

Entering Adulthood after Forced Migration: A Focus Group Study of Ukrainian Refugee Youth in Olsztyn and Kraków

Wchodzenie w dorosłość po przymusowej migracji – badanie fokusowe młodych uchodźców z Ukrainy w Olsztynie i Krakowie

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Abstract: This pilot qualitative study examines how Ukrainian refugee youth navigate the transition to adulthood in Poland after forced displacement caused by the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine. It focuses on education, employment, housing, and interpersonal relationships and explores differences between the experiences reported in Olsztyn and Kraków. Data were collected in 2024 through two focus group interviews with 22 purposively selected participants aged 16–19, including 12 participants in Olsztyn and 10 in Kraków. Polish-language proficiency emerged as the principal barrier to educational participation and social integration in both groups. Participants in Olsztyn more often described survival-oriented strategies and early labour market participation, whereas participants in Kraków placed greater emphasis on education, personal development, and extracurricular activities. Across both groups, participants reported employers' reluctance to hire minors, a mismatch between their qualifications and available jobs, high housing costs, and barriers in the rental market. Most maintained relationships with other Ukrainians, and many also had Polish friends; however, perceived differences in attitudes towards adulthood constrained closer peer relationships. Nationality-based discrimination was reported only sporadically. Given the pilot design and the inclusion of one focus group in each city, the observed differences should be treated as exploratory rather than representative. The findings highlight the need for language support, accessible educational opportunities, housing assistance, and age-sensitive labour market measures for Ukrainian refugee youth in Poland.

Keywords: Ukrainian refugee youth, forced migration, transition to adulthood, educational integration, labour market integration, housing insecurity, social integration

Abstrakt: W pilotażowym badaniu jakościowym przeanalizowano, w jaki sposób młodzi uchodźcy z Ukrainy wchodzą w dorosłość w Polsce po przymusowym przesiedleniu spowodowanym pełnoskalową rosyjską inwazją na Ukrainę. Badanie obejmowało edukację, aktywność zawodową, warunki mieszkaniowe i relacje interpersonalne oraz miało na celu zidentyfikowanie różnic w doświadczeniach zgłaszanych w Olsztynie i Krakowie. Materiał empiryczny zebrano w 2024 roku podczas dwóch wywiadów fokusowych z 22 celowo dobranymi uczestnikami w wieku 16–19 lat: 12 osobami w Olsztynie i 10 w Krakowie. W obu grupach niedostateczna znajomość języka polskiego okazała się główną barierą uczestnictwa w edukacji i integracji społecznej. Uczestnicy z Olsztyna częściej opisywali strategię ukierunkowaną na przetrwanie i wczesne rozpoczęcie pracy, natomiast uczestnicy z Krakowa większe znaczenie przypisywali edukacji, rozwojowi osobistemu i zajęciom dodatkowym. W obu grupach wskazywano na niechęć pracodawców do zatrudniania osób niepełnoletnich, niedopasowanie dostępnych ofert pracy do kwalifikacji, wysokie koszty utrzymania oraz bariery na rynku najmu mieszkań. Większość badanych utrzymywała relacje z innymi Ukraińcami, a wielu miało również polskich przyjaciół; jednak dostrzegane różnice w podejściu do dorosłości utrudniały budowanie bliższych relacji rówieśniczych. Przypadki dyskryminacji ze względu na narodowość zgłaszano sporadycznie. Ze względu na pilotażowy charakter badania i przeprowadzenie jednego wywiadu fokusowego w każdym mieście, zaobserwowane różnice należy traktować jako eksploracyjne, a nie reprezentatywne. Wyniki wskazują na potrzebę wsparcia językowego, zwiększenia dostępności edukacji, pomocy



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mieszkaniowej oraz rozwiązań na rynku pracy, które uwzględniają wiek młodych uchodźców z Ukrainy

Słowa kluczowe: młodzi uchodźcy z Ukrainy, migracja przymusowa, wchodzenie w dorosłość, integracja edukacyjna, integracja na rynku pracy, niepewność mieszkaniowa, integracja społeczna

INTRODUCTION

The full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine triggered a major migration crisis in Europe, on a scale not seen since World War II. Approximately 3.4 million Ukrainian refugees arrived in Poland within the first two and a half months of the outbreak of the war, with minors younger than 17 accounting for 43.3% of this population (UNHCR 2022; Krawczak 2022, 355). For many youngsters, the decision to leave their homes, schools, and communities was not a choice but a necessity dictated by the horrors of war. Upon their arrival in Poland, Ukrainian youth not only carried traumatic personal experiences but also a determination to rebuild their lives (Popyk et al. 2024, 6).

Individuals living through war typically experience uncertainty, imbalance, emotional turmoil, cognitive disarray, and instability in their system of values (Khoruzha 2024, 104). Young people who remained in Ukraine have reported various forms of loss since the beginning of the war. Most of them have experienced a reduction or loss of income (30% in 2024 relative to 36% in 2023), death of friends or family members (this figure doubled from 14% in 2023 to 28% in 2024, reaching 49% in eastern Ukraine), and deterioration of mental health (28% in both 2023 and 2024). A considerable proportion of Ukrainian respondents reported that their relations with friends (18%) or family members (13%) had been broken, or that they had been separated from their loved ones (14%), which points to a significant weakening of social ties. Among the respondents, 13%—mostly from eastern (32%) and southern (19%) Ukraine—were forced to relocate, whereas 6% decided to leave the country. According to most Ukrainian youth living abroad (73%), displacement was the main loss sustained as a result of the war. An increase was also observed in the percentage of young people who were wounded during military operations (from 6% in 2023 to 9% in 2024), lost their homes (from 5% to 8%, respectively), or whose homes were destroyed (from 6% to 8%, respectively). The number of

young Ukrainians who were conscripted into the Armed Forces also increased significantly (from 9% in 2023 to 21% in 2024) (Kostiuchenko, Volosevych and Sapiens 2024, 36).

Poland provided Ukrainian refugees not only with immediate shelter and assistance but also with long-term support and opportunities for social adaptation. Pursuant to the provisions of the *Act of 12 March 2022 on Assistance to Citizens of Ukraine in Connection with the Armed Conflict on the Territory of Ukraine*, Ukrainian migrants were granted the right to legal residence, legal employment and business activity, as well as access to healthcare, education, and social benefits (including family benefits under the 800+ program, welfare assistance), free psychological support, and Polish language instruction. As of August 2025, approximately 987,000 of Ukrainian citizens in Poland were receiving temporary protection, including just over 400,000 adolescents aged 14-17 and nearly 76,000 persons aged 18-34 (Eurostat 2025).

The need to provide tens of thousands of Ukrainian children and adolescents with adequate care and schooling presented an immense challenge to Poland's educational system. Various measures were implemented to address this need. Alternative educational and care facilities were established; Ukrainian students were provided with free transportation to schools; inter-school departments were created to facilitate the transition process and adapt school curricula, and additional initiatives were introduced to recruit more educators and teacher assistants (Ministry of Education and Science 2022a). As of late October 2024, 203,000 Ukrainian students (of whom 152,000 were refugees and 51,000 were prewar migrants) were enrolled in Polish schools. These figures indicate that four out of every 100 students in Polish schools were of Ukrainian origin (Świdrowska and Stano 2025, 3, 12). However, approximately 150,000-200,000 Ukrainian children and adolescents remained outside the educational system, which represents a considerable problem (Amnesty International 2023a, 4). To address this issue, as of 1 June 2025, the eligibility for benefits under the 800+ program was limited to migrant families whose children were enrolled in Polish schools.

In 2022, new measures were also introduced in the tertiary education system to enable Ukrainian students to enroll in Polish universities. These included assistance in organizing preparatory university entrance exams for high school seniors, expanding the number of places in university dormitories, free enrolment in full-time Polish-language university programs, scholarship opportunities, and the launch of the "Solidarity with Ukraine" program (Ministry

of Education and Science 2022b, 68). In the 2023/2024 academic year, 46,200 Ukrainian students attended Polish universities, accounting for 43.1% of all foreign students (Statistics Poland 2024a, 2).

Learning Polish was the greatest challenge for Ukrainian children and adolescents enrolled in Polish schools.¹ This was the main reason their academic performance lagged behind what it had been in the home country. Ukrainian students had to adapt to different school curricula and a new grading system, and they had to integrate with teachers and peers in a new social environment. The problems experienced by young migrants were further exacerbated by psychosocial distress and deteriorating mental health (Centrone, Gromada and Posylnyi 2023, 44). These findings have been confirmed by researchers, including Ilana Tyler-Rubinstein, Daniel Gorevan and Laura Kivela (2022, 3).² Most of the surveyed students (57%) reported feeling less happy after leaving Ukraine, with older adolescents (aged 16 and more) being most affected. The vast majority of them experienced increased anxiety, which is linked to escaping the war, living in a foreign country, feelings of alienation, academic overload, difficulties in overcoming the language barrier, cultural differences, and experiences of xenophobia (Tędziągowska, Walczak and Wielecki 2023, 6).

Despite the fact that Ukrainians were warmly welcomed in Poland, some young Ukrainians experience discrimination and hostility from Polish students and their parents (Amnesty International 2023b, 4). Xenophobic behaviors were reported not only in schools but also in places of residence and public transportation, especially if students conversed in their native language (Centrone, Gromada and Posylnyi 2023, 6). An empirical study³ commissioned by the Children's Rights Ombudsman (2023, 27) revealed that 8% of Ukrainian students had experienced negative attitudes or behaviors from Polish classmates. However, positive attitudes were more frequent, and 39% of the respondents reported that their classmates were very friendly, whereas 34% claimed that they were being "tolerated" by their peers.

¹ Based on the results of a focus group study conducted in 2023 in Warsaw, Kraków, and Wrocław. A total of 104 children and adolescents aged 8-17 (90 from Ukraine and 14 from Poland) participated in the study.

² More than one thousand children and their parents from Finland, Italy, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Romania, and Sweden participated in surveys and focus group interviews. The study was conducted in July and August 2022.

³ A total of 3100 primary school and secondary school students were surveyed. The study was conducted in June 2023 using the CAPI method.

While the situation of adult Ukrainian migrants has been relatively well researched (see, e.g. Chmielewska-Kalińska, Dudek and Strzelecki 2022; Długosz, Kryvachuk and Izdebska-Długosz 2022; Chmielewska-Kalińska, Dudek and Strzelecki 2023; Duszczek et al. 2023; Dudek, Panuciak and Strzelecki 2024; Subocz, Sternicka-Kowalska and Głuszak 2024), the experiences of young Ukrainians have received far less scholarly attention. The present study was undertaken to fill this gap in the literature.

1. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Youth is an ambiguous sociological category that is difficult to define. According to demographic criteria, the category of youth includes individuals aged 15 and above (Niezgoda 2014, 46). This criterion was adopted in this research project. Two focus group interviews involving Ukrainian youth living in Olsztyn and Kraków were conducted in August 2024. These regional capitals were selected for the study because they host foundations established by Ukrainian migrants,⁴ which facilitated the organization of the research process. In both interviews, a purposive sampling method was applied to select respondents based on the age criterion (Babbie 2003, 204). A total of 22 individuals aged 16-19, including 12 in Olsztyn and 10 in Kraków, participated in the focus group interviews.

The study was conducted in accordance with the provisions of the Code of Good Practice in Research Involving Children (Maciejewska-Mroczek et al. 2014, 1). Before the study, the participants' parents or legal guardians were informed about the purpose of the research project and asked to provide written consent for their children's participation in the focus group. The young migrants were informed about the purpose of the study, the intended use of the results, their rights, the applied research methods, the researcher's affiliations, as well as the fact that the interview would be recorded.

The study focused on the following key aspects of Ukrainian migrants' participation in social life in Poland:

⁴ Ukrainian migrants founded the "Dwa Skrzydła UA" (Two Wings UA) Foundation in Olsztyn and "Jedność" (Unity) Foundation in Kraków. These organizations launch projects and initiatives aimed at supporting Ukrainians, promoting their social adaptation, and providing them with psychological assistance and educational support. They organize cultural events and promote the development of Ukrainian culture and national identity.

- Education – what types of problems do the respondents experience in the Polish educational system? Which academic subjects present the greatest difficulty? Do they participate in extracurricular activities?
- Professional activity – are the respondents employed? If so, why did they choose work over study? In which sectors of the economy are they employed?
- Housing – are the respondents' living conditions conducive to studying? What problems are experienced by young migrants on the housing market?
- Interpersonal relationships – do the respondents maintain contact with their friends in Ukraine? Do they have Polish friends? Have they ever experienced discrimination from Poles?

This study was a pilot project, conducted with the objective to perform a preliminary assessment of the living conditions and challenges faced by young Ukrainian refugees. The present findings can be used to design a larger-scale study in other Polish towns and cities beyond Olsztyn and Kraków.

2. SELECTED RESULTS

2.1 Education

The interviewed migrants pursued different educational paths. Some of them continued their education in the Ukrainian system only (online), some were enrolled in Polish schools and universities, whereas others combined both systems. Some respondents decided not to pursue further education. Learning Polish proved challenging for Ukrainian youth interviewed in both cities.

“You understand the language, but speaking is far more difficult” (FO).⁵

“(…) It takes so much more time, which is really frustrating, because first you have to learn something in your own language, and then you have to learn it in another language and be able to understand it and write about it” (FK).

The respondents also noted that their limited language proficiency prevented them from meeting the disproportionate expectations of teachers, who required Ukrainian students to be fluent in Polish. These demands adversely impacted the respondents' academic performance and were a source of frustration.

⁵ F – female, M – male, O – Olsztyn, K – Kraków.

“(…) My grade point average is 4.5 because I get good grades in the subjects I like, but my average grade in Polish is 3 (…) since my teachers have unrealistic expectations” (FK).

Proficiency in the host country’s language undoubtedly contributes to successful social adaptation. Poor command of Polish is the main reason why some young migrants are excluded from the educational system.

“I don’t go to a Polish school, I’m enrolled in a Ukrainian online school (…) because my Polish is not very good, and reasonably priced Polish language tutors are very difficult to find” (FK).

The differences between the Polish and Ukrainian educational systems pose yet another challenge. As a result, the educational stages of students in the same age group are not always aligned. In Poland, Ukrainian students are often placed in grades below those corresponding to their age. As a result, their period of schooling is extended by one or even two years (Sternicka-Kowalska and Subocz 2025, 109-110). In Ukraine, the school-leaving examination is typically taken at the age of 17 or 18, which is due to the earlier start of schooling (at 6 years of age) and a shorter secondary school program. Polish and Ukrainian school curricula also differ considerably. The respondents commented on these discrepancies using mathematics as an example. In mathematics classes, Ukrainian students repeated the material they had already covered in their home country.

“Math was the easiest subject (…) When I started going to a Polish school, I already knew everything that was being taught” (FO).

Owing to their relatively low wages, many Ukrainian mothers have to make an extra effort to educate their children, for example, by taking on additional jobs. The respondents were aware of this fact:

“(…) My mother works very hard in Poland so that I can live and study here (…) At one point, she worked three jobs at the same time (…)” (FK).

The interviews conducted in the two cities also revealed differences in the young migrants’ participation in extracurricular activities. Young people living in Olsztyn did not have private tutors, did not take part in extracurricular activities, and were not interested in them. In contrast, respondents from Kraków not only participated in these activities but also expressed an interest in additional lessons, in particular language classes. Financial constraints were the

key barrier to attending after-school activities. Extracurricular activities are expensive, and free options are limited.

“Generally, I’d really like to take part in some kind of extracurricular activities (...) but unfortunately, I can’t find free classes or at least cheaper tutors” (FK).

“I’d like to take language classes, but they’re too expensive. The main problem is the price because I’m really motivated to learn” (FK).

The participants were aware that by studying in Poland, they would obtain a diploma that is recognized throughout the European Union, which would improve their career prospects. If young migrants were to return to Ukraine at some point, their academic achievements would also undoubtedly contribute to the country’s human resource development.

“(...) If you get a Polish diploma, you have greater opportunities in Europe. Education is important in the European Union and in Ukraine (...)” (FK).

2.2 Professional activity

Employment was one of the main spheres of activity for young Ukrainians residing in Olsztyn and Kraków. Many participants worked part-time jobs, mainly in the service sector. The respondents worked in retail, as English tutors, leaflet distributors, baristas, security guards, beauty salon consultants, and couriers. However, finding a job is not always easy because many employers are reluctant to hire minors, and the supply of jobs matching their qualifications is limited. These issues cause frustration.

“I did look for work, but I couldn’t find anything because Poles are reluctant to hire 16-year-olds. They can legally do it, but they don’t want to” (FK).

“I have professional qualifications to work in commerce, but I cannot work in my field although I’d like to; they will only hire me as a maid, a kitchen assistant or a cleaner” (FO).

Motivation for work is also an important issue in this context. For some young migrants, working is a conscious choice that is made to gain independence or pursue own dreams.

“I have been working for a long time. I want to pursue my dreams” (FO).

“I work for a living (...), to earn extra money” (FK).

In turn, other respondents had to find employment to provide financial support for their families, especially at the beginning of their stay in Poland.

“I worked as a leaflet distributor in the summer of 2022. I had to do it to help out financially at home (...)” (FK).

Although most of the surveyed subjects received financial assistance from their parents, some lived in Poland alone, without their immediate family, and had to support themselves.

“(...) I support myself, and I have to work. Rent is very expensive. I live alone, so I have to pay the full amount” (MO).

Therefore, employment plays a pivotal role in fostering independence and social integration among Ukrainian youth in Poland. However, it also exposes the structural barriers that hinder the full realization of their professional potential.

2.3 Housing

When asked about conditions for studying at home, the respondents living in Olsztyn and Kraków highlighted problems such as not having their own room or a desk.

“My mom and I live in a two-room apartment—one bedroom and a living room with a kitchenette. I use the dining table as my desk” (MO).

Some respondents from Kraków sought better study conditions outside their homes, for instance in libraries or community spaces ran by Ukrainian foundations.

‘I have moved many times since I came to Poland (...). I didn’t always have the adequate conditions for studying, but in the worst cases, if the apartment simply didn’t have a desk, I would study at the foundation (...) In other cases, when the foundation was closed, I would go to a public library instead” (FK).

In this regard, the difference between the two cities could be attributed to the greater availability of academic infrastructure in Kraków, which is one of the largest Polish cities. In turn, young Ukrainians residing in Olsztyn—a medium-sized regional capital—pointed out the low availability of spaces near their homes that were conducive to studying. In both cities, high real estate prices and rental costs posed the greatest challenge, particularly in comparison with the Ukrainian market. Housing costs constituted a significant burden for the respondents and

their families. However, these problems are equally daunting for young Poles who are planning to buy or rent an apartment.

“Apartments are very expensive, and if your parents work in Ukraine, they can’t afford to buy you a place or even pay your rent. Real estate is a business, and the wages are different in Ukraine (...) This is why we can’t study, and we have to work to make a living in Poland” (MO).

In addition to high rents and large security deposits, the respondents also pointed out formal barriers, mostly landlords’ reluctance to rent apartments to Ukrainians, particularly young people. In their opinion, landlords often expect Ukrainian tenants to pay double security deposits, present a certificate of their parents’ incomes, or sign an occasional lease agreement (a special type of a residential lease agreement), which makes renting an apartment a very difficult and costly process. Such experiences can lead to feelings of unfair treatment and increase the risk of housing exclusion.

“(...) I can’t rent an apartment because landlords think that young people can’t pay for it. (...) It makes no difference if we tell them that we are students, that our mothers help us, provide us with financial support, no one responds to that, even though the landlords’ interests are fully secured by an occasional lease agreement because they get a down payment and a security deposit. The deposit (...) is also double” (FO).

The present findings indicate that the housing problems faced by the young refugees are multifaceted, encompassing both material constraints and institutional barriers. These difficulties may have a direct impact on the social adaptation and educational opportunities of young Ukrainians in Poland.

2.4 Interpersonal relationships

The study also explored the interpersonal relationships maintained by young Ukrainian migrants. The results indicate that the respondents’ social experiences were diverse, ranging from isolation and lack of acceptance to close friendships, mutual support, and openness. The quality of social relations was influenced by the context (school, work, neighborhood) as well as the respondents’ personality traits and attitudes. Many of them declared that they had many

Polish friends and found it generally easy to build relationships in Polish schools. However, not all of the participants had positive experiences in this area.

“(…) Communication was the main problem when I started school. It wasn’t just the language; I think we have a different mentality” (FO).

Differences in mentality and attitudes toward adulthood were identified as one of the main difficulties in establishing contacts with Polish peers. In Ukraine, adolescents become independent fairly early, usually immediately after finishing school. Their parents also expect them to embrace adulthood sooner than is typical in Poland.

“Ukrainian mothers kick their children out once they finish school – it’s time to earn a living” (MO).

In Poland, the jump into adulthood is delayed by several or even more than ten years. According to Statistics Poland data (2024b), there were 1.7 million “boomerang kids” in Poland in 2022, implying that every third (33%) individual aged 25–34 lived with their parents and had not started their own family. According to the respondents, indicators of adulthood in Ukraine include a certain level of material status: owning an apartment and a car and having a paid job. Conversely, in Poland, young people aged 18–29 years are moving away from traditional indicators of adulthood, such as material possessions or economic status. These are being replaced by a definition of adulthood that includes possessing certain competencies, such as the ability to make independent decisions, life wisdom, self-sufficiency, and providing for one’s family (Wiszejko-Wierzbicka and Kwiatkowska 2018, 157–158).

“In Ukraine, you’re expected to work, have your own place, and buy a car once you turn 18, but in Poland, these expectations seem to be delayed until you’re 30–40 (…). In Ukraine, if you don’t even have a car by the time you’re 18, people think you’re kind of a loser (…). Most of us leave school at 16 or 17, and 17-year-olds are expected to cope on their own, even if they go to university (…). The mentality is clearly different” (FO).

Some respondents have maintained online contact with friends in Ukraine, whereas others claimed that many of their relationships faded over time and were eventually lost.

“I stayed in touch with my friend, but our relationship ended two weeks ago because both of us have changed. We only met once after I had left for Poland” (FO).

However, most of the participants residing in both Olsztyn and Kraków maintained contact with other Ukrainians living in Poland. Most respondents noted that they had more Ukrainian than Polish friends in Poland. In general, their relations with Poles were described as friendly or ambivalent. Experiences of unfair treatment or discrimination based on nationality were reported only sporadically. Instances of harassing behavior and anti-Ukrainian ridicule and provoking conduct in the workplace were more frequently reported by young people residing in Olsztyn.

“Older girls would sit near the door to my office, mock me, and wait for my reaction (...) I would get up and say, ‘Come on, girls, I’m trying to work here; I’m not disturbing you (...)’. They would say, ‘You think you’re so smart? (...) Then go back to your Ukraine and work there’” (FO).

Instances of verbal and physical harassment in public spaces were also reported. “My friends and I went to an Orlik sports complex to watch a football game (...) I speak Russian or Ukrainian with my friend, but I live in a housing district in Zatorze (...) They don’t like Ukrainians there (...) During the game, this dude walks up to me and says—pardon my language—‘Get the fuck out of here’ (...)” (MO).

Such incidences were reported infrequently, yet they remained vivid in the respondents’ memories, contributing to a sense of insecurity and hindering complete social integration. Shortly after the outbreak of the full-scale war in Ukraine, Poles were open and highly committed to helping refugees, as reflected by the results of a public opinion survey conducted by the Center for Public Opinion Research – CBOS (Kubiciel-Lodzińska and Kownacka 2023, 231). However, the willingness to help Ukrainians declined over time (Baszczak, Wincewicz and Zyzik 2023, 24-25). Poles’ attitudes toward Ukrainians have also changed, which did not escape the respondents’ attention.

“Some Poles are against any foreigners living in Poland. It’s the same everywhere—people don’t want foreigners taking their jobs. Polish taxpayers want their money to be spent on Poles, not Ukrainians. There are people like that in every country” (MO).

It should be noted, however, that instances of verbal discrimination against Ukrainians were not reported repeatedly. One of the respondents observed that “most Poles have a positive

attitude toward Ukrainians” (FO). In their opinion, young Poles are more tolerant and open to foreigners than members of the older generation.

CONCLUSIONS

In the educational context, the language barrier represented the greatest challenge for the surveyed Ukrainian youth. This observation was shared by respondents from both cities where the focus group interviews were conducted. The participants from the two focus groups differed mainly in their educational aspirations. The strategies adopted by respondents from Olsztyn were primarily based on survival and pragmatism (no after-school tutors, the need to enter the labor market quickly). In turn, despite financial problems, Ukrainian youth residing in Kraków were more oriented toward personal development (plans to pursue university education, learn languages, willingness to participate in extracurricular activities). The respondents also noted that their limited language proficiency prevented them from meeting the disproportionate expectations of teachers, who required Ukrainian students to be fluent in Polish. These demands adversely impacted the respondents’ academic performance and were a source of frustration.

In the areas of employment and housing, the surveyed Ukrainians reported challenges that are commonly experienced by young people during the transition to adulthood and independent living. The main problems included employers’ reluctance to hire minors, lack of job opportunities matching the candidates’ qualifications, high housing prices and rental costs. These factors were an additional source of dissatisfaction among the surveyed youth. For some respondents, employment was a personal choice that enabled them to achieve financial independence and pursue their dreams. Some young people had to work to provide financial support for their families, whereas others lived alone in Poland and had to support themselves.

As regards interpersonal relationships, many respondents reported having Polish friends. Differences in mentality were identified as one of the obstacles to establishing contacts. Young Ukrainians tend to become independent relatively early, whereas among Poles, the transition to adulthood is delayed by more than ten years. Respondents residing in both Olsztyn and Kraków maintained contact with other Ukrainians living in Poland. Existing friendships

and relationships with peers in Ukraine tended to fade over time. Experiences of unfair treatment or discrimination based on nationality were reported only sporadically. Such incidents, including mocking, ridicule, and provoking conduct in the workplace as well as verbal and physical harassment in public spaces, were more frequently indicated by young people from Olsztyn.

The authors are aware of the limitations of this pilot study, resulting from its relatively small sample size. Nevertheless, the present findings can serve as a basis for planning a similar, larger-scale study in other Polish towns and cities, with the aim of further exploring the discussed issues and drawing comparisons.

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