

## REFUGEES BETWEEN FAMILY CRISIS AND RESILIENCE. CASE STUDY ON UKRAINIAN REFUGEES IN ROMANIA

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**Abstract:** The phenomenon of forced migration due to the war in Ukraine generated enormous flows of population that moved to European countries and therefore also to Romania. A particularly complex and constantly evolving social phenomenon - the problem of refugees - is only at the beginning of sociological and social assistance investigations. In this article, we intended to detail the situation of Ukrainian refugees from a small sample selected in the north of Romania following three axes of analysis: the refugees' perception of their situation, the identification of the factors that contribute to the development of the refugees' resilience and the evaluation of the perception of the humanitarian aid received since leaving the country of origin by refugees. Exploratory research (undertaken as part of a master's thesis) can be a good start for wider research carried out in several areas in Romania where the reception and assistance of war refugees is in full swing.

**Keywords:** refugees, families in crisis, resilience, adaptation, integration into the labour market.

**Résumé :** Le phénomène de migration forcée dû à la guerre en Ukraine a généré d'énormes flux de population qui se sont déplacés vers les pays européens et donc aussi vers la Roumanie. Un phénomène social particulièrement complexe et en constante évolution - le problème des réfugiés - n'en est qu'au début des enquêtes sociologiques et d'assistance sociale. Dans cet article, nous avons voulu détailler la situation des réfugiés ukrainiens à partir d'un petit échantillon sélectionné dans le nord de la Roumanie selon trois axes d'analyse: la perception par les réfugiés de leur situation personnelle, l'identification des facteurs qui contribuent au développement de la résilience des réfugiés et l'évaluation de la perception de l'aide humanitaire reçue depuis le départ du pays d'origine par les réfugiés. La recherche exploratoire (menée dans le cadre d'un mémoire de maîtrise) peut être un bon début pour une recherche plus large menée dans plusieurs domaines en Roumanie où l'accueil et l'assistance des réfugiés de guerre bat son plein.

**Mots clés :** réfugiés, familles en crise, résilience, adaptation, insertion sur le marché du travail.

**Rezumat:** Fenomenul migrației forțate datorate războiului din Ucraina a generat fluxuri enorme de populație care s-au deplasat spre țările Europei și deci și spre România. Fenomen social deosebit de complex și în continuă evoluție -problematika refugiaților- este abia la

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începutul investigațiilor sociologice și de asistență socială. În acest articol am intenționat să detaliez situația refugiaților ucraineni dintr-un eșantion restrâns selectat în nordul României urmărind trei axe de analiză: percepția refugiaților asupra situației personale, identificarea factorilor care contribuie la dezvoltarea rezilienței refugiaților și evaluarea percepției asupra ajutorului umanitar primit din momentul părăsirii țării de origine de către refugiați. Cercetarea de explorare (întreprinsă în cadrul unei teze masterale) poate fi un bun început pentru cercetări mai ample efectuate în mai multe zone din România unde primirea și ajutorarea refugiaților de război este în plină desfășurare.

**Cuvinte cheie:** refugiați, familii în criză, reziliență, adaptare, integrare pe piața muncii.

## 1. Introduction

The issue of refugees from war zones has unpredictably returned to the news with the outbreak of the armed conflict between Russia and Ukraine in February 2022. With the outbreak of this war, an impressive influx of refugees crossed the border into our country either to settle in Romania or order to cross to other European countries appeared at the borders of Romania, and not only - an impressive influx of refugees who crossed the border into our country. In general, a refugee has lost the protection that the state of origin (in our case Ukraine) granted by switching to an international protection regime. A new state (in our case Romania) becomes a protective state that will maintain relations with refugees in what has been called 'surrogate citizenship'. Kneebone et al, 2014; p. 98; Vegatti, 2009). *1951 Geneva Convention* On the status of refugees, defines a refugee as a person who „as a result of events (...) and well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of which he is national and is unable or, owing to such fear, unwilling to protect that country; or who, having no nationality and being outside the country of former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, unwilling to return'. The 1951 Convention was supplemented by a 1967 Protocol which stated, inter alia: refugees should not be penalised for entering or being present in the country illegally, as long as they make this known to the authorities without delay; refugees are obliged to comply with the laws and regulations of the country of asylum; Humanitarian work to protect refugees should not become a source of tension between countries.

In addition, there are many other aspects related to refugees' right to documentation, access to work, public education, access to court, freedom of movement, and freedom to practice their religion, among others (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees [UNHCR], 2011). By Law 46 of 1991, Romania acceded to the Convention on the Status of Refugees as well as to the Protocol on the Status of Refugees. A directive on temporary protection has been established at the European level (European Council, 2023), with the initiative having a start in the displacement generated by armed conflicts in the Western Balkans.

Psycho-sociological research on the refugee situation has identified four general responses to stressful experiences: anticipation, devastating events, survival, and adaptation (Fazel, Stein, 2002). The intention to leave ('flight') is

accentuated by various social unrest and chaos of social life in general. Limited access to schools disrupts education and social development, and at family and individual levels, refugees often face threats to their safety and that of family members. Before leaving, refugees anticipate and then cope with devastating events, and young refugees may witness or engage in scenes of violence (Gonsalves, 1992).

During the 'flight', refugees must survive displacement from their homes and places of transit or transition (e.g. refugee camps) amid great uncertainty about the future. They are often at the mercy of external sources to meet their basic needs and determine their asylum options. Children born in this phase undergo important stages of psychological development amid turmoil, and separation from parents and caregivers is encountered (Papadopoulos, 2001).

Other authors emphasize the phenomenon of acculturation that occurs against the background of the meeting of at least two different cultures when four types of phases can occur: contact, conflict, crisis, and, finally, adaptation (Williams and Berry, 1991).

Once refugees resettle in a host country, new belief systems, values, and mores challenge their adaptation (Papadopoulos, 2001). New roles and family models disrupt resettlement, and refugee children's cross cultures old and new. Because of their educational experiences and faster language acquisition than parents, they can act as cultural links for older generations (Coll and Magnuson, 1997).

## **2. Refugees from Ukraine in Romania and specific problems**

The number of refugees in Europe doubled in 2022 and the number of those who were internally displaced rose to almost 9 million, creating significant humanitarian needs. Millions of people who have fled the international armed conflict in Ukraine will also need support in 2023, inside Ukraine, in the Republic of Moldova, and throughout the region. In 2022, Europe demonstrated that fair and swift protection is possible if all actors work together in a whole-of-society approach, promoting inclusion and solidarity from the outset (UNHCR, 2022a).

In the context of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, on February 24, 2022, the number of refugees in Romania increased considerably. Since the beginning of the conflict, more than 1.6 million Ukrainians have arrived in Romania. Of these, some 83,748 people are still in the country (UNHCR, 2022b).

As of December, there were 4.8 million refugees from Ukraine registered for temporary protection or similar regime in the European Union (UNHCR, 2022b). In February 2023, according to UNHCR data, 115,047 people were registered for temporary protection or other forms of protection in Romania. All these people face a complex set of personal/social issues that are difficult to review exhaustively. We can mention, among others, the stress and trauma felt in the pre-and post-migration period, which may be related to harsh living conditions, erosion of social support mechanisms, reduced access to basic needs and services, and lack of opportunities to maintain livelihoods and education. On the other hand, forced migration has considerably weakened the capacity for self-help and mutual

support, and separation from families and communities has encouraged violence and mistrust (Malia, 2006). In this context, it is necessary to analyse family stress as a consequence of stress felt from the outside (Hill, 1949).

The experience of migration itself necessarily disrupts family and cultural systems, as well as separations from family and ethnic communities or stays in refugee camps. In the process of migration, refugees suffer numerous losses, such as economic stability, familiar environment and previous relationships, which hinder their ability to thrive in their new place of settlement. The literature highlights one of the strongest stressors refugees experiences after arriving in their host country as social isolation, usually associated with continued family separation, loss, and a breakdown of social, community, and family structures (Lambert & Alhassoon, 2015).

Regarding the issue of resilience, it refers to a person's ability to successfully adapt to acute stress, trauma or chronic forms of adversity (Masten, 2014). From another perspective, resilience is associated with a person's ability to „involve inner strength, competence, optimism, flexibility, and the ability to cope effectively when faced with adversity” (Wagnild & Collins, 2009, p. 1).

Domestic resources have been identified in the literature as a major contributor to refugee resilience. Studies of refugee women suggest that personal qualities such as optimism, adaptability and perseverance helped them cope and survive. Belief in one's inner strength to face life's challenges, a positive attitude and hope for a good future helped refugee women cope. A study by Shakespeare-Finch and Wickham (2009) suggests that looking to the future strengthens refugees' resilience. One study participant stated, „I will lay a good foundation for myself, for my children, for my family” (Shakespeare-Finch & Wickham, 2009, p. 38).

In addition to personal qualities related to refugee resilience, external forms of support have also been prominent in building resilience. Several qualitative studies have highlighted the importance of family (including extended family), friends and community in building refugees' resilience in the resettlement process. In a qualitative study, Bosnian refugee women cited the support they received from their husbands, children and family as a key factor in building their resilience. As one participant stated, „Once you have family, you can't give up, you have to stay strong for them” (Sossou, Craig, Ogren & Schnak, 2008, p. 378).

In addition to receiving support from friends and family, refugees also used their ethnic community to help them cope and adapt to their new way of life (Schweitzer et al., 2007). Not receiving outside support is a trigger for family crises (Irimescu, 2004).

Religion and spirituality are strongly identified as other major contributing factors to refugee resilience. Several studies have shown that religion in its various forms is linked to improving a person's psychological and physical well-being (Green & Elliot, 2010).

Numerous other types of research discuss other factors that may support resilience: „the role of volunteering, work, and activism for refugee causes, social support, experiencing migration as an opportunity generally and for women in

particular, being a parent, being young” (Walther et al, 2021). For other researchers, the factors for improving resilience were „future orientation, coping strategies, social support, opportunities, religiosity, and cultural identity. In addition, positive emotions constituted a key feature of refugees' resilience” (Fadhliya et al., 2022).

Concerning the support provided to refugees, let us recall that the *National Strategy on Immigration* (Government of Romania, 2021) is enshrined in Romania, which includes the policy on the social integration of foreigners. The objective of the policy is to support the integration process of refugees by helping them to become self-sustaining and independent, not dependent on assistance provided by the state or non-governmental organisations, and to participate in an active cultural, social and economic manner. The National Strategy on Immigration implies the observance of a facilitating legal and institutional framework for integration, through the possibility to participate in integration programs carried out and by developing a multicultural environment.

Among the services offered by Romanian institutions in favour of refugees who have received a form of protection, we find information and counselling, cultural accommodation, Romanian language course, accommodation in regional centres, subsidizing the rent of the house with approximately 50%, offered by the General Inspectorate for Immigration. In terms of obtaining a job, professional counselling, professional training courses, and identification of jobs with employers are provided by the National Employment Agency. Children are offered allowances by the Social Assistance Directorate and diplomas can be recognized upon request, to obtain jobs and integration, by the National Center for Recognition and Equivalence of Diplomas. In addition to state or supra-state bodies, numerous non-governmental organizations aim to support refugees in integrating and adapting to the new environment and community (Buzducea, 2010, pp. 606-609).

Buzducea (2010) recalls the social policies for refugees, which aim at diminishing and even removing procedural impediments to access social services through equal treatment, eliminating disadvantages about others through equal opportunities and the possibility of suppressing disadvantages created by the social and economic environment through equality of results.

### **3. Methods: participants, instruments**

The field research conducted in May-June 2023 was qualitative using semi-directive interviewing and sociological field observation. The sub-themes pursued in the interview guide were the following: perception of one's condition as a refugee and of war; environmental, cultural or family factors contributing to the development of resilience of Ukrainian refugees, perception of humanitarian aid received. The observation guide proved to be a useful tool that could complement some information obtained in interviews (mimicry, gestures, clothing, language, behaviours, etc.) were recorded.

The research group consisted of 10 women refugees for over five months in Suceava County, Romania coming from Chernivtsi Region, Ukraine (named in

the analysis with initials from „I no.1” to „I no.10”). Due to geographical proximity, respondents knew the Romanian language at a conversational level. Their ages ranged from 26 to 48. Nine out of 10 respondents have children with them. The respondents signed an informed consent form, were assured of the anonymity of their answers (they were not asked for personal data: names, email addresses, series of documents, etc.) and accepted the recording of conversations.

#### 4. Results

For most of the interviewees the last completed studies are university, only two women out of the ten have completed secondary education (one year of high school education, respectively nine grades). Among the current professions, we found: teachers, social workers, psychologists, beauticians, educational facilitators, gastroenterologist doctors (in Ukraine, online), and nurses. Two of the interviewees kept their occupation in Ukraine and Romania, namely that of beautician, the others (with one exception) were employed in various jobs in Suceava (for example, an interviewee found a job as a translator at an NGO). We will follow relevant excerpts from interviews grouped on major research topics:

##### *A. Perception of personal situation*

The moments of the outbreak of war and the decision of forced migration were intensely felt by the interviewees:

*„I felt at that time that I had run away, and I felt somehow traitorous...” (I. No. 2, 41 years);*

*“At first it even seemed to me that it was a joke, I told myself that it scares us a bit and this is what it ends with. When I saw that people all started going to shops, taking products, having water, oil, everything necessary, taking money out of the ATM, not losing money, that is, it was such a kind of fear” (I. No. 4, 34 years);*

*„It was an ordinary day when I thought that the next day I would leave for work, and the children to school, it all started at 5 in the morning, when my husband, being a journalist, was contacted by colleagues in Bucharest with a phone, to comment on the beginning of the war about which I knew nothing at 5 in the morning, but I found out from them... it seemed such a horror movie. It was like it wasn't true.” (I. No. 5, 38 years).*

One respondent reported that while heading to Romania, standing in a 10 km queue, through mud, thorns, among cars, she made a correlation between her life at the outbreak of war and the life of her grandparents:

*„Without realizing it, I began to remember what my parents told me about, about my grandparents who fled during the Second World War, how they passed, how hard they crossed to Romania. Because unfortunately, I repeated the story of my grandparents. Practically the whole family ended up in*

*Romania, except for my grandfather who was detained, could not leave the country and was deported by the Russians to Siberia.”* (I. No. 5, 38 years).

For one of the interviewees, life was arranged to the last detail, as she was going to give birth to a child shortly:

*„I was pregnant, I just went on maternity leave for a week, then the war started and all day I spent on the road and saw what was happening. Sirene. Row. Panic. A panic started in my country, my parents and my husband, sent me to my brother in Romania who has been working for several years. And so I got out of the country, to be safe. First of all, to keep the pregnancy and the baby.”* (I. No. 8, 32 years).

All 10 interviewees share that the first day was a shock, they could not believe what was happening, and they felt panic and fear:

*„I couldn't believe this was happening. I thought it was a dream, a movie, something I watch, on the internet, on Instagram, it seemed to me that these were a video, something that did not happen in reality* (I. No. 6, 26 years).

They thought about what they would do and those who had children thought about how to ensure their safety, how to prevent the occurrence of diseases of the development of the mental and emotional part:

*„Clearly I left motivated, the reason that stimulated me to leave was the 3-year-old child. which I didn't want to be affected, mentally, because mental health comes first* (I. No. 2, 41 years);

*„And we decided that even for the child's psyche and mental health it wasn't okay to stay and he could resist, that it was the alarm, we had to go, go down to the basement, stay in the cold, and he could get sick. He began to say such words about death: Mommy, you leave me if you go to work, what do I do if he comes and you are not? And that's why we decided to come to Romania”* (I. No. 1, 31 years old).

In addition to the panic, fear, anxiety, and stress felt by mothers crossing with children, one respondent, being a mother, recounts an event from the moment she waited in front of the barrier separating Ukraine from Romania:

*„At one point, someone who heard that the husband couldn't get out started screaming very loudly behind us, me with the babies by the hand, and pushed us in front a little bit, because she probably wanted to stand out, that maybe the customs officers would see her and feel sorry to leave her husband. And it pushed us into the barrier. Then, the customs officer aimed at us with the vending machine, the children were very scared because he aimed at my 9-year-old boy. I was speechless, paralyzed so on the spot, that I didn't know how, I just grabbed him, but he was so targeted for about 15 minutes on us, that we were the ones who leaned against that barrier. And he was yelling at us terribly.”* (I. No. 5, 38 years).

All interviewees wanted to help Ukrainians who left their country of origin and settled in Romania, so they either got a job or volunteered in non-governmental organizations that carry out projects with this target group. Respondent number 10, although she does not volunteer for any NGO because she stays in the Refugee Camp, is sometimes asked to assist Ukrainians who are transported to the hospital and cannot manage their linguistically:

*„I liked the Romanian language, but I mostly go, sometimes the ambulance takes me to the hospital, for those who do not know the Romanian language, and I go and translate” (I. No. 10, 33 years old).*

During their stay in Romania, respondents felt good, helped, and warmly received by Romanians:

*„The situation was quiet because we knew that no bomb would arrive here, we had a lot of support from Romania, the people were welcoming, they helped us” (I. No. 4, 34 years old).*

*„The Romanians met us with a lot of warmth, so the Romanian customs officers from the start took all my bags, and helped me get to the passport control. There it didn't even take a few minutes, we got to the other side, everyone met us with hot tea, with food, but we were in such a state that we were happy to arrive as if we didn't want to eat, drink, or anything absolute, we just thanked everyone. I could hear people in the back saying: I give them everything but they don't want to take anything, what do they want? And that's when I realized that it's not okay to refuse in a way that I was upsetting people...” (I. No. 5, 38 years).*

Currently (at the time of the field research) the interviewees feel more confident, they feel safe, they have integrated into Romanian society, and they have enrolled children in school but also in programs/activities supported by various NGOs for Ukrainian children. The spirit of self-help is dominant: *„Slowly, I began to recover and began to look for a way to help others like me” (I. No. 9, 29 years).*

One of the interviewees admits that she commutes to Chernivtsi with a student boy there: *„I am here during the week, on the weekends I go home. I have to divide myself and that's very difficult, I stay here for a weekend, my mind is still in Chernivtsi, the children are there, it's quite difficult” (I. No. 7, 48 years old).*

#### *B. Factors contributing to building the resilience of Ukrainian refugees*

The first factor that facilitates the resilience of refugees is the geographical proximity of Suceava-Chernivtsi (proximity that makes customs and lifestyle in general similar). Another important reason is that refugees have some acquaintances or even friends in Suceava County. For some of the interviewees, staying in Suceava makes it possible to meet relatives from time to time:



*„My husband deals with humanitarian aid from Romania, Poland, Germany and so on, and he can sometimes come to Romania for work, and that was still a moment because it is easier to meet in Suceava” (I. No. 2, 41 years old).*

*„In case of anything, I can go home and I have support when I'm homesick, I go meet my father and my in-laws, and we can still see each other if we went further it would be rarer, harder to see each other” (I. No. 8, 32 years old).*

Two of the interviewees initially went to other parts of Romania, to Cluj and Bucharest, either because when they left the country they opted to leave as far away from home as possible, *„because I didn't want to be close to the war, to be far, farther and farther” (I. no. 2, 41 years old)*, or because, *we thought it would be easier to find work there” (I. No. 5, 38 years)*. However:

*„We needed more peace at this time, we decided to go back closer to the border, to be closer to home and we chose Suceava, our Bukovina, then others followed” (I. No. 5, 38 years old).*

Suceava was also the city where they found jobs and this was a reason for settling in this county, so that 9 of the 10 interviewees are in the workforce. Satisfaction with the current occupation can be seen from the interviewees' statements:

*„It is the most beautiful thing I have done in my life and I do it with great love” (I. No. 8. 32 years).*

*„Now I teach Romanian and Ukrainian to refugee children and... (smiles) is very demanding because I have to prepare constantly and occupies almost all my free time. And on one side it's very good for mental health I think” (I. No. 2, 41 years).*

At the same time, by finding a job, they felt safer, and even *„apart from the energy I can say that as a ... I feel at home” (I. No. 4, 34 years old):*

*„Finding a job where I could develop my capabilities, skills and profession I think influenced for the better, I felt safer. And the financial part plays a role, that it is a security” (I. No. 3, 31 years).*

However, the job also hurt one respondent because she had different expectations, especially working in an organization that focuses on doing good:

*„Being an ethnic Romanian from Chernivtsi we always looked at Romania as our soul country, the mother country, where for us everything was ideal and perfect. And for me, it was a whole tragedy when I met colleagues from Romania, who intentionally harmed me or sought to harm me. And that's what I have to this day. Such an inner divergence, I cannot understand these things and more than that, that it happens in an organization meant to do good” (I. No. 5, 38 years old).*

Although opinions are divided, responses about the impact of the workplace prevail with a positive impression of the interviewees, the workplace offering them not only financial security but also a distraction from what is happening on the other side of the border.

Resilience is complemented by the intention to know more about Romania and even to settle here:

*„At the moment we were organizing ourselves to visit, to relax, not to be just tied to work and the apartment, or school and kindergarten” (I. No. 3, 31 years old).*

*„All the places in Romania for me are the places of my soul and the place where I found myself and I am happy and I decided that here I will stay and nowhere else” (I. No. 5, 38 years old).*

*„All places in Romania I think offer a state of well-being. I couldn't understand this state of well-being until the war, while we couldn't even think once that we would live in Suceava, we would change everything, and to tell you honestly, even if the war ends, I don't know if I want to go back to Ukraine. I don't seem to see myself in Ukraine anymore because of the laws that were made there, and which will be I don't know, but I don't know, I want to stay in Romania, that's my idea, that's how I feel” (I. No. 4, 34 years old).*

*„Sucevita village, where my ancestors come from, there is also a house there, but they are no longer alive. I don't know why, but when I'm there, it's like there, there's an energy that keeps me there. That I believe that relatives there were born, lived and that's where my mother's family comes from.” (I. No. 8, 32 years).*

Resilience is also facilitated by shared cultural customs:

*„When the Ukrainians came and when it was March 1, when Martisor were given, they were all learning „Martisor” – meaning for them it was something new, something wow, „there is no such thing in our country”. While in our village, in Chernivtsi, we celebrated this holiday, for me it was nothing new” (I. No. 4, 34 years).*

*„I wouldn't see much difference from what I saw in Chernivtsi... even Suceava is also a mix, and I can't say it was something extraordinarily different. No culture, no customs, that is, for me, it would be religion, what I am as values, family, I saw these things here and it was not unknown to me” (I. No. 3, 31 years old).*

There are also cultural differences due to differences in Orthodox rite and even food/culinary differences:

*„We eat more beef, pork here and I can't find beef. The biggest problem. But culture, traditions are alike” (I. No. 6, 26 years).*

From the point of view of language, although not all interviewees encountered such great difficulties, they still felt that they needed to improve their language:

*„Yes, even though I am a teacher and since childhood, I spoke in the Romanian language, it seems to me that we speak an old language in Chernivtsi, I meet it only in people from Romania who are older, people who live in the countryside speak like us, but from the city and Radauti speak as in the book, meaning the accents differ, that is, I have a lot to learn” (I. No. 8, 32 years).*

Some of the interviewees say that although they are from Chernivtsi, it was still necessary to learn Romanian:

*„Well, I had to learn the language, I didn't go to school Romanian, I don't know how they say, when I went outside with the child, that's how I learned it. I don't know quite right, but I can handle it, as best I can. Yes, they start learning new words. I have to translate a lot in my head first and then say (laughs)” (I. No. 1, 31 years old).*

The crisis of refugee families cannot be blurred, however. The family of origin was supported before leaving, and some family members left Ukraine with respondents. But for the most part, (extended) families remained in Ukraine. The role of the family can be found in all the testimonies of these women:

*„I think my family was that place of support, encouragement, motivation, I think here I have the greatest resource to go forward, to make things good” (I. No. 3, 31 years).*

*„They supported this, more I think morally they helped me because that's what it was: keep the baby, keep the money for longer, that's it, leave. They knew that I alone could do everything” (I. No. 6, 26 years).*

Some of the interviewed women managed to pass with their husbands, this gave them the security they needed, *„first of all that the husband is safe, I knew that the family is also safe” (I. No. 3, 31 years).*

Respondents tell about their families and how they cope with the situation generated by the war with sadness, as most members are determined to stay there, especially because they have certain assets and a life they do not want to give up:

*„They worked a lifetime and built the house and stayed, they also bought an apartment, they keep all these things they have worked on all their lives” (I. No. 8, 32 years).*

Discussing how families left behind feel, respondents tearfully describe the stress their relatives feel:

*„My family now at home is under a lot of stress, like, na, there is war in the country and we don't know, today is quiet, thank God it's a year since it's quiet but we don't know what can be tomorrow, what can be another day.*

*And they are stressed and it is noticed a lot, when I talk to them on the phone: today it passed well, it's ok (I tear up in my eyes) and you feel this stress in them. I also told them to come to Romania, but they said no, it's quiet, and they don't want to leave their house. They've gotten used to it, they've done everything to make it comfortable, but it feels like it's not good." (I. No. 4, 34 years).*

*C. Perception of humanitarian aid received since leaving the country of origin*

The first impression of the interviewees about the people who offered them support when they entered Romania is a particularly good one:

*„The world was too good, so I think, only nobody owes us to help us” (I. No. 1, 31 years).*

*„First thought: what a good, understanding, decent world. I had no words, nor would I express. It was something I couldn't figure out existed” (I. No. 9, F, 28 years).*

All interviewees were greeted from the border by people who wanted to offer support, which caused them emotions and tears:

*„A customs officer told me everything would be fine, supported me, I know I cried in the car alone” (I. No. 3, 31 years).*

*„I told you I didn't cry all day, I was scared but I didn't cry, not even in customs. In customs there was an ideal silence, there were many people, there was a big row, everyone didn't know what to say, they were sitting as if they had taken water in their mouths, nobody said a word, everyone was thinking. When I entered Romania and saw that everyone wanted to help us, I started crying. I seem to have everything and I have to leave, to be safe, to preserve our life first of all because it is more precious than everything” (I. No. 8, 32 years).*

The aid received was necessary and often exceeded expectations:

*„Oh, it helped me a lot because there were a lot of unforeseen expenses because you can't take in a suitcase what a family need. I had something taken from home, but it can't reach you, it helped me a lot” (I. No. 2, 41 years old).*

*„Oh, I've always turned her down, but... Mmm... I don't know. When I received help and even brought home those who knew I was staying with my brother, everyone helped me and gave me, took me to the family doctor, to the doctor where to give birth in Suceava, I know it's very difficult to get to a doctor here in Romania, he took me without a turn. I said that so many people helped me that I don't know how to help them in the future and I am always happy for the help they have given. I don't know how to help if in the future I can, I will gladly help too” (I. No. 8, 32 years).*

Some interviewees decided not to seek help, as they felt others needed it most. Many refugees depended 100% on this aid. Special programs have successfully helped arriving refugees:

*„Mmmm about everything I can say that I have a good opinion because the country Romania helps people and no matter how, how little, they try with the 50/20 program, they try with money and vouchers. Help people, even if there is no war in their area, they could come, and look for work. In Ukraine there are no jobs, men stay hidden so as not to take them to war. Women came with their children and had support and help. Romania helped a lot, with everything it does” (I. No. 9, 28 years).*

*„It's okay because in these programs they also give food and take care and that's very. I think for the mother who has a child, this is very helpful. That at least you can sit freely, relax with your child for 24 hours and you're in a foreign country and you don't know anything, you don't have friends, you don't have so much support, you don't have your family by your side, it's kind of hard. A helping hand is great” (I. No. 1, 31 years old).*

The future is quite uncertain for the interviewees, because if before they had their lives arranged for 2/3 years, now things are not like that. For some, the future sounds like a settlement in Romania:

*„No one knows, everything is changeable (laughs). But, my family decided to stay in Romania, we even decided to continue school here, my husband got a job, I have temporary jobs, but I also hope to legalize my medicine” (I. No. 5, 38 years old).*

*„To have a stable job and I think I would like to stay here in Romania” (I. No. 7, 48 years).*

With great emotion, the interviewees hope for an end to the war as soon as possible:

*„I hope that Ukraine will resist, that every people has, I would say, the right to exist, to develop and probably they will understand a lot from this war, I hope in the right direction. I wish them to resist so that all the sacrifices of this war may not be in vain. All these families lost their sons, who lost their father, and their grandfather because it left an imprint on their lives forever. It will not be possible to erase the trace of this war for these families. And very much I wish that everything that happened to them would not be sudden because it will be very difficult for them to know that what their husbands, brothers or parents died for was in vain or forgotten” (I. No. 5, 38 years).*

## **5. Conclusion and discussions**

The present study was exploratory and followed three descriptive axes: perception of refugees' situation, identification of factors contributing to the

development of refugees' resilience and assessment of the perception of humanitarian aid received by refugees.

Ukrainian refugees perceive the personal situation generated by the war as one in which life began from scratch in a new country. The appearance of war generated in each of the interviewee's feelings of fear, shock, panic, stress, uncertainty of tomorrow or even life. Refugees feel betrayed for leaving their country to save themselves or compare to grandparents who fled during World War II. Forced migration brought financial instability, separation from the extended family and cultural/societal context. It was the children who were motivated especially to leave the environment affected by the emergence of war.

The elements that contribute to the resilience of the new arrivals identified geographical proximity, cultural similarities (traditions, customs, religion), positive perception of Romania and Romanians in general, perception of genealogical developments with roots in Romania, involvement in lucrative or volunteer activities, constant connection with the family of origin.

Regarding the topic of perception of the humanitarian aid they have received since leaving their country of origin, respondents express their gratitude and emotional wonder at the support provided by civil society and public authorities in Romania.

The outlook for the future remains uncertain among all 10 interviewees. For now, we want an end to the war, even for those who do not want to return to Ukraine.

Respondents want peace for the part of the family left there and for the rest of the families who have to endure something that can never be erased from the memory of Ukrainians.

Research on Ukrainian refugees is still in its infancy and will certainly continue. The phenomenon itself is extensive and concerns all counties of Romania neighbouring Ukraine or the Republic of Moldova. Romania's effort in this situation was perceived directly by refugees, but also by countries across Europe as truly exemplary.

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