

Integrating when on the move? Ukrainian refugee women's subjective perspectives on settlement in Berlin and Munich

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As of June 2023, nearly eight million Ukrainians have fled abroad as a result of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine (UNHCR, 2023). Yet, according to the IOM (2023), around one million of them have since returned to Ukraine and even more have expressed a desire to return to their homeland. The uncertainty about the duration and scope of the ongoing conflict, the ability and legal right to travel back and forth, imaginaries of possible return and digital strategies of maintaining social and economic ties with Ukraine, along with the everyday struggles of settling in a foreign country leave many Ukrainian forced migrants unsure whether to stay abroad or return to Ukraine.

In this paper, we explore how local integration processes of refugees are entangled with their im/mobilities. More specifically, we study how Ukrainian refugee women in Berlin and Munich perceive their integration pathways in light of 1.) existing, often state-funded integration opportunity structures, like social benefits, schooling and childcare, access to local housing and labour market; 2.) their geographical im/mobilities and future considerations surrounding them, and 3.) transnational living and family arrangements. The paper draws on 40 semi-structured interviews from a semi-longitudinal qualitative panel study with 10 Ukrainian refugee women in their respective context of settlement which were conducted between September 2022 and February 2023.

By engaging with this question, the paper contributes to the empirical knowledge on integration processes of Ukrainian refugees in Germany. It, moreover, adds to conceptual discussions on the tensions between integration, im/mobilities and transnationalism.

PRELIMINARY FINDINGS:

Specific context of integration (TPD, geographical proximity and mobility, uncertainty/nature of the war, local realities in reception context, ...), in which individuals

- Simultaneously live here and there (two-tier lives)
 - Create specific imaginaries of settlement and return
 - Negotiate transnational ties and uncertainty around space/ status/ time
 - Navigate bureaucracy and relations with host state institutions
- Converging positions between those wanting to stay or to return over time
- ❖ Ambivalence regarding stay and return (inconsistent, contradictory statements, shaped by interplay of un/anchoring factors, individual and family needs)
 - ❖ Emerging idea of a transnational way of life (transnational social fields)
 - ❖ Non-linear adaptation strategies, plentitude of options and varying perceptions of agency

OPEN QUESTIONS:

- Role of support structures in more or less successful „integration pathways“?
- Adaptability of state institutions to newly arrived group with specific needs – flexible integration policies? Testing ground for other labour market integration models?