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## Auto-biographies of Ukrainian war refugees. From forced migration to anchoring\*\*\*

**Keywords:** *Ukrainian war refugees, forced migrations, anchoring, autobiography*

**Abstract:** *This article aims to present the Ukrainian war refugees' experience. Twenty-one interviews focused on autobiographical memoirs of Ukrainian war refugees were collected during the field research project in Poland and Germany in the summer and autumn of 2022. The text aimed to point out the peculiarities of Ukrainian refugeeism in the context of its specificity related to the evolution of the phenomenon of migration and forced migration over recent years in Central Europe. The content was analyzed for the fleeing and adaptive context of personal experience. It considers social ties, including family ties, which appeared in the interviewees' statements. The studied material insights into the course of the war in Ukraine in 2022 from the perspective of civilians. It shows numerous and diverse examples of survival and adaptation activities under armed attacks, during the evacuation, border crossing, and anchoring in the places of their new residence. Due to the dominance of women in the sample, these examples can contribute to the analysis of the specificity of female migration, which differs from the previous profiles of economic migration in the region.*

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## Introduction

The beginning of the third decade of the new millennium brought a series of crises to the citizens of Europe, in particular Central and Eastern Europe. As a result of the Russian aggression against Ukraine, the enormous wave of war refugees since 1945 has appeared in European countries since February 2022. They leave Ukraine, crossing the borders of the neighboring countries. Citizens and NGOs in the host countries have spontaneously organized or joined aid initiatives, and simultaneously various forms and assistance programs for refugees were launched<sup>1</sup>. This was the case, for example, on the Polish-Ukrainian border, where young volunteers, boy and girl scouts were on duty. After a few days, they were handed over to state organizations or at reception points for refugees operated by volunteers, who gradually handed over their responsibilities to non-governmental and state organizations. The mass arrival of war refugees met with a massive social reaction in the host countries<sup>2</sup>, to mention at least 35% of the refugees declared that after leaving Ukraine, they lived with local volunteers at no charge<sup>3</sup>. Other forms of material assistance through various fundraisers also spontaneously took part, and a lot of evidence of symbolic support for Ukraine and its inhabitants appeared in the public space – Ukrainian flags hung on public and private buildings, similarly, “we are with you” stickers in Ukrainian, and many others. Subtitles and announcements in Ukrainian appeared in schools, health centers, shops, and many other places, and many press titles, including Polish Radio, launched special broadcasts in Ukrainian with the participation of Ukrainian journalists. War refugees gradually became increasingly integrated with local labor markets and became visible in shops, public spaces, cultural institutions, and museums. Ukrainian children attend local schools and kindergartens and play on playgrounds. Ukrainian youth socialize with their local acquaintances.

The text aimed to point out the peculiarities of Ukrainian refugeeism in the context of its specificity related to the evolution of migration and forced migration over recent years. Two significant elements of this specificity are unique: the consequent continuity of the phenomenon of forced migration of Ukrainians since 2014 and the gender specificity of the phenomenon. Some-

<sup>1</sup> See: <https://data.unhcr.org/en/situations/ukraine>, <https://www.unhcr.org/ukraine-emergency.html>; [https://reporting.unhcr.org/ukraine-situation#\\_ga=2.185031849.1434551828.1666686297-1668202912.1666686297](https://reporting.unhcr.org/ukraine-situation#_ga=2.185031849.1434551828.1666686297-1668202912.1666686297) (10/01/2023).

<sup>2</sup> M. Feliksiak, B. Roguska, *Polacy wobec rosyjskiej inwazji na Ukrainę*, cbos.pl 38/2022.

<sup>3</sup> J. Isański, M. Nowak, M.A. Michalski, V. Sereda, H. Vakhitova, *Social reception and inclusion of refugees from Ukraine*, UKREF research report 1/2022, DOI: 10.13140/RG.2.2.28450.91845.

times overlooked is also the historical context that triggered massive waves of migration and forced migration in contemporary Central Europe. Without its causal context, contemporary social dynamics will not be comprehensible.

Looking at the context, one can analyze it through the prism of metaphors of anchor or anchoring, which takes place in various places of working and living. The theoretical concept framed around this metaphor has been conceptualized and operationalized over the last 10 years. Notably, using the concept of anchoring<sup>4</sup> does not mean breaking ties with the place of origin. This concept has been used in migration since 2013, forming the basis for subsequent studies. Important in the choice of this conceptualization is the focus on migrant adaptations to a greater extent than the integration often present in migration studies. The specifics of the case drive the choice here under review. Irrespective of the harsh wartime conditions, many war refugees visit their sites of origin and relatives remaining there and maintain various forms of contact with them. In our text, we want to present the family relationships based on the anchoring context modified by the experiences of forced migration.

## Historial context

The specificity of war refugees, or forced migration, has revised the core of operationalizing discussions on migration phenomena. The broader context of such migrations, going beyond typical phenomena of workforce movements and their impact on the world and particular societies<sup>5</sup> brings other meanings to mind. The Ukrainian war refugee movement exemplifies this assumption in a specific situational context. As British-Polish historian Norman Davies writes: “none other nation suffered more from Russia than Ukraine”<sup>6</sup>, to mention the 1930s and the time of forced collectivization and Holodomor,

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<sup>4</sup> A. Grzymała-Kazłowska, *Od tożsamości i integracji do społecznego zakotwiczenia – propozycja nowej koncepcji teoretycznej*, 2013 CMR Working Papers 64/122; A. Grzymała-Kazłowska, *Social Anchoring: Immigrant Identity, Security and Integration Reconnected?*, «Sociology» 2015, no. 1, pp. 1–17, DOI: 10.1177/0038038515594091; A. Grzymała-Kazłowska, L. Ryan, *Bringing anchoring and embedding together: theorizing migrants’ lives over-time*, «Comparative Migration Studies» 2022, no. 10: 46, <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40878-022-00322-z>.

<sup>5</sup> See: I. Goldin, G. Cameron, M. Balarajan, *Exceptional People. How Migration Shaped Our World and Will Define Our Future*, Princeton University Press 2011; U. Apitzsch, *Migrationsbiographien als Orte transnationaler Räume*, [in:] U. Apitzsch, J. Mechthild, (eds.), *Migration, Biographie und Geschlechterverhältnisse*, Münster Westfälisches Dampfboot. / in: K. Kaźmierska (ed.), *Metoda biograficzna w socjologii. Antologia tekstów*, Kraków 2012.

<sup>6</sup> N. Davies, *Mala Europa. Szkice polskie*, Kraków 2022, p. 15.

with millions of casualties<sup>7</sup>. Even during WWII, the territory of Ukraine suffered from the Stalinist strategy of burned ground and mass deportations<sup>8</sup>. While the present-day cruelties and war crimes evoke the past shockingly. As a result, war refugeeism is not only a form of surviving a situation of war and existential threat but also a training ground for the adaptation and participation of refugees in host societies of particular interest because of its socio-demographic specificity.

It is worth considering the term refugees in the title context, as it illustrates comparatively accurately the status of war migration. Let us recall the definitions of the concept from the 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol removing temporal and spatial restrictions: a refugee is “a person who owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it”<sup>9</sup>. In this case, however, the legal context of refugee protection was less relevant to us, given the solutions adopted, for example, in Poland. The decision to use the term forced migration stems from the extensive literature on women’s migration issues and a broader definition.

What is important here is the specificity of the experiences of Ukrainian war refugees, distinguishing them from earlier, mainly economic, migrations of Ukrainians to European countries. The latter topic is well described in the literature<sup>10</sup>. The difference in the wave of war refugees who have been leaving Ukraine since the beginning of 2022 is related not only to the reasons

<sup>7</sup> T. Snyder, *Bloodlands. Europe between Hitler and Stalin*, New York 2010; M.J. Chodakiewicz, *Intermarium. The Land between the Black and Baltic Seas*, New Brunswick (U.S.A.) and London (U.K.) 2016.

<sup>8</sup> N. Davies, *Mała...*, p. 15.

<sup>9</sup> C.B. Keely, E.P. Kraly, *Concepts of Refugee and Forced Migration: Considerations for Demographic Analysis*, [in:] H.M. Graeme, J. Abbasi-Shavazi, E.P. Kraly, (eds.), *Demography of refugee and forced migration*, New York 2004, pp. 23–24.

<sup>10</sup> O. Fedyuk, M. Kindler, (eds.), *Ukrainian migration to the European Union. Lessons from migration studies*, IMISCOE Research Series 2016; M. George, *Migration Traumatic Experiences and Refugee Distress: Implications for Social Work Practice*, «Clinical Social Work Journal» 2012, no. 40, pp. 429–437; N. Harney, *Migrant strategies, informal economies and ontological security: Ukrainians in Naples, Italy*, «International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy» 2012, vol. 32, no. 1/2, DOI: 10.1108/01443331211201725; V. Volodko, *Transnational family practices of Ukrainian female labour migrants in Poland*, [in:] J. Isański, P. Luczys, (eds.), *Selling One’s favourite Piano to emigrate: Mobility patterns in Central Europe at the beginning of the 21st century*, Cambridge 2011.

for their departure<sup>11</sup>. Still, it is also associated with the socio-demographic characteristics of the migrant diaspora. At first glance: it is very much feminized<sup>12</sup>. Women cross the border with Poland, mainly with children and relatives. They constitute over 90% of people granted a PESEL number entitling Poland to state health care, education, legal employment, and other forms of care. However, such a composition of the migrant diaspora determines not only specific needs. It is also related to the uniqueness of adaptation specificity in new settings which relates to the issue of identity. As suggested by Grzymala-Kazłowska and Ryan: "Anchors are specific points of reference and support which might be analytically distinguished, including not only new but also the established ones that might be simultaneously maintained by migrants, for example, in their countries of origin"<sup>13</sup>. The scale of arrivals of war refugees from Ukraine is enormous – by March 2023, it exceeded 10 million crossings of the Ukrainian-Polish border. It should be mentioned that the traffic at the border is also taking place on a much larger scale than before, and over 7 million people entered Ukraine from Poland from February 2022 to February 2023<sup>14</sup>.

The functioning of various anchors, both in the place of origin and in the area of migratory destination and residence, modifies the trajectories of their fates. It also influences the reactions to emerging challenges and allows the tamed temporality process to be maintained. Analyzing the case of Ukrainian refugees a little deeper, it is essential to see that the phenomenon has a more extended history, with the beginning of the conflict in 2014. It set in motion the first wave of internal refugees within Ukraine and the sensation of international migration, mainly seen in a labor context. What seems essential is that this former refugee wave had a rather masculinized character. Also, the networks of relationships created earlier gave rise to at least some refugee decisions. What is important is that, to a certain extent, as a consequence of this new phase of the war, the masculinized migration was replaced by a chain

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<sup>11</sup> E.G. Ravenstein, *The Laws of Migration*, «Journal of the Royal Statistical Society» 1889, vol. 52, no. 2.

<sup>12</sup> M. Duszczyk, P. Kaczmarczyk, *War and migration: the recent influx from Ukraine into Poland and possible scenarios for the future*, «CMR Spotlight» 2022, no. 4(39), April 2022; M. Duszczyk, P. Kaczmarczyk, *The war in Ukraine and migration to Poland: outlook and challenges*, «Intereconomics», May 2022, DOI: 10.1007/s10272-022-1053-6; R.M. Staniszewski, *Spółeczna percepcja uchodźców z Ukrainy, migrantów oraz działań podejmowanych przez rząd Mateusza Morawieckiego – raport z badania opinii publicznej*, June 2022, DOI: 10.13140/RG.2.2.17930.34243; J. Isański et al., *Social...*, DOI: 10.13140/RG.2.2.28450.91845.

<sup>13</sup> A. Grzymala-Kazłowska, L. Ryan, *Bringing anchoring and embedding together...*

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.strazgraniczna.pl/> (22.03.2023).

migration with a different gender specificity and a significant presence of older people and children. Based on these early established relationships, migrants take up professional activities, look for a place to live for themselves and their families, send their children to school, and visit relatives left behind in Ukraine. All this with more or less fluidity of ordinary, everyday life practices. The repetition of these situations, which is visible in the accounts of our interlocutors, allows us to search for generalizations and patterns that go beyond individual experience<sup>15</sup>.

The emergence of Ukrainian war refugees brought another necessity for a new look at international migrations. As Ryan points out concerning reflections from the beginning of the new millennium: "Writing at the start of the 21st century, Russell King (2002) called for the deconstruction of traditional migration dichotomies such as transience and permanence. He pointed to the 'multiplicity and variety of types of migration and movement' that challenge simplistic migration 'polar types'"<sup>16</sup>. King pointed out, among other things, the change in the sphere of production and the transition to post-Fordism (Europe's departure, for example, from multiscale, masculinized – industry to specialized production and the growing demand for specialized skills) and the associated descriptions: such as the belief that the poor or poorly educated emigrate<sup>17</sup>. Accepting King's assumptions, however, we reach deep into the past conceptualization of the classic culturalist context that researchers of the phenomenon will associate with studies carried out in Chicago in the 1920s. Recent events unexpectedly add a new chapter to this perspective, providing an opportunity to observe and participate in large-scale processes and analyze their implications using the concepts of adaptation and anchoring already used about Ukrainian migrants before 2022<sup>18</sup>.

The feminization of Ukrainian forced emigration also leads to more practical questions about the specifics of "woman in exile" here and now and in the future. So the research questions approach: what are the experiences of female Ukrainian war refugees? How many declared settle and anchor in their current places of residence, and how many were waiting to return to their place of ori-

<sup>15</sup> D. Riffe, S. Lacy, F. Fico, *Analyzing Media Messages. Using Quantitative Content Analysis in Research. Third Edition*, Routledge 2014, p. 139.

<sup>16</sup> L. Ryan, *Narratives of Settling in Contexts of Mobility: A Comparative Analysis of Irish and Polish Highly Qualified Women Migrants in London*, «International Migration» 2018, no. 57(1), p. 1, DOI: 10.1111/imig.12493.

<sup>17</sup> R. King, *Toward a New Map of European Migration*, «International Journal of Population Geography» 2002, no. 8, pp. 89–106, <https://doi.org/10.1002/ijpg.246>, pp. 89–90.

<sup>18</sup> A. Grzymała-Kazłowska, A. Brzozowska, *From Drifting to Anchoring. Capturing the Experience of Ukrainian Migrants in Poland*, «Central and Eastern European Migration Review» 5 January 2017, pp. 1–22, DOI: 10.17467/ceemr.2017.04.

gin as soon as possible? What factors determine their choice of living in exile, and what is the durability of ethnic and social ties (with their family members, friends, and acquaintances)? What kind of personal experiences after arrival have refugees received in their countries of residence?

## **Autobiographical context of the research and anchoring**

Our research design meets the conditions relevant to the study of autobiography, which "... is not static, i.e., it does not 'grow' simply by adding new events over the years, but consists in the constant restructuring of past events within the unpredictability of the present situation. In this sense, autobiography mainly refers to internal cognitive processes"<sup>19</sup>. In this context, looking for general process structures beyond the individual experience of responding to forced migration challenges was also essential<sup>20</sup>.

Therefore, it is necessary to mention the interactive and interpretative context of the migration experience treated as a derivative of the refugee trauma and the need for individuals' metamorphosis<sup>21</sup> in the place of a new residence. To analyze the traumatic migratory experience, and to build biographical trajectories on the axis of the analysis of the collected material<sup>22</sup>, we were also willing to investigate the adaptation practices. So, the concept of anchoring can be considered very useful in this case. It "highlights the needs for stability and security as well as migrant agency in attempts to fulfill these needs and stresses internal anchoring (e.g., cognitive and spiritual) in addition to other dimensions"<sup>23</sup>.

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<sup>19</sup> M. Kohli, *Biografie: relacje, tekst, metoda*, [in:] K. Kaźmierska (ed.), *Metoda biograficzna w socjologii. Antologia tekstów*, Kraków 2012, p. 129.

<sup>20</sup> U. Apitzsch, *Migrationsbiographien als Orte transnationaler Räume*, [in:] U. Apitzsch, J. Mechthild (eds.), *Migration, Biographie und Geschlechterverhältnisse*, Münster Westfälisches (2003/2012). *Dampfbboot.* / [in:] K. Kaźmierska (ed.), *Metoda biograficzna w socjologii. Antologia tekstów*, Kraków 2012, p. 609.

<sup>21</sup> F. Schütze, *Analiza biograficzna ugruntowana empirycznie w autobiograficznym wywiadzie narracyjnym. Jak analizować autobiograficzne wywiady narracyjne*, [in:] K. Kaźmierska (ed.), *Metoda biograficzna w socjologii. Antologia tekstów*, Kraków 2012, p. 158.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 158.

<sup>23</sup> A. Grzymala-Kazłowska, L. Ryan, *Bringing anchoring and embedding together...*, p. 7; see also: P. Tomczak, *Dlaczego kotwica kotwaczy? Przegląd mechanizmów i zasad działania heurystyki zakotwiczenia*, «Decyzje» 2017, no. 28; A. Trąbka, P. Pustułka, *Bees & butterflies: Polish migrants' social anchoring, mobility and risks post-Brexit*, «Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies» 2020, vol. 46, no. 13; A.W. Clopton, B. Finch, *Re-conceptualizing social anchors in community development: utilizing social anchor theory to create social capital's third dimension*, «Community Development» 2011, vol. 42, no. 1.



A critical analytical observation is that it is impossible to speak of a single anchor, but of a diversity of these in different natures. From this point of view, the presence and significance of specific ties is an empirical question to understand the specificity of the social process recorded in biographical stories, which is also defined by gender and the impossibility of breaking ties with the place of origin.

## **Data and findings**

We have divided the interview scenario into three blocks of general topics addressed in the biographic interview: (i) an introduction including sketching the biographical context and social and professional status of the refugee; (ii) the immediate causes and course of escape; and (iii) the anchoring context of a relationship with different actors with the receiving community and possible tensions (see Appendix 1). The questions asked were intended to capture individual refugee trajectories. The choice of interviews as a research technique was purposive, dictated by the specific moment in which we carried out the research: the first weeks and months of staying in a new place, with vivid and current memories of the trip and the journey itself, allowed us to capture a methodologically fascinating situation. The data presented below were collected during 21 on-site and online In-Depth Interviews with Ukrainian war refugees who participated in the research project in the summer and autumn of 2022 in Poland and Germany. The interviews were conducted in Ukrainian, Polish, or English, with 17 women and four men. The interviews were recorded, transcribed in English, analyzed, and visualized using Atlas.ti software. The content of the interviews was translated into English before coding and analysis. Interviewees were selected from the former CAWI and CAPI research stage, and the transcripts of the pre-test interviews carried out as part of the research project transcripts were performed.

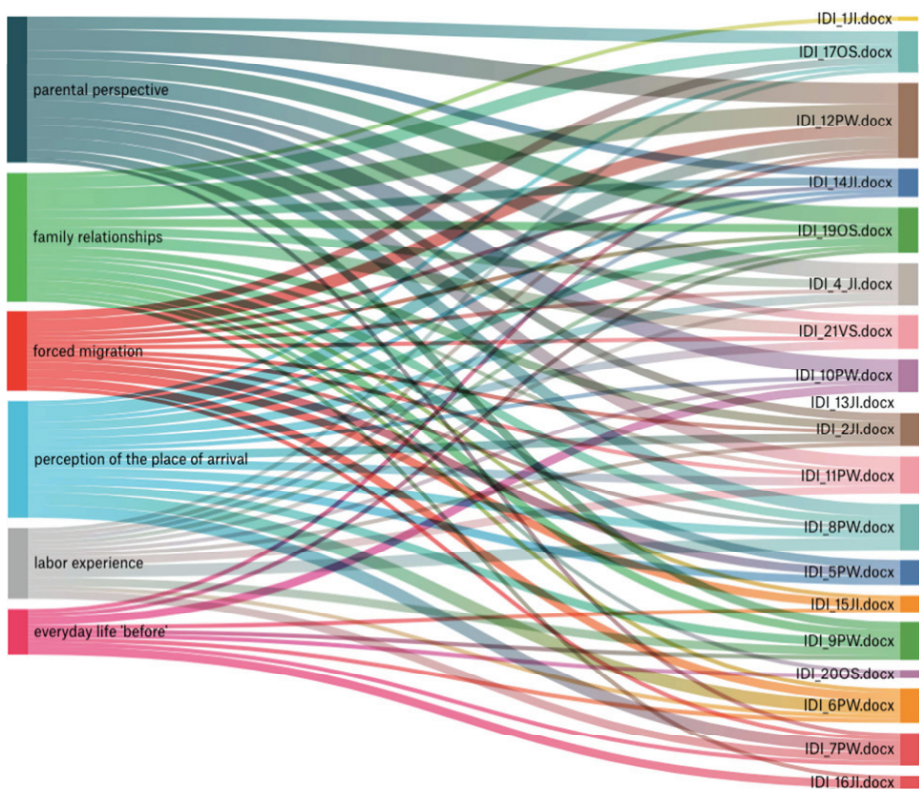
In further analysis, we focus on the autobiographical perspective of the individual experience of war refugees. Based on the transcript material, we selected the most common threads of the migration trajectories of our interlocutors: (1) the forced refugee experience, (2) autobiographical references to living conditions in the place of origin, (3) family relationships in the process of migration, (4) labor market issues, (5) perception of the places of arrival, with particular emphasis on social reception Ukrainian war refugees, and (6) children as a modifying factor. We find the above threads as 'typical' not only based on the frequency of their occurrence but mainly because of the similar reactions and the trajectory of forced migratory experience seen here. The analysis of the



main themes of the biographical stories of refugees will be followed in the form of bullet points. The visual presentation of the frequency of occurrence of the mentioned codes is presented on the chart below (see Picture 1).

What is noteworthy from the visualization of the dominant codes is that parental and family perspectives dominate in statements reconstructing refugee motives. The events' emotional (traumatic) context and the threat of special warfare appear less frequently. It can be seen that it is only by juxtaposing the two perspectives: situational circumstances and those related to the performance of social roles provides a basis for understanding the behaviour of refugee women. This also indirectly explains the co-occurrence of a number of anchors defining the 'bridging' condition of female forced migrants in the new place. A more detailed analysis aims to analyse which collocations and in connection with which topics particular codes occur.

**Picture 1.** The visual presentation of the frequency of occurrence of six selected codes in analyzed transcriptions of interviews, "parental perspective" and "family relationships" constitute the most numerous codes: 36 in each case; the thickness of each line is linked with the length of coded content



Source: own research.

(1) The first of the analyzed thread is connected with the individuals' perspective of forced migration. It occurs in the vast majority of interviews' content. It had various forms and meanings but constituted the main narration, followed by other issues. When analyzing the impact of unusual circumstances of departures, it should be remembered that civilians portray it as people not directly involved in armed fights but still touched by concerns about their safety and their relatives.

As mentioned, the migratory experience of forced departure was extensively described during the interviews. The immediate cause of departure was the lack of a sense of safety and, eventually, children – shelling of the city or region of residence, press reports about the deaths of civilians, or the destruction and damage to the urban infrastructure. The continuous lack of utilities (heating, water, food) or problems with access to food also motivated people to flee. The journey occurred in challenging conditions: ad hoc searching for accessible means of transport, crowds of people and the lack of access to information, uncertainty about the route, state of war restrictions for night routes, or the necessity to reach the country's border (especially the very last kilometers before the state border) on foot. In these circumstances, crossing the border clearly distinguishes between danger and safety. Below selected examples are presented with relatively short but very expressive words: "And here it all began! Such fear! They shoot and shoot and shoot. We are near Kyiv, so we can hear everything with a bang when flying to Kyiv! Bah! Bah! I scream to myself, crying. I moved into the basement, but I could hear everything, screaming and crying. That somehow... I feel sorry for the children. This fear is for their lot." (IDI\_21, female from Kyiv, aged 72).

Similar experiences occurred in other IDIs, too: "There is a TV tower in this area, and they said on TV that a rocket hit it. It was said that there were burnt people, a whole family. In the news, I also read how girls were raped in Kherison and hung on a tree. (...) I have a child, and I understand that if Russian soldiers rape girls, they can start raping children later. Unfortunately, it turned out to be right because what happened in Bucha and Irpin is... I can't find the words. I can't remember this without crying. (...) Her relatives came to my classmate – her brother's wife and the mother of her brother's wife and her niece. They came from Irpin; they endured all this for a long time. Their child was constantly lying in the bathroom because it was safer. They decided to leave when the shell flew into their kitchen. Then they realized that there was nowhere to live. They spent the night in the basement and boarded the last evacuation train." (IDI\_7, female from Kyiv, aged 29).

Other memoirs contain similar emotions and details: "In the beginning, it was still tolerable, but then these sounds of shots and bombs became more

and more frequent. Planes often flew in our direction, and we often ran out into the yard. The husband covered everything in the house that was in the house with strong foam, boards, and old doors. So that if something happens, if there is a blast wave, these fragments of windows and everything else will not harm us. The doors shook from these explosions. I have never experienced anything like this in my life. Many planes flew over us, and we could not recognize whether they were Ukrainian planes or Russian ones. The worst thing was that we did not know what would happen in the next second. There was no sense of security. And when I told the children to run under a load-bearing wall and cover themselves with blankets ... After seven days of staying in such conditions, I realized that our psyche could not stand it." (IDI\_12, female from Kharkiv, aged 36). And two additional quotations to provide other details about the insiders' perspective of military actions, bombings, and the necessity to escape with the family members: "Once when I was working in Kharkiv, and I heard bomb blasts, not near me but they were loud, and I heard them in the city when I was sitting in this rehabilitation center. I thought it was foolish to know about the danger and not leave this place." (IDI\_5, male from Kharkiv, aged 32).

"After this explosion, when the shell fell very close to our house, we realized the war had begun. When we ran out into the yard, people also ran out of different homes. We opened the bomb shelter we had in the next house and did not leave until the next morning. We slept on the ground with the children. It was terrifying. That's how the war started for me." (IDI\_6, woman from Kharkiv, aged 53).

Finding himself in the area of rocket or artillery fire and the risk of an accidental hit were the direct reasons for the decision to flee from the place of residence or stay. According to the accounts of our interlocutors, these decisions were made spontaneously. Local civil or military authorities did not encourage the evacuation, usually. Similarly, the journey was relatively poorly organized and very demanding for the old and the children. The refugees headed west and southwest of the country, trying to reach one of the big cities (Lviv, Vinnytsia) to transit and continue their route towards Poland, Romania, Bulgaria, or farther destinations like Denmark, Ireland, or Italy. The intention of these journeys was to the territory of Ukraine and the desire to cross the borders with one of the neighboring countries. The feeling of danger passed after reaching another country.

In most cases, our interlocutors mentioned that the volunteers who hosted them, members of non-governmental organizations, or relatives and friends of Ukrainians who had crossed the border earlier took over the role of subjective influence on their further fate. War trauma was mainly related to the need to

flee the sphere of warfare, the feeling of material loss, and the awareness of a radical change in the conditions of life so far. Notably, the escape (migration) carried out due to these factors was as organized as possible, using the available means of individual and collective transport, searching for information on safe routes, and contacting people who could provide various support. Our interlocutors usually talked about controlling their fate until we crossed the border.

(2) The above traumatic points might involve evoking former daily routines. Although slightly less frequent in the content of interviews, such threads help us to enlighten the unwanted change of daily routines and the necessity to adapt. The experience of everyday life 'before' the Russian invasion is made, for obvious reasons, from the perspective of the loss, highlighted with the need to suddenly abandon the current place of residence in terms of space and community (neighborly) life. Therefore, one interviewee recalled: "I had a wonderful life. I am a director and a teacher of acting and stage language. Before the war, until February 24, I worked at an art school with children, we staged plays, and I taught them. I also wrote scripts for music videos. I wrote plays staged by our theaters." (IDI\_6, woman from Kharkiv, aged 53). Another refugee, a farmer, mentioned a similar perspective of a stable life: "We lived well, we lived in our house, but we had two apartments and several cars. My husband was engaged in agriculture; we worked hard but were on our land. We had horses and cows. We had no problems with money." (IDI\_10, female from Krywyj Ryh, aged 47). Other memoirs contain details about peaceful urban life interrupted by war, bombings, and first-hand flee experience: "I worked as an English teacher in two kindergartens, and I also worked as an English tutor with two people. I just felt I was starting a good life; everything was fine. Everything was interrupted by the war." (IDI\_7, female from Kyiv, aged 29). Another person, a dentist, reported: "I have a daughter and a husband. Strictly speaking, before the war, we lived a normal life. We were ordinary people – we worked from morning till night, raising our children. Everything was fine; we had plans for the future. (...) I worked as a dentist in Kharkiv. We left because it was deafening in the city on February 24. We had aircraft flying overhead. There was a bombing. The child was always scared. It was just awful." (IDI\_9, female from Kharkiv, aged 34).

In this case, the war trauma was reinforced by comparison with the previous conditions of everyday life, materially and about relationships with other people. The necessity to leave the place of residence influenced these conditions, acutely causing a sense of loss of the previous stability and predictability. The purpose, as mentioned earlier, of control over the situation gives way to a sense of loss after crossing the border, deepened by the fear of an unknown

future. The anxiety is aggravated by concerns about relatives and the moral obligation to care for them.

(3) After the first two areas of interest: the circumstances of forced migration confronted with the routines of regular life before the war, we follow its feminized specificity. Family relationships and their impact on the migration and adaptation practices are approached here. As mentioned, most of interviews, the family context played a role, like in the following case: "The daughter-in-law was running somewhere, she came and said that the bus is going to Poland tomorrow. I'm arguing, what, where? I am here almost like a stranger in Lviv, and you are taking me to Poland! The daughter was also against it, but the son called and ordered her to do everything that way. I say you are at war so that I will be here; there is almost no shooting here. Does he say that if they kill him, then how will we live? I have to go. It's dangerous here. Take the grandson and everyone and go. Oh, I don't have a passport! But the daughter-in-law said that they would let her. I'm already crying and leaving—such a foreigner. I have never been abroad. But I read books about the war and those films, you know? In Soviet times there were many. I think, now my fate is like in the movies." (IDI\_21, female from Kyiv, aged 72).

As mentioned above, family relationships are the main and the most crucial predictor of migration strategies; they determine the other choices of our interlocutors and remain, regardless of the dynamics of the sense of influence on one's fate presented above, they remain an invariable indicator of the intention of impact on one's destiny. The feeling of "being rooted", or the search for "a place to live", is modified by a subjective analysis of factors concerning the family's situation and not only by the current unit cost and profit calculation. Family relationships, especially when linked with extra challenges in the new destination places, require the additional activity of migrant mothers; below are some examples presented: "I heard a lot of such problems when my son, who is friends with the boys on the field and cannot say something, for example, in Polish, does not know how the word will go, and the children go to their parents and say what about he came from Ukraine and cannot come here say nothing." (IDI\_14, female from Kharkiv, aged 35).

In other cases, family members and relationships are the dominant perspectives to memorize the past and conceptualize the present: "My husband is the same as me. He says that if I go to Ukraine, he will go with me, and if I decide to stay in Poland, he will stay with me. It is easier for us in this regard. Of course, I would like to live in my land, Ukraine, because all my relatives and grandmother stayed in Kyiv. My grandmother was in occupation in Borodianka for a month." (IDI\_8, female from Odessa, aged 33). Another interviewee straightforwardly emphasized the family, and homesickness: "I want

to go home. I want to go home to my husband." (IDI\_9, female from Kharkiv, aged 34). While the young woman cited above provided more details about her family status and actions taken to adapt to the new setting: "I am asking my son, but he said to be here. My daughter also wants to go home. But children can be fine here. Maybe it will be easier, as she will find a job, and the grandson will attend school here. I don't know what he will be like there; after all, Germans are around, but they say that children are somehow easier. The daughter-in-law does not want to return at all. She says that if even the war ends, let the son go to us, not us to him. I somehow... I want to go to my house, to the garden. My poor garden! What is being done there? I called my neighbor, and she removed some weeds." (IDI\_21, female from Kyiv, aged 72).

(4) The anchoring context is usually connected with labor market issues. Respondents coming to the countries neighboring Ukraine (usually Poland, but Bulgaria, Romania, or Slovakia, too) received the necessary material, logistics (transport), or psychological support here. Many mention the friendly, spontaneous reactions of locals on the border who spontaneously offered free accommodation, food, or winter clothing.

On the other hand, the destination place in the country of arrival was often determined by previous labor migration experiences and knowledge of co-ethnics who had previously found a place of residence there and offered their help. The respondents also mentioned the choice of geographical proximity – as a place convenient for arrival and a possible return to Ukraine in the event of an end to armed fights, especially in the areas of their origin. Descriptions of these situations abound in dramatic dilemmas about returning or staying, uncertainty about the fate of loved ones (men) mobilized to serve in the army, and the future of older parents or grandparents who, due to their old age, decided not to leave Ukraine. One of the interviews described the process of official registration into the system: "Better help was framed in the Red Cross. They did it more and more civilized. There was a live queue, and they somehow registered everyone through the PESEL number. Now at the humanitarian point in the shopping center, they also register, but they give out help only once a month. The Red Cross gave help, and they had good humanitarian aid. It was possible to take hygiene products, food, and many things for children. Of course, I don't have children, but those mothers who received this help said they also give many things to children." (IDI\_8, female from Odessa, aged 33).

"It's quite difficult; you must look for a job here if you want to stay here for at least a year. I could also look for a job here, learn the language perfectly, confirm my diploma, and work here. (...) I want to live in my hometown, so I had no plans to stay here." (IDI\_9, female from Kharkiv, aged 34). Thus, the feeling of being tied causes regaining control over his fate and, in this case,



extend the area of his attention again to the fate of relatives remaining in Ukraine. Even if the labor context is approached less frequently, it provides a precious perspective of refugees who rely on various forms of temporary support and try to adapt to the new reality with their responsive practices in local labor markets.

(5) The perception of the place of arrival, and especially the reception by the locals, results, on the one hand, from the volunteers' openness and readiness to help. However, no less important is the sense of security, the lack of which was, in most cases, the direct cause of departure. Thus, in the statements of the respondents, they mention, for example, an instinctive fear related to the sound of passing airplanes: "We arrived in Poznań, and we were fortunate that my friend was here thinking about us for two weeks. We couldn't decide what we needed to do because we were so scared. We were afraid of every rustle and the sounds of airplanes and other loud sounds." (IDI\_6, female from Kharkiv, aged 53).

"Mostly, there was a positive attitude. I understand that many Poles are already morally and financially tired because they helped a lot from the first days of the war. Perhaps many Poles are slightly offended by Ukrainians because not all Ukrainians behave well. Various Ukrainians left, and we also lived in a non-ideal country. We have both bad and good people. But in general, the Poles strongly support the Ukrainians and help us. They say they are doing this for themselves and us because as long as Ukraine fights, the war will not go on." (IDI\_8, female from Odessa, aged 33).

"I did not volunteer, but my husband went there [to the aid center] every day. He wanted to help. There were many Poles there, and seeing this response from our side, they were very pleased to see that we were ready to consume and help." (IDI\_12, female from Kharkiv, aged 36).

"In Poland, we were greeted very kindly; as soon as they saw us, the volunteers ran up, took the bag, and took us to the heating point. There they gave us hot food and hot tea, offered hygiene products, clothes, and toys for children, and small children were given food and purees. Volunteers asked where we were going and if we had accommodation. We drove purposefully to my mother in Poznan. And we had to get to Poznan with the children. Volunteers took us to the train station, and there we took a free bus to Poznań." (IDI\_19, female from Kremenchuk, aged 38). The perception of the conditions at the point of arrival, the assistance provided, and the various forms of support appear in our interviews as the main counterpoint to previous traumatic experiences. Material aid and symbolic support and respect for refugees and Ukraine as a country are essential to rooting and influencing possible decisions on further migration.



(6) The final analysis area was connected with the parent's perspective. Mostly women, but not only had to provide care for their children. And although migration research often mentions the strengthening of the role of mothers, the situation we analyze also shows the 'ambivalent limbo'<sup>24</sup> of the biographical experience of migrant women: their efforts 'here' and 'there' in their places of origin and places of recent arrival. Both these contexts refer to the obligation to provide appropriate conditions for one's relatives. Both children or older relatives with whom they came, as well as husbands, partners, or sons remaining in Ukraine, as well as other relatives. As we noticed in our research, it was a critical modifying factor of their adaptation processes. "They worked with the children and distracted them with toys, cartoons... The first time, when there was no money, there was incredible support from Poland in terms of food and hygiene products. It's basic, but it was so touching and so cool. I cried for the first two weeks because I did not expect such help. It was very cool. (...) We applied for PESEL and opened a bank account. We received first aid of 300 PLN. We also issued 'PLN 500+' per child. We probably received the first money somewhere in May. I understand that it took so long because of the banking system. It was not very important because, for the first month or a half, we lived off the help of volunteers. It's amazing. (...) When we arrived, everything was at its best... You know, it's like when a baby is given to its mother. We were this baby; we were taken and held. I cannot convey these emotions. We didn't need anything. They gave us everything." (IDI\_11, female from Krywyj Ryh, aged 28). The perspective of a mother interested in fulfilling children's needs seems particularly relevant here. It often determines the discourse of a parent-refugee: "Another big problem is finding housing for Ukrainians with children. I understand that according to the laws in Poland, no one has the right to kick you out of an apartment if you are with a child, but at the same time, almost no one wants to rent an apartment to a mother with a child." (IDI\_7, female from Kyiv, aged 29). In a similar vein, two following quotation provides insight into this point of view: "I will stay in Poland even if the war ends. Soon, we will still be here because there are many cluster bombs in Ukraine, mined areas... I plan to find at least some kind of job here, and I will stay so my child can go to school and study to have a good future." (IDI\_10, female from Krywyj Rih, aged 47); "To be honest, I can't talk about the future yet, and it's tough to think and plan while we are here. The war will end, and we will consider what to do next. Everything is fine with us; we are working, the children are settled, and my husband is the only thing I miss. I miss him very much, and he is with us." (IDI\_19, female from Kremenchuk, aged 38).

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<sup>24</sup> See: F. Schütze, *Analiza...*, p. 189.

The above parts present various perspectives of war refugees' experiences. The war trauma modified its migratory experience concerning group (community or family) context or anchoring practices. The necessity of providing care or shelter for children, family members with disabilities, or elderly members of families, provides an even more traumatic context of the mentioned biographies. The dynamics of the hierarchy of goals and needs that arise from the statements of our respondents indicate the main areas of interest. The accompanying change in the sense of being able to influence one's fate is a complement to this process.

Before the war in Ukraine, we were used to analyzing the migrations from the east in the labor context. But the present-day migrations are much more complex, to be explained by just revised and updated versions of older theories. A multidimensional model should be introduced to follow new realities: former theoretical analyses are modified by the new reality of the mass war refugee movement and various adaptive and anchoring practices in places of living, working, schooling children, and planning the future.

## **Conclusion**

Our project of interviews with refugees took place in the first months after the outbreak of a full-scale conflict and the resulting wave of emigration from Ukraine. It was at the same time one of at least a few ongoing projects referring to biographical analyses. One of them, which is currently still ongoing, is the project: "24.02.2022, 5 am: Testimonies of War"<sup>25</sup> focused on documenting events. In relation to the latter, our project conducted in Poznań was characterised by two aspects: relational nature and a specific moment of collecting research material. The freshness of forced migration experiences, the uncertainty of further fate, and concerns for the loved ones and relatives remaining in Ukraine created a dominant context for this research. Unexpectedly for all of us, Russian aggression added another chapter to the history of forced migrations worldwide. Surprising parallels to the experience of World War II refreshed questions we had hoped never to ask again. And yet they returned as the experiences of refugees forced to hide in basements with their children, to travel in shadowed trains at night in fear of air raids, to women's unequivocally articulated fears of wartime rapes, sexual violence, and cruelty of the occupiers.

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<sup>25</sup> The project: "24.02.2022, 5 am: Testimonies of War", aimed at "recording testimonies documenting the experience of Ukrainian citizens affected by the war", website: <https://swiadectwawojny2022.org/en/> (22.03.2023).

It seems crucial here to mention the social context around the social roles of refugee women: (a) family relationships (where their partners, parents, and relatives are located), (b) close social relationships (based, for example, on the neighborhood) and (c) professional relationships with those who remained in Ukraine. It can be assumed that multidimensional anchoring affects the dynamics of adaptation in the new place, which overlaps with the traumatic nature of the escape experiences, in many cases limiting the effectiveness of the process. A key finding of a theoretical nature is to highlight the adequacy of the anchoring concept (based on the recognition of the coexistence of multiple anchors) to describe the phenomenon of feminized forced migration caused by warfare. The exciting aspects of such anchoring are its (a) contextuality and (b) aspectual. Where (a) contextuality refers directly to the traumatizing experience of war and, to some extent, the uniqueness of this experience concerning other experiences typical of refugeeism in *de iure* sense invoked (based on the mentioned 1951 Convention); (b) aspectual, in this case, means perceiving the multiplicity of elements constructing the refugee's "bridging" identity, where family ties coexist, the classical context of a little homeland emerges, and the new place takes on the character of a temporary or substitute point of attachment. What conclusions can be drawn from this observation? Can we talk about any specificity of Ukrainian migrations caused by Russian aggression?

The frequency of threads that we analyzed in our interlocutors' opinions mainly concerns actuality, particularly family relationships – both within the immediate family and with more distant relatives. In the vast majority of comments, the unique experience of leaving the place of residence, work, and everyday life did not lead to severing ties with relatives, friends, or neighbors who remained there. The links keep our interlocutors in subjectivity and agency and re-organize their everyday lives. On the other hand, the relatives with whom they came to the places of their new stay force actions such as looking for a place to live, work, kindergarten, or school for children – in our opinion, similarly anchoring them in their new 'here', arranging everyday life, and giving it at least a temporary meanings. So, our sample is feminized in the socio-demographic profiles and the outcomes of our research content. It is marked in the multi-modal strategies of anchoring not limited to the labor market and the individual perspective. Their anchoring context involves relatives 'here' and 'there'. It is also more profound and applies a variety of taken actions.

The limitation that should be mentioned is the composition of our sample: deliberately selected from among the participants of the quantitative study who found themselves outside Ukraine in mid-2022. Writing about represen-

tativeness in the context of the completed research is challenging. However, it is possible to discern elements of typological representativeness, at the center of which is the gendered specificity of looking at events related to the war. However, the described phenomena are ongoing, so the descriptive nature of the above context is dominant.

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**Appendix 1: In-Depth Interview scenario:**

<b>General topic</b>	<b>Information required (if necessary, to ask supplementary questions)</b>	<b>Questions to ask respondents (suggestion of specific questions to be asked)</b>
Introduction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Residence in Ukraine;</li> <li>• Information on refugee occupation in Ukraine;</li> <li>• Information on marital status and basic family information.</li> </ul>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Tell me about yourself and what your life was like before leaving Ukraine?</li> </ol>
Reasons and course of escape	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Immediate reasons for the decision.</li> <li>• Factors facilitating and impeding movement.</li> </ul>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2. Under what circumstances did you decide to move?</li> <li>3. Please describe the journey from your place of residence to the border with Ukraine...</li> </ol>
The dynamics of refugee anchoring – relationship with different actors with the receiving community and possible conflicts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “The milestones” in a refugee’s biography;</li> <li>• First experiences/challenges in the new place of residence;</li> <li>• Knowledge of current place of residence;</li> <li>• Characteristics of the place of residence from the point of view of strengths and weaknesses (refugee perspective);</li> <li>• Feeling/no sense of discrimination;</li> <li>• Feeling of being safe/threatened in a new place;</li> <li>• Range of contacts in the new place of residence;</li> <li>• Interest of the Ukrainian receiving society;</li> <li>• Contacts with institutions and NGOs;</li> <li>• Registration procedure;</li> <li>• Housing problem;</li> <li>• Job issues;</li> <li>• Language problems;</li> <li>• Kindergarten, school for children;</li> <li>• Participation in voluntary activities;</li> <li>• The impact of the experience in Ukraine on life beyond its borders;</li> <li>• General assessment of life in the new place;</li> </ul>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Tell us your story after leaving Ukraine...</li> <li>2. Which refugee moments have been the most important in recent months?</li> <li>3. What are the most important reasons/factors that led you to your current location?</li> <li>4. What did you hear about this place of residence before you moved there?</li> <li>5. Do you feel like a rightful resident? (If so, do you remember the moment you felt it?)</li> <li>6. What are the advantages and disadvantages of living in your current place of residence?</li> <li>7. What are people’s attitudes towards refugees in your current location?</li> <li>8. Are there people whom you might call friends, whom you visit here or celebrate with them? Who are they?</li> <li>9. Have you been asked about Ukraine?</li> <li>10. What interests people the most?</li> <li>11. Did you ask for local authorities, volunteer organizations etc.? If so, what was the reason?</li> <li>12. Did you /or your family manage to get official registration?</li> <li>13. Were there any problems with housing?</li> <li>14. Are you working or have you had problems getting a job?</li> <li>15. Are there any language difficulties?</li> <li>16. What household problems do you face and how do you solve them?</li> <li>17. If the respondent has children: Does your child(ren) go to kindergarten/school?</li> </ol>

**continued Appendix 1**

<b>General topic</b>	<b>Information required (if necessary, to ask supplementary questions)</b>	<b>Questions to ask respondents (suggestion of specific questions to be asked)</b>
The dynamics of refugee anchoring – relationship with different actors with the receiving community and possible conflicts		18. How did you look for a kindergarten, or a school? Settled yourself or with someone's help? Were there any problems with your placement in kindergarten / school? Are there any problems in the child's communication with peers? 19. Have you ever volunteered here? 20. Do the experiences from Ukraine affect your current life? 21. How would you rate your life here, in a new place of residence?
A vision of the future in the next few months	Plans for the future; The future for Ukraine; The future of Ukraine in the context of refugee plans;	1. How do you envision your everyday life in the nearest 12 months if (unfortunately) the war continues? 2. How do you envision your everyday life in the nearest 12 months if (unfortunately) the war continues? 3. How do you see Ukraine's prospects in the future? How would it influence your life?