressed,  
25 “Interest in intersectionality arose out of a critique of gender-based and race-based research for failing  
26 to account for lived experience at neglected points of intersection—ones that tended to reflect  
27 multiple subordinate locations as opposed to dominant or mixed locations”. Despite the fact that most  
28 of the research within intersectionality concerns gender and race, a considerable amount of literature  
29 has been published on exploring the geographies of age (Hopkins and Pain 2007; Pain and Hopkins,  
30 2010) and disability (Lister 2007; Erevelles and Minear 2012). The intersectional approach has also  
31 increasingly been employed to help understanding of ethnic diversity and inequality as determinants  
32 of health and services access (see, for example, Green et al. 2014; Hankivsky and Christoffersen 2008  
33 etc), and as a tool for exploring mental health among migrants (Tang and Pilgrim 2017). Bastia  
34 (2014), providing an overview of intersectionality’s role in migration studies, highlighted that it has  
35 “greatly contributed to visibilizing the interconnected and constitutive nature of multiple forms of  
36 oppression ... in migration processes” (238).  
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53 Some authors criticized the intersectionality approach for its predominate focus on North America  
54 and Europe, which cannot provide a universal approach of tackling gender and class in broader  
55 contexts, especially in relation to the Global South (see, for example Lutz et al. 2011; Bastia 2014).  
56 While, conceptually, it is difficult to regard Ukraine as neither the Global North nor the South (see  
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3 Müller 2018) we argue that the intersectional approach is a very valuable lens to critically explore  
4 how the inequalities caused by the forced displacement and how state policies towards this group  
5 exacerbate the situation.  
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9 The multiple oppressions within the intersectional approach, according to Collins (1990, 276), are  
10 interlocked via a “matrix of domination” which comprises structural, disciplinary, hegemonic and  
11 interpersonal power relations. In our research, we focus mainly on structural and disciplinary aspects  
12 of the power relations which we capture via interviews with IDPs, non-governmental organizations  
13 (NGOs) and local level officials and analysis of interviews and talks of public officials.  
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16 The emergency character of state policy towards the mass population displacement from war-torn  
17 territories implies the importance of focusing on spatial and temporal aspects of both lived  
18 experiences and policies. Following Anthias (2013), we admit that the combination of a  
19 translocational lens and intersectionality “enables the understanding of contradictory social locations  
20 and therefore the intersection between privilege and disadvantage” which also provides significance  
21 to the broader social context and temporality. For the analysis of how political discourses regarding  
22 IDPs impact on their lived experiences we engage with Massey’s (2009, 19) notion of “power  
23 geometry”, which enables us to “capture both the fact that space is imbued with power and the fact  
24 that power in its turn has a spatiality”. This geometry has a relational (space) component “exercised in  
25 interaction with other places” (19), and a component of time and temporality as space is always  
26 “under construction”.  
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44 In Ukraine, where some parts of Donetsk and Lughansk oblasts and Crimea became NGCA in 2014,  
45 the terms of temporality and construction of space have a direct meaning as several checkpoints  
46 control the mobility of people and goods between NGCA<sup>3</sup> and GCA of Ukraine. The status of the  
47 IDPs is dependant on the former residency of people who resided in NGCA but also on complex  
48 bureaucratic procedures which should confirm that status. Thus, we consider IDPs as a group in the  
49 same way as Massey, seeing space as where power relations take place, related to those “who are also  
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59 <sup>3</sup> The list of non-government controlled areas is available at: <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/79-2018-%D1%80/paran2#n2>  
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3 doing a lot of physical moving, but who are not 'in charge' of the process in the same way at all"  
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5 (Massey 1994, 149).

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8 Recent debates about borders consider them as beyond territories (Sassen 2013; Jones and Johnson  
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10 2016; Cassidy et al. 2018) and we found it useful to engage with this concept. We analyze this  
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12 complex space, power, borders, intersectionality and displacement through the lens of modalities of  
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14 technical landscapes of social control and discursive landscapes of social power (Paasi 2009, 2013).  
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16 Technical landscapes of social control (Paasi 2009, 2013) manifesting in databanking, digital  
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18 surveillance, biometric identity technologies and digital surveillance (Paasi 2013, Dijstelbloem and  
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20 Broeders 2015) are significant parts of borders nowadays. In a context of internal displacement we  
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22 analyze how processes of registration and verification impact on the everyday life of IDPs and how  
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24 different social groups of the displaced try to be 'visible' or 'invisible'.  
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28 Discursive landscapes of social power include such various components as material landscapes,  
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30 national commemorations, and media (Paasi 2013), and serve as emotional landscapes of control  
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32 (Paasi 2009). In our research we will focus on one aspect of it, studying how the politics towards  
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34 pensioners from Donbas is embedded in the media via official interviews and statements of  
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36 politicians. The special role of discourse we understand following Müller's conceptualization as not  
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38 just a language, but also as language and practice (2008). Therefore, addressing authorities' stance  
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40 towards pensions of IDPs represented in the media enables us to tackle social-space dialectic  
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42 including 'representation of space' and 'space of representation' (Lefebvre 1991).  
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46 The paper argues that without seeing the specific needs formed by the intersections of age and  
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48 displacement, and understanding how many are denied their rights, not only will particular groups of  
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50 IDPs continue to endure extreme marginalization but, overall, further efforts for reconciliation and  
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52 social cohesion will continue to be very problematic. To explore this in depth, after describing its  
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54 methodology, the paper addresses state policies towards IDPs with an emphasis on how IDPs verify  
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56 their status and register in their new location. Then, considering that more than half a million  
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58 pensioners in Ukraine have not received their pensions due to being under government suspicion of  
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3 supporting terrorists, the political discourses regarding pensions, and the everyday experiences of  
4 elderly men and women are analyzed. We argue that Ukrainian citizens moving from NGCA become  
5 internally displaced people not only because they cross checkpoints but because of the peculiarities of  
6 space construction and modalities of borders manifested both in discursive landscapes of social power  
7 and technical landscapes of social control.  
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## 16 Methodology

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19 The research upon which this paper is based was conducted in Ukraine in 2017–2018, and included  
20 interviews with displaced people, local and national authorities, NGOs and a desk research. It also  
21 included critical discourse analysis of authorities' position towards pensioners which included  
22 interviews and statements in on-line mass media and Facebook pages of state officials between May  
23 2014 and July 2019. It focused on reference/nomination strategies, predication strategies (labels) and  
24 argumentation strategies (Wodak and Reisigl 2001, 45).  
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31 As it was highlighted by Valentine (2007, 19) in regards intersectional analysis, “attention to lived  
32 experience (...) offers an important potential tool for feminist geography to understand the intimate  
33 connections between the production of space and the systematic production of power, thereby  
34 increasing its effectiveness to develop and employ its critical insights within and beyond the  
35 academy”. Therefore, open-ended interviewing was chosen as it provides the informant with an  
36 opportunity to reflect on her or his experience, and we were able to understand how relations with  
37 power institutions and civil society were formed, what the main fears and experiences of the displaced  
38 were/are. Interviews were conducted in Ukrainian and/or Russian depending on preferences of  
39 respondents. Beginning the interviews three to four years after the inception of the armed conflict  
40 allowed for reflection on changes in the situation of IDPs, as well as evaluating the social  
41 consequences of the recent changes in legislation regarding displaced people in Ukraine. In-depth and  
42 semi-structured interviews were conducted with IDPs (n = 104) in Lviv, Kyiv, Chernihiv, Kharkiv,  
43 Dnipro, Zaporizhia regions and Mariupol, including 15 people 55–64 years old, 8 people older 64  
44 years old, 41 men and 63 women. The interviews were also collected with representatives of NGOs,  
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3 international organizations, central and municipal authorities (n = 25). These regions were chosen  
4 because the majority of IDPs live there and informants were representative in terms of gender and age  
5 considering that the demographic characteristic of IDPs are different from the general population with  
6 a bigger share of pensioners. Not only persons with the official status of IDPs were selected for  
7 interview but also those who fled but were not registered as an IDP. Additionally, two focus groups  
8 with IDPs from Chernihiv, Zhitomir and Sumi oblasts were conducted in Chernihiv in 2017 (12 and 9  
9 people). The snowball technique was used to select informants among IDPs as this method is widely  
10 used in studying confidential topics or hidden communities; each time a person (selected via groups in  
11 social media, NGOs or social networks) gave multiple referrals, and only one new subject was  
12 recruited among them (Atkinson and Flint 2001). **In this paper, we focus on the experiences of IDPs  
13 who have fled from war in Donbas.** The interviews with displaced people were anonymous and  
14 conducted in a way to minimize risks of disclosure of personal information. The questions were  
15 designed primarily to reveal the everyday experiences of people after displacement, with the  
16 interviews starting by exploring the informants' narratives before moving onto more open-ended  
17 questions.

### **Technical borders of social control. State policies towards IDPs: registrations and verifications**

18 It is widely recognized in the academic literature that the securitization discourse towards migrants is  
19 rising across the globe. Ideas of 'chaos' and 'crisis' are often put forward by the state as justification  
20 for the continuing securitization of migration policy as a part of "geographical assertions of sovereign  
21 power" (Mountz and Hiemstra 2014, 383). As Allen et al. (2018, 218) note "categorisation is central  
22 to efforts to govern migrants and refugees", and it has "wider geopolitical implications for our  
23 understanding of nations, states and citizens" (221). The process of categorization and registration of  
24 migrants in Russia, for example, intersects with racism and discrimination (see Kuznetsova and  
25 Round 2019). What has not been addressed before, is how state categorization of internally displaced  
26 people impacts on their everyday life.

27 The status of internally displaced persons who fled from the war-torn territories in Donbas and  
28 annexed Crimea quickly became an issue of international concern with the UN Refugee Agency,

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3 International Organization for Migration, European Commission, Norwegian Refugee Council and  
4 other international organizations becoming involved in trying to provide support. The status of IDP is  
5 necessary for all displaced people who are going to engage with any kind of formal relationship with  
6 a state – including health care access, pensions, employment and education. The Ukrainian authorities  
7 verify identity and place of residence in the GCA **of those IDPs who receive benefits or pensions**  
8  
9 every six months. After several trials initiated by NGOs identity verification rarely takes place at the  
10 place of residence of IDPs, instead, within one to two days of their arrival in a municipality they are  
11 asked to come to the Department of Social Protection. For many of our respondents this process is not  
12 only inconvenient, and forces them to lose a day or more from work, but also demonstrates  
13 government's distrust towards IDPs. For example, one elderly woman who works informally and  
14 hardly makes ends, stressed:

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16 ...they said: we will be checking, you have to sit at home. But it is very inconvenient, if they  
17 call and say you must be at home for three days. For example, I am very pleased when I was  
18 asked to distribute leaflets; it is some income for me. I ask if I can come to social services by  
19 myself, and they say – 'no, you cannot – maybe you lie, and you go to Donetsk area.' This is  
20 very hard. It means they do not believe us. They think that we travel backwards and forwards  
21 (female, 71 years old, from Horlovka, lives in Kharkiv).

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23 According to most of our respondents, this process of verification is very frustrating, although checks  
24 have been cancelled for some categories of IDPs<sup>4</sup> and since 2016 it has been possible to verify  
25 identity at branches of Oschadbank.<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, interviews revealed that checks on the place of  
26 residence still exist, even for those whose ID was verified via the bank. Informants from advocates for  
27 IDPs' rights mentioned that the current law makes it prone for misinterpretations, and the research

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<sup>4</sup> <http://zakon3.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/689-2017-п/paran12#n12>

<sup>5</sup> Amendments to the Decree of the Cabinet of Ministries of Ukraine, 14 March 2016 № 167  
<http://zakon3.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/167-2016-п>

This was followed by the Decree from 26 December 2016 N 1028 which states that all pensioners  
before receiving electronic ID of pensioners will have to pass regular identification via Oschadbank.  
See

<http://oschadbank.info/poleznoe/16-identifikaciya-v-oschadbanke>

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3 revealed that municipalities and other official institutions very often interpret regulations in a way to  
4 make verifications more difficult than legal requirements, thus IDPs suffer from so-called street-  
5 bureaucracy (Lipsky 2010). Another step which IDPs have to take in order to be fully documented is  
6 to obtain registration for their new place of residence. In 2001, the Constitutional Court of Ukraine  
7 recognized that the overall system of registration of the place of residence was a violation of human  
8 rights. The former Soviet approach to registration ('propiska') was therefore replaced with a more  
9 simplified system of registration for citizens on their place of residence;<sup>6</sup> however, this did not change  
10 the system that provides the majority of public services to citizens on a territorial basis. Recent  
11 reforms in 2016 did not resolve the problem of binding a person to the address registered in his/her  
12 passport. This becomes obvious when a person needs to use public services in a different location, e.g.  
13 pension payments, registering with tax authorities, etc. (see also, Kuznetsova et al. 2018). Many of the  
14 informants found the process of registering and receiving a document indicating their IDP status as a  
15 compulsory attachment to their passport, very unfair:

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Anyway, as a person who is Ukrainian, why do I need to register? I have a passport stating that I am a Ukrainian citizen. Why do I need to have a separate registration?! (...) The state just wants to think that if I am IDP I am homeless (...) I am not going to live with a document of an IDP. I want to live freely (interview with IDP from Donetsk, anonymous, male, 42 years old, lives in Lviv).

Belonging to Ukraine is essential for most of our respondents and these feelings echo Sasse and Lackner's (2018) results which suggest that "Ukrainian citizenship is (and was) by far the most prevalent self-reported identity in the Kyiv-controlled Donbas and among the IDPs" (153).

Therefore, informants feel disillusioned with the necessity to have an additional status of IDPs. Some displaced people, however, refuse to receive a document denoting their IDP status. Ivankova-Stetsuk and Seleschuk (2017, 31–32) recognize the choice to be "invisible" is a strategy of "assimilation".

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<sup>6</sup> The Law of Ukraine "About freedom of movement and free choice of place of residence in Ukraine" (Bulletin of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine (VVR), 2004, No. 15, p.232) <http://zakon2.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/1382-15>

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3 However, it is argued here that this strategy does not necessary mean ‘assimilation’ but rather reveals  
4 why some categories of the population choose be ‘invisible’. For example, while pensioners have to  
5 receive an IDP status to be able to receive their pensions, young people working informally do so  
6 without the need for registration. **It partly explains the disproportion of elderly people in the statistics**  
7 **of the IDPs in Ukraine.**

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13 Young men are often under suspicion of assisting separatists in NGCA and according to some of our  
14 informants this fear represents a big barrier when it comes to communication and even employment,  
15 which leads them to choose the ‘invisible’ status. The research revealed that the fact of a stamp in an  
16 internal passport with a registration in a territory which is currently not under the control of the  
17 government (Donetsk, for example), makes displaced people ‘visible’ and more prone to different  
18 types of ‘othering’ from official institutions as, for example, banks and employers. For example, one  
19 of our informants was unable to receive a money transfer with just a passport as the bank demanded a  
20 document of IDP after a member of staff saw the stamp in his passport.

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30 In addition to the benefits of access to constitutional rights, such as health care, pensions and  
31 education, IDP status provides financial support. However, at 442 Hrivna for adults (approximately  
32 17 USD)<sup>7</sup> and 1000 for children and pensioners<sup>8</sup> per month it is below the minimum wage in Ukraine  
33 and would not cover anywhere near the rent for a flat. Moreover, to receive this benefit, an adult of  
34 working age should be in formal employment within two months of registering as an IDP.<sup>9</sup> As one  
35 informant argued:

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43 How can we call this 400 Hrivna “support”? For this we have to degrade ourselves and go to  
44 all these institutions. We made some attempts but to have to go every half year and tell them  
45 where you work, it is not worth it. And now we do not receive any financial support at all, in  
46 spite of the fact that legally and constitutionally we should (interview with IDP from Donetsk,  
47 anonymous, male, 27 years old, lives in Kyiv).

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57 <sup>7</sup> <http://zakon3.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/689-2017-п/paran12#n12>

58 <sup>8</sup> before January 2018 benefits for children and pensioners were 882 Hrivna, but were increased by the  
59 Decree N 15 from 15 January 2015 <http://zakon3.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/15-2018-п/paran2#n2>

60 <sup>9</sup> <http://zakon3.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/689-2017-п/paran12#n12>

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3 In many cases, registration is very difficult to obtain, with delays commonplace. Those IDPs who lost  
4 their passports cannot receive registration, and the issuing of new passports is very difficult. As the  
5 liaison officer in Kyiv oblast, Mahurova said in interview during our research in 2017, “In 2014 there  
6 was a loyal policy towards documenting, but then perhaps there were some abuse and even statements  
7 of some officials that combatants from separatists move and receive Ukrainian passports” (implying  
8 that some people want to change their names to escape justice). Non-registered status, which  
9 interviewees note, can last from several months to several years, excludes people from the formal  
10 labor market, pensions and social security. It also causes difficulties in finding suitable  
11 accommodation, as despite the fact that most of the rental market is informal, landlords still check  
12 tenants’ passports. Respondents often mentioned the officials’ negative attitudes towards them. Many  
13 benefits can only be received after registration as an IDP if a person came from NGCA: this is the  
14 case for not only pensions, but also benefits for people with disabilities, single parents and parents  
15 with many children. Such requirements put many people at further risk, considering that the situation  
16 of displacement is stressful in itself. This all has a massive impact on the everyday life of forcibly  
17 displaced people regarding their access to social and political rights. This situation, combined with the  
18 negative rhetoric from politicians, makes their further social integration very difficult.

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37 The language which Ukraine’s authorities use towards IDPs suggests a static status that excludes the  
38 displaced population which still resides in NGCA. Furthermore, if some IDPs travel to the NGCA and  
39 do not return within 60 days they automatically lose their IDP status and pensions rights as well. The  
40 recent Donbas reintegration law adopted in January 2018 talks about hostages in occupied territories  
41 but does not refer in detail to those who initially had to flee from the NGCA but were then in practice  
42 forced to return because of the difficulties of coping without accommodation, job and/or a pension.  
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As Anthias (2012) argues “groups are treated as homogeneous categories of people with particular  
and given characteristics (e.g. groups relating to women or ethnic groups are defined as having  
particular needs, predispositions and strategies)”, which in regard to migration is often reduced to the  
idea that migrants “belong to ethnic groups and they bring with them given predispositions” (104). In  
relation to IDPs in Ukraine, we can observe that the state reduces them into one broad category of  
‘internally displaced people’ expecting them to have similar issues. Therefore, interactions with the



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3 state do not start with an evaluation of urgent needs but with the procedures which aim to identify the  
4 legal status of a displaced person. In terms of the power geometry, the authorities shape space in such  
5 terms that they try to support order in conditions of uncertainty and protracted conflict. The system of  
6 registration and verification of IDPs' identity is part of what Massey (2009, 81) claimed as "the  
7 spatial has both an element of order and an element of chaos". As she stated "Seeing space as a  
8 moment in the intersection of configured social relations (rather than as an absolute dimension) means  
9 that it cannot be seen as static. There is no choice between flow (time) and a flat surface of  
10 instantaneous relations (space)" (81). And if some of the IDPs actively resist classification avoiding  
11 their IDPs status, some of the displaced who lack resources are dependent on how the state will  
12 interpret their status. The pension policy is the most explicit example of the power geometry towards  
13 IDPs.

### **Ukraine's pensioners within discursive landscapes of social power**

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29 Constituting over half of all registered IDPs<sup>10</sup> the elderly are often the most marginalized due to  
30 problems in obtaining their pensions, the lack of affordable accommodation, financial difficulties  
31 which make them unable to pay for medical services, and limited opportunities in the labor market.  
32 Those pensioners who still reside in the NGCA have to cross the line of control every two months in  
33 order to receive their pensions, both risking their lives and being subjected to humiliation in queues  
34 while waiting many hours to cross the 'border'. As the UNHCR (2017) notes, due to this process:

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42 the number of persons from the NGCA receiving pensions dropped dramatically from  
43 956,000 in January 2016 to 391,000 in April 2017 .... This represents only 30 per cent of  
44 pensioners who were residing in the NGCA in August 2014. More than 500,000 Ukrainians  
45 have lost their pensions since January 2016.

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50 Furthermore, pension payments have also been suspended for many retired people residing in the  
51 GCA because of frequent mistakes in the verification system which erroneously showed that a person

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57 <sup>10</sup> Ukraine Ministry of Social Policy's local social security branch records and Ukraine's IDP Records  
58 Single Information Database compared by Dr Vlad Mykhnenko, March 2017 (see Kuznetsova et al.  
59 2018).  
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3 no longer lives in GCA. In addition, pensions for retired people, benefits for single mothers and for  
4 other categories of IDPs are often suspended for six months if a person is not at home at the moment  
5 of verification. Many people with disabilities who depend on benefits found themselves included in  
6 lists of the IDPs for whom benefits and pensions were suspended because of the lack of evidence of  
7 them living in GCA, including residents of ‘Svyati Gori’ – a care home where some of the IDPs with  
8 severe disabilities reside and have never left since moving from the occupied territories (Rights to  
9 Protection 2017).

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18 However, the permanent registration of residency does not resolve all the issues because even those  
19 IDPs who obtained a property in GCA still have to be registered as IDPs to receive pensions.

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22 Therefore, there are two categories of pensioners in Ukraine, IDPs and non-IDPs, and the former has  
23 risks of suspension and errors in pension payments. Currently, there are debates about the  
24 simplification of procedures for receiving pensions by the IDPs and people from NGCAs and a draft  
25 law,<sup>11</sup> but there are no ready mechanisms as yet.

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30 According to the Law of Ukraine “On the peculiarities of State policy on ensuring Ukraine’s State  
31 sovereignty over temporarily occupied territories in Donetsk and Luhansk regions”, the so-called  
32 Donetsk and Lughansk People’s Republics are stated as Russian-occupied territories in Donetsk and  
33 Luhansk Oblast. Until 2018 in Ukraine, at the official level, the armed conflict in the eastern part of  
34 Ukraine was not called a war with Russia, but rather an anti-terrorist operation (ATO) (see also  
35 Taradai 2019). This largely gave rise to the ambiguity of definitions, when the state recognizes the  
36 IDPs as victims and pays benefits, while the rhetoric of terrorism adds towards the ambiguous  
37 attitudes regarding the IDPs in society.

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47 Official statements around the pension issue clearly indicate how those who fled from war-torn areas  
48 or still reside there are perceived. The former Minister for Social Policy at the time, Ludmila  
49 Denysova, said at the beginning of the conflict:

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<sup>11</sup> See <https://www.ukrinform.ua/rubric-society/2520104-donbas-bude-nsq-bilsist-pereselenciv-nazad-ne-zbrautsya.html>,  
[http://search.ligazakon.ua/1\\_doc2.nsf/link1/GH7TL00A.html](http://search.ligazakon.ua/1_doc2.nsf/link1/GH7TL00A.html)

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3 I will explain why today there was a need to keep account of internally displaced persons:  
4 because there was now such phenomenon as ‘pension tourism’ – that is people just leave,  
5 receive pensions outside this region, and then come back, and we don't know who these  
6 people are, why they come back to the anti-terrorist operation zone and in what events they  
7 are involved (UNIAN 2014).  
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14 Furthering this line of thought, Dmytro Snegirev, from the civil movement Pravoje Delo, supported  
15 ideas of verification of IDPs arguing that “Donbas based terrorists” are sponsored by pensioners: “It is  
16 no secret that it is one of the sources of financing of illegal groups: when a person in the occupied  
17 territory collects the cards of pensioners, removes cash there and comes to our territory” (Tkachuk  
18 2017). Though pensioners were not called ‘terrorists’ directly, the authorities’ discourse towards  
19 pensions for IDPs always included the reference to the war and to terrorists. Ukraine’s Deputy Prime  
20 Minister, Pavlo Rozenko, in 2016 said the aim is “establishing order in social payments and fight  
21 against leakage of the budgetary and pension funds for occupied territories which we have begun  
22 together with the SSU [Security Service of Ukraine] will continue”. He then assured that “all pensions  
23 and social benefits to real displaced will be conducted in time and in full”, and “Any kopek from the  
24 State budget of Ukraine or from the Pension Fund won't get to the pockets of terrorists”.<sup>12</sup> As was  
25 mentioned above, these measures cost the suspension of pensions of many IDPs and even of those  
26 who had not visited NGCA.  
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41 In April 2019 Mr Andriy Reva, the Minister of Social Policy called pensioners who reside in NGCA  
42 as ‘scums’ saying in his interview to the BBC “Everyone who was pro-Ukrainian has left. And those  
43 who want to claim pensions on both sides have to put up with it. Honestly, I don’t feel pity for them,  
44 not one of them, at all. I feel pity for those soldiers and officers, and for their families. They were  
45 killed there because of those scums” (personal Facebook page of journalist Olga Malchevska, 26  
46 April 2019). After massive criticism from Ukraine’s civil society, Reva claimed that the journalist had  
47 deliberately misused his words, and emphasized that he “considered and consider the Government's  
48 duty to assist residents of the occupied territories in obtaining social benefits, including pensions”, but  
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<sup>12</sup> ‘Pensionnyy turizm pereselentsev otmenyayetsya’ <https://www.6264.com.ua/news/1195454>

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3 then stressed again that “I believe that those citizens of Ukraine who are fighting with arms in their  
4 hands against their own country, killing our soldiers and officers, paying pensions is unacceptable”  
5 (personal Facebook page Ministry of Social Policy in Ukraine Andriy Reva. 29 April 2019).<sup>13</sup>  
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9 Because of the ambivalence of his interview and the following reaction, the local news ran a headline  
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11 “Kyiv Court to Consider Criminal Proceedings Against Ukraine's Social Minister” (Hromadske  
12  
13 2019). This again demonstrates how the state’s discourse links pensioners with the situation in the  
14 occupied territories. There is no guarantee or a recipe for how to be a ‘real’ IDP, as previously  
15 mentioned, even those who did not visit NGCA after displacement could find themselves in an SSU  
16 list for pension suspension. The restrictions imposed also question the right of citizens for free  
17 movement as emphasized by the Human Rights Watch (2018).  
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21 In contrast, some informants consider the situation of pension suspension should not be viewed via  
22 such an ideological lens but, rather, as an instrument which the government uses to save money:  
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28 Possibly, this is because they have seen a hole in a budget of pension funds and started to  
29 think how to save money, and unlawfully created lists of Security Services of Ukraine, and  
30 stopped payments for half a million of citizens simultaneously. ... Well, I hope it is not  
31 ideological, but just a ‘dry calculation’ (interview with a lawyer from Donbas SOS, February  
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33 2018, Kyiv).  
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39 To try to alleviate the problem of suspension of pensions, Draft Law No. 6692, drawn up by Rights  
40 for Protection, Donbas SOS, UNHCR and other international and local organizations, as well as  
41 various MPs, was submitted to parliament on 12 July 2017. However, despite the issue’s urgency, 18  
42 months later at the time of writing, it has still not had its first reading. It aims to decouple pension  
43 payments from the IDP status and the place of residence, thus ensuring that the right to a pension is  
44 guaranteed irrespective of place of residence. The law also aims to reduce verification procedures and  
45 cancel the restrictions on receiving an unclaimed pension to just three years for this category of  
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<sup>13</sup> In October 2019 Mr Reva repeated his positions in social media. See screenshots from the Facebook of a  
journalist Irina Isachenko. 22 October 2019.  
[https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story\\_fbid=2505266776358908&id=100006268298759](https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=2505266776358908&id=100006268298759)

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3 The stigma of ‘pension tourists’ and ‘social benefits tourists’ transmitted by public officials via the  
4 mass media exacerbates the negative image of displaced people, and those who live in NGCA,  
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7 stymieing the processes of social cohesion and reconciliation. Beginning to recognize this, a Strategy  
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9 for the Integration of IDPs was adopted by the Ministry for the Temporary Occupied Territories and  
10 IDPs (2018). Despite this, there is still no implementation plan and it does not provide a mechanism  
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12 for de-linking pensions from IDP status. However, on September 4, 2018, The Grand Chamber of the  
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14 Supreme Court of Ukraine upheld a landmark judgement to satisfy the claims of an internally  
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16 displaced person from the Donetsk region whose pension has been suspended since April 2017. As  
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18 highlighted by UNHCR (2018) it is expected that this decision “will result in simplified procedures  
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20 that enable IDPs and other conflict-affected people to receive their pensions consistently and  
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22 predictably like other citizens of Ukraine.” Overall, the pension situation, together with the other  
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24 constrains endured by IDPs, have significant impacts on the everyday experiences of the elderly,  
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26 leading to some returning to the conflict zone or coping with extreme economic marginalization.  
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28 Moreover, it contributes to the construction of fractured space within the government controlled  
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30 territories bringing the war-lexicon into the discourse towards IDPs.  
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### 37 **The lived experiences of elderly IDPs: issues with pensions, accommodation, employment and** 38 **forced return** 39 40 41

42 The research revealed the impact of gender and age bias in Ukraine’s labor market which creates  
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44 barriers for employment, not only for retired women but also for those over 50 who are not yet at  
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46 retirement age. Men, at the same time, face other issues such as the common stigma of ‘underserved  
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48 pensioner’ and difficulties around the loss of status of ‘breadwinner’, which together with health  
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50 issues create intersectional spaces for deep feelings of disadvantage. Additional issues facing both  
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52 women and men are the mismatching of skills and qualifications to vacancies that are available to  
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54 them. Part-time work and work from home, as the research found, are not commonly available in the  
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56 official bureau for employment, and often IDPs have to work in the informal labor market which is  
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58 very common in Ukraine (see Williams and Round 2007). One of the respondents in Dnipro, a 69-  
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3 year-old lady, with higher education who used to work in the creative sector before the displacement,  
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5 provided the following comments:  
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8           And now I work. Some kind of part-time. I have children, I have to earn. I do not refuse to do  
9           anything: to clean, to nurse or to trade [in a market]. Any job, if only I could work and receive  
10           some money.  
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16 At the same time, the opportunities for working in the informal economy are very limited; some of the  
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18 IDPs are away from their supportive social networks and routine practices. For instance, IDPs are  
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20 away from gardens and allotments and so-called *datcha* which are a very common source of self-  
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22 provision in Ukraine. Displacement deprived people of such resources. The research presented here  
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24 confirms that elderly women are in the most vulnerable position because of the ‘triple’ pressures  
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26 arising from displacement. They face the challenge of finding suitable employment in pre- or post-  
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28 retirement age, and the pressure of the continued role of caregiver which echoes with the social  
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30 construction of the elderly in Ukrainian society who are associated with providers of care and support  
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32 for younger members of family (see Solari 2017). In addition, there is the stigma from the government  
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34 that they might be ‘not real’ IDPs and therefore not eligible to receive their pensions.  
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39 Even being able to receive a pension does not solve many problems as its size is still too low to rent  
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41 suitable accommodation. As a result, people become dependent on their children (if they have any), or  
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43 have to live in temporary accommodation provided by charities; however, after three years many of  
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45 them (as one in Dnipro for example) are about to be closed down. As one of the female respondents of  
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47 pre-pension age stressed:  
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50           You cannot integrate into society without housing. You always live with suitcases. So we  
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52 keep everything that we do not use in boxes and then it is easier to move and find other  
53  
54 accommodation. Owners always look and if they feel you have stability they put the price of  
55  
56 the rent up. You are always with suitcases and always have to think what to do tomorrow.  
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58           Which plans could you make? Nothing really when you do not have any stability. When you  
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3 are young you can live in rented flats. But when you are elderly – and touchwood will not get  
4 sick – which landlord would keep you in a flat? It is very frustrating” (female, 58 years old,  
5 from Luhansk oblast, lives in Kharkiv).  
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11 Accommodation is a major problem for IDPs. Dormitories provided by the state for IDPs were not  
12 able to accommodate everyone in need. Furthermore, some IDPs have been asked to leave their  
13 accommodation, and rental prices have increased. In Kyiv, residents of a dormitory for IDPs had a  
14 hunger strike near the USA embassy as a protest about paying a tourist fee and utilities bills  
15 (Hromasdk Radio 2017). Some of the dormitories are still under construction and often the location  
16 is far from available work. For example, the new dormitory in Kirovohrad oblast does not have many  
17 IDPs because of its undesirable location – it is remote and there is little nearby work (Vozle 2017). In  
18 many cases the decisions on the provision of accommodation in the temporary dormitories were made  
19 on a first come, first served basis which created inequality between IDPs. There are no legal  
20 mechanisms to provide social housing for the most vulnerable categories of IDPs (the elderly, people  
21 with disabilities, and single parents). The temporary dormitory in one town (its name hidden to  
22 protect anonymity) was closing down, and IDPs were offered the choice of moving to a dormitory in  
23 another oblast. This would have massive implications on their everyday life, considering that among  
24 those who lived in that dormitory are elderly people and women with disabilities. For example, the  
25 following informant felt very frustrated when she shared her worries:  
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44 We were offered to move to different city – to Sumy or Kryvyi Rih – I do not remember now.  
45 But we are not stray musicians, rights? We are temporally displaced people. When the war  
46 will be finished we will go back home. How could we return there if we live in those two  
47 rooms where they placed us? I do not know. Where could I go to another city? Children go to  
48 kindergarten. Lena – to kindergarten, Irina – to school, Anna – to college. Olga – in spite the  
49 fact that she has disability, has bronchial asthma – she went to work in the factory informally.  
50 What to do? I would like to work but I cannot physically, I have such a rare disease, one in a  
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3 million people... I have to stop after each 20 metres walking (female, 50 years old, names  
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5 have been changed).  
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9 The new scheme of 50/50 where the IDP receives half the price of a property and covers the rest  
10 themselves has not met with enthusiasm from either IDPs or NGOs, as the time lines and conditions  
11 are not transparent, and also it excludes vulnerable categories of IDPs. Almost all interviews with  
12 IDPs highlighted that housing issues are one of the most crucial factors when they think about their  
13 prospects of living in GCA. Some of the IDPs who have friends and relatives living in NGCA  
14 question the position of the authorities that support only those who moved to GCA and do not go  
15 back. As one of the participants of the focus-group, an elderly women, mentioned: "Some say that  
16 those who wanted to move [from war-torn territories] they moved. You know, well... But where?  
17 Does anyone invite you anywhere?" (focus group in Chernihiv 2017). Moreover, our respondents  
18 mentioned IDPs (mostly elderly) who had to move back [to NGCA] because of difficulties with  
19 accommodation, pensions and employment. Also, the impossibility in many cases of bringing elderly  
20 parents to the government controlled areas (due to housing issues in many cases), makes the choice to  
21 go back to the so-called self-proclaimed republics unavoidable. Then because people do not want to  
22 lose the status of an IDP they had to go back to GCA regularly for verifications to receive pensions. In  
23 sum, the lack of adequate policies towards IDPs force many of them to return to conflict areas.  
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42 According to the recent survey of 4290 people crossing the 'line of contact', conducted by the Rights  
43 for Protection in June–July 2017, in the five operating entry/exit checkpoints (EECPs) located in  
44 Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts 46.2% of the people who had moved to the government controlled  
45 territories had since returned (Rights for Protection 2017). For about half of the IDPs the high cost of  
46 rented accommodation was the main factor behind this decision. Similarly, the International  
47 Organization for Migration (IOM) revealed that among those who returned to NGCA, 57% are retired  
48 people, and the most common reasons for return were possession of property which results in people  
49 not having to pay rent (64%) and 'family reasons' (43%) (IOM 2018, 53–54). Regarding family  
50 reasons, interviewees indicated that people with caring responsibilities for their elderly parents or  
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3 relatives with disabilities who cannot leave NGCA, often return to their former homes because they  
4 cannot easily visit their dependent relatives, due to restrictions in crossing the control line. As noted  
5 above, they cannot take the dependent family members to other parts of Ukraine because of the  
6 already indicated issues with pensions and accommodation. Taken together, these results demonstrate  
7 that there is a lack of recognition of the intersectionality of IDPs in state policies towards forced  
8 displaced people and what can be called 'forced return' when people have to go back to the territories  
9 where there is still armed conflict, which place them in conditions of bigger humanitarian concern  
10 because of lack of infrastructure and danger to safety in general.  
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## 21 **Conclusions**

22 This article has offered an intersectional approach and employed Massey's (2009) 'power geometry'  
23 concept. It also explored technical landscapes of social control and discursive landscapes of social  
24 power as modalities of bordering space which politically situate internally displaced people within a  
25 protracted conflict. Recent debates show territory is "a capability with embedded logics of power and  
26 of claim-making" (Sassen 2013, 23), and in Ukraine control over borders and space is amplified  
27 because of the ambiguity of the status of the population from NGCA. Not only physical checkpoints  
28 become landscapes of technical control but discursive landscapes of social power bordering the space  
29 become policies towards the IDPs who need to have registered status and pensions.  
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42 The different spatial powers which are exercised in Ukraine, between the government and non-  
43 government controlled areas, enable authorities to distinguish between IDPs and those who reside in  
44 non-government controlled territories and allows them to construct IDPs as terrorist supporters,  
45 despite the extreme socio-economic marginalization many of them endure. This (in Collins' (1990)  
46 terms) is reflected in both structural and disciplinary policies towards IDPs. In terms of temporality  
47 and space the socio-political construction of IDPs by the authorities is static and one of control. For  
48 example, to maintain IDP status citizens must declare to the authorities their place of residence and  
49 they are not allowed to leave the GCA of Ukraine for more than 60 days. Some IDPs, especially  
50 young people and those who have resources, try to avoid being placed in such 'power geometry', and  
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3 thus do not obtain the legal status of internally displaced person to escape government control and  
4 observation. Those who do require state support, especially the elderly and people with disabilities or  
5 injuries from war, are affected in their everyday life by the above regime of verifications, even though  
6 registration with the state does not mean that their specific needs are provided for by the government.  
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8 Moreover, the space within GCA is affected by the fact that IDP pensioners living there are  
9 constructed by the state as 'pension tourists' if they return to NGCA even if only for a very brief  
10 period of time. This distinction has enabled the Ukrainian government to suspend the pensions to  
11 thousands of elderly people and people with disabilities who rarely, or never, return to the war-torn  
12 territories.  
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23 The intersections of displacement with gender and older age and the lack of state recognition of these  
24 differing groups of IDPs, together with the lack of the economic resources for social policy, produces  
25 multiple forms of social exclusion. This includes the lack of affordable and appropriate  
26 accommodation, suspension of pension and benefits and lack of the specialised free medical support  
27 for those who were injured during the war. The situation of elderly IDPs and people with disabilities,  
28 and the violation of their rights is a significant consequence of the conflict. However, because those  
29 whose rights are violated often do not have a voice, including the right to vote in local elections, only  
30 NGOs and international organizations are very active in promoting rights of pensioners and IDPs (see  
31 Kuznetsova et al. 2018; Kuznetsova 2019) though considering the long time since the start of war, the  
32 success is much delayed. As a result, it forces some of them to go back to NGCA. In these conditions,  
33 the opportunities for reconciliation and social cohesion in Donbas can be very restrained. This lack of  
34 a humanitarian perspective, and the authorities' rhetoric which does not make IDPs feel welcome, can  
35 be challenging for social cohesion.  
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51 The research presented in this article highlights the need for an analysis of both state policy and the  
52 intersectional experiences of the forcibly displaced people, the number of which grows daily around  
53 the world, in a context of power geometry and **modalities of borders**. It highlighted the opportunities  
54 of this approach in analyzing how the reaction to the war brings authorities to perceive displaced  
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3 people as a static category and reproduces war-lexicon in policies which fractures **and borders** the  
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5 space of everyday life.  
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9 Future research should target developing better tools for understanding the cross-border experience of  
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11 displaced people who go back to the separatists' regions and its impact on their sense of belonging,  
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13 and intersections between regional and nation-state belonging. Overall in Ukraine, there are at least  
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15 three million people who have been deprived of full access to citizens' rights: this could protract the  
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17 everyday uncertainties faced by IDPs during the current conflict. While neglecting IDPs' electoral,  
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19 property and pension rights, the country might face, not only a population loss, but also a deeper gap  
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21 between civil society and state.  
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