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Volosevych, Inna

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## Conducting Surveys During Wartime: A Personal Reflection

Inna Volosevych (Info Sapiens, Kyiv)

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This contribution, written by Inna Volosevych in the summer of 2023, describes the personal experiences of the deputy director of Info Sapiens in conducting surveys in Ukraine during the first year of the full-scale invasion. It is an excerpt from the forthcoming book “Russia’s War in Ukraine 2022. Personal Experiences of Ukrainian Scholars”, edited by Tetiana Kostyuchenko and Tamara Martsenyuk. The edited volume will be published in the “Ukrainian Voices” series by Ibidem later in 2024.

The Ukrainian Analytical Digest is grateful to the publisher, the editors and the author for permission to publish the following passages.

### CATI Surveys in Wartime: Methodology and Organization

*“I hope you, your colleagues, families, and friends are safe during these very difficult times. What is the current state of Info Sapiens and are you still operating? Please let us know your situation so we can plan accordingly.”*

When I received this message, I asked my colleagues if they wanted to work, and most of them did—in the first three months of the war there was even a competition between them for taking the job because jobs were a rarity those days. I was very lucky that we had Wi-Fi in our bomb shelter and I was able to work—this was the only thing which prevented me from going insane. Our telephone interviewers said the same thing: they wanted to work, because work creates an illusion of normality in this nightmare.

The COVID-19 epidemic did not paralyze Info Sapiens’ work: in 2020, we arranged remote work and launched our “Virtual CATI (Computer Assisted Telephone Interviews) Studio” through which interviewers work at home and number dialing, recording and control are organized centrally.

The first challenge was methodological: How can we build a sample in a situation of unprecedented external and internal migration? The only solution was to build it according to pre-war settlement, so we had to ask two questions: 1) Where did you live before the onset of the full-scale war?; 2) Have you moved since then and, if yes, where do you live now? We also added a question asking whether the respondent is currently living on territory occupied in 2022.

Our first surprise was that the response rate was three times higher than it was before the war (and as of January 2023 it is still higher than the baseline). There are at least four possible explanations for this trend:

- People desire to inform the world about Ukraine (as we explained that this data will be published in Western media)

- People wish to share their experiences, emotions, and thoughts in this extreme situation.
- Increased empathy in Ukrainian society due to the war: people becoming kinder to each other, more helpful—even to telephone interviewers
- Increased free time due to higher unemployment (the response rate increased three times after the beginning of the invasion, and still sitting at twice pre-war)

The second surprise was language: 23% chose to have their interview conducted in Russian, while before the war 33% did this (and by the end of 2022 this figure further decreased to 14%). This was not particularly surprising, as over half of Info Sapiens employees are historically Russian-speaking (though most of them were bilingual and had always switched to Ukrainian while talking to Ukrainian-speaking colleagues), and after February 2022 most switched to using Ukrainian.

But the greatest shock were the results: Ukrainian society had changed drastically in a single week. Directly after the start of the invasion, suddenly 56% were against any promise that Ukraine not join NATO, even if such a concession would end the war (Info Sapiens, 2022a).<sup>1</sup> Before February 24, 2022, only 48% had supported NATO membership... (Nova Yevropa, 2020). Additionally, after February 24, 2022, 79% of Ukrainians were against the official recognition of the previously occupied areas of the Donbas region as part of Russia and 75% against the official recognition of Crimea as part of Russia, even if it ends the war.

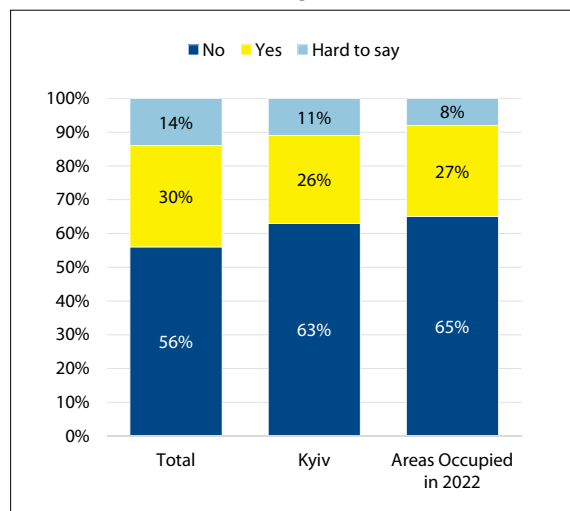
I lived near the town of Vasylykiv, about 20 km away from Kyiv, during the first days of the full-scale invasion. For eight days, dozens of rockets and bombs destroyed houses, schools and hospitals, and Russian paratroopers landing in our village shot civilians. During this time, I personally was ready to accept anything just to end the war. That’s why I was impressed by the courage of

<sup>1</sup> Later polls showed 85% support for NATO membership, almost twice as high as pre-2022 support—see “62% ukrayintsiv vvazhayut’, shcho viyna tryvatyme pivroku i bil’she, ale neprymyrymist’ shchodo postupok Rosiyi zrostaye.” 14.08.2022, Info Sapiens. <https://www.sapiens.com.ua/ua/publication-single-page?id=239>

Ukrainians who refused to accept Putin's conditions in order to end the war: not to enter NATO (though NATO doesn't call us), and not to maintain our claims on Crimea and the occupied Donbas (though at that time we did not have the military capacity to regain control over these territories).

I even supposed that people who reject Putin's conditions were those who didn't suffer from the bombs, but no: specifically among people in Kyiv who suffered from numerous rocket attacks and explosions, 86% are against recognizing the previously occupied areas of Donbas as part of Russia, 81% are against recognizing Crimea as a part of Russia, and 63% are against a ban on Ukraine entering NATO. What's more, these figures are also higher among residents of occupied areas than among the general population:

**Figure 1:** If It Guaranteed an Immediate End to the War, Which of the Following Scenarios, If Any, Would You Be Willing To Accept, Even If Reluctantly? [Statistics for Answer: "A Ban on Ukraine Entering NATO"]



Source: *Info Sapiens*, 2022a.

I personally agree with public opinion—if we accept Putin's requirements, evil will remain unpunished and the terror and atrocities will continue. Since 1991, Russia has launched 12 (!) local wars (Tsentr protydyi dezinformatsiyi pry RNBO Ukrayiny, 2022)—we have to stop this.

Before its publication, I unofficially asked a friend from the President's office whether they are all right with publication of this data and received no objections. That was the first survey on attitudes to Russian conditions for peace—it was even published in the *Washington Post* (*Washington Post*, 2022). At the same time, we received some critiques and concerns, specifically:

- One famous journalist wrote that wartime surveys have high volatility level and that we cannot trust them. Time has shown that he was wrong: the cited figures proved rather stable, and only slowly increased from March 2022 to the following January (and similar figures were later obtained by other research organizations): see Figure 2 on p. 8
- Our research colleague wrote that the question about acceptance of Russia's conditions is risky: what if we don't agree for neutral status 10,000 people would die? What about 100,000? I answered that we don't know how many people would die if we agree to neutral status and become even more defenseless given that Russia's promises are always lies. So we have agreed that it is hard to find an ideal formulation in this regard. He also asked from whom we had received permission to conduct this survey, and I said that we didn't receive prohibition, and we have agreed that, though according to the law there are no restrictions on conducting surveys during martial law, we still have to be careful with publishing the survey data

After receiving the survey results, we could immediately see that both Ukrainians living abroad and those living in areas occupied in 2022 are underestimated. Only 1% of respondents had moved abroad because of the war, compared to the official UN estimate of 1.5 million refugees (about 4% of the Ukrainian population). We also knew that in some occupied settlements there was no mobile connection during the sampling period. We have thus summarized the limitations of the wartime surveys compared to the surveys in 2014–2021 in the following way:

- Insufficient coverage of Ukrainians abroad (mainly due to roaming costs). In subsequent surveys we tried to compensate respondents for additional connection costs or to send a link to the questionnaire, but the coverage of this group was still insufficient—the only way to cover it is building an additional sample group (see in more details below)
- Insufficient coverage of residents of the areas temporarily occupied by Russia after February 24, 2022, in addition to previously occupied after 2014 (and where, as a result, Ukrainian mobile operators do not provide mobile telephone services).

As no one could ascertain the sex/age structure of emigrants/residents of occupied areas, the only solution was to use the pre-war demographic structure. The unweighted CATI sample in wartime conditions does not significantly differ from the pre-war sample (there was a small increase in the male population and fewer youth, but the difference is not drastic). Also, most surveyed Ukrainians abroad plan to return, and most surveyed residents of previously occupied areas want to

live in Ukraine, so we expect that the social structure of the country after the war will be close to its pre-war structure.

The blackouts in November–January created serious barriers for CATI surveys:

- Interviewers often didn't have electricity.
- Respondents often didn't have electricity and didn't want to drain their phone batteries by using them. Additionally, if they did have electricity, they were often in a hurry to complete household chores before it was cut off again.

Our solutions to these problems:

- Whereas in 2020 we had mothballed our CATI studio because of COVID-19 and organized a virtual one, in 2022 we had to restore it because of the war—that's how life in Ukraine looks like. We also have a generator in the office so the interviewers don't have to depend on the electrical grid to complete their work.
- We used CATI only for short surveys; for the long ones, we use the face-to-face method (f2f).

Photo 1: Operation Managers Preparing the CATI Studio

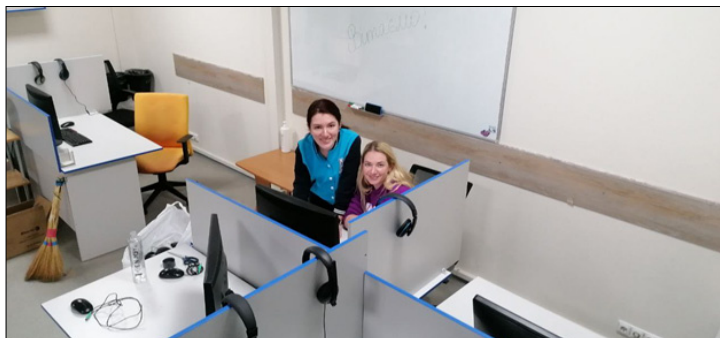


Photo: Ivan Hadji, 20.11.22

### Surveys of the Groups Not Covered by National CATI: Residents of Occupied Areas and Refugees

The Info Sapiens team conducted numerous surveys on occupied areas of Donbas and Crimea in 2014–2021, but in 2022 the repressions in these areas became much worse than those of the 2014–2021 period. As a result, we have taken the following decisions:

- To filter out the responses to political questions of residents of currently occupied areas answering all-Ukraine surveys, because answering political questions can be dangerous for them (as was mentioned above, the surveyed dwellers of areas occupied in 2022 were radically anti-Russian)
- Not to include political questions in surveys targeting occupied areas. In 2022, Info Sapiens conducted three surveys in Crimea and areas occupied in 2022, but these results are closed.

Also, when we perform qualitative surveys in occupied areas we never use video-recording—only audio or written notes.

As for the refugees, the only way to conduct representative surveys of this population is via mobile numbers. Almost all refugees still use Ukrainian mobile numbers for messengers—even if they switch off the mobile call services, they can still receive SMS messages. The mobile operators send SMS messages with the link to the survey to the owners of randomly selected mobile numbers in all countries proportionally to the amount of Ukrainian numbers located there, forming a representative sample. Info Sapiens has conducted three representative surveys of the Ukrainians abroad as of spring 2023.

### Face-to-Face Surveys in Wartime: Methodology and Organization

The first f2f surveys in wartime were launched in August 2022, but these were regional. The interviewers also reported a higher response rate compared to the pre-war period and as compared to CATI.

Info Sapiens possesses a nationwide network of interviewers and supervisors of about 700 persons and more than 200 devices (tablets) for CAPI (Computer Assisted Personal Interviews). This network was recovered in November 2022 when we launched the first all-Ukraine face-to-face survey (f2f). In 2023, f2f interviews were conducted in government-controlled areas of all oblasts of Ukraine except for Luhansk, which is totally occupied, and Donetsk and Kherson, which are mostly occupied.

We have also faced methodological challenges: if the CATI method provides simple random selection of respondents, CAPI requires building a sample in advance. The logical solution is to build sample according to recent CATI results of geographical distribution of the population (as it constantly changes) and then to weight the data on the basis of pre-war settlement. So, just as in CATI interviews we have put two questions to the respondents: 1) Where did you live before the full-scale war?; and 2) Have you moved and, if yes, where do you live now? From March 2022 to January 2023 the share of IDPs remained rather stable, varying from 15% to 19%. At the same time, the distribution of IDPs across oblasts varied significantly, some people leaving their homes, some returning to them, some relocating permanently.

The other challenge is blackouts, but these have a smaller negative influence on CAPI than on CATI.

### Qualitative Surveys in Wartime: Methodology and Organization

The respondents of quantitative and qualitative surveys have different levels of traumatic experiences, but the standard format of quantitative interviews is generally less sensitive. If the respondent begins to worry we teach interviewers the following:

- To suggest to take a pause in the interview (or to stop it entirely)
- To provide the contacts of hotlines for free psychological support or support of vulnerable groups

The qualitative surveys are much more complex, and moderators should take into account the emotional and psychological state of the respondents—for these reasons, we organize additional trainings for them. We also use additional, more in-depth screening of the potential respondents for loss and injuries due to the war, using advanced screening to gain a more in-depth understanding of a potential respondent’s profile.

In 2022, the proportion of IDIs (in-depth interviews) was higher in qualitative research because the most sensitive issues and topics should be studied by IDIs.

The respondents’ reflection can have different degrees and levels of emotional manifestations and reactions, especially critical for Focus Group Discussions (FGD)—depression, indignation, and tears.

The following basic behavior models for moderators/ interviewers are possible:

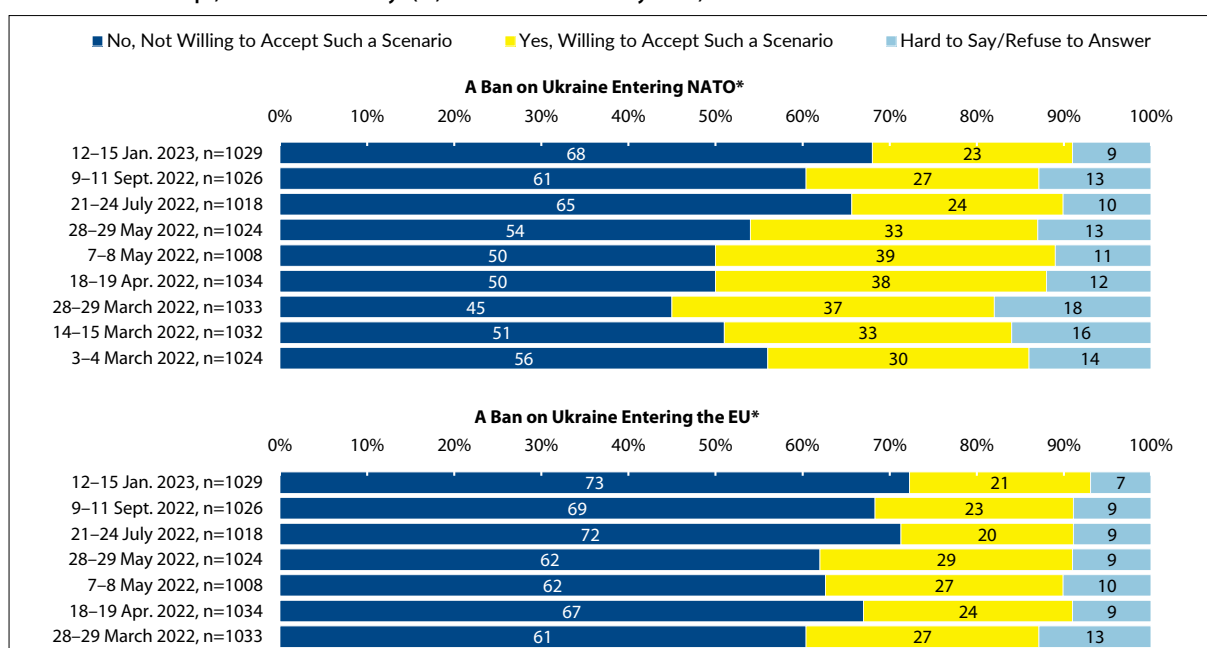
- Deep empathy—showing compassion and support, taking time to balance the respondent’s condition. Advantages: the respondents feel more trust and open up more. Disadvantages: the emotional atmosphere can interfere with the dynamics of FGD, which will lead to losses in terms of the amount of information received.
- Neutral behavior—average level of empathy, transition to less emotional issues. Advantages: the overall calmer atmosphere of the group is preserved, the dynamics are not lost. Disadvantages: individual respondents who had vivid emotional reactions may shut down, which will lead to the loss of some information.

We also use the CETA questionnaire provided by Center for Mental Health and Psychosocial Support of National University of Kyiv-Mohyla Academy, which we are very grateful for, to check the psychological support needs of the interviewers/moderators and respondents.

*About the Author*

Inna Volosevych has a Master’s degree in Sociology from the National University of Kyiv-Mohyla Academy and is the Deputy Director of Info Sapiens research agency. She has more than 15 years of working experience in survey research and has managed more than 1,000 social research projects. During March 2023 – February 2024 she was a ZOiS fellow in Berlin, where she worked on a research project monitoring the impact of the war on the Ukrainian population.

**Figure 2: Most Ukrainian Don’t Accept the Ban on Entering NATO and EU as a Condition of the War’s End If It Guaranteed an Immediate End to the War: Which of the Following Scenarios, If Any, Would You Be Willing to Accept, Even If Reluctantly? (% , March 2022 – January 2023)**



\*During the 5<sup>th</sup> wave of research, we were criticized for the word “ban” because it provokes protest and formally no one can forbid Ukraine from joining one or another union. We believe that Russia is blackmailing Ukraine by murdering and torturing Ukrainians, so the word “ban” is appropriate. At the same time, we conducted an experiment when half of the respondents were asked about the “ban on joining NATO/EU”, and half about “Ukraine promises not to join NATO/EU”. The differences are statistically insignificant.

Source: Presentation by Inna Volosevych: The main changes in the Ukrainian society after the launch of the full-scale war