

**Charles University**

**Faculty of Arts**

Department of Sociology

**Master's Thesis**



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***„It was like a job for me”*: Transition of Ukrainian refugees to the private rental housing market in the Czech Republic**

*„Bylo to pro mě jako práce”*: Přejchod ukrajinských uprchlíků na soukromý nájemní trh s bydlením v České republice

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#### Declaration

I declare that I have independently prepared this thesis, properly citing all sources and literature used. Furthermore, this thesis has not been utilized in the context of any other university study, nor has it been submitted to obtain another degree.

In Prague 2 May 2024

#### Prohlášení

Prohlašuji, že jsem diplomovou práci vypracovala samostatně, že jsem řádně citovala všechny použité prameny a literaturu a že práce nebyla využita v rámci jiného vysokoškolského studia či k získání jiného nebo stejného titulu.

V Praze dne 2. května 2024

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Abstract (in English):

The Czech Republic has become one of the top destinations for refugees from Ukraine following the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. However, research conducted in the Czech context regarding housing for refugees from Ukraine has yet to fully capture the complexity of their experiences in this regard. Utilizing qualitative research with a phenomenological framework, I conducted semi-structured interviews with refugees from Ukraine who have secured housing in the private rental housing market within the Prague metropolitan area. The primary research question addressed their strategies for finding accommodation in the private rental market, along with sub-questions exploring their motivations and barriers to entry into this market, as well as their utilization of capital during this transition. Thus, I identified a strategy of maximising one's own independence, a strategy of maintaining financial sustainability and a strategy of mobilising social networks. The findings of this study revealed that refugees are proactive agents, actively seeking to control their own lives. They employ creative strategies utilizing capital available to them to overcome various barriers and successfully access the private rental housing market. Consequently, this thesis contributes valuable insights to migration studies, enriches the theoretical understanding of agency, and offers practical recommendations for integration policies.

## Abstrakt (česky):

Česká republika se po ruské invazi na Ukrajinu v únoru 2022 stala jednou z cílových destinací uprchlíků z Ukrajiny, avšak výzkumy v českém kontextu týkající se bydlení uprchlíků z Ukrajiny doposud nereflektují komplexitu jejich zkušeností v této oblasti. Za využití kvalitativního výzkumu s fenomenologickým rámováním a provedením polostrukturovaných rozhovorů s uprchlíky z Ukrajiny, kteří získali bydlení na soukromém nájemním trhu s bydlením v Pražské metropolitní oblasti, jsem odpověděla na hlavní výzkumnou otázku, jaké strategie při hledání ubytování na soukromém nájemním trhu volí, spolu s podotázkami, které se týkají jejich motivací a bariér vstupu na tento trh a využití kapitálu v přechodu na tento soukromý nájemní trh. V rámci práce jsem tak identifikovala strategii maximalizace vlastní nezávislosti, strategii zachování finanční udržitelnosti a strategii mobilizace sociálních kontaktů. Výsledky práce ukázaly, že uprchlíci jsou proaktivní agenti, kteří se snaží kontrolovat svůj vlastní život a volí kreativní strategie za využití jim dostupného kapitálu pro překonání řady bariér a pro úspěšný vstup na privátní nájemní trh s bydlením. Práce tak svými poznatky přispěla do oblasti migračních studií, přispěla do teoretického rámce jednání, a navíc poskytla několik praktických doporučení pro integrační politiky.

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# 1 Introduction

The Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 led to a massive international displacement from this region, with more than 5.9 million people having fled the country (as of 19 April 2024) (UNHCR, 2024). Among their top destination countries, the Czech Republic rapidly became the third country in the European Union with the highest number of refugees from Ukraine, and currently hosts almost 350 thousand individuals (Ministry of the Interior CZ, 2024b). The highest number of them, almost 90 thousand, have chosen to live in the Prague metropolitan area. Accessing the housing market has become one of the goals for refugees from Ukraine since housing plays a significant role in the process of refugees' integration. Studies from other countries reveal that refugees face various difficulties in accessing the private rental housing market and experience discrimination (Adam et al., 2021; Brown et al., 2024; Kohlbacher, 2020). Refugees from Ukraine, however, granted temporary protection, receive a different package of rights and state support, which may result in different experiences during the process of transition. Although research exploring their living situation has been carried out, these studies did not reflect the complexity of their experiences in the field of housing and an in-depth understanding of the process of transition into the private rental housing market was lacking.

This thesis thus delves deeper into the lived experiences of refugees from Ukraine during the process of finding accommodation in the private rental housing market in the Prague metropolitan area. In this thesis, I work with the concepts of agency and capital, and I work with these concepts in the sense of a feminist critique of deterministic understandings of these concepts and the simplistic dichotomy of power and powerlessness. By conducting a qualitative interview-based research study, I answer the research question of what strategies refugees from Ukraine employ when looking for accommodation on this market. Additionally, I answer three sub-questions concerning the motivations for entering the private rental housing market, the barriers to entry, and the use of capital in this transition. This research is based on semi-structured interviews with refugees from Ukraine of economically active age living in rented accommodation in the Prague metropolitan area. This thesis is thus conducted with the objective of gaining a deeper understanding of their situation and lived experiences, enriching the international debate concerning this topic, and bringing new insights for integration policies.

In this thesis, I present my research in the following order. After providing an introduction to the thesis, in the second chapter I introduce the topic of housing by explaining the meaning of housing for individuals, as well as its significance in the integration process, and I present a brief overview of the findings to date concerning refugees' experiences in the private rental housing market. In the third chapter, I focus specifically on refugees from Ukraine, describing the type of protection granted to them, following this with the trend in the number of temporary protection holders in the Czech Republic. Additionally, I explain the rights and state support granted to them in the host country in more detail, specifically explaining the state support received by them concerning housing and subsequently presenting the available findings regarding their housing integration in the Czech Republic. In the fourth chapter, I describe the theoretical framework of this thesis by explaining Bourdieu's approach to the concepts of agency and capital and drawing on a feminist approach. In the fifth chapter, I then follow this with the methodology of the research; specifying my research question, detailing the research design, explaining the sampling method and the sample itself, describing the type of analysis chosen, and finally addressing some ethical questions concerning this type of research. Subsequently, in the sixth chapter, I present my research findings. Finally, in the seventh and eighth chapters, I discuss them and provide some recommendations for integration policies and point out potential directions for future research.

## **2 Refugees on the private rental housing market**

Accessing the private rental housing market can be considered a sign of independence of refugees and their desire to actively control their own life. The right to adequate housing is defined as one of the basic human rights indicating that housing is crucial for one's life, and thus the topic of housing has received attention in research with regard to the integration of refugees. However, studies that deal with the housing situation of refugees are mainly centred around the topics of initial housing, asylum centres, and refugee mass accommodation, but less is known about the experience of refugees on the private rental housing market.

The private rental housing market is overcrowded and housing has become a scarce commodity, with the situation being described as a global urban housing affordability crisis (Wetzstein, 2017), and thus the search for new accommodation is very competitive, making it significantly difficult for disadvantaged groups to compete on the housing market, and thus this transition into the private rental housing market is especially challenging for refugees, as they are a particularly vulnerable group (Brown et al., 2024).

### **2.1 Housing**

When fleeing their country of origin, refugees leave behind not only their houses but also their homes. As El Moussawi (2023) declares, we can think of displacement as a constant search for a home. Not only does housing give one a roof over one's head, but it also has a strong potential to provide a sense of home. Thus, housing can be understood either in this physical context, or it can go beyond this and provide an individual with much more in the sense of home. Home can be seen as a complex concept incorporating several dimensions – material, relational, temporal, and spatial – all of which are represented in housing. These dimensions of home then relate to different aspects of it – and therefore the concept of home can be represented in material objects, relationships, memories, or physical space (Taylor, 2013). Firstly, home provides one with a sense of belonging and represents a place of safety, security, and privacy (Borselli & van Meijl, 2021; Fozdar & Hartley, 2014). Secondly, home can be understood not as a static place or phase, but rather as an ever-changing, constantly evolving process. Thus, home is constructed rather than just gained. This is important, as it opens up an opportunity for refugees to regain housing and home. As noted by Fozdar and Hartley (2014) the process of creating one's home always occurs within a physical space in which one dwells. However, displacement disrupts such a construction of home and refugees

must then re-create, reconstruct, or make their home again. Therefore, housing plays an important role in the process of home-making and creating a sense of home.

Thus, home manifests itself in several forms, one of which is its physical form – housing. Housing thus represents more than just a building or a space where one lives but goes beyond this meaning in the sense of home.

## **2.2 Meaning of housing for integration**

Housing can be explored in its relation to home and refugees' sense of belonging, but it can also be regarded and evaluated as one of the pillars of integration. Drawing on the work of Ager and Strang (2008), we can perceive integration as a multidimensional process with interlinked domains which all account for what could then be evaluated as successful integration. In this sense, integration can be understood through its many layers, such as employment, housing, education, health, legal rights, social connections, safety and stability, language, and cultural knowledge. It is important to understand how these domains influence the overall process of integration and, more precisely, what role housing plays in the process.

Firstly, by granting rights to refugees, host countries are made responsible for exercising and upholding these rights accordingly, and furthermore this entitles refugees to demand these rights. Rights define conditions and measures for the residence of refugees and thus affect the experience of refugees during the process of integration (Ager & Strang, 2008). The conditions for acquiring citizenship and rights are fundamental to integration, as they legally empower refugees in their lives within host countries, thereby influencing their options for integration in this domain. This is evidenced by the fact that changes in laws related to migrants' rights over time can impact their housing outcomes (Lukes et al., 2019). Secondly, feelings of safety and stability are crucial. Feeling unsafe or being in a place of instability in the context of housing can have a negative impact on one's mental health (Ziersch et al., 2023). As mentioned before, housing provides a sense of safety and stability (Borselli & van Meijl, 2021; Fozdar & Hartley, 2014). Thirdly, health is among the domains of integration, and not only because good health is an important prerequisite for civic engagement (Ager & Strang, 2008). Housing is one of the predictors of good health, with the physical conditions of housing, as well as its quality and affordability, affecting the physical and mental health of refugees in the host country (Ziersch & Due, 2018). Fourthly, employment is arguably the most studied domain of integration as accessing the labour market successfully is a desired goal for refugees set by stakeholders. Finding a decent job opportunity engenders feelings of

stability and empowers refugees. The employment options of refugees are strongly dependent on the rights granted to them – the implementation of various immigration policies is thus studied (Marbach et al., 2018). Here again, housing interacts with this domain, with evidence that refugees who have obtained accommodation outside the state support system are more likely to be employed (Bevelander et al., 2019). Lastly, housing is among the indicators of integration. As already mentioned, housing provides a sense of home and belonging. It also promotes feelings of stability and security (Borselli & van Meijl, 2021; Fozdar & Hartley, 2014).

As shown above, housing thus enters the process of integration as an interacting variable in relation to other domains, but at the same time it is an independent key element of the process of the integration of refugees. It thus plays a significant role in the integration of refugees in host countries.

### **2.3 Experience of refugees on the housing market**

The existing studies about the position of refugees on the housing market indicate that refugees face multiple barriers. These can include unfamiliarity with the housing market in the host country (Adam et al., 2021; El Moussawi, 2023), the language barrier (Strang et al., 2018), a lack of financial resources (El Moussawi, 2023; Strang et al., 2018), or a lack of social connections (Makalesi et al., 2022). Consequently, they find themselves in a disadvantaged position on the housing market.

Refugees thus face several hardships which altogether make them unfavourable tenants for landlords. Property owners, being aware of the vulnerable situation of refugees, take advantage of them, leading to unfair treatment or even exploitation (Kohlbacher, 2020). Refugees recall situations when landlords refused their applications for housing because of their refugee status, origin, or religion (Adam et al., 2021) or the fact that they are recipients of social benefits (El Moussawi, 2023; Francis & Hiebert, 2014).

Refugees are thus more likely to end up residing in accommodation in unsuitable conditions. Many of them are left with the only option being to flatshare, sharing rooms with several people living in overcrowded accommodation, and so they then live with almost no personal space nor a place for privacy (Aigner, 2019; Francis & Hiebert, 2014). Some then describe their dwelling as being in unhygienic conditions, with broken furniture and in general need of repairs (Francis & Hiebert, 2014). Inadequate accommodation is an undesirable option and so refugees try to change their circumstances and find new and more

suitable accommodation (El Moussawi, 2023). Moreover, unfortunately, also because of their vulnerability, refugees are more likely to find themselves in an unstable housing situation and living without any legal rental contract (Adam et al., 2021; Francis & Hiebert, 2014; Kohlbacher, 2020). Such circumstances can result in frequent moves. This housing insecurity imposes a burden on refugees' mental health, with refugees describing their feelings of frustration and despair (El Moussawi, 2023).

Refugees are also more likely to experience homelessness or a state of hidden homelessness – residing in non-residential housing or in a friend's accommodation through not having their own place in which to live. As Francis and Hiebert (2014) declare, half of the refugees in Vancouver reported being in a state of hidden homelessness at some point of their post-migration journey.

In conclusion, refugees are among the disadvantaged groups competing on the private rental housing market. The starting point of their journey to finding a suitable dwelling is represented by their lack of knowledge about the local housing market, insufficient language skills, and lack of social and economic capital. As a result, they are considered to be unpreferred tenants and face discrimination by landlords. In such a situation refugees have little freedom of choice for their housing and find themselves in a constant state of housing precariousness.

### 3 Refugees from Ukraine in the Czech housing market

The Czech Republic had not been among the key destination countries for refugees until 2022. Indeed, the country hosts a rather small number of asylum applicants, as well as people with recognised refugee status and subsidiary protection, with 1,268 international refugees possessing asylum status and 1,228 holders of subsidiary protection status (as of 31 December 2023) (Ministry of the Interior CZ, 2024a). The situation changed with the arrival of refugees from Ukraine following the beginning of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, with there currently being over 348 thousand holders of temporary protection from this region in the Czech Republic (Ministry of the Interior CZ, 2024b).

#### 3.1 Status of protection, its recognition

In response to the Russian invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022, a few days after the initial events, the Temporary Protection Directive (Council Directive 2001/55/EC, 2001) was implemented to ensure that the regular asylum system would not be negatively affected. The Czech Republic implemented this Directive in Act No. 65/2022 of the Collection of Laws (Lex Ukraine, 2022). Regarding the issuance of temporary protection in the Czech Republic in this matter, an individual must apply at the Regional Assistance Centre for Ukraine. To qualify for this type of protection, they must prove that they left Ukraine because of the Russian invasion and that they are:

- a) Citizens of Ukraine who lived in Ukraine before 24.02.2022 and subsequently left Ukraine.
- b) Foreigners of third countries and stateless persons who have received any form of international protection in Ukraine before 24.02.2022.
- c) Family members of persons mentioned in paragraphs 1-2 who stayed with them in Ukraine before 24.02.2022 and subsequently left Ukraine.
- d) Foreigners who stayed on the territory of Ukraine before 24.02.2022, on the basis of a permanent residence permit, if they cannot return to the country of origin or to the part of the country due to the threat of real danger (*Dočasná ochrana*, 2024).

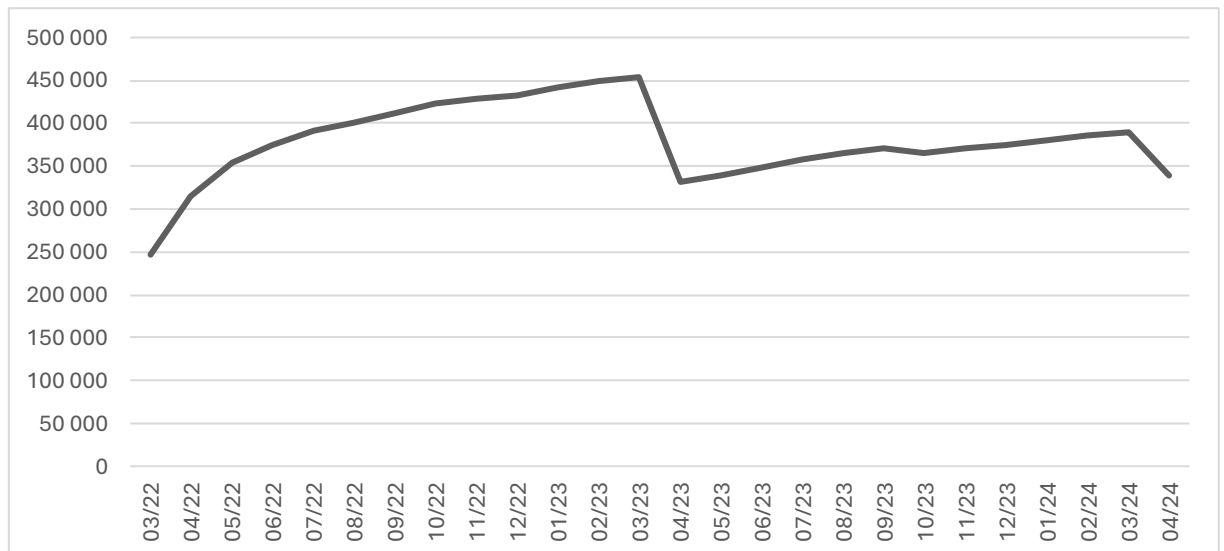
This means that only people who fled Ukraine because of the Russian invasion can be granted temporary protection. Therefore, individuals from Ukraine who left Ukraine before 24 February 2022 for whatever reason are not eligible to receive this type of protection.

This thesis employs the term ‘temporary protection’ in this meaning and when refugees from Ukraine are referred to, they are considered to be holders of temporary protection in the sense stated above.

### 3.2 Trends

The first days of the Russian invasion of Ukraine were already marked by inflows of high numbers of refugees to other European countries and the Czech Republic was among them. Thousands of people from Ukraine started to arrive in the Czech Republic on a daily basis and soon the Czech Republic became the third country in the European Union with the highest number of refugees from Ukraine (Ministry of the Interior CZ, 2024b).

*Graph 1: Number of Temporary Protection Holders in the Czech Republic 03/22–04/22*



*Source: Ministry of the Interior of the Czech Republic, 2024*

Note: Values are related to the last day of each month or the latest recorded date of the month, except 04/24 which is related to 1 March 2024.

The numbers of people from Ukraine fleeing to other European countries grew rapidly in the spring months of 2022. In the case of the Czech Republic, the numbers of incoming refugees were already significantly high in the first days after the invasion and by 31 March there were almost 250 thousand holders of temporary protection from Ukraine in the country. The number increased by more than a quarter, passing the mark of almost 315 thousand refugees by the end of April 2022. August 2022 marked the number of 400 thousand issuances of temporary protection. The first few months after the Russian invasion represented an abrupt increase of the refugee population from Ukraine in the Czech Republic, but the growth gradually slowed, fluctuating between 1.1 and 2.8% from August 2022 to April 2024. During this period, we can register three points at which the number of holders of temporary



protection decreased. One of them was a slight decline of around 6000 refugees from Ukraine in October 2023. The other two were significant drops in the refugee population from Ukraine in April 2023 and 2024, which was due to the obligation to renew the temporary protection visa by 31 March of each year at the latest. Overall, the Czech Republic had issued almost 600 thousand temporary protection visas altogether (as of 1 April 2024) and around 348 thousand refugees from Ukraine applied for renewal of their status, of whom 60% were of economically active age (61% women to 39% men), 26% children, and 4% elderly (Ministry of the Interior CZ, 2024b). The decrease in the number of temporary protection visas after the renewal indicates that around two-fifths of the refugees from Ukraine had left the Czech Republic. The most common reasons for leaving were to return to Ukraine (93.5%), voluntary termination of the status (5%), and relocation to another country (1.5%) (Ministry of the Interior CZ, 2023).

Regarding the preference for the location of residence of refugees from Ukraine, we know that they are not evenly distributed across the Czech Republic. Most of them aim to reside in cities and towns, avoiding rural areas (Ministry of the Interior CZ, 2024b). This finding is not unusual – in general, refugees, regardless of their country of origin, prefer to move to and live in urban areas (Kohlbacher, 2020; Weidinger & Kordel, 2023; Wernesjö, 2015). One of the reasons for this tendency is that towns provide more opportunities for refugees in terms of employment and education. Also, there is a higher chance of larger diasporas and other ethnic communities being located in urban rather than rural areas (Wernesjö, 2015). Unsurprisingly, almost 40% of temporary protection holders live in one of the six largest cities of the Czech Republic (Ministry of the Interior CZ, 2024b). The fact that urban areas and especially bigger cities and towns are the preferred option for living for refugees from Ukraine is proved by the finding that the top urban areas for residence were Prague and Brno, the two largest cities in the Czech Republic (Ministry of the Interior CZ, 2024b). Moreover, the Prague metropolitan area hosted around a quarter of all refugees from Ukraine and this proportion has remained constant over the months of 2022 and 2023 and the first quarter of 2024. Around 87 thousand of them were living in the capital city at the end of March 2024 (Ministry of the Interior CZ, 2024b).

In conclusion, the Czech Republic has become one of the top receiving countries for refugees from Ukraine. Over a third of refugees from Ukraine have left the host country, and yet over 348 thousand of them remain living on its territory and the population is still growing

steadily. Holders of temporary protection mostly reside in urban areas, with the Prague metropolitan area being preferred by the biggest number of them.

### **3.3 Rights and state support**

Temporary protection entitles refugees to certain sets of rights. Generally speaking, holders of this type of protection are granted residence permits for the duration of their protection (up to three years). They have the right to access the asylum procedure, and they are supposed to be granted free access to the labour market and medical care. Minors have the right to access education. Temporary protection also allows individuals to receive social welfare benefits; they have freedom of movement within the territory of the European Union and have the freedom to relocate to another country within the European Union (this applies only to those who have not yet received their temporary protection). Lastly, holders of temporary protection have the right to apply for family reunification (Council Directive 2001/55/EC, 2001).

Along with the general rights of temporary protection holders, refugees from Ukraine in the Czech Republic were granted a package of rights and state support, including aid in the form of a humanitarian allowance, health, education, employment, and housing (Lex Ukraine, 2022). Holders of temporary protection were immediately given the opportunity to receive humanitarian aid, which can currently be obtained for the first 150 days after recognition of one's temporary protection status; the amount is then reduced (Lex Ukraine V, 2023). Furthermore, they were permitted free access to the labour market, and they could also apply for unemployment benefits (Lex Ukraine, 2022). However, refugees from Ukraine report that they encountered many barriers when accessing the labour market, resulting in frequent employment without legal contracts and their unemployment rate being double the national rate (UNHCR, 2023). What is more, among the refugees who are employed, many are underpaid (PAQ Research, 2023). This all puts refugees from Ukraine into a very difficult position, with a high risk of living in poverty.

### **3.4 State support regarding housing**

To understand the housing situation of refugees in the Czech Republic and the state support granted to them, we must first understand the housing market in the country. The Czech Republic is typically dominated by owner-occupied housing. The transformation in the 1990s represented changes for housing and there was gradually a high degree of privatisation and a decline in the construction of public housing, resulting in public and social housing

gradually becoming only a residual housing solution (Lux et al., 2012). Even today, owner-occupied housing is typical for the Czech population, with 75% of households owning their own home, while only 18% live in rented accommodation on the private rental housing market (OECD, 2021). Moreover, social housing accounts for only 0.4% of total dwellings (OECD, 2021). Additionally, home ownership is significantly preferred and rental housing is still seen as only a temporary solution (Lux & Sunega, 2010). Thus, the rental and social housing system in the country today is not sufficiently developed.

Regarding the state support for housing for refugees from Ukraine, they are given the option to stay in initial housing upon their arrival. In the first months of the Russian invasion accommodation for refugees was provided free of charge and a solidarity allowance was introduced to provide financial support to local households that were willing to supply housing to refugees for free (Lex Ukraine, 2022). Hosts were guaranteed the amount of 3000 CZK per person (up to 12,000 CZK received by a household). With the amendment of the law Lex Ukraine II (2022) at the end of June 2022, hosts acquired an option to receive a solidarity allowance from the state while obtaining payments for electricity and gas bills from refugees. Additionally, the amount of the solidarity allowance was made dependent on the housing situation of refugees. Hosts sharing accommodation with refugees were entitled to receive 3000 CZK per person monthly (up to 9000 monthly), while hosts providing separate accommodation to refugees were granted 5000 monthly for one person per month (up to 15,000 monthly for five people) (Lex Ukraine II, 2022). Thus, flat-sharing with hosts entitled the latter to receive a smaller amount of financial support compared to hosts renting entire accommodation to refugees (Lex Ukraine II, 2022). The coming into force of Lex Ukraine V (2023) introduced many changes to the housing of refugees from Ukraine. Since 1 July 2023, the official date of Lex Ukraine V (2023) coming into effect, refugees have been guaranteed free accommodation for a maximum of up to 150 days after recognition of their temporary protection visa. This, however, does not apply to vulnerable groups of the refugee population (Lex Ukraine V, 2023). Moreover, the solidarity allowance is no longer available (Lex Ukraine V, 2023). Refugees could then apply to receive financial support for their housing that was dependent on their household income. Therefore, the state support regarding housing has been gradually reduced over the two years since February 2022. These changes represent a setback for refugees' integration, sending them into a state of greater uncertainty and instability.

### **3.5 Housing integration**

As stated above, housing is a key domain of integration and thus the housing situation of refugees from Ukraine has been a centre of focus. Given the fact that refugees were granted immediate free access to the housing market, the housing of refugees varies greatly, with different types of housing options. Therefore, where holders of temporary protection end up living depends on a variety of factors. Firstly, refugees from Ukraine with social networks in the Czech Republic were more likely to find accommodation on the private rental housing market (PAQ Research, 2022b). These social connections could be represented by family members or friends already living in the country. Such connections were an advantage for refugees because their friends and relatives probably had knowledge about the Czech housing market and knew the language.

Secondly, the period in which refugees arrive also affects their housing options. Those who came to the Czech Republic in later months were more likely to live in substandard housing (PAQ Research, 2022b). This further complicates their situation because those living in this type of housing face more difficult circumstances for moving out (PAQ Research, 2022a). Moreover, this non-residential housing is arguably the least preferred option, which is proved by the fact that this group of refugees report their desire to move out the most out of all groups of refugees living in different types of housing (PAQ Research, 2022a). Objectively, it can be argued that non-residential housing is by far the least suitable type of housing. Residing there often means having limited access to the accommodation only within certain hours, not having enough privacy, and having to share sanitary and kitchen facilities with strangers under unhygienic conditions (PAQ Research, 2022a, 2022b). Unfortunately, inadequate housing conditions were not reported solely by the residents of substandard accommodation but were an issue for over a fifth of the refugees from Ukraine, regardless of the type of housing (UNHCR, 2023).

Also, the financial constraints faced by refugees affect their housing situation. More than 20% of refugees claimed that they have experienced difficulties with the payment of their rent, resulting in their rent payment being overdue at least once (UNHCR, 2023). This reflects the many challenges that refugees must deal with.

Refugees from Ukraine also face challenges because of frequent moves – four in ten refugees moved at least once (PAQ Research, 2022a). Taking into account the fact that refugees already had to leave their accommodation in Ukraine to come to the Czech Republic,

these numbers, reported in August 2022, show that refugees had to move several times within a significantly short period of time. Moreover, only half of the refugee population from Ukraine claim that they have their housing secured for six months or longer. What is more, over a quarter of refugees report being uncertain how long they will be allowed to stay in their current accommodation (UNHCR, 2023). Just one move alone can be very stressful, let alone multiple moves. Leaving one's country of origin to seek safety elsewhere already brings a struggle to find a sense of home – embodied not only in the physical form of housing – it thus represents the first move, which is, as we can see, followed by subsequent moves in the country of refuge and this is accompanied by feelings of uncertainty about the future of their housing situation. This can be very stressful, putting refugees under intense pressure and distress that affect their mental health.

Although the housing situation of refugees is complicated, many manage to successfully transition to the rental market and find commercial accommodation. The number grew greatly, from 22% in August 2022 to 40% in March 2023 (PAQ Research, 2023). In contrast, the number of refugees living in accommodation provided by locals in solidarity decreased significantly, from around 50% to 30% in the same period (PAQ Research, 2023). This was arguably caused to some extent by the fact that the government reduced the solidarity allowance granted to households accommodating refugees. Another finding that arouses concern is that in this period the number of refugees living in non-residential housing remained constant (PAQ Research, 2023). This only supports the argument that refugees living in such housing struggle to find different accommodation and improve their housing situation.

However, we must keep in mind that these numbers and their trends give us only a very limited picture of the complex reality that refugees live in. Neither does the fact that a significant portion of refugees have transitioned to the private rental housing market reveal to us the actual situation that refugees are in. We lack an in-depth understanding of the housing situation and experience of refugees from Ukraine.

## 4 Theoretical framework

### 4.1 Concept of strategies

The search for new accommodation can be a long and challenging process. The housing market is a competitive place and accommodation seekers thus need to employ different strategies to succeed. According to Lu and Burgess (2023) in their study on the housing strategies of highly skilled migrants, migrants use several different strategies to obtain affordable housing. They define these as individual housing choices, employment-level support, and community support, where not only was migrants' search for affordable housing focused on their own capabilities and abilities, but also their strategies and efforts to find housing were channelled through their employers and communities who were trying to promote their interests. In contrast to this, the study of Dotsey and Ambrosini (2023) explains what strategies migrants and refugees choose if they fail in the housing market or if the given housing is not suitable and they find themselves in a precarious situation with regard to housing. They then solve their unsatisfactory housing situation through strategies where they rely on their social networks, attempt apartment sharing, or choose the strategy of living in social housing and affordable accommodation, then they shift their focus to free short-term and emergency accommodation, and lastly they have no choice but to choose rough sleeping.

Nevertheless, these housing strategies are defined within a social structure which limits the space a person has for controlling their life. Bourdieu (1986) understood the social structure, or more precisely field, as the space within which individuals can make decisions and thus create their own agency. Structure, understood as, for example, socioeconomic inequalities or the setup of housing policies, thus also defines barriers faced by different agents. We understand agency as one's ability to act on one's desires and control one's own life and it can also be described as decision making or the adoption of strategies performed according to the position of an agent within the field. According to Bourdieu, the agency and strategies of individuals are then prescribed according to their position in the hierarchical social structure.

Bourdieu also works with the concept of capital. Individuals, meaning social agents, operate on the basis of their acquired capital within a social structure which then defines their space for agency and possible strategies. Bourdieu differentiates between three essential types of capital with which agents operate – economic, cultural, and social capital. First of all, economic capital, which we can define as income, assets, and other financial resources, is

crucial for success in the housing market. Indeed, economic capital is also important for migrants in their housing pathways, with employment status proving important in their access to the housing market and housing outcomes. As Shier et al. (2016) show, if migrants become unemployed they are more likely to end up living in inadequate housing conditions. Economic capital thus plays a role in the opportunities of migrants (and others too) in the housing market. Secondly, cultural capital enables mobility within the social structure and has been proved to be a useful resource for individuals in the housing market (Hochstenbach & Boterman, 2015). Cultural capital can be seen as an individual's education, or as their language and cultural knowledge (Bourdieu, 1986). These aspects of capital recognised by society facilitate mobility in the social structure. Cultural capital is thus significant because it can be exchanged for economic capital in the housing market and thus help the individual in their position in this market. Research studying access to housing and housing pathways confirms that in the housing market individuals benefit from their specific cultural capital (Boterman, 2012; Hochstenbach & Boterman, 2015). Cultural capital has proved to be an important complement to economic capital in the housing market and is proving to be very important for the integration of migrants. Lastly, when accessing the housing market, social capital has proved useful (Aigner, 2019; Kohlbacher, 2020). Bourdieu's work on social capital (1986) suggests that it is acquired by individuals through their social networks, which then help them in their vertical and horizontal mobility. Social networks are an essential part of the concept of social capital and additionally, Granovetter (1973) differentiates between strong and weak ties. Strong ties, represented in close relationships with family and friends, are a beneficial source of support. Indeed, in terms of housing, this type of social tie can serve as a safety net to avoid homelessness (Dietrich-Ragon & Jacobs, 2015). Nevertheless, weak ties, which we see, for example, in relationships with acquaintances or colleagues, also benefit one's position in the social structure (Granovetter, 1973). Prior to the Russian invasion of Ukraine, citizens of Ukraine represented the largest migrant community in the Czech Republic, numbering around 30% of all migrants (Czech Statistical Office, 2022). Refugees from Ukraine thus had co-ethnic social networks in the country and this diaspora could then potentially serve as a valuable network of social ties for them. We thus assume that for refugees from Ukraine in the Czech Republic there is a potential for social networks not only with locals but also with the diaspora.

Bourdieu's concept of different types of capital has been widely recognised and used; however, his understanding of not only capital but also social structure and agency has been criticised for being too deterministic and rigid and for perceiving society from too

mechanistic a perspective (see Faber, 2017). It is precisely because if social structures determine the habitus of individuals, and thus their internalised set of dispositions and preferences, their habitus must then become conformist, which then influences social practices and so agents cannot be active players in the social structure and create new strategies and have agency (King, 2000). Everything is thus predetermined and conformism of social agents is the only possible outcome, which consequently means that there is no room for the social mobility of agents or social change (Jenkins, 1982). Bourdieu also works with the concept of capital in a rather deterministic way because in his understanding capital determines options for mobility within the social structure (Yang, 2014). Bourdieu's model and interpretation of social reality are thus considered deterministic.

Nevertheless, it is important to note that not all scholars see Bourdieu as deterministic and they argue that in fact in his work Bourdieu deals with this problem of determinism and explains how social change is possible. That is, when an open system exists and offers new opportunities, the habitus and field of social agents are mismatched, and social agents are thus able through explicit pedagogy to create a new habitus and social agents are reflexive and, for instance, able to counter the influence of socialisation and thus individualise their actions (Yang, 2014). Thus, according to Bourdieu's supporters, the notion of structure and agency enables change, conscious decisions, and agency. Thus, according to his supporters, criticism of Bourdieu's work for excessive determinism stems simply from a misunderstanding or simplification of that work (Faber, 2017; Yang, 2014).

These concepts of Bourdieu's that theorise agency have been criticised not only for extensive determinism but also for being too simplistic – in his work, agency is understood as the capacity to act being in the hands only of those who hold power. In this sense, this dichotomy puts individuals into groups of the powerful and powerless and attributes agency only to the powerful, while considering those who are subjugated to be powerlessly vulnerable.

Feminist scholars oppose this simplistic idea of the powerful and powerless and shift the interest to the agency of the subjugated. They argue that the notion of vulnerability falsely assumes passivity and incapability to take action and create agency. Moreover, such a practice further victimises the vulnerable (Butler, 2016). They claim that vulnerability does not imply passivity or lack of agency but rather they argue that, despite their disadvantaged position, those who are vulnerable deploy a variety of strategies to cope with their life situation (Butler, 2016; Mahmood, 2001). Thus, those who are subjugated are not passive agents without



agency and creative decision making. Nevertheless, even if vulnerability implies passivity, it does not imply inactivity as such, but can instead imply a purposeful decision and agency (Mahmood, 2001). So, even though the vulnerable groups have fewer options for choice and decision making in their life, their disadvantage does not exclude them from having agency and despite their circumstances, they are still active agents in their life, employing different strategies to control their own life. A feminist approach is thus emancipatory; not only does it expose unequal power settings, but it also points to the fact that it is not only those who hold power who have agency. Moreover, by applying an intersectional approach based on feminist approaches, we can unpack the multi-layered spheres of oppression (Crenshaw, 1991). This feminist approach is then useful in exploring agency in those communities that experience oppression. Agency is thus studied not only in women but also, for example, in the disabled (Watson, 2002) or non-Western societies (Mahmood, 2001), where these identities are not studied individually but precisely in their intersecting nature. This thus helps to highlight inequalities and reveal the disadvantages of these individuals, while at the same time pointing to their subsequent proactive agency despite being disadvantaged.

A feminist and intersectional approach is also believed to be beneficial in migration studies, because through this approach we can stop seeing migrants as passive victims of their situation, but instead recognise their capacity to act, have agency, and develop creative strategies in their lives (Bürkner, 2012). Thus, this lens of the vulnerable in the social structure can also be applied to refugees. Indeed, migration research proves that refugees, despite their disadvantaged position, develop strategies to actively make choices about their life (Bakewell, 2010; Feng et al., 2021). Indeed, refugees show a strong desire to control their own life independently (Strang et al., 2018) and they strongly refuse to be depicted as victims (Hunt, 2008). For example, refugees try to become more in touch with the host society; they attend language courses or attend various events to try to establish some social networks with locals as well as to learn the local language and to familiarise themselves with the dominant culture (Makalesi et al., 2022). They get training to enhance their career prospects (Yakushko, 2010). They mobilise their contacts with social workers or volunteers to ask proactively for assistance to access education (Nimführ et al., 2020). Some seek psychological services with the aim of taking care of their mental health (Yakushko, 2010).

The concept of agency is also useful in the study of the housing trajectories of refugees. Many theories try to explain housing trajectories, such as rational choice theory or constraint choice perspective, which, however, as Aigner (2019) claims, do not provide a sufficient

explanation of the agency and decision making of refugees during their search for accommodation. These theories put a strong emphasis either on the choice of actors or constraints of choice, which does not reflect the active role of refugees in the process and their creative use of strategies to succeed. This lens works with the limited and simplistic dichotomy of the agency of the powerful and powerless. However, in order to provide a comprehensive picture of the lived experiences of refugees, we need to overcome this and understand refugees as capable of having agency and employing strategies in their life. Certain studies reflect this fact that searching for accommodation is an active goal-oriented act employing agency and different strategies in one's process of seeking accommodation and thus refugees as active agents are made the centre of attention (Aigner, 2019; Strang et al., 2018).

In this thesis, drawing on a feminist approach, refugees are considered to be active agents in their life who deploy various strategies to navigate through their own life and, drawing on criticism of Bourdieu's determinist approach, we can argue on the basis of the critique that, on the contrary, capital enables the individual's mobility in the social structure and thus their position is not predetermined.

## **5 Methodology**

### **5.1 Research questions**

On the basis of the literature review and identified gaps in research, this master's thesis aims to answer the main research question *What strategies do refugees from Ukraine employ when looking for accommodation in the private rental housing market?* In addition, three sub-questions are also proposed – *What motivates refugees from Ukraine to look for accommodation in the private rental housing market? What barriers do refugees from Ukraine face when looking for accommodation in the private rental housing market? How do refugees from Ukraine employ capital during the process of finding accommodation in the private rental housing market?*

### **5.2 Research design**

Since the topic of the housing strategies of refugees from Ukraine has not been fully explored, I conducted a qualitative interview-based research study. Given the nature of my research objective, the research was grounded in a phenomenological framework. Phenomenology allows us to study the lived experiences of individuals experiencing a phenomenon (Creswell, 2007). With my research I explored the phenomena and lived experiences of refugees from Ukraine in the housing market of the Prague metropolitan area utilizing qualitative research methods. Subsequently, I used inductive and abductive analysis to analyse my data. I used an inductive approach to search for new topics without a pre-existing theory (Braun & Clarke, 2006); specifically, I used it to explore the topics of motivation and barriers experienced by the research participants, and I employed an abductive approach to analyse the topic of strategies and capital. The abductive approach was useful in my research as it allowed me to work with pre-existing theories and look for plausible explanations for my data (Timmermans & Tavory, 2012). To answer my research questions, I conducted semi-structured interviews. Interviewing is a widely-used research method to gain in-depth insights into research participants' experiences (Knott et al., 2022). I chose to employ semi-structured interviews as I wanted to explore certain phenomena of the lived experiences of refugees from Ukraine during the process of transition to the private rental housing market and topics related to it. Semi-structured interviews thus allowed me to have a prepared topic guide revolving around certain topics as well as to be responsive to the research participants' responses during the interviews and ask additional questions. The topic guide with questions can be seen in Appendix 1.

### **5.3 Data collection and sample selection**

To recruit research participants purposive sampling was employed. The opportunity to participate in the interviews was first offered to a few clients of the Association for Integration and Migration and they were encouraged to suggest other potential research participants eligible for the interviews. However, this snowball method did not prove useful since none of the research participants recommended anyone who met the criteria. Subsequently, a leaflet with information about the interview was posted online in four groups dedicated to refugees from Ukraine in the Czech Republic on the Viber and Telegram social media platforms. These groups had between 185 and 5300 members. The leaflet provided basic information about the research, its purpose, criteria for the selection of research participants, and the contact details of the author of the study. Thus, the potential research participants could then contact the author of the study directly or could fill in an online application form. The application form required little information to fill in to ensure the smallest number of barriers to participation in the research. I then contacted everyone who applied, thanking them for their interest and stating, once again, what the criteria for participation in the interviews were. Subsequently, I started to arrange interviews with them on the basis of the order in which they applied but also on that of other given information that was available to me and so I tried to achieve the greatest variety of research participants, keeping in mind the criteria of the target population. However, not everyone who applied to participate in the interviews in the first place then wanted to proceed and some did not respond to my inquiry about our interview. As a result, the first few research participants were clients of the Association for Integration and Migration (3) and others were recruited online (9). A total of twelve research participants participated in the interviews.

To ensure the greatest possible inclusiveness of research participants, the interviews were conducted in three different languages – Czech, English, and Ukrainian, so that different language competencies were taken into account. Given the language proficiency of the author of this research, interviews were thus also conducted with the involvement of interpreters. The interpreters were employees of the Association for Integration and Migration; all three of them were employed as intercultural workers and had extensive experience with working with refugee communities and working as interpreters. The research participants were reimbursed for their participation in the interviews with the amount of 300 Czech crowns received in cash at the end of the interview. They were all asked to sign an informed consent form that included information about the interview, the purpose of the research, and data storage and

privacy requirements. The informed consent forms were provided in the Ukrainian, Czech, and English languages. The English version of the document is attached in Appendix 2.

My target population was people from Ukraine who had fled the country since 24 February 2022 and who had received temporary protection in the Czech Republic. I aimed to select research participants among people who, at the time of the interview, lived in accommodation on the private rental housing market, and, to ensure the greatest variability, were of economically active age (18-65 years old), of different genders, with different levels of education, with different family arrangements and differently composed households, and lived in the Prague metropolitan area. I selected the Prague metropolitan area for my research purposes because as a capital city it has become the district with the most refugees from Ukraine in the Czech Republic (Ministry of the Interior CZ, 2024b). As already mentioned, urban areas are preferred by refugees, and they often relocate to cities (Kohlbacher, 2020; Weidinger & Kordel, 2023; Wernesjö, 2015). Indeed, refugees from Ukraine in the Czech Republic follow the same trend (Ministry of the Interior CZ, 2024b).

#### **5.4 The sample**

My sample consisted of twelve research participants. All the interviews were held in person and the research participants could choose the time and location at which the interview would take place. Some of the interviews were thus conducted in cafés (mostly in the city centre) and others were held at the offices of the Association for Integration and Migration. The interviews were collected in the course of five weeks, and the duration was between 30 and 90 minutes. Some interviews were conducted in Czech (3), or English (3) with the presence only of the interviewer. Three research participants voiced their wish to speak in Czech during the interview but also wanted to have an interpreter present. The remaining four interviews were held with the involvement of an interpreter.

At the time of the interviews, all of the research participants were renting their accommodation on the private rental housing market within the metropolitan area of Prague. All of them were women. Two men applied to participate in the interviews but, unfortunately, during the phase of arranging our interviews, they both stopped responding, even though I tried to contact them several times. The research participants were of ages ranging from 25 to 49 years old, and had fled different regions of Ukraine. All the research participants except one had obtained tertiary education. Some of them came to the Czech Republic on their own, others lived only with their children, with a partner, or with their partner and children, and

some households included other people outside the nuclear family unit. Moreover, for some the arrangement of the household members changed over time (larger groups of acquaintances moved away, or some household members moved in with them later on). The basic characteristics of the research participants can be seen in Table 1, with an extended version including more information being provided in Appendix 3.

Seven research participants arrived in the Czech Republic in March 2022, with four others arriving in the later months of the same year. One research participant did not arrive in the country until the autumn of 2023. The accommodation of the research participants in the first days after their arrival in the Czech Republic varied. Some of them had to stay in temporary accommodation, some decided to stay in commercial hotels and other accommodation facilities for tourists, paying for their stay themselves, while others stayed with friends and relatives. The period of their entry into the housing market and the duration of the process of finding accommodation also differed significantly, as can be seen in detail in Appendix 3.

*Table 1: Characteristics of the Sample*

<b>Name</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Current occupation</b>	<b>Month of arrival in the Czech Republic</b>	<b>Duration of the transition process</b>
Kateryna	37	project architect	March 2022	4 months
Nataliya	25	programmer	September 2022	2 weeks
Polina	43	salesperson	May 2022	4 months
Anna	25	lecturer	March 2022	1 week
Olena	49	cleaner	March 2022	2 months
Oksana	48	therapist	March 2022	2 months
Alina	37	hospitality worker	March 2022	2 months
Svitlana	45	parental leave	March 2022	3 months
Iryna	35	unemployed	September 2023	1 month
Lyudmyla	39	parental leave	April 2022	2 months
Olha	35	parental leave	August 2022	2 months
Nadiya	40	unemployed	March 2022	2 months

## **5.5 Data analysis**

Every interview was audio recorded and subsequently transcribed by the author with the help of the Microsoft Word software, and, in the case of the interviews conducted in Czech, Ukrainian, or Russian, translated into English. The software allowed the transcription process to be partly automatised; however, the text was then carefully checked by the author and edited if needed. I anonymised any personal or sensitive information during the transcription phase. The audio recordings were stored under passwords and destroyed once the transcription was finished.

I then analysed the transcribed texts using the ATLAS.ti software employing thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2012). This allows recurring patterns and themes to be found in the data. The data was coded within the framework of thematic analysis as recommended by Braun and Clarke (2012). Thus, after the interviews had been transcribed, I re-read through them in detail to gain a deeper understanding of their content and I paid attention to interesting passages that could potentially form certain thematic units. This was followed by the actual coding. I created a total of sixty codes; some codes relating to the same overarching topic, for example, barriers to refugees in the housing market, were then put into code groups, with a total of five code groups. These included sociodemographic information, housing strategies, motivation, barriers, and capital, and the results chapter revolved around them. Additionally, other codes that added valuable information were included in the text part of the results. In the next phase, attention was focused on finding themes and patterns. Thus, thematic units were subsequently formed with subcategories that answered the research questions. In addition, codes that did not directly answer the research question were also identified.

## **5.6 Ethical questions**

Working with people under protection requires deep consideration of ethical issues in research. Conducting research requires confidentiality and privacy (Akesson et al., 2018). For this reason, the research participants were reassured that any identifying information discussed during the interview was considered confidential and would subsequently be anonymised. To ensure the privacy and autonomy of the research participants, they were asked to choose the time and location at which the interview would take place. If the research participants did not choose a specific place for the interview, it took place at the Association

for Integration and Migration in a room with the presence only of the author and possibly an interpreter. These steps helped to ensure privacy and confidentiality.

To ensure optimal sensitivity to the research participants' experiences during the interviews and in order to be informed as much as possible about cultural differences, prior to the commencement of the interview phase I met with two intercultural workers who were of Ukrainian descent. We discussed what topics might be emotionally challenging for the research participants and how to deal with that, but we also touched on the differences between the Ukrainian housing market and the Czech context. This helped me to gain a better understanding of their situation and be better prepared for the actual interviews.

Another ethical issue concerns the provision of sufficient information about research to research participants. As Mackenzie et al. (2007) note, in the case of research concerning refugees, because of their situation, it should be ensured that they are given full information about the research and understand the implications of giving their consent to being part of the research. As mentioned above, prior to the commencement of the interviews, the research participants were given an informed consent form to read and sign; it included information about the research that also included the contact details of the author of the research. In this way the research participants gained an opportunity to stay in touch with the author of the research in case they had any follow-up questions or wanted to re-discuss any concerns they might have regarding the interview and the purpose of the research. The purpose of the study was re-introduced to them in the language of their choice before the interview began and the research participants were given space to ask any additional questions. They were also assured that their participation was voluntary and they could withdraw at any point during the interview.

Another important ethical consideration for this research was the language of communication. The research participants could choose the language of the interview and were assured that they could choose freely according to their preference. The interviews could thus be conducted in Czech or English with the presence of only the interviewer or were held with the assistance of an interpreter. The interpreters spoke Ukrainian (1) and Russian (2). The research participants were informed about this fact prior to the interview and were asked if they preferred any language to be spoken by the interpreters. Given the fact that the research participants left Ukraine because of the Russian invasion, they were also reassured that it was not required of them to speak Russian or to a Russian-speaking interpreter. In fact, none of the research participants saw this as an obstacle and some even preferred to speak Russian during



the interview, claiming that it was more comfortable for them. The interviews were interpreted consecutively, meaning that the interpreter listened to part of the speech and interpreted it when the speaker paused. Given the expertise of the interpreters involved, this process was smooth and did not pose any challenges to the interviews. This way of interpreting allowed me to ask additional questions if needed.

If the research participants reacted emotionally during the interview they were shown compassion for their situation, and they were also given space to feel through these emotions and to cope with them. In addition, once again, they were reassured that they did not have to answer any questions that would make them feel uncomfortable. If the research participants talked about any issues or a difficult life situation they were provided with contacts to NGOs which provide legal, social, or psychosocial counselling.

## 6 Results

The findings from my analysis presented certain patterns in the responses of the research participants, which are presented below. Firstly, I introduce the results with a brief explanation of the positionality of the research participants before the transition process. Then I focus on their motivations to start looking for accommodation in the private rental housing market. Next, I describe the barriers which they experienced during the transition. Subsequently, I present the strategies which they employed in the transition process, together with an explanation of how they used their capital in this process. In the final paragraphs I describe the positionality of the research participants after their transition.

### 6.1 Basic positionality of refugees from Ukraine in the Czech housing market

Regardless of the time of the research participants' arrival in the Czech Republic, some of them expressed continuous feelings of shock and disbelief over the Russian invasion and their forced displacement from their homeland. These feelings are illustrated by Iryna, who explained that she only came to the Czech Republic for a few days to gain some energy and recover but never planned to stay for longer. However, the situation in Ukraine changed and so she eventually had to stay indefinitely in the Czech Republic. During the interview, she then described the shock of the whole situation, which she had not anticipated.

*“...we only came for a few days to rest, which are still ongoing.” (Iryna, 35 years old, unemployed)*

After their arrival, the refugees received various forms of support from locals, volunteers, and non-governmental organisations as well as governmental organisations. Volunteers offered them assistance with interpreting, and they also received housing support. Thus, in the first days after arrival some found accommodation thanks to the assistance from the Regional Assistance Centre for Ukraine or solidarity housing from locals who did not require any financial compensation for the accommodation provided. However, as already mentioned, refugees had different housing options in the first days after their arrival, with some having the opportunity to live with friends or relatives while others lived in regular hotels where they had to pay for their accommodation. Thus, all the research participants obtained housing in the private rental housing market only after leaving their initial temporary accommodation, so no one entered the housing market directly upon arrival. This means that all the research participants moved at least once in the Czech Republic, with some moving up

to four or five times during their time here before securing housing in the private rental housing market.

## **6.2 Motivation**

The research participants decided to enter the private rental housing market for various reasons. Among these reasons three patterns of motivation for this transition were identified. However, it is important to note that these identified motivations were not always isolated but were based on the changing circumstances of the research participants; their motivations would sometimes change during the process or co-existed simultaneously when, for example, someone wanted to gain independence together with stability.

### **6.2.1 Seeking stability and normality**

One of the reasons why the research participants started to search for accommodation in the private rental housing market was that they wanted to regain a sense of stability and find a new normality in their life. Even though the initial accommodation was important for them, in most cases it was only a temporary solution, with its conditions not being sustainable in the long run. In the case of mass accommodation facilities research participants recalled that the conditions were unsuitable and inadequate for normal everyday life. One of the research participants, Polina, who arrived in the Czech Republic in March 2022 with her two children alone and who was only able to be reunited with her husband several weeks afterwards, recalled the time when she and her family lived in mass accommodation. As she described it, all four of them lived in one room with no kitchen facilities, and thus the conditions of this type of housing were not suitable for normal life and it took a toll on their mental health.

*“Well, there was no kitchen, it wasn’t good for the family, my daughter couldn’t get used to it, she cried.” (Polina, 43 years old, salesperson)*

Those who spent their first days with friends or relatives, who thus lived in a room or part of their flat, also described how in the following weeks and months the flatmates’ accommodation became an unsustainable option. Neither the research participants nor their friends or relatives had enough privacy for themselves and the flat-sharing sometimes resulted in uncomfortable conflict situations. This was the motivation for finding her own rented accommodation for Iryna, who arrived in the Czech Republic with her husband in September 2023. In the initial phase, they used the opportunity to move in with their friends, but after several weeks it became an unsuitable option for them since there were many people sharing the same accommodation.

*“So, we were actually staying in this house with these friends and there were two couples and we had our own room but one couple had two kids so there were a lot of us together in that house. And we were living sort of around a month, and it was getting kind of like tense, it was like not that we were arguing, but sometimes there were just like, like, not very nice housing situations arising.” (Iryna, 35 years old, unemployed)*

As we can see, stability and normality represented an important goal in the integration journey for the research participants. Because temporary accommodation could not serve this purpose precisely because of its temporary nature, they felt motivated to seek accommodation on the private rental housing market in order to obtain more secure and stable housing.

### **6.2.2 Desire for independence, control over one’s own life**

Another type of motivation for the research participants was the desire for independence. It was apparent from some of the interviews that it was very important for the research participants not to be a burden or be dependent on any external support. The research participants also described how they wanted to have their own place to live where they could make decisions about the space and it would feel more their own. That motivated them to start the process of finding accommodation on the housing market. This was also the case for Anna, who, after moving between different types of temporary accommodation over a few weeks after her arrival in the Czech Republic, wanted to regain her independence by obtaining her own rented accommodation. As she described during the interview, looking into the future, she did not want to be dependent on other people any more and reliant on others to provide housing for her.

*“...I can’t always stay in a hotel and I can’t always ask people to provide accommodation for me, that’s not possible.” (Anna, 25 years old, lecturer)*

Therefore, the desire for independence and control over one’s own life was an important force for some of the research participants to start looking for accommodation in the private rental housing market. Research participants felt motivated to leave temporary housing solutions which did not allow enough space for their independence and so they decided to start the transition process.

### **6.2.3 Desire to regain financial sustainability**

Some of the research participants were motivated to search for accommodation for very practical reasons because of the termination of housing support. They discussed the fact that because of the termination of the solidarity allowance from the state their housing costs would

increase and for this reason they were faced with the decision to look for another option for their accommodation. With increased housing costs this option of living in a solidarity household was no longer the best option for the research participants and this motivated them to start looking for accommodation on the private rental housing market. This was also articulated by Kateryna, who had to find accommodation for herself and her two children and whom it took four months to actually secure housing in this market.

*“Hmm, and another thing, the Czech Republic won’t pay for the rent of the room, and it looked as though it would be per person, I have three people, that would be about 20,000 with fees, that’s expensive.” (Kateryna, 36 years old, project architect)*

Unlike the other two types of motivation, this one was more practically oriented. It was not so much an inner motivation but instead it was a type of motivation based on external circumstances. Research participants in this case were not so much motivated by their desire to gain an internal sense of stability or independence, but were motivated by the external influence of the end of the solidarity contribution.

As can be seen research participants were motivated to seek accommodation on the rental market for a variety of reasons. Housing on the private rental market thus represented a certain greater security for them, whereby in their perception they could finally gain feelings of stability and independence and no longer had to rely on refugee housing support, which was subject to greater change and therefore uncertainty.

### **6.3 Barriers**

The research participants faced many barriers when entering the private rental housing market and beginning the process of a search for new accommodation. As a result, they described this period as difficult and associated it with negative feelings. They recalled feeling sad and frustrated because of the endless search for accommodation. They also felt dissatisfied with the situation and were very tired as a result of the effort they were putting into it. Many were also very nervous and worried about whether they would achieve their goal of finding accommodation. For Iryna, coming to terms with leaving her home in Ukraine and unexpectedly starting a new life in the Czech Republic was so mentally demanding that she broke down.

*“So I was, I wasn’t feeling well and I still wasn’t okay because of the situation in Ukraine, so overall I didn’t feel good. I thought that we just came here for a bit of a rest, that it had sort of layered on – the situation then with finding that accommodation and I had three*

*or four like nervous breakdowns so that I really had a breakdown.” (Iryna, 35 years old, unemployed)*

In addition, the situation of finding housing was stressful for the research participants because they often had to deal with other responsibilities and commitments in the new country at the same time; they were not only looking for housing, but at the same time they were looking for jobs or schools for their children or dealing with the authorities. These feelings were articulated during the interview by Kateryna. Her husband stayed in Ukraine, and so she arrived in the Czech Republic alone with two children and had to take care of everything on her own.

*“Well, I was really nervous, I had to find a school for my children, a job, a permanent place to live, that was a problem...” (Kateryna, 36 years old, project architect)*

In the responses of research participants regarding the challenges they faced in the process of transition into the private rental housing market I identified several topics which made it difficult for refugees to enter this market. These can be differentiated between individual and structural barriers. These included the circumstances of a crowded housing market, language barriers, discrimination by landlords because of refugees’ backgrounds, visa issues, financial constraints, the composition of the household, inappropriate conditions in the accommodation offered, landlords’ failure to respond to research participants, and uncertainty about the future.

### **6.3.1 Individual barriers**

Individual barriers affected research participants in the housing market but unlike structural barriers were not embedded in the social structure. Individual barriers thus included the language barrier, financial constraints, the composition of the household, inadequate accommodation and unfair treatment from potential landlords, no response from landlords, and uncertainty about the future.

#### **6.3.1.1 Language barrier**

The research participants also mentioned the challenges regarding the language barrier. Because none of them spoke Czech upon arrival, it was not easy for them to reply to potential landlords, communicate with landlords, or to go to viewings where they needed to speak Czech. Some of them tried to speak English at least. They also explained that they tried using online translators to overcome this barrier. The research participants described how many landlords did not want to communicate in another language and that it was apparent that some

minded the fact that they did not speak Czech. However, the language barrier did not discourage them, and they tried to find different ways to overcome it.

The language barrier is a frequent obstacle for refugees and not only when looking for accommodation, which was also confirmed by studies conducted in countries such as Canada (Francis & Hiebert, 2014) or the United Kingdom (Strang et al., 2018). The language barrier greatly complicates the integration of refugees and, as in the Czech Republic, when it comes to housing, landlords in host countries often refuse to communicate in another language.

### **6.3.1.2 Financial constraints**

Research participants recalled the financial challenges that the search for housing posed, with many stating that the rents were too high for them, even though some of them were already employed at the time of their transition into the private rental housing market. Despite this, they were not able to secure some possible accommodation because of its cost.

In addition to the cost of rentals, the research participants also struggled with the cost of security deposits. The need to pay a security deposit, which is usually in the range of one to three months' rent, was often the primary obstacle that prevented them from obtaining accommodation they desired. This was also the case of Iryna, who, during the interview, described her experience with the process of finding accommodation. She explained that she and her partner were on a tight budget and so she expressed her concerns about the cost of the rent, deposit, and other fees.

*“And mainly like the price was the problem because the prices were crazy, sometimes like either the rent or the fees were crazy sometimes. Sometimes the price of the security deposit was crazy and we were actually on a tight budget.” (Iryna, 35 years old, unemployed)*

These experiences are very similar to those described by refugees with other types of protection seeking accommodation in Cologne (Adam et al., 2021) or Glasgow (Strang et al., 2018). Their limited financial resources severely restricted their accommodation options, which sometimes resulting in their living in inadequate housing. The cost of rent, but also the need to pay a security deposit, was a significant barrier to their transition to the private rental housing market.

### **6.3.1.3 Household composition**

The composition of the household was another barrier which research participants had to cope with. Many research participants described their experience of being rejected by landlords because, on the basis of their own evaluation, the household had too many members

for the given housing. Some tried to find a smaller dwelling than their ideal because of the cost of rentals, but some were looking for accommodation that would meet the requirements of their household, for example, depending on how big the apartment they were living in in Ukraine was, and were also rejected by the landlords. Some research participants then resorted to the decision to look for somewhere larger, knowing that they would have to pay a higher amount for rent.

Another barrier was a search for accommodation while having any pets. The research participants stated that in most cases pets were not allowed and so their search was even more challenging. As a result, some are forced to leave their pets behind in their homeland on a short trip back to Ukraine in order to have a better chance of getting accommodation in the Czech Republic.

As confirmed by other studies, refugees in other countries also have problems with the composition of their household when looking for accommodation. Finding housing for large families proves particularly problematic as they face many rejections, leaving them feeling unwelcomed and excluded from society (Ziersch et al., 2023). This places another burden on refugees when looking for accommodation in the private rental housing market.

#### **6.3.1.4 Inadequate accommodation and unfair treatment from potential landlords**

During the process of finding accommodation on the private rental housing market the research participants experienced inadequate housing conditions and unfair treatment from landlords. In the interviews some research participants explained that sometimes during viewings they found out that the accommodation did not look like what was advertised online – for example, there were differences in what the flat looked like or in its disposition or furnishings. They also experienced substandard accommodation conditions; some flats were visibly mouldy and some accommodation was cramped or located in a windowless basement, for example, and offers for room-sharing were overcrowded. In addition, some research participants encountered unfair practices by landlords who were taking advantage of the housing market. For example, they demanded booking fees from research participants or cancelled agreed accommodation without notice.

These experiences of refugees from Ukraine with inadequate housing conditions were similar to those of refugees in other cities such as Vancouver (Francis & Hiebert, 2014) or Glasgow (Strang et al., 2018). However, unlike refugees in these cities, the participants in this research study did not end up living in such housing as they were able to find and secure different housing options.



### **6.3.1.5 No response**

The research participants also had to deal with the fact that many landlords did not respond to their inquiries. They thus felt uncertain whether they would ever receive a positive response and would secure any accommodation at all. Moreover, Alina, who arrived in the Czech Republic in March 2022 and who spent two months searching for accommodation on her own, being ignored by landlords, was outraged and explained that this behaviour on the part of landlords left her feeling uncertain about her housing prospects.

*“The truth is that it was challenging when I was messaging, maybe in the [Facebook] marketplace I didn’t get any response, like maybe you see that the person read the message but didn’t reply. Like he can reply saying I’m not interested, just for me to know just because this way I felt so bad about sending, sending those messages, and not getting replies. So, I didn’t really know if I can count on it or not.” (Alina, 37 years old, hospitality worker)*

The problem with the landlords not answering research participants’ emails was specific to refugees in the Czech Republic. We can assume that it is related to the problem of an overcrowded housing market, that landlords receive so many messages about their offers of accommodation that they can be very choosy and thus may not even try to reply to all interested parties.

### **6.3.1.6 Uncertainty about the future**

Another barrier to entering the housing market for the research participants was their uncertainty about the future. Some described how they hoped to return to Ukraine soon, and therefore would not need to look for long-term housing, so they wanted to obtain housing that would allow them to be on the private rental housing market for a possibly shorter period of time. This was also described by Anna, who thus searched hard on the private rental housing market for housing where they would give her a lease contract for less than one year.

*“The first one [lease contract] I had for six months because I had no idea...I wanted it [a lease contract] for six months. Most of the adverts wanted it for like one or more years, three years and more. And I didn’t know when the situation would end then. We were hoping it will end soon. So I wanted six months max., or some flexibility.” (Anna, 25 years old, lecturer)*

As Anna’s response shows, because the research participants were unsure of what the future would look like and hoped that their stay in the Czech Republic would only be

temporary, for some this fact represented another barrier to their transition to the private rental housing market.

The fact that some were unsure about their stay in the Czech Republic, as they wanted to move to another country, even to Western Europe, also appeared in the research participants' responses about their uncertainty about the future. They mentioned that in Germany, where they wanted to relocate to, they would have better job opportunities or could get better state support. This was discussed by Nataliya, who, as a programmer, was aware that she could get better pay for her work in Western Europe.

*“I’m already thinking about finding the same job where I will get paid more. And it’s easy to do to change a country, so I know that my colleagues in Germany doing the same job are earning more money and I’m thinking about it because part of my family lives in Germany, near Frankfurt, so I know that I could move there and earn more. Just like that. So I know that I wouldn’t stay here and wouldn’t get here, I mean, in the Czech Republic, I wouldn’t get citizenship.” (Nataliya, 25 years old, programmer)*

Uncertainty about the future, in the case of both general uncertainty and the desire to return to Ukraine and of the desire to leave for the West, posed a barrier for the research participants, as they did not know whether to look for housing on the private rental housing market in the first place, but then, above all, they had to deal with the fact that they did not plan to live in the Czech Republic for a long time, which worsened their position on the private rental housing market in the eyes of landlords, for whom they became potentially unstable tenants and thus undesirable ones.

### **6.3.2 Structural barriers**

Structural barriers can be seen as obstacles caused by the structural set-up of the housing market or the set-up of the legal rights associated with visas. The structural barriers experienced by the participants in this research were an overcrowded housing market, discrimination because of their origin or refugee status, and the temporary nature of their visa.

#### **6.3.2.1 Overcrowded housing market**

The research participants reflected on their experiences with looking for accommodation and gradually discovering information about the housing market in the Prague metropolitan area. According to them, the situation in Ukraine is very different from the one in the Czech Republic regarding the process of finding accommodation because there the demand does not exceed the supply. The research participant Nataliya, who started to look

for rented accommodation almost right away after her arrival in the Czech Republic and needed to find it quickly, described having different expectations when she began the process of finding accommodation on the private rental housing market.

*“...actually for understanding in Ukraine, if you wanna rent a flat, if you go to see this flat, you can rent it the same day and you will stay there. And in the Czech Republic it’s a rather different process.” (Nataliya, 25 years old, programmer)*

In this regard, the situation in the Prague metropolitan area is thus similar to the one in cities across Western Europe, with declining affordability of housing (Dewilde, 2018). Indeed, the Czech Republic has been experiencing declining affordability of housing, with Prague’s housing prices rising the most in recent years (OECD, 2021).

Refugees searching for accommodation explained that they did not anticipate how long the process would take. Their expectation was, probably depending on their experience in Ukraine, that it would be a relatively short process. In the Czech Republic they were thus faced with the barrier of an overcrowded housing market. Perhaps that is why it took several months for many of them to find new accommodation. One of the research participants, Anna, who arrived in the Czech Republic in March 2022 and who needed to find accommodation in a short timeframe of several weeks, explained that she felt as if she was at an auction, which was something she did not expect. She thought that she would be the one to choose but she soon found out that the situation is the opposite and the owner chooses from among a crowd of interested people.

*“No, I was a bit surprised to tell you the truth, because after the first viewing I understood that it was similar to an auction. Like, I’m not picking the apartment, but the owner is picking out of 50 people and that was a surprise to me because in Kiev I picked and I was living there right away.” (Anna, 25 years old, lecturer)*

The refugees had to deal with the fact that there were many applicants per offer and so the fact that they found suitable housing or what they desired did not mean that they would actually obtain it. Some of them then reflected on the fact they subsequently understood that they must search intensively and if that they were invited to a flat viewing they would then have to act quickly to acquire it.

Given these experiences, some research participants then felt as if they did not have a choice between different accommodation options. During the interviews, some described how if they had had the opportunity, they would probably have looked at more flats or would have

been more picky and perhaps would not have chosen the accommodation they were living in, but the situation on the overcrowded housing market in the Czech Republic did not allow them to choose much and so they felt as though they had no choice.

### **6.3.2.2 Discrimination because of origin or refugee status**

During the interviews some refugees also described their experience with discrimination because of their background. Firstly, some landlords rejected all foreigners categorically but above all these refugees experienced situations where they were rejected specifically because of their origin. As the research participants explained, some housing adverts included xenophobic information from landlords about the fact that they refused to rent to Ukrainians or refugees. Even during flat viewings, some research participants experienced being turned down when landlords asked for their passports and consequently rejected them as potential tenants because of their origin. This was also the experience of Iryna, for whom it took a month to find rented accommodation for herself and her partner, and who described her frequent experience, explaining that, during viewings of the accommodation, the owners would ask where she was from and when they found out she was a citizen of Ukraine, they would reject her without further explanation.

*“They didn’t explain why. But it was in several situations, sometimes my husband was there, sometimes I was there, and they just sort of specifically told me, for example, they asked about passports and asked what country we were citizens of. And when they saw the passports, they just said no and they didn’t explain why. They just said they don’t rent housing to Ukrainians.” (Iryna, 35 years old, unemployed)*

Discrimination in the housing market is one of the significant issues also addressed in studies in other national contexts. For example, correspondence experiments show that landlords discriminate against individuals on the basis of their names, thus considering them as members of certain religious, ethnic, and racial groups (Sawert, 2020). The Czech Republic has long faced discrimination against the Roma community, who thus experience significant segregation in their everyday lives as a result (Černušáková, 2020). Refugees then represent another marginalised group in the housing market that experiences discrimination.

### **6.3.2.3 Temporality of visa**

Another barrier to refugees obtaining accommodation was their legal situation with visas. Because the temporary protection for refugees from Ukraine is always granted for only a year and subsequently has to be renewed, landlords were unsure how the situation would evolve and therefore renting accommodation to refugees was a risk they did not want to take.

Svitlana, who was searching for accommodation for herself and her two children and who had moved two times already before a successful transition onto the private rental housing market, had a similar experience. The situation with the visa then further complicated her search for accommodation.

*“...it didn’t go very well because we only had a visa until March and all the Czechs wanted to rent an apartment for a year; we couldn’t prove that it would be for that longer period.” (Svitlana, 45 years old, parental leave)*

The fact that refugees from Ukraine receive temporary protection visas for only a limited period of one year caused significant problems in the process of finding accommodation, leaving them with feelings of hopelessness and frustration. The situation of refugees from Ukraine looking for accommodation on the private rental housing market while holding temporary protection is thus specific in this respect as it poses another obstacle to their transition.

## **6.4 Strategies**

### **6.4.1 Circumstances of the process of transition to the private rental housing market**

After the research participants decided to start the process of finding accommodation on the private rental housing market, they began to employ various strategies to succeed. Although they had received support from non-governmental and governmental organisations from the moment of their arrival, they did not receive any external assistance with housing or the process of entering the housing market and obtaining commercial rentals. We may thus assume that this type of external support from a third party is not available in the Czech Republic or that the research participants were not aware about this type of support.

The research participant Nadiya recalled looking for accommodation for two months for her household of seven people, recalling how she saw the search almost as her job, where she devoted every possible moment to finding accommodation.

*“It was like a job for me, every day after breakfast I went to the computer and searched every minute. I knew every apartment for rent in Prague by then.” (Nadiya, 40 years old, unemployed)*

Anna, who began her search for new accommodation already in March 2022, only a few weeks after her arrival and who needed to find accommodation in a short timeframe of several

weeks, had the same experience and, during the interview, she described how she had to sacrifice all of her time to the search.

“... I really was looking for every minute of every day. Because if you answer that ad when it’s up for over 30 minutes, it’s no use because other people have already replied and they are already full.” (*Anna, 25 years old, lecturer*)

Thus, the research participants sent out a large number of messages and responses to housing offers in the hope that they would receive at least some response. They were also very determined. If they were invited to a viewing they were very goal-oriented and so they talked to the owner almost immediately about their interest in renting the given accommodation. One of the research participants, Nataliya, who arrived in the Czech Republic in September 2022 and needed to find rented accommodation within a short timeframe, found an unusual solution in order to obtain the accommodation.

*“So the third time when I went to see a flat, I asked the real estate agent: Is it OK that I’m a foreigner and how are we going to proceed? And he actually suggested several ways in which we’re gonna do this. First of all, to say you can increase the deposit by doubling it if you’re OK with it, and if it’s OK, we can divide it over several months or so, but you will need to pay a double deposit, or show a bank account with some amount of money. That would make it seem as though I can pay for this.”* (*Nataliya, 25 years old, programmer*)

Although the research participants took a variety of specific steps to obtain housing, they engaged in certain strategies with the creative use of capital for their successful transition. I identified three strategies; a strategy of maximising one’s own independence, a strategy of maintaining financial sustainability, and a strategy of mobilising social networks.

#### **6.4.2 Strategy of maximising one’s own independence**

The strategy of independence was a type of a strategy where research participants tried to be independent from the start and not use any source of support. It was typical for them to start looking for housing very quickly after their arrival in the Czech Republic, when they wanted to quickly regain a sense of independence that other types of accommodation did not represent for them. They relied primarily on themselves; thus, as the feminist approach suggests (Butler, 2016), they were proactive agents in this transition process and their priority was to obtain housing on the private rental housing market. Obtaining such housing on this market provided a sense of independence, stability, and security which then helped them in the next steps of their integration in the Czech Republic. Typically, research participants with

high economic and cultural capital employed this strategy. Thus, they were able to use their significant economic capital in the form of declaring proof of their income or increasing their security deposit as well as their cultural capital in the form of their high level of education and language skills, especially the ability to speak English. This helped them in the housing market because they had the opportunity to communicate with landlords in an international language, but most importantly, through their high economic and cultural capital, they represented reliable applicants and potential future tenants for landlords. For example, in the case of the crowded housing market barrier, these high levels of capital helped them because they were able to compete with other bidders. This strategy was distinctive because, unlike others, the research participants could not use social capital to their advantage on the housing market, as they started looking for housing on the private rental housing market within the first few days of their arrival in the country and could not rely on the strength of weak ties, as Granovetter (1973) defines them, and thus could not rely on newly-built relationships in the country, and nor did they have any other social network support. The research participants thus had limited social capital and did not focus on this in their strategy. Those research participants who chose this strategy were ones who had no vision of returning to their homeland from the very beginning of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. This may have partly facilitated their decision to seek rented accommodation immediately and to use all their available capital rather than wait to see how the situation in Ukraine developed.

This strategy is more closely illustrated by the story of Nataliya. Although she arrived in the Czech Republic in September 2022, she started to seek information about the housing market in the host country even before her arrival. Therefore, she had an idea about how the market works, or, for example, how much rents are in the metropolitan area of Prague. Moreover, before leaving Ukraine, she had already found a job in the Czech Republic, which she was able to accomplish partly thanks to her high cultural capital in the form of her high level of education and specific professional field, working as a programmer. She was thus very goal-oriented. After arriving in the Czech Republic, she stayed at an Airbnb which she paid for herself, and she immediately started to search for accommodation on the private rental housing market. This shows her agency and determination to accomplish her goal. As she described it, because she wanted to start her new job with the security of having her own rented accommodation, finding housing on the private rental housing market was one of her top priorities. So, to find housing in such a short time, she used all of her accumulated capital. Firstly, she had high cultural capital; she spoke English, which benefited her in the housing market, so that she could look for housing on her own without any external support, and

moreover she had a high level of education and above all she had a high level of economic capital and so she was able and willing to provide evidence of her high income and possibly increase her deposit to secure housing. She took a proactive approach to the issues of housing and finding different ways to secure it. Perhaps, because of this strategy and her use of capital, she was able to find accommodation on the private rental housing market within two weeks of starting her search. On the other hand, Nataliya did not use any of her social capital during the process of the transition, both because she did not have social networks in the country to turn to prior to her arrival and probably because she started her search immediately after her arrival, so she did not have time to create any new social ties that she could then mobilise during the process of finding accommodation on the private rental housing market.

For this type of strategy it was typical that research participants had high levels of economic capital as well as significant cultural capital. They employed these types of capital creatively during their process of finding accommodation in the private rental housing market and thanks to that they were able to succeed in a short period of time. In contrast, their social capital was limited and so they did not try to employ it for their transition.

#### **6.4.3 Strategy of maintaining financial sustainability**

Some of the research participants chose a strategy of maintaining financial sustainability in their search for accommodation in the private rental housing market. On the basis of the interviews, we can assume that this strategy was probably already applied during the process of finding initial housing prior to searching on the private rental housing market and when the research participants began the process of transitioning onto the housing market they used this strategy again. Because they had already chosen this strategy for their initial housing, which for them was living in solidarity households or other types of financially sponsored housing, they initially lived in these types of accommodation, often for free or at reduced prices. Thus, they initially lived in solidarity households or another type of financially sponsored housing. Thus, for most of the research participants, the end of the solidarity allowance, in which they lost thousands of crowns (up to CZK 5000 per person), was an important factor in their search for new accommodation, which can be understood as a kind of push factor that then prompted or forced them to start looking for another accommodation option. Suddenly, the option of living in a solidarity household or partly sponsored housing under the new conditions was no longer the most financially sustainable option, and so, given these circumstances, the research participants made the decision to start again, searching for new accommodation that was newly the most sustainable option. The most dominant type of capital in this strategy was



economic capital or rather its absence or the lack of it. The option of temporary accommodation represented the possibility of financial sustainability when it encompassed an option of saving up or, for example, finding a job and thus having some economic capital in the next phase of the transition onto the private rental housing market. Additionally, research participants sometimes had to prove this economic capital to landlords to guarantee that they would be able to pay the rent. To achieve their goal of finding new accommodation, they then also tried to employ other types of capital; for instance, they tried to communicate in English or Czech, and thus use their higher cultural capital, as Bourdieu (1986) defines it. Cultural capital was thus another way in which research participants tried to achieve success in the private rental housing market with this strategy. They also tried to use the power of weak ties as defined by Granovetter (1973) and ask their friends for support. Despite their efforts, they were not able to mobilise their social capital much to their advantage in this strategy.

The strategy of financial sustainability was chosen by Alina in her search on the private rental housing market. She arrived in the Czech Republic alone in March 2022. First, she took the opportunity to live in solidarity households, which offered her the chance to live for free and thus save some money after finding a job and subsequently to gain some financial security. So, when the end of the solidarity allowance was announced, for Alina it would have meant an increase in her cost of living in that solidarity household, when for the same price she would have been able to get more suitable accommodation where she would have her own space to suit her needs. In fact, for many research participants living in solidarity households it looked as if they were sharing accommodation with their landlords, sometimes even sharing a room, or living within communal areas, so they did not have enough privacy or space of their own, which was also the case for Alina. Therefore, she subsequently decided to find accommodation on the private rental housing market and because she had been working for some time, she had some money saved up and was able to pay the deposit and was able to afford to go into rented accommodation. However, her limited economic capital did not allow her to take many offers and so she made decisions strategically so that her new accommodation would be financially sustainable for her. Some other research participants also employed this strategy. Even though it took Alina many months to find housing and she also had one roommate who cancelled, even though arrangements had been made with this future roommate, she did not give up; she was very persistent and determined to achieve her goal. Alina tried to use her social capital during the process; however, it did not prove useful, and the search was mostly up to her. She searched for housing on social media platforms as well as on websites that gather rental listings. As she was looking for accommodation on the

private rental housing market after having been in the Czech Republic for some time, she was able to communicate in Czech to some extent; moreover, she gradually learned how the Czech housing market works. She thus possessed cultural capital that she used creatively to her advantage in the housing market, as did other research participants who used this strategy. Before Alina found accommodation on the private rental housing market, she moved three times within several cities in the Czech Republic. Making a number of moves was typical for the research participants who employed this strategy. Thus, we can say that with a financial sustainability strategy, the goal of obtaining housing on the private rental housing market was harder to achieve and the strategy of financial sustainability was thus also more difficult to achieve. Research participants who employed this strategy had less capital, which they nevertheless tried to use in the most creative way to meet their needs and requirements. This, again, points to their own agency and creative employment of strategies.

In this strategy the dominant capital was the limited economic capital with which research participants tried to achieve financial sustainability in housing, which looked as though they were trying to find the rented housing option which would be the most financially manageable for them in the long term. Additionally, they used their higher cultural capital for their success. With this strategy, research participants also tried to employ their social capital and asked their acquaintances for their assistance. Thus they tried to use all of their available, though limited, capital in different ways to obtain housing in the private rental housing market.

#### **6.4.4 Strategy of mobilising social networks**

The last of the strategies for entering the private rental housing market that was identified was the strategy of social networks. As the name suggests, the main distinctive type of capital for the research participants using this strategy was their social capital. These research participants used their already-existing strong ties with family and friends or newly-built weak relationships with colleagues and acquaintances in the Czech Republic. They asked them for assistance, and so the latter provided information on where to search and how it works on the Czech housing market, also assisting them to write an introduction letter or to communicate with landlords, accompanying them to viewings of accommodation, or also acting as a kind of guarantor for the research participants. Thanks to them, many research participants even obtained housing through informal ways which would not have been possible if it was not for their social capital. So their social capital helped immensely, not only in the form of established strong relationships, but also in the strength of weak ties, as

described by Granovetter (1973). Adding to this, some of the research participants also used their ability to communicate in English, or they tried to speak Czech when trying to communicate with landlords. Of course, economic capital was also important in the search for housing, but in contrast, with this strategy most research participants did not use their economic capital in such a significant way, i.e. proactively, to help them in their search. They mostly had to prove their income to landlords to confirm the fact that they were employed, so they had to have some economic capital, and of course they had to have economic capital to be able to rent housing at all, but they did not focus on that themselves in their strategies; it was not so much a targeted step, but rather they only proved it as a matter of necessity when asked by landlords. Research participants who used this strategy also employed their higher cultural capital in a number of ways, by trying to use their higher education as a kind of guarantee of their reliability to landlords or to communicate in English, or used their newly-acquired knowledge of the housing market in Prague. Nevertheless, social capital, as defined by Bourdieu (1986), was a major force for obtaining housing with this strategy.

This strategy was typified by Iryna, who arrived in the Czech Republic in September 2023 along with her husband. She already mobilised her social capital after her arrival in the country and so her initial accommodation was at a friend's place. According to her, her friends supported her during the entire process of finding housing on the private rental housing market. They assisted her with communication with landlords, passed on their knowledge about the local housing market, and also accompanied her to viewings. In Iryna's case, her social capital proved to be a significant source of support, which was common to all those research participants who searched for accommodation with this strategy. Thus, thanks to social networks, the research participants and their household members often already had their initial housing sorted out through friends or family, and the support of social capital proved useful in the transition to the housing market. Iryna also attempted to use her cultural capital by communicating with landlords in English where possible, which made it easier for her to deal with some landlords, and thus she did not always have to ask her friends to interpret for her. Iryna thus showed a great deal of her own effort and creativity during the transition process. She then found her accommodation on the private rental housing market via an estate agent's advertisement on social media, and therefore had to have at least some economic capital to be able not only to pay the rent and deposit itself, but also to pay the estate agent's fees. However, economic capital did not show as a purposefully used capital for this strategy; the research participants either had to pay fees to real estate agents or prove their income to landlords, so they had to declare some economic capital, yet it was not that

significant for these research participants, and above all, they did not focus purposefully on it in their strategy but rather it was a necessity for them in order to be able to actually get housing at all.

The distinctive capital for this strategy was social capital, in the form of both strong and weak ties. Research participants were able to mobilise this type of capital immediately after their arrival in the Czech Republic and use it for their transition into the private rental housing market. Moreover, they employed their high cultural capital, which they used proactively for their success in the housing market. On the contrary, they did not focus much on economic capital in this strategy and so social capital was a dominant force in this strategy, with a complementary use of cultural capital.

## **6.5 Positionality of refugees after the transition**

After talking about the process of securing housing in the private rental housing market, as part of the interviews, the research participants often recalled their feelings after the transition. Their feelings after finding accommodation were in great contrast to the feelings described during the process of searching for accommodation. Alina, who moved between different types of temporary housing four times before finding accommodation in the private rental housing market and spent several months looking for accommodation and also had her flatmate-to-be cancel their agreement about sharing a flat at the last minute, explained her feelings of happiness and excitement about her newly-rented studio apartment, where she acquired a sense of privacy and a place for self-determination.

*“So when I found the apartment, it was like a total miracle and it was still summer. And I was walking down this street and there were linden trees and it was so pretty.” (Alina, 37 years old, hospitality worker)*

As Alina’s response suggests, acquiring housing in the private rental housing market was associated with positive feelings for many of the research participants. Securing housing was thus met with feelings of relief and excitement.

During the interviews, the topic of their satisfaction with their current housing also appeared. At the time of the interviews most of the research participants rated their housing situation as being stable; only two were not sure whether their contract would be renewed and so whether they would be able to live in their current accommodation in the future. Most of the research participants were satisfied with their housing; however, some expressed dissatisfaction. Those who were dissatisfied talked mostly about the issues with their rent

costs, about having a bad relationship with their landlord, or about their housing instability, not knowing whether their lease contract would be renewed.

Thus, the interviews suggest that for the research participants, finding housing on the private rental housing market gave a sense of relief and excitement about their newly-acquired accommodation. Finding accommodation was a big goal for them, as it often took many months to succeed, and so when they did find accommodation, they were able to relieve some of the stress. It is important to note that some research participants were not completely satisfied with their housing and reported some problems, but in most cases, on the contrary, research participants described being satisfied with their accommodation even after many months of living there during our interviews. For all research participants, obtaining housing in the private rental market was nevertheless a success, often after several moves between temporary accommodation and often many months of searching, overcoming a number of barriers that made their transition to the private rental market difficult, using their capital and engaging in a variety of strategies, they achieved their goal.

## 7 Discussion

In this thesis, I presented strategies that refugees from Ukraine employ to make their transition into the housing market successful. As the findings of my research showed, refugees choose their strategies creatively on the basis of their available capital. They use a variety of ways to succeed in the housing market and, most importantly, they display a high degree of goal-orientation and determination and put in a great deal of their own effort.

The thesis also contributed to the theoretical discussions on refugee agency. I proved that research participants employed the capital that they had in various creative ways. Some were able to employ their high economic capital to increase their deposit or declare their high incomes, others used their high cultural capital to declare their higher educational attainment and communication in various languages or used their social capital which took the form of support from family and acquaintances. All these creative ways consequently helped them in their search for housing. Furthermore, they had not received any support from the state or other organisations to transition into the private rental housing market and so this entire process was entirely a matter of their own responsibility. This meant that they did not become passive victims of the situation and lose their autonomy, but, on the contrary, their motivation and strategies prove that they took action as conscious and proactive agents, as feminist scholars argue (see Butler, 2016; Mahmood, 2001). Their employment of proactive agency and creative use of strategies demonstrated the fact that they are individuals who have agency and want to be independent and have control over their own life. This thesis thus underlines the importance of approaching marginalised communities as active agents.

The strategies presented here thus show that refugees use various ways to succeed on the private rental housing market and try to use their accumulated capital. All the participants in this research had some capital which may have helped their transition and thus we can only discuss how refugees with little capital cope with this situation. This can make their journeys very difficult, as proved by PAQ Research (2023), which shows that refugees in hostels are in a worse financial situation and have great difficulty moving out. This thesis thus showed that the solidarity allowance was very helpful for many of the refugees from Ukraine and represented support in their housing options. Its termination thus represented yet another problem with which refugees from Ukraine had to cope. In addition, with the end of the solidarity allowance and the future end of the other financial support for vulnerable groups of refugees from September 2024, those with little capital, for whom the financial support was

essential to fund their housing, may find themselves in the complicated situation of not being able to address their housing situation.

Additionally, the thesis confirmed the fact that although refugees from Ukraine received support in the area of housing, especially in the initial phase of their arrival, there was no systematic support for refugees to enter the housing market. However, the transition from temporary accommodation to the private rental housing market is an important step towards successful integration. The question is therefore to what extent those who have managed to find housing on this market are also those who have more economic, cultural, and social capital, and thus to what extent this transition is impossible for those refugees with less of these types of capital and this lack of support from the state reinforces deeper structural inequalities. Future research should therefore focus on those refugees who have not been able to enter this market and try to explore the reasons for this.

Furthermore, the research brought new insights into the barriers refugees face in the process of transition into the private rental housing market and proved that also in the case of refugees from Ukraine these individuals face barriers which are in line with previous studies about non-European refugees conducted in, for example, Vancouver (Francis & Hiebert, 2014) or Cologne (Adam et al., 2021). These included the language barrier, financial constraints, the composition of the household, inadequate housing conditions and unfair treatment from landlords, discrimination because of origin or refugee status, and an overcrowded housing market. Moreover, the research presented specific experiences of refugees from Ukraine in the Prague metropolitan area. They faced barriers of no response from landlords, issues because of their visa, and, lastly, uncertainty about the future, especially regarding their prospects of moving out of the Czech Republic. These identified barriers point to the specifics of temporary protection and of the housing market in the Prague metropolitan area. The experience of no response from landlords may be due to the overcrowded housing market, a barrier that is not specific to refugees in the Czech Republic, where landlords are at a certain advantage because the demand exceeds the supply of housing, and so they may not even try to respond to all applicants. However, this may also be linked to the set-up of the process of acquiring housing on the private rental housing market, where in the Czech Republic, on some platforms, landlords respond directly to applicants and then, in combination with the high demand, they do not always have to try to respond to everyone. The barriers related to visas and uncertainty about the future together point to the specific situation of refugees from Ukraine, for whom obtaining temporary protection is only a

temporary solution to their situation. As temporary protection is only granted for one year, with the possibility of extending these visas again only for one year, so far refugees from Ukraine have no long-term solution for their stay and are therefore in a state of constant uncertainty, which may have a negative effect on their integration in the Czech Republic.

This thesis also showed that refugees from Ukraine, despite being granted immediate access to the housing and labour market and therefore having a prerequisite for direct entry into the private rental housing market, did not actually enter the market right away. Their situation is not easy, and the transition actually takes time and effort, to the point where for some research participants it felt like having a job. Why refugees from Ukraine do not enter the housing market immediately upon arrival in the host country remains a question. Two factors may provide an explanation of the obstacles. First, as the primary rental may be financially challenging as it requires having some savings to pay not only the rent but also the deposit and other fees, it may be that their immediate transition to the private rental housing market was hindered for some by lack of finance. Indeed, this would be consistent with the results of this research, where, with a strategy of maximising independence, some research participants could afford an almost immediate transition, largely because they had significant economic capital, and on the other hand, those research participants who employed the strategy of maximising financial sustainability mostly stayed in solidarity households for free, which allowed them to save up before the transition. Thus, economic capital was essential for the transition. Furthermore, the fact that the housing market in the Prague metropolitan area is overcrowded and housing is generally very difficult to obtain, and thus time- and money-consuming, may also have prevented refugees from accessing the housing market immediately.

This thesis thus showed that, unlike in studies from other metropolitan areas, for example Vienna (Kohlbacher, 2020) or Vancouver (Francis & Hiebert, 2014), our research participants, after the transition, rated their satisfaction with their housing as relatively good; moreover, none of them lived in inadequate housing conditions or overcrowded housing, which was the experience of many refugees in these other countries who entered the private rental housing market. This could mean that refugees from Ukraine had in the first place, thanks to the support linked to their temporary protection, more opportunities to secure housing and gain some stability and perhaps even to acquire capital, especially economic and social, in the form of savings and social networks before starting the process of the transition to the private rental housing market. This may have further helped them in being able to find



suitable rented accommodation. However, this does not mean, as shown in the thesis, that refugees from Ukraine were in an easy situation, but rather it points to the issue of the overall setup of integration policies and the support granted to them. Since systemic support was introduced for individuals who decided to provide accommodation to refugees from Ukraine and at the same time financial compensation was introduced for mass accommodation facilities that also provided accommodation, refugees from Ukraine were able to obtain initial housing with the assistance of external entities, as shown by this research, where none of the research participants entered the private rental housing market directly, but always lived in some kind of mediated accommodation before that. Thus, thanks to this support, we can infer that they gained the possibility of not being forced to move to completely substandard accommodation, as they could first live in a different type of accommodation before acquiring housing on the private rental housing market, which is not the case for asylum seekers or refugees with recognised asylum status or subsidiary protection who do not receive such support to the same extent.

As already mentioned, the thesis explored the strategies of refugees from Ukraine during the transition into the private rental housing market. However, given the nature of the work, it must be stressed that these strategies are not exhaustive and do not represent a comprehensive list of all the strategies that refugees would employ in the housing market. It is important to note that the research of this thesis has some limits. One of the problems can be seen as the fact that all of the research participants were women. We can argue that women represent more than half of the refugees from Ukraine in the Czech Republic because men of economically active age were ordered to stay in Ukraine. Additionally, except for one research participant, all of them had attained higher education. This may have biased the research results to some extent because higher levels of education as part of cultural capital are associated with specific, often higher, levels of economic and social capital (for example see Savage et al., 2013). Thus, the specific capital of the research participants in this thesis may have influenced the variety of identified strategies. Other strategies might have been discovered if research participants with different levels of education had been part of the research sample of this thesis. Thus, it should be noted that these facts represent certain limits of this research.

Moreover, the fact that some of the interviews were conducted with the involvement of an interpreter may bring some challenges. The interpreter is another person who enters into a relationship with the research participant during the interview and may thus inadvertently

influence their statements, but, above all, misinterpretation and miscommunication may occur as a result of the involvement of the interpreter. Although this limitation could not be completely avoided, I was mindful of certain principles in my work, as suggested by Kosny et al. (2014), in order to maintain as much validity in the research as possible. These included only working with qualified and experienced translators who also had experience working with refugees. In addition, I informed the interpreters in advance of the topic of the interview and the research participants were informed of the role and involvement of the interpreter. In this way, I have tried as much as possible to avoid research bias due to the involvement of the interpreter.

As part of the research, I also presented findings that some of the research participants wanted to move from the Czech Republic to Western Europe, as they explained that they expected to have better employment opportunities and receive greater state support regarding housing. This is supported by research from Poland showing that over a quarter of refugees from Ukraine in Poland held a desire to move to Germany (EWL, 2022). Those who moved to Germany after several months spent in Poland mentioned the possibility of accumulating more savings when living in Germany and better social security among the top reasons for their departure (EWL, 2023). This may indicate the fact that the countries of Central and Eastern Europe do not provide sufficient support to refugees from Ukraine. However, the Czech Republic has long been facing labour shortages (Poor et al., 2020). Refugees from Ukraine can make a significant contribution to the workforce and the state should therefore make a strong attempt to keep them in the country and support their long-term integration, for this reason as well as for others. Thus, further research should also aim to provide a better understanding of those refugees from Ukraine who want to leave the Czech Republic for other countries and to understand their reasons and plans.

It must be noted that by being granted temporary protection refugees from Ukraine receive different rights and especially support, which may thus influence their integration journey and that by studying their lived experiences in the context of the Prague metropolitan area as part of the Czech Republic where home ownership is the dominant housing option and where there is almost no social housing, this research is specific. Thus, the situation of refugees with different types of protection in other cities might be different, exactly because of their type of protection and the specific local housing market.

On the basis of these facts, I present several recommendations. Firstly, refugees in the Czech Republic should also be supported by the government in their transition to the private

rental housing market. It is crucial that the entire responsibility is not placed only on the shoulders of the refugees because it limits their options and makes it more difficult for them to transition, thus limiting their ability to integrate themselves into society. Moreover, the fact that this process is only in the hands of refugees can consequently create more barriers for refugees with lesser economic, cultural, or social capital. That is why it is essential that the state supports refugees during this process and tries to facilitate their entry into the market. This could be done by, for example, including refugees from Ukraine into the system of housing allowances, from which they are so far excluded. In the long term, the state needs to address the issue of the temporary nature of the protection visas and propose a long-term solution for the residency of refugees from Ukraine. Regarding housing, the state needs to address the issue of social housing and have a sufficient housing fund that could be used to support not only refugees (but not only refugees). Secondly, exactly because entry into the private rental housing market is shaped by accumulated capital, not only does systematic support need to be implemented but it has to be inclusive and targeted to refugees in different ways to avoid creating greater inequalities. So, for example, the state support for vulnerable groups should still be in place with the aim of supporting them in their housing situation. Thirdly, the thesis also showed that acquiring financial stability in the host country was an important prerequisite for successful entry to the private rental housing market. This proves that housing is not an isolated aspect of integration but is interrelated with other aspects such as employment or education. Therefore, it is essential that the state promotes support for refugees in all aspects of integration.

## 8 Conclusion

This thesis provided insights into the experiences of refugees from Ukraine in the private rental housing market in the Prague metropolitan area. Thus, it showed that the motivation behind refugees' decision to make the transition into the market includes a desire for normality and stability, a desire for independence and control over their own lives, and a desire to regain financial sustainability. To do so, they employ various strategies, which I defined as those of maximising one's own independence, maintaining financial sustainability, and mobilising social networks by using different forms of economic, cultural, and social capital. The research proved that refugees are proactive agents who have agency and show a strong determination to control their lives and to be independent. Moreover, they use creative ways to succeed in the private rental housing market. It also pointed to a number of barriers to making this transition that manifest themselves at the individual and structural levels. The analysis also highlighted how the research participants experienced the process of transition to the private rental housing market and how they assessed their current housing situation. The thesis also made a theoretical contribution by showing that refugees do indeed have agency and use their various types of capital creatively in their transition process.

As the topic of accommodation for refugees from Ukraine has not received sufficient attention, the thesis has produced unique findings that can have practical implications. It showed that there is a need for host societies to promote integration policies that provide refugees with support not only in their initial stage after arrival, but especially in their long-term integration. Thus, the thesis has contributed with its findings to the discussion of this issue in migration studies and helped to deepen the knowledge about the situation of refugees from Ukraine. Moreover, the thesis both contributed to the theoretical framework of refugees' agency and also provided several practical recommendations for integration policies.

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# 11 Appendices

## 11.1 Appendix 1

### Interview Refugees on the Czech housing market

**Introduction BEFORE THE AUDIO RECORDING STARTS:** (re)-introduction of the study (scope, aims, and end results), interviewer self-presentation. Confirmation that the participant has no further queries about the study, their participation, the use of their data and that they are happy for the interview to be recorded. Informed consent form is signed by the participant pre-interview.

#### INTRODUCTION

##### General information about interviewees

1. Could you tell me about yourself – anything that you find important?

❖ If not mentioned:

- a. What is your age?
- b. What is your highest level of education? What field of studies?
- c. What is your family arrangement?
- d. Economic activity
  - 1..d.1. Before leaving Ukraine, what was your occupation?
  - 1..d.2. Are you currently employed? What is your occupation?

##### Housing situation before arrival in the Czech Republic

2. Could you tell me about your housing situation in Ukraine before you moved to the Czech Republic?

❖ If not mentioned:

- a. What was your housing situation before you left Ukraine? Where did you live? Did you own your accommodation? How many people lived with you and what was your relationship?

#### PRIMARY STRATEGIES – EXPERIENCE WITH HOUSING DURING THE FIRST DAYS IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC

*I will now ask you more about your housing situation right after you arrived in the Czech Republic.*

##### Housing in the first days after arrival in the Czech Republic

3. Could you tell me about your housing situation during the first days after your arrival in the Czech Republic?

➤ Additional questions:

- 3.1 When did you arrive in the Czech Republic?

❖ If not mentioned:

- a. What type of housing was it? What was the location of your accommodation?

- b. Did you share your apartment/room with anyone? Did you have any flatmates? What was your relationship with them? Were you able to choose your flat/roommates?
  - c. Who was providing the accommodation?
4. Did you live in initial housing? What was your overall experience?

**Experience with a support regarding housing provided by the state and other subjects**

5. Did you receive any assistance when looking for housing after your arrival? If yes, how did the assistance look like? Where or whom did it come from? How useful was it for you?
- ❖ Additional question:
    - 5.1 Have you ever received humanitarian aid and other social benefits? Do you currently receive it?

**STRATEGIES DURING THE TRANSITION TO PRIVATE HOUSING**

*Now, I would like to talk to you more about the process of finding accommodation on the regular housing market.*

**Motivations for seeking accommodation on the regular housing market**

- 6. Why did you decide to look for accommodation on the regular commercial housing market?
- 7. When you first started looking for accommodation, what were you looking for? What was your ideal accommodation?
- 8. How much did you know about the situation on the Czech housing market before you started looking for accommodation?

**Transition to the regular housing market in Czech Republic**

9. What was your experience with looking for accommodation on the commercial housing market?
- ❖ If not mentioned:
    - a. How long did it take you to find accommodation?
    - b. Where and how you looked? (social media, real estate agencies, etc.)
10. What helped you in the process of looking for accommodation?

**Barriers and challenges encountered on the regular housing market**

- 11. Were there any barriers or challenges that you had to face during the process of finding accommodation?
- 12. How did you deal with these challenges?
- 13. When looking back at your ideal accommodation when you were at the beginning of the process of finding housing - were you then able to find what you were looking for initially? Were you able to get your ideal accommodation? Why?

**CURRENT HOUSING SITUATION**

**Current housing situation**

- 14. What is your current housing situation? Describe your situation in more detail.
- 15. How did you get this accommodation?
- 16. What is your relationship with the landlord(s)?

17. How stable is your housing situation right now? When does your contract end?
18. How satisfied are you with your current housing situation?
  - Additional questions:
    - 18.1 What works for you? What does not work?

## **FUTURE STRATEGIES**

*Let's now talk a bit about your future prospects.*

### **Future housing aspirations**

19. What are your plans for the future regarding your housing situation?
20. When looking for new accommodation, what would you do the same and what would you do differently?

### **Importance of having an own place to live**

21. What does it mean to you to have your own place to live?

## **INTERVIEW CLOSURE**

*Thank you for your time. We have come to the end of the interview now. But before we finish, do you have questions or would you like to add anything to what we have already discussed?*

**END OF AUDIO RECORDING**

## 11.2 Appendix 2

### Information about the research

Name of master thesis: **Refugees on the Czech housing market**

Author of master thesis: Veronika Kostelecká

The master thesis is conducted as a final thesis at the Faculty of Arts, Charles university at the Department of Sociology.

Dear Sir/Dear Madam,

This sociological research is a part of a master thesis which aims to explore the situation of refugees from Ukraine on the Czech housing market. The purpose of this master thesis is to expand the knowledge about the situation of refugees from Ukraine on the Czech housing market and thus enrich the discussion about strategies for a successful integration of refugees (not only) in the Czech Republic and to present valuable and relevant information for migration policies. As part of this thesis, in depth interviews are being conducted with refugees from Ukraine. An interview with you will contribute to a deeper understanding about this situation. The interview will take between 60-90 minutes (in case of an interpreter being involved it might be a bit longer). It is completely anonymous, which means that your name nor your identification details will not be mentioned anywhere. With your permission, the interview will be audio recorded, transcribed and anonymised afterwards, so that none of your opinions or statements will be directly linked to you. Information from the transcription will be used only for the research purposes. The audio recordings will be stored under a password, and they will be destroyed completely when the thesis is finished. The anonymised text will be archived.

We are not aware of any risk resulting from your participation in this research. Your participation is completely voluntary, and you can withdraw at any time without giving any reason if you do not wish to continue. If you wish to obtain any additional information about the interview or the research you can contact the author of the master thesis at any time, during or after the interview, using the contact details below.

Contact details of the author:

Bc. Veronika Kostelecká

[kosteleckaveronika@gmail.com](mailto:kosteleckaveronika@gmail.com), 776 555 631



### Informed consent form

I declare that I have read the text presented above which states information about the research Refugees on the Czech housing market and I have understood the aim and purpose of it.

I agree to participate in the research and I understand that I can withdraw freely at any time without any explanation. I also agree for my personal details to be used as part of the audio recording which then will be transcribed and anonymized and will be deleted when the master thesis is published.

I was informed and declare that:

- I'm informed about the purpose, potential benefits and risks of the study and that I know what is expected of me.
- I have had enough time to think and I have been able to ask all the questions that have come to mind and I have received a clear answer to my questions.
- I understand that my participation in this study is voluntary and that I'm free to stop my participation in this study without having to give a reason.
- I have a right to request access to my personal data, rectification or erasure of, or restriction of processing of, personal data concerning me, I have the right to object to the processing of personal data.
- I have a right to file a complaint to the supervisory authority (Office for personal data protection) in case I believe that the processing of my personal data is in breach of the law.
- I have a right to withdraw my consent to the processing of my personal data at any time, without any penalty or disadvantage by informing the author at the email address kosteleckaveronika@gmail.com or by any other means by contacting the author of the research mentioned above. The lawfulness of data processing prior to withdrawal of consent is not affected.

**On the basis of the above information, I hereby give my consent to the researcher to process my personal data for the purpose of the research.**

Name and surname: .....

Signature: .....

In ..... date: .....

**Statement of the author**

I, the undersigned Veronika Kostecká, declare that I have provided the required information about this study as well as a copy of the information document to the participant.

I confirm that no pressure has been exerted on the participant to have him / her consent to participate in the research.

Name and surname: .....

Signature: .....

In ..... date: .....

## 11.3 Appendix 3

Table 2. Characteristics of the Sample, extended version

Name	Age	Level of education	Current occupation	Month of arrival in the Czech Republic	Duration of the transition process	Number of moves in the Czech Republic	Household composition during the transition process	Language of the interview	Presence of an interpreter during the interview
Kateryna	37	tertiary education	project architect	March 2022	4 months	4	2 children	Czech	no
Nataliya	25	tertiary education	programmer	September 2022	2 weeks	1	alone	English	no
Polina	43	secondary education	salesperson	May 2022	4 months	3	husband and 2 children	Czech	no
Arna	25	tertiary education	lecturer	March 2022	1 week	2	alone	English	no
Olena	49	tertiary education	cleaner	March 2022	2 months	1	husband and 1 child	Czech	yes
Oksana	48	tertiary education	therapist	March 2022	2 months	5	2 children	English	no
Alina	37	tertiary education	hospitality worker	March 2022	2 months	4	alone	Ukrainian	yes
Svitlana	45	tertiary education	parental leave	March 2022	3 months	2	2 children	Czech	no
Iryna	35	tertiary education	unemployed	September 2023	1 month	1	husband	Ukrainian	yes
Lyudmyla	39	tertiary education	parental leave	April 2022	2 months	1	husband, 2 children and senior	Ukrainian	yes
Olha	35	tertiary education	parental leave	August 2022	2 months	2	husband and 2 children	Ukrainian	yes
Nadiya	40	tertiary education	unemployed	March 2022	2 months	2	husband, 1 child, sister-in-law, brother-in-law, acquaintance and 1 child	Ukrainian	yes