Ukrainian Children and Adolescent Refugees in Romania
A Multidisciplinary View of Their Well-being

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Abstract: *Ukrainian children and adolescent refugees meet a diverse range of challenges during the migration process due to the war crisis in their country. Analyzing qualitative data from interviews with professionals working with these people brings into focus a few main points for good practices. According to collected data, the most important factors for enhancing the well-being of refugee children and adolescents are: the aimed interventions for developing language tools, providing social support (instrumental and emotional) for individuals and families, facilitating psychological counseling or personal development intervention (e.g., through artistic activities) and participating in multicultural activities, both in formal and informal educational settings.*
The main implication of this study is for the professionals working with Ukrainian children and adolescents in Romania, as it brings relevant data regarding this population's struggles and potential solutions for facilitating their well-being, through the transition and adjustment process to a new country and culture.

Keywords: *Ukrainian children and adolescents; migration; well-being;*

Introduction

In this paper, we are mainly interested in the cultural, social, and psychological aspects of children and youth regarding the war migration of Ukrainian people.

According to the literature, well-being refers to the subjective evaluation people make regarding their lives, both from a cognitive and affective perspective, eliciting the beliefs of achievement and desirability of their lives[2]. The environment and social context children are immersed in, the relationship with the caregivers and significant others in their lives, and the access to material goods, financial resources, and different types of services are also connected to their well-being[3].

As for the support regarding health, housing, financial resources, etc., there are already legal provisions ensured by the Romanian government (https://protectieucraina.gov.ro). In this paper, we aim to investigate how different stakeholders address the cultural, social, and emotional needs of children and adolescents from Ukraine.

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[2] F. Casas. 2011. "Social indicators and child and adolescent well-being". *Child Indicators Reasearch*, 4, pp. 555-575. Diener, E. 2012. "New findings and future directions for subjective well-being research". *American Psychologist*, 67(8), pp. 590-597. In Schütz, E., Garcia, D., Archer, T. 2014. "Affective state, stress, and type A-personality as a function of gender and affective profiles". *International Journal of Research Studies in Psychology*. 3: 51–64.

[3] F. Casas. și A. Bello (coord.). 2012a. Calidad de vida y bienestar subjetivo en España. Qué afecta al bienestar de niños y niñas españoles de 1 de ESO?, Documenta Universitaria. España, Girona: UNICEF. Montserrat, C., Casas, F. & Malo, S. 2012. "Delayed educational pathways and risk of social exclusion: the case of young people from public care in Spain". *European Journal of Social Work*, 16(1), pp. 6-21.

Migration is a people's decision to move from one region or country to another to achieve better living conditions. Yet, when there are push factors such as war or disasters that force people to leave their homes, there is a higher pressure on them, putting them at greater psychological risk, in the short and long term[4].

Refugees are exposed to multiple risk factors due to the pre- and post-migration exposure to major life stressors[5]. The most prevalent stressors, according to different studies, are relationship ruptures, loss of resources (social, economic, material), lack of education, lack of understanding of the new language and culture, unemployment, discrimination, and navigating unfamiliar laws and regulations[6].

Migration also comes with major cultural changes, cultural bereavement being frequently met. Culture and ethnicity play a crucial role in defining social identity. Common "history beliefs, values, food and entertainment preferences, religion and language" give people a sense of belonging and understanding of who they are, whereas cultural changes challenge self-esteem and mental health, along with related identity aspects[7].

Cross-cultural interventions for migrants in need are a challenging task. First, culture is a multifaceted construct that is difficult to put in a single and common definition, and second, because some aspects may look pathological in one culture, but typical in another. The lack of a unitary perspective and a common language regarding some core issues tend to affect the efficacy of the interventions aimed to support individual adjustment and well-being[8]. As much as possible, culturally sensitive services (such as psychotherapy) should be provided by Ukrainian professionals, or at least professionals with a high degree of experience in Ukrainian culture.

In the long term, refugees are exposed to the acculturation process. This implies the changes in "values, beliefs, expectations, norms, roles, practices and related psychological functioning" that occur both in the migrant group and the cultural environment where they settle[9]. Acculturation is a complex process in which some aspects are gained, regarding the acquisition of the host culture and some things are lost, in the relationship with the culture of origin[10].

Due to its complexity and the large number of variables it depends on, acculturation produces asymmetric results. While some studies suggest a strong relationship between

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[4] H. Altunay Yılmaz. 2018. "Adjustment experiences of Syrian refugees in Turkey: findings from a community-based participatory research," M.S. - Master of Science, Middle East Technical University. Bailey, R. 2010. *Immigration and migration*. Infobase Publishing.10.1080/15562948.2016.1186770.

[5] R. A. Bryant, B. Edwards, M. Creamer, O'M. Donnell, D. Forbes, K. L. Felmingham, D. Silove, Z. Steel, A. Nickerson, A. C. McFarlane, M. Van Hooff, D. Hadzi-Pavlovic. 2018. "The effect of post-traumatic stress disorder on refugees' parenting and their children's mental health: a cohort study". *Lancet Public Health*. 2018 May; 3(5):e249-e258. doi: 10.1016/S2468-2667(18)30051-3. PMID: 29731158.

[6] H. Altunay Yılmaz. 2018. "Adjustment experiences of Syrian refugees in Turkey: findings from a community-based participatory research," M.S. - Master of Science, Middle East Technical University. R. King, T. Heinonen, M. Uwabor, A. Adeleye-Olusae. 2016. "The Psychosocial Well-Being of African Refugees in Winnipeg: Critical Stressors and Coping Strategies". *Journal of Immigrant & Refugee Studies*. 1-21. 10.1080/15562948.2016.1186770.

[7] D. Bhugra, M. Becker. 2005. "Migration, Cultural Bereavement and Cultural Identity". *World psychiatry: official journal of the World Psychiatric Association* (WPA). 4. 18-24.

[8] V. Koneru, A. Weisman, P. Flynn, H. Betancourt. 2007. "Acculturation and mental health: Current findings and recommendations for future research". *Applied and Preventive Psychology*. 12. 76-96. 10.1016/j.appsy.2007.07.016.

[9] J.W. Berry 2005. "Acculturation: Living successfully in two cultures. International Journal of Intercultural Relations", 29, 697–712. Betancourt, H., & Lopez, S. R. 1993. "The study of culture, race, and ethnicity in American psychology". *American Psychologist*, 48, 629–637. In Koneru et al., *op. cit.*, p. 77.

[10] R.H. Chung, B.S. Kim, J.M. Abreu. 2004. "Asian American multidimensional acculturation scale: development, factor analysis, reliability, and validity". *Cultural diversity & ethnic minority psychology*. 10(1):66-80. doi:10.1037/1099-9809.10.1.66.

acculturation and distress, the are other studies that do not support this association[11]. In some cases, acculturation may bring a new sense of belonging (in the host culture) for the culturally bereaved individuals, during their socialization and adjustment process in the new country[12]. Being in a country with similar cultural values, with friendly and supportive policies for refugees, that facilitates the social, professional, and economic integration of the individual, should enhance more positive outcomes on their well-being. For example, if people from a collectivistic society move to a similar cultural context, they have better chances to do well, compared to those moving to a more individualistic society[13].

One of the most critical variables affected by acculturation seems to be language[14]. The reason why it may bring further distress, besides other acculturation aspects, is that it facilitates community fragmentation. Language provides "cohesion and preservation of oral and written traditions, as well as opportunities for community-based rituals and engagement"[15]. So, it should be addressed in a manner to avoid marginalization and other undesirable social effects. Children seem to be more affected by linguistic and cultural exclusion, so, measures taken for refugees in this regard should be sensitive to language preservation (as much as possible, at least in certain social activities and contexts).

Migration due to high stressors, such as war, puts kids at greater risk as they are not able to take care of themselves. They need caregivers to protect them and ensure them the necessary conditions for survival.

Direct exposure to traumatic events, seeing dead or injured people, seeing despair and strongly negative parents' reactions, lack of resources and opportunities after migration such as poverty, parental unemployment, and lack of education are among the factors that increase the risk of developing psychopathology[16].

Wartime exacerbates their vulnerabilities, the tendency for mistrust, self-doubt, inferiority, insecurity, etc., impairing their typical development[17]. The caregiver's ability to provide an appropriate emotional context for the children to self-regulate seems to be a protective factor that buffers their psychological adjustment. In the lack of such opportunities, children seem to be more susceptible to developing trauma-related dysfunctional responses[18]. Bryant et al.[19] show that when caregivers are affected by PTSD, they are more prone to apply harsh parenting practices that are

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[11] Koneru et al., *op. cit.*

[12] Bhugra & Becker. 2005. *op. cit.*

[13] *Ibidem*, p. 22

[14] M. Rodriguez Le Sage & A. Townsend. 2004. "Acculturation and depressive symptoms in Mexican American couples". *Diversity and Aging in the Social Environment*, 10, 131–154. Vega, W. A., & Sribney, W. 2003. "Parental risk factors and social assimilation in alcohol dependence of Mexican Americans". *Journal of Studies on Alcohol*, 64, 167–175. In Koneru et al., *op. cit.*, p. 3246.

[15] *Ibidem.*

[16] Ş. Y. Sapmaz, B. U. Tanrıverdi, M. Öztürk, Ö. Gözaçanlar, G. Y. Ülker, & Y. Özkan. 2017. "Immigration-related mental health disorders in refugees 5–18 years old living in Türkiye". *Neuropsychiatric Disease and Treatment*, 13, 2813.

[17] M. Eisenbruch. 1988. "The mental health of refugee children and their cultural development". *International Migration Review*, 22, 282–300.

[18] S. Lustig, M. Kia-Keating, W. Knight, P. Geltman, B. Ellis, J, Kinzie, T. Keane, G. Saxe. 2004. "Review of Child and Adolescent Refugee Mental Health". *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry*. 43. 24-36, pp. 26-29.

[19] R. A. Bryant, B. Edwards, M. Creamer, O'M. Donnell, D. Forbes, K. L. Felmingham, D. Silove, Z. Steel, A. Nickerson, A. C. McFarlane, M. Van Hooff, D. Hadzi-Pavlovic. 2018. "The effect of post-traumatic stress disorder on refugees' parenting and their children's mental health: a cohort study". *The Lancet. Public health*, 3(5), e249–e258. In Idemudia, E., Boehnke, K. 2020. "Theoretical Explanations of Migrations, Mental Health, Wellbeing and Posttraumatic Stress Disorder". In *Psychosocial Experiences of African Migrants in Six European Countries. Social Indicators Research Series*, vol 81. Springer, Cham.

associated with more frequent conduct problems, emotional symptoms, and hyperactivity tendencies in children and adolescents.

So, children's well-being seems to be directly connected to the parental one, as the caregiver's well-being facilitates children and adolescents' functioning and adjustment[20].

Besides parental/caregiver support, adolescents who benefit from peer support seem to experience a lower degree of loneliness in the cultural adjustment process[21].

The protective factors seem to be receiving financial and psychological support, having a social network, understanding the language, being employed, and continuing to exercise the native culture, and spirituality[22]. The characteristics of the host society (e.g., cultural congruity) as well as those of the individual (e.g., resilience) are also determinants of how effective the adjustment process would develop[23].

For children, parental support, peer support, and access to education are among the main factors that could buffer migration's negative effects and positively impact their well-being. Teachers play a key role in children's adjustment and sometimes even healing[24]. They need to be highly trained in knowledge about refugees and their experiences and how to express values and protective attitudes aimed to support students' sense of belonging[25]. Teachers can provide support in the classroom and school and also develop and facilitate a nuanced perspective of diversity and multiculturalism, overcoming negative stereotypes, biases, and assertions that could impair Ukrainian students' adjustment.

Public and private sectors and nongovernmental actors (libraries, clubs for children and youth, NGOs, educational hubs, etc.) may also facilitate culture sharing and interconnectedness by leisure time activities and informal education opportunities.

In this qualitative research, we aim to investigate a few main aspects regarding Ukrainian children and adolescents' adjustment and well-being, in the migration process due to war:

- How is their adjustment process developing months and/or years later after migration?

- What are the main challenges (risk factors) children and adolescents face in Romania, regarding their well-being and adjustment processes?

- What are the protective factors regarding their well-being and adjustment process?

- What are some of the best practices for Ukrainian children and youth refugees designed to enhance their well-being in the wartime migration crisis?

1. Methodology

As a part of the *MentUwell project - Preserving Youth Mental Wellbeing in Wartime Migration Crisis,* interviews with professionals from multidisciplinary fields of intervention aimed to identify their experiences with Ukrainian children and youth refugees and the needs and

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[20] Lustig et al., *op. cit.*, pp. 26-29

[21] *Ibidem.*

[22] Altunay-Yılmaz, *op. cit.*

[23] Bhugra & Becker, *op. cit.*, p. 22

[24] T. Kovinthan. 2016. "Learning and Teaching With Loss: Meeting the Needs of Refugee Children Through Narrative Inquiry". *Diaspora, Indigenous, and Minority Education*. 10. 141-155.

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requirements for services reported by them, to protect their well-being during a wartime migration crisis. More extensive results of the findings in the participating countries in the project are internationally published in different academic settings and events. The present study brings into discussion only the results collected in the Romanian sample.

Ten semi-structured interviews were conducted over a six-month period. Data were collected in one or more interview sessions. An interview guide with 8 main questions was conducted face-to-face with each participant, allowing the respondents to reflect on and customize their answers according to their experiences and views without feeling restricted or compelled to offer socially desirable answers. The average length of the interviews was 80 minutes. Participating was voluntary, and the respondents could retreat from the research if desired.

The participants were selected due to their experience in working with Ukrainian children or teenagers (and their willingness to answer the interviews). The professional fields they were selected from were: private and public schools or other educational services providers (educational hub), public libraries, NGOs or youth clubs, psychological counseling, cultural facilitators, etc. The languages used during interviews were Romanian or English, according to their choice, so that they could express their opinions without difficulty.

1.1. Data analysis and main findings

The interviews were verbatim transcribed, and sensitive information such as personal data was removed. The content was then analyzed by two researchers and thematic aspects or specific patterns were revealed. Data were clustered according to the main issues of interest for this investigation.

There was implemented a two-stage coding process; the first stage involved the entire dataset. The second stage of coding allowed a refinement of the main themes identified.

To reduce bias and ensure validity, the coding was initially done independently by two researchers. As interview data had a good degree of clarity and coherence, the agreement between the two researchers was high. Where there were data besides the identified codes, they were discussed between the researchers and analyzed based on their agreement.

Adjustment to the migration situation and well-being
There is an asymmetrical adjustment among children and adolescents from Ukraine. Some of them seem to do better, mainly where they have a high level of support from their families, a higher socio-economic status, and have the chance to participate in different areas of social activities, educational, cultural, leisure time, etc.

Yet, another part of them do better socially than emotionally. Homesick feelings, grieving the things from home they no longer have, friends, community, etc., are among the challenges they have to manage in the migration adjustment process.

Accepting the fact that their staying in Romania is on a long-term and not only a transitory state, seems to play a positive role in their adjustment.

"Once they accept the reality and the situation and they commit, they are participating wholeheartedly in the school activities. This seems to be the biggest change, at the beginning, they were waiting to go back, to be temporarily the whole situation, as a bad dream. So, it was not their country, not their place, they didn't want to stay, to make friends. Once they accepted that this might become their country, that the school, the teachers, and their colleagues do everything for

them to integrate, they took their role seriously and most of them are very serious students, willing to learn and to integrate and adapt.”

Regarding the emotional difficulties that might arise, the coregulation that occurs in the relationship with the adults around them seems to play an important role in their adjustment.

“Like all the teenagers, they are confused. But they learn fast as long as we create a safe context and avoid exaggerations. Their well-being depends, most of the time, on how calm the adults around them are.”

All the participants in the study reported a better adjustment and a better level of well-being in the Ukrainian children and teens months and years after their arrival. In this case, acculturation seems to play a protective part. Finding new friends, defining their identity through new cultural coordinates alongside the initial ones, re-writing their story in the new context, learning the language, and getting accustomed to the Romanian way of living seem to facilitate and develop a new sense of belonging, a desire to be part of what happens in this social environment. Furthermore, developing better coping strategies and learning to live under these new conditions might also be associated with these better outcomes over time.

Impact factors on the adjustment process

Interview data analysis provided a range of factors (Table 1) that might impair the well-being of Ukrainian refugees (risk factors) or facilitating factors (protective factors) that are associated with better well-being, better coping mechanisms, and adjustment levels.

Protective factors	Risk factors
- Participating in different social contexts (school/classroom, community, leisure time activities, etc.); - Social support (family, friends, services); - Psychological counseling; - Empowerment (the sense of control over what happens to them); - Belonging (feeling useful, part of the peer group, of the classroom activities); - Socio-economical status of the child/teen's family, - Access to multicultural activities (the chance to exercise their culture).	- Language barrier, - Lack of appropriate services (overload of cases for school counselors, lack of training of the facilitators working with Ukrainian) - Bullying, - Discrimination, - Marginalization, - Parental distress - Lack of commitment, motivation to adjust; - Helplessness, hopelessness; - Trauma.

Table 1. *The main protective and risk factors associated with well-being and the adjustment process*

According to the professional opinions and observations expressed during the interviews, it seems that there is a large range of protective factors that could support and enhance the refugee children's and adolescents' well-being, such as: feeling useful and part of the peer group, in the classroom activities, having the possibility to speak in English at school (at least until they manage

to speak Romanian coherently), having a reasonable family socio-economical status, feeling empowered, participating in multicultural activities, having access to psychological counseling.

"Multicultural events that include them but not put them in the spotlight, intercultural education and multicultural projects…"

"Since 2023, we have the Ukraine Hub for Teenagers in the County Public Library and we could organize, in this way, activities based on different ages and interests. The children and the teenagers I meet seem to be enjoying activities, and participating with joy. After two years, I can see some integrating with ease, making friends, learning the language."

The Romanian Government developed legal provisions and mechanisms designed to support and facilitate Ukrainian adjustment for those who decided to become residents in this country. Nevertheless, when trying to translate these provisions into direct services addressed to this vulnerable group, the lack of training for their facilitators seems to be a barrier to effectively implementing these services. Lack of human resources, insufficient knowledge about Ukrainian culture and about working with refugees, lack of training regarding working with people experiencing trauma, etc., make things difficult both for the beneficiary of these services and for the facilitators (educators, counselors, teachers, etc.)

"Lack of trained educators. The laws are not helping very much, the adapted curriculum is understood as a diminished and simplified amount of information - not a real adjustment of the content to the real needs of the student. The educators, social workers, and teachers don`t know how to deal with these problems. We need consultations, training, and the 'know-how'."

"A main challenge is the trauma; in this case, of M., her father is still there, they can hear the bombing every 30 seconds when they speak on the phone and they don't know if he will even answer the phone next time, all their family future is uncertain, their house where they used to live doesn't exist anymore. In these cases, we need guidance to know how to react and how to act."

"The biggest challenge was the fact that there was just one person who took care of translating and mediating the activities. If she was out of town, we had to postpone the workshops. We have a very full program with our job activities, it was difficult - the financial resources, the understaffed, the lack of volunteers, especially for Romanian and English classes. We were unable to have these activities on the weekends, unfortunately, it would have been too much for us."

Similar findings are brought by other studies, showing that professionals working with refugee individuals, discuss "the need for increased knowledge and awareness of cultural differences" in services provision, language barriers, and sometimes the difficulty in diagnosis and treatment (understanding cultural specificities challenges the identification of normal responses to the highly stressful and complex life situation from PTSD or connected symptoms)[26].

Helpful resources for well-being and good practices

Based on an in-depth interview analysis, five main areas of good practices were revealed as having the highest impact on Ukrainian children and adolescents' well-being, and social and educational adjustment: communication, training, support, empowerment, and participation

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[26] S. Sandhu, N. V. Bjerre, M. Dauvrin, S. Dias, A. Gaddini, T. Greacen, E. Ioannidis, U. Kluge, N. K. Jensen, M. Lamkaddem, R. Puigpinós i Riera, Z. Kósa, U. Wihlman, M. Stankunas, C. Straßmayr, K. Wahlbeck, M. Welbel, S. Priebe. 2013. "Experiences with treating immigrants: a qualitative study in mental health services across 16 European countries". *Social psychiatry and psychiatric epidemiology*, 48(1), 105–116, p. 100.

(Figure 1). According to the interviewed professionals, these variables draw the prior areas where good practices should be developed and the main resources invested.

Fig. 1. *The main fields for intervention and action to enhance the Ukrainian refugees' well-being*

Qualitative data suggest that best practices for the well-being of Ukrainian kids and adolescents are related to the following:

Language and communication. Learning Romanian and/or having the possibility to work with bilingual educational resources seem to be a very important factor for their adjustment and well-being.

Offering friendly language support and courses according to the children's age, and having translators and educational facilitators trained to work according to the refugees' age, language, and cultural needs could be a protective factor for their well-being.

Similar findings are brought by other studies. Shandu et al.[27] show that disparities between the language of service providers and that of the clients seriously limit the effectiveness of these services. In this regard, addressing language constraints (e.g., translators, courses, bilingual books, and resources) should be one of the first lines of intervention. Linguistic capabilities offer the migrants the opportunity to establish better interactions with the host community[28].

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[27] Sandhu et al., *op. cit.*
[28] Bhugra & Becker, *op. cit.*

In addition, augmenting their communication skills and supporting them to express their thoughts and feelings in a non-verbal but culturally sensitive manner, would also contribute to their well-being and their cultural and social integration. Artistic activities and art therapy techniques would support both their self-expression but also their social communication and interaction.

"*Art and creative activities, art therapy techniques, and games make them less defensive and help them express their emotions freely. We would also need a Romanian language class specially designed for children and teenagers from Ukraine. We have classes for adults but we need classes for children - they might not speak English well enough, so a direct Ukrainian-Romanian language class would be necessary. Also, what might help is games for identifying the emotions, and emotional regulation through imaginative and respiratory techniques, like a small manual that requires minimum language skills on both sides, easy to understand and use.*"

Training the staff that provides different kinds of services for the Ukrainian refugees is a prior requirement for supporting their well-being. Offering the necessary knowledge and equipping them with the set of skills they need to effectively work with the Ukrainian kids and adolescents would help them navigate more easily through the challenges in the process. Culturally sensitive, trauma-informed education training for the educational facilitators would provide a coherent context both for their professional development and improvement (raising their job education in relationship with these new tasks and challenges) and would also support the integration and adherence of the Ukrainian children and adolescents to the services provided in our country.

Having the understanding for optimal communication in the relationship with the Ukrainian students, knowing their particularities as a group but also as individuals would facilitate better decisional skills and a more effective multilevel intervention in the school setting or any other educational environment.

"*It is important to train facilitators, educators, and teachers to know how to work with migrant teenagers. And the psycho-pedagogical training is mandatory. And I also believe the adults should be updated (reminded) about the way teenagers learn, think, and develop according to different ages and stages.*"

"*Training the educators on methods helps. If the adults know how to communicate and keep calm and efficient, the emotions of the teenagers bounce less. It is the key to creating a safe learning environment. Consulting and mediating between the school community, family, and society is also important.*"

Sandhu et al.[29] in a similar investigation of professionals working with immigrants emphasize the need for congruence between the professional-client belief system and the cultural expectations in the services-providing process, in order to minimize the bias.

Matlin et al.[30] also underline the critical importance of developing and providing cultural/transnational competence in the professionals and institutions working with migrants and refugees.

The inclusive interventions main goals should be to provide these services customized according to the Ukrainian needs and culture, in order to reduce the risk factors. This approach requires well-prepared professionals and "interventions at multiple levels of the social ecology"[31].

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[29] Sandhu et al., *op. cit.*

[30] S. Matlin, A. Depoux, S. Schutte, A. Fiahault, L. Saso. 2017. "Migrations and refugees' health: towards an agenda of solutions". *Public Health Reviews*, 39(27), 1–55. In Idemudia & Boehnke, *op. cit.*, p. 86.

[31] Lustig et al., *op. cit.*, p. 30.

Support. Both emotional and instrumental support are needed to meet the complex needs of Ukrainian children and adolescent refugees. On the one hand, they need economic and material support for their everyday living (food, shelter, clothes, access to services and resources, etc.). On the other hand, for their well-being, they need mainly the social and emotional support provided by the family, the peer group, the school staff, etc. Furthermore, in some cases, they need psychological counseling or other mental health services. Psychological support for them as a group, individuals, or families should be provided by professionals who already have the knowledge and skills to work with Ukrainian refugees. Online supporting services for children and families should also be helpful. In providing services for vulnerable groups it is of paramount importance to make those services highly accessible.

Children sometimes do not have access to services, due to their age or to the families' opportunities and openness to elicit support. In these cases, well-being good practices mean addressing the families as social functioning entities, meeting their interests and giving them the chance to participate, organizing workshops and activities for parents-children partnership, to enhance the family functioning and the good practices within it.

Not least, it is important to involve the community as much as possible. Supporting the refugees to integrate and be part of the community is an important predictor of their (and their children's) well-being.

"The school counselor helps a lot with advice in difficult situations."

"The best integration and adaptation happened thanks to the children, the other children. Like at the beginning of the war - until the officials found a way, the people, the NGOs reacted faster, at a human, compassionate level. What helps is to involve the family, to act based on the real needs of the children after consulting. Training the educators helps, more psychologists and counselors in schools, extracurricular activities - diverse, multiple choices according to wishes and talents to prevent isolation."

"We would like to be able to do more for the mothers regarding their children, maybe games and common activities that can bring them together, crafts, etc. We could use guides, bilingual or image-based guides, and tools."

"The most helpful, for those who decide to stay, is […] to feel a full member of the community, to feel there is no barrier between us, to feel equal. In the long term, this is necessary for a better integration."

Support is a variable often mentioned in studies regarding migration. Social support tends to smooth refugees' adjustment process, to decrease the stress they experience as a result of resettlement, and has a direct positive effect on refugees' well-being in the adjustment process[32]. Emotional support tends to exert a greater effect on well-being, both on the provider side and on the recipients, especially where the two are socially connected (e.g., friends)[33].

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[32] Altunay-Yilmaz, *op. cit.*, pp. 28-29.
[33] L. B. Aknin, C. P. Barrington-Leigh, E. W. Dunn, J. F. Helliwell, J. Burns, R. Biswas-Diener, I. Kemeza, P. Nyende, C. E. Ashton-James, M. I. Norton. 2013. "Prosocial spending and well-being: cross-cultural evidence for a psychological universal". *Journal of personality and social psychology*, 104(4), 635–652. S. Morelli, I. Lee, M. Arnn, J. Zaki. 2015. "Emotional and Instrumental Support Provision Interact to Predict Well-Being". *Emotion*. 484–493.

Ki and Jang[34] showed that even online support forums can be effective in enhancing immigrants' well-being, as channels for seeking and receiving social support for mental health issues among immigrants.

Empowerment and participation. These two are powerful tools for supporting children to become active members of their community and responsible citizens for the broader society in the long term. Allowing and supporting them to exercise their culture, to talk about their experiences, and to be part of the story makes them feel more in control regarding their lives, their relationship with others, and also regarding their future. One way to enhance their well-being is by raising the feeling of control and predictability over their life. Being part of what happens to them, having structure, predictability, and control over their life by feeling empowered and participating might be strong predictors of their well-being.

"*The young people in our association want to contribute to society, to popularize culture, to encourage community leadership, and to include as much as possible, diverse and multicultural perspectives. We understand that adaptation and integration might be difficult, therefore, we don't force it. We believe in auto efficiency and self-organizing. We want our Ukrainian peers to feel welcome, included, and respected, no matter how long they will stay.*"

"*A network of educational services and hobby activities that offers the opportunity to interact naturally with their peers. To have diversity (chess, sports, fine arts, dance, music, literature, drama, etc.).*"

"*What was great about EtniCity is the fact that it allowed free participation and facilitated interaction in a natural, easy way, just creating the contexts for a meeting. If an official institution organizes it, it will diminish the real contribution and empowerment of teenagers. They have to decide, contribute, and make those events their own. They have to own it.*"

To support children and youth empowerment and participation, there has to be an interagency coordination and partnership, ensuring that knowledge, initiatives, and actions are shared (and avoiding the duplication of efforts) in order to produce and optimize effective outcomes[35].

2. Conclusions

The issues discussed in this paper bring similar data to the previous literature. The findings highlight some key aspects that should be considered when working with Ukrainian children and youth refugees, in generating efforts to support their adjustment and integration in a host culture.

Qualitative data analyzed in this paper strongly emphasize the idea that initiatives, efforts, and solutions for these children and young people must be combined, augmented, and mutually supported, both locally and nationally[36].

To generate a sustainable cross-sectoral response, a unified strategy for coordination and collaboration is needed. That involves defining specific requirements for each actor or stakeholder

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[34] E.-J., Ki, J. Jang. 2018. Social support and mental health: An analysis of online support forums for Asian immigrant women. *Journal of Asian Pacific Communication*. 28. 226-250.

[35] Seminar on Health and Migration, 9-11 June 2004, Session II B – Investing in mental health in post-conflict rehabilitation. Document extracted from MC/INF/271 IOM *Position Paper on Psychosocial and Mental Well-Being of Migrants*, 2003. p. 1 [https://governingbodies.iom.int/system/files/jahia/webdav/shared/shared/mainsite/about_iom/en/council/86/MCINF_271.pdf]

[36] Boldiș, I. 2020. *Tranziţia tinerilor din sistemul de protecţie la viaţa independentă*. Cluj: Presa Universitară Clujeană, p. 299.

implicated in the process and implementing them in a mandatory manner. This, however, involves a common agreement on who has the power to do so and the recognition of those poles of power as legitimate[37].

This paper provides data that can serve as a starting point for good practices addressed to refugees' well-being and their effective integration into the host culture. Even if the sample of interviewees was reduced, the presented data corroborated with findings from other countries could generate a broader perspective on how intervention should be tailored according to the real needs and requirements of both the providers and the recipients of the services designed for war-migration children and adolescents.

Further research should focus on a cross-cultural comparison between the native and the host culture compatibilities or challenges, emphasizing how to acknowledge the strengths and the similarities of the two cultures that meet in the war migration process, in order to support a stronger commitment to foster collaboration and integration both for the refugees and the host society.

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[37] *Ibidem*, pp. 299-300.

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