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**ANALYSIS OF THE UNIVERSITY STUDENTS' INTEGRATION IN
FORCED MIGRATION CONDITIONS IN UKRAINE AND THE CZECH
REPUBLIC**

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Abstract. The study examines the specifics of the integration of Ukrainian refugee students in the Czech Republic and internally displaced university students in Ukraine after the Russian invasion in February 2022. The aim is to compare the levels of integration of these two groups according to language, economic, sociocultural, legal, and psychological criteria, for which an online survey of 46 Ukrainian students in the Czech Republic (Masaryk University) and 231 internally displaced students in Ukraine (Donbas State Pedagogical University) was conducted.

The results show that both groups face significant challenges despite support from countries, institutions, and higher education institutions. Language barriers remain a problem even for students with medium levels of Czech language skills. Low incomes and non-educational work hamper

economic integration. Sociocultural integration is characterized by an interest in local culture but limited by deep social ties with the local population.

Both groups demonstrate a good awareness of their rights, but a low level of participation in social and political initiatives. The high level of psychological distress among students, despite their general satisfaction with life, is particularly alarming.

The study highlights the need for comprehensive support strategies that focus not only on the practical aspects of integration but also on mental health, social connections, and long-term economic integration. Implementing programs that promote deeper cultural exchange, provide resources to support mental health, and support career development relevant to students' fields of study is recommended.

Keywords: university students; refugees; internally displaced persons (IDPs); integration; barriers.

Introduction. The Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 triggered the largest refugee crisis in Europe since World War II. Over 8 million Ukrainians have fled the country, with millions more internally displaced. This humanitarian emergency has significantly impacted university students, forcing the suspension of studies and dislocation en masse.

Many Ukrainian students have continued their education in neighbouring countries, especially Poland and the Czech Republic which have welcomed university transfers. The Czech government has been notably accommodating by offering Ukrainian students direct entry into Czech universities, allowing continuation in the English language, providing special scholarships, amending residency policies, guaranteeing campus housing, and fast-tracking visa applications.

This study examines the forced migration of Ukrainian university students into the Czech higher education system. Specifically, it analyses the challenges and outcomes for Ukrainian students as displaced persons building lives in exile while pursuing their academic dreams. Risks include culture shock, language barriers, discrimination, mental health declines due to trauma and uncertainty, financial shortfalls, and future professional disappointment stemming from the war's economic impacts. Nevertheless, Ukraine's youth remain remarkably resilient. As the fulcrum of post-war recovery, this scholar generation's educational persistence and success will be critical for Ukraine's future.

In Ukraine, the educational system has been severely disrupted by the Russian invasion, with many universities damaged or destroyed. Remaining operational institutions are struggling to support a growing population of internally displaced students amidst wartime instability. Resources are scarce and studies routinely interrupted by air raid sirens and power outages. However, Ukraine has recently passed legislation enabling refugee youth to transfer to any operating domestic university tuition-free. This allows displaced students to continue Ukrainian-accredited programs

even while relocated.

The Czech Republic has emerged as a leader in supporting refugee education. Czech universities are allowing direct transfers to comparable degree programs without losing academic progress, crediting Ukrainian schools. They waive tuition, guarantee campus housing, and provide targeted scholarships and cost-of-living stipends to displaced students. These universities also facilitate quick student visa approvals, offer free Czech language courses, and fund ancillary support services. However, eligibility relies on documentation and admissions are competitive, presenting barriers.

The Czech Republic has implemented commendable legislation to facilitate the integration of Ukrainian refugees, especially students, into Czech society. The landmark Lex Ukraine bill passed in March 2022 granted Ukrainian refugees permanent visa protections, access to social services, government stipends, employment rights, and healthcare coverage equivalent to Czech citizens. Special accommodations provided Ukrainians the ability to stay in the Czech Republic for over a year without needing other residency status.

Importantly for students, Lex Ukraine enabled Ukrainian schools to transfer accreditation for those displaced mid-program. It also updated Czech tertiary education laws allowing Ukrainian students to enroll directly in Czech universities, even mid-year. Simplified admissions require only a passport and documentation from the home institution rather than a lengthy verification.

Overall, while educational capacity has been decimated in embattled regions of Ukraine, fleeing into EU countries like the Czech Republic enables displaced students to continue studies almost uninterrupted. Though leaving home is traumatic, Ukrainian academic exiles have been met with astonishing institutional support, financial aid, accelerated admissions policies and inclusive integration programs from Czech universities. This enlightened example of refugee education policy in action is not just upholding, but uplifting, the Ukrainian scholar community amidst ongoing hardship. It serves as a model, both morally and academically, for effective crisis response and displacement management globally.

The study is aimed to analyse the difference in the level of integration between IDPs who fled the conflict-ridden territories of eastern Ukraine and refugee students who moved into the Czech Republic.

Literature Review. There is considerable complexity and divergence surrounding interpretations of integration across various realms of academic scholarship. Experts from fields such as sociology, psychology, and political science have each approached integration from distinct vantage points, producing an array of definitions and conceptualizations. This multiplicity spotlights the intricate nature of

integration processes, which can encompass cultural, social, and economic facets (Bosswick & Heckmann 2006). In attempts to delineate integration, there are several prevalent ways of framing the concept. Drawing from W. Bosswick's and F. Heckmann (2006) compilation of 23 definitions, integration refers to the stability of interrelationships between components within a delineated system, one that is clearly demarcated from its external environment. When this state is reached, the system is regarded as integrated. Integration is a two-way practice that includes readiness from the host nation as well as preparedness to adapt on the part of the refugees (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), 2014).

There is an absence of consensus surrounding the definition of refugee integration, with no agreed upon theory or model (Mykhnenko, Delahaye, 2022; Streitwieser, Loo, Ohorodnik, & Jeong, 2019; Rizzi, Ciuffo et al., 2022). Integration is an ongoing process necessitating adaptation by both the welcoming community and new arrivals (Lenette, 2016). As such, integration cannot be equated to either assimilation or separate coexistence of populations. According to P. Herrera & O. Byndas (2023), integration often carries connotations of a harmonious blending of cultures and systems, implying mutual effort between the host society and displaced individuals. Integration is a principles-based idea, typically grounded in human rights, citizenship, and personal empowerment. Complete integration is accomplished when refugees can fully exercise their civil rights and duties while benefiting from equal opportunities (Kontowski and Leitsberger, 2017; Reinhardt, Zlatkin-Troitschanskaia, 2018). In concrete terms, integration initiatives allow refugees to overcome barriers to further integration, including issues like foreign credentials not being recognized, insufficient host country language abilities, lack of social ties, or employer bias (Morrice, 2007, p. 156). Refugees may additionally face racism, religious discrimination, and other forms of bias (Halkic & Arnold, 2019; Herrera & Byndas, 2023).

A number of studies have underscored distinct challenges encountered by refugee students navigating university systems (Finatto, Aguiar Dutra et al. 2023; Kurapov, Pavlenko et al, 2023; Morrice, 2013). Frequently lacking prior exposure to the host country's academic conventions, refugees can struggle with disparate pedagogical approaches, administrative frameworks, and evaluative norms which institutions often do not adequately acknowledge. Universities also recurrently fail to account for variation within refugee backgrounds. L. Naidoo et al. (2018) advocate for a conceptual reframing of refugee student integration; rather than a fragmentary process, it must be envisioned holistically, engendering a supportive culture actively harnessing refugee capabilities and strengths. This comprehensive integration

paradigm spotlights student well-being alongside academic achievement.

To conceptualize integrative actions by higher education systems, D. Kontowski and M. Leitsberger (2017) employed the framework developed by A. Ager and A. Strang (2008). This framework identifies key areas of integration based on research into successful immigration. While rights and citizenship form the bedrock of integration, practical integration cannot occur without facilitators like language and cultural knowledge, safety, and stability. Factors that destabilize refugees include short-term housing, insecure tenure, and certain dispersal approaches (Ager and Strang, 2008, p. 184). According to D. Kontowski and M. Leitsberger (2017), social bonds with those of similar backgrounds, bridges with the welcoming community, and links to social services also enable and are vital for achieving marker and means-level integration. Marker and means domains include employment, housing, health, and education.

Taking into consideration developed frameworks of the refugee integration among markers of successful integration of the Ukrainian university students in the Czech Republic we define language, economic, sociocultural, legal, and psychological levels of integration.

Materials and Methods. In order to gain a better understanding and analyse the level of integration of the Ukrainian university refugee students in the Czech Republic we conducted a survey among migrant students from Ukraine who study at Czech universities and among students from Ukraine who stayed to study at Ukrainian universities. Refugee students received a short questionnaire, in which they were asked questions about their success and difficulties in terms of being a refugee in the Czech Republic. The questionnaire was written in Ukrainian. All sensitive information has been anonymized.

The total number of respondents in the Czech Republic was 46. The average age of the respondents is 20 years old. 96.1% of the respondents are studying at the bachelor's level of higher education and 3.9% at the master's level. All the respondents are students of Masaryk University (Brno, the Czech Republic) and came to the Czech Republic after the beginning of the war in Ukraine (the average length of staying in the Czech Republic is 1,5 years). The survey involved applicants who were born and lived in Ukraine (geography of participants: Kyiv, Zaporizhzhia, Poltava, Ivano-Frankivsk, Kharkiv, Khmelnytskyi, Volyn, Odesa, and Kherson regions). Among the respondents, 34,6% were men and 65,4% were women. 69,2% of respondents did not plan to move to another country before the war in Ukraine. 73,1% of the respondents came with their family or one of their parents, 19,2% came to the Czech Republic on their own.

A semi-structured questionnaire as Google form was developed for the research.

The survey among the IDPs in Ukraine was conducted online, anonymously and voluntarily. The total number of respondents who took part in the survey was 231. The age of the respondents ranged from 16 to 66 years old (the average age of the respondents was 26,5 years old). All respondents are university students (bachelor's degree – 49,8% and master's degree – 50,2%) at Donbas State Pedagogical University). Gender composition: 83,9% of the respondents were female, 13,9% were male, and 2,2% were other. Gender differences were not taken into account in the research. All respondents are IDPs (before the war outbreak, they had resided in Donetsk (84,9%), Dnipro (0,9%), Zaporizhzhia (1,7%), Kyiv (0,9%), Kharkiv (7,3%), Luhansk (3,9%), and Kherson (0,4%) regions). The predominant majority of respondents have been living in another city for more than 1,5 years. Before the war began, 11,3% of respondents had intended to move to another city. When considering the specifics of the move, it was revealed that 78.4% of respondents moved with their family or at least one of their parents; 15,6% moved alone, 4,8% moved alone to relatives or friends; 1,3% with friends. The most common reasons for choosing a city to move to were safety, relatives/friends living there, housing or job offers, and circumstances.

Results.

Refugee integration of the Ukrainian university students in the Czech Republic *Language integration*

The criteria for analysing the peculiarities of language integration were the level of language proficiency, the presence or absence of language barriers, and attendance at language courses (to improve their own language level).

The majority of respondents speak Czech at B1 (42.3%) and B2 (42.3%) levels, but despite this, to the question “Have you encountered language barriers” 53,8% of the respondents answered “yes, I still do” (while another 38.5% had language barriers at the beginning of language learning). The reason for language barriers is defined by 57,7% of respondents as an insufficient level of language, lack of frequent practice of communicating with native speakers, lack of knowledge of dialects, catchphrases and local slang. The answer “absence of real communication with native speakers” refers to the situation when a person lives directly in the country of the language they are learning, in our opinion, may indicate that the person has no contact with the local population, lives in their own bubble (i.e., communicates only with their countrymen). Psychological reasons for language barriers (in other words, fear of speaking, self-doubt, attitudes toward refugees, unwillingness to learn the language, feeling that one is perceived differently, lack of experience in a foreign language environment and corresponding uncomfortable feelings, etc.) were mentioned by 38.5% of respondents.

Economic integration

To analyse economic integration, we specified as the following criteria: income level, employment, connection between work and education, and use of refugee support programs.

The majority of respondents (65,4%) estimated the level of their own income in the Czech Republic as “below average”, while 23,1% of respondents estimated their own income as “average”. None of the respondents has a high level of income. 76,9% of people said they were employed (among them, 38,5% “are working to survive”, 19,2% “are working to ensure their financial independence from parents”, 11,5% “are working to help parents/relatives”, 7,7% “are working but not financially obliged to”). 15,4% of respondents said they do not work because they do not have any necessity. Among those who are employed, 60,8% of respondents chose a job that are not related to education. Such a high percentage may be due to the fact that Ukrainian students are much younger than European students, and often underage, so in most cases they cannot have a job in their professional scope. The jobs that are fully or partially related to education is occupied by 30,4% of the respondents. The Czech Republic has an extensive financial support program for refugees. At the same time, 38,5% of respondents indicated that they do not use support programs; 34,6% use them only partially (i.e., partial payment of housing) and 26,9% use them.

Sociocultural integration

In order to analyse the peculiarities of sociocultural integration, we took into account the following criteria: interest in Czech culture, traditions and society, involvement in cultural activities and events, students' subjective opinion on their own involvement in the community, the sufficiency of communication, attitudes towards locals (and perceptions of how they treat me), and preservation of their own culture.

Among those surveyed, 80,8% attend cultural events in the Czech Republic, only sometimes (when they have time), and 19,2% do not attend at all. At the same time, 46,1% and 38,5% of respondents like and partially like Czech culture, respectively, while 15,4% do not like the local culture. In Czech culture, respondents admire local holidays and traditions, the culture of recreation, respect for national achievements and their own family, Czech friendliness, architecture, and education. As far as the holidays and traditions are concerned, 61,5% of respondents said they celebrate local holidays (at least sometimes). 30,8% of respondents have Czech friends, 50% said they have no friends yet, but have Czech acquaintances, and 19,2% have no local friends in the Czech Republic. The majority of respondents (61,5%) describe the local population positively (namely, as positive, polite, friendly, cheerful, compassionate, economical, reliable, patient), 23% of respondents described the local population neutrally or not at all, and 15,8% indicated negative characteristics (such as close-mindedness).

Czech news, movies, podcasts, etc. are watched by 73,1% of recipients, and 80,8% are interested in news and events taking place in the Czech Republic.

Regarding expectations/perceptions of life in the Czech Republic, 46,1% of respondents had partially aligned expectations, 19,2% had fully corresponded expectations, 15,4% had mismatched expectations, but 3,8% were completely disappointed. 46,1% of respondents consider their life in the Czech Republic to be full, diverse and interesting, even more so than at home, 15,4% consider it to be at the same level as at home, and 26,9% consider it worse than at home.

11,5% of respondents feel fully themselves "among their own", partially – 38,5%. At the same time, half of the respondents still do not feel themselves "among their own". We asked the respondents about their future plan "will you be able to feel like you belong in the Czech Republic in the future?" To this question, 34,6% of respondents answered that they will never be able to feel this way, and the same number said they did not know because it is difficult to predict. A positive response to this question was given by 30,8% of respondents. Almost half of the respondents (42,3%) partially feel as if they were at home in the Czech Republic, and 15,4% feel completely at home, while 42,3% do not sense the feeling of home in the Czech Republic. Interestingly, when asked "Do you have enough communication?" 50% of respondents said that there is enough communication, but the vast majority of them communicate only with their countrymen, which may indicate that they are avoiding the integration process. 50% of the respondents feel that the local population mostly treats them positively, kindly and patiently; 42,3% reported neutral and normal attitudes; 7,7% described negative attitudes. Never had conflicts with the locals – 57,7% of respondents, had conflicts – 42,3%.

When asked about preserving their own cultural identity, 23,1% said that they currently have problems with it (mainly because their identity is still being formed or other difficulties that interfere) or do not care about this aspect at all. Among those who care about their own cultural identity (76,9%), the answers were related to observing traditions, habits, using the Ukrainian language and Ukrainian content, wearing national clothes or at least Ukrainian symbols.

Generally, 30,8% of respondents do not participate in multicultural events or organizations, sometimes and rarely – 42,3%, and 26,9% participate constantly.

Legal integration

Legal integration implies awareness of their own rights and opportunities, and also active involvement in social and political initiatives.

Awareness of their rights as refugees/migrants was reported by 42,3% of respondents, partial awareness – by 50%, and 7,7% – by those who were not aware.

53,8% of respondents are informed of where to go for help if their rights are violated, 15,4% and 30,8% do not know or do not quite know where to turn in this situation. 76,9% believe that their refugee status corresponds to their rights and obligations, and 23,1 said that it only partially does.

Among the respondents, 88,5% do not participate in any local social or political initiatives (in our opinion, this might be partly due to the rather young age of the respondents).

While the majority of students say they have access to healthcare services, 42,3% do not have contracts and/or have not used these services at all during their staying in the Czech Republic.

The overwhelming majority of students (80,8%) are fully satisfied with the quality and educational system and other 19,2% are partially satisfied.

Psychological integration

We defined the peculiarities of psychological integration based on the subjective level of satisfaction with their own life, subjective assessment of their own integration, their emotional state and identity.

Thus, 65,4% and 26,9% of the surveyed students are partially and completely satisfied with their life in the Czech Republic (accordingly), and 7,7% are dissatisfied with their life.

Analysing the previous indicators, which mostly indicate a sufficient level of adaptation of Ukrainian students in the Czech Republic, it was impressively that only 11,5% of respondents said that over the past 6 months they were in a great, good or high emotional state most of the time, while all the rest reported a chronic state of fatigue, complete exhaustion, fear, depression, loneliness, frustration, anxiety and emotional instability (sudden mood changes). Among the respondents, 92,3% have experienced at least one of the following quite often over the past 6 months: apathy, panic attacks, sleep disturbances, eating disorders, depression, procrastination/lack of motivation, lack of or insufficient energy, overwork and emotional exhaustion, irritability, aggression, physical and somatic diseases. These indicators show that the surveyed students have possibly undergone post-traumatic stress disorder and need individual psychological assistance.

Students rated their own level of integration in the following proportions (fig. 1): fully integrated (high level) – 3,8%, rather integrated (sufficient level) – 34,7%, partially integrated (medium level) – 57,7%, not integrated at all (low level) – 3,8%.

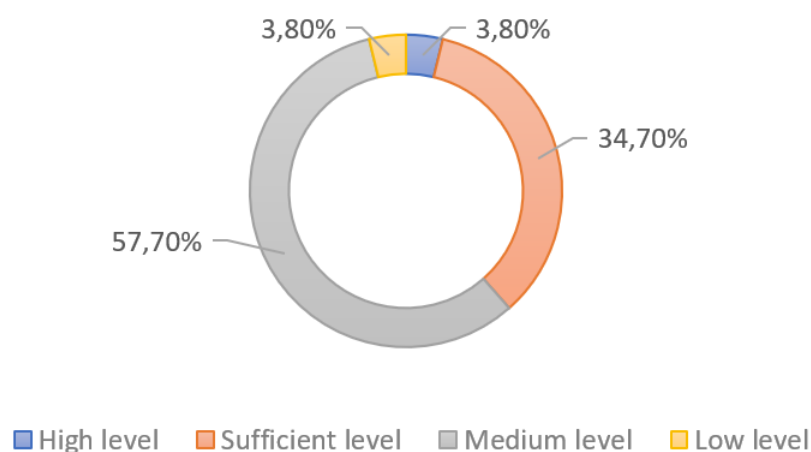


Figure 1. Self-assessed levels of integration among Ukrainian refugee students in the Czech Republic

Source: compiled by the authors

We have divided the barriers and difficulties faced by students during integration into several groups: language barriers (lack of knowledge of the language, poor pronunciation, difficulties in communication), psychological barriers (fears, feelings of rejection/alienation, low motivation (for example, “I thought I would return home soon, so I didn’t study anything, didn’t meet anyone”, lack of experience in another country, internal resistance), cultural (different culture, customs, traditions, behavioural norms), and identical (difference in mentality, vulnerability to criticism of Ukrainians, discrimination based on nationality).

According to the students’ subjective assessment, rapid language learning, communication with Czech families, communication with fellow countrymen, adaptation seminars, university studies, job search, new hobbies, experience in a foreign language environment, and acceptance of the situation helped them cope with difficulties. Personal traits include sociability, curiosity, openness, dedication, positivity, willpower, flexibility, desire to learn new things, courage, independence, ability to react quickly in stressful situations, and soft skills.

After the war ends, 15,4% of students are confident that they will return to Ukraine, 15,4% plan to stay in the Czech Republic, 15,4% plan to stay in a foreign country except for the Czech Republic and Ukraine, and 53,8% have not decided yet.

Regarding the assessment of their own identity, 61,5% of respondents said they feel proud to belong to Ukrainians, 11,5% are aware of their own belonging but do not feel it, 3,8% associate themselves with a nationality different from Ukrainian, 7,6% have problems with defining their own identity, and 15,4% have not thought about this

issue at all.

IDPs integration of the university students Ukraine
Economic Integration

In order to determine the peculiarities of economic integration, following criteria have been developed: income level, employment, connection between work and education, and use of support programs for internally displaced persons.

Among the surveyed students, 43,3% estimate their income to be below average, 55,8% estimate their income to be average, and only 0,9% of respondents estimate their income to be high. To the question "Do you have a part-time job?" 34,2% of students answered "yes, in order to survive," 18,6% work to be financially independent from their parents, 8,7% of the respondents work to help their parents/relatives financially, and 22,5% have a part-time job but did not specify the reason for it. 16% of respondents said they do not work because they do not have any necessity. Thus, 84% of the surveyed applicants have a job or a part-time job. Among those who are employed, 50,2% have jobs that are not related to their specialisation (which they are currently studying), and 20,3% have jobs that are only partially related to their education. Financial support programs for IDPs are at least partially used by 86,1% of the surveyed applicants.

The data analysis shows that the majority of students estimate their income (according to the average subsistence level in Ukraine) as below average and average, and therefore have to have part-time jobs to be able to handle difficult life circumstances, while half of the respondents have no job related to their education at all.

Sociocultural Integration

The peculiarities of sociocultural integration were determined based on the following criteria: interest in local culture, traditions and society, involvement in cultural activities and events, students' subjective opinion on the assessment of their own involvement in the community, the sufficiency of communication, attitude towards locals (and the idea of how they treat me), and preservation of their own culture.

Among the respondents, 48,5% said they never participate in cultural events in the city where they live. Another 44,2% said that they sometimes attend cultural events only when they have time. Only 7,4% of respondents answered "often" to the question "Do you participate in cultural events in the city where you live?" At the same time, more than half of the surveyed applicants (59,3%) mentioned that they like the local culture (local flavour, identity, architecture, local customs, celebration of national

holidays, etc.)

The survey showed that 41,6% of the respondents already have friends among the locals, another 39% have no friends but have local acquaintances, and 19,5% said they have neither friends nor acquaintances among the local population. Moreover, the answers to the question "How would you characterise the local population?" are diametrically opposite (for example, from positive: friendly, kind, calm, polite, tidy, united, understanding, to negative: angry, sad, poor, lacking initiative, self-serving, etc.) We conditionally divided all answers to the question "How do you perceive the way locals treat you?" into 4 groups. The first group includes positive answers (such as "well", "with respect", "with understanding", "as one of their own", etc.) Therefore, the group that feels positive attitude of the local population amounted to 40,3% of respondents. The second group included neutral answers (e.g., "no", "neutral", "normal", etc.). This group constituted 22,9% of the respondents. The third group consisted of respondents who believe that the locals have a negative or prejudiced attitude towards them (in this group, we included answers such as "negative", "bad", "they do not like IDPs", "as an Easterner – with rejection", etc.) This was 21,6% of respondents. Another 15,2% of respondents made up the "other" group of answers. The "other" group included answers such as "I do not want to answer this question", "I am not interested in how the locals treat me", "I do not care what others think of me", etc. The analysis of conflicts with the local population revealed that the majority of respondents (88,7%) did not have conflicts with the locals, and 9,5% of respondents reported conflicts (mainly due to prejudice against IDPs or language issues).

The vast majority of respondents (93,5%) claimed to be interested in events that take place in the city where they live. Local holidays (including religious ones) are fully and partially celebrated by 26,4% and 45% of respondents, respectively. The majority of respondents partially and fully admit to feeling "among their own" (45% and 32,9%, accordingly) and have at least a partial coincidence between their expectations and real life in the new city. At the same time, 55,4% of respondents said that their life at home was much more fulfilling and interesting. 23,4% of respondents believe that their life is as interesting and full in the new place as at home, and another 13,4% believe that their life has become better than at home. Almost half (43,7%) of the respondents said that they do not feel at home in the new place and another 38,5% only partially feel as being at home.

To the question "Do you have enough communication?" 32,9% of respondents answered "yes" and noted that they have many friends, both local and old. Another 41,6% of respondents also answered "yes" but wrote that they communicate only with old friends. Unfortunately, 20,4% of respondents stated that they lacked

communication and felt lonely (3,5% of them felt lonely back at home).

For the analysis of legal integration, we asked about awareness of their own rights and opportunities, active involvement in social and political initiatives.

According to the survey results, the respondents are well aware of their own IDP rights (61,5%), know where to turn for help in case of violation of their rights (74%) and believe that their IDP status corresponds to their rights and obligations (71,9%). Among the respondents, 34,2% are partially aware of their own IDP rights and another 4,3% do not know their rights.

Free access to medical services (including a contract with a doctor) at the new place of residence is available to 80,1% of respondents. The rest of the respondents indicated that they do not use medical services or have contracts with their family doctors and receive consultations online.

Since all the respondents are students of DSPU, they all have free access to educational services (online and offline in Dnipro), and 77,9% of the respondents are satisfied with the quality and system of educational services of DSPU at the new location.

Interestingly, 77,1% of respondents do not participate in local social or political initiatives. Partial involvement in the mentioned spheres was reported by 19% of respondents.

Psychological Integration

The peculiarities of psychological integration were defined on the basis of the subjective level of satisfaction with one's own life, subjective assessment of one's own integration, and one's own emotional state.

Thus, 31,6% of respondents are completely satisfied with their life in the new place, and 54,1% are partly satisfied. The analysis of answers about the emotional state of applicants revealed that over the past six months, 32,9% of respondents have a normal or good mood, 5,6% have a neutral emotional state, and another 13,4% of respondents have a state of emotional instability (rapid mood changes, shifts from calm to anxiety or apathy). Unfortunately, 46,3% of respondents have a negative emotional state (apathy, depression, anxiety, depression, confusion, stress, irritation, fear, loneliness, anxiety, etc.) Another 4 respondents did not answer this question.

Among the respondents, 48,5% have constantly or frequently experienced at least one of the following symptoms over the past 6 months: apathy, panic attacks, sleep disturbances, eating disorders, depression, procrastination/lack of motivation, lack of or insufficient energy, physical exhaustion and emotional exhaustion, irritability, aggression, physical somatic diseases, and 25,1% of respondents have experienced the above symptoms sometimes or rarely. 18,6% of applicants have never

experienced any of these symptoms. The rest of the respondents refused to answer this question.

As we can see, a significant part of the surveyed applicants has problems with their mental state (which, given the realities of today, is an obvious factor, because the war continues, and people are forced to be under tension and chronic stress all the time).

Students rated their own level of integration in the following proportions (fig. 2): fully integrated (high level) – 19,8%, rather integrated (sufficient level) – 39%, partially integrated (medium level) – 37,7%, not integrated at all (low level) – 3,5%.

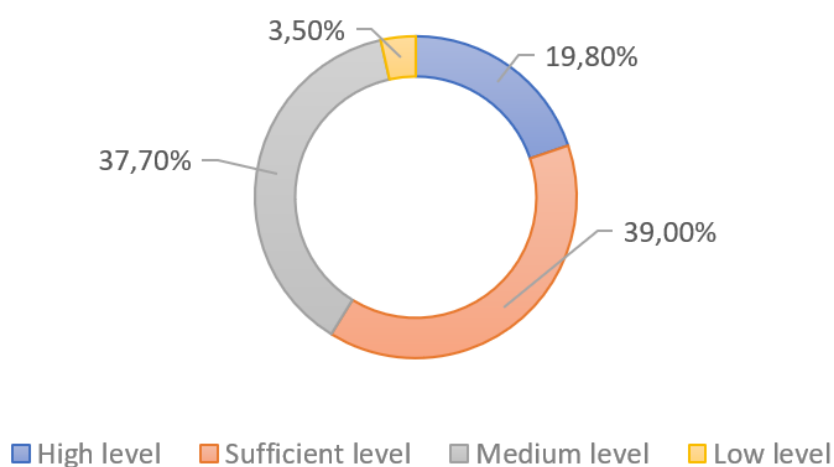


Figure 2. Self-assessed levels of integration among IDP students of Donbas State Pedagogical University

Source: compiled by the authors

In the opinion of the respondents, the following things helped them to speed up the integration process: communication and support from the environment (communication with family, close friends, local friends), active lifestyle, personal motivation, positive mindset, studying, working or volunteering, openness to new things, self-development and working with a psychologist. According to the respondents, the following personal traits helped them to integrate: communicability, amiability, ability to ask for help, friendliness, politeness, kindness and responsiveness, charisma, courage, tolerance or neutrality, assertiveness, openness, sincerity, and optimism.

Among the respondents, 40,7% want to return home after the war ends, 8,7% want to stay in their new place of residence, 9,1% want to move to another place (different from where they live now or lived before the war), 41,6% of respondents have not decided on this issue yet.

Discussion. Research shows that the university students displaced abroad by violence and persecution often encounter significant psychosocial challenges especially with their integration in their new environment (Burliai et al., 2023; Halkic & Arnold, 2019; Lintner, Diviák, Šeďová et al., 2023). However, C.P. Finatto et al. (2023) and S. Marcu (2018) agreed that the results of integration of the refugee students are much more effective when universities, government and society work together to reduce inequalities.

Indeed, most respondents (the Ukrainian refugee university students studying at Masaryk University, Brno, the Czech Republic). reported sufficient level (rather integrated– 34,6%) and medium level (partially integrated– 57,7%) of integration. Furthermore, several groups of the barriers were defined: language, psychological, cultural, and identical barriers, which correlate with the studies by several scholars (Burliai et al., 2023; Kurapov, 2023; Rataj & Berezovska, 2023, etc.). In the Czech Republic, despite many students having intermediate language skills, a majority still face language barriers. This highlights the challenge of practical language application in real-life settings, even when formal language proficiency is achieved. Both groups face economic challenges, with most reporting below-average or average income levels. A high percentage of students in both contexts are working, often in jobs unrelated to their studies, indicating economic pressures and potential difficulties in finding field-relevant employment.

While many students in the Czech Republic show interest in local culture, there's a noticeable gap in deep social connections with locals. In Ukraine, IDPs show varied levels of cultural engagement and social integration, with a significant portion feeling disconnected from their new communities. Students in both contexts generally report good awareness of their rights and access to services, though participation in social and political initiatives remains low, especially among IDPs in Ukraine.

A striking finding is the high prevalence of psychological distress among both groups. Despite many reporting satisfactions with their current situations, a large proportion experience symptoms of stress, anxiety, and other mental health challenges. While both groups showed high life satisfaction and perceived integration, refugee students in the Czech Republic reported significantly more psychological issues compared to IDP students in Ukraine. There is significant uncertainty about future plans among both groups, with many undecideds about whether to return home, stay in their current location, or move elsewhere.

Conclusions. In summary, while there are similarities in many aspects of integration between the two groups, refugee students in the Czech Republic seemed to face more language and psychological challenges, while showing higher cultural

engagement. IDP students in Ukraine reported slightly better economic situations and emotional states, but lower cultural participation. Notably, despite the Czech government's enlightened efforts to facilitate refugee integration across myriad domains, findings reveal persisting struggles in key areas like language acquisition, economic security, mental health, and social inclusion. Self-assessments indicate intermediate integration success thus far among respondents resettled in the Czech Republic, with psychological and emotional dimensions being acute unmet needs. The study highlights that while Ukrainian students show resilience and adaptability in their integration processes, significant challenges remain, particularly in the areas of psychological well-being, deep social integration, and economic stability. The high prevalence of psychological distress among both groups is particularly concerning and suggests a need for targeted mental health support.

The integration process appears to be multifaceted, with students often achieving functional integration (e.g., language skills, awareness of rights) but struggling with deeper forms of social and cultural integration. This is evident in the persistence of language barriers despite language proficiency, and the limited social connections with local populations. Economic integration remains a challenge, with many students working in jobs unrelated to their studies, potentially impacting their long-term career prospects and full utilization of their skills. The uncertainty about future plans among a large portion of students in both groups reflects the ongoing impact of the war and displacement on long-term life decisions.

These findings suggest a need for comprehensive support strategies that address not only practical aspects of integration (like language and legal rights) but also focus on mental health, social connection, and long-term economic integration. Universities and policymakers should consider implementing programs that foster deeper cultural exchange, provide mental health resources, and support career development aligned with students' fields of study. Ultimately, this analysis highlights the inherent complexities of integration, especially amidst continuing emergency conditions. Supporting refugees involves more than facilitative infrastructure and access provisioning. True integration requires psychological healing, mutual cultural understanding and society co-creation.

Future research could explore the long-term impacts of these integration experiences on students' academic and career trajectories, as well as investigate effective interventions to address the identified challenges, particularly in the realm of psychological well-being and social integration.

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АНАЛІЗ ІНТЕГРАЦІЇ СТУДЕНТІВ В УМОВАХ ВИМУШЕНОЇ МІГРАЦІЇ В УКРАЇНІ ТА ЧЕХІЇ

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Анотація. У дослідженні проаналізовано особливості інтеграції українських студентів-біженців у Чеській Республіці та внутрішньо переміщених студентів в Україні після російського вторгнення в лютому 2022 року. Метою було порівняти рівні інтеграції цих двох груп за мовним, економічним, соціокультурним, правовим та психологічним критеріями, для чого було проведено онлайн-опитування 46 українських студентів у Чехії (Університет Масарика) та 231 внутрішньо переміщеного студента в Україні (Донбаський державний педагогічний університет). Результати показують, що обидві групи стикаються зі значними викликами, незважаючи на підтримку з боку країн, інституцій та закладів вищої освіти. Мовні бар'єри залишаються проблемою навіть для студентів із середнім рівнем володіння чеською мовою. Економічна інтеграція ускладнюється низьким рівнем доходів та роботою, не пов'язаною з освітою. Соціокультурна інтеграція характеризується інтересом до місцевої культури, але обмеженими глибокими соціальними зв'язками з місцевим населенням.

Обидві групи демонструють добру обізнаність щодо своїх прав, але низький рівень участі в соціальних та політичних ініціативах. Особливо тривожним є високий рівень психологічного дистресу серед студентів, незважаючи на загальне задоволення життям. Дослідження підкреслює необхідність комплексних стратегій підтримки, які б зосереджувались не лише на практичних аспектах інтеграції, але й на психічному здоров'ї, соціальних зв'язках та довгостроковій економічній інтеграції.

Ключові слова: студенти; біженці; внутрішньо переміщені особи; інтеграція; бар'єри.

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