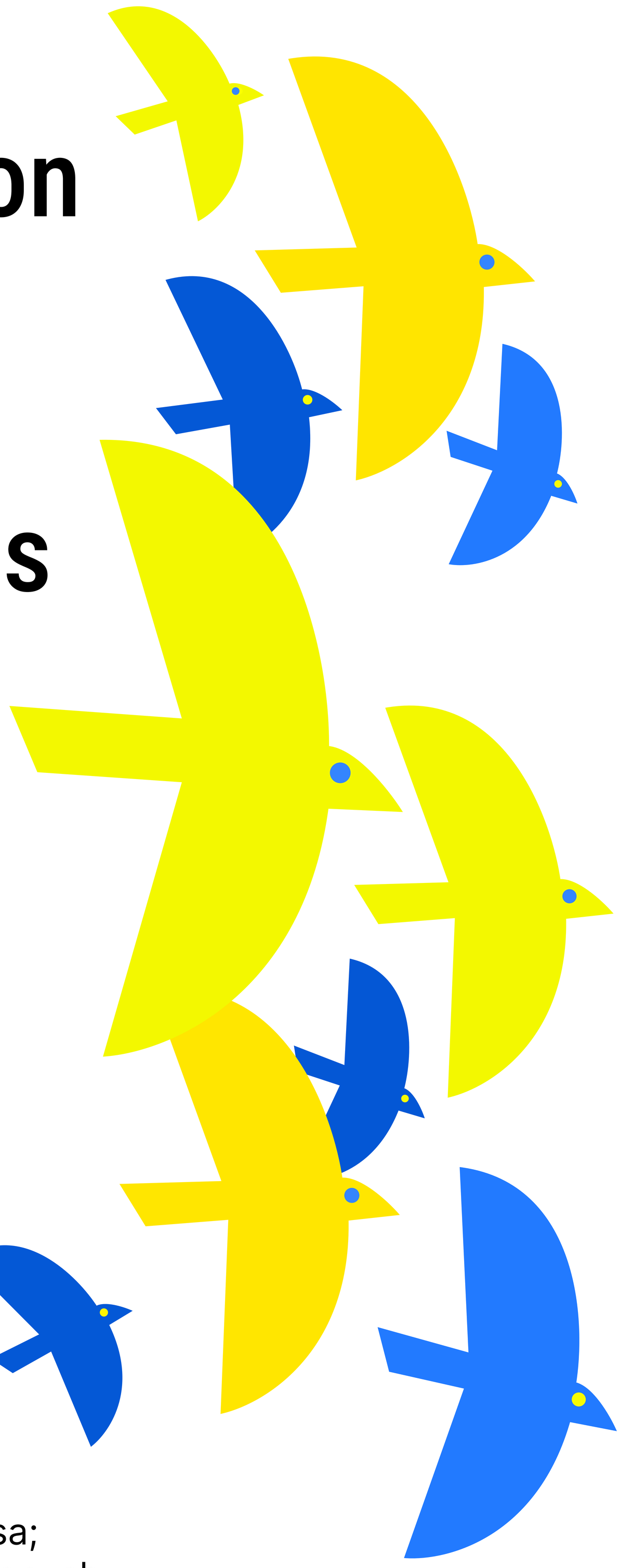
Migration and adaptation capabilities, aspirations and strategies of displaced Ukrainians in Berlin, Warsaw and Budapest



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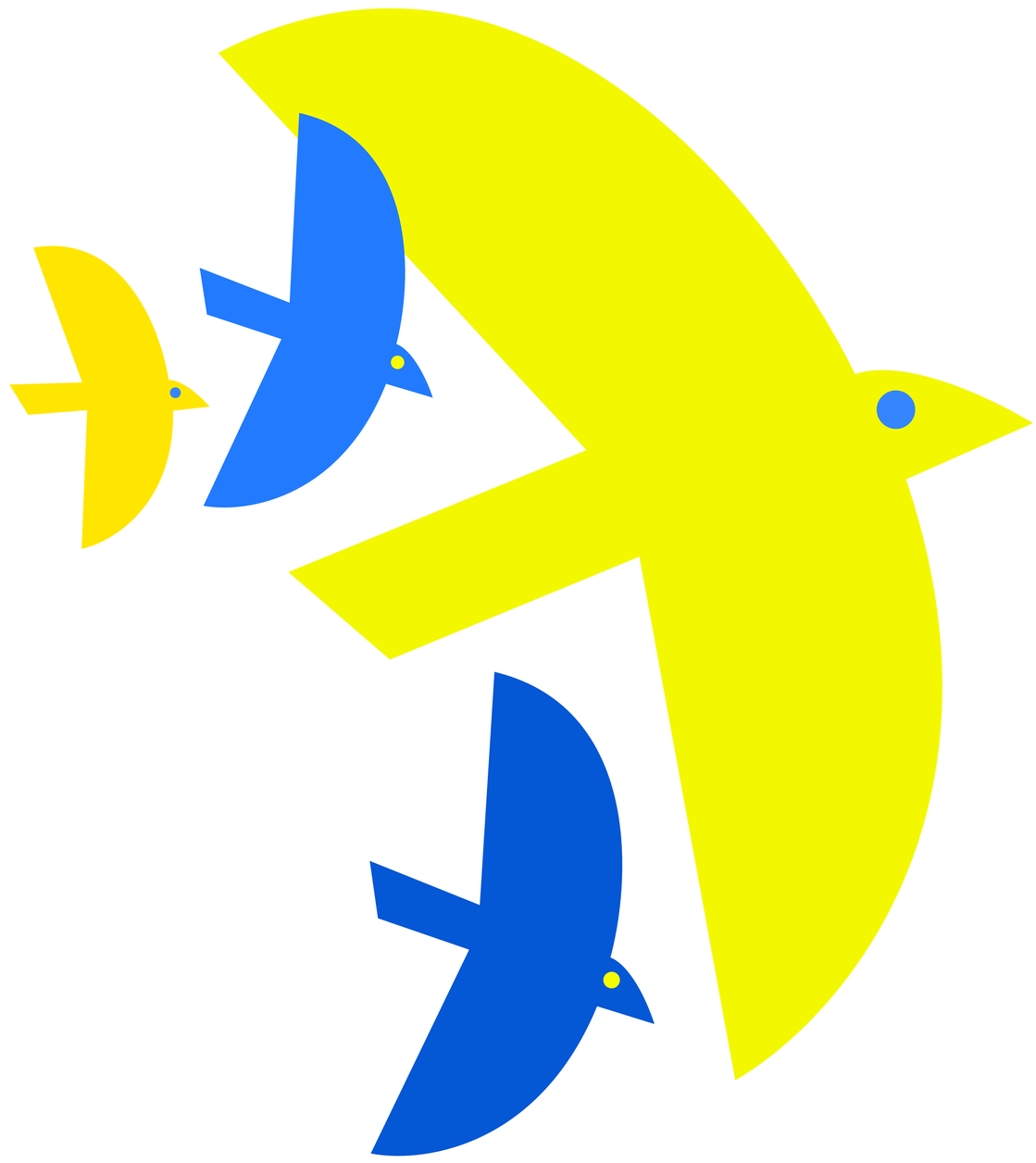

Aim of project:

Assessing migration and adaptation strategies of displaced Ukrainians in three major destination cities over time. Method: qualitative panel data analysis based on repeated interviews of displaced Ukrainians every 6 months.

Funding:

FU Berlin and Cluster of Excellence “Contestations of the liberal script”

Data collection:

How did we design the sample?

- Sampling capitals of largest host countries
- Sample with variation on following characteristics: children vs no children, gender, age, regions of origin, level of formal education, foreign language skills, prior contact in destination country
- Large sample required during the first wave to compensate for drop off rate in the following waves

How did we collect the data?

- Data collection between April and August 2022
- 100 interviews in Berlin, 100 in Warsaw and 60 in Budapest
- Second wave of data collection between January and May 2023
- About 75 follow-up interviews in Berlin, 65 in Warsaw and 30 in Budapest
- Plan to conduct follow-up interviews every year over a period of four years

How did we contact the interviewees?

- Diversification of recruitment channels: distribution of flyers at central locations visited by newly arrived displaced Ukrainians; Contact of volunteering associations of Ukrainian expatriates; snowball sampling; ads on social media

What do we ask?

- Open-end questions on migration decisions, adaptation strategies and experiences in the destination country (on labour market, in education, with administration, with volunteering associations), social contacts with people who stayed in Ukraine, with Germans, other displaced Ukrainians in Germany or abroad, further migration plans (intention to return, stay or move further)

Data analysis:

- All interviews are transcribed and translated into English by native translators
- All interview transcriptions and translations are imported into MaxQDA, a qualitative analysis software
- We link all interview transcriptions and translations from the different data collection waves conducted with the same participant
- We code all interview translations according to common themes (such as migration, adaptation on labour market, transnational social contacts)
- This coding preparation enables four different analytical access to the data:
- Analysis of a particular theme across participants and waves (such as adaptation on the labour market or wish to return)
- Analysis of a particular profile of participants (such as displaced Ukrainians with young children or elderly displaced Ukrainians)
- Analysis of differences among participants due to the destination countries
- Analysis of trends over time across all data waves (such as development of a feeling of being “at home” in destination country over time)

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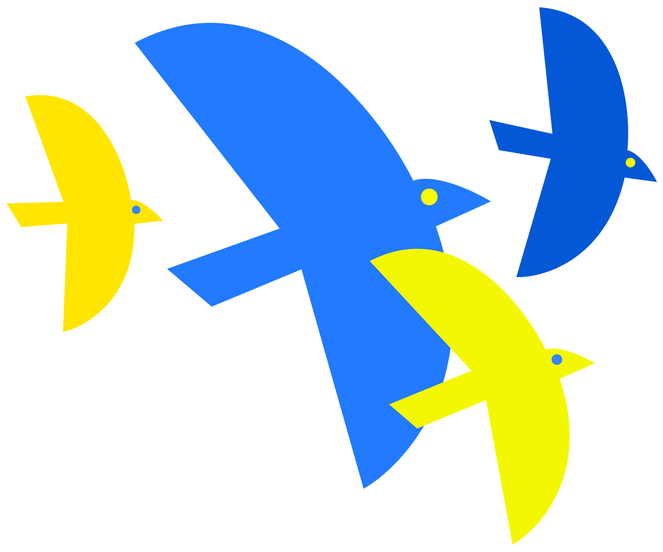
Analysis of destination choice of displaced Ukrainians



Research question:

what were the main motives behind the decision of displaced Ukrainians to flee to Berlin, Budapest or Warsaw? Why did they choose these particular destination cities?

Theoretical debate:

- Scientific literature on forced migration focuses on the involuntary character of forced migration and tends to produce a clear-cut distinction between forced migration and voluntary migration (such as labour migration).
- But: there is no clear-cut boundaries between forced and voluntary migration, more like a scale ranging from complete forced migration to complete voluntary migration. Forced migrants have also agency
- Agency of displaced Ukrainians is the focus of analysis

Context:

Activation of the EU Temporary Protection Directive in response to the unprecedented Russian invasion of Ukraine on 24th February 2022

- Displaced Ukrainians within the EU benefit of temporary protection in any EU country of their choice with following rights:
  - Right of a residence permit for the entire duration of protection; Move freely in EU countries for 90 days
  - Guarantees for access to the asylum procedure
  - Access to employment; to suitable accommodation or housing; to social welfare (if necessary); to medical care; to education for persons under 18 years; to banking services
- unique opportunity to analyse immigration decisions among displaced migrants since free movement rights and large support of civil society and state

Why Berlin? Main reasons mentioned by displaced Ukrainians in Berlin

Social contacts: relatives or friends already in Berlin who were willing to support with registration in administration, housing, searching for a job or with information on destination country	“Later, my colleague from my former job in the theater suggested we go to Berlin because her grandmother lived here. So, she could shelter us, in theory, and offered we don’t just go but help speed up the process of helping other refugees to settle down there because many of them don’t know English at all. I do know the language, at least and I can help them translate or something else. The idea was to get there as soon as possible to offer our help to people like us, something like that. At least, we didn’t have to search for housing because her grandma is there; she lives in the Berlin suburbs so essentially this problem was solved.” (DE 11 DP)
Attractive labour market: knowledge of job opportunities in Berlin	“I thought Berlin is a big city, I checked it on Google so I could find a job there. What else does the person need? They need a job. I thought I could somehow stay in Berlin and I always knew how to make ends meet and earn some money for myself. But if you go to some small cities, well, they will give you accommodation, it’s easier there but what about work?” (DE 1 KS)
Language: knowledge of German or English. Berlin as capital is perceived as having a high share of inhabitants with English skills	“In Germany, I knew that everyone spoke English. Also, the area and people. And I asked guys from Ukraine who often went to work abroad, where is the best place to go so that there would be an opportunity to quickly realize myself and generally find some work, not to mention advertising and cinema. They told me to go to Berlin. And I was like, okay, the stars aligned. The girls are there. I was directed there.“ (DE 41 AN)
Social security: knowledge about access to a relatively generous social protection	“When we realized, it wasn’t going to end in the nearest future, we started thinking about what to do for a living, so we decided to go abroad, and we chose Germany because some of our friends were already here. Second, everything is more or less clear with financial aid here and it seems to me that Germany is one of the many countries that help Ukrainians a lot. Poland was already overcrowded at that time, so we decided to go to Germany.” (DE 6 DP)
The larger geographical distance to Ukraine provides a feeling of physical security	“I thought that in Poland, I was looking for a job on my way, Poland offers a lot of jobs, Poland, Czech Republic, but honestly, I thought it was still close, I thought, would Putin stop after Ukraine? No, Poland would be the next, so I had to go somewhere further. “ (DE 1 KS)

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Why Budapest? Main reasons mentioned by displaced Ukrainians in Budapest

Social contacts: relatives or friends already in Budapest who were willing to support with registration in administration, housing, searching for a job or with information on destination country

"We immediately decided to go to Hungary, definitely, because my daughter and son-in-law now live here." (HG 1 TE)

Job offer in Budapest prior to immigration

"Hungary - because it has this program for IT people, a white card, according to which it is very profitable to work here for two years and pay taxes to Ukraine, and it is official, and that is why we left." (HG 22 T E)

Close to Ukraine; easier to come back and keep contact with relatives who stayed

"Why did we choose Budapest? Because it is closer to Ukraine. Warsaw is even closer, but there are 3 million people there, and there are fewer refugees here. We didn't go for example to Barcelona, as it is too far, and here, we are like neighbors." (HG 26 TE)

No strength to travel further

"There weren't many options. Afterward, many of my friends and acquaintances left. But for some reason, I didn't go further. I probably didn't have the mental strength. I understood that no matter what country it was. There was also Poland, where the standard of living and prices are roughly the same as in Hungary. I didn't go to Germany because I didn't know how to survive there. And here I have already stopped. I have to survive here, find something to do." (HG 17 TE)

Why Warsaw? Main reasons mentioned by displaced Ukrainians in Warsaw

Social contacts: relatives or friends already in Warsaw who were willing to support with registration in administration, housing, searching for a job or with information on destination country

"My cousin Marina was going to go to Poland and offered to go with her. It so happened that I decided that we were going." (PL_08_AP_T_E)

Knowledge that finding a job in Warsaw is easy

"There are many friends and acquaintances here. My friend is in Warsaw, we have been talking for a very long time. So she called and told us to come. When we arrived here, everything went right at once - both housing and work. Well, here's everything. (PL_15_VS_T_E)

Language and culture: similarities between Polish and Ukrainian, easier to learn Polish than other European language

"Poland seems to be closer to Ukraine, they're like our relatives". (PL_14_VS_T_E, Pos. 41)

Close to Ukraine: easier to come back and keep contact with relatives who stayed

"Why? Because the closest thing to Ukraine and, in any case, you want to return. "(PL_15_VS_T_E, Pos. 24)

Discussion

Displaced Ukrainians decided to flee to a particular destination based on multiple motives. Key motive among most participants was the ability of social contacts in the destination country. Most participants also based their decision on prior knowledge of national and local specificities of job market and social protection. The geographical distance to Ukraine (large in the case of Berlin; short in the case of Warsaw and Budapest)

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Analysis of main strategies of Ukrainians in integrating into the labor market of host society

Research question:

What strategies do Ukrainians choose to integrate into the labor market in Berlin, Budapest or Warsaw?
How this strategizes can be different between cities/countries?

Berlin (Germany)

· guarantees Ukrainians the right to employment
· social benefits (on a monthly basis for both adults and children)
· social housing payment
· health insurance
· language courses

Budapest (Hungary)

· guarantees Ukrainians the right to employment
· social benefits (on a monthly basis for children)
· health insurance

Warsaw (Poland)

· guarantees Ukrainians the right to employment
· social benefits (on a monthly basis for children)
· health insurance

Working in Berlin (Germany). Main strategies

1. Passing a German language course and confirming diplomas / specialty in Germany. Desire to continue working in one's specialty

"I honestly don't want to go to work washing dishes or cleaning in hotels. I have a higher education, I have a wonderful profession. If I learn the language, I could teach children music or piano." (DE 97 DP)

"RESPONDENT: Of course. I'm a doctor, and I understand that this is quite a popular work in Germany, so I want to pass the language exam and try to work.
MODERATOR: Would you like to continue working in your specialty?
RESPONDENT: To be honest, yes, because it is very difficult to study for 8 years, so I want to continue this path." (DE 78 LK)

2. Passing a German language course and mastering a new specialty that is relevant for Germany through a job center

"Besides, I follow several Telegram channels: looking for jobs abroad, IT remote, IT jobs abroad. But I don't feel like working as a cleaner now. If I had the need – to feed children, or if I were short of money, no problem, I would go and work, but my husband is working, I have the necessary care, I don't spend money on accommodation, I have enough money for food and basic needs. So I can afford learning because my priority is to complete training and have a salary that would cover my needs. Without education, I can now go pick strawberries, but what will I have apart from a kilo of strawberries in 6 months?" (DE 24 AN)

3. Passing a German language course, social benefits + part-time work, which allows you to keep the allowance and have work experience in Germany.

"I would like to look for a part-time job, it's not even that I want to look for a part-time job, in terms of the fact that I work there 24/7. Most likely I would like to have a part-time job to spend time in a company of these people, I want to be surrounded by these people, to learn the language. Well, I don't know, maybe I'll start communicating with the Germans and I will get some good work. Of course, I do not want to wash the dishes. Therefore, firstly, I want to go to language courses. I hope that I will be able to combine it with work, since I don't really want to count on social payment only, because I don't know what will happen after all these stages. Therefore, I want to not depend on anyone, just work and know that you are earning for yourself, that's all. I am told a lot that it is not necessary to know perfect German in order to make good money." (DE 70 AN)

4. Official employment using social networks without knowing the language mainly

"And recently, it's a strange story, some Ukrainians will condemn me for it, but I met a Russian who is working for a textile brand as a designer. I found this brand and decided to write them, and then I saw a Nikita working for this brand. And I thought that Nikita must be a Ukrainian name, so I should write to him. I wrote to him that I was looking for a job and whether he could help. And he replied, "Oh, I'm going to leave this position, let me help you with the portfolio." (DE 9 KS)

5. Unofficial part-time jobs without knowing the language mainly in the service sector (cleaning, bartending, bakery ect.)

"I was thinking of something where I can clean something, in a hotel or what, somewhere where I don't need a language, I looked through some options, something like social work, to help elderly people. But the minimum level of German is required there, at least A1 or A2. (DE 1 KS)

Working in Budapest (Hungary). Main strategies

1. Continue working remotely on Ukrainian company

“MODERATOR: And this company is Ukrainian?
RESPONDENT: Kharkiv company. Moreover, employees of that company left Kharkiv to different places - some went to Lutsk, some to Vinnytsia, Lviv, Ivano-Frankivsk. And then it happened that those who could leave, arrived here. And here they also opened a hostel for us for two weeks in order to adapt until we find a permanent housing. It was great to have this help, and it is good that if you need help, there are people you can turn to. We know that we are not alone here, and there are other Kharkiv residents. (HG 22)”

2. Official employment jobs without knowing the language mainly in the service sector (cleaning, bartending, bakery ect.)

“I was looking for a job in a bakery. Shared my CV with several bakeries, went to several myself. And I got a job in one of the bakeries here. I worked here for a month and left. Physically I could not stand it, it was very hard. And now I'm out of work, but I'm also looking again.” (HG 25)

3. Working in projects for Ukrainians from Foundations

“I work part-time. I filled out documents at the Columbus Foundation, which helped refugees from Ukraine, I worked there for 3 weeks. When the children were in the camp, we worked as educators for the Ukrainians, they organized a camp at the Balaton, I was there for 5 days. But these were such small payments. I worked online at the university, so my salary still came from there. I don’t know how it is now, whether there will be students in September and whether I will have a workload, but here I am looking for a job. On the 6th there will be a job fair, we were invited there by the Employment Center, perhaps something will be there. While it comes across something like factories or cleaning, although I did it, I was cleaning offices.” (HG 7)

4. Attempts to find a job in their specialty (among our respondents, there are none who found it)

“Of course, I want a job. Because you have to pay for the apartment, for food. Soon it will be September - notebooks, pens, etc. I really want to find a normal job. Because I went to other cities and factories. The situation is that I have a mother, a child, and a dog. The factory doesn’t hire me. The work there is hard and low-paid. Many people from Ukraine came here, and I still can't figure out the secret of how people managed to earn money. Maybe because I ended up in Budapest, I don't know. I really want some more or less stable job that would allow me to live on.” (HG 17)

Working in Warsaw (Poland). Main strategies

1. Unofficial part-time jobs without knowing the language mainly in the service sector (cleaning, bartending, bakery ect.)

“But we don’t like this feeling of being dependent, begging for something, so we were looking for a job. So our daughter found some for us to wash the dishes in the restaurant because we aren’t that good at the language.” (PL 14)

2. Official employment jobs without knowing the language

“My wife went to work to Auchan, her sister works there, but after some period she got laid off. Then they called her back, it was intermediaries, I am not sure how to name them properly, and they offered her to work as a cashier in Auchan. So, she worked as a cashier, not knowing Polish at all they were satisfied with her work. But she was promised a salary of 16 zlotys, but she received only 13 zlotys. After that, I already told her that there was no point in going there.” (PL 95 VS)

3. Attempts to work as individual entrepreneur

“I have a job in Uber on my car, and additionally I tried to repair of household appliances here through advertising. But it's still unofficial, because I don't know if it makes sense to issue as individual entrepreneur here yet. So far, there are not very many orders. I work more as a taxi driver.
MODERATOR: Is it difficult for you to work for Uber? Do you have many orders?
RESPONDENT: Now it's a little worse, I have friends from Ukraine who also came and work in a taxi. There is nothing stable, sometimes there are some orders, and sometimes there are no orders. It all depends on the weather; sometimes I don't have any orders. Plus, a lot of people moved here, I saw for myself that many of the women also work for Uber.” (PL 95 VS)

Analysis of identity struggles in the course of adaption experienced by displaced Ukrainians

Research question:

what identity struggles are expressed by displaced Ukrainians
in the process of adaptation to their destination countries

Context:

- Despite growing fears of the upcoming invasion, many Ukrainians did not fully believe that the war will start, and therefore did not prepare mentally or otherwise for the possibility of fleeing abroad.
- Ukrainians with higher socioeconimic background and cultural capital were more likely to have the funds and knowledge to migrate abroad. Therefore, we expect that a lot of displaced Ukrainians abroad used to have a higher socioeconomic status (higher education, stable job and housing) prior to fleeing the war. This would lead to them having more resources and agency to lose once they flee.
- The newly acquired displaced status would inform their adaptation strategies. These strategies will also be expressed differently depending on whether or not the destination country provides consistent finanicial and social support.

General (all countries of destination)

Expressed identity struggles:

Discomfort with receiving help, being an inconvience, a "beggar"

«She really didn't like the way it sounded, you know, "refugee". “Don't call me that”, you know, she was like that. And I don't need any help. I don't want any statuses» (DE_12_DP_T_E, Pos. 52)
«It's really humiliating, we are truly grateful for all this help and all this, but there is gratitude and there is some humiliation, you know! When these women, who had a normal life in Ukraine, fled not from poverty, but from war» (DE_90_DP_T_E, Pos. 35)

Loss of control over one's life

«This uncertainty, incomprehensibility of what to do, hesitations on the future, a fear of what to expect. It does not depend on us at all, and this lack of control is very difficult. It really stops you from making plans» (PL_30_AP_T_E, Pos. 27)

Suppression of negative emotions, feeling like they are "not allowed" to complain

«Of course, my whole life was crossed out. In Ukraine, I was a well-known writer, and my books were published. I had nice clothes and high heels. I drove a car and could afford everything because I had a good income... But I don’t feel like that... I am wearing someone else’s clothes, it’s someone’s used clothes, I don’t live in my apartment... But all this doesn’t mean anything at all... Because so many people are in Mariupol right now; so many people lost their homes in Ukraine that I just... I can’t actually complain that I am missing anything. I have a roof... And, most importantly, I have peace, a peaceful sky over my head» (DE_20_KS_T_E, Pos. 43)

Feeling guilt for being in safety and in good living conditions

«That there was an incredible feeling of guilt when I left. There was an incredible feeling of betrayal because of that fighting spirit and cohesion in Ukraine and patriotism at a high level as never before and because of all these people. I felt terrible as a person who left» (DE_68_KS_T_E, Pos. 68)

Finding relief and self-actualization in helping other Ukrainian refugees

«I was just a volunteer, I was helping people here as much as I could. I felt so much pain inside because I couldn’t defend anyone in Ukraine because I’m not a military person, I cannot fight, I don’t know how to hold a gun, I don’t know what good I would do there. I wanted to do good to people to compensate this feeling of guilt by being a volunteer. I was volunteering, I was helping social services to register people, to interpret, to coordinate things in Berlin» (DE_45_AB_T_E, Pos. 19)

Grieving lost stability and comfort

«Before the war, my life was planned for 5 years into the future. I had a stable life, I had a clear understanding of what happens next and how my whole life would go. [...] But now I understand that there is just here and now, and this is pretty much all we can count on». (DE_20_KS_T_E, Pos. 21)

Inaplicability of previous experience and cultural capital

«On Saturday I cried a lot; I am used to baking Easter sweet bread, cooking lots of salads, and waiting for the guests. I was very upset that I can't bake this bread and then go to a church to have it blessed. I didn't have this holiday» (PL_99_VS_T_E, Pos. 8)
«[In a bank] ...you imagine that they would do this and that, but instead they ask you completely different questions and do absolutely different things. This was stressful for me». (DE_57_KS_T_E, Pos. 40)

Dissonance between own mental state and surroundings

«Well, how can I say, I like everything. If I came here like a tourist, everything would be perceived differently. And now I am forced to live here, I am thinking all the time when this will end, and I will be able to go home, in such situation there is a different perception of Warsaw. I like everything here, and nature, everything. But home is better, everything is your own at home, native (crying)» (PL_28_VS_T_E, Pos. 48-49)

Positive re-identifications: overcoming hyperindependence, embracing new life

«In the Ukrainian mentality, we were taught that this world is not safe and there are a lot of bad people around; even my mom taught me to keep the doors locked. But now I see that if everyone lived with the thought that the world is dangerous, then no-one would be helping us right now; people risk opening their hearts, doors, and apartments. And they treat us, refugees, with trust. And I am actually very thankful for this, and I think that we have a lot to learn from Germans and Europeans in general in this respect» (DE_20_KS_T_E, Pos. 13)
«I will study, and we will succeed. I'm not afraid to start here! When we came here, of course, there was fear, but from the fact that we didn't know how it would be like. But we were very warmly received here» (PL_19_AP_T_E, Pos. 2)

Germany

Context: consistent governmental help, bureucracy, assimilation pathway "language courses → traning → job"

Discomfort with being dependent on welfare

«No one plans to sit and wait for the social aid; we've been working and moving forward our whole lives, nobody has ever expected any help from the country or anyone else even in Ukraine. We've always relied only on ourselves» (DE_99_LK_T_E, Pos. 72)

«And I want to quickly submit documents to the job center. And I don't want to live on this support from the Government. I also want to be useful» (DE_39_AN_T_E, Pos. 68)

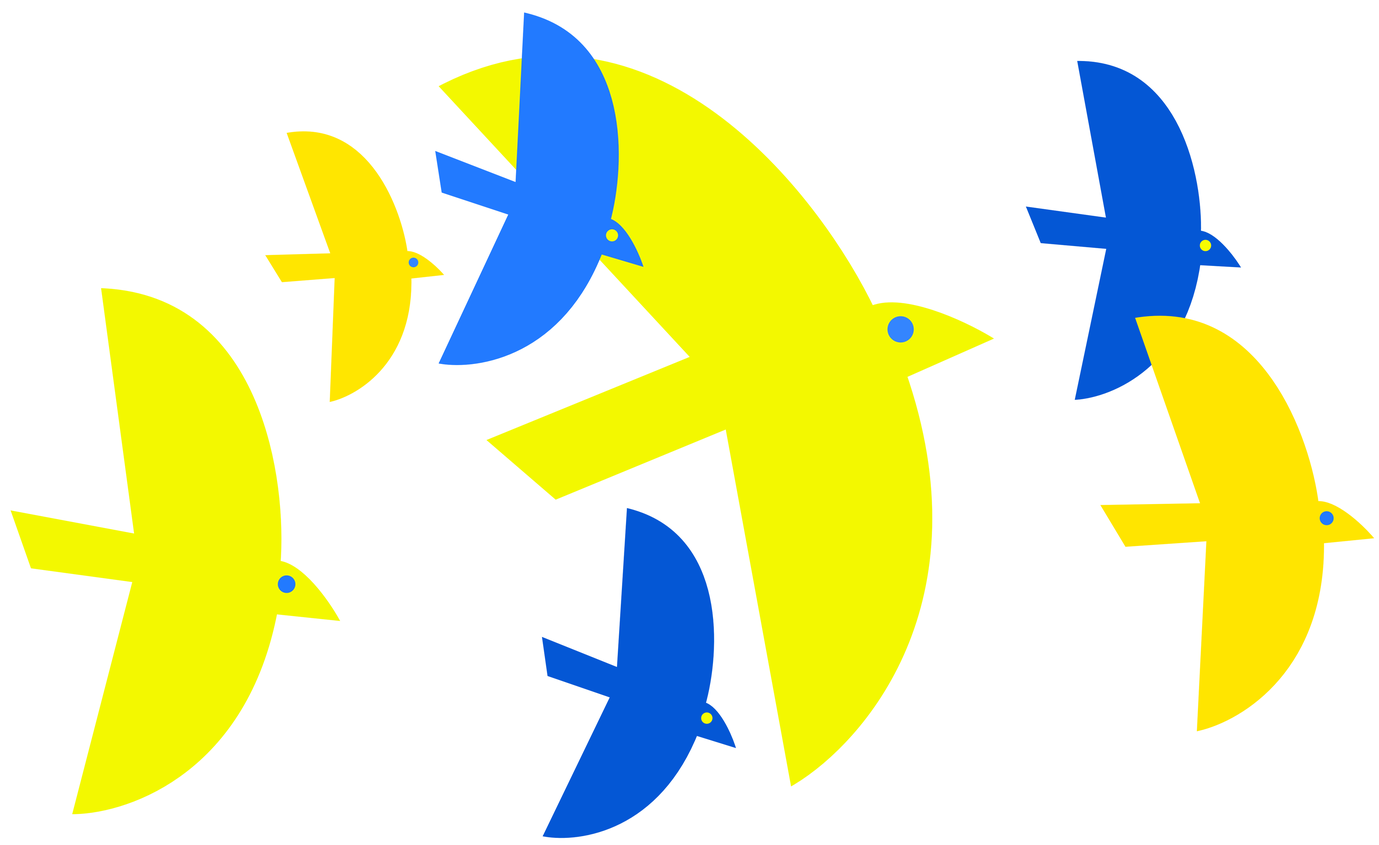
Poland

Context: similar culture and language

Easier adaptation, familiarity, feelings of adequacy

«I didn't feel abroad, everything was clear, I understood people, routines, processes. It was easier for children, too, they understand Polish more or less. I didn't panic about what to do» (PL_3_TN_T_E, Pos. 102)

«The culture is closer and there are a lot of Ukrainians, here you have kind of a feeling that to's like home but it's not and there are no so many strict rules, we're not used to them in Ukraine» (PL_4_TN_T_E, Pos. 132)



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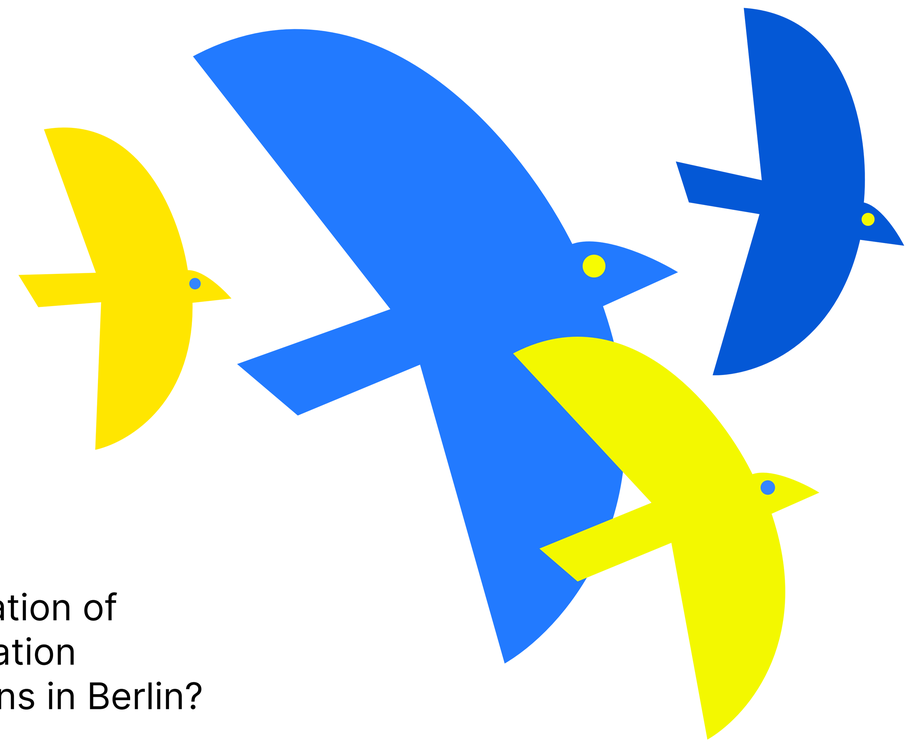
Analysis of the role of social capital in displaced Ukrainian's resettlement in Berlin



Research question:

What is the impact of social capital on displaced Ukrainian's access and utilization of social services in Berlin? How did social capital influence the choice of destination country? What is the nature of social capital possessed by displaced Ukrainians in Berlin?

Results from Berlin:

Our analyses show three different types of networks that shape support for displaced Ukrainians in their access and utilization of social services, such as help with administration (registration in Berlin, receiving money from the state), searching accommodation, school enrollment for children, access to healthcare or searching for a job.

Network based on relatives and friends who have already settled in Germany (not only in Berlin, but also have connections in Berlin):

'Networking here solves the problems. There are so many stories of someone helping someone. But it's also become much more important that here we are helping someone, and someone is helping us. It's this connection, like a spiderweb.' (Female, 40 y.o., divorced, has a daughter)

'It was my friend, who lives here in Berlin. She has opened a bank account for some of her acquaintances. I don't know. She said that there is an office, and we can go. Maybe if it was in English, I could open it myself, but in German I can't. Something, some words I can... But here you have to, really, learn the language'. (Female, 40 y.o., divorced, one daughter)

Migration networks: Ukrainians who moved to Germany and Berlin at the beginning of the war are helping other Ukrainians who moved later or who are planning to move.

'I got a call from a friend who is in Berlin. We used to work and study together, and she said: "I'm in Berlin, we're settled in, come over; if you get a chance, come over, we're waiting for you here'. (Female, single)

Non-supportive and hostile network of compatriots:

'I can note that our people, I mean Russians, Belarussians, Ukrainians, Moldovans, or Georgians, anyone from the post-Soviet states, they are all very angry. I was just like that; and when you get into the society of your fellow men, you understand how foul our people are when they are together. Many scandals happened in the queue... I was leaving the country as a father of many children, and there was a woman with two kids and her sister. So, I was standing in the line, and just by looking at me, they started telling me how much they hated me and moralizing about how much money I brought out, who I was at all and how I got there. I Was coming across these issues every time in every queue'. (Male, married, 4 children)

Discussion:

Social connections and migration networks are in many cases – decisive variables in the choice of destination country and city. Although almost everyone mentions the difficulties of the German, or even Berlin bureaucratic system, having a friend or relative, who has already been down this road or who speaks German and can translate, makes the bureaucratic journey from getting registered in Berlin to getting a school place or finding a job much easier. Moreover, those who, for example, arrived alone and do not have the necessary social connections or language skills, describe the experience in Germany as terrible and regret having chosen Berlin as a relocation site. Interestingly, the flip side of migrant networks also stands out from the interviews, with interviewees mentioning aggression and envy from fellow citizens who had settled in Berlin before the war started and generally mentioning negative traits of 'their' people.

Thus, the primary analysis shows that social capital plays a major role in both the choice of destination country and the subsequent adaptation and access to social services such as finding accommodation, obtaining a bank card, healthcare and so on.

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