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INTEGRATION OF UKRAINIAN MIGRANTS IN THE CONTEXT OF PROMOTING A SHARED SOCIETY

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Abstract[2]

Establishing a shared society is essential for fostering a healthier and more fulfilling community, highlighting the need for new knowledge. This research addresses challenges arising from the evolving dynamics of European society, particularly in the context of the largest migration crisis of the 21st century. The primary focus of this study is on the challenges faced by migrants impacted by the military conflict in Ukraine as they socialize and adapt in host countries. Over three months, we interviewed Ukrainian nationals residing in several European countries to identify the key obstacles in the integration process. Our analysis seeks to partially answer the question of which policies should be implemented to ensure that migrants feel safe and secure, thereby encouraging them to become active participants in a shared society where everyone enjoys equal rights, access to resources, and contributes to the community's overall well-being.

Keywords: *shared society, Ukrainian migrants, integration, international and European law, Ukraine's membership in the European Union.*

INTRODUCTION

The concept of *a shared society* is a broader term that emerged in the early 2000s, primarily among practitioners and scholars in conflict resolution, peacebuilding, and development studies. It is defined as a „socially cohesive society“ that is stable, safe, and respectful of everyone's dignity and human rights, providing equal opportunities for all individuals. As the Club de Madrid (2011) outlined, this term has been embraced by practitioners worldwide and is frequently used in policy discussions and academic research. It presents a set of general

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principles for governance and daily behaviour in societies. Central to these principles is greater inclusiveness in socio-economic and political arenas (Kuttner, Eiran, 2021: 81-95).
The concept of a shared society was initially defined as a collective idea that „is not owned by one group, but belongs to all.“ Today, it is a universal symbol and an overarching vision for the future, grounded in strong moral principles. The term has entered the realm of applied research, reflecting a broader scope of societal policies, attitudes, norms, and practices. It marks the beginning of developing sustainable democracy and addresses various challenges and crises (Taneva et al., 2024: 23-24).
According to a team of scholars from the Faculty of Philosophy at Sofia University, who focus on integrity and social cohesion issues in contemporary societies, the shared society as a social phenomenon arises from dynamic centrifugal forces that can lead to dissatisfaction and conflict. However, it is improved through positive integration and cooperation. This concept promotes adaptability and integrity, reducing conflict and disunity (Taneva et al., 2024).
Social inclusion and *social cohesion* are other terms used to promote stable, safe, just, and tolerant societies that respect diversity, equal opportunity, and participation of all people (Ferguson, 2008). Although these terms are contested, often leading to debates about what is meant when they are used, in this particular context, we accept that a shared society is a place where all feel safe and secure, are part of a society where all have equal rights and opportunities, and all contribute to society. According to F. Browder, a shared society can shift the balance towards equilibrium and enhance people's lives over the long term (Braudel, 2009), contributing to social integrity and well-being.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This paper explores the concept of a shared society through a case study. The research addresses an innovative problem related to the changing dynamics of European society, specifically focusing on the world's largest migration crisis of the 21st century.
Citizens drive societal progress in a developed community like the European Union (EU). EU policies generally aim to create an environment where citizens can live fulfilling lives while facilitating the integration of new members. In recent years, Europe has faced an unprecedented situation due to the war in Ukraine, raising critical questions about how to adapt thousands of displaced individuals to new environments. The solutions to these questions are complex and multifaceted, going beyond the simple promotion of a shared society and requiring in-depth analysis.
According to A, migration processes are closely related to the integration issue. Krusteva, this term encompasses a wide range of policies and practices, from assimilation to multiculturalism (Krusteva, 2008). In recent years, there has been a growing emphasis on social cohesion. Migrants must prepare to live in the host society by learning its language and adopting liberal values.
This study addresses several key issues:

- What are the primary reasons for the relocation of Ukrainian citizens[3]?

[3] A significant number of people affected by the armed conflict in Ukraine are Ukrainian citizens. However, there is a percentage of individuals from other countries who have sought shelter, either temporarily or permanently, in host nations. Migrants from all sides of the conflict face largely the same challenges.

- In which countries are the most migrants located?
- Have they successfully adapted to their new countries?
- What are their most significant challenges in integrating into a new European living environment?

ANALYSIS OF THE KEY LEGAL ACTS: UKRAINE'S MEMBERSHIP IN THE EU

Before delving into the central part of the research, we will first analyse several important normative documents that reflect the attitudes of Ukraine and its citizens toward EU membership. Before the war, there were active discussions in various scholarly forums about Ukraine's European development vector and its aspiration to become a member of the EU[4].

By 2022, significant steps had been taken in this direction. The „Ukraine-EU Association Agreement“ was established in 2008 in Paris, and since 2009, Ukraine has been part of the EU's Eastern Partnership program. The „Association Agreement“ was signed in 2014, and its ratification by the EU was completed on 11 July 2017. In February 2019, the Association Agreement was ratified. The Verkhovna Rada legally enshrined in the Constitution of Ukraine the course of accession to the European Union, with the following wording in the preamble: „reaffirming the European identity of the Ukrainian people and the unwavering European and Euro-Atlantic course of Ukraine“[5]. During these years, Ukraine remained an important economic partner for the EU[6].

In a report published months before the outbreak of the war in Ukraine (17 September 2021), we conducted a forward-looking analysis regarding Ukraine's full membership in the European Union (EU). The Ukrainian government had identified EU membership as a key foreign policy priority. According to a poll conducted in 2021 by the Centre for Social and Marketing Research „Socis“[7], over 61% of Ukrainian citizens supported the country's accession to the EU. However, Ukraine’s EU membership timeline during this period remained undefined.

The EU accession process occurs in several stages; as of 2021, Ukraine was in the first stage. This process requires the country to fulfil various political and economic conditions known as the Accession Criteria (Copenhagen Criteria)[8]. Following this, the European Parliament must give its consent to enlargement. In our report, we noted that Ukraine planned to formally apply for EU membership in 2024, with aspirations to join by 2030 (Braga, 2021: 79). However, even this date in 2021 is considered „a pipe dream“ by many international and European law scholars.

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[4] Міжнародна науково-практична конференція „Наука та суспільне життя України в епоху глобальних викликів людства у цифрову еру (з нагоди 30-річчя проголошення незалежності України та 25-річчя прийняття Конституції України)“, 21.05.2021, Odessa, Ukraine; Міжнародна науково-практична конференція „Юриспруденція сьогодні: між апологією і креативністю“, 17.09.2021, Odessa, Ukraine, etc.

[5] The Law “On Amendments to the Constitution of Ukraine (regarding the strategic course of the state towards Ukraine's full membership in the European Union and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization)”. Published on 19 February 2019. https://www.rada.gov.ua/news/Novyny/167509.html

[6] In 2015, the EU accounted for 34% of Ukraine's exports and 41% of its imports. https://ukrstat.gov.ua/operativ/operativ2009/zd/ztp_ES/ztp_ES_u/ztp_ES15_u.ht;
Exports and imports of goods to countries around the world in 2015. https://ukrstat.gov.ua/operativ/operativ2016/zd/eip_kv/eip_kv_u/eip2015_u.htm

[7] https://lenta.ru/news/2021/09/28/ukr_opros/

[8] https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/enlargement-policy/glossary_en#accession-criteria

Following Russia's large-scale invasion, Ukraine applied for EU membership on 28 February 2022. In June 2022, the European Union approved Ukraine's application, and by December 2023, EU countries decided to initiate accession negotiations during a summit in Brussels. In June 2024, the European Commission announced that Ukraine had fulfilled all the necessary conditions for EU membership. Subsequently, on 25 June 2024, the First Intergovernmental Conference in Luxembourg officially started negotiations for Ukraine's accession to the EU.

While some political analysts argue that Ukraine's admission as a full EU member is not currently feasible and that the beginning of negotiations does not guarantee a swift accession, what is significant is that Ukrainian citizens, who currently hold migrant status, may soon become integrated into the larger European family as full citizens. Moreover, according to a poll conducted by the Ukrainian polling group „Rating“ in February 2024, the share of respondents supporting Ukraine's EU membership is 77%.

INTEGRATION OF MIGRANTS INTO EUROPEAN SOCIETY: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

According to official data from the UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees), over 6 million Ukrainians have sought refuge in European countries[9]. Depending on optimistic or pessimistic estimates, between 1.3 million and 3.3 million may choose to remain in Europe, as stated in a study by the Centre for Economic Strategy (CES). This study is based on data from two research agencies, Info Sapiens surveys.

Where have Ukrainian refugees found shelter? Most internally displaced persons initially settled in Poland. However, according to Eurostat (the EU's statistical office), Germany has emerged as the country granting the most temporary protection status to Ukrainian nationals, with over 20%, while Poland follows closely at 15%. Other leading destinations include the Czech Republic, the United Kingdom, Spain, Italy, and Romania.

The United States and Canada have welcomed significant numbers of Ukrainians outside Europe. In contrast, Bulgaria has received a considerably smaller influx of migrants, with over 174,000 Ukrainian refugees granted temporary protection. Among these, one in three, or over 77,000 individuals, have chosen to remain in Bulgaria.

These people with different education, professional skills, and wealth are already part of the European space. Therefore, in our view, it is necessary to pay special attention to the analysis of successful organisational models, pan-European practices, and efforts to integrate migrants, which will create the conditions in the long term for these people to want to become part of a shared society. However, simultaneously, be prepared to take on obligations and responsibilities to contribute to this society.

In this context, we want to comment on the report presented by L. Asher[10], the European Commission's adviser on Ukraine. The report indicates that the European Union is starting to experience „solidarity fatigue“ regarding Ukrainian refugees. The primary reason is the slowdown in economic growth in host countries. According to the report, the EU has signed

[9] Source: United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR). Statistical data are compiled mainly from data provided by the authorities of the host countries and are updated monthly.
https://data.unhcr.org/en/situations/ukraine#_ga=2.228732760.514168680.1646989952-176134281.1646551413

[10] https://thehill.com/homenews/ap/ap-international/eu-warns-of-solidarity-fatigue-despite-warm-welcome-for-millions-of-ukraine-refugees/

1.3 million labour contracts with Ukrainians fleeing the war. However, job creation has become increasingly difficult due to the influx of refugees from Ukraine amidst record inflation. L. Asher notes, „Solidarity is alive and well, but fatigue is also present, especially among the most vulnerable refugees and the most disadvantaged in host societies.“[11] A survey among Ukrainian migrants supports these observations, revealing that approximately 20% of respondents live "day-to-day." A similar percentage of migrants are facing challenging economic situations, struggling with issues related to social security, and residing in collective accommodation centres or free housing.

To explore the reasons behind their relocation and the main challenges Ukrainian migrants encounter in their socialization and adaptation processes, we employed a modern empirical research method: a direct survey in which respondents personally completed questionnaires. This survey was conducted with 227 Ukrainian citizens across Germany, Poland, the Czech Republic, and Bulgaria over three months (from 10 September to 10 December 2024).

Information on respondents' age, education, and previous employment was collected anonymously. Based on these data, we found that the age groups 28-45 (107) and 45-55 (98) had the highest number of respondents; younger respondents were 13, and among those over 55, there were nine. Consequently, the majority of respondents, 214, are of working age.

The first question posed to respondents was:

„What are the main reasons for moving abroad?“ (You may select more than one answer.)

According to the survey results, family security and well-being were among the primary reasons for migration since the onset of the full-scale war, with nearly half of the respondents (45%) citing this concern. Other common reasons included the opportunity to work abroad (23%), worries about children's futures (18%), better career opportunities (9%), and various other reasons (5%).

The analysis indicates that these responses came from a specific demographic group: individuals aged 28 to 55 with a high social status before the war. This group comprised graduates, actively employed individuals with developing careers, families, and who were financially well-off, primarily from large cities. The study continued with this group of respondents, totalling 205 individuals, whose selection fully met the requirements for representativeness.

We asked participants the following questions:

Question 1: *Have you been able to adapt?*

The survey results reveal that a significant percentage (62%) of respondents indicated that they have adapted (entirely or quickly) to life and can remain in the host country. The next question in the survey aims to gather more information about this adaptation.

Question 2: *How do opportunities in Ukraine compare to those in Europe in the long term?* (It is important to note that 92% of respondents have been outside Ukraine for more than a year.)

When comparing opportunities, the first thing Ukrainians state that Europe means to them is: security (social; protection of rights and freedoms) - 63% vs. 15% in Ukraine; jobs - 52% vs. 21% in Ukraine; also mentioned are better income (16%), comfort and infrastructure (11%).

[11] EU warns of “solidarity fatigue” after accepting Ukrainian refugees. Euronews (7 June 2023).

At the same time, Ukraine remains for them a place with better medical and educational services, with more affordable housing, 64% compared to 21% in Europe. Respondents also believed that success can be achieved equally in both Ukraine and Europe.
Central to the survey is the question:

Question 3: *What are the most significant difficulties in the integration process?* (You can give more than one answer.)
The most common response was the local language, which 42% of participants mentioned. The second most frequent difficulty was the process for the legalization of diplomas, cited by 24% of respondents. Additionally, 21% of participants reported difficulties finding a job, while a smaller number mentioned financial difficulties (7%) and other issues (6%). These responses indicate that the main challenges faced by migrants are primarily related to their proficiency in the local language.

The survey results show a clear correlation between language skills and employment opportunities. Among those who did not speak Polish, only 32% were employed, whereas 62% of those who spoke Polish well were employed. In Bulgaria, the employment figures were 41% for those who did not speak Bulgarian and 83% for those who spoke it well. This disparity may be partly because many respondents speak other Slavic languages, such as Ukrainian and Russian. The familiarity with the Cyrillic alphabet likely aids in their adaptation to written language. In the Czech Republic, the situation is different: the employment rate for those without knowledge of the local language is 22%, while in Germany, it drops to 16%.
The aforementioned report highlights that, as of mid-2023, refugee integration has been stalled due to the ongoing uncertainty surrounding the war. This situation makes it challenging for individuals to begin the processes of adaptation in their host societies. This phenomenon is referred to as the „waiting dilemma.“ Many people, particularly those who are financially stable, prefer to remain in their home country, hoping to return once it is safe. This uncertainty complicates decisions such as whether to start learning a new language, pursue longer-term training or education for better adaptation, or integrate their children into the educational systems of European countries. Consequently, companies in host countries are also hesitant to invest in Ukrainian migrants, as there is a risk that these individuals may leave shortly after arriving[12].
The analysis of the survey responses leads us to conclude that learning the local language creates opportunities for individuals seeking cultural and economic integration in the host society. However, targeted organizational models and practices are necessary to accelerate the integration process for migrants. Most respondents highlighted the following solutions: the organization of language courses, assistance with the process of credential recognition (notification), and support in job placement.
When addressing the challenge of overcoming the language barrier, it is crucial to emphasize that this process should occur within a shorter timeframe – ideally, months rather than years – because, in most cases, proficiency in the local language is essential for professional success.

[12] EU warns of “solidarity fatigue” after accepting Ukrainian refugees. Euronews (7 June 2023).

For instance, for a doctor or lawyer wishing to practice in Bulgaria, legalizing their diploma through the National Centre for Information and Documentation is not sufficient. They must also pass an exam in the Bulgarian language, including specific professional terminology, and take state exams defined by the general state requirements.

This is exactly what prevents many professionally trained, qualified professionals from continuing with their previous practice. Among the respondents, this was 23%. Many respondents accept lower-skilled and lower-paid work or wait for an opportunity to return home. At the same time, these professionals could fill a labour market that continues to experience acute shortages, such as medical staff and nuclear power engineers in Bulgaria or engineers and social pedagogues in Germany.

In this regard, we would like to draw attention to the need to analyse different interdisciplinary methods, such as the case study (the interactive jurisprudence method) for educational problem solving in foreign language teaching (Braga, 2023: 72-81). We will point to several publications of lecturers from Southwestern University „Neofit Rilski“ who use in their practice additional methods, tools, and resources in teaching Bulgarian to Ukrainian refugees (Padareva-Ilieva, Todorova, 2022: 169-178; Todorova, 2023: 532-543).

This methodology addresses the needs of the current socio-cultural and educational context by providing language training with a clear communicative focus. It enhances educational motivation and tackles several key objectives for developing linguistic and professional competencies. However, effectively implementing such methodologies in practical lessons for mastering the host country's language requires well-trained teachers.

CONCLUSION

This study presents a portion of the observations, which will be expanded in future research that includes survey data collected from migrants in Great Britain and France, two leading host countries following the second wave of migration. In summarizing the analysis of a specific case study related to the integration of migrants in the context of promoting a shared society, it is clear that the challenges posed by migration, which have long been a topic of discussion in European countries, increasingly require a long-term and targeted plan.

A comparative analysis of the potential and need for the integration of Ukrainian citizens into the policies established in various European Union countries will help us build a comprehensive understanding of the experiences of different international partners. This understanding can encourage other host countries to actively adopt these best practices. The analysis should focus on key aspects of the issue, specifically education and social adaptation. By doing so, we can create equally comfortable conditions for the entire lives of Ukrainian migrants, who can eventually become full citizens of the European Union.

Education is essential for opening doors for many migrants. The first and most critical component is language adaptation, facilitating effective social communication. Only after language proficiency can migrants achieve social, professional, and mental adaptation, leading to a fulfilling life and personal and professional development opportunities. The irreversible damage caused by the current armed conflict has not only altered the lives of millions of migrants but also raised important questions about how to build a shared future.

The long-term goal of this study is to address some of these questions, as understanding them is vital for shaping a future where we can all coexist peacefully.

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