

# *Professional situation of the Ukrainian actors during the Russian aggression against Ukraine*

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The paper presents the professional situation of Ukrainian actors after the outbreak of war in February 2022. The data presented here concern the different needs and possibilities of supporting Ukrainian actors living abroad and those displaced within Ukraine. The article presents possible differences in the situation of actors in Ukraine and abroad and how much chance Ukrainian actors currently have to follow up on their acting career.

**KEYWORDS:** actors, Ukrainian film, war in Ukraine

The Russian army's invasion of Ukraine that began on 24 February 2022 came as a surprise to Europe's politicians and citizens, although it can be seen as an escalation of the conflict ongoing since 2014 and the annexation of the Crimea. The first months of the war generated a great wave of Ukrainian war refugees, largely women and children, which Europe had not seen for a long time. By mid-September 2022, close to 5 million individual refugees from Ukraine had been recorded across the EU and other OECD countries,[1] and nearly 7.9 million as of December 2022. The European Union countries have granted Ukrainians fleeing the war necessary immigration concessions, while other countries have also taken different measures to enable Ukrainians entry and stay in their countries. As of the end of 2022 we can, however, already risk stating that although the prompt reaction of the EU countries was impressive and generous, there is still a lack of systemic long-term solutions on how to accommodate, legalize and professionally integrate the unprecedented number of people who have fled Ukraine. Consecutively, more than 6 million refugees decided to return to Ukraine after the first shock of war, according to the International Organization for Migration.[2]

[1] OECD, *International Migration Outlook 2022*, Paris 2022.

[2] International Organization for Migration (IOM), *Ukraine Returns Report*, September 2022, <https://tinyurl.com/4hauX6yw> (accessed: 30.06.2023).

The aim of the paper is to present the professional situation of Ukrainian actors after the events of February 2022. The data used in the paper was collected by means of a questionnaire. In a direct message through the platform for Ukrainian actors: [aktorky-ta-aktory.org](http://aktorky-ta-aktory.org) actors registered on the platform, actors in or from Ukraine were invited to take part in an anonymous online questionnaire in the Ukrainian language on the situation of professionals in the performing arts. A total of 122 interviews (a 17% response rate) were collected within a week in November 2022.<sup>[3]</sup> It builds on the already existing structure and proof of concept of the Pan-European initiative called *Aktorky ta Aktory* ([www.aktorky-ta-aktory.org](http://www.aktorky-ta-aktory.org)). This initiative was established by leading European institutions and associations of filmmakers to create an international network of Ukrainian actors which could connect them with one another, as well as with leading European casting directors, agencies and filmmakers. The main goal was to help them integrate as professionals among EU filmmakers. The project was established by the German-based IT company *Denkungsart* that runs EU-based services for actors as [www.castupload.com](http://www.castupload.com) and [www.filmmakers.de](http://www.filmmakers.de), and thus used its already established network as a digital backbone.

The platform [aktorky-ta-aktory.org](http://aktorky-ta-aktory.org) was launched in June 2022 and is available free of charge to professional actors from Ukraine. The platform, which was launched initially together with the German Federal Acting Association BFFS and the Alliance of Producers in Germany, has received wide official support from multiple film and theatre organizations working in the performance sector: VDA (Association of Agencies for Film, Television and Theater e.V.), ARDA (Association of French Casting Directors), PCDG (Polish Casting Directors Guild), VOECD (Association of the Austrian Casting Directors), CDG (The Casting Directors' Guild of Great Britain & Ireland), Academy of Austrian Films, German Film Academy e.V., SSFV (Swiss Union Film and Video), t. Swiss Theater Professionals, *SzeneSchweiz*, Dutch Directors Guild, ACT (Association for Professional Actors in the Netherlands), ZZAP (Polish Actors Trade Union), Dutch Casting Society's, BVC (Bundesverband Casting e.V.), CSA (Casting Society of America), ICDN (International Casting Directors Network), VOFTP (Flemish Independent Film and Television Producers), Pact (the UK screen sector trade body), UICD (Italian Union of Casting Directors), FIA (International Federation of Actors in France) and the APA (the UK Advertising Producers Association).

Currently, there are 1,131 professional Ukrainian actors registered in the database, most of them with public profiles. The main goal of the initiative is to give visibility to actors from Ukraine who had to leave their country and/or their professional employment because of

[3] The questionnaire was received by 719 Ukrainian actors registered at *Aktorky ta Aktory* who expressed the wish to be contacted through the database. The

answers ratio of the 122 collected responses stands at 17%.

the war or were displaced within other places in Ukraine. Aktorky ta Aktory is operated on the technical infrastructure of Castupload (EU wide casting system) and the profiles are integrated into the established network of casting directors, production companies, actors' databases and associations of filmmakers. The supporting associations promote the visibility and the integration of the Ukrainian actors into the European industry.

This research shows that more than half (55.7%) of the Ukrainian actors that took part in the questionnaire are currently living outside of Ukraine, with the majority of them living in large cities of Germany, Poland, the United Kingdom and Spain. The fact that they are not entirely settled there can be observed through the fact that 9.8% of the respondents are planning to move to another country within the next 6 months and 42.6% are not excluding such a possibility. These results correspond with the overall location structure of Ukrainian actors registered in the Aktorky ta Aktory database, where over 60% of the registered professionals declare they are currently living abroad (with most living in Poland and Germany).

The chance of finding employment as an actor depends greatly on the exposure they receive through their participation in casting calls, relationships with casting directors and the ability to secure an agent in their respective country of residence. However, these factors lose in importance in the situation where actors living in the countries in which the majority of the projects within the audiovisual industry are conducted in the language not mastered or even not known to the respective actors. In the case of displaced actors, the lack of language skills often makes it impossible for them to take on available roles. Of the 1,131 professional Ukrainian actors with a profile on the Aktorky ta Aktory platform, most declare being able to speak Russian and English fluently, with German, Polish and other European languages being significantly less represented. The full list of all foreign languages spoken by the actors who took part in the questionnaire can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1. Foreign languages spoken by the Ukrainian actors

Out of the 1.131 adult & professional Ukrainian actors with a profile at A&A, the following number stated that they also speak fluently...		
709	Russian	63%
409	English	36%
50	German	4%
39	Polish	3%
21	French	2%
14	Spanish	1%
14	Italian	1%

Source: own research.

Focusing on the current employment status of the Ukrainian actors, the majority have not been professionally active within the last 6 months, with only 4.9% of the respondents stating that they were able to continue their career as a full-time actor (see Table 2).

Table 2. Employment status of the Ukrainian actors

Within the last 6 months, how much have you worked as an actor/actress?	N=122
not at all	29.5%
only one smaller opportunity	18.0%
several smaller opportunities	27.0%
I had at least one bigger role	12.3%
I was quite busy	8.2%
full time work as an actor/actress	4.9%

Source: own research.

The most popular kind of employment for the Ukrainian actors has been theatrical appearance and participation in commercials. Within the projects not specified in Table 3, the actors mentioned mostly YouTube projects, music videos and dubbing opportunities.

Table 3. Employment trends of the Ukrainian actors

Within the last 6 months, what projects were you involved in as an actor/actress? (multiple answers possible)	N=122
feature film	16.4%
theatre play	33.6%
short film	18.0%
TV production	16.4%
commercial	20.5%
photo shoot	17.2%
other	31.1%

Source: own research.

Once engaged in projects, Ukrainian actors mostly took leading or main parts (63.1%). In a comparison between the groups of Ukrainian actors who stayed in Ukraine and those who fled the country, the actors living abroad tend to be more often unemployed, with only 1% working full time as an actor. At the same time, although the war in Ukraine has influenced the performance industry, as well as other creative sectors, the actors who have decided to stay in Ukraine, or in the meantime have come back to the country, are relatively more often engaged in the projects, as can be seen in Table 4.

Table 4. Ukrainian actors workload against their current country of residence

Within the last 6 months, how much have you worked as an actor/actress?	total answers N=122	Which country are you currently living in?	
		answer "Ukraine" N=54	answer "other country" N=68
not at all	30%	17%	40%
only one smaller opportunity	18%	22%	15%
several smaller opportunities	27%	26%	28%
I had at least one bigger role	12%	17%	9%
I was quite busy	8%	9%	7%
full-time work as an actor/actress	5%	9%	1%

Source: own research.

Furthermore, the participants were asked to rate their agreement with standardized statements regarding a possible personal benefit. With a large majority of positive answers, the users of the platform saw a benefit in attending courses and training related to their skills or if they could learn about the casting process from casting directors. Within the nine statements regarding professional training, language skills and aspects of networking, in every case the vast majority confirmed a possible benefit for themselves. Within all these statements in the form of "I would benefit from...", the most positive answer "I strongly agree" was given a minimum 54% of the answers. Focusing on the respondents who during the last 6 months had only been involved in smaller roles and projects, it is visible that they express a stronger wish for support from casting directors with regard to understanding the casting process. On the other hand, they express a very similar rate of agreement in terms of the need to improve their language skills compared to answers of all respondents.

With the aim of an open, non-biased research approach, participants were further asked an open question about what would support them to be more successful as an actor. The elements mentioned most often were networking, training and language skills. The aspect of networking, in the way of either the exchange of experience, professional guidance or in gaining access to casting directors and employment opportunities, was named in more than half of the written answers. Training, for example to develop skills or receive feedback, and especially to improve language skills, was also mentioned in about half of the cases.

The expressed need to secure an agent should be presented in the wider context. According to the sources, only around 15% of German actors are represented by agents.[4] As for the professional adult actors

[4] P. Jacobshagen, *Schauspieler*, FILMRECHT.com, <https://www.filmrecht.com/schauspieler.html> (accessed: 5.01.2023).

in the European Union registered on Castupload and filmmakers.one (the largest and oldest actor databases in the EU), the numbers are relatively higher and add up to 56% of the registered 55,324 profiles which have an agent attached. At the same time, in DACH territories it is 57% of the 30,327 registered actors. Compared to them, the results of the Ukrainian actors registered within the Aktorky ta Aktory database are not dramatically lower, standing at 32% of 1,131 Ukrainian profiles. The founders of the platform boast the relationship between the platform and the Association of Agencies for Film, Television and Theater VdA,[5] which volunteered to act as an interim agency for all actors from Ukraine, representing them for free until they find a respective agency, and represent 58% of the Ukrainian actors represented by an agent within the Aktorky ta Aktory. So far over 40 actors represented temporarily by the VdA were able to find their own agency within the last 6 months. At the same time, 13.1% of the survey respondents state they were able to secure an agent in their current countries of residence, with 42.6% claiming not to have been able to do so, despite their efforts. These results may have their source in the fact that some respondents do not see the service offered by the VdA, which in fact is an association of agents, as a service offered by a talent agency as such.

The results of the type of employment exercised by the respondents of the survey (see Table 5) show that there is a relatively similar number of Ukrainian actors currently having to work in other fields than acting with most of the cases outside of the performing industry being limited to part-time activities such as event announcers, entertainers at parties, acting teachers, translators, photographers or volunteers. These activities take up 2 to 30 hours a week of their time with a slightly higher number on the part of the respondents who are currently living outside Ukraine.

Table 5. Involvement of the Ukrainian actors in employment outside of acting

Do you currently work in another job than being an actor/actress?	total answers N = 121	Which country are you currently living in?	
		answer "Ukraine" N = 54	answer "other country" N = 67
No	51%	44%	57%
Yes (I'm working as)	49%	56%	43%

Source: own research.

As regards the benefits of being registered in the Aktorky ta Aktory database, most respondents are aware of the advantages of having an

[5] VdA, Association of Agencies for Film, Television and Theater e.V., is an association of 69 talent agencies within the audiovisual sector in Germany. At the same time, VdA represents more than 3600 actors and filmmakers. Within the Aktorky-ta-Aktory the

VdA has offered to initially represent the registered members and help them find their respective agents, with currently 212 registered Ukrainian actors using the offered service, <https://www.castupload.com/agents/vda-aktorky-ta-aktory> (accessed: 4.01.2023).

up-to-date profile on an international platform that enables them to browse international casting calls, have a profile on the platform used by the casting directors in Europe, and take part in online masterclasses with casting directors.

The results of this study help to shed light on the professional situation of Ukrainian actors currently living outside Ukraine. The situation is in constant flux, as more people might leave the country or move back to Ukraine. Nevertheless, the participants' responses in this study point to possible approaches to support actors in other countries. Beyond basic language courses, the need to integrate into the professional network of performing arts is expressed. Initiatives such as Aktorky ta Aktory have proven to provide a service that meets actors' needs in making themselves visible to the international industry, as well as facilitating the networking process, thanks to the extensive list of organizations and associations, mostly casting directors, from various European countries. At the same time, initiatives such as Film-makers for Ukraine or UA Talents provide databases for cross-border offers for representatives of the creative sector from Ukraine in various countries of Europe.

International Organization for Migration (IOM), *Ukraine Returns Report*, September 2022, <https://tinyurl.com/4haux6yw> (accessed: 30.06.2023)  
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## B I B L I O G R A P H Y