

## PARENTAL UNCERTAINTY IN PLANS AND EDUCATION OF UKRAINIAN REFUGEE CHILDREN IN EUROPEAN COUNTRIES: A PILOT STUDY INTRODUCTION

**Ganna Chovpan**

*The aim of this article is to better understand parents' decisions regarding their children's education in the face of uncertainty in plans. The focus of this paper is twofold. First, the author shows how, even with sufficiently favorable mechanisms for integration into the host society, immediate protection status, and substantial material support, uncertainty affect the experience of refugee parents with temporary protection status. The author also wants to show how, at a time of the greatest uncertainty in the plans of refugee parents, distance education makes its own special and distinct contribution to the educational strategy. The survey was completely anonymous, with 160 respondents, 65 of whom currently reside in Germany, 61 in Poland as well as 34 in the UK. The pilot study involved parents from three countries – Poland, Germany and the United Kingdom. These are the countries that have received the most significant number of Ukrainian refugees. It was concluded that the desire to complete all possible strategies in the education of their children is highest among those who are in a state of greatest uncertainty. Such parents tend to continue educating their children remotely in Ukraine and in local schools in parallel. This strategy creates an unnecessary burden on children and possibly worsens their adaptation in local schools, but in the parents' opinion, it insures children from possible gaps in their education. It is necessary to develop more flexible criteria for different groups of refugee children, depending on their age and their parents' plans to return home*

**Keywords:** Ukrainian refugees, children, schoolchildren, education, uncertainty, distance learning, online learning, welcome classes, temporary asylum status, education quality monitoring

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### 1. Introduction

Refugee crises are a major issue in the modern world. The Yugoslav crisis, the Syrian crisis, and now the Ukrainian crisis have become major challenges for host countries since the beginning of the 21st century. In recent years, Europe has faced the most significant wave of migration since the end of World War II. The surge in asylum applications in the European Union is believed to be at a historic peak, with around 1.3 million applications in 2015, almost double the number in 2014, during the European refugee crisis. Between 2015 and 2019, there were approximately 4.46 million asylum applications in the EU [1]. As of January 1, 2023, approximately 8 million people have left the borders of Ukraine, and with the war still ongoing, the number of Ukrainian refugees has surpassed this maximum number. According to the UN [2], half of the people fleeing the war are children. This means that ensuring children's right to education is one of the main tasks of host countries, in addition to providing security and basic necessities.

Some countries opt for immediate integration of Ukrainian children into regular classes (Poland, Czech

Republic and Slovakia), while others, such as Germany, France and Belgium, keep them in reception classes for months or even years to learn the language. Obviously, the difficulties and risks of adjustment will vary with different approaches. However, another significant factor, temporality and uncertainty, as applied to the education of Ukrainian children, requires special attention.

Migration processes and adaptation of students is not a new topic and has been well studied. The main and most significant problem for these children is the lack of language skills, which creates conditions for the deterioration of school performance, as well as isolation and retardation in the creation of social ties and contacts [3, 4]. The main reason for migrants to leave their home country is the economic basis [5]. As a rule, migrants can return home if necessary. Their children can learn the language before they move. In the case of refugees, parents leaving the country did not have the opportunity to prepare for the coming hostilities in advance, to learn the language of the host country in advance, to help their children learn the language of the host country, and as a rule, the first months and even years are forced to deal more

with issues of priority life support [4]. Refugee parents usually understand the importance of education for their children [5]. However, they need to choose a strategy that takes into account several options for the development of events at the same time. No one can say how much time will be spent in the host country and when it will be possible to return home. Moreover, how likely is the possibility of staying in the host country for an extended period of time after the war ends, if desired? Contrary to all practical experience, many countries still assume that migrants stay only temporarily [6]. According to the UN, however, up to 40 percent of refugees remain in their host countries for a long time [1]. This whole set of circumstances, namely the unclear possibility and conditions of returning home, as well as the uncertain prospects of staying or settling in the host country, is precisely the factor that creates a sense of permanent temporality. When refugees live in conditions of permanent temporality, they "calculate their likely gains and losses from action or inaction" and "their approaches are often tactical in nature, which allows them to abandon their obligations without regret and seize new opportunities" [7]. In the context of refugee children, the study of refugee educational attainment has shown that even in cases where exile is prolonged and refugees are "integrated" into the national system, they usually seek an education that can help their children after leaving the host country due to an uncertain future [8]. It can be argued that, in the case of Ukraine, European countries have chosen a double-choice strategy, i.e. the system of receiving Ukrainians is designed both for their ability to return home and for their possible desire to stay and live in the host country [9]. In any case, language courses were organized for Ukrainian refugees, and in the vast majority of countries temporary asylum was granted immediately and for up to two years; temporary asylum immediately guaranteed the right to work. The concept of temporary protection for Ukrainians even allows them to change their country of protection and return home for a while if they want or need to. Nevertheless, the refugee concept implies uncertainty in planning, as many families have husbands and elderly relatives back home, as in Ukraine men up to 60 years old are not allowed to leave the country during the war. Families with children may seek to return home (temporarily or permanently) to be reunited with family when there is a lull in the fighting in one part of the country or another, but they cannot be entirely sure that this is at least safe and feasible.

What the author means is that even this generally supportive concept, compared to other waves of refugees, offers a variety of choices regarding their future, but the consequences of each action cannot be calculated with an acceptable probability, placing an additional psychological burden on people who have already experienced severe psychological trauma as refugees. Naturally, the factor of temporality affects the psychological state of refugees, increasing anxiety and the likelihood of depression [10]. However, as the author has already mentioned, almost half of the refugees who left Ukraine are children. A significant proportion of them are of school age. This adds uncertainty to parents' intentions, as these plans must also take into account the interests of children. It forces them to look for strategies that will be most beneficial to their children in the event of one or another pos-

sible outcome. In the case of a possible return from the host country, it is necessary to look for a suitable development vector for them both in the case of a longer stay in the host country and in the case of a return to their homeland. This means actively studying the language and mother language of the new country at the same time. To follow as much as possible the educational program of the new country and to learn the program of one's own country. The situation with the Ukrainian war is unique because the Ukrainian school continues to operate remotely despite shelling and ongoing attacks on the power grid. Compared to Pakistan and Syria (where a large number of refugees have fled in the last decade), which are not countries with a high level of education, Ukrainian education is considered to be of sufficient quality [6] and offers Ukrainian children the opportunity to continue their studies online anywhere in the world. The Ukrainian online school continues to function despite shelling, power outages, and communication problems even during the hard times in the winter of 2022 [6]. This phenomenon in the context of insecurity serves as the object of study in this paper.

For those refugees who want to (and presumably can) stay in their chosen host country, the actions of their parents must be more or less certain, although uncertainty is also sufficiently characteristic of such a group. In Poland, for example, even before the war began, there were many Ukrainian migrants and a fairly strong diaspora with relatively easy opportunities to obtain residence permits [9]. Therefore, the refugees who are now in Poland are well aware of how to stay in Poland permanently. And they take quite specific measures to adapt their children in schools, for example, their children are taught Polish in an accelerated way. But what about those who have not yet decided on their plans or are not sure about the possibility of staying in the host country? Let us also assume that, as a consequence, this category of children should have a low level of progress in language learning. This is because parents may be wasting time waiting to return home. Uncertainty will encourage parents to continue their children's education in Ukrainian schools in parallel with their enrollment in local schools. Distance learning in Ukraine provides an opportunity to communicate with classmates, follow the Ukrainian curriculum, participate in subject Olympiads, study academic material in their native language, and continue learning the language and history. In addition, they can become literate in Ukrainian or earn a secondary school diploma. The opportunity to study in the host country's schools allows them to master the host country's language, communicate with their peers, integrate into the local community, and bring balance to their lives.

## 2. Literature review

### 2. 1. What is uncertainty and how it affects refugee parents' decision making?

*Uncertainty* is a state, caused by the general unpredictability of life and what the future holds. Uncertainty points to the recognition and awareness that change can happen and things can get better or worse for both the future of individuals and their children [11, 12]. Most migrants face high uncertainty: leaving a familiar place

generates economic, social, linguistic, and sometimes even physical uncertainty [13]. This is especially true for refugees and forced migration, as it is often a more or less unplanned response to deteriorating circumstances and/or severe threats to human security. Refugees awaiting temporary asylum status may be on hold for months or years. All this time, they may be in poor housing and material conditions, they often live without access to medicine and to the labor market. Their children cannot attend school, and the overall picture of permanent temporality can seem bleak [14]. Uncertainty in migration has two sources: imperfect knowledge of the new environment and unpredictability of the future [14]. From a theoretical perspective, the uncertainty, faced by refugees, can reach a level where they are forced to lead a "bare life", their mere physical existence, since in some situations, it is not even clear whether they will enjoy the most basic rights [10]. Individuals, detained in so-called European "hot spots" in Greece, for example, are denied access to legal remedies in their situation, they cannot move forward or backward, and their individual and collective futures are extremely uncertain, with no way to influence them [10]. Furthermore, the protracted refugee situation in Turkey (many of whom may wait eight years to be interviewed for refugee status determination), as well as the multiple interviews and documentation requirements, through which a displaced person applies for refugee status and resettlement in a third country, become sites of permanent trauma for the refugee subject [15]. However, even with temporary protection status, plans for the future can remain vague; the psychological trauma received does not allow for meaningful integration plans; often, refugees are simply in a state of constant waiting without any definite plans. Although most destination countries expect temporary migrants to return home, some temporary migrations will likely become permanent if migrants decide they would like to stay longer or indefinitely for various reasons [16]. Factors related to the decision of temporary migrants to become permanent residents or not have also been a focus of research in recent years, e.g. [16]. In fact, the farther refugees are from their home country, the longer they stay there, and the more family members they have with them, the more likely it is that temporary stays will become permanent [17]. Numerous academic publications have described uncertainty in the context of its impact on the psychological and physical health of refugees. The relationship between state policies of uncertain waiting and the health of asylum seekers is supported empirically [18, 19]. The data show a significant negative relationship between long periods of uncertain waiting, caused by long asylum processes in the UK, and health. Nevertheless, uncertainty generates different consequences, not necessarily negative ones. It can be a negative phenomenon, forcing refugees to live passively in despair, a long wait, or a stimulus. On the one hand, dependence on external circumstances generates passivity and waiting since there is little to influence their final decision. On the other hand, uncertainty creates space for both hope and social change [10, 20].

Personal psychology also influences integration processes; educational attainment and cognitive skills can play a significant role, as especially pointed out by Hahn, E., and all [4]. In this sense, the self-selection

factor of Ukrainian refugees and their socio-economic profile is also quite remarkable, as most Ukrainian applicants for asylum have a university degree [9].

Most of the research that has been conducted has focused on adult refugees. However, we focus on refugee parents on whom children depend and how this uncertainty affects educational strategies. Conflict and refugee displacement have become increasingly protracted, requiring a rethinking of refugee education as a long-term project related to the idea of return and the permanent nature of staying in the host country. Schools are a stabilizing factor in the unsettled lives of refugee students [21]. They provide a safe space for new encounters, interactions, and learning opportunities. They also provide literacy, which is the key to academic success, post-secondary educational opportunities, life choices, community involvement, and settling in [22]. Being able to fully integrate into a new society is a goal of host countries. One of the most critical factors determining the successful integration of children in schools is mastering the host language [23]. Furthermore, it is the factor of certainty or predictability in plans that have a hindering or accelerating role in this process [24]. It is shown, for example in [5], that the main obstacle to the integration of Syrian children into the educational space of Turkey was precisely the language barrier and the need for certainty in plans for the future. When the level of uncertainty among Syrian children in Turkey began to decrease, parents began to pay more attention to their children learning Turkish; parents became less concerned about their children not knowing Arabic, interviewees with concrete plans for the future did not mention Turkish as a barrier to their children's education. Thus, the issue of certainty provoked the speed of integration processes in children. The author can expect that the same processes of adaptation depending on the state of uncertainty in parents' plans will occur in Ukrainian children as well.

Let us imagine someone who came to a particular country and was even granted temporary protection status there. This status is given for a certain limited period of time. During all this time, the parents undergo economic, psychological, and other adaptations. And all this time they are in a state of uncertainty, not knowing how long they will stay in the host country. Let us assume that at the time of the move, the person has set a goal to stay in the host country, and there are specific reasons for this and, in his/her opinion, the probability of this is relatively high, such as finding a job, language skills, clear conditions for obtaining a permanent residence permit. In this case, the person actively integrates into the environment and actively integrates his/her children there. He/she no longer behaves as a refugee but instead as a migrant. That is, the certainty of plans stabilizes the psychological state of parents but also affects their behavior regarding their children's education. If, however, parents have plans to return or are still undecided about plans, they may for some time seek to fill in various strategies in their children's education or simply do nothing. As for the Ukrainian refugee crisis, it seems interesting to trace the patterns of support, provided to children at moments of the highest uncertainty in plans, considering the opportunity to study online.

## 2. 2. Condition of Ukrainian refugee children in European schools

According to UNICEF, about 50 percent of the eight million Ukrainians who have crossed the border into the European Union since the war began have been children [1]. Ukrainian parents were given the right to enroll their child in a school in a country of temporary asylum. The temporary asylum status for Ukrainians has also been automatically extended until at least March 2024, according to the EU directive [25, 26]; that is, it is valid for two years (even up to three years in the UK). Thus, the first premise for this study arises. Ukrainian parents, if desired, can stay in the host country for up to two years. In general, the severity of the situation of uncertainty and the suffering, associated with it, were usually caused by the long wait for temporary protection status, the difficult material conditions it entailed, living in camps, the lack of the right to work and the inability to assess the possibility of remaining in the host country and, consequently, to make plans for their children. Temporary protection status for Ukrainians fleeing the war was granted immediately. In addition, Ukrainians received substantial material support, access to medical care, the right to work, substantial allowances for themselves and their children in many countries, integration courses, and other social support. At some points, the gravity of uncertainty has been mitigated. In some other moments, it is simply impossible to avoid. It is necessary to trace how uncertainty will influence the educational strategy of parents, taking into account the sufficiently developed Ukrainian educational system and modern information technologies. The question is what will happen after these two years, or if the parents have short-term plans for the host country. At the start of the 2022–2023 school year, about 2.25 million children were enrolled in schools, according to UNICEF [26, 27]. Despite the unprecedented pressure on local schools, the state of uncertainty about the number of students who may appear in schools, the lack of teachers who can master the methodology of teaching a language as a foreign language, the majority of children were successfully enrolled in schools and continued their studies. The approach to the integration of children was different. In countries with linguistic proximity, children were immediately enrolled in regular classes. In other cases, children were mostly enrolled in welcome classes, where they learned only the host country's language during the first year. That is, the situation looks somewhat optimistic or at least not catastrophically. The most significant problem for Ukrainian children is a lack of knowledge of the local language [6]. It should also be noted that in European schools there is an obligation to educate children in schools until they reach 15–16 years of age, but in some countries (Poland, Montenegro, Bulgaria) it is possible to choose between distance education in Ukraine and local schools. For example, in Poland [28] about half of the students are enrolled in local schools. In the Czech Republic their number depends on the age of the children, and the overwhelming majority of children of primary school age attend school. On the contrary, in half of the cases high school students are not enrolled in local schools [29]. In Bulgaria, only a handful of parents enrolled their children in local schools [29]. In Germany,

children are required to attend local schools [6], and the same obligation applies to parents in Belgium, the Netherlands, France, Spain, and the United Kingdom [26, 27].

## 2. 3. Ukrainian parents' plans during the first months of the war

The experience of previous refugee crises in Europe and, in general, in the most developed countries shows that some of those who flee the war remain in the host countries permanently [30]. However, the full integration is more likely when entire families flee, as in this case the refugees are mostly women with children, many of whom have left their husbands in Ukraine. The decision to return becomes more likely the shorter the time spent abroad, the closer the host country, and the smaller the difference between the welfare systems and, more generally, the quality of life in the source and host countries. When conflicts drag on for years, families with children, educated in host countries, are the least likely to return [30].

As for the certainty of the Ukrainians' plans to stay in the host countries, the IFO Institute in Munich examines in detail the issues of economic migration and the plans of Ukrainians for their further stay in Germany. Throughout 2022, they repeatedly published large-scale surveys, which examined in sufficient detail the issues of the level of education, gender composition of the remaining Ukrainians, and their plans for the future. The latest IFO survey, conducted in October 2022, showed that the number of those who intend to stay in Germany has begun to grow. If in June there were 43 % of those who planned to stay in Germany for at least two years [31], by October the percentage had risen to 63 % [32].

"This is the general portrait of Ukrainian refugees in Germany: young, educated and willing to return to their homeland". The results of the first representative survey, conducted by three German sociological institutes in cooperation with the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees, show that 30 % intend to return to Ukraine after the end of the war, while 25 % want to remain in Germany. The authors of the study presented their data at a press conference in Berlin [33], where the living conditions of Ukrainians who fled the war in their homeland were discussed. One of the most recent was a study by the IFO Institute in Munich [32], which points to several types of adaptation and integration strategies for adult refugees from Ukraine. The authors point to six strategies, from a simple temporary stay in Germany due to the danger of being in Ukraine with no desire to integrate, to a clear and steady desire to return home as soon as possible, to a certain desire to stay in Germany, get a job, and fully integrate. These different groups of people will have different attitudes toward learning a language and finding a job. Therefore, the authors suggest that differentiated social assistance packages should be applied to different groups of refugees. Different categories of people are supposed to have different attitudes towards their own integration, employment, and language learning, and thus different attitudes towards their children's education in European schools.

As far as the United Kingdom is concerned, there is also evidence that Ukrainians are beginning to find

work and are demonstrating a desire to stay for at least the next two years. *The Guardian* conducted a large-scale survey of Ukrainian refugees and reported that half of the Ukrainians surveyed plan to stay in the UK for three years or more. 56 % of respondents claimed to be working, up from 19 % in June. About 60 % of refugees reported that they had enough money to feed themselves and their children for the next three months, although in June, such as 37 % of respondents [34].

As for Poland, the survey, conducted by Gremy Personnel, shows that although Ukrainians say that they can afford more in Poland than in Ukraine, they are nevertheless looking for temporary work for 6-9 months because they want to return to their homeland [35]. As the survey showed, 51 % of Ukrainians answered that in Poland they could buy things and products, for which they did not have sufficient money in Ukraine [35, 36]. Another 36.7 % of respondents said they did not see the difference, and 12.2 % answered that they live at a lower level because they have better jobs and higher salaries in Ukraine. The war in Ukraine is dragging on; due to the systematic shelling of critical infrastructure, homes are without water, electricity, heat, and communications for long periods of time. Many families with children are unable to return home, so the state of constant temporality will only continue for the time being.

### 3. The aim and objectives of the study

The aim of this article is to better understand parents' decisions regarding their children's education in the face of uncertainty in plans.

To achieve the aim, the following tasks were set:

1. To conduct a pilot study in the form of an anonymous survey among parents of Ukrainian children who are currently abroad due to military actions.
2. To analyze parents' plans for returning home and, as a consequence, their possible strategies for their children's education.
3. To make preliminary conclusions about the possible advantages, disadvantages and risks of this or that parents' choice.

### 4. Materials and Methods

The pilot study involved parents from three countries – Poland, Germany and the United Kingdom. These are the countries that have received the most significant number of Ukrainian refugees. The survey was conducted from October 17 to November 1, 2022, among parents of schoolchildren who have already enrolled their children in schools in the host countries. The survey was completely anonymous, with 160 respondents, 65 of whom currently reside in Germany, 61 in Poland as well as 34 in the UK. Due to the small sample size, the study should be considered indicative, some characteristics of the results are comparable to systematic surveys, conducted by other services [31, 32, 35–37]. Future plans, socio-demographic profile of the refugee, education level, employment, and some other answers correlate with systematic representative surveys, conducted by other services, such as these. Therefore, this survey, despite the small sample size, can also be considered quite reliable and reflective of parents' real attitudes and plans regarding their children's education.

The survey was conducted in three Facebook groups: "Ukrainians in Germany", "Ukrainians in Poland" and "Ukrainians in the UK". It included 28 questions. The first block of questions concerned the socio-psychological portrait of the parent of a Ukrainian student. It asked questions about the level of education, region of residence, plans for the future, emotional and economic problems they faced in the host country, knowledge of foreign languages, and employment plans. The second part of the survey concerned the situation of Ukrainian students in European schools and their interaction with Ukrainian schools. In this part, the following questions were asked:

- Does your child experience any problems in the new school? How do you try to help him/her in school difficulties?
- Does your child attend Ukrainian school in a distance mode? If yes, what difficulties do you think he/she is experiencing there?
- If your stay abroad continues, do you plan to send your child to a Ukrainian school?
- Do you have any plans for your child to continue his or her education in this country?
- Would you like your child to attend a weekend school for Ukrainian children? By weekend school the author does not mean a school based on the study of the basics of the Orthodox religion, rather it is a school where children from the Ukrainian diaspora could study the Ukrainian language, culture, history, etc.

All respondents had already received the legal status of temporary asylum at the time of the survey. The vast majority of those who completed the questionnaire (96.3 %) were women, 69 % had higher education, and another 8.9 % had a degree. These data are consistent with self-selection among refugees [36]. Only 28 % of parents interviewed indicated that they had secondary or specialized secondary education. Moreover, among parent, interviewed in Germany, only 16.7 % indicated that they had secondary or vocational education. Among parents, surveyed in Great Britain, 18.2 % had no higher education. These data also compare well with the socio-demographic profile of refugees that has already been investigated [31–36].

All responding parents who were in Germany and the UK had already enrolled their children in local schools (there is a duty to educate children in schools there). 50 parents out of 61 (82 %) who are in Poland have enrolled their children in local schools (in Poland one has to choose whether it is a Ukrainian school or a local school).

In order to qualitatively assess the motives that guide parents in making decisions about their children, all the interview questions had not only multiple choice options, but also the possibility for the respondents to supplement the selected answer option with their own comments. We will define the answer options, chosen by parents, descriptively in the form of quantitative assessment. The method of data analysis was thematic analysis [38]. That method involves reading the data and identifying categories related to the focus of the study. Thus, we will be able not only to assess the trends in Ukrainian parents' plans, but also to understand the motives behind their choices [39].

**Research Ethics.** The author declares that ethical approval for the research, conducted in the framework of the project "Students in European Countries", has been obtained from the IRB committee (No 23\_09\_CH, 17/02/2023) of the institute that the author of the paper represents. The survey was completely anonymous and all participants gave consent to data collection and processing.

## 5. Results

### *Plans to return home*

Two thirds of the respondents stated that their material and housing conditions had at least not deteriorated. As for the job they found, about one in four stated that they do not work because they attend language courses, about one in ten stated that they work remotely in Ukraine, and one in five stated that they work, but the place of work does not correspond to their qualification level. 12 % of respondents indicated that they work either full-time or part-time in their specialty. 25 % of respondents are not working at the time of the survey.

Mental health problems of one kind or another were reported by 90 % of the refugees interviewed. Uncertain future plans and lack of stability were complained by 51 percent of respondents. A general concern about the state of education of their children was indicated by 92 % of interviewed parents. Only one in five children, according to the respondents, is in a stable and calm state.

Nine months after the beginning of the war, 38 % of respondents, when asked about their plans, stated that they would definitely return to their homeland. At the same time, only 14 % of respondents said that they definitely want to stay in the host country. Every fourth of them is inclined to stay in the host country. The rest hesitate between the two poles, saying they would like to stay under certain conditions, such as partner arriving or job opportunities.

### *Plans for the children's future*

44 % of respondents said they would continue to educate their children in a Ukrainian school even if the fighting continued.

55 % of respondents said they would like their children to continue their education in the EU countries, 24 % said they were undecided, the rest of the respondents would like their children to be educated in Ukraine. Many respondents gave such answers as "It depends on circumstances", "We do not understand where we will live next", "I do not know, it is difficult for me to think about it yet".

### *Helping children in education*

The greatest difficulties for children, according to parents, are related to the lack of knowledge of the local language (47 % of respondents). The greatest concern of parents is the fact that due to the lack of knowledge of the local language the child "loses" the school year (29 %), some disciplines will "suffer" due to the lack of knowledge of the local language", requirements for some subjects are higher at home than in the local school (27 %).

Despite the possibility of sending their children to local schools, parents did not expel their children from online Ukrainian schools. Among all respondents, 65 %

attend Ukrainian school remotely. Let's consider how these children are distributed among those who are determined or undecided at least about their immediate future. Among those who unequivocally declare their desire to return to their homeland, 68 % of surveyed children attend Ukrainian school remotely. Among those who declare their desire to stay for a longer period of time in the country of stay, 35 % attend Ukrainian school. Among undecided parents, the percentage of children attending Ukrainian schools remotely is the highest – three quarters of respondents.

When asked whether they would continue to educate their child remotely in a Ukrainian school if hostilities drag on, 44 % of respondents answered positively.

Let us further consider the assistance that parents provide to their children. When asked how exactly they help their child to cope with school difficulties in Ukrainian school and school in the host country, almost 45 % of surveyed parents answered that their child has private tutors in some subjects or language courses in the host country.

It is noteworthy how preferences are distributed among these parents regarding the choice of additional help for the child. Among those parents who intend to stay in the host country, another 30 % agreed with school subject tutors, but 70 % agreed with additional host country language courses.

Among those who clearly stated their desire to return home, the number of those who help the child with school subjects compared to those who help the child with the host country language is already 60 to 40, due to the understanding that the programs in the host country and at home are different. They would like their child to keep up with the home program when they return home.

When asked: "Does your child attend Ukrainian school in a distance mode? If yes, what difficulties do you think he/she experiences there", in the part of the survey where it was possible to express their opinion, parents' answers were most often as follows:

– **Uncertainty in plans:** "We can't make any plans", "We don't know how it will turn out, we want the child to get an education, we are not sure about the plans", "If we understood what awaits us, we could make a decision, but now the child is studying in two schools", "No strength, no motivation, but not enough determination to expel from the Ukrainian school if we have to return"; "I can't choose, I am afraid of missing opportunities".

– **Difficulties related to overload and motivation:** "The child does not want to study in Ukraine additionally, but we understand that studying is his/her future", "Lessons are poorly organized, our city is in occupation, so the child has to study with tutors, this is his/her future", "Teachers do not pay attention to the fact that the child studies in two schools at the same time, but if we have to return home, the child will not be transferred to the next grade, so we do not expel him/her from the Ukrainian school", "Difficulties with the fact that the child does not have time to do homework, the child is overloaded"; "Only study and we are busy all the time, it worries me, I think that this class we will have to take again".

– **Formal motives:** "The child must finish school, get a certificate", "In Germany it is necessary to study 12

years in a gymnasium, but in Ukraine my child gets a certificate this year", "It is difficult to enter a Polish lyceum due to age, but my child finishes school in Ukraine this year", "My child is a high school student, he/she is studying".

– **Educational motives:** "My child is an elementary school student, he/she needs to master Ukrainian literacy", "I want my child to know mathematics well, the requirements for the program at home are higher", "My child studies in an integration class, he/she misses the school year" (the latter is especially typical for parents from Germany).

– **Choice not to enrol a child into a local school:** those parents, who did not enroll their child in the local school, noted: "my younger child is studying in the local school, but my older child is a high school student, and we could not find a place for him/her in the lyceum", "We are going to return home", "The child does not want to study in the local school, misses his/her friends in Ukraine".

The last question was asked: "Would you like your child to attend a weekend school for Ukrainian children?" Only a quarter of respondents answered this question positively, another seventeen percent were indifferent to the idea, and the rest answered negatively, leaving the following comments: "It is too difficult for a child to combine local school, Ukrainian school and also Sunday school", "It is necessary to do lessons for Ukrainian school on weekends", "Too much load on the child".

## 6. Discussion

In addition to immediate temporary protection status, housing subsidies, and access to healthcare, Ukrainian refugees were also provided with unemployment benefits, the opportunity to learn the host nation's language, and the right to education for their children. In contrast to the experience of previous refugee crises [15, 40–43], such measures should potentially reduce parents' feelings of uncertainty. However, there appear to be factors that cannot be eliminated by any level of support from host countries. Furthermore, we see that the vast majority of parents, regardless of their plans and country of residence, are seriously concerned about their children's education. They not only enroll their children in local schools, but also continue to educate them remotely in Ukraine. On the other hand, their decisions are often influenced by the state of uncertainty, in which they find themselves. Parents are more likely to withdraw their children from Ukrainian schools and try to help them integrate more quickly when there are stable plans.

When plans are uncertain, parents try to help the child as much as possible, using all possible strategies. Parents try to help the child, so that if they have to stay, he or she will integrate as much as possible and in case of possible return will not allow gaps in education. In this way, the Ukrainian school is a kind of insurance for the future. As for the possible results of the situation, it is still difficult to say to what extent all children are involved in the education in the host schools. The number of children, enrolled in European schools, is constantly changing, and if parents leave their children for distance education only in Ukrainian schools, such education remains the responsibility of the families and certainly

requires control by the host governments. There is no precise data on the exact number of children who are educated only in Ukraine.

In countries where there is an obligation to enroll children in local schools, there are also difficulties, associated with the uncertainty of parents' plans. The first obvious consequence is unjustified overburdening of the child. After school, a child needs rest and socialization with peers. Additional academic load reduces the quality of adjustment and worsens well-being. Parents need to spend more time with their children, but not to control their homework in Ukrainian schools. For this purpose it is necessary to reduce tensions and anxieties of parents, to help them to determine their plans in the best possible way, perhaps with the help of consultations with psychologists or specialists in child psychology.

On the other hand, the question remains how to organize the educational process for such children in terms of academic load and proper quality of education. The issue of compulsory enrolment of the child in a local school, if the parents do not plan to stay in the chosen country of asylum, should be reconsidered in favor of a more flexible and child-friendly solution. On the one hand, allowing a child to study exclusively in Ukrainian schools remotely entails some immediate risks, namely the inability to control the quality of the educational process, i.e. the parents are essentially responsible for the child's education. Nevertheless, such a strategy may be justified in some cases when the child is finishing middle or high school and the parents plan to return home. Since it is impossible to predict the timing of the end of hostilities, there are risks, associated with lack of full integration and learning the local language. Currently, we see some intermediate options in the described situation as follows. Distance learning in Ukraine can be fully organized in the host countries. This would require separate premises where children would study in Ukraine under the supervision of tutors for at least the time, stipulated by law. In the afternoon it would be possible to organize additional classes for learning the language of the host country, sports, art. Such measures would avoid the harm of sitting in front of monitors for hours, ensure communication with peers, control the learning process of children, as well as mastering the language of the host country. Of course, such a measure would seem to be coercive and temporary. However, it seems to be most clearly in the interest of a particular group of children in situations of greatest insecurity. If hostilities continue in the country of origin, the possibility of transfer to local schools would be facilitated. If a child is already studying in a local school, his/her distance learning in Ukraine could also be taken over and the child's study load monitored. As for the possibility of organizing weekend schools for Ukrainians, this idea is not very popular among Ukrainian refugees, although such schools are successfully operating in many schools in Europe for children of migrants. Obviously, such schools provide an opportunity to learn Ukrainian language, culture and history, which is more necessary for younger students, but they do not solve the main problem related to the uncertainty of future plans in the context of children's education. It can be assumed that a part of parents is counting on the possible certainty

of their future plans, so they are planning to eventually expel their children from Ukrainian schools. However, as we can see, a significant part of them plans to continue distance education for their children in Ukraine.

In any case, additional educational opportunities are additional chances to avoid loss of human capital in the future. Therefore, the possibilities of distance education for refugees in the countries of origin certainly require further study.

The limitation of the study is the small sample size (160 parents), although we consider it sufficient for a pilot study and also in line with general trends in the socio-psychological portrait of a refugee. The problem of the impact of distance learning in Ukrainian schools on the quality of integration and school success in host country schools is promising for further research.

## 7. Conclusion

This article explores the state of uncertainty in the context of refugees in general and Ukrainian refugees fleeing the Russian invasion in particular. This paper is a study of the state of uncertainty in the plans that determine the behavioral strategies of Ukrainian refugees toward their schoolchildren. The study is based on an anonymous online survey (n=160) of adult refugees (parents) currently living in Poland, Germany, and the United Kingdom. The results of the study are as follows:

1. Uncertainty about future plans led two-thirds of respondents to report that their school-aged children continue to study remotely in Ukrainian schools. At the same time, their children are studying in local schools in parallel, and this double study might lead to overburdening of children and fatigue, which many respondents complained about.

2. Among those who plan to stay in the country of residence, the percentage of those who continue to educate their children in Ukrainian schools in parallel is the lowest. And the highest percentage of those who educate their children in two schools is recorded among parents who have not decided about their future plans. This phenomenon can be explained by the fact that refugees do not know how long they will stay in the country and try to help their children in any way possible. In particular, they hire private tutors for their children in the host coun-

try's language or organize help in difficult subjects, such as math.

3. This is because the parents understand that if they return home, the curriculum in the host country will be different from that in Ukraine, or their children will have spent their first year in the host class, learning only the language of the host country. In this situation the additional support will help children to continue their education quietly either in the host country or at home in a Ukrainian school.

4. The author also points out ways to support and help parents who are in a state of uncertainty, as well as their children. In those countries where there is an obligation to send children to school in the host country, it is suggested to introduce a more flexible approach and in some cases to allow children to study remotely only in Ukrainian schools.

This study shows that some of the factors that lead to uncertainty in plans can be considered insurmountable, even with the most favorable mechanisms for helping refugees, especially Ukrainians. Moreover, this study itself reveals the phenomenon of refugee students continuing their education at a distance in their country of origin, something that has never happened in history. The potential opportunities and drawbacks of such distance education have yet to be explored. This study can serve as a starting point for further research on the possibilities of distance education in wartime.

## Conflict of interest

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest in relation to this research, whether financial, personal, authorship or otherwise, that could affect the research and its results, presented in this paper.

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## Data availability

Data will be available on reasonable request.

## Use of artificial intelligence

The author confirms that she did not use artificial intelligence technologies when creating the current work.

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**Ganna Chovpan**, PhD, Associate Professor, Department of Medical and Biological Physics and Medical Informatics, Kharkiv National Medical University, Nauky ave., 4, Kharkiv, Ukraine, 61022, Department of Physics Education, Leibniz Institute for Science and Mathematics Education, Olshausen str., 62, Kiel, Germany, 24118

**ORCID:** <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3619-2927>

**E-mail:** ann.chovpan@gmail.com