

Ukraine's displaced desperate to find housing, employment

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In the Ukraine

He doesn't want his name to be known, or exactly where he lives now. Just know, it's in Western Ukraine far away from the bombings in the eastern provinces that he used to call home.

'My street is being bombed today,' he says, 'I've been checking social media all day to see if my house is still there.'

During the Maidan, everything was quiet in Luhansk.

'The people were shown anti-Ukrainian propaganda, many workers were told their salaries would be cut in order to fund the Maidan protest in Kyiv. They were told that the protestors were payed by the U.S.'

I asked him if he ever believed this. He didn't, but his parents did. 'The people in Luhansk and in the East of Ukraine slowly came to fear the West and the Centre of Ukraine. All of a sudden tents with Russian flags popped up with pro-Russian demonstrations. That's when they turned off Ukrainian television and began showing us Russian TV instead.'

'You know the rest of the story,' he says. 'The rebels put up barricades, they were given weapons - the police supported them, too. Russia helped supply weapons and men. The situation is similar to Somalia.'

'The propaganda was very effective. A lot of people believe that Ukraine is composed of fascists. They think they're under threat, and only the rebels can protect them.'

I asked him how he knew that the rebels' equipment was Russian. 'I saw the Chechens with my own eyes.' (Fighters from a Russian oblast who were ostensibly called to join the rebels in Eastern Ukraine.)

'The separatists are stealing cars, stealing people. They take everything and anything they want. That's when my parents stopped supporting them - when they saw what they were doing to Luhansk. That's when the propaganda didn't work anymore.'

'Many of my friends moved to Russia, some don't speak to me anymore. I hear similar stories here in the West, where people's relatives cut ties - the propaganda is that terrible.' Here, I can relate to him. My aunt in St. Petersburg doesn't speak to us anymore and is disappointed that we don't support the annexation of Crimea by Russia.

As soon as the separatists began a military operation, this 20-something IT specialist packed up a suitcase, stuffed 10,000 hryvnias into his pocket (the equivalent of \$870), and got on a train headed to the West. 'I set off into the complete unknown,' he says, 'I knew no one. I didn't know where I was going to live, I didn't know where I was going to work. But I wasn't going to go back.'

Over the course of the military conflict in the East of Ukraine, the UN estimates well over 100,000 Ukrainians have left their homes. Many don't like calling themselves refugees, they prefer the term 'migrants.' Many have fled to cities like Lviv, Kyiv and a portion have even crossed the border into Russia. There's hardly a vacant apartment left in Kyiv, and those that are, are listed at astronomical prices. Jobs are scarce, and many have had to take up jobs as taxi drivers, gradually learning the roads as they go.

The Ukrainian military campaign against the separatists may be nearing an end, but the conflict isn't cooling down yet. Infrastructure in the regions of Donetsk and Luhansk has taken a massive hit which many say will take years to rebuild. Russia is also massing troops on its border, and the threat of a Russian invasion to support their weakened rebels has become more apparent.

But despite those Ukrainians who have fled their homes, many still remain in the middle of the conflict. Hiding in basements from shelling or explosions, without electricity, water, or food, and no way out of the city. For all its military success, little attention has been paid to the people caught in the middle.

Focused on among other things, economic reform, parliamentary elections and sanctioning Russia, the questions of where the displaced Ukrainians will live and work remain to be answered.