

**CHARLES UNIVERSITY**  
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**Bachelor's thesis**

**The Impact of War on Ukrainian Women Refugees in  
Czech Republic**

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## Declaration

Hereby I declare that I have written this bachelor's thesis by myself, using solely the references and data cited and presented in this thesis. I declare that I have not been awarded other degree or diploma for thesis or its substantial part.

Prague, 27.06.2024

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## **Abstract**

The Ukrainian conflict has caused major social and psychological impacts, especially for women who have fled to Europe. Focusing on the Czech Republic, this thesis examines the effects of the war on Ukrainian women refugees, exploring the circumstances of emigration, family networks, psychological impacts, and social changes. Drawing on the study of existing literature about social and psychological impact of war and six semi-structured interviews, the study investigates the experiences and challenges these women face in another country.

Key themes include survivor guilt, which is the emotional burden of surviving when others did not, and the mental stress of their experiences. The research delves into the difficulties these women encounter in integrating into a new society, such as language barriers and instances of discrimination. It also examines how being displaced affects community ties, highlighting the strength and contributions that Ukrainian women make in the Czech Republic and Ukraine.

**Key words:** Survivor guilt; women refugees; consequences of war; mental health; war in Ukraine

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## **Introduction**

The war in Ukraine started when Crimea was annexed by Russia in 2014 and fully escalated with an invasion in 2022, it has resulted in one of the most significant humanitarian crises in recent history. Millions of Ukrainians had to flee their homes, to become a refugee in a different country. There are a lot of women who face different challenges and experiences because of the impacts of war, displacement, and gender. This thesis aims to explore the real experiences of Ukrainian women refugees, who live in the Czech Republic, focusing on their integration into Czech society, mental health, coping mechanisms, contributions to Ukraine, and their future plans.

The war in Ukraine has not only led to widespread displacement but has also caused severe disruptions in the social, economic, and cultural fabric of the nation. Numerous people died during these events, it also led to destruction of infrastructure and economic instability. The escalation of conflict in 2022 has worsen these issues, leading to a massive outflow of refugees to countries such as Poland, Romania, and the Czech Republic, since they are closer to Ukraine, but also to many other countries.

The primary objective of this thesis is to provide an in-depth analysis of the experiences of Ukrainian women refugees in the Czech Republic. Including examining the psychological impacts of displacement, some coping mechanisms used by these women, their efforts to integrate into Czech society, their ongoing contributions to Ukraine, and their aspirations for the future. By doing so, this research aims to contribute to the broader discourse on refugee experiences and the specific challenges faced by women in the context of the ongoing Ukrainian conflict.

### **Research Questions:**

What are the key social and psychological challenges faced by Ukrainian women refugees in the Czech Republic?

This question explores the various social disruptions, mental health issues, and specific gender-related challenges that these women encounter, providing insights into their daily struggles and the broader impact of displacement.

How do Ukrainian women refugees cope with the trauma and stress of displacement, and what coping mechanisms are most effective?

This question investigates the resilience and adaptability of these women, examining the strategies they use to manage their mental health and maintain a sense of normalcy in their lives.

What are the experiences of Ukrainian women refugees in integrating into Czech society, and what factors influence their successful integration?

This question looks into the integration process, including the roles of language acquisition, employment, social networks, and community support in helping refugees adapt to their new environment.

In what ways do Ukrainian women refugees contribute to their home country while living in exile, and how do these contributions affect their sense of identity and purpose?

This question examines the transnational activities of these women, such as financial remittances, social media activism, and direct aid efforts, highlighting their ongoing connection to Ukraine and the impact of their contributions.

### **Significance of the Topic:**

The topic of Ukrainian women refugees is particularly interesting and significant because it sheds light on the human aspect of a major geopolitical conflict. By focusing on the experiences of women, this research addresses a critical gap in understanding the gender-specific impacts of war and displacement.

### **Structure of the Thesis**

This thesis is organized into two main parts: the theoretical framework and the empirical research.

Chapter 1 provides a comprehensive review of existing literature on the impacts of war and displacement on refugee women. Key themes include the psychological toll of war, the importance of social support and resilience, the challenges of integrating into host societies, and the ongoing connections refugees maintain with their home countries. The literature review establishes the context and foundation for understanding the experiences of Ukrainian women refugees, drawing on relevant theories and previous studies. Chapter 2 describes a methodology.

Chapter 3 presents the findings from the semi-structured interviews conducted with six Ukrainian women refugees in the Czech Republic. The analysis covers several key themes: family dynamics, mental health and survivor guilt, coping mechanisms, integration into Czech society, contributions to Ukraine, and future plans. The empirical research provides qualitative insights into the daily lives, challenges, and resilience of these women, offering a detailed exploration of their personal experiences and perspectives.

By combining literature review and interviews, the thesis aims to provide a holistic understanding of the complex and multi-faceted experiences of Ukrainian women refugees in the Czech Republic. The theoretical framework informs the analysis of the empirical data, allowing for a nuanced and comprehensive examination of the issues at hand.

In conclusion, this thesis seeks to illuminate the lived experiences of Ukrainian women refugees in the Czech Republic, exploring their challenges, resilience, and hopes for the future.

Through a combination of empirical research and theoretical analysis, it aims to contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the impacts of war and displacement on women.

I have tried my best to support Ukrainian women since I am Ukrainian as well. Even though this research is small, I hope it will significantly help others understand what refugee women go through.



# **Chapter 1: Social and psychological impacts of war. A literature review**

This chapter examines social and psychological impacts of war on Ukrainian women refugees, detailing their experiences of displacement, family dynamics, and economic hardships. It investigates the mental health challenges they face, such as trauma, anxiety, and survivor guilt, and explores the coping mechanisms and resilience strategies they utilize. The chapter also discusses their integration into host societies, including cultural adaptation and the importance of social support networks. Additionally, it highlights the contributions these women make to both their host and home countries, their future aspirations, and their involvement in community and political activities.

## **1.1 Historical Context and Overview of the Conflict**

Understanding the impact of war on refugee women requires a contextual grasp of the conflict itself. The roots of the current Ukrainian crisis can be traced back to the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, when Ukraine declared independence. Despite initial stability, tensions between Ukraine and Russia have persisted due to historical, cultural, and political factors. These tensions erupted dramatically in 2014 when Russia annexed Crimea following Ukraine's Euromaidan protests, which ousted the pro-Russian President Viktor Yanukovich. The annexation of Crimea was widely condemned by the international community and led to severe sanctions against Russia (Reynolds, 2016).

The conflict further intensified with the outbreak of armed separatist movements in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions of Eastern Ukraine, collectively known as the Donbas. These regions declared independence from Ukraine, leading to a bloody and ongoing conflict between Ukrainian forces and Russian-backed separatists. This war has resulted in significant loss of life, displacement, and widespread human rights abuses. The Minsk agreements, aimed at ceasing hostilities, have largely failed to bring lasting peace, leading to a protracted conflict with sporadic escalations (Reynolds, 2016; UNHCR, 2023).

In February 2022, the conflict escalated dramatically when Russia launched a full-scale invasion of Ukraine. This invasion marked a significant escalation from the previous localized fighting in the Donbas region and led to widespread destruction across Ukraine. Major cities, including Kyiv, Kharkiv, and Mariupol, faced heavy bombardment, resulting in extensive civilian casualties and damage to infrastructure. The war has caused a massive humanitarian crisis, with

millions of Ukrainians fleeing their homes to seek refuge in neighboring countries, including Poland, Romania, and the Czech Republic (UNHCR, 2023).

The Ukrainian economy and social fabric have been severely disrupted by this ongoing conflict. The destruction of infrastructure, loss of homes, and economic instability have forced many Ukrainians to seek refuge abroad. The protracted nature of the conflict means that many refugees live in a state of limbo, uncertain about when or if they will be able to return home. This uncertainty exacerbates the psychological stress experienced by refugees, as their futures remain unclear. The economic impacts are profound, with significant declines in GDP, high unemployment rates, and a substantial portion of the population living below the poverty line (Byman, 2017).

Socially, the war has fractured communities and disrupted social networks. According to Byman (2017), conflicts like the one in Ukraine result in the breakdown of community structures and social networks, leading to a loss of social capital which is essential for both immediate survival and long-term recovery. The prolonged nature of the conflict means that many families are separated for extended periods, increasing the emotional and psychological toll on refugees. The separation of families and the displacement of millions have led to widespread trauma and a deep sense of loss among the Ukrainian people.

The conflict has also led to significant human rights violations and atrocities. Reports of war crimes, including targeting civilians and civilian infrastructure, have added to the trauma experienced by refugees. Instances of torture, sexual violence, and extrajudicial killings have been documented, further complicating the displacement situation. These human rights abuses have been condemned by international bodies, and investigations into these crimes are ongoing (Reynolds, 2016; UNHCR, 2023).

The international response to the conflict has been multifaceted, involving diplomatic efforts, economic sanctions, and humanitarian aid. The European Union, the United States, and other countries have imposed severe sanctions on Russia, aiming to pressure it into ceasing its aggressive actions. Humanitarian organizations have mobilized to provide aid to the displaced populations, offering food, shelter, medical care, and psychological support. Despite these efforts, the needs of the refugees remain vast and complex, requiring sustained international cooperation and support (UNHCR, 2023).

This historical context sets the stage for understanding the complex and multi-faceted experiences of Ukrainian women refugees in the Czech Republic. The geopolitical tensions, economic instability, and social disruption caused by the conflict have profound implications for the displaced populations. The following sections will explore the specific challenges faced by

Ukrainian women refugees, their coping mechanisms, and their integration into Czech society, providing a comprehensive understanding of their lived experiences during this tumultuous period.

## **1.2 Social Impacts**

### *Displacement and Refugee Experiences*

Displacement due to conflict involves a complex array of experiences that affect individuals differently. According to Zetter (1991), the refugee experience is multi-dimensional, encompassing the disruption of social networks, loss of livelihood, and the challenges of integrating into host societies. For women, these challenges are often compounded by gender-specific issues, such as the responsibility of caring for children and the increased risk of gender-based violence (Buvinic et al., 2013). These gender-specific challenges can include increased domestic responsibilities, limited access to reproductive health services, and heightened vulnerability to exploitation and abuse.

### *Family Dynamics*

Family dynamics play a critical role in the experiences of refugee women. Research indicates that the separation from family members during displacement can be a significant source of stress and anxiety (McSpadden & Moussa, 1993). Many Ukrainian women have had to leave behind their husbands, fathers, and brothers, who are required to stay and fight, resulting in female-headed households in exile (Freedman, 2016). This dynamic often leads to increased responsibilities and pressures on women to maintain family cohesion and provide for their children

Moreover, the emotional burden of worrying about family members left behind can have profound psychological impacts. The separation from spouses and parents can lead to a sense of isolation and loneliness, exacerbating the trauma of displacement. Studies show that refugee women who are separated from their families experience higher levels of anxiety and depression compared to those who have some family members with them (Silove, 1999). The disruption of family structures often results in role changes within the family, with women taking on more responsibilities, which can be both empowering and overwhelming.

The burden of single parenthood is another significant aspect of the family dynamics experienced by Ukrainian refugee women. The absence of male family members, who are often involved in the conflict, leaves women with the sole responsibility of caring for their children. This situation not only increases their workload but also their emotional stress as they have to navigate the challenges of a new environment while ensuring their children's well-being. This dual role of provider and caregiver is taxing and often leaves little room for women to attend to their own needs.

Additionally, the experience of separation and loss can be compounded by the trauma of witnessing or experiencing violence. Many refugee women have reported experiencing or witnessing violence before fleeing their homes, which can have lasting impacts on their mental health and their ability to care for their families (Priebe et al., 2016). The stress of these experiences can also affect their parenting, making it harder for them to provide the emotional support their children need.

#### *Economic Challenges and Employment*

One of the significant challenges faced by refugee women is economic instability. The loss of livelihoods due to displacement often means that women have to find new ways to support their families in the host country. This can be particularly challenging given the barriers to employment that refugees often face, such as language barriers, lack of recognition of qualifications, and discrimination (Koser, 2007).

Many refugee women find themselves in precarious employment situations, often taking low-wage, low-skill jobs that do not match their qualifications or experience. This underemployment can lead to financial strain and limit their ability to support their families adequately (Phillimore, 2012). Additionally, the need to balance work with childcare responsibilities further complicates their ability to find and maintain stable employment.

The economic challenges faced by refugee women are compounded by the lack of access to social services and support systems. Many refugees do not have access to adequate housing, healthcare, or social welfare programs, which can exacerbate their financial difficulties (Freedman, 2016). These challenges highlight the need for targeted support programs that address the specific needs of refugee women and help them to achieve economic stability.

#### *Housing Challenges*

Finding adequate housing is a significant challenge for many refugee women. The displacement often leaves them without a stable place to live, and the process of finding suitable housing in the host country can be fraught with difficulties. Language barriers, discrimination, and financial constraints make it difficult for refugees to secure safe and affordable housing (Phillimore, 2012).

In many cases, refugee women end up in temporary shelters or overcrowded living conditions, which can exacerbate their stress and impact their mental health. The lack of a stable home environment can also affect their children's well-being and their ability to integrate into the host society (Freedman, 2016). Addressing these housing challenges requires coordinated efforts from governments, NGOs, and community organizations to provide adequate support and resources for refugees.

Stable housing is essential for the well-being and integration of refugees. Having a safe and secure place to live provides a foundation for building a new life in the host country. It allows refugees to focus on other aspects of their integration, such as learning the language, finding employment, and building social networks (Phillimore, 2012).

#### *Not Knowing Where You Belong*

The sense of not knowing where you belong is a common experience among refugees. The displacement and uncertainty about the future can leave refugees feeling disconnected from both their home country and the host society. This sense of limbo can exacerbate feelings of isolation and impact their mental health (Berry, 1997).

For many refugee women, the desire to return home is strong, but the reality of the conflict and the challenges of rebuilding their lives in the host country create a sense of ambivalence. This uncertainty about their future and where they belong can affect their ability to integrate into the host society and impact their overall well-being (Freedman, 2016). Addressing these feelings of dislocation requires providing refugees with the support and resources they need to build a sense of belonging and stability in their new environment.

### **1.3 Psychological Impact**

The psychological toll of war and displacement is profound, with common issues including trauma, anxiety, depression, and survivor guilt (Silove, 1999). For refugee women, the stress of ensuring their children's safety and the guilt of leaving loved ones behind can exacerbate these psychological impacts (Priebe et al., 2016). Survivor guilt, a condition where individuals feel guilty for surviving when others did not, is particularly prevalent among those who have fled conflict zones (Lifton, 1967).

#### *Mental Health and Survivor Guilt*

Research has shown that refugee women often experience higher levels of mental health issues compared to men due to their roles as caregivers and the emotional burden of displacement (Priebe et al., 2016). Many women report feelings of guilt for having escaped the conflict while their loved ones remain in danger, which can lead to chronic anxiety and depression (Silove, 1999). This guilt is often compounded by judgments from peers and the broader refugee community, further affecting their mental health (Freedman, 2016).

The pervasive sense of uncertainty about the future further exacerbates mental health issues among refugee women. The constant worry about the safety of family members left behind, coupled with the challenges of adapting to a new country, creates a continuous state of stress and anxiety. Studies have found that the lack of a clear timeline for returning home or reuniting with family members can lead to feelings of hopelessness and despair (Priebe et al., 2016). Additionally,

the trauma of having witnessed or experienced violence during the conflict can result in long-term psychological effects, such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

The psychological impacts are also influenced by the support systems available to refugee women. Access to mental health services, social support networks, and community resources can play a crucial role in mitigating the negative effects of displacement. However, many refugees face barriers to accessing these services, including language barriers, lack of awareness, and cultural stigmas associated with seeking mental health support (Freedman, 2016). Addressing these barriers is essential for improving the mental health outcomes of refugee women.

The concept of resilience is crucial in understanding how refugee women cope with these psychological challenges. Resilience refers to the ability to adapt and recover from adversity, and it is influenced by various factors, including social support, personal traits, and access to resources (Goodman, 2004). Studies have shown that strong social networks and community support can significantly enhance resilience among refugees, helping them to cope with trauma and stress more effectively (Goodman, 2004).

#### *Health and Well-Being*

The physical health of refugee women is another critical area of concern. Displacement often results in limited access to healthcare services, which can exacerbate existing health conditions and lead to new health issues. Many refugee women face barriers to accessing healthcare, including language barriers, lack of health insurance, and unfamiliarity with the healthcare system in the host country (Priebe et al., 2016).

Reproductive health is a particularly important issue for refugee women. Access to reproductive health services, including prenatal care, contraception, and gynecological care, is often limited in refugee settings. This can lead to poor health outcomes for both women and their children. Studies have shown that refugee women are at higher risk of complications during pregnancy and childbirth due to lack of access to adequate healthcare (Silove, 1999).

Mental health services are also critical for addressing the psychological impacts of displacement. However, many refugees face barriers to accessing mental health care, including stigma, lack of culturally appropriate services, and limited availability of mental health professionals. (Freedman, 2016).

#### *Coping Mechanisms and Resilience*

Despite the severe challenges, refugee women often exhibit remarkable resilience. Coping mechanisms such as engaging in hobbies, maintaining routines, and seeking community support are common among displaced populations (Goodman, 2004). For Ukrainian women in the Czech

Republic, activities such as art, music, cooking, and participating in community events have provided essential outlets for coping with their stress and trauma.

Several studies have highlighted the importance of hobbies and routine in managing psychological stress. Engaging in familiar activities can help refugees create a sense of normalcy and control amidst chaos (Ai et al., 2014). For instance, Ukrainian women have found solace in artistic pursuits, which not only serve as emotional outlets but also help maintain a sense of identity and continuity (Ai et al., 2014).

Additionally, work and education have proven to be crucial coping mechanisms for many refugee women. Being employed or engaged in educational programs provides a sense of purpose and normalcy, helping them to focus on future goals rather than past traumas. The structure and routine provided by work and school help in stabilizing their lives and improving their mental health (Goodman, 2004).

Community support is another significant coping mechanism. Forming bonds with other refugees who share similar experiences can provide emotional support and a sense of belonging. Community events and support groups allow refugee women to share their stories, which can be therapeutic and reduce feelings of isolation (Goodman, 2004). These community networks are essential for fostering resilience and helping women to navigate the challenges of their new environment.

Furthermore, religious and spiritual practices can also serve as important coping mechanisms. For many refugees, faith and spirituality provide comfort, hope, and a sense of purpose during difficult times. Engaging in religious rituals, attending services, and being part of a faith community can offer emotional support and help in coping with the trauma of displacement (Silove, 1999).

Access to mental health services and counseling is also critical in helping refugee women cope with their experiences. While barriers to accessing these services exist, those who are able to receive counseling and psychological support often report significant improvements in their mental health and well-being (Freedman, 2016). Culturally sensitive and trauma-informed care is essential in addressing the specific needs of refugee women and helping them to process their experiences effectively.

The role of social media and technology in coping mechanisms is also significant. Many refugee women use social media to stay connected with family and friends, access information, and find support. Online communities and support groups can provide a sense of belonging and help refugees to share their experiences and find resources (Al-Ali et al., 2001).

#### **1.4 Integration into Host Societies**

Integration into host societies is a crucial aspect of the refugee experience. Successful integration involves both cultural adaptation and psychological adjustment (Berry, 1997). Factors such as language acquisition, employment opportunities, and social support networks significantly influence the degree of integration (Phillimore, 2012). For Ukrainian women in the Czech Republic, language barriers and cultural differences pose significant challenges, but supportive community programs and friendly local interactions facilitate their adaptation.

Older refugees and those with children often face greater difficulties in integration compared to younger, single individuals. Language barriers, cultural differences, and the responsibilities of childcare can hinder their ability to fully participate in host society (Freedman, 2016). However, supportive programs and community networks can significantly ease this transition (Phillimore, 2012).

Studies have shown that language acquisition is a critical factor in successful integration. Proficiency in the host country's language facilitates better communication, increases job opportunities, and helps in building social connections (Berry, 1997). For many women, learning a new language has been a significant challenge, but language courses and community support have played a vital role in helping them overcome this barrier (Phillimore, 2012). For Ukrainian women, though, learning Czech language is a bit easier since both Ukrainian and Czech come from the same Slavic group of languages.

Employment is another key factor in the integration process. Having a job not only provides financial stability but also helps in building a sense of purpose and belonging. For many refugee women, finding employment in the Czech Republic has been challenging due to language barriers and the need to balance work with childcare responsibilities (Freedman, 2016). However, those who have been able to secure employment report improved mental health and a greater sense of integration (Phillimore, 2012).

Social support networks are essential in helping refugees integrate into host societies. Building relationships with locals and other refugees can provide emotional support, practical assistance, and a sense of community. Community organizations, support groups, and social events can facilitate these connections and help refugees feel more at home in their new environment (Berry, 1997).

Educational opportunities also play a crucial role in the integration of refugee women. Access to education allows them to improve their language skills, gain new qualifications, and enhance their employment prospects. For younger refugees, attending school or university can provide a structured environment for making friends and integrating into the local culture



(Phillimore, 2012). Educational programs tailored to the needs of refugees, including language courses and vocational training, can significantly enhance their integration prospects.

#### *Legal and Policy Frameworks*

The integration of refugees is also influenced by the legal and policy frameworks of the host country. Policies that provide access to education, employment, healthcare, and social services are crucial for supporting the integration process (Koser, 2007). In the Czech Republic, the government has implemented various programs to support refugees, including language courses, vocational training, and social support services. These programs are designed to help refugees navigate the challenges of integration and become self-sufficient.

However, restrictive immigration policies and bureaucratic hurdles can impede the integration process. These barriers can create uncertainty and stress, hindering their ability to integrate effectively (Koser, 2007). Advocacy and policy reform are essential to address these challenges and create a more supportive environment for refugees.

#### *Cultural Adaptation and Identity*

Cultural adaptation is a significant aspect of the integration process. Refugees must navigate the cultural norms and values of the host country while maintaining their own cultural identity. This process can be challenging, as it involves balancing the need to adapt to the new culture with the desire to preserve one's cultural heritage (Berry, 1997).

For Ukrainian women, cultural adaptation may involve learning new social norms, customs, and behaviors that are different from those in Ukraine. This adaptation can be facilitated by participating in community events, cultural exchange programs, and social activities that promote cross-cultural understanding (Berry, 1997). At the same time, maintaining cultural practices, traditions, and languages is important for preserving their cultural identity and sense of belonging.

The concept of biculturalism, where individuals can navigate and integrate aspects of both their original and host cultures, is relevant in this context. Biculturalism allows refugees to retain their cultural identity while adapting to the new environment, which can enhance their psychological well-being and sense of belonging (Berry, 1997).

#### *Interpersonal Relationships and Social Integration*

Interpersonal relationships play a critical role in the integration process for refugees. Building relationships with locals can provide refugees with emotional support, practical assistance, and a sense of belonging. Positive interactions with local communities can help refugees feel more welcome and reduce feelings of isolation (Berry, 1997).

For Ukrainian women, building relationships with Czech individuals and communities can be challenging due to language barriers and cultural differences. However, many refugees report positive experiences with local communities, who have shown kindness, understanding, and a willingness to assist. These positive interactions are crucial for fostering social integration and helping refugees feel more at home in their new environment (Phillimore, 2012).

Social integration is also influenced by the attitudes and perceptions of the host society towards refugees. Inclusive and welcoming attitudes can facilitate the integration process, while xenophobia and discrimination can create significant barriers. Addressing negative attitudes and promoting cross-cultural understanding is essential for creating a supportive environment for refugees (Freedman, 2016).

### *Community Support and Social Networks*

Community support is a vital aspect of the integration process for refugees. Forming bonds with other refugees who share similar experiences can provide emotional support and a sense of belonging. Community organizations, support groups, and social events can facilitate these connections and help refugees build social networks in their new environment (Berry, 1997).

For Ukrainian women, participating in community events and support groups allows them to share their stories, which can be therapeutic and reduce feelings of isolation. These community networks are essential for fostering resilience and helping women navigate the challenges of their new environment (Goodman, 2004).

The role of community organizations in supporting refugees cannot be overstated. These organizations provide essential services, including language courses, vocational training, and social support, which are crucial for the successful integration of refugees. By offering a range of support services, community organizations help refugees build a sense of stability and belonging in their new environment (Phillimore, 2012).

Numerous Czech organizations have mobilized to provide comprehensive support, ensuring that displaced individuals receive the necessary assistance to rebuild their lives. Notable among these are the Organization for Aid to Refugees (OPU), the Czech Red Cross, and People in Need (Člověk v tísni). These organizations offer a wide range of services, including legal assistance, language courses, vocational training, and psychological support. OPU, for instance, provides legal counseling to help refugees navigate the complexities of asylum applications and residency permits (Organization for Aid to Refugees, 2023). The Czech Red Cross has been instrumental in offering emergency relief, medical care, and social services, addressing the immediate needs of refugees (Czech Red Cross, 2023). People in Need focuses on long-term integration efforts, such as educational programs and job placement services, to facilitate refugees'

adjustment to Czech society (People in Need, 2023). These organizations play a crucial role in fostering a supportive environment for refugees, enhancing their ability to integrate and thrive in their new community.

#### *Relationships with the Host Society*

The relationship between Czech citizens and Ukrainian refugees is multifaceted, characterized by both solidarity and tension. Many Czech organizations and individuals have shown considerable support and empathy towards Ukrainian refugees, offering assistance through various means such as legal aid, housing, language courses, and emotional support (People in Need, 2023). This support has been instrumental in helping refugees navigate their new environment and start rebuilding their lives. However, the literature also notes instances of xenophobia and discrimination that can hinder the integration process. According to Phillimore (2012), refugees often face mixed reactions from host communities, where initial sympathy can sometimes give way to suspicion and resentment, particularly in times of economic hardship or political unrest. These negative attitudes can create barriers to social integration, making it difficult for refugees to establish a sense of belonging and security in their new home. Furthermore, cultural differences and language barriers can exacerbate misunderstandings and reduce opportunities for meaningful interactions between refugees and local residents (Berry, 1997). Despite these challenges, ongoing community initiatives aimed at fostering cross-cultural understanding and mutual respect have shown promise in bridging these gaps and building more cohesive communities (Freedman, 2016).

#### **1.5 Contributions to Home Country**

Refugees often maintain strong ties to their home countries, contributing through financial remittances, social media activism, and direct aid efforts (Al-Ali et al., 2001). Ukrainian women in the Czech Republic engage in various activities to support Ukraine, from financial donations to participating in protests and leveraging social media to raise awareness and funds.

Transnationalism refers to the ongoing connections refugees maintain with their home countries (Boccagni, 2012). For Ukrainian women, this includes regular financial contributions to support military and humanitarian efforts, as well as leveraging social media to disseminate information and mobilize support (Al-Ali et al., 2001). These activities are critical for both their own sense of agency and the support of their countrymen.

Art and culture also play significant roles in their contributions. Many Ukrainian women use their artistic talents to raise funds and awareness for Ukraine. Participating in charity concerts, selling artwork, and organizing cultural events not only provide financial support but also help to

keep their culture alive in exile. These activities also serve as a way to connect with the local community and share their cultural heritage. (Mykhailiuk, 2023)

The involvement of refugee women in direct aid efforts is another important aspect of their contributions. Many women have been actively involved in providing aid to those affected by the conflict, both in Ukraine and in their host countries. This involvement includes organizing and participating in protests, volunteering in aid organizations, and using their professional skills to support their fellow countrymen (Rubryka, 2023). These efforts highlight the resilience and agency of refugee women in contributing to their home country despite being displaced.

Social media has emerged as a powerful tool for transnational activism among refugees. Ukrainian women use platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter to share news, organize fundraisers, and advocate for their country. Social media allows them to reach a global audience, mobilize support, and maintain a sense of connection with their homeland (Rubryka, 2023).

Financial remittances are a significant form of support provided by refugees to their home countries. Many Ukrainian women send money back to their families and communities in Ukraine to help with basic needs, healthcare, and education. These remittances are critical for the survival and well-being of those left behind, especially in conflict-affected areas where resources are scarce.

In addition to individual remittances, many refugee women participate in collective fundraising efforts to support humanitarian and military efforts in Ukraine. These efforts often involve organizing community events, charity drives, and online campaigns to raise funds and awareness. The financial contributions made by refugees can have a significant impact on the resilience and recovery of their home communities.

Many refugee women continue to contribute to their home countries through direct aid and volunteer work. This involvement often includes organizing and participating in protests, volunteering with aid organizations, and using their professional skills to support those affected by the conflict. These efforts highlight the resilience and agency of refugee women in contributing to their home country despite being displaced. (Rubryka, 2023)

Engaging in direct aid activities allows refugee women to maintain a sense of connection with their homeland and to actively contribute to its recovery. This involvement can provide a sense of purpose and agency, helping them to cope with the challenges of displacement (Goodman, 2004). Additionally, their contributions can have a significant impact on the resilience and recovery of their home communities, providing much-needed support and resources.

### **1.6 Future Plans and Aspirations**

The uncertainty faced by refugee women regarding their future is a significant challenge documented in the literature. This uncertainty is often driven by the prolonged nature of conflicts

and the instability in their home countries, which makes it difficult for refugees to make concrete plans. As noted by Phillimore (2012), the protracted nature of conflicts means that many refugees live in a state of limbo, unsure if or when they will be able to return home. This uncertainty can have profound psychological impacts, contributing to heightened levels of anxiety and stress.

Refugee women often face additional layers of uncertainty due to gender-specific challenges. Freedman (2016) highlights that women refugees are more likely to be responsible for dependents, which adds to the pressure of securing stable housing, income, and education for their children. The literature also emphasizes that uncertainty about legal status and residency rights in host countries exacerbates these challenges, as women navigate complex asylum processes and face potential deportation (Koser, 2007).

The lack of clear future prospects can lead to emotional and psychological distress, as refugees struggle to establish a sense of stability and predictability in their lives. According to Berry (1997), this persistent uncertainty can hinder the integration process, as refugees may feel disconnected from both their home and host countries. Furthermore, Boccagni (2012) discusses how transnational ties can complicate future planning, as refugees remain emotionally and financially invested in their home countries while trying to build a new life abroad.

Aspirations for return among refugee women are a complex and deeply emotional issue, often influenced by a mix of hope, nostalgia, and practical considerations. The literature highlights that many refugees, despite the safety and opportunities offered by their host countries, harbor a strong desire to return to their homeland once conditions allow. This aspiration is rooted in a longing for familiarity, cultural connections, and the desire to reunite with family members who remained behind (Berry & Hou, 2016). For many women, the idea of returning home is not just about reclaiming their previous lives but also about fulfilling a sense of duty towards their country and contributing to its rebuilding process. This sentiment is echoed by Al-Ali et al. (2001), who emphasize that the connection to one's homeland remains strong even after prolonged displacement, driven by cultural and emotional ties.

However, the decision to return is fraught with challenges and uncertainties. The ongoing instability in conflict zones means that the safety of returning is not guaranteed, and the infrastructure may be severely damaged, complicating reintegration efforts. Freedman (2016) points out that the desire to return is often tempered by the reality of the conditions back home, which may include ongoing violence, economic instability, and limited access to basic services. Additionally, refugee women may face unique challenges in the return process, such as the loss of social networks they built in the host country and the potential for gender-specific threats, including sexual violence and discrimination, which can be more pronounced in post-conflict settings (Buvinic et al., 2013).

The decision to stay in the host country or return to the home country is a complex and deeply personal one for each refugee. Factors influencing this decision include the safety and stability of the home country, the availability of opportunities in the host country, and the strength of social and family ties. For many refugees, the desire to return home is strong, but the practicalities of rebuilding their lives in a post-conflict environment can be daunting (Koser, 2007).

Many refugee women, particularly the younger generation, have aspirations for furthering their education and professional development. They recognize the importance of acquiring new skills and qualifications to improve their employment prospects and integrate into the host society. Educational programs, vocational training, and professional development opportunities are crucial for helping refugee women to achieve their goals and build a better future for themselves and their families (Phillimore, 2012).

Access to higher education and vocational training can also provide refugee women with a sense of purpose and direction, helping them to cope with the uncertainty and instability of displacement. These opportunities can empower women to take control of their lives and work towards their aspirations, despite the challenges they face (Berry, 1997).

#### *Community and Political Engagement*

In addition to their personal aspirations, many refugee women are also engaged in community and political activities. They participate in local community organizations, advocacy groups, and political movements to support their fellow refugees and advocate for their rights. This involvement allows them to contribute to their new communities, build social networks, and gain a sense of agency and empowerment (Goodman, 2004).

Political engagement is particularly important for refugee women who wish to advocate for policy changes and improvements in the support systems available to refugees. By participating in political activities, they can raise awareness of the challenges faced by refugees and work towards creating a more supportive and inclusive environment for all displaced individuals (Freedman, 2016).

#### **1.7 Literature review conclusion**

Chapter 1 explores the deep social and psychological impacts of the Ukrainian conflict on women refugees, highlighting the complex challenges they face, such as disrupted social networks, loss of jobs, and difficulties integrating into the Czech Republic. It details the emotional and logistical burdens on women who have left behind male family members, resulting in increased trauma, anxiety, depression, and survivor guilt. Economic and housing challenges add to their stress. The chapter emphasizes the importance of stable housing and employment for refugees' well-being and integration, and looks at coping mechanisms like hobbies, work, education,

community support, and religious practices. It underscores the vital role of social support networks and community organizations in aiding integration and discusses how refugee women contribute to Ukraine through financial help, social media, and direct aid. The chapter also addresses the uncertainty surrounding their future plans and aspirations, noting the difficult decisions about whether to stay in the host country or return home, influenced by factors like safety, stability, and social ties. Overall, it provides a clear overview of the resilience and challenges faced by Ukrainian women refugees as they rebuild their lives.

## **Chapter 2: Methodology**

### **2.1 Sample**

This chapter outlines the research methodology employed in examining the consequences of war on Ukrainian women refugees in the Czech Republic. I pose three key research questions:

- What are the social and psychological challenges faced by Ukrainian women refugees in the Czech Republic?
- What coping strategies women refugees use?
- In what way women refugees contribute to their home country?

To address these questions, and gain in-depth insights into the social and psychological impacts experienced by these women the study adopts a qualitative approach. A qualitative design allows focusing on the lived experiences of Ukrainian women refugees. This approach is suitable for exploring complex, personal, and context-specific issues such as the psychological and sociological consequences of war. These methods deployed includes semi-structured interviews and content/narrative analysis.

#### **2.1Semi-structured interviews.**

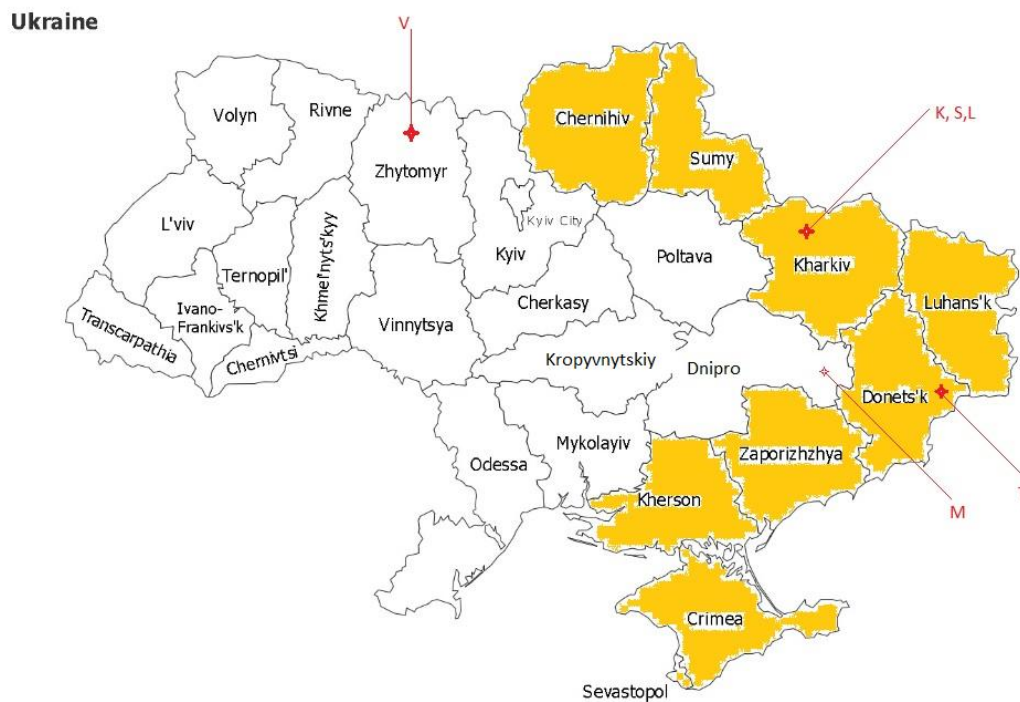
Primary data was collected through semi-structured interviews with six Ukrainian women refugees residing in the Czech Republic. This method was chosen for its flexibility and ability to capture detailed, personal narratives. The interviews were conducted in a confidential setting such as a private room in a library, to ensure the comfort and privacy of the participants. Interview lasted approximately 40-90 minutes and were guided by a set of open-ended questions designed to elicit comprehensive responses about their experiences, challenges, and coping mechanisms.

I chose 6 participants based on the fact that they fled to Czech Republic from Ukraine. I tried to find women of different ages and experiences. As their pseudonyms I used a first letter of their name. All the main information about them I put in a table.



Name	Age	Occupation	City Lived In Before War	Original City	Children	Previous Occupation(s) in Czech Republic	Occupation in Ukraine
M	23	Artist/Student	Dnipro region	-	None	-	Art Student
L	45	Manager	Kharkiv	Pripyat	One adult daughter	Nanny	Lawyer
T	67	Cleaner	Donetsk region	-	One adult daughter(one son has died, one daughter no contact)	-	Mine engineer
V	24	Administrative job	Zhytomyr region	-	None	Restaurant, Shop	Manager
S	40	Employee at Lidl	Kharkiv	-	Two children	-	Bank Employee
K	33	SMM	Kharkiv	Odesa	One daughter	-	Hotel manager

Table 1. Participants 1



Map of participants 1

On this map yellow regions are zones of active conflict. Red arrows show the region where each participant comes from.

Based on this map it is visible that most of the participants come from most dangerous regions in Ukraine during this war.

The interview questions focused on six several key areas:

- Personal Background referring to information about the participants' life in Ukraine before the war.
- War Experience during the conflict, including displacement and migration.
- Psychological impacts including trauma, stress, and survivor guilt; .
- Sociological impacts such as integration challenges, social support, and changes in social roles.
- Coping Strategies: Identifying the methods and resources the participants use to cope with their experiences and current situation.
- Contribution to the Home country

All interviews were held in Ukrainian, tape recorded and full transcribed verbatim to ensure accuracy and facilitate detailed analysis. informed consent obtained orally. Despite the psychological difficulty of discussing their experiences, all participants expressed a strong willingness to contribute to this research. This eagerness underscores the importance they place on sharing their stories and aiding in the understanding of refugee experiences.

## **2.2 Methods of data analysis**

The data analysis process involved several steps. First the transcriptions were thematically coded using thematic analysis. This involved identifying significant themes., codes included "family separation," "survivor guilt," "employment challenges," "coping strategies," and "integration experiences."

Based on the codes, patterns were identified, and categories within the data, and six themes condensed: family dynamics, mental health and survivor guilt, coping strategies, integration to Czech society, their plans for the future, contribution to Ukraine. The analysis aimed to draw connections between individual experiences and broader sociological and psychological concepts.

### **2.3 Ethical Considerations and researchers' positionality**

Ethical considerations were paramount in this study. Informed consent was obtained from all participants orally, ensuring they were fully aware of the study's purpose, procedures, and their right to withdraw at any time. The confidentiality and anonymity of participants were strictly maintained. Pseudonyms were used in all documentation to protect their identities. Additionally, the emotional well-being of participants was prioritized, with referrals to counseling services provided if needed.

During the process of making the questionnaire I was considering how to make them as comfortable as possible for the participants since they are in a vulnerable state, which I totally understand since I'm Ukrainian and was affected by war as well. Although I am not a refugee, the war in Ukraine has profoundly impacted me, shaping my understanding of the struggles faced by those displaced. When the war began, I was deeply worried about my friends and family back home, experiencing a sense of survivor guilt. I tried to help as much as I could. My mother, who was visiting me in the Czech Republic two weeks before the war started, had to stay. Shortly after, my sister arrived, having only two hours to pack her belongings and taking a week to reach the Czech Republic by car. A year later, we brought our father over after he finally had all the necessary documents to cross the border. Throughout this period, I supported them, but the emotional toll was significant, leading to my diagnosis with an anxiety disorder in April. Despite my support, adapting to a new language, finding jobs, handling documents, and dealing with the uncertainty of their future has been extremely challenging for them. Although they are better now, it remains a difficult journey. This personal connection to the subject has driven my research, which focuses on the lived experiences of Ukrainian women refugees in the Czech Republic.

### **2.4 Limitations**

While this methodology provides rich, qualitative data, it is not without limitations. The sample size of six participants, while adequate for in-depth qualitative research, is far from representing the entire population of Ukrainian women refugees in the Czech Republic. Furthermore, the findings are based on self-reported data, which may be subject to bias. Despite these limitations, the study offers valuable insights into the experiences of a specific group of refugees, contributing to the broader understanding of the impacts of war on women

## **Chapter 3: Real experiences of Ukrainian women. Empirical research**

This chapter presents an in-depth analysis of the lived experiences of six Ukrainian women refugees residing in the Czech Republic. The interviews covered key themes. Each theme was analyzed to understand better how these women navigate their new realities while maintaining strong ties to their homeland..This chapter aims to offer a comprehensive overview of the psychological and sociological impacts of war and displacement on these women, providing valuable insights into their resilience and the coping strategies they employ. The findings contribute to the broader discourse on refugee experiences and the specific challenges faced by Ukrainian women in the context of the ongoing conflict.

### **3.1 Coming to Czech Republic**

Each woman had her own experience coming to the Czech Republic. To better understand their experiences, it's crucial to know the story and context of their journeys. M, 23, was studying in Kyiv when the war started. She moved to western Ukraine for a month before her friend, who had already relocated to Czechia, advised her to come as well. Her friend found a program at UMPRUM and helped M find one at AVU. M moved to Czechia and started living with a Czech girl who was also a student and wanted to help Ukrainians. She still lives with her.

L, 45, and her 21-year-old daughter were in Kharkiv when the war began, spending most of their time in metro stations and bomb shelters. They initially considered going to Poland but eventually came to Czechia after a few weeks and now live together.

T, 67, and her daughter decided to go on vacation on March 12th, thinking the situation wouldn't last long and they needed a change. However, they ended up staying in Czechia and live together.

V, 24, came with her mother on March 3rd after the horrors in Bucha. They thought they would return, but after visiting Ukraine in the summer of 2022, they decided to stay and live together.

S, 40, moved from the Kharkiv region two weeks after the invasion started. She saw many tanks and soldiers and had to pay people to escape the town with her two children because Russian soldiers wouldn't let anyone leave. Her small town was under occupation, and the bridges were bombed. They now live in a dormitory.

K, 33, was in Kharkiv with her daughter, volunteering. After a month, she decided it was enough for her daughter. A Czech-Kazakh couple, who were journalist volunteers, helped her come

to Czechia by car. They initially lived with this couple, but now the couple has helped them find their own apartment.

The information varies for each woman because not everyone was comfortable reminiscing about bad memories.

### **3.2 Family dynamics**

The family dynamics of Ukrainian women refugees in the Czech Republic reveal a complex web of relationships and poignant stories of separation, loss, and adaptation. This section delves into their family situations, focusing on who they came with, the family members they left behind, and the ongoing challenges they face in maintaining familial connections.

Most of the women interviewed arrived in the Czech Republic alone or with their children. Younger women came through university programs or with the help of friends. One young woman recounted how her friend found a university program for both of them, allowing them to escape the conflict together and continue their education.

M(23): "I was lucky that my friend found this program. We applied together, and now we are both studying here. It made the transition much easier," she said.

Some younger women arrived with their mothers, forming small family units that provided mutual support. Other women brought their children of various ages but left their parents behind, often because their parents were unwilling or unable to leave Ukraine.

None of the women interviewed brought their husbands or brothers with them, as men of fighting age are typically required to stay in Ukraine and serve in the military. This separation has been a significant source of stress and anxiety, particularly for those whose male relatives are actively engaged in the conflict.

S(40) shared, "My husband is still in Ukraine, and I worry about him every day. It's hard to be apart, especially knowing he is in danger."

T(67) faced a particularly tragic situation. She came to the Czech Republic with her daughter, but her other daughter has been in Russia for ten years, leading to a cessation of contact. Her son died during the war, a loss that has profoundly affected her.

"My son was killed in the fighting. My other daughter is in Russia, and we haven't spoken in years. It's been incredibly hard to cope with all of this," she recounted.

When asked about their families, many women did not mention their partners or husbands. This omission suggests a prevalence of single motherhood, a common situation in Ukraine. These women face the dual challenge of rebuilding their lives in a new country while single-handedly caring for their children.

L(45) explained, "It's just me and my kids now. Their father isn't in the picture, which is common for many women I know. We rely on each other to get through each day."

A significant number of these women have family members who are currently serving in the Ukrainian army, including fathers, brothers, and other close relatives. The constant worry about the safety of their loved ones adds an additional layer of stress and anxiety.

K(33) mentioned, "My brother is in the army, and we hear from him whenever he can get in touch. It's always a relief to hear his voice, but the worry never goes away."

V(24) shared, "My father and my brother are both fighting. It's hard to concentrate on anything else when you're constantly worried about their safety."

Despite the dangers, some women make periodic visits to Ukraine to see friends and family. These visits are fraught with risk but are essential for maintaining their connections and providing a sense of continuity for themselves and their children.

K(33) described her recent visit, "My daughter and I visited Kyiv and Odessa. It was important for me to show her where we come from and what is happening there, even though it was risky. We didn't go to Kharkiv because it was too dangerous."

L(45) shared her mother's refusal to leave Kharkiv, underscoring the deep-rooted attachment many Ukrainians have to their homeland despite the ongoing conflict. Her mother, originally from Pripjat, had already lost her home once during the Chernobyl disaster and was determined not to leave again.

"My mother said she won't leave Kharkiv. She already lost her home once after Chernobyl, and she doesn't want to go through that again," she said.

The family stories of these women highlight the resilience and strength they exhibit in the face of profound challenges. Whether navigating life as single mothers, maintaining long-distance relationships with loved ones, or dealing with the loss of family members, their experiences underscore the deep personal impact of the conflict.

K(33) noted, "Even though we are safe here, the emotional toll is immense. We miss our family and worry about them constantly. But we have to stay strong for our children and make the best of our situation."

M(23) emphasized the importance of creating a new sense of family and community in the Czech Republic. She has formed close bonds with other Ukrainian refugees, providing mutual support and understanding.

"We've built a new family here with other Ukrainians. We support each other, share our stories, and help each other cope. It's not the same as being with our real families, but it helps," she explained.

### **3.3 Mental Health and Survivor Guilt**

The mental health of Ukrainian women refugees in the Czech Republic has been profoundly affected by their varied experiences of the war. This section delves into the psychological impact of these experiences, focusing on feelings of depression, anxiety, and survivor guilt. The interviews reveal a spectrum of experiences and emotions, highlighting the deep psychological scars left by the conflict.

The women interviewed arrived in the Czech Republic at different times and had diverse experiences during the conflict in Ukraine. Some managed to escape before the worst of the fighting began, while others lived through the horrors of occupation, witnessing the presence of Russian soldiers, tanks, and the devastation of bombings. Despite the differences in their direct experiences of the war, all the women reported significant levels of stress, anxiety, and depression.

S(40) recounted her harrowing experience, "I saw tanks rolling down our streets and soldiers everywhere. We had to hide in our basement for days, and the constant fear was unbearable."

V(24), who managed to leave early, still felt the psychological toll, "Even though I didn't see much of the war, the fear and anxiety of what was happening to my family and friends back home were overwhelming. I couldn't sleep or eat properly for weeks."

The psychological impact of these experiences has been severe. All the women reported feelings of depression and anxiety. The uncertainty about the future, coupled with the traumatic memories of their experiences, has left them struggling to find a sense of normalcy in their new environment.

Many of the women described feeling a pervasive sense of hopelessness and fear. They struggle with insomnia, nightmares, and an inability to focus on everyday tasks. The trauma of what they witnessed or feared they might witness has left deep psychological scars.

V(24) shared, "I have constant nightmares. Even in the safety of my new home, I can't escape the fear that something bad will happen. It's like I'm always waiting for the next bomb to drop."

A particularly poignant and recurring theme in the interviews was survivor guilt. Many of the women felt a profound sense of guilt for having escaped the conflict while their loved ones remained in danger. This guilt was compounded by feelings of not doing enough to help those left behind. The women with children expressed that their primary motivation was to ensure their kids' safety, yet this did not completely alleviate their feelings of guilt.

S(40) explained, "I did everything I could to get my children to safety, but I still feel guilty every day. I left my parents and siblings behind. They are still in danger, and I can't help but feel like I abandoned them."

The sense of survivor guilt was not only directed inward but also reinforced by interactions with other Ukrainians. Some women reported being judged by their compatriots for leaving, adding to their emotional burden. This judgment, whether explicit or perceived, exacerbated their feelings of guilt and inadequacy.

M(23) described her experience, "Some people I knew in Ukraine told me I was a coward for leaving. It's hard to deal with those comments. I know I did what was best for me and my family, but the guilt is always there."

Despite these feelings of guilt, most of the women noted that their relatives supported their decision to seek safety abroad. This support has been crucial in alleviating some of the emotional burdens they carry. Knowing that their loved ones back home understand and approve of their choice to leave has provided some comfort and validation.

K(33) stated, "My family told me to go, to be safe. They didn't want me to stay and risk my life. Their support means everything to me, and it helps me cope with the guilt."

M(23) shared a similar sentiment, "Even though I feel guilty, my parents told me that they were relieved knowing I was safe. That support makes a big difference in how I handle my feelings."

For mothers, the psychological impact of the war is intertwined with the responsibility of caring for their children. Their primary focus is on providing a stable and secure environment for their kids, often at the expense of their own mental health. The constant worry for their children's well-being, both physical and emotional, adds an additional layer of stress.

L(45) expressed, "My children's safety is my top priority, but it's exhausting. I'm constantly worried about them, and I don't have much time to take care of myself."

The burden of ensuring their children's safety and stability often leaves these women feeling isolated and overwhelmed. However, their determination to create a better future for their children provides them with a sense of purpose and resilience.

S(40) said, "Knowing that my children are safe gives me strength. I may be struggling, but seeing them smile and play without fear makes it all worth it."

Older women, who have spent most of their lives in Ukraine, experience a unique form of psychological distress. The abrupt disruption of their settled lives and the loss of familiar surroundings have compounded their anxiety and depression. Many older women feel an acute sense of dislocation and a longing to return to their homes.

T(67) remarked, "I left behind everything I know. My home, my friends, my entire life is in Ukraine. It's hard to start over at my age, and the memories of what I left haunt me every day."



For these women, the psychological burden is intensified by their deep-rooted connection to their homeland and the perceived finality of their displacement. Their distress is not just about the current conflict but also about the loss of a lifetime of stability and familiarity.

### **3.4 Coping Strategies**

The Ukrainian women refugees in the Czech Republic have employed a variety of coping mechanisms to manage the psychological stress and trauma resulting from their experiences. These mechanisms range from immersing themselves in hobbies and work to seeking stability through routine and community support. This section explores how these women are finding ways to cope and rebuild their lives.

Several women have turned to hobbies as a means of distraction and therapy. One student, for instance, has found solace in her artistic pursuits. She paints, creates various forms of art, and plays the flute. These activities not only provide an emotional outlet but also help her to maintain a sense of normalcy and control amidst the chaos of displacement. Interestingly, many of these women did not initially recognize these activities as coping mechanisms; they simply gravitated towards what made them feel better.

M(23) explained, "Art and music are my escape. When I paint or play the flute, I can forget about the war and everything else for a while. It's my way of coping with all the stress and anxiety."

M(23), a young artist, found that her coping mechanism was art. She painted more pictures in one year in the Czech Republic than she had in her entire life before. Art became her outlet for expressing her emotions and dealing with the trauma of displacement, providing her with a sense of purpose and continuity

K(33) shared that she has taken up cooking and spending quality time with her daughter. These activities help her focus on positive, nurturing aspects of life, providing comfort and a sense of purpose. Again, she did not see this as a formal coping strategy, but rather as a natural response to her situation.

"I've started cooking a lot more and trying new recipes. It's something I can do with my daughter, and it keeps me busy. Plus, it's a way to bring a little bit of joy into our home," she said.

Work has become a crucial coping mechanism for many of the women interviewed. Immersing themselves in their jobs allows them to focus on something productive and meaningful, diverting their attention from the stress and trauma of their past experiences. The structure and routine of work provide stability and a sense of accomplishment. This immersion was often an instinctive move rather than a deliberate coping strategy.

T(67), who lost her son in the war illustrated a profound sense of resilience. When asked if she was afraid, she responded, "It is what it is. I'm not afraid anymore." To manage her

overwhelming feelings, she immerses herself in work and, when that doesn't help, she finds solace in attending church. Her coping mechanism emphasizes the importance of faith and routine in her life.

L(45), who has a background in psychology, has been using psychological techniques to manage her mental health. By applying these strategies, she has been able to process her experiences more effectively and support her emotional well-being.

"I've always been interested in psychology, so I've been using different techniques to help myself cope. It's been really helpful to understand my feelings and work through them," she explained.

The establishment of stability and routine has significantly improved the mental health of these women. After the initial turmoil of displacement, finding a place to live, securing employment, and integrating into their new environment have provided a much-needed sense of security. Many of these women were unaware that establishing a routine was a coping mechanism; they were simply trying to regain control over their lives.

S(40) shared, "Now that we have a place to live and I have a job, things are much better. Having a routine helps a lot. It's not easy, but at least we have some stability now."

The consistency of daily life routines helps mitigate the chaos they once faced, offering a predictable structure that is comforting and reassuring.

Learning the Czech language has also been a vital coping mechanism. As they become more proficient in Czech, these women find it easier to navigate their new surroundings, communicate with locals, and integrate into the community. This linguistic competence reduces feelings of isolation and enhances their sense of belonging. Like other strategies, this was more a necessity than a conscious coping technique.

V(24) noted, "Learning Czech has made a big difference. It's easier to connect with people and feel like part of the community. It gives me confidence and helps with everyday tasks."

The support from the Czech community has been a significant factor in helping these women cope. Many have reported positive interactions with Czech people, who have shown kindness, understanding, and a willingness to assist. This support has been crucial in helping them adjust to their new environment and feel less alone.

"The Czechs have been very supportive. They try to help us in any way they can, whether it's with language, finding a job, or just being friendly. It makes a big difference to know that we are not alone," said T(67).

Attending Ukrainian community events in the Czech Republic has provided these women with a sense of connection and cultural continuity. These events allow them to maintain ties to

their heritage, meet other Ukrainians, and share their experiences. This sense of community is comforting and helps alleviate feelings of isolation.

M(23) mentioned, "Going to Ukrainian events helps a lot. It's a chance to be with people who understand what we're going through, and it keeps our culture alive. It's like having a piece of home here."

Despite these coping mechanisms and the significant improvements, they have experienced since their initial displacement, the women continue to struggle. The lingering effects of trauma, ongoing anxiety about the future, and the challenge of being far from home weigh heavily on their minds. Even though they have found some stability, the psychological scars of their experiences remain.

K(33) summarized it well, "Things are better now than at the beginning of the war, but it's still hard. We have homes and jobs, but the fear and sadness are still there. We're doing our best to cope, but it's a constant struggle."

### **3.5 Integration into Czech Society**

The integration of Ukrainian women refugees into Czech society emerged as a critical theme in the interviews. This section explores the different facets of their integration experience, highlighting the varying degrees of ease with which different groups of women have adjusted to their new environment. The findings reveal a complex interplay of factors influencing their integration, including age, language skills, social networks, and societal attitudes.

For younger Ukrainian women, integration into Czech society has generally been more straightforward. Many of these women are attending universities or participating in various educational programs, which offer structured environments conducive to making connections and learning the language. The presence of numerous support programs and initiatives aimed at helping refugees has significantly eased their transition.

M(23) shared, "University has been a gateway for me to integrate into Czech society. There are many programs designed to help us, and the younger generation here often speaks English, which makes communication easier."

The availability of language courses and the relatively high prevalence of English speakers among the youth have also facilitated their adaptation. Younger women are more likely to immerse themselves in social activities, joining clubs, and participating in community events, which helps them build a social network in their new country.

For many Ukrainian women refugees in the Czech Republic, finding a job and a place to live has been incredibly challenging. Some still live in dormitories due to the difficulty of securing permanent housing. V(24) shared that she had to work at both a restaurant and a shop, which was

a hard experience for her because she encountered rude people. She had already found her dream job in Ukraine, where she was in a position of authority, and now she felt the roles had reversed. L(45) mentioned that she had a prestigious job in Ukraine but had to work as a cleaning lady in the Czech Republic. While she wasn't happy about the change, she maintained a positive attitude, saying, "Every job is a job, and I'm okay with it."

For older women and those with children, the integration process has been more challenging but still manageable. These women often face greater difficulties in learning the Czech language and adapting to cultural differences. Despite these hurdles, they have made significant strides in becoming part of Czech society, often through the help of community support programs and their own determination.

S(40) explained, "It's harder for me to learn the language and adapt to the culture, but I've found ways to manage. The support programs here are very helpful, and my children are adjusting well, which gives me hope."

Although these women have made Czech friends, the depth of these relationships varies. Many expressed that while they have friendly interactions with Czechs, their closest relationships are still with fellow Ukrainians. This sense of solidarity among Ukrainian refugees provides a critical support system, helping them navigate the complexities of their new environment.

L(45) said "I have Czech friends, but we aren't very close. I feel more connected to other Ukrainians here because we share similar experiences and understand each other's struggles."

The general attitude of Czech society towards Ukrainian refugees has been positive, with most women describing their interactions with Czechs as kind and welcoming. However, instances of xenophobia have also been reported, highlighting the challenges of integrating into a foreign society. One woman recounted a negative experience where she encountered xenophobic behavior, which left a lasting impression on her perception of her new home.

S(40), "Most Czechs have been very nice, but I did meet some who were quite xenophobic. It was a difficult experience, but thankfully, it hasn't been common."

Despite such negative encounters, the overarching sentiment among the women is one of gratitude towards the Czech people and the opportunities they have been given. This general kindness has played a significant role in their efforts to integrate, even though their closest bonds remain with fellow Ukrainians.

Employment has been a crucial aspect of their integration, with all the women either working or studying. Their participation in the workforce not only provides financial stability but also facilitates their integration by giving them a sense of purpose and belonging. Through work, they interact with Czech colleagues and contribute to the local economy, reinforcing their role as active members of society.

K(33) expressed, "Working here has helped me feel like I am part of this society. I have colleagues who are supportive and kind, and it makes a big difference."

Their involvement in education and employment highlights the adaptability and resilience of these women. Despite the significant changes and challenges they face, they have found ways to become active and contributing members of Czech society. This active participation is essential for their integration, providing them with social connections and a sense of normalcy amidst the upheaval caused by the conflict in their home country.

The influx of Ukrainian refugees has also had a noticeable impact on Czech society. The arrival of a significant number of refugees has prompted changes in community dynamics and increased the visibility of multiculturalism. This has led to a greater awareness and acceptance of different cultures, although it has also brought to light some societal tensions.

A woman reflected, "Czech society has changed a bit since we arrived. People are more aware of our presence, and there is a mix of reactions. Overall, I think our presence has made people more open-minded."

This evolving societal landscape underscores the bidirectional nature of integration. As Ukrainian women work to integrate into Czech society, their presence and contributions are simultaneously shaping the social fabric of their new home. The mutual adaptation between the refugees and the host society is a testament to the dynamic process of integration, where both parties influence and learn from each other. Through education, employment, and social interactions, these women are carving out spaces for themselves in their new environment, while also contributing to the evolving cultural landscape of the Czech Republic.

### **3.6 Contribution to Ukraine**

The Ukrainian women refugees in the Czech Republic have demonstrated a remarkable commitment to supporting their homeland despite being far from home. Driven by a desire to aid their fellow countrymen and contribute to Ukraine's resilience and recovery, they engage in various activities that extend beyond their personal challenges. This section explores the ways these women are contributing to Ukraine, emphasizing their donations, social media efforts, artistic endeavors, direct aid activities, and mutual support within their community.

A significant number of these women make regular financial contributions to support Ukraine. Many of them donate to the Ukrainian army, recognizing the crucial role of military efforts in defending their country. One woman mentioned that she only donates to peace organizations within Ukraine, highlighting a desire to support non-military avenues for restoring peace and stability.

V(24) shared, "I can't be there to fight, but I can help financially. Every month, I send money to the Ukrainian army. It's my way of contributing to the defense of our home."

L(45) explained, "I prefer to donate to peace organizations because I believe in supporting efforts that aim to rebuild and bring long-term stability to Ukraine."

Younger women, in particular, leverage social media to spread awareness about the situation in Ukraine, help other women abroad, and amplify fundraising efforts. They use platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter to share news, organize donations, and support various causes related to the war.

K(33) explained, "Social media is a powerful tool. I use it to share updates about Ukraine, organize fundraisers, and support other Ukrainian women abroad. It's a way to stay connected and make a difference from afar."

These women are not only reposting existing campaigns but also initiating their own. They create and share content that highlights the needs of the Ukrainian people, raising both awareness and funds.

Art and culture also play a significant role in their contributions. M(23) sells her artwork and participates in charity concerts, directing all proceeds to support Ukraine. Her artistic talents have become a vital part of her efforts to raise funds and bring attention to the ongoing crisis.

"I sell my paintings and participate in charity concerts. All the money goes to support Ukraine. Art is a way to keep our culture alive and use it for a good cause," she said.

Several women have a history of direct aid and volunteer work, both in Ukraine and in their current locations. K(33) from Kharkiv has a particularly inspiring story. During the early days of the war, she worked at a hotel where she assisted both Ukrainians and foreigners. She was involved in distributing and preparing food in her city and later helped people flee from Ukraine. Eventually, she had to flee herself for her daughter's safety.

Now in the Czech Republic, she continues her efforts by participating in protests, leveraging her social media marketing skills to help people from the army start their own small businesses, and using every available platform to support her country.

"I used to help distribute food and aid people in Kharkiv. Now, I go to protests, and I use my SMM skills to help soldiers start small businesses. It's important to keep contributing, no matter where we are," she explained.

Engaging with the local community and participating in protests are other significant ways these women contribute. They use their voices and presence to raise awareness about the plight of Ukraine and advocate for international support.

M(23) stated, "I attend every protest I can. It's important to keep Ukraine in the public eye and push for continued support. Every voice counts."

Utilizing their professional skills, some women help soldiers and other affected Ukrainians start small businesses. This support is crucial in providing economic stability and independence for those who have been displaced or injured.

In addition to their efforts aimed directly at supporting Ukraine, these women also place significant emphasis on helping each other. By forming close-knit support networks, they ensure that their fellow refugees have access to the resources and emotional support they need. This mutual aid not only strengthens their community in the Czech Republic but also indirectly helps Ukraine by fostering resilience and solidarity among its diaspora.

V(24) highlighted, "We try to help each other as much as we can. Whether it's finding a job, learning the language, or just offering a shoulder to cry on, we're there for each other. Helping each other is another way we support Ukraine."

This mutual assistance includes sharing information about job opportunities, housing, and local resources, as well as providing emotional support and companionship. By building a strong, supportive community, these women create a network that can better advocate for and contribute to Ukraine.

### **3.7 Their Plans for the Future**

One of the most prominent themes that emerged from the interviews is the profound uncertainty that these women face, making it difficult for them to make concrete plans for the future. The ongoing conflict in Ukraine has disrupted their lives, forcing them into a state of limbo. Many expressed a sense of being unable to look too far ahead, as the situation in their home country remains volatile and unpredictable.

L(45) remarked, "It's hard to make plans when you don't know what will happen next week or next month. We live day by day, hoping for the best but preparing for the worst."

Younger women, particularly those without children, are attempting to establish themselves in the Czech Republic, at least temporarily. These women are focused on building a new life in their host country, taking advantage of educational and employment opportunities available to them. They are learning the language, integrating into Czech society, and trying to create a semblance of stability amidst the chaos. However, they are also aware of the provisional nature of their plans, knowing that their ultimate goal is to return to a peaceful and stable Ukraine.

M(23) shared, "I'm studying Czech and trying to find a job here. It's not easy, but I need to make a life for myself while I'm here. I hope one day to go back to Ukraine, but for now, I need to focus on what I can do here."

Women with children are prioritizing the safety and well-being of their kids, planning to stay in the Czech Republic for an extended period. The safety and educational opportunities for

their children in the Czech Republic are significant factors influencing their decision to stay. These mothers are determined to provide a stable and secure environment for their children, away from the dangers of the conflict in Ukraine. Despite the challenges they face, such as language barriers and societal differences, they find solace in the safety that the Czech Republic offers.

S(40) shared, “My children’s safety comes first. Here, they can go to school, play outside, and live a normal life. I don’t know what the future holds, but as long as they are safe, we will stay here.”

In contrast, older women expressed a strong desire to return to Ukraine. Their entire lives, including their homes, social networks, and cultural ties, are rooted in Ukraine. For these women, the thought of rebuilding their lives in a foreign country is daunting. They struggle with the language barrier and often feel out of place in Czech society. Despite feeling safe and grateful for the refuge provided by the Czech Republic, their hearts remain in Ukraine, and they long to return once it is safe to do so.

T(67) said, “I am grateful to be safe, but my home is in Ukraine. Everything I know and love is there. I want to go back as soon as it’s safe. This is just a temporary place for me.”

All the women interviewed expressed concerns about the future prospects in Ukraine. They are acutely aware that the country will take many years to rebuild, and that job opportunities and economic stability may not be forthcoming for at least a decade. This reality weighs heavily on their decisions and adds to the uncertainty of their plans. The fear of an uncertain future in Ukraine is a significant factor in their consideration of staying in the Czech Republic, even if temporarily.

A common sentiment was, “Ukraine will take years to rebuild. I worry about jobs, homes, everything. How can I plan to go back when there’s so much uncertainty?”

Adjusting to life in the Czech Republic has not been easy for these women, particularly due to language barriers and societal differences. Learning a new language and adapting to a different culture pose significant challenges. Some women have found it difficult to integrate into Czech society, feeling isolated and disconnected from their surroundings. However, despite these challenges, they unanimously expressed gratitude for the safety and support they have received in the Czech Republic. They appreciate the hospitality and assistance provided by the Czech government and people, which has been crucial in helping them navigate this difficult period.

T(67) noted, “The language is difficult, and I often feel like an outsider, but I am grateful for the safety and support here. The Czech people have been very kind, and that makes a big difference.”

L(45) added, “It’s hard to adjust to a new society, but we are safe and my children are safe. That’s what matters most. We are thankful for the chance to be here.”



### **3.8 Empirical research conclusion**

The experiences of Ukrainian women refugees in the Czech Republic paint a vivid picture of resilience, adaptation, and unwavering commitment to their homeland. Through in-depth interviews, several key themes emerged, illustrating the complexities of their lives as they navigate the challenges of displacement and integration.

The interviews revealed a common thread of uncertainty among these women regarding their future plans. Younger women focus on building temporary lives in the Czech Republic, pursuing education and employment opportunities while holding onto the hope of returning to a peaceful Ukraine. Mothers prioritize the safety and stability of their children, and older women, deeply rooted in their homeland, express a longing to return to Ukraine. Despite their varied plans, all share a common concern about Ukraine's future prospects and the challenges of rebuilding their lives there.

Integration into Czech society has varied among these women. Younger women find it relatively easier, aided by university programs, language skills, and social networks. Older women and mothers face more significant challenges, including language barriers and cultural differences. Despite these obstacles, all the women have found ways to integrate, forming friendships with Czechs and relying on their Ukrainian community for support. Their involvement in education, employment, and social activities underscores their resilience and determination to create new lives in a foreign land.

The psychological toll of their experiences has been profound, with widespread feelings of depression, anxiety, and survivor guilt. These women have faced traumatic events, from witnessing war's devastation to the constant worry for loved ones left behind. Survivor guilt is a recurring theme, exacerbated by societal judgments and personal reflections on their escape. Despite these challenges, the support from relatives and the solidarity within their community provide crucial emotional support, helping them navigate their mental health struggles.

To manage the psychological impact, these women have developed various coping mechanisms. Engaging in hobbies, immersing themselves in work, establishing routines, learning the Czech language, and participating in community events are some of the ways they cope with their trauma. These activities provide a sense of normalcy, stability, and purpose. The supportive Czech community and strong networks within the Ukrainian diaspora further bolster their resilience, highlighting their capacity to adapt and thrive despite ongoing struggles.

Their contributions to Ukraine are testament to their enduring connection and commitment to their homeland. Financial donations, social media awareness campaigns, artistic endeavors, direct aid, and volunteer work are some of the ways these women support Ukraine from afar. By helping each other and building strong support networks, they reinforce their collective resilience

and solidarity. Their efforts to aid Ukraine underscore their dedication to their country's resilience and recovery, demonstrating that distance does not diminish their impact.

Family dynamics reveal stories of separation, loss, and strength. Many women arrived alone or with children, leaving husbands, brothers, and parents behind. The absence of male relatives, often serving in the military, adds to their anxiety. Despite these separations, they strive to maintain family connections through visits and constant communication. Their resilience is evident in their ability to adapt to new family structures and support systems, both within their immediate family and the broader refugee community.

The narratives of these Ukrainian women refugees illustrate a remarkable journey of resilience, adaptation, and unwavering commitment to their homeland. Their experiences highlight the complexities of displacement, the challenges of integration, the profound impact on mental health, and the creative coping mechanisms they employ. Through their contributions to Ukraine and their mutual support, they embody the strength and determination of the Ukrainian spirit. Despite the distance and ongoing struggles, their efforts ensure that their impact remains significant, both in their new communities and in their homeland.

## Conclusions

This thesis has explored the multifaceted experiences of Ukrainian women refugees in the Czech Republic, addressing three key research questions: How do family dynamics affect their refugee experience? What are the main psychological impacts of displacement? How do these women navigate integration into Czech society while maintaining connections to their homeland? Through a combination of theoretical frameworks and empirical research, this study provides a comprehensive analysis of the social and psychological impacts of war and displacement on these women.

The findings of this study reveal the profound stress and anxiety caused by family separation and the burden of single parenthood. The separation from family members, especially male relatives who stayed behind to fight, significantly increased the emotional strain on these women. The absence of male family members left women with the sole responsibility of caring for their children, adding to their workload and emotional stress. This dynamic often resulted in female-headed households, which brought about unique challenges and pressures to maintain family cohesion and provide for their children. These findings align with the literature, which highlights the significant psychological impacts of family separation and the burden of single parenthood on refugee women (Goodman, 2004).

The psychological impacts of displacement on Ukrainian women refugees include high levels of anxiety, depression, and survivor guilt. The uncertainty about the future and the trauma of past experiences further exacerbate these mental health issues. The interviews highlighted how these feelings were compounded by the pressures of adapting to a new environment while managing the well-being of their children. The pervasive sense of uncertainty about the future, coupled with the constant worry about the safety of family members left behind, created a continuous state of stress and anxiety. Studies have found that the lack of a clear timeline for returning home or reuniting with family members can lead to feelings of hopelessness and despair (Freedman, 2016; Silove, 1999). Additionally, the trauma of having witnessed or experienced violence during the conflict can result in long-term psychological effects, such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

Despite the severe challenges, these women exhibited remarkable resilience. Coping mechanisms such as engaging in hobbies, maintaining routines, and seeking community support were crucial for managing psychological stress and fostering a sense of normalcy. Activities like art, music, and cooking were frequently mentioned as therapeutic outlets. These activities not only served as emotional outlets but also helped maintain a sense of identity and continuity amidst chaos. The concept of resilience, as discussed in the literature, emphasizes the ability to adapt and

recover from adversity, which is influenced by various factors, including social support, personal traits, and access to resources (Goodman, 2004; Ai et al., 2014).

Integration into Czech society was influenced by factors such as language acquisition, employment opportunities, and social support networks. The presence of supportive community programs and positive local interactions facilitated their adaptation, although challenges remained. The varying degrees of success in integrating into Czech society were evident, with younger women and those with educational opportunities often adapting more quickly. Language barriers and cultural differences posed significant challenges, but language courses and community support played a vital role in helping them overcome these obstacles. Studies have shown that language acquisition is a critical factor in successful integration, facilitating better communication, increasing job opportunities, and helping build social connections (Berry, 1997; Phillimore, 2012).

The economic challenges faced by refugee women were significant. The loss of livelihoods due to displacement meant that women had to find new ways to support their families in the host country. Many found themselves in precarious employment situations, often taking low-wage, low-skill jobs that did not match their qualifications or experience. This underemployment led to financial strain and limited their ability to support their families adequately. Additionally, the need to balance work with childcare responsibilities further complicated their ability to find and maintain stable employment. The economic challenges were compounded by the lack of access to social services and support systems, highlighting the need for targeted support programs that address the specific needs of refugee women and help them achieve economic stability (Koser, 2007; Freedman, 2016).

The sense of not knowing where they belong is a common experience among refugees. The displacement and uncertainty about the future can leave refugees feeling disconnected from both their home country and the host society. This sense of limbo can exacerbate feelings of isolation and impact their mental health. For many refugee women, the desire to return home is strong, but the reality of the conflict and the challenges of rebuilding their lives in the host country create a sense of ambivalence. This uncertainty about their future and where they belong can affect their ability to integrate into the host society and impact their overall well-being (Berry, 1997; Koser, 2007).

Despite being displaced, Ukrainian women maintained strong ties to their homeland, contributing through financial remittances, social media activism, and direct aid efforts. Regular financial contributions to military and humanitarian efforts, social media activism, and participation in protests and volunteer work were common. These activities provided a sense of agency and connection to their homeland, highlighting the resilience and determination of these women to contribute to Ukraine's resilience and recovery. Art and culture also played significant

roles in their contributions, with many using their artistic talents to raise funds and awareness for Ukraine (Al-Ali et al., 2001; Boccagni, 2012).

The integration of Ukrainian women into Czech society presented both opportunities and challenges. Language barriers, cultural differences, and the responsibilities of childcare were significant obstacles. However, supportive programs and community networks played a crucial role in easing the transition. Positive relationships with Czech locals provided emotional support and practical assistance, helping to reduce feelings of isolation and foster a sense of belonging. The presence of xenophobia and discrimination posed barriers to integration, and addressing these negative attitudes is essential for creating a supportive environment for refugees (Berry, 1997; Phillimore, 2012; Freedman, 2016).

The continued uncertainty faced by many women regarding their future underscores the need for sustained support and advocacy. The interviews revealed a mix of hope and anxiety about the future, with many women grappling with the challenge of rebuilding their lives. Younger women focused on building a new life in the Czech Republic, while older women expressed a strong desire to return to Ukraine once it is safe to do so. This thesis contributes to the broader discourse on refugee experiences by providing valuable insights into the unique challenges and strengths of Ukrainian women refugees. The findings emphasize the importance of comprehensive support systems to help these women rebuild their lives and continue contributing to both their host and home communities (Phillimore, 2012; Berry, 1997; Goodman, 2004).

In conclusion, the resilience and strength demonstrated by these women underscore the importance of continued support and advocacy to help them rebuild their lives and contribute to both their host and home communities. The combination of empirical research and theoretical analysis has provided a comprehensive understanding of the impacts of war and displacement on these women. The resilience and determination of Ukrainian women refugees in the Czech Republic are a testament to their strength and the critical need for ongoing international support and solidarity (Berry, 1997; Goodman, 2004; Freedman, 2016).

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