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## The Family Situation of Ukrainian Female Forced Migrants in Poland<sup>1</sup>

This article presents the results of an analysis of the family situation of Ukrainian female forced migrants in Poland. The study focuses on the status and dynamics of the family situation of Ukrainian women who have been granted temporary residence in Poland due to the war in Ukraine. The article examines the changes that have taken place in marital and family relationships, between parents and children, and in other family members' dynamics. The qualitative research methodology used in the study, including in-depth interviews with Ukrainian female forced migrants in Poland (65 interviews), psychologists, volunteers, and activists with various migration experiences (19 interviews), as well as focus group interviews (2 groups), aimed to achieve a deeper understanding of the subject matter. The study explores various aspects of the family dynamics of Ukrainian women displaced by the war. Analysis of this data reveals the conditions and challenges faced by Ukrainian forced migrants in Poland, as well as the changes in their family relationships. This has enabled identification of factors contributing to change in the family lives of migrant women, such as loss of contact with family in Ukraine, being unable to meet one's family's needs, the challenges of raising children in a new environment, difficulties in interacting with other family members, and more. The study sheds light on important aspects of the lives of Ukrainian forced migrant women and their families in the context of forced migration. Overall,

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the qualitative research conducted here provides valuable insights into the impact of forced migration on Ukrainian women and their families, particularly in the context of the war in Ukraine. The findings contribute to a better understanding of the complex challenges faced by these women and can inform the development of support programmes and interventions tailored to their specific needs.

*Keywords: female forced migrants, refugee, family situation, marital and family relationships, war in Ukraine*

Artykuł prezentuje wyniki badań dotyczących sytuacji rodzinnej ukraińskich kobiet, które zostały zmuszone do migracji do Polski w wyniku wojny na Ukrainie. Badanie to skupia się na analizie statusu i zmian w dynamice rodziny wśród ukraińskich kobiet posiadających tymczasowe prawo pobytu w Polsce. Metodologia badawcza obejmowała pogłębione wywiady z 65 ukraińskimi kobietami, 19 psychologami, wolontariuszami i aktywistami, a także dwa wywiady grupowe, co pozwoliło na głębokie zrozumienie zagadnień związanych z życiem rodzinnym migrantek. Analiza danych ujawniła główne wyzwania, takie jak utrata kontaktów rodzinnych, problemy z zaspokajaniem potrzeb rodziny, wychowywanie dzieci w nowym środowisku oraz trudności w interakcjach z innymi członkami rodziny. Artykuł rzuca światło na skomplikowane wyzwania, z którymi mierzą się te kobiety, i dostarcza wglądu w wpływ przymusowej migracji na życie rodzinne, co może przyczynić się do rozwoju programów wsparcia i interwencji dostosowanych do ich specyficznych potrzeb. *Słowa kluczowe: przymusowi migranci, uchodźca, sytuacja rodzinna, relacje małżeńskie i rodzinne, wojna w Ukrainie*

## Introduction

Displacement and forced migration are common phenomena in the modern world, and they are often associated with various causes including wars and conflicts, human rights violations, poverty and economic problems, natural disasters and environmental issues. Forced migration can have a significant impact on the individuals experiencing it. It can be highly stressful and traumatic, especially when it is related to war or persecution. The traumatic experience of war, evacuation, occupation, and forced migration leads to psychological problems and complicates individuals' adaptation within the host community. This experience affects not only the individual, but also their immediate surroundings. Forced migration can tear apart families and couples, who are forced to separate due to displacement, leading to conflicts and tension. The experience of forced migration can be tragic for family relationships or, conversely, strengthen them. Children can experience stress and anxiety, and be overburdened due to changes in their environment and the loss of stability. It is important to explore the effects of forced migration on family relationships, so as to help develop appropriate social-psychological support programmes for the families of forced migrants.

The experience of migration is generally highly traumatic for individuals. After forced displacement, a person faces numerous difficulties and challenges during adaptation and integration into the host community. The main challenges faced by forcibly displaced individuals are related to the traumatic experience of departure, difficulties during border crossings and obtaining asylum in the host community, cultural shock, social alienation, economic hardships, and more. Many forcibly displaced individuals have experienced war, persecution, loss of loved ones, and hazardous migration routes.

Refugee admission programmes in Europe typically have normative dimensions, including vulnerability assessments (deserving of care) and the ability of refugees to assimilate (no threat to national order). Under these programmes, European governments select a limited number of refugees from other countries worldwide to ease the burden on first countries of asylum and provide assistance to particularly vulnerable refugees. Family norms play an important role in these programmes, and the acceptance of families is seen as a natural practice. Many European resettlement programmes prioritise refugees together with their families (this analysis was conducted using the example of Syrian refugees in Turkey, and their resettlement experience in Germany). Family, women, and children are the focus of European resettlement programmes and humanitarian programmes (Welfens N., Bonjour S. 2021).

It is important to analyse the objective conditions created in the receiving country for forcibly displaced individuals. For example, the Swedish state system for supporting the integration and adaptation of newly arrived refugees includes an individual entry plan that encompasses language, citizenship, and health lessons. A qualitative study involving 24 Syrian refugee parents described the experience of their forced displacement and acquisition of asylum status in Sweden. “The parents describe the experiences of having escaped from a war-torn country and arrived in new surroundings as mainly challenging for their current situation. Feelings of uncertainty arise as families struggle with daily life while waiting for residence permits, finding stable housing, learning a language and adjusting to new social circumstances” (Mangrio E., Carlson E., Zdravkovic S. (2019).

Research focusing on meeting the needs of children from immigrant and refugee families in host countries is of particular importance. These studies emphasise how practitioners who provide support to refugees find themselves caught between cultural reactions to parents and adherence to their own educational beliefs and principles. This can complicate their work with immigrant children. (Tobin J. 2020). Publications analysing the issue of access to education systems for refugee and forced migrant children are cru-

cial. Quality education contributes to social integration, economic growth, and innovation. The education of children from forced migrant backgrounds is seen as a social investment in the long term (Koehler C., Schneider J. 2019).

It is important to note that traumatic experiences do not disappear without a trace, and that they continue to have an impact on future generations. There are publications that analyse the phenomenon and mechanisms of trauma transmission across generations in forcibly displaced families, where parents have experienced direct trauma associated with war, but children do not have a history of direct traumatic impact. “Findings suggest that parental trauma exposure and trauma sequelae indirectly affect child well-being via potential mechanisms of insecure attachment; maladaptive parenting styles; diminished parental emotional availability; decreased family functioning; accumulation of family stressors; dysfunctional intra-family communication styles and severity of parental symptomology” (Flanagan N., Traversa A., Valliçresb F., Hansena M., Halpinb R., Sheafe G., Rottmanna N., Johnsen A.T. 2020).

The outbreak of war and the full-scale invasion by the Russian Federation into the territory of Ukraine has led to a new wave of mass forced migration to European countries. The share of women among the adult refugees is around 70% in most host countries, and many have arrived with children, with the share of minors at around 30%. This is different from other refugee flows, for example women made up only about 30% of all asylum applications during the 2015–17 refugee crisis in Europe (OECD, 2023). The current refugee crisis has surpassed the number of refugees that arrived in Europe in 2015 and 2016, primarily from Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan (Morrice L. 2022). In the case of forced migration from Ukraine, the host communities are facing unique challenges and needs among the refugees, as well as a qualitatively different composition of those seeking refuge. Key characteristics of this migration wave include seeking shelter in neighbouring countries, cultural affinity, the magnitude of the crisis, the traumatised state of the forced migrants, and the subjective characteristics of Ukrainian forced migrants. Ukrainian refugee women benefit from certain favourable policies, such as those giving them immediate access to employment after registering. They also have relatively high levels of education and well-developed social networks. These factors are likely to improve their socio-economic integration prospects compared to other refugee women (OECD, 2023). There are other factors, however, including care burdens, risks of exploitation, the breakdown of family units and uncertainties about the length of stay, that may create obstacles to their integration (OECD, 2023).

Due to its territorial proximity to Ukraine, Poland has become one of the main countries to have received a large number of forced migrants from Ukraine (Duszczyk M., Kaczmarczyk P. 2022). “The initial priorities were to address basic human needs, such as shelter, infectious disease concerns and healthcare access, but evolved to include mental health, non-communicable diseases and protection needs. This necessitated a ‘whole of society’ response involving multiple agencies and civil society” (Lee A.C.K., Khaw F.-M., Lindman A. E.S., Juszczak G. 2023).

It is important that the specificities of forced migration of Ukrainian women to Poland, as well as the changes that have occurred in their family relationships, be analysed in greater detail.

## Materials and methods

The purpose of this article is to analyse the state of the family and the dynamics of familial relationships among Ukrainian female forced migrants temporarily residing in Poland. It aims to examine the changes that have taken place in their marital and family relationships, as well as their interactions with other family members. The study is focused on understanding the current circumstances and trends within the families of Ukrainian female forced migrants, specifically those who have obtained temporary residency in Poland due to the ongoing war in Ukraine.

The methods used during the research were in-depth semi-structured interview, focus group, overt observation, and qualitative document analysis.

This involved the following:

1) the collection of research material from social networks, namely Telegram and Facebook, and observations of the everyday life of Ukrainian forced migrant women in Poland (period of information collection: 01.09.2022 – 30.04.2023).

2) individual interviews: 65 interviews were conducted with Ukrainian female forced migrants in Poland (both online – using zoom and google meet – and face-to-face).

These women were aged 18 to 35 (37%), 36 to 59 (57%), and over 60 (5% of the respondents). 86% of the respondents had not previously held the status of internally displaced person, and most were abroad for the first time. 42% of them had higher education. There were also families who had left together either through the occupied territories, or through territory controlled by Ukraine (for example, men with three or more children). 12% of the respondents came to Poland to join their husbands, who had come to this country as labour migrants. There were also divorced women, women

who had lost their husbands, and those not in a formal relationship. There was one example of a woman leaving Ukraine who came to Poland together with her foreign husband.

The Ukrainian women who took part in the study came from 23 cities in Ukraine, from various regions, and were staying in 38 cities in Poland. All of these women were forced migrants who had fled the war in Ukraine, and who came to Poland to receive temporary protection – with all respondents having been granted this status (“UKR”). The women interviewed represented a variety of family types: nuclear families; single-parent families; extended families; stepfamilies; grandparent families; young families; distant families; families in which children had disabilities; and remarriage. A significant number of these women, at the time of evacuation from Ukraine, had a small child and were on maternity leave. In regard to the date of crossing the border, most of the respondents had arrived in Poland within the first month after the start of the full-scale invasion, and were in Poland at the time of the interview. There were also Ukrainian women who came to Poland during the next waves of migration, including a month before the interview (in September and October 2022).

A significant number of the women covered by the study, during their temporary protection in Poland, had made a brief return to Ukraine (mostly residents of the western regions of Ukraine, or migrants from the eastern and central regions with family members who were internally displaced persons in this part of the country). For example, one of the respondents said she first came to Poland with a child at the beginning of the full-scale war, but after six months in Poland she decided to return to Ukraine. Her home had survived, and her husband was by himself in Ukraine, so she decided that she would also stay in Ukraine with their child. However, when an explosion occurred near her house in August she and her child were very scared, and her husband insisted that they urgently return to Poland (0 y.o.). Such examples of repeated forced migration to Poland following a period in Ukraine, due to deterioration in the security situation in all regions of the country, were quite common.

3) structured individual and focus group interviews with all women of the indigenous and newly settled Ukrainian population in Warsaw and cities with a significant Ukrainian minority, as well as interviews with Ukrainian activists helping refugees in intermediate cities on their way to Poland. During project implementation, we conducted 19 interviews with activists, psychologists, volunteers and social workers in Poland and Ukraine. These were Ukrainians already living in Poland for a significant length of time (from 2 to 20 years), actively involved in various forms of support for the families of

Ukrainian forced migrants. The interviews were conducted face-to-face in a park, café or the respondent's home, as well as online (using Viber, Zoom, or Google Meet). All interviews were recorded (audio). We also held 2 focus groups, which were attended by both Ukrainian female forced migrants who had arrived in Poland after 24 February 2022, and by Ukrainian women who had been living in Poland for a significant time (from 2 to 20 years).

## Results and discussion

Ukrainians who lived in different regions of Ukraine were affected by different traumatic experiences of war: some were in an area of combat operations and under occupation, others – in safer regions of Ukraine; some needed help during the evacuation from the area of combat operations, others provided assistance and shelter. Consequently, the impact on family relations also differed. The first reaction to the full-scale invasion was fear, panic, and a desire to find a safe place. Some families, in response to the start of the full-scale invasion, decided to evacuate to safer regions or even leave the country. Others decided to stay at home, to stock up on the basic necessities, and to set up shelters. The decision to move to a safer place of residence was typical regardless of the region where the Ukrainians lived: both in the western regions (from which they immediately went abroad), and in the eastern and central regions (from where they first went to the western regions, and later abroad). There was a tendency of family members living separately to unite and then move to a safer place together. For example, spouses who lived separately from their parents decided to move in with them for a while because of the availability of shelter, and a husband who was working abroad insisted on his wife and child leaving as a matter of urgency, and so on.

It is worth noting that our respondents who left in the first days of the full-scale invasion said this was not based on a conscious decision to leave; rather, it was a spontaneous decision, given little consideration, driven by the instinct for self-preservation and the desire to take their children to safety. People were very often ill prepared, they did not take necessary items and documents, and they had things in their luggage that they did not need at all; they were under stress.

According to a woman from Kryvyi Rih, the decision to move abroad was not one she made herself. At that time, her daughter and her husband were working in Poland as migrant workers. She was alone at home with her three grandchildren:

*“... when I called her [daughter] and said that the war had started, that we were being bombed [cries] ... she told me to leave quickly. I resisted for a*

*week. I was just afraid to leave. Three grandchildren. I was unable to manage with three children by myself, and could only take two of them in my arms, so what about the third? I found someone who was also going to leave [a neighbour – she was on her own, without any family]. And then we rushed to the train station” (A17).*

Those women who went abroad later either stayed in their hometown until the last moment, were in an occupied locality and unable to leave earlier, or initially left for a safer region and only after some time went abroad. Some decided to stay in their hometown following the outbreak of war, and tried to provide themselves and their families with the most necessary things:

*“And then, that was the first thing my husband and I thought about, that we should stock up on baby formula. Because the child had been fed on formula since birth, so we went to look in all ATBs [shops], both in our district and in others...” (A6).*

The following comes from the story of a respondent who spent a month in Ukraine after the full-scale invasion:

*“... everything seemed very scary to us, because we were afraid to even go to the store. We walked with the stroller only on one street, on our own. We could have gone down a little lower. We were afraid to go to the playground. It was already stressful. We could go somewhere to a friend’s house, five streets away, 10 minutes’ walk, but that already seemed stressful to us” (A6, Zaporizhzhia).*

The situation deteriorated throughout Ukraine, with constant enemy attacks, air alarms and periodic reports of the large-scale destruction of infrastructure and civilian deaths, and that was followed by an energy crisis, blackouts, and a sense of constant danger. All this became a reason to leave even for those who had not previously planned to move abroad.

As for people who had experienced relocation in 2014, it turned out during the interviews that their earlier experience did not help them adapt to the beginning of the new stage of the war in Ukraine.

Family relations were impacted by the outbreak of war. Families in a favourable socio-psychological state had more support and understanding, both during departure and during separation and the long stay abroad of one of the family members (most often women and children). In conflict families, relations deteriorated further. Nevertheless, there were cases of the relationship between husband and wife improving at a distance. An understanding had developed of how valuable such relationships were.

There were cases of individual family members taking responsibility for others and taking important decisions: for example, a single woman decided that her mother and two children (minors) would go abroad, or a husband

decided to send his wife and children abroad. These decisions were initially perceived as feasible, but later it was realized that the individuals concerned, although reluctant to leave, were compelled to go abroad due to the worsening situation in Ukraine, which as a result led to a deterioration in relations within these families.

### Reasons for choosing Poland as a country for the temporary protection of Ukrainian female forced migrants

At the beginning of the full-scale invasion, moving abroad amidst the panic and chaos was rather difficult and dangerous. For most of the respondents it was the first time they were going abroad. People in a panic tried to find a safer place, went to stay with relatives and friends in the western regions of the country, and then moved abroad. Women went abroad for the sake of their children's psychological condition, and not just their physical safety.

The destination country was chosen primarily based on the availability of somebody who could provide initial support after the displacement. The vast majority of our female respondents travelled to Poland after having been invited by relatives, acquaintances or colleagues. A significant number of them were going to a specific person, either a relative, an acquaintance, a distant relative or a work colleague.

*"It was Poland, first of all because my husband was already staying here at the time, and we had relatives here. I didn't choose the city of stay myself, but came specifically to my husband and my sister" (A1).*

Residents of the western regions of Ukraine said that they had long had close ties with Poland, and that was why in the situation of danger they had the opportunity to turn to friends and get asylum:

*"I've been to Poland several times. I even went shopping in Poland, because it's a little cheaper in Poland. I understand Polish, know my way around here. There was no problem for me. It was easy for me to watch Polish TV at home. I understood everything. I knew that both Poland and the Polish language are close to me. I have relatives in Poland" (A19).*

Women respondents from other regions also had family connections in Poland: *"We packed and came to Poland. My brother lives here. He invited us (...) I probably wouldn't have dared go to another city, just would not dare, would not go, but would have stayed in Zaporizhzhia" (A20).*

There were cases in which the logistics and choice of where to go next were managed by volunteers who helped find housing and organised the evacuation.

For Ukrainian female forced migrants, it was also important that Poland was geographically close to Ukraine, meaning that they would be able to quickly return home.

Women and children left first, while their parents and other relatives followed in later waves of migration. In these cases, Ukrainian female forced migrants who already had some experience living in emigration provided support for the new arrivals.

### Wave of migration

Travelling abroad (evacuating) in the first days and weeks after the start of the full-scale invasion was the most traumatic moment for the Ukrainian refugees. The experience of leaving on an evacuation train, and the moment of parting with one's husband (for his wife) or father (for his children) at the border were the most traumatic memories for many. At that time there was more informal support from volunteers and Ukrainians who lived in western regions and border towns, and from the Poles. Those Ukrainians who left later were more prepared for travelling abroad, and they made more conscious decisions. By that time there was less support provided by volunteers, but there was greater institutional support from the host country.

### Nature of the support

One can trace a certain dependency of mutual support among Ukrainians, depending on their time of departure. At the beginning, due to the extreme experiences, respondents indicated little about mutual support among Ukrainians during their departure. Such support was received to a greater extent from those who were away from the epicentre of events (February-March). The further away Ukrainians were from active military operations (a source of acute stress and panic), the more empathy they showed. Special support was received from the Poles. Almost none of the respondents made acquaintances on the way to Poland (all were focused solely on their family).

Having experienced military operations in 2014 did not contribute to a manifestation of adaptive response to the full-scale invasion on 24 February 2022. On the contrary, persons who had experienced internal migration caused by the events of 2014 often had long-standing traumas, and it was difficult for them to recall that period of their life; it was also more difficult for them to decide to travel abroad. Already during the interview, they realised that the memories of 2014 were still very traumatic for them.

Ukrainian female forced migrants families travelled not only across Ukraine's border with Poland, but also through other countries, including through the aggressor country – the Russian Federation. This was due to other evacuation routes being unavailable.

The activities of volunteers in the first hours of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine also deserve attention.

The assistance of volunteers was significant during evacuation in Ukraine itself, at the border crossing, and during movement in Poland. Local residents and volunteers provided much help at train stations and during the border crossing.

“(...) when we arrived at the border, I was already crying very much. I saw how people helped, how they treated the children, how they gave these blankets, it was cold, especially at night. We left, well, wearing a light jacket, and they gave some kind of capes, gave all sorts of goodies to the children” (A4).

“I have tears in my eyes, I will probably remember it for a very long time, perhaps until my old age, if I live, I will remember them [volunteers] with tears of gratitude (...)” (A40).

### Temporary stay of Ukrainian female forced migrants in Poland in 2022

All the women in the study said they had been sure the war would end very quickly, and that they would be able to return home. Then, when the realisation sank in that it would last longer than they initially expected, they started thinking about the future. Some decided to return to Ukraine despite the existing dangers (most of them left for Poland again in October or November); some decided to leave for other countries, primarily the United States, Canada or the United Kingdom. Most of them stayed in Poland.

Marital and family relations among forced migrants depend on what the relationships were like beforehand, whether the spouses are together now, and whether there is support for each other. Distance often affects the nature of the relationship between a man and a woman due to poor understanding of the conditions, inconsistency in their opinions, and the different security situations. A husband's support for her wife bears a certain importance, and this is precisely one of the reasons why a woman decides to return to Ukraine to her husband.

In general, there are the following types of marital and family situations:

- 1) the husband remains in Ukraine, and his wife – in Poland (distance relations);
- 2) both spouses go abroad together;
- 3) the wife leaves Ukraine to be with her husband, who has been working and living in Poland (a situation of forced migration for the woman, and labour migration for her husband).

By level of support, we can distinguish between families in which the husband supported his wife's departure abroad and those in which the husband was opposed to her leaving. Accordingly, this significantly affected the financial, psychological and emotional support the wife received from her

husband. It is worth noting that in all cases there are difficult situations and conflicts that the spouses can either cope with (taking into account previous experience of marital relations) or not.

Relationships with other family members either did not change or improved (and in some cases worsened). Conflicts arise due to forced cohabitation by a large number of people in a limited space, even if they belong to the same family. The problem is that of not having one's own space and the lack of privacy.

Communication with family members who have remained in Ukraine can also be split into two main types:

- the first is mutual support (financial as well as psychological and emotional, in both directions);
- the second is the deterioration of relations, which is linked to differing views on the security situation in Ukraine and Ukrainians residing abroad.

Quasi-family relations are common among Ukrainian female forced migrants who were not previously part of the family, but in conditions of forced migration for certain reasons live together, run a shared household, have mutual responsibilities, provide family support, worry about each other and spend free time together, and so on (these can be Ukrainians or Poles with whom a person was either previously familiar or became acquainted after moving to Poland, and who now live together and partially perform family functions).

As for teaching children, the following models of organising the education of Ukrainian children are common in Poland:

- 1) attending a Polish School;
- 2) instruction through a Ukrainian school based on distance learning technologies (or attending Ukrainian schools functioning in Poland);
- 3) combining instruction through a Ukrainian school based on distance learning technologies with instruction at a Polish school.
- 4) attending English-language private schools (isolated cases).

During the interviews, there were no cases where children were totally excluded from the two education systems, although such stories are occasionally discussed in social networks. There were also children studying at home in a Ukrainian school who were not required to attend all online lessons.

## Relationships with children

Children have a hard time going through the traumatic events of war and forced relocation, separation from their father and friends, changes in educational institutions and the need to learn Polish. This affects not only

the emotional state of a child, but also leads to a significant deterioration in their health. The age of the child and the psychological state of the mother, who may (or may not) be supporting her child, are important. Younger children adapt more easily to life in Poland. Those children who have Ukrainian peers in their class who also left their country due to the full-scale invasion also find it easier to adapt. It is also important to have support from teachers in the educational institution, and for there to be cross-cultural assistants in the school. Teenagers find it the most difficult to adapt due to the complexity of the curriculum at school, and because of their lack of knowledge of the Polish language (especially boys, who do not have the support of their father and are forced to comply with stereotypical perceptions concerning “male” behaviour). It is worth mentioning that the most difficult situations are when a woman has left together with her teenage children, and is forced to work hard in order to be able to provide her children with the necessary standard of living. In such situations little time is given to raising the children and monitoring their learning at school.

### Financial situation and standard of living

The financial situation of most Ukrainians has worsened. It is important for Ukrainian forced migrants to find work and a way to maintain a sufficient standard of living. The problem lies in employment that does not correspond to their level of education or professional qualifications. However, Ukrainian forced migrants understand the need to learn Polish for them to be able to secure employment in keeping with their level of education. They also understand that in order to stay in Poland and have an appropriate standard of living, they need to work. They are grateful for social assistance and the support provided by the government, but such assistance (the 500+ programme for children) is not perceived as their main income. That is why they are trying to find gainful employment.

There are various patterns of behaviour associated with the prospect of returning to Ukraine in the future, or staying for longer in Poland:

- 1) active learning of the Polish language, studying in schools for adults and other educational institutions, recognition of diplomas, starting one’s own business, and so on – in order to improve the prospects of a longer stay in Poland and further legalisation;
- 2) temporary employment, including in low-skilled jobs, in order to ensure the necessary standard of living for the family during their stay.

Many Ukrainian female forced migrants work online and remotely in Ukrainian firms and organisations.

In general, Ukrainian forced migrants value their work, are educated, and have the appropriate professional qualifications; however, they face the stereotypical image of a “Ukrainian Zarobitchanin” during employment.

Ukrainian female forced migrants with a higher education, who have experienced a situation of declining social status in their host community, understand that they will be able to improve their situation later through education, by studying in educational institutions in Poland, as well as by learning the Polish language.

A significant number of respondents noted the complexity of renting housing in Poland. The living conditions of Ukrainian women in Poland are usually worse than what they had in Ukraine, but they clearly appreciate having the opportunity to live in safety.

In terms of communication, Ukrainians (both women and children) are more likely to communicate with other Ukrainians.

Gratefulness towards Poles for their support, despite difficulties in adapting to how one obtains certain types of service, is clear to see. Ukrainian women understand that these processes have their peculiarities in another country.

We can see how values are being reassessed in regard to both material things (belongings, property) as well as the value of life as such, of humanity and mutual support.

Information was sometimes provided about how Ukrainians who left for Poland to work before 24 February 2022, but who did not stay for long, have specific attitudes. While there is a certain degree of competition for employment from them, at the same time they are the ones who have provided the greatest support to their family members who fled the war and came to join them in Poland. Those Ukrainians who have been living in Poland for a long time provided and continue to provide significant support to forced migrants in adapting to Poland (language, temporary shelter, finding housing, processing documents). Ukrainian forced migrants, after some period of adaptation, join the volunteer movement in support of those fleeing the war in Ukraine. But it is the Poles who provide the greatest support.

In general, it is very important to have support at the time of moving and adapting to new living conditions. According to the interviewees, the adaptation process was easier when there was a person nearby who provided such support.

At the time of the interviews, a significant number of respondents could not see their future in any way; they were living for the day, which indicates a rather depressed state. Almost none of the respondents had plans for their futures (a day, or a week at the most). As a rule, those not yet planning to return to Ukraine after the war had thought or planned of migrating before

the outbreak of the full-scale war. There were also those who considered Poland a temporary place of stay, and who planned to travel on to other countries.

## Conclusions

In general, the family situation among Ukrainian female forced migrants in Poland is unstable, and is changing as a result of traumatic objective factors. Using methods of qualitative analysis allowed us to record and preserve people's real stories, to recreate the chronology of events during the war, occupation, evacuation and migration abroad, as well as to analyse life strategies, the social and economic problems of Ukrainian forced migrants, and the changes in relations between family members who are together in forced migration and with those who remain in Ukraine.

During their forced migration to Poland, many Ukrainian women experience separation from their husbands, who remain in Ukraine. This separation can have profound effects on the relationships and dynamics within families. It often results in long-distance relationships, where communication and emotional support are maintained through technology, such as phone calls, video chats, or instant messengers. However, the challenges of physical separation can strain marital relationships, leading to difficulties in maintaining intimacy, trust, and overall connection. Furthermore, the absence of a spouse may require women to assume additional responsibilities and roles within their families. This shift in family dynamics can have both positive and negative impacts, as it empowers women economically but may also create emotional and practical challenges. In situations where fathers are separated from their children, parental separation can have significant emotional and psychological effects on children, regardless of the circumstances. The absence of a father figure can impact their overall wellbeing and development.

Ukrainian forced migrant women who are in Poland together with family members (husband, parents, children) can also experience conflicts and family difficulties. The process of forced migration itself, along with the challenges of adapting to a new country and culture, can put strain on family dynamics. The situation of losing social status and financial wellbeing, and being forced into low-skilled employment, together with the need to adapt to a new culture and learn a new language, can all contribute to tension and imbalance, potentially leading to family conflicts.

Based on the information provided, we can draw the following conclusions:

First of all, a significant number of Ukrainian forced migrants remain in Poland (most of them with higher education, and mostly women and chil-

dren). According to official data, about 1.5 million refugees from Ukraine have been granted temporary protection status in Poland. About 900,000 forced migrants from Ukraine have been employed in Poland on simplified terms.

Secondly, a significant number of Ukrainian forced migrants who arrived after 24 February 2022 have left Poland. They either returned to Ukraine (for various reasons), or left for other European countries, Canada, Great Britain, or the USA.

Thirdly, there are frequent cases of Ukrainians who returned to Ukraine before deciding to come back to Poland due to the deterioration in the security situation. There are also those who left for Canada or Great Britain, but who after some time returned to Poland.

Fourthly, the smallest group comprises those who have come to Poland for the first time for the purpose of obtaining temporary protection. Basically, these are people who have close relatives in Poland, among whom are those who have the status UKR.

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