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## Ukrainian War Refugees in Poland: Understanding Integration Through a Behavioral Lens

Ukraińscy uchodźcy wojenni w Polsce.  
Spojrzenie na integrację przez soczewki  
behawioralne

### Abstract

This paper analyzes the integration of war refugees through a behavioral science framework, focusing on Ukrainian war refugees in Poland. It distinguishes between economic migrants and war refugees, highlighting the latter's distinct challenges such as involuntary migration, exposure to violence, and psychological difficulties. The paper explores various behavioral factors influencing integration, including time perception, social networks, and public narratives. The findings suggest that understanding and addressing these behavioral aspects is essential for developing effective integration policies. This research advances the field by providing a nuanced understanding of war refugees' integration challenges from a behavioral perspective.

Keywords: behavioral science, war refugees, time perception, public narratives, policy

## Abstrakt

Niniejszy artykuł analizuje integrację uchodźców wojennych z perspektywy nauk behawioralnych, koncentrując się na ukraińskich uchodźcach wojennych w Polsce. Wyróżnia migrację ekonomiczną i uchodźstwo wojenne, podkreślając unikalne wyzwania stojące przed uchodźcami wojennymi, takie jak przymusowa migracja, narażenie na przemoc i trudności psychologiczne. Artykuł bada różne czynniki behawioralne wpływające na integrację, w tym postrzeganie czasu, sieci społeczne i narracje publiczne. Wyniki wskazują, że zrozumienie i uwzględnienie tych aspektów behawioralnych jest kluczowe dla opracowania skutecznych polityk integracyjnych. Badanie to wnosi istotny wkład w rozwój wiedzy, dostarczając szczegółowego spojrzenia na wyzwania związane z integracją uchodźców wojennych z perspektywy behawioralnej.

**Słowa kluczowe:** nauki behawioralne, uchodźcy wojenni, postrzeganie czasu, narracje publiczne, polityka publiczna

## Introduction

The integration of war refugees, a complex and multifaceted phenomenon, requires an analytical approach that extends beyond conventional economic and sociological frameworks. In this paper, we undertake an innovative exploration in migration studies by applying a behavioral science lens to understand and address the diverse challenges faced by war refugees. This analysis is informed by relevant literature, drawing from disciplines such as behavioral psychology, trauma and resilience studies, cultural adaptation theory, the sociology of migration, and public policy.

Our methodology is anchored in desk research, comprising a comprehensive and systematic review of existing literature and studies. This approach enables us to collate and analyze a wide range of academic sources, reports, and case studies, thereby providing a rich foundation for our analysis. Through this method, we aim to synthesize and interpret diverse perspectives, insights, and empirical findings, constructing a cohesive narrative on the integration of war refugees.

The paper begins by establishing the significance of behavioral science in the context of refugee experiences, advocating for its transition from a traditional analytical lens to a holistic interpretative framework. This sets the groundwork for distinguishing between migrants and refugees, highlighting the unique circumstances and challenges inherent in war-induced migration.

We then conduct a detailed examination of the behavioral challenges confronting refugees, including the impact of trauma, the dynamics of cultural adaptation, and their implications for integration policies. This is followed by an exploration of the understudied yet crucial aspect of heightened sensitivity among refugees and its ramifications for mental health and social integration.

A discussion on the perception of time and its influence on the human capital of refugees is presented, analyzing how these perceptions shape their integration process and long-term outcomes. The role of social networks and community support is also scrutinized, underscoring their importance in facilitating refugee adaptation and resilience.

In conclusion, we discuss the impact of public narratives and societal attitudes towards refugees on their integration process. This section highlights the potential for policy interventions to positively influence these narratives and attitudes.

Our paper aims to provide a detailed, nuanced, and empathetic understanding of the integration of war refugees. It highlights the potential role of behavioral science in enhancing integration strategies, with the hope of contributing meaningfully to the broader discourse in migration studies.

## Behavioral Science: Transitioning from Analytical Tool to Interpretative Lens

Although applied behavioral science has been used for over a decade globally by international organizations, public entities, and companies, the understanding of its role and scope continues to evolve<sup>1</sup>.

To date, behavioral science has primarily been applied as a tool to analyze and modify the behavior of specific agents. The process of developing behavioral insights involves several stages. The initial stage focuses on identifying the specific context targeted for change and the factors influencing behavior and choices. The subsequent stage defines a target behavior or decision that can be monitored and measured, followed by the design of an experiment to test the intervention's effectiveness. An

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1 Zeina Afif et al., *Behavioral Science Around the World: Profiles of 10 Countries* (Washington, D.C: World Bank Group, 2019); OECD, *Behavioural Insights and Public Policy: Lessons from Around the World* (Paris: OECD, 2017), [https://read.oecd-ilibrary.org/governance/behavioural-insights-and-public-policy\\_9789264270480-en#page1](https://read.oecd-ilibrary.org/governance/behavioural-insights-and-public-policy_9789264270480-en#page1) (accessed 14th August 2024); Richard H. Thaler, Cass R. Sunstein, *Impuls: jak podejmować właściwe decyzje dotyczące zdrowia, dobrobytu i szczęścia* (Poznań: Zysk i S-ka, 2008).

optional final step involves scaling up the successful intervention to assess its applicability on a broader scale<sup>2</sup>. These methods have been particularly useful as tools for solving “last-mile problems,” a term referring to the final obstacles to achieving desired outcomes<sup>3</sup>.

This foundational understanding has led to a number of success stories in influencing decisions such as saving for retirement<sup>4</sup>, reducing electricity consumption<sup>5</sup>, replacing heat sources<sup>6</sup>, fighting discrimination against older people in the labour market (PIE 2022), not paying taxes in a timely manner<sup>7</sup>, not attending medical appointments or abusing antibiotics<sup>8</sup>.

In these cases, behavioral interventions employed various strategies, including reducing effort in retirement savings, framing and leveraging social pressure to reduce energy consumption, and modifying communication regarding tax payments. These examples of effective interventions, on the one hand, require minimal investment and, on the other hand, yield significant results. Such successes have contributed to the natural evolution of the role of applied behavioral science<sup>9</sup>. Nowadays,

- 2 Paul Dolan et al., „Mindspace. Influencing Behaviour Through Public Policy” (London: Institute for Government, 2010), <https://www.bi.team/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/MINDSPACE.pdf>; David Halpern, „EAST: Four Simple Ways to Apply Behavioural Insights” (London: Behavioural Insights Team, 2014), [https://www.bi.team/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/BIT-Publication-EAST\\_FA\\_WEB.pdf](https://www.bi.team/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/BIT-Publication-EAST_FA_WEB.pdf); OECD, *Tools and Ethics for Applied Behavioural Insights: The BASIC Toolkit*, 2020, <https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/9ea76a8f-en/index.html?itemId=/content/publication/9ea76a8f-en> (Paris: OECD, 2020) (accessed 17th July 2024).
- 3 Dilip Soman, *The Last Mile: Creating Social and Economic Value from Behavioral Insights* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2017).
- 4 Richard Thaler, Shlomo Benartzi, „Save More Tomorrow: Using Behavioral Economics to Increase Employee Saving”, *Journal of Political Economy* 112 (2004): 164–187.
- 5 Erez Yoeli et al., „Behavioral Science Tools to Strengthen Energy and Environmental Policy”, *Behavioral Science & Policy* 3/1 (2017): 68–79.
- 6 David Halpern, *Inside the Nudge Unit: How Small Changes Can Make a Big Difference* (London: Ebury Press, 2016).
- 7 Marco Hernandez et al., „Zastosowanie technik behawioralnych w celu poprawy ściągalności podatków. Wyniki badań empirycznych przeprowadzonych w Polsce” (World Bank Group, 2017). <https://www.funduszeuropejskie.gov.pl/media/80108/rbs.pdf> (accessed 1st September 2024).
- 8 Theresa A. Rowe, Jeffrey A. Linder, „Novel Approaches to Decrease Inappropriate Ambulatory Antibiotic Use”, *Expert Review of Anti-infective Therapy* 17/7 (2019): 511–521.
- 9 Sanchayan Banerjee, Siddhartha Mitra, „Behavioural Public Policies for the Social Brain”, *Behavioural Public Policy* (2023): 1–23; Christopher J. Bryan, Elizabeth Tipton, David S. Yeager, „Behavioural Science is Unlikely to Change the World without a Heterogeneity Revolution”, *Nature Human Behaviour* 5/8 (2021): 980–989; Cristiana Cerqueira Leal et al., „Nudging and Choice Architecture: Perspectives and Challenges”

behavioral science is not merely a tool among many in the toolbox; it serves as a lens through which solutions to most public policies are analyzed and designed<sup>10</sup>.

The emerging understanding of behavioural science, particularly in relation to refugee migration, provides a new lens for comprehensive analysis. It enables the challenges of integration to be thoroughly explored, the key elements of the complex situation faced by war refugees to be identified and, consequently, appropriate interventions to be developed.

This fresh perspective also redefines the categorization of objectives in behavioural interventions. Traditionally, problems have been divided into behavioural and non-behavioural categories, either tacitly or explicitly. However, applying a behavioural lens allows for the identification of behavioural components in virtually any public policy issue, thereby enhancing policy effectiveness. This inclusivity stems from the fact that almost every issue involves elements of behavior, judgment, and decision-making<sup>11</sup>.

One of the best explanations of the metaphor of behavioral science as a lens was proposed by Jared Peterson and Ellis Morlock:

Imagine a photographer taking photos of a family event. She puts the camera to her eye only to see a blurry image through the glass. Knowing the distances, angles, and lighting of the shot, she adjusts the sensors, and what was previously obscure becomes crystal clear. Equipped with the knowledge of the clarified scene now in her view, she can never return to the understanding of this same scene in its clouded state. What was previously obscure can now not be unseen, giving an illusion that everything must have been obvious from the outset. Similarly, using Behavioral Science as a lens transforms problems from obscure and cloudy into actionable paths forward.<sup>12</sup>

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*Revista de Administração Contemporânea* 26 (2022): 1--; Stephanie Mertens et al., „The Effectiveness of Nudging: A Meta-analysis of Choice Architecture Interventions Across Behavioral Domains”, *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 119/1 (2022): e2107346118.

10 Michael Hallsworth, „A Manifesto for Applying Behavioural Science”, *Nature Human Behaviour* 7/ 3 (2023): 310–322.

11 *Ibidem*.

12 Jared Peterson, Ellis Morlock, *Behavioral Science as a Lens to Solve Problems*, <https://medium.com/behavior-design-hub/behavioral-science-as-a-lens-to-solve-problems-9213a18a7707> (accessed 17th November 2024).

By adopting this perspective therefore allows the use of a behavioural intervention perspective to assess the complexity of the situation of war refugees from Ukraine living in Poland. In the next step, the concept of a war refugee will be defined based on relevant literature, with a focus on the behavioural challenges, barriers and characteristics specific to war refugees.

### Migrants vs. Refugees: Key Differences and Shared Challenges

Economic migrants differ from war refugees not only by name. Nevertheless, the literature debates the relevance of the distinction between economic migrants and forced migrants, including war refugees<sup>13</sup>. There is also no consensus on conceptual definitions, as the meaning of the terms ‘migrant’ and ‘refugee’ may change depending on the academic discipline conducting the research. Some scholars emphasise the forced nature of refugee migration in contrast to the voluntary nature of economic migrants’ decisions<sup>14</sup>. In contrast, another group of researchers notes that it is difficult to make a clear distinction between political and social or economic factors<sup>15</sup>. And while it is indeed difficult in the social sciences to have precise definitions that divide reality into disjoint domains, especially in the realm of individuals’ motivations<sup>16</sup>. It would seem that in the case of war refugees from Ukraine, it is easier to conclude that their motivation and life circumstances are fundamentally different from those of other migrants from Europe and Asia arriving in Poland from countries not occupied by the Russian army. In this sense, although the authors cited above are quite correct in principle,

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13 Renate Ortlieb, Lena Knappert, „Labor Market Integration of Refugees: An Institutional Country-Comparative Perspective”, *Journal of International Management* 29/2 (2023): 1–16.

14 Christian Dustmann et al., „On the Economics and Politics of Refugee Migration”, *Economic Policy* 32/91 (2017): 497–550.

15 Heaven Crawley, Dimitris Skleparis, „Refugees, Migrants, Neither, Both: Categorical Fetishism and the Politics of Bounding in Europe’s ‘Migration Crisis’”, *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 44/1 (2018): 48–64; Marta Bivand Erdal, Ceri Oeppen, „Forced to Leave? The Discursive and Analytical Significance of Describing Migration as Forced and Voluntary”, *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 44/6 (2018): 981–998; Roger Zetter, „More Labels, Fewer Refugees: Remaking the Refugee Label in an Era of Globalization”, *Journal of Refugee Studies* 20/2 (2007): 172–192.

16 Katy Long, „When Refugees Stopped Being Migrants: Movement, Labour and Humanitarian Protection”, *Migration Studies* 1/1 (2013): 4–26.

the boundary between war refugees and economic (or social) migrants can be clearly delineated in this particular case<sup>17</sup>.

There are interesting and relevant conceptual proposals in the existing literature, particularly when forced migration is analyzed from an applied behavioral science perspective. Szkudlarek and his team argue that refugees and economic migrants occupy opposite ends of a continuum of relocation cases. Refugees, according to this approach, are supposed to be characterised primarily by the involuntariness of the decision to migrate, insecurity, vulnerability, low social status in the host country, resulting in a unique set of challenges that economic migrants typically do not face<sup>18</sup>. This conceptual issue is also of practical significance, because depending on whether a society is dealing with refugees or economic migrants, the public's attitude also shifts to a less positive one<sup>19</sup>.

War refugees are distinguished from economic migrants by the reasons for their departure, the involuntary nature of their choices, the timing and organisation of their relocation, their experience of violence or the threat of such violence, a sense of fear, uncertainty and different perspectives on future scenarios<sup>20</sup>.

While changing one's place of residence and arriving in another country is inherently a difficult and often stressful event linked to a completely new set of challenges, the situation of war refugees is considerably more complex. It begins with the involuntary nature of their departure, the timing, logistical challenges, relationship with family members and the possibility of travelling together and essentially escaping, the number of belongings that can be taken, and ends with the prospects of arranging one's life in the destination country.

In terms of the reasons for migration, there are fundamental differences between war refugees and economic migrants at the initial stage, which affect the entire experience of migrating and are relevant to the public policy design. The departure of the latter is planned, they know

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17 Betina Szkudlarek, Luciara Nardon, Soo Min Toh, „A Temporal Perspective on Refugee Employment – Advancing HRM Theory and Practice”, *Human Resource Management Journal* 34/2 (2021): 275–291.

18 *Ibidem*.

19 David De Coninck, „Migrant Categorizations and European Public Opinion: Diverging Attitudes Towards Immigrants and Refugees”, *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 46/9 (2020): 1667–86; Justyna Tomczak-Boczko, Klaudia Gołębiowska, Maciej Górny, „Who Is a ‘True Refugee’? Polish Political Discourse in 2021–2022”, *Discourse Studies* 25/6 (2023): 799–822.

20 David Scott FitzGerald, Rawan Arar, „The Sociology of Refugee Migration”, *Annual Review of Sociology* 44/1 (2018): 1–16; Ortlieb i Knappert, „Labor Market Integration of Refugees”.

where they are going and what their next months will look like. They often join friends or family already living in their chosen destination. They enter the social network of other migrants, who informally share knowledge about how to function successfully in their chosen location. Economically motivated migrants migrate seeking a better quality of life, new career paths or simply better income opportunities<sup>21</sup>.

War refugees, by contrast, flee violence, persecution or even existential threats. Their decision is forced; they would not have changed their place of residence were it not for war or the threat of violence. This aspect central to the definition of a war refugee in the War Refugee Convention. The choice to evacuate is made in haste, which in turn is reflected in insufficient planning and preparation for departure.

War refugees are also confronted with various logistical challenges. Due to the haste, they can take only a few belongings, which in turn can make adaptation in the destination country more difficult. Research shows that the main needs of Ukrainian refugees include food, clothing, personal belongings, medication, and securing a shelter. Additionally, they may have to move through zones at risk of violent conflicts and, at times, cross the border illegally. Another factor causing stress and affecting their ability to make decisions is the hampered relationship with their families, who have not managed – for various reasons – to flee the threatened territories. Research in Poland shows that 75 per cent of refugees experience traumatic stress disorder and psychological distress was diagnosed in 50 per cent of respondents<sup>22</sup>. Economic migrants do not face these experiences, and therefore are spared the psychological burdens of trauma.

To sum up, stress, insecurity, psychological issues, concern for others, vulnerability and the lack of extensive social networks in the host country are key aspects of the war refugee experience that should be considered when designing migration policies aimed at facilitating their integration into the host country's labor market.

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21 Alexander Betts, „Survival Migration: A New Protection Framework”, *Global Governance: A Review of Multilateralism and International Organizations* 16/3 (2010): 361–382.; Szkudlarek, Nardon, Toh, „A Temporal Perspective on Refugee Employment – Advancing HRM Theory and Practice”.

22 Piotr Długosz, Liudmyła Kryvachuk, Dominika Izdebska-Długosz, *Uchodźcy wojenni z Ukrainy – życie w Polsce i plany na przyszłość* (Wydawnictwo Academicum, Lublin, 2022).



## Mapping Behavioral Challenges

Before moving on to a more detailed discussion of the behavioral challenges specific to war refugees, it is important to acknowledge that the integration process is a two-way process the success of which is not determined solely by the host society and the state. Refugees need to adjust to their new environment, just as society needs to adjust to the forced migrants they have accepted<sup>23</sup>.

Among the factors facilitating the mutual integration process is the widespread belief that war refugees, unlike other non-forced migrants, are in need of protection. This societal sense of responsibility toward newcomers enhances the likelihood of their successful integration, including into the local labor market<sup>24</sup>.

In Poland, the Polish Economic Institute conducted two surveys in 2022 and 2023 that examined, among other topics, Poles' attitudes toward Ukrainian refugees. Between early spring and autumn of 2022, the percentage of Poles who believed that refugees are people in need of assistance decreased from 84 percent to 50 percent. When asked "Are foreigners needed in the labor market?" the percentage of positive answers dropped from 81 percent to 63 percent.

The belief that unconditional aid is necessary has also declined. In the spring of 2022, as many as 69 percent of Poles agreed that providing refugees with a safe haven should be an absolute priority, even if it worsens the quality of life for the host population. A few months later, this number dropped to 47 percent. While it is clear that Poles are willing to help refugees, it should be acknowledged that this window of openness and willingness to sacrifice may gradually narrow over time<sup>25</sup>.

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23 Paweł Kaczmarczyk, „Ukrainian Migrants in Poland during the War: The State of the Art and Key Challenges”, *Social Insurance. Theory and Practice* 155/4 (2023): 1–28; Antoni Olak, „Adaptacja kulturowa – przystosowanie się emigrantów ukraińskich w społeczeństwie do polskiej rzeczywistości. Zarys problematyki”, *Współczesne Problemy Zarządzania* 9/2 (2021): 77–87.

24 FitzGerald, Arar, „The Sociology of Refugee Migration”; Renate Ortlieb, Elena Glauninger, Silvana Weiss, „Organizational Inclusion and Identity Regulation: How Inclusive Organizations Form ‘Good’, ‘Glorious’ and ‘Grateful’ Refugees”, *Organization* 28/2 (2021): 266–288.

25 Łukasz Baszczak et al., „How Polish Society Has Been Helping Refugees from Ukraine” (Warszawa: Polski Instytut Ekonomiczny, 2022); Łukasz Baszczak, Agnieszka Wincewicz-Price, Radosław Zyzik, „Poles and Ukrainians – the Challenges of Integrating Refugees” (Warszawa: Polski Instytut Ekonomiczny, 2023); Katarzyna Kalinowska, Katarzyna Krakowska, Marta Sałkowska, „Dlaczego Polacy pomagali Ukraińcom? Typologia powodów zaangażowania w pomoc ukraińskim uchodźcom”, *Kultura i Społeczeństwo* 67/3 (2023): 41–64.

Factors that increase the likelihood of successful integration include institutional factors (e.g., providing official support), legal issues (e.g., introducing regulations that permit employment) and economic factors (e.g., preventing economic exploitation of refugees)<sup>26</sup>. However, in addition to these, there are several less obvious strategies and variables that may not immediately come to mind when analyzing public policies at supporting refugee integration.

### The Dark Side of Sensitivity

One factor that significantly impacts the overall integration process is the perception of a person as a ‘refugee’ and how it influences their treatment in the workplace. Employers and managers may view refugees predominantly as vulnerable individuals in need of assistance, as noted by Pesch et al. (2023). This perspective can lead to an underestimation of their professional competencies and may cause employers to overlook opportunities for refugees to develop their skills. Consequently, while social openness facilitates the reception of refugees, it can inadvertently hinder their long-term integration into the labor market.

Employers often perceive refugees through a lens of vulnerability, focusing primarily on their limitations and, in some cases, even questioning their ability to make rational decisions. This approach can inadvertently lead to a form of secondary victimization, where the emphasis is placed excessively on providing aid rather than on training, skill development, or offering constructive feedback. However, as highlighted by Ludwig and Ortlieb and Ressi (Ludwig, 2016; Ortlieb, Ressi, 2022), this is not the only perspective in the workplace. There are also pragmatic and potential-based approaches to refugee integration. Nonetheless, the major challenge lies in public policy reforms and adopting a macro perspective that emphasizes employer and managerial sensitivity and responsiveness. It is essential, therefore, to systematically examine how refugees are perceived by members of the host society<sup>27</sup>.

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26 Giles Hirst et al., „Refugee Recruitment and Workplace Integration: An Opportunity for Human Resource Management Scholarship and Impact”, *Human Resource Management Journal* 33/4 (2023): 783–805; Eun Su Lee et al., „Unveiling the Canvas Ceiling: A Multidisciplinary Literature Review of Refugee Employment and Workforce Integration”, *International Journal of Management Reviews* 22/2 (2020): 198; Szkudlarek, Nardon, i Toh, „A Temporal Perspective on Refugee Employment – Advancing HRM Theory and Practice”.

27 Maria Babińska et al., „Poles Toward Ukrainians: The Results of Survey Studies after the Russian Invasion of Ukraine in 2022”, *Nauka* 4 (2022): 37–58; Maciej Duszczczyk et al., „War Refugees from Ukraine in Poland – One Year after the Russian Aggression.

## Time and Human Capital

The prospect of return matters. War refugees, as a subset of involuntary migrants, often do not know when or if they will be able to return to their country. Consequently, they may be uncertain whether it is worthwhile to invest their time and effort in integrating into the social and economic fabric of the new society. It is refugees' perception of time and foresight of an insecure future that matters for the level of efforts they will make to successfully integrate into the labour market<sup>28</sup>.

In the absence of uncertainty regarding their legal status, the more accessible the labor market and educational opportunities are, along with other social benefits, the more motivated individuals are to invest in their human capital. However, the focus should not solely be on temporary solutions but also on sustainable, long-term integration strategies, potentially culminating in the acquisition of citizenship in the host country.

When analyzing the impact of time on refugee decision-making, it is crucial to distinguish between investments in human and physical capital. Investments in education, language skills, or the acquisition of new skills allow for greater mobility, with benefits potentially extending beyond the host country's borders. In other words, investing in human capital may be advantageous for refugees regardless of where they ultimately reside. In contrast, investments in physical capital, such as real estate, or decisions about starting a family, are likely to be made only when forced migrants have a secure and permanent legal status in the host country. To illustrate these concepts, the case of Polish displaced persons from the Eastern Borderlands after World War II provides valuable insights. The findings of these analyses indicate that forced migrants and their children often achieve a higher level of education compared to ethnically, linguistically, and religiously similar groups. This finding underscores the shift in preference towards investing in human capital at the expense of physical capital among forced migrants. Understanding the factors that influence investments in physical versus human capital

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Socioeconomic Consequences and Challenges”, *Regional Science Policy & Practice* 15/1 (2023): 181–99; Maciej Duszczyk, Paweł Kaczmarczyk, „The War in Ukraine and Migration to Poland: Outlook and Challenges”, *Intereconomics* 3 (2022): 164–170.

- 28 Dustmann et al., „On the Economics and Politics of Refugee Migration”; Francesco Loiacono, Mariajose Silva Vargas, „Improving Access to Labor Markets for Refugees: Evidence from Uganda”, 2019, <https://nru.uncst.go.ug/handle/123456789/1164> (access: 17.08.2024); Kirsten Schuettler, Laura Caron, *Jobs Interventions for Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons* (World Bank, Washington, DC, 2020), <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/bitstreams/8f75a541-5f92-5115-8e15-be120ac74dcb/download> (access: 10.11.2024).

can play a pivotal role in shaping effective migration policies. The noted educational attainment of forced migrants and their descendants highlights the potential long-term benefits of policies that support human capital development in refugee populations<sup>29</sup>.

One key indicator in understanding refugee intentions is their expressed desire to return to Ukraine. Survey results on this topic vary depending on the timing of the data collection. Notably, a survey conducted by the Ukrainian Centre for Economic Strategy in February 2023 revealed that 74% of refugees residing in Poland expressed a desire to return to Ukraine promptly. In contrast, a 2022 study by the National Bank of Poland (NBP) found that only 56% of respondents planned to return within three months after the war's end (NBP 2022). Interestingly, among pre-war migrants, only 25% indicated a desire to return, with a significant 75% preferring to stay in Poland post-war. These findings illustrate the distinct differences in return intentions between economic migrants, or those who migrated before the war, and war refugees.

As highlighted previously, time plays a crucial role in refugee decision-making. If refugees anticipate a prompt return to their homeland following the end of an armed conflict, their willingness to invest in personal, familial, or economic aspects within the host country is naturally limited – a trend supported by various studies.

The experience of violence, the trauma of fleeing, and the ordeal of being forcibly displaced often lead to a pessimistic assessment of future developments. This, in turn, can result in lowered aspirations and ambitions among war refugees. Consequently, this altered outlook manifests as a reduced willingness to undertake risks in economic decisions within the host country, reflecting a cautious approach shaped by their experiences.

### Social Ties as a Key Factor in Refugee Adaptation

Social networks play a pivotal role in supporting war refugees. The ability to consult fellow compatriots regarding accommodation, employment opportunities, navigating the public education system, and understanding the healthcare system provides invaluable support.

Fear and the urgency to flee predominantly influence refugees' choice of destination. Consequently, refugees are more likely than economic migrants to settle in countries where social networks are not sufficiently established to aid significantly in their adaptation and integration. One

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29 Sascha O. Becker et al., „Forced Migration and Human Capital: Evidence from Post-WWII Population Transfers”, *American Economic Review* 110/5 (2020): 1430–1463.

major repercussion of this is a lack of information about the labor market, effective job search strategies, and the regional diversity of employment opportunities. A greater number of tenured members within a refugee's social network positively influences their employability and raises their potential hourly wage<sup>30</sup>. Refugees with job-seeking intentions benefit from their social contacts, particularly those who are already employed, as these contacts provide valuable insight into the labor market and thereby increase their chances of finding employment<sup>31</sup>. Additionally, social networks serve a dual role in not only preventing social exclusion but also significantly enhancing the chances of successful social integration and providing emotional support to refugees<sup>32</sup>. In Poland, the challenge of limited social networks is mitigated by the presence of a well-integrated Ukrainian minority. Prior to the war, this community was estimated to include around 1.5 million Ukrainian citizens, as reported by the Union of Polish Metropolises (UMP, 2022).

It is crucial to acknowledge that refugees often face a lower levels of mental health, with a higher incidence of depression, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and borderline personality disorder (BPD). Research indicates that refugees are more susceptible to major depressive disorder (MDD), the effects of PTSD, and BPD<sup>33</sup>. A comprehensive meta-analysis revealed that 22.7% of refugee and asylum-seeking children and adolescents suffer from PTSD, 13.8% experience depressive episodes, and 15.8% face anxiety disorders<sup>34</sup>. The psychological consequences of experiencing violence, war, and forced migration, especially in children, can manifest as stress, anxiety, a lack of interest in their surroundings, or even aggressive behavior<sup>35</sup>.

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30 Lori A. Beaman, „Social Networks and the Dynamics of Labour Market Outcomes: Evidence from Refugees Resettled in the U.S.”, *The Review of Economic Studies* 79/1 (2012): 128–161.

31 Perihan Saygin, Andrea Weber, Michèle A. Weynandt, „Coworkers, Networks, and Job-Search Outcomes among Displaced Workers”, *ILR Review* 74 (2019): 95–130.

32 Hanne Beirens et al., „Preventing Social Exclusion of Refugee and Asylum Seeking Children: Building New Networks”, *Social Policy and Society* 6 (2007): 219–229.

33 Martina Patanè et al., „Prevalence of Mental Disorders in Refugees and Asylum Seekers: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis”, *Global Mental Health* 9 (2022): 250–263.

34 Rebecca Blackmore et al., „The Prevalence of Mental Illness in Refugees and Asylum Seekers: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis”, *PLOS Medicine* 17/9 (2020): e1003337.

35 Arash Javanbakht et al., „Prevalence of Possible Mental Disorders in Syrian Refugees Resettling in the United States Screened at Primary Care”, *Journal of Immigrant and Minority Health* 21/3 (2019): 664–667.

The mental health of Ukrainian war refugees in Poland exemplifies this issue. A study by Długosz et al.<sup>36</sup> found that 75% of Ukrainian refugees in Poland exhibit elevated levels of psychological distress, with experiences of war trauma as measured by the RHS-15 scale. This situation, which Polish authorities and society must address, underscores the critical need for mental health support as a fundamental component of successful integration. Providing adequate mental health care is not merely an act of compassion; it is an essential step towards ensuring the effective integration of refugees into their new communities.

### Public Narratives and Social Attitudes Towards Refugees

The influence of public and media narratives on the attitudes towards refugees, as well as on the perceptions of host country citizens, is a critical factor in the integration process. These narratives, often simplified and structured, serve as interpretive frameworks and discourses that are extensively studied not only in migration studies but also in the field of economics. Robert Schiller, a prominent researcher on the role of narratives in economics, posits that narratives function similarly to stories crafted and disseminated according to the logic of epidemics, impacting individual behaviors as well as broader economic cycles and trends<sup>37</sup>. Such narratives play a crucial role in shaping identities for entire social groups and influence the attitudes of societies towards groups like migrants or refugees<sup>38</sup>.

The selection and presentation of information about refugees significantly influence the construction of their image, impacting both positive and negative perceptions of refugees and the integration process<sup>39</sup>. Depending on the context, refugees can be stigmatized, leading to the emergence of xenophobic attitudes, even in the face of efforts by state

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36 Piotr Długosz, Liudmyła Kryvachuk, Dominika Izdebska-Długosz, *Uchodźcy wojenni z Ukrainy – życie w Polsce i plany na przyszłość*, (Lublin: Academicon, 2022).

37 Robert J. Shiller, *Narrative Economics: How Stories Go Viral and Drive Major Economic Events* (Princeton, 2019).

38 James Dennison, „Narratives: a Review of Concepts, Determinants, Effects, and Uses in Migration Research”, *Comparative Migration Studies* 9, nr 50 (2021): 1–14; Rūta Sutkutė, „Public Discourse on Refugees in Social Media: A Case Study of the Netherlands”, *Discourse & Communication*, (2024): 72–97; Victoria Yantseva, „Migration Discourse in Sweden: Frames and Sentiments in Mainstream and Social Media”, *Social Media + Society* 6/4 (2020): 1–29.

39 Kesi Mahendran et al., „Reification and the Refugee: Using a Counterposing Dialogical Analysis to Unlock a Frozen Category”, *Journal of Social and Political Psychology* 7 (2019), 577–597.

administrations to promote favorable narratives<sup>40</sup>. In this context, the media play a pivotal role in determining the nature of information conveyed and its interpretation.

Negative framing of war refugees and the integration process can adversely affect refugees, potentially fostering resentment towards the host society, fueling isolation within refugee communities, and discouraging active engagement in job-seeking, education, and skill development<sup>41</sup>.

In examining the dynamics of public narratives and social attitudes towards refugees, it is evident that perceptions can significantly evolve over time, particularly in response to prolonged crises. This is illustrated by the changing perceptions of Ukrainian war refugees regarding the attitudes of Poles from 2022 to 2024. Initially, in 2022, the percentage of refugees perceiving negative and very negative attitudes was relatively low, with only 0.4% expressing negative views and 3.1% holding very negative opinions. However, by 2023, these figures had notably increased to 3.1% for negative opinions and 0.3% for very negative opinions. This trend continued into 2024, with negative sentiments rising sharply to 22.1%, although the percentage of very negative opinions slightly decreased to 0.0%. This progressive hardening of perceived attitudes underscores the impact of enduring conflict situations on public sentiment and highlights the crucial role that public narratives play in shaping social attitudes towards refugees.

Furthermore, narratives significantly influence public authorities. Dominant narratives, whether positive or negative, can legitimize specific migration policies. Negative narratives, in particular, may lead to exclusionary public policies<sup>42</sup>. However, understanding the role and social impact of narratives regarding refugees creates opportunities for proposing counter-narratives. For example, positive stories that highlight successful integration can foster more inclusive attitudes. When examining the behavioral aspects of migration processes, the role of narratives becomes indispensable. They shape the axiological ecosystem necessary for the adoption and success of specific public policies solutions, directly influencing their effectiveness.

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40 Andrianna Milo, „The Concept Refugee in the Discourse of New Media (Case Study of Government Media and Social Networks of Germany)”, *Studia Linguistica* 17 (2020): 85–99.

41 Sarah Steimel, „Refugees as People: The Portrayal of Refugees in American Human Interest Stories”, *Journal of Refugee Studies* 23 (2010): 219–237.

42 Victoria Esses, Stelian Medianu, Andrea Lawson, „Uncertainty, Threat, and the Role of the Media in Promoting the Dehumanization of Immigrants and Refugees”, *Journal of Social Issues* 69 (2013): 518–536.

## Summary

This paper provides an overview of the integration of war refugees through a behavioral science lens, offering fresh insights into the challenges and opportunities faced by this group. It emphasizes the distinction between economic migrants and war refugees, highlighting the unique involuntary nature of war-induced migration and the resulting psychological and social repercussions. The paper explores key behavioral factors, including trauma, resilience, time perception, cultural adaptation, and social networks, illustrating how these aspects significantly influence the integration process. It also discusses the importance of understanding refugees' narratives and perceptions in shaping their integration experiences.

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