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The Challenges of Ukrainian Refugee Educators Abroad: Survey Results Based on the Example of Poland

Abstract

Abstract The study presents the results of the online case study of Ukrainian refugee educators who were forced to move to Poland. The study aimed to investigate problems encountered by refugee educators and find possible options for supporting them and their professional activities per the interests expressed during the survey in the context of lifelong learning. The conceptual background of the research problem was based on the theory of adult education and the recent international strategies. The research sample consisted of 124 refugee educators aged 35–55+ years who have the potential to work by the obtained speciality. Data were collected using a Google Forms questionnaire; qualitative research methods were used. The results allowed for formulating conclusions and perspectives on the educators' professional development and support.

Keywords: *refugee educators, survey, adult education, Ukraine, Poland*

Introduction

The military actions associated with Russia's invasion of Ukraine forced many citizens to leave their places of permanent residence. Among the refugees, a part are pedagogical workers and their families who left Ukraine in 2022 and 2023. Here, Ukrainian teachers faced the problems of employment and getting any job, as well as the problems that arose before them due to their lack of knowledge of the language and culture of the host country. It should also be noted that due to

the short stay of Ukrainian educational refugees in Poland, there is not enough research to date, so obtaining any data is valuable for Ukrainian and foreign researchers, which can help find appropriate solutions in Poland and Ukraine. This situation made it necessary to conduct a case study in the form of an online survey, which helped to identify problems and outline proposals for their solution. The scientific significance of the research lies in highlighting the problems encountered by refugee educators and finding possible options for supporting them and their professional activities following the interests expressed during the survey in the context of lifelong learning. Therefore, when conducting research, the authors relied on the theory of adult education to determine the directions of professional development, particularly when formulating the questions of the online questionnaire regarding the need for professional development, methods and concept of teaching (Marx et al., 2022). When determining the part devoted to stress resistance and the psychological state of educators, the fact that the teaching profession is the most stressful was considered (Boyle et al., 1995, pp. 49–67).

Research Context

This study aims to analyse the data from the online questionnaire devoted to the problems of refugee educators in Poland after they leave Ukraine due to the Russian aggression in 2022. According to various sources, 15 million Ukrainians were forced to leave their homes (which is approximately 34% of the total number of citizens of the country). In response to these processes, the EU Council Decision of March 4, 2022 activated Directive 2001/55/EC (EUR-LEX – 32022D0382 – EN – EUR-LEX, n.d.) on providing temporary protection for Ukrainians. According to this directive, the beneficiaries of temporary protection received the right to access the labour market in the EU countries, to professional education and training. A significant part of Ukrainian citizens and educators are in Poland today. According to the Polish publication RMF FM, in the period from February 24, 2022 to July 2, 2023, almost 12.5 million citizens of Ukraine crossed the Ukrainian-Polish border, some of whom left, returned home or moved to other countries. According to the information of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Administration, there are currently more than 1.2 million citizens of Ukraine in the country (Fm, 2023, July 9).

Considering different factors that have influenced on the educators' escape abroad, their psychological state, and enrolment to work, it is possible to find options and solutions for supporting them and their professional activities in

accordance with the interests and needs expressed during the survey 2023 in the context of lifelong learning.

Research Methodology

A qualitative descriptive and explanatory descriptive design (Lincoln & Danzin, 2017, pp. 1–123) has been created to find out the needs of Ukrainian refugee educators, their problems and psychological intentions, motivation for professional development as well as educators' opinions about the good practices that can be applied from Poland education system to Ukrainian school education. This type of statistical analysis allows for generalising the results and better understanding the phenomena.

Respondents' Characteristics

In this study, a random non-representative sample was used: teachers, methodologists, school psychologists, social pedagogues, teacher assistants, and school administrators; a total of 124 respondents. More than half of the respondents are teachers (56.1%). The rest belong to the mentioned other categories in an approximately equal percentage. Among the participants, 45 (36.3%) aged between 36–45 years; 29 (23.4%) aged between 46–55 years; 26 (21%) aged between 31–45 years; 12 aged between 25–30 years (9.7%) and 12 aged 55+ years (9.7%). All respondents were females (this is explained by the fact that the greatest number of adult refugees from Ukraine in 2022–2023 (the able-bodied people) are women with their children. Furthermore, 59.7% of the respondents have a Bachelor's degree compared to 32.3% who have a Master's degree and 8.5 who have a PhD.

Data Collection and Analysis Procedure

The authors conducted a qualitative study based on the responses to the online questionnaire. The questionnaire is based on the review of scientific literature and similar studies conducted in Ukraine and other countries, in particular, devoted to the studies on the teachers' attitudes towards quality management and online education (Tzafilkou et al., 2022), teachers' perceptions of their career experiences and job satisfaction (Torres, 2019). Several studies are devoted to the state and atti-

tude of Ukrainian teachers toward the difficulties of distance education during the COVID-19 quarantine (Ovcharuk & Ivaniuk, 2022). Thus, two types of questions were composed: closed and open-ended. The survey was conducted using Google Forms, and respondents were asked to answer anonymously. The questionnaire included a total of 25 questions:

- 3 dichotomous questions (yes or no);
- 15 questions that require multiple-choice answers;
- 7 open-ended questions.

The research sample was randomly selected by the following steps: 1) defining the population (in our case, these are teachers, school psychologists, and other educational workers (teacher assistants, trainers); it was decided to involve a medium number of respondents by randomly e-mailing, posting on the FB page and other social networks; 3) collecting data from respondents from May 20 to June 15, 2023.

Therefore, the target groups of the study are: teachers of general secondary education institutions, pedagogical workers, practical psychologists and social pedagogues, teachers of higher pedagogical education institutions, methodologists and employees of post-graduate pedagogical education institutes, and other interested persons.

The different types of visual representation of the obtained results are used: diagrams, graphs, and a word cloud presented in tables and figures.

Results

During the online survey, an important question for the respondents was their status in the host country (Poland). Among those surveyed, 86.2% have a temporary shelter; have a residence permit – 6.5%; status not determined – 7.3% (Fig. 1). Under Directive 2001/55/EU, received the right to reside in the country within the framework of temporary protection; access to work, access to housing; medical assistance; social assistance and access to education for children and adolescents (EUR-LEX – 32001L0055 – EN – EUR-LEX, n.d.).

According to Polish sociologists from the University of Warsaw, who surveyed refugees from Ukraine at the end of March – beginning of April 2022, every third respondent was oriented towards a long-term stay in Poland (EWL Group, 2023). During the case survey within the framework of this study, it was found that approximately the same number of interviewees intend to return home (42.3%), have not yet decided on this issue (44.7%), and 13% reported that they

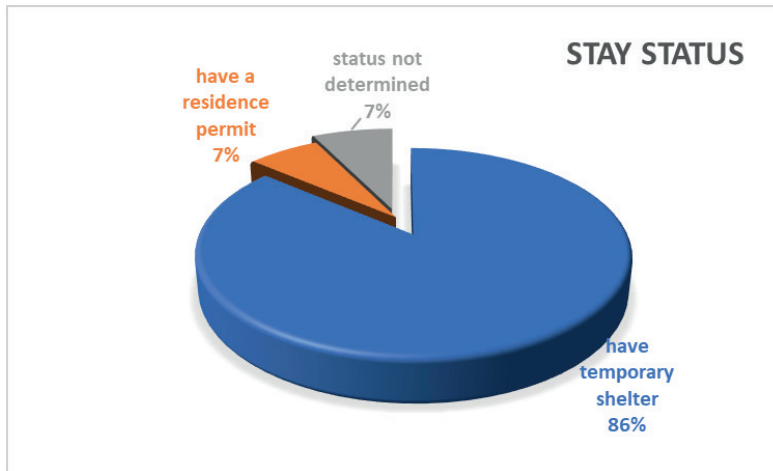


Figure 1. Stay status of Ukrainian refugee educators

are not going to return to Ukraine. Such answers may partially indicate that many respondents are unsure of their own future and cannot plan it for themselves and their families.

To the question “Are you ready to change the direction of your previous professional activity?” such willingness was expressed by 51.2%; another 15.4% stated that they were forced to do so, while 32.5% of respondents gave a negative answer. There is a catastrophic shortage of teachers in Poland, but Ukrainian teachers who do not know the language can only count on the work of an assistant.

The majority of Ukrainian teachers who are currently in Poland also work. So, to the question, “do you have a job in the country of your stay?” 92.7% of people gave a positive answer. To clarify whether the respondents work in Poland by profession, it was found that 56.5% work, no – 41.1% study, get a new speciality – 2.4%. It was also important to find out how long the interviewees had been looking for work abroad. The following answers were received: started working immediately after moving – 94.9%; after ceasing to receive financial assistance from the Polish government – 5.1%.

The Polish government aims to help Ukrainians better integrate into the local labour market, work in professions that require high qualifications and meet the requirements of employers. It applies, in particular, to the education system. That’s why it was important to find out how difficult it was for the respondents to confirm their speciality and legalise their diplomas. Analysis of answers to the question

“Have you tried to legalise your diploma?” showed that most Ukrainian teachers have a biased attitude towards this procedure, and therefore, the vast majority (66.7%) did not even try to do it. While 10.6% tried to legalise their diploma, they did not succeed, and 14.6% said they did not need it.

An important part of the research was finding out the needs of educators in Poland. It was found that most respondents need to acquire new knowledge. Approximately one-fifth of respondents have this need in part, although some indicated the absence of such a need. Analysis of answers to the question “Do you use the educational opportunities provided by your host country?” showed that the respondents actively seek to improve their professional level. The respondents indicated that they attend courses/studies based on their interests, master a new profession, learn a language at the workplace, study post-graduate studies and only plan to participate in attending various courses and implement other opportunities provided by the host country (Fig. 2).

Respondents were asked how much time they were willing to use for training. Yes, 28.5% are willing to spend 1–2 hours; 2–4 hours – 38.2%; 4–6 hours – 28.5%. Respondents also indicated another (quotation without changes): “as much as needed; I am learning a language; I study at a vocational school; I was looking for work from the beginning of my stay in Poland, I found it six months later, I was in despair...; physical work for 12–14 hours is impossible for me”.

The answers to the question “What can motivate you to be included in the learning process?” showed that the majority of respondents are motivated by the possibility of professional development – 33.1%; need for employment – 31.5%; acquisition of new knowledge, skills – 27.4%; satisfaction of personal interests – 4%; training to facilitate adaptation – 7.3%; material independence – 0.8%.

To the question “Which seminars or courses are interesting for you?” the following answers were received: respondents are most interested in language courses (44.7%) and teaching methods (30.1%). 10.6% of respondents are interested in computer courses, and 6.5% in the use of ICT. 7.3% of respondents indicated they are interested in civic education and human rights; 2.4% are interested in volunteering. Among other things, the respondents pointed to everything that allows you to get a job (0.8%), everything related to psychology, and music therapy (0.8%).

One of the questions concerned, “What kind of help do you need?”. Most respondents need assistance in adapting to the new requirements of the labour market (49.6%). They also indicated they need informational assistance (39%); and psychological support (10.6%). Among other needs, the following was indicated:

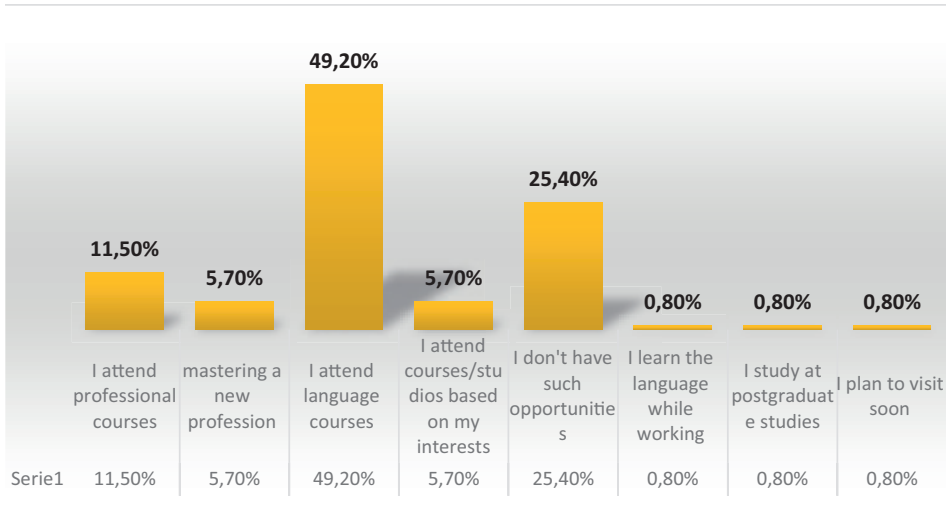


Figure 2. Distribution of respondents' answers regarding the use of opportunities provided by the host country

additional work, employment in a bank and office, where there are prospects for professional growth, medical assistance, and return home.

As revealed during the survey, only 10.6% of the respondents choosing the answer options indicated that, among other types, they need psychological help. But, being aware of the complexity of the respondents' conditions, we separately asked whether they needed psychological help. 22.8% answered "yes" to this question; no – 46.3%; did not think about it – 30.9%.

Concerning the topics of psychological seminars that would help overcome psychological discomfort, it was found that among the most popular topics are: increasing the effectiveness of parent-child relationships (25.4%), forming a positive life position (23.8%); overcoming stress (17.2%), effective communication (16.4%), psycho-corrective training (8.2%) and family therapy training (8.2%). Some respondents also indicated a topic related to the host country's history, culture, tradition, mother-child relations, etc. (Fig. 3).

Separately, they asked what exactly the needs teachers have today. It was found that 51.2% have access to information about institutions and organisations that provide educational services to immigrants, and 48.8% do not have such access.

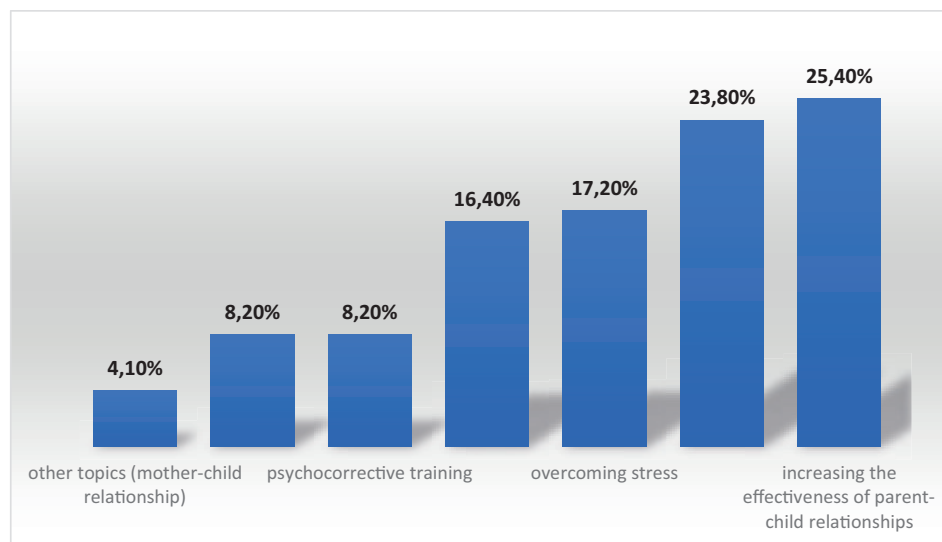


Figure 3. Distribution of answers regarding popular topics of psychological seminars. Source: own elaboration

There are various reasons for this situation. First of all, not knowing the language of the host country.

Respondents' answers to the open question, "What kind of educational experience would you suggest to implement in the Ukrainian education system from what you/your children have used?" proved valuable for further understanding and preparation of recommendations. In total, more than 80 points of view were submitted by the respondents.

Educators focused on new teaching methods in the classroom, master classes and various extracurricular activities for children, evaluation system and conflict-free communication, work of psychologists and teacher assistants, and creating a safe and friendly environment for children and teachers. For clarity of the most significant concepts expressed by educators in open-ended questions, we present a cloud of words that allowed us to visualise the totality of respondents' statements (Fig. 4).

n.d.). In Poland, the University of Warsaw conducts a project for Ukrainians to provide them with the skills necessary for integration into Polish society. This project proposes free learning of Polish and other languages, seminars on career planning and professional activation, computer classes, psychological and other individual consultations for adults and students (Wydział Nauk Ekonomicznych, n.d.).

When determining the part devoted to stress resistance and the psychological state of respondents, among the popular topics of psychological seminars, 25.4% of educators indicated the need to increase the effectiveness of parent-child relationships, 23.8% stressed forming a positive life position, 17.2% indicated the need of overcoming stress, and 16.4% need to learn more about the effective communication (Fig. 3). Many studies indicate the need to overcome the stresses that have arisen in accordance with the degree of job satisfaction and career commitment among educators (Boyle et al., 1995, pp. 49–67). Some studies are focused on the various psychological interventions to address stress and burnout among teachers and propose suitable interventions to improve teachers' stress-coping ability, reduce the likelihood of burnout and improve general well-being (Agyapong et al., 2023, pp. 3–6).

Despite recent studies on the stay of pupils and students of refugees from Ukraine abroad, the issue of the needs of Ukrainian educators is, unfortunately, beyond the scope of thorough research (Cedos, n.d.). By carrying out this online case study, the authors hope for the importance of the raised topic, which confirms the support programmes for refugees to help find a job and improve the qualifications of these specialists in the EU and Poland in particular (Educational Staff, n.d.), (Ukrainian Refugees' Pathways to Inclusion in Education: Insights from Host Countries, 2023). Setting before themselves the task of defining the problems of Ukrainian teachers who have found themselves abroad, the authors hope for attention to this direction in the scientific environment, and the conclusions presented below will outline the prospects for further research.

Conclusions

The answers received from Ukrainian educators made it possible to draw conclusions and outline recommendations for their further professional development and support.

The Republic of Poland received the largest number of Ukrainian citizens looking for a safe place to live. Among the forced refugees from the war, a fairly high

percentage are teachers (in February 2023, 12.5 thousand teachers were abroad, Ministry of Education and Culture of Ukraine).

Educators who arrived in Poland faced the need to find work, place their children in educational institutions, and find housing. Some of the teachers in Poland continued to work remotely, held classes and consultations with students and parents. Later, these specialists found themselves without a job in Ukraine because, at the end of 2023, teachers and lecturers were partially prohibited from working remotely and forced to look for work in the host country.

The main number of teachers under temporary shelter do not speak the host countries' languages and cannot confirm their qualifications. In addition, educators, like other citizens, are in stressful situations and need psychological support. Some educators have made decisions about changing professions or areas of professional activity.

The main barrier to getting a job in their speciality was ignorance or a low level of the language of the host country and a complex process of "nostrification" (confirmation) of higher education diplomas, which prompted them to actively start learning the language, as well as attend various courses to increase their chances of finding a job.

The stay in the Republic of Poland and inclusion (active or passive) in the educational process of the country allowed Ukrainian educators to acquire certain experience, which, in their opinion, is worth using in Ukraine.

The presented qualitative study is only the first stage of the set of research steps planned for the future. At the second stage, it is planned to quantitatively expand the target audience, conduct an in-depth qualitative analysis of the obtained results, and survey focus groups considering professional specialisation (teacher, secondary education teacher, educator, etc.).

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