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Ukrainian Refugees' Family Integration into Slovak Society: Socio-economic and Cultural Dimension

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Abstract

Title: Ukrainian refugees' family integration into Slovak society: Socio-economic and cultural dimension

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The conflict in Ukraine has led to the greatest influx of refugees since World War II, creating a refugee situation inconceivable in contemporary Europe. Ukrainian people have been forced to leave their homes in search of safety, protection, and assistance because of the escalation of the Russian military war in Ukraine. This study aimed to explore the integration process of Ukrainian refugee families into Slovak society, specifically in Ruzomberok, considering social, economic, and cultural aspects. The role of social workers in facilitating integration was also analyzed. The author employed the theory of change to determine the indicators of the integration process and the ecological system theory to comprehend the role of social workers for the Ukrainian refugees in Ruzomberok. The social capital theory was incorporated into the study to develop an effective integration model for the Ukrainian refugees. A qualitative research approach (online interviews) and thematic analysis were employed to collect and analyze the data. The study used purposive sampling to select 12 participants, including six participants from Ukrainian refugee families and the rest of the six participants from social workers.

The findings revealed that Ukrainian refugee families received acceptance, adequate housing, cultural ties, and religious freedom in Ruzomberok. However, they encountered challenges such as limited access to the labor market, language barriers, limited access to healthcare, limited information, and limited social networks. The study also underlined the vulnerability of single-parent Ukrainian refugee families in accessing opportunities compared to those with two parents in Ruzomberok. Social workers facilitated various strategies to support integration, including housing, resource allocation, information sharing, social connections, and stakeholder collaboration. Challenges for social workers included trust-building, insufficient information, communication difficulties, a shortage of practitioners, and insufficient government support.

Finally, the research found that the 'model of effective integration approach' was effective and successful for the Ukrainian refugees' families in their integration process in Ruzomberok.

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List of Abbreviations

ALMP- Active Labor Market Policy

CEB- Council European Development Bank

ECRE- European Council on Refugees and Exiles

EU- European Union

GDP- Gross Domestic Product

IDP- Internal Displace Person

INGO- International Non-Government Organization

NGO- Non-Government Organization

OECD- Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development

ToC- Theory of Change

TPD- Temporary Protection Directive

UK- United Kingdom

UN- United Nation

UNICEF- United Nations Children's Fund

WHO- World Health Organization

INTRODUCTION

Background of the study

People leave their country in quest of security when confronted with life-threatening circumstances, either inside or outside of their national territory (Mestheneo & Ioannidi, [2002](#)). The challenge of refugees has emerged as a result of these events and other numerous occurrences (Sesay, [2002](#)). Moreover, the refugee issue has impacted individuals' lives globally, including in Europe (Nmoma, [1997](#)). The increase in the number of refugees is one of the world's major challenges in the twenty-first century. The UNHCR ([2013](#)) highlights the prevalence of this phenomenon in wars, aggression, repression, and human rights violations in different corners of the world. The UNHCR ([2022a](#)) estimates that 103 million people have been forcibly displaced by the year 2022. Meanwhile, it is also the highest increase between years that has ever occurred (UNHCR, *ibid*). The Russian invasion of Ukraine is reviving the brutality of war and forcing people to leave in seeking asylum (Carrera et al., [2022](#)). Since the beginning of the war on February 24, 2022 (*ibid*), many people who had lived in Ukraine before moved to other European countries (Šveda & Štefková, [2022](#)). A considerable surge of refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) began to flow from the eastern parts of Ukraine to the western border UNHCR ([2022b](#)) claimed about 4 million people left Ukraine in search of safety and shelter one month after the war had started, bringing the overall number of (IDPs) to approximately 6.5 million. Experts estimate the total amount of individuals affected by combat at 12.65 million (UNHCR, *ibid*).

The integration of refugees is a multi-dimensional, two-way procedure that demands work from all parties involved (Borrie, [1959](#); Mestheneo & Ioannidi, [2002](#)). This includes refugees' ability and willingness to adjust to the host community without having to sacrifice their own culture and identity, and the accompanying willingness on the part of the host government and local organizations to welcome refugees and fulfill the demands of the population. Integration is a continuous and complex process with separate but connected legal, economic, social, and cultural components (Hing, [1993](#), Dryden-Peterson & Hovil, [2004](#), Yamey et al., [2022](#)). The Temporary Protection Directive was activated by the European Commission in response to Russia's attack on Ukraine on February 24, 2022, in order to provide prompt aid to Ukrainian refugees entering the EU-27 (Bobiński et al., [2022](#)). Ukrainian citizens, their families, non-Ukrainian passport holders, and stateless people who were constitutionally residing in Ukraine and who are unable to return to their home country or country of birth (such as asylum seekers or recipients of international protection), and their families are eligible for temporary protection for one year (*ibid*).

The Slovak Republic declared a state of emergency on 26 February 2022, because of the massive influx of refugees from the ongoing conflict in Ukraine (O'Meara, [2022](#)). It includes the distribution of essential supplies to stabilize the situation, the updating and dissemination of legislation, the facilitation of access to

health and safety services as well as to the labor market, and the immediate integration into the educational system (ibid). On the other hand, social workers play a leading role in assisting refugees (International Federation of Social Workers, [2015](#)). Social workers in Europe must develop integrating strategies to assist refugees to become self-sufficient in their new settings. Therefore, this study will focus on the integration experiences of the families of Ukrainian refugees in their host society along with the role of social workers in integrating Ukrainian refugees into Slovak society.

Statement of the problem

The integration of refugees is a global concern (Baker, [1990](#)). A person's experience as a refugee from their place of origin has an effect on a number of aspects of daily life (Jacobsen & Landau, [2003](#)). A refugee has to overcome challenges to adapt to new surroundings and situations, whether internal or external. (Paludan, [1981](#)). Nevertheless, this immigrant frequently has to accept the truth that adapting to a new environment takes time. The process of adaptation can be delayed when refugees frequently relocate before being placed in a permanent location (Mostafa, [2017](#)). However, the process of integration is complex that has implications for the law, the economy, and society in general (Wanninayake, [2021](#)).

Governmental organizations had not enough capacity to handle a huge number of refugees (Raga & Pettinotti, [2022](#)). The abilities of Slovakia's existing systems were insufficient for the Ukrainian refugees to manage such a serious humanitarian crisis (Enríquez, [2022](#)). Similarly to the physical infrastructure, the processing power was confined and inadequate for the Ukrainian refugees' families (Enríquez, [2022](#)). However, the government of Slovakia tried to do its best but has no capacity to handle all the difficulties associated with Ukrainian refugee integration with a single hand (Tessler et al., [2022](#)). In this circumstance, social workers are coming to the front lines of helping refugees and resolving legal issues (Vansač & Gul'ášová, [2022](#)). Social workers need to be competent in assisting these Ukrainian refugees who frequently ask for legal assistance and services (Tessler et al., [2022](#)). There have been linguistic difficulties, economic stressors, and psychological impacts that result in a high workload in social work practice with Ukrainian refugees (Vansač & Gul'ášová, [2022](#)). A considerable and uncontrolled workload is caused by the lack of training and resources for social work practice during times of crisis (Mitschke et al., [2017](#)).

This study attempts to explore the integration process of Ukrainian refugees in Slovakia. The study will address how refugees are integrating into the Slovak community (in the example of Ruzomberok¹), supported by the local integration package that was given to them. The study takes the position that, in identifying the effects of integration on Ukrainian refugees from a social, economic, and cultural

¹ Ružomberok – town in North Slovakia; population of Ružomberok area is around 57 thousands. Population – 92% Slovaks. Religion – 62% Roman Catholics, 23% - no religious affiliation. Source: www.statistics.sk

perspective. This study will also connect the social work practice in refugee integration to get a better and more comprehensive understanding of their integration process as a whole

Research aim and objectives

This research aims to highlight the integration process of Ukrainian refugees' families in terms of social, economic, and cultural dimensions. The study attempts to figure out the current situation of the Ukrainian refugee group and the challenges that they face during this integration period into Slovak society. However, it is not possible to overlook the contribution of social workers at different levels, particularly at the community, municipality, and national levels, and their role in promoting effective socioeconomic and cultural integration for the Ukrainian refugees. Therefore, the role of social workers and their experience will be included in the above-mentioned integration process.

General aim

The general objective of this study is to explore the integration process for the Ukrainian refugee into Slovak society in terms of social, economic, and cultural dimensions and the role of social workers to help Ukrainian refugees' integration at different levels.

Specific objectives

- 1) To explore the different indicators of integration for the Ukrainian refugees' families in the context of social, economic, and cultural dimensions.
- 2) To analyze the integration experiences of the Ukrainian refugees' families in the host community.
- 3) To understand the role of social workers and their contribution to the integration of Ukrainian refugees' families into Slovak society.

Research question

In order to stay focused on the research objectives, this study has one primary question and four supporting questions. The following research questions are addressed:

Main question

How does the integration process in terms of social, economic, and cultural factors being implemented for the families of Ukrainian refugees?

Supporting questions

- 1) What are the indicators that influence the social, economic, and cultural integration of Ukrainian refugees' families into Slovak society?
- 2) How do the Ukrainian refugees' families explain their integration process within the host community?
- 3) What approaches do social workers at different levels apply to help Ukrainian refugees' families adapt to Slovak society?
- 4) What are the main challenges for the Ukrainian people as refugees and social workers as service providers in the integration process?

Significance of the study

The ongoing Ukrainian crisis has led to the biggest influx of refugees into European nations (Bajaj & Stanford, [2022](#)), and Slovakia is one of the countries facing significant challenges to integrate the huge number of refugees into their societies (Chodosh & Wezerek, [2022](#)). There are few studies on this crucial topic because of the recent event. The author tries to fill the research gap regarding the refugee integration process. This study addresses the knowledge gap on the prerequisites of refugees by researching the integration experiences of the Ukrainian refugees. Moreover, professionals, service providers, and policymakers will benefit from the study since it helps to build an effective integration policy strategy and maintain the rights of refugees.

Furthermore, in the field of social work with children and youth, knowing the difficulties faced by refugee families in various social circumstances is undoubtedly important for successful integration into host societies. This research is also helpful for social workers, as it will enable them to understand the skills needed for the refugee crisis, collaborate with other institutions in accordance with needs, and build bonds with refugees (clients) to facilitate successful integration. Finally, this study will contribute to expanding the knowledge in this field and the literature developed in various regions of the world, as well as bringing up a lot of opportunities for future research on this topic in Europe.

Operational definitions

Ukrainian refugees: 'Ukrainian refugee' indicates the group of people from Ukraine who have been forced to flee their country and seek refuge in the EU and neighboring countries because of Russia's invasion of Ukraine (NordForsk, [2022](#)). The existing Ukrainian refugee crisis in Europe took place On February 24 of the year 2022 (O'Meara, [2022](#)), while it is anticipated that over 8 million refugees have already departed Ukraine (Åslund, [2022](#)). By March 20, over a fourth of the nation's citizens had left their homes in Ukraine, whereas, women and children represent about 90% of Ukrainian refugees (Gizewska et al., [2022](#)).

Refugee family: This study only concerns the families of Ukrainian refugees who escaped the Ukraine war; however, a family can be classified in this research into two categories based on the number of parents (Single parent family and two parents' family). As a result, the outcome is more specialized to each group's needs.

Refugee integration: 'Refugee integration' is a dynamic process that helps refugees, both as individuals and as groups, integrate into society (Berry, [1997](#)). In addition, despite the requirements established by the EU and international law, the quality of integration strategies for those under international protection varies greatly between European nations (Bohrer et. Al., [2019](#)). Suitable conditions are an exception rather than the standard (Barends, [2017](#)). However, this study focuses only on the Ukrainian refugees and their integration (social, economic, and cultural) into Slovak society.

Social integration: 'Social integration' refers to components of a social system (Ritzer, [2007](#)). Therefore, the phrase "social system" is applied broadly (Bauböck & Heller, [1996](#)). It denotes a social group that creates a limit between itself and its surroundings (Ritzer, [2007](#)). In this perspective, social systems can be characterized by groups, organizations, or even the entire population (Ritzer, [2007](#)). In this research, "social integration" refers to how refugees interact with locals in the host society. It also indicates social cohesion and the way refugees of a community conduct their daily lives.

Economic integration: 'Economic integration' indicates social equality between refugees and the citizens of the host nation (Kuhlman, [1991](#)). Integration in the context of employment is technically characterized to be gained when the employment rate of refugees and the nationals of third countries are similar (Wilkinson & Garcea, [2017](#)). The economic integration concept for this study is that a Ukrainian refugee would get similar opportunities in the host country in terms of labor market access and have the same economic standard that a refugee used to get in their home country.

Cultural integration: 'Cultural integration' is the process by which members of one culture adopt elements of another, such as beliefs, rituals, languages, behavior, and acceptance; while simultaneously preserving their own culture (Hosseini-Kaladjahi, [1997](#)). However, the cultural integration for the refugees depends on how the host country is structured. Sometimes, cultural integration turns into a forced integration or assimilation for the refugees when the minority is required to adopt the cultural norms of the host nation (Hosseini-Kaladjahi, [1997](#)).

Slovak society: Slovak society refers to a group of people, their culture, beliefs, values, traditions, and institutions that exist inside the geographical boundaries of Slovakia. The research focuses on Ukrainian Refugees who are hosted by Slovakia. Therefore, Slovakia is the area of concern of this study but the study will not cover the entire area of Slovakia instead it will concentrate on the town of Ruzumberok, as an area of the 'Slovak Society' for this research.

Social work context of refugee integration: The social worker's role in the context of Ukrainian refugees' integration refers to how social work practice at various levels of the hierarchy can help refugees be integrated into Slovak society. To better comprehend the integration process, this study considers social work practice at the community, municipal, and national (policy) levels.

1 CHAPTER ONE: UKRAINIAN REFUGEE SITUATION AND INTEGRATION PROCESS

An understanding of the proposed study is intended to be developed and supported by a review of relevant prior studies. In the context of the goal of the study, this chapter aims to provide a thorough and critical assessment of the prior research on the proposed study area.

1.1 Background of the European refugee crisis

One of the most significant and controversial phenomena in modern European politics has been the refugee and migrant issue (Valenzuela & Ramota, [2016](#)). However, the Europe-Africa concern whereas the UN identified migration as a dominant element of global development, the EU has lagged in taking a systematic approach to the issue (Art, [2015](#)). In addition, with the collapse of the Berlin Wall, the end of the Cold War in 1991, and the recent wave of globalization in the 1990s, migration has steadily gained popularity (Ayoub, [2019](#)). Due to wars in some regions of the Middle East, Asia, and Africa, Europe has already started to see an increase in the number of refugees arriving in 2010 (Delauney, [2015](#)). From July to October 2011, the most current crisis in Europe has been a reflection of the Arab Spring's consequences, the following civil wars in Syria, Iraq, and Libya, as well as additional revolutions in the Middle East and Africa (Zaragoza-Cristiani, [2015](#)). Although the number of refugees began to dramatically increase in 2013, it was not until 2015 that the crisis became a political issue for the European Union (Zaragoza-Cristiani, [2015](#)).

However, the 2015 European migrant crisis, sometimes referred to as the 'Syrian refugee crisis' globally, was characterized by a sharp rise in the flow of refugees and migrants into European countries in 2015, when 1.3 million people sought asylum there, the highest number in a single year since World War II (Ayoub, [2019](#)). In addition to a substantial number of Afghans, Pakistanis, Nigerians, Iraqis, and Eritreans, as well as economic migrants from the Balkans (the majority of whom came from Albania and Kosovo), Syrians made up the majority of those who applied for asylum in Europe in 2015 (Delauney, [2015](#)). Many people wanted to relocate permanently as it became evident that the wars in their own nations would not cease in the near future. Furthermore, beginning in 2014, Lebanon, Jordan, and Egypt refused to accept

Syrians seeking asylum (Ayaz & Wadood, [2020](#)). These incidents combined to increase the number of persons fleeing to Europe in 2015. As winter approached and the voyage grew riskier, the number of refugees entering the country started to fall off quickly in the autumn of 2015. (Buonanno et. al., [2016](#)). As a result, numerous EU governments closed their borders to surrounding nations (Connor, [2018](#)). Coordination amongst the member states was inadequate. The majority of the refugees arrived in Germany, but after the government chose to temporarily suspend prosecution of an EU regulation requiring asylum seekers to reside in the first EU country they enter, most other nations sent them away (Art, [2015](#)). As a consequence of the wave of migrants, news reports of crimes committed by and against immigrants have significantly increased (Moses, [2019](#)).

The massive influx of immigrants raised fears among the general public about European values (Marsh, [2015](#)). Right-wing populist parties seized on anti-immigrant emotions in the stricken countries, often making it the main theme of their platforms (Moses, [2019](#)). However they typically did not attract enough support to enter government, their participation frequently had an impact on politics by making alliance formation challenging and mainstreaming anti-immigration sentiment. Immigration-related protests increased, and the Great Replacement white nationalist conspiracy narrative spread more widely (ibid). During and immediately after the crisis, there was a considerable push for changes to EU asylum law, but this movement mainly died down as the number of refugees arriving decreased. The crisis had a significant impact. a polarization increase, a decline in EU credibility, and a change in refugee laws (Marsh, [2015](#)).

Ukrainian refugee

The 1951 Refugee Convention states that a refugee is first and foremost someone who is incapable or unwilling to return to their homeland due to a well-founded danger of being oppressed because of their caste, religious ideology, ethnicity, membership of a social group, or political stance (Aiyar et al., [2016](#)). The phrase "Ukrainian Refugee" refers to people who have received some form of international shelter while fleeing Russia's war against Ukraine, particularly supplemental and temporary protection in addition to full refugee status under the Geneva Convention (as in the case of most refugees from Ukraine) (Åslund, [2022](#)). Meanwhile, Millions of people's lives have been seriously threatened by Russia's invasion of Ukraine, and many of them have been compelled to escape their homes in search of safety in nearby European nations (ibid). Moreover, many Ukrainian refugees initially fled to neighboring countries, where they still reside in large numbers, secondary mobility has increased, and there are now more Ukrainian refugees in countries farther away from Ukraine.

Nevertheless, many children and young people are among the vast number of refugees who have been compelled to flee Ukraine. They experience conflict, displacement, and, frequently, the loss of family members and friends, all of which are upsetting and stressful situations. Many of these young individuals may have to relocate permanently or even long-term to other nations because their future is uncertain

(Sandilya et al., [2022](#)). Most Ukrainian men between the ages of 18 and 60 are unable to leave the country due to active participation in the war (ibid). Therefore, relatively few men of working age and largely women with children have fled the country so far. For instance, the Office of Foreigners reports that in Poland, the number of Ukrainian refugees is about more than 1 million, whereas 48% are dependent children and 92% of the adults were female (Jankowski & Gujski, [2022](#)). Moreover, about 42% of all Ukrainian refugees in Lithuania are children under 18, while 83% of adults are female (Batuchina, & Ratkevičienė, [2023](#)). Similar to Moldova, the UNHCR reports that women made up 80% of all Ukrainian adults who had chosen to remain in the country, while minor children made up 50% of those individuals (Gizewska et al., [2022](#)). The percentage of child refugees in nations farther from the Ukrainian border appears to be slightly lower, ranging from 32% (such as France and Greece) to 40%. (e.g. Czech Republic and Belgium) (UNHCR, [2022b](#)). For instance, 75% of adults in Spain were women, and 36% of all Ukrainian refugees are under the age of 18 (Gizewska et al., [2022](#)), whereas, about 35 to 36 percent of Ukrainian refugees in Portugal, Italy, Estonia, and Latvia are children (OECD, [2022](#)).

1.2 Ukrainian refugee flows

With the largest influx of refugees since World War II, the conflict in Ukraine has created a situation of refugees inconceivable in contemporary Europe. The majority of refugees are moving into neighboring countries surrounding Ukraine, however, others have utilized those countries as transit points to continue their journeys inside the EU. People have been forced to evacuate their homes in search of safety, protection, and aid as a result of the escalation of the international military war in Ukraine, which has resulted in civilian deaths and damage to civilian infrastructure (Kyriazi, [2022](#)). Millions of Ukrainian refugees have fled across borders into neighboring nations, while many more have been compelled to relocate within the nation. An inter-agency provincial refugee approach is being undertaken in supporting the efforts of refugee-hosting nations due to the crisis and the magnitude of humanitarian requirements (Pastore et al., [2023](#)). The Regional Refugee Response Plan, which brings together the UN, NGOs, and other pertinent partners, aims to assist host country governments in providing refugees and foreign nationals departing Ukraine with safe access to their countries in accordance with international norms (ibid). Additionally, it gives humanitarian aid and the provision of essential protection services with prime concern.

The Central and Eastern European Union Member States are primarily responsible for accommodating refugees. Poland, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania, and Germany are the principal recipients in Europe (Antezza et al., [2022](#)). The majority of refugees entered the country in March. The number of new refugees arriving each month has reduced since Russia departed from Kyiv. Approximately 3.5 million Ukrainian refugees were being hosted in Poland as of May 30 (ibid). On the other hand, Romania and Germany were hosting the second and third-highest numbers of entering refugees among all CEB member countries.

Countries with lower populations, like Slovakia and Hungary, are receiving a disproportionately large number of refugees (ibid). For example, the number of refugees in Slovakia is around 8.2% of the total population. At the same time, in Hungary, this number is 6.8% of the total population (Table 1). Therefore, Slovakia and Hungary have seen a 25,000 percent increase in refugee inflows compared to their 10-year average (Kyriazi, [2022](#)). This is due to the influx of refugees from Ukraine. At the peak of the 2015–16 refugee crisis, 1.4 million initial asylum petitions were submitted to CEB member nations (Rosstalnyj, [2022](#)). However, according to CEB, if the present levels of refugees continue, the war in Ukraine will have produced more than three times as many refugees as the 2015–16 refugee crisis (Rosstalnyj, [2022](#)).

Table 1: Refugee influx from Ukraine: the biggest receiving countries (24 June 2022)

Country	Refugee Population	Total Population	Share of population (%)
Poland	3,544,995	37,768,292	9.4
Slovakia	446,755	5,459,642	8.2
Hungary	654,664	9,614,006	6.8
Romania	972,203	18,995,613	5.1
Germany	600,000	84,290,181	0.1

Source: UNHCR ([2022](#)) *Ukrainian refugee statistics*

Beyond the top nations mentioned above, people from Ukraine are also looking for the status of a refugee (Temporary protection). Between February 24 and May 12, 55,272 war refugees were registered to enter France, 98% of whom were citizens of Ukraine (UNHCR, [2022](#)). In addition, on April 10, a total of 51,957 temporary protection permits had been issued to people who were war refugees in Spain (ibid). However, smaller member countries in Europe have also contributed. A total of 337 Ukrainian people have been granted temporary protection in Malta as of April, whereas, Lithuania had 53 891 Ukrainian refugees as of May 25 (ibid). Moreover, since May 18, around 23,482 Ukrainian nationals had applied for temporary protection in Finland (ibid).

The existing considerable Ukrainian diaspora in the EU may grow significantly as a result of numerous refugees staying in host nations for an extended length of time. Before the invasion, the Ukrainian diaspora was thought to number 1.35 million, mostly migrants drawn by the promise of greater pay overseas and the bad geopolitical and economic conditions in Ukraine (Oleinikova, [2019](#)). Ukrainians were the third-largest number of non-residents with valid residency permits by the end of 2020. (Eurostat, [2022](#)). Germany, the Czech Republic, Italy, Poland, and Spain have the greatest Ukrainian diasporas (ibid). Earlier on during the war, the EU anticipated that half of those fleeing Ukraine would be taken in by Ukrainian diaspora networks around the EU, while many more would travel through legal immigration procedures. By the 15th of

November, roughly 4.5 million people have applied for temporary protection in the EU, and the number may rise based on how the invasion of Ukraine develops (Jauhiainen & Erbsen, [2023](#)) However, if the invasion is delayed, the environment in Ukraine may continue to be dangerous and unstable for some time. Considering this uncertainty, many refugees may be more willing to remain outside of their home countries, especially if the economic and social conditions in the host nations develop (Dadush & Weil, [2022](#)).

1.3 Refugee integration

Integration progression is a sociocultural endeavor. Integration, roughly defined, is the procedure by which refugees and immigrants become a part of the host society. It is frequently used to indicate a one-way adaptation to the dominant culture and way of life. According to Strang and Ager ([2010](#)), it is frequently used in this way as a "watered-down variant of assimilation." A second use of the phrase characterizes it as having a two-way adaptive response for both immigrants and the existing society, run simultaneously to the first in connection to the present Scottish integration policy. Moreover, a "harmonious, impartial, and inclusive society" would then be one of the requirements for effective integration, however in the UK, it is still likely that immigrants may encounter "situations of discrimination, prejudice, and unemployment" (ibid). According to Penninx & Garcés-Mascareñas, integration involves a wide range of aspects, including those that are geographical, financial, societal, geopolitical, legal, emotional, and cultural (Penninx & Garcés-Mascareñas, [2016](#)) According to Castles ([2004](#)), considerations of integration should focus on "the variances deriving from official classifications and regulations" because immigrants, refugees, and asylum seekers will experience integration processes differently (ibid). They propose an "integration matrix" that might act as a checklist for detecting particular problems and requirements and assist in organizing assistance for refugees and immigrants. Circumstances of the exodus (from the place of birth), classifications of immigrants, legal status, traits of entrants, traits of an immigrant minority, and conditions of reception context would all be included (Penninx & Garcés-Mascareñas, [2016](#)).

1.3.1 The perception of 'Refugee Integration' within the European Union

The 1951 United Nations Convention on the Status of Refugees has an impact on international laws addressing asylum and refugee issues related to integration (Mestheneos & Ioannidi, [2002](#)). It is suggested that best practices be shared between countries in the best scenario when developing and implementing integration policy, which is considered a matter for each individual member state. In Europe, there is general agreement that integration is viewed as a national issue that only affects the country of ultimate destination and is distinct from migration (Milner, [2005](#)). In connection with this, and in consequence of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination being ratified, numerous European States have put into place measures meant to eradicate racism and social exclusion. The following detailed description is provided by the European Council on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE), a global

advocacy group for international collaboration on refugee issues, and it serves as the foundation for all of its programs and best-practice guidelines (Sigona, [2005](#)). Integration is:

- a) A continuous procedure that lays accountability on both immigrants and members of the receiving community needs a willingness on the side of the refugee to adapt to local norms without losing one's individuality. Host communities must make a promise to modify public institutions so that they can promote equal access and create a welcoming environment in order to integrate (ibid).
- b) A lengthy process that begins for all stakeholders upon arrival in the host community and ends when the refugee is granted official citizenship status (ibid).
- c) A comprehensive process that "refers to the circumstances for and practical involvement in all facets of the nation of sustainable asylum's financial, societal, cultural, administrative, and political life" (ibid). The refugee's assessment of the host community's sentiments and the general environment of acceptance and respect also has an impact (ibid).

The ECRE suggests that the purpose of Europe-wide integration initiatives be the promotion of long-term identity and self-esteem within the refugee, backed by constructive engagement in the public and private realms of community engagement. The acquisition of formal citizenship is viewed throughout the literature as the process's endpoint, providing everyone with an equal set of rights and obligations (ibid). The idea that citizenship education, which enables refugees to understand the traditions, languages, and behaviors of the host nation as an inspiring factor, should be included in the integration process is reinforced (Mestheneos & Ioannidi, [2002](#)).

1.4 Main aspects of Ukrainian refugees' family integration

The Ukrainian refugees often encounter psychological discomfort and difficulties as a result of the compelled aspect of their journey and the terrible experiences frequently connected with it (Teke & Sirkeci, [2022](#)). They typically have not had a chance to get ready for their lives in the new environment, notably by beginning to learn the language, as they haven't decided to migrate (ibid). Since the Ukrainians obtained their credentials through a foreign educational system and their work experience through distinct labor market conditions, they typically arrive with little to no commitment to or connection to the host country. Additionally, a lot of Ukrainian refugees lack the required papers to confirm their degree of education or skill (Enríquez, [2022](#)). Furthermore, Ukrainian refugees frequently arrive as part of a massive influx, which puts them in competition with one another for jobs and other resources (ibid). To facilitate the integration of refugees into the host community, several key services are crucial including housing facilities, access to the labor market, health care facilities, education and childcare services, social protection and financial inclusion, and cultural adjustment.

1.4.1 Housing facilities and labor market access

Supporting Ukrainian refugees with affordable housing is crucial during the early stages of integration. Nations require a combination of private housing and public arrival centers for the initial reception of refugees. Several nations, including the UK, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Latvia, Lithuania, and Poland, as well as the Slovak Republic, offer financial assistance to persons who are hosting Ukrainian refugees (Trojanek & Gluszak, [2022](#)). As a consequence, many Ukrainian refugees have, at least in the beginning, found accommodation (De Coninck, [2022](#)). Private organizations' support has been a crucial component of national responses, but this is primarily a humanitarian solution. After the immediate emergency phase, host countries will need to offer affordable housing choices for refugees, which can be difficult because the influx of migrants will place pressure on the demand for affordable housing. With regards to Policies to promote additional supply in response to the increasing housing demand can take a variety of forms, such as addressing barriers from incredibly strict land use restrictions, making sure that rent control systems do not diminish funding to encourage new affordable housing, introducing deductions from energy efficiency standards in buildings for asylum seekers and refugees, increasing federal funding for social housing, or offering new incentives to invest (Merheim-Eyre, [2022](#)).

To help refugees, obtain employment, a robust labor market system is required. In EU nations, Ukrainian refugees can work with temporary permits (Dumont & Lauren, [2022](#)). For Ukrainian refugees, many host nations are putting in place active labor market initiatives that include assistance with job searching, skills training and adult education, and training in the local language (ibid). The integration of refugees and their long-term wages can both be significantly impacted by language training (Arendt, [2022](#)). The European Commission has identified assistance for competence and qualification recognized as crucial to attaining improved and long-lasting integration (Leuffen et al., [2022](#)). In the past, Integrated Public Employment Services (PES) have shown success in fostering labor market integration, particularly in the case of refugee communities in Sweden (Aiyar et al., [2016](#)). To promote more labor market inclusion for Ukrainian refugees, EU states have worked together to build PES available in refugee shelters (Leuffen et al., [2022](#)). Nonetheless, public investment in labor market activation initiatives varies greatly between nations, with Western, Southern, and Northern European nations investing more in ALMPs (active labor market policy) as a percentage of their GDP than Eastern European nations spend (Aiyar et al., [2016](#)). Consequently, more investment in ALMPs may be required for the latter group. Temporary exemptions from minimum wage legislation have proven successful among refugees in Germany and Denmark in areas where integration is difficult (Bird & Amaglobeli, [2022](#)).

1.4.2 Financial inclusion and healthcare services

Interventions in social protection prioritize addressing urgent and fundamental needs through social assistance before integrating refugees into social insurance programs. Although the amount and the methods of help differ, the majority of OECD nations offer financial assistance to meet basic necessities (OECD, [2022](#)). The average adult monthly allowances vary by country, for instance, this adult monthly allowance is €61 in Hungary and €68.8 in Slovakia, on the other hand, €360 in Germany and over €500 in Switzerland (ibid). Based on current laws, Spain has a two-phase scheme intended to assist temporary protection beneficiaries in achieving independence by restricting support in the latter period to merely basic requirements (ibid). However, access to basic bank transactions and financial assistance for getting material support is a key problem for families of refugees (Tamale, [2021](#)). Anyone who is legally living in an EU country has the right to access a basic bank account. The European Banking Authority does not need financial organizations to seek a passport to confirm a refugee's identity in order to enable access to basic financial goods and services. Alternatively, they depend on external, independent paperwork to show that a potential client is a refugee leaving Ukraine (Khudaykulova et al., [2022](#)).

Due to war, stress, and problems resulting from the conflict, the health services of Ukrainian refugees are probably greater than those of typical people in recipient nations, for example, hypertension, mental health, trauma/injury, and radiological exposures are among the areas where Ukrainian migrants face significant health risks (Su et al., [2022](#)). Accessibility to critical sexual and reproductive health care must be made available to women and girls fleeing Ukraine, especially those who have experienced sexual or other types of gender-based persecution (OECD, [2022a](#)). However, host nations have generally given extended healthcare benefits to Ukrainians fleeing from war, although to different degrees. While the majority of European nations offer regular coverage, including Bulgaria, Canada, and Estonia, also offer emergency assistance (ibid). Eventually, research indicates that health spending for refugees might total €1.5 billion (0.23 percent of GDP) in Poland and €0.85 billion (0.31 percent of GDP) in the Czech Republic, based on current health spending per capita (ibid).

1.4.3 Cultural adjustment

Cultural integration is a crucial component of the integration phase. The key concern in cultural integration is whether a person must entirely sacrifice their cultural identity in order to integrate, or if they can simply adopt the practices of the host culture (Entzinger & Biezeveld, [2002](#)). Moreover, cultural integration involves the implementation of common values and fundamental guidelines for social understanding while maintaining basic guidelines and standards that should not be ignored (ibid). Cultural integration is influenced by a number of factors, including the effectiveness of interactions between refugees and their children and the host society, the degree to which refugees adjust to and deny the cultural practices of the

host society, and the host society's acceptance of refugees' cultural norms (Brian, [2002](#)). Furthermore, Numerous indicators can be used to measure it, including inter-group marriages, cultural contact across communities, and a person's feeling of belonging to the host culture. Similarly, the extent of group independence is used to evaluate cultural integration; for instance, the segregation of faith from host institutions or education or a person's future plans to go back to their own country (ibid).

However, an incredible display of sympathy for Ukrainians has occurred across the EU (ARONIN, [2023](#)). On the other hand, as we have seen in other situations, this does not necessarily indicate that things will remain as they are. Public attitude can change depending on the number of arrivals as well as the timing. It has already issued a warning that over time, European hospitality may decline. Another reason why addressing integration is so crucial is because tensions will definitely arise sooner or later (ibid). Nonetheless, similarities in language and culture may assist Ukrainian refugees to Eastern Europe to avoid such conflicts, but there is no assurance (Engelbrekt et al., [2023](#)). Fostering local engagement will consequently be crucial because not just newcomers will need to adjust (ibid).

1.4.5 Education and childcare services

It is imperative to expand the capacity of educational institutions in light of the increasing influx of child refugees. Moreover, approximately 28 to 44 percent of refugees in the EU are children, particularly larger percentages in the nations bordering Ukraine, for instance, around 44 percent of refugees in Poland are children (Morrice, [2022](#)). High immigration rates will put enormous demand on countries to provide educational support. In addition, around 559,060 Ukrainian children had enrolled for temporary protection in Poland at the end of July 2022 (OECD, [2022](#)). The expected total yearly education spending for 559,060 children would have been €2.2 billion, which is 0.34 percent of Poland's GDP, using the average annual government expenses per student in primary and secondary education as a benchmark (€3,932) (OECD, [2022](#)). However, adapting education policy to the requirements of Ukrainian children is crucial. As students improve their language abilities, host nations have built up transition programs, either inside schools (France, Lithuania, and others) or at specialist education institutions (Portugal, Spain, and others). At the same time, innovative methods, such as those that make it easier for Ukrainian residents to work as teaching assistants (Poland) or that partner with the Ukrainian Ministry of Education to offer distance learning (the Czech Republic and Latvia) can provide both economical and realistic short-term responses (Kruszewska & Lavrenova, [2022](#)).

To manage childcare and education services, national authorities must receive sufficient financial and administrative support. Sub-central authorities are primarily in charge of schooling and childcare facilities, social protection, housing assistance, and enlarged training, while the central government is typically tasked with managing enrollment and urgent refugee-related responsibilities (such as planning of the asylum

procedure, emergency housing, instant first aid, civic inclusion, and returns) (Korintus, [2000](#)). Furthermore, municipalities in the UK will get an additional £10,500 per refugee for ongoing support, with more money going to children who are school age (Kruszewska & Lavrenova, [2022](#)). The central governments require to help financially to their local governments and encourage effective integration given the relatively large percentage of children refugees (OECD [2022a](#)). Moreover, for families escaping Ukraine, accessible early childhood education and childcare facilities for their children are crucial. At the same time, given the significant proportion of mothers and children among Ukrainian refugees, whereas childcare support in promoting parental employment, enhancing family income, encouraging childhood development and well-being, and ensuring future progress for their children. However, in all OECD nations, the lack of cheap childcare facilities can be a substantial impediment to single-parent households seeking employment, with expenses in Ireland, the UK, and the Slovak Republic reaching up to 25% of average female wages (ibid). A balance of fee declines, tax incentives, and financial support can be taken into consideration in nations with high education and childcare services.

1.5 Social worker's role in refugee integration

The field of social work has long been dedicated to upholding and advancing human rights, regardless of their client's nationality, language, race, sexual orientation, religion or belief, ideology, age, physical capabilities, position, or any other factor that can give rise to discrimination, whereas social workers prioritize helping the most disadvantaged groups around the world (Allan, [2015](#)). Additionally, particularly in the field of asylum policy, social workers are in an excellent position to stimulate reflection by offering more constructive points of view on the refugee crisis (Al-Makhamreh et al., [2012](#)). The refugee frequently finds it difficult to fully utilize professional social work services due to problems with authority and control (Baláž & Čemová, [2019](#)). Despite this, in a context that is often hostile with a law enforcement mindset, social workers can play a more active role in assisting refugees and putting anti-oppressive techniques into practice (Al-Makhamreh et al., [2012](#)). Social work is also able to concentrate on the significance of making sure that approaches to refugees are well-considered and acceptable since the values of social work acknowledge both principles of human rights and the dignity and respect of each individual (Baláž & Čemová, [2019](#)).

1.5.1 Social work approaches and practices with refugees

In order to fulfill refugees' complex and interconnected needs, social workers frequently organize and implement support services; to do this, they frequently collaborate with other relevant parties and multidisciplinary teams (George, [2012](#)). The target population served by social workers who work with refugees and asylum seekers is particularly at risk. The vulnerability stems from their forced migration and the stressful events connected to it, such as challenges in getting jobs, vulnerable status, communication

issues, discrimination, risk of social isolation, and cultural shock, among others, as well as their uncertain living conditions in particular and the risk of oppression by human traffickers, child abusers, and criminal activities (Martinez-Brawley & Zorita, [2011](#)). Therefore, for these factors, social workers must take a comprehensive approach that considers the specific situation of this group of migrants, acknowledge their complexity, and views them as distinct people with very different needs but also strengths to draw upon (ibid). The anti-oppressive and multicultural sensitivity methods are two helpful approaches that may have an impact on other types of social work while dealing with refugee groups (Payne, [2020](#)). Whereas the multicultural sensitivity approach incorporates principles of cultural awareness and ethnic diversity and encourages valuing disparities in societies and stronger relations between distinct demographic classes, the anti-oppressive practice integrates helping individuals with modifying the society and its frameworks with the goal of eliminating oppression and ensuring social fairness and equity for oppressed groups (Amadasun & Omorogiuwa, [2020](#)). However, the social work practices used to help refugees integrate into the host society will also be addressed below.

Social work and refugee rights

Social workers are playing a vital role when dealing with legal concerns and refugees. Using the National Association of Social Workers as a source, Haider ([2020](#)) argues that when working as an international social worker, they have the necessary skills to understand immigration laws; for their clients to feel trusted and informed, service providers must be aware of the rights of refugees. Practitioners should investigate and interpret laws and regulations pertaining to domestic violence, child molestation, and workplace exploitation (ibid). Many of these rules are applied in different ways in refugees' home countries. In order to explain to the client the disparity, the social worker must be knowledgeable of the regulations.

Mental health concerns and the role of social workers

It is well known that all refugees deal with two problems related to their mental health: trauma and loss (Delgado et al., [2005](#)). Moreover, most forced migrants have experienced trauma to a certain extent; the variations in each situation relate to the time, amount, and type of trauma that each individual has suffered (ibid). Refugees may experience trauma throughout the integration process, which is brought on by the profound sense of loss they face (Crisp, [1996](#)). Forced migrants can suffer a few of those, or all of the various types of loss, whereas, the term "material loss" means the physical, familiar surroundings that have been left behind and includes any homes or other tangible things that the people may have had in their own country (Galambos, [2005](#)).

However, in a variety of situations, social workers play significant responsibilities in managing the mental health problems of forced migrants. According to Al-Qdah and Lacroix ([2011](#)), many school administrators

in Jordan, for instance, are unaware of the behavioral needs of Iraqi refugee children. In these situations, social workers are considered to act as instructors to the teachers and counselors, having to pass on best practices for acknowledging this population's particular needs. According to research, a significant proportion of Iraqi refugees in Jordan are from urban areas and fight hard with trauma and loss as well as new stressful events that have an impact on a person's personal and family lives. These stressors include domestic violence, behavioral issues in children, anxiety, depression, and parental relationships that have been impacted by the integration process (ibid). By satisfying these basic requirements, specifically in the realm of protection, education, medical services, counseling, and most crucially, the availability of psychosocial support, social workers may assist refugees and potentially improve their overall well-being (Kim et al., [2007](#)).

Socio-economic issues in refugees and social work's function

To resolve major difficulties as well as provide planning and development of aid programs, the majority of international social workers may be found collaborating with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in the global environment (George, [2012](#)). As a result, social workers have important roles to play in promoting awareness, advocating for funding and education, mobilizing communities, and developing and implementing initiatives for peace and justice (Al-Qdah & Lacroix, [2011](#)). Particularly, it is advised that social workers are competent about the services which are offered and the alternatives for the relocation while offering culturally acceptable interventions that address and appreciate each person's right to self-determination and are in accordance with the values of the refugee/forced migrant in the society (George, [2012](#); Libal & Harding, [2011](#)). The economic and social conditions may be extremely degrading and detrimental to the dignity of forced migrants, impairing all spheres of functional and emotional health (Delgado et al., [2005](#)). Many refugees and asylum seekers can discover that they must live as second-class citizens with few advantages, entitlements, freedoms, and privileges until they are granted refugee status by the host nation (George, [2012](#)). It has been suggested that both governmental and non-governmental organizations offer specialized training to refugees and asylum seekers since the beginning of the various aspects of forced migration. These services ought to include instruction in micro-enterprise or job skills (Aysa-Lastra, [2011](#); Abdullah et al., [2007](#)); budget-friendly methods for offering a nutritious diet (Gunnell et al., [2015](#)); advice on financial planning and the judicial framework (Hatoss & Huijser, [2010](#)); techniques for integrating with the host society (George, [2012](#)). Additionally, social workers must help women who frequently take on the role of the head of the household and are responsible for their families. Programs monitoring by social workers have focused on autonomy and human rights and guaranteeing women's access to services is crucial for this particular population (Al-Qdah & Lacroix, [2011](#)).

Legal issues and social worker position

The abusive behavior individuals suffered there would be very tough to verify because personal accounts are damaged by PTSD, mental illnesses, memory loss as a result of trauma experienced, etc. (Marlowe, [2010](#)). Therefore, refugees and asylum seekers must provide evidence of the purposes they left their country of origin to be eligible for legal documents. It could be very challenging to gather or preserve tangible proof of abuse, eyewitnesses, or other abuse-related documents during the immigration process. As a result, the resettlement process can be delayed since those seeking asylum and refugees might not be able to demonstrate that they were persecuted in their place of origin. Additionally, studies have revealed that the migration of these people is stigmatized (Al-Qdah & Lacroix, [2011](#); Harper & Rahman, [2008](#); Libal & Harding, [2011](#); Marlowe, [2010](#)). For instance, data demonstrates that highly qualified professionals in Jordan are more likely to be granted work permits than refugees with lesser levels of education (Al-Qdah & Lacroix, [2011](#)). Castles ([2012](#)) also makes a clear distinction between behaviors toward migrants of higher-skilled professionals, quite often referred to as "professional mobility," and behaviors toward marginalized and branded "immigrants" lower-class, lower-skilled people, regardless of how desperate the circumstances leading up to the relocation (ibid). When forced migrants deal with the judicial system, this disparity becomes most obvious. The problems that refugees, asylum seekers, internally displaced people (IDPs), and returnees confront must be understood because there is no quick fix or simple solution that would "heal" all of these problems (Libal & Harding, [2011](#)). Most frequently, long-term treatments at all the aforementioned stages are the alternatives. It is advised that refugees be given legal status, either temporary or permanent, based on the particular circumstances, in order to protect their human rights and a respectable level of living in the host country (Sharpe & Namusobya, [2012](#)). Raising public knowledge of the legal requirements of refugees, asylum seekers, IDPs, and repatriation is a specific duty for social workers (ibid). By making the status of those who have been forcibly evicted in their nation of repatriation, they must fight for a secure social environment and accessibility to jobs, healthcare, and other resources.

1.5.2 Tools for social workers working with refugees

It is important to gather data and evaluate backgrounds when dealing with refugees. There are numerous methods that make the work of gathering data easier in order to help the refugee group. The culturagram (Singer, [2008](#)) is one method used to collect information about refugees' backgrounds and cultures (Congress, [2017](#)). Social workers assess a person's behavioral content using cultural ecograms. These techniques enable the social worker to incorporate culture into clinical treatment and identify inequities within the immigrant community (Hahm & Yasui, [2019](#)). The client could feel insecure when conflict occurs. This frequently occurs whenever the social worker displays a lack of comprehension of the client's requirements (Huey & Polo, [2010](#)). Ecograms support the treatment strategy and the evaluation of the

results. The National Association of Social Workers' 2017 Code of Ethics states that cultural literacy and congruency procedures improve the efficiency of performance and treatment (Simmons et al., [2008](#)). The NASW cultural competency indicators can be used if a social worker has any doubts about the duties of an international social worker. The National Association of Social Workers' cultural competency criteria are measured using markers of cultural competence (ibid).

In addition, useful methods for social workers working with adult clients have been identified (Clemons, [2014](#)). Culturally Enhanced Video Feedback Engagement is a method that has been adopted when working with families with children (CEVE) (Hahm & Yasui, [2019](#)). Moreover, Hahm & Yasui ([2019](#)) recommended coordinating minority children who demonstrate inappropriate behavior using the CEVE. Refugees' mental health issues are frequently disregarded (Walker, [2010](#)). Therefore, by integrating different social work principles, a culturally competent model is one approach that can help social service providers in a comprehensive way. There is a critical demand for refugee resettlement because of the rise in international wars. Social workers and other professionals need to appreciate the value of cultural competency in order to better comprehend refugees (Valtonen, [2012](#)). A functional analysis must be carried out in order to comprehend the refugee. A community focus group can be used to implement this procedure and examine methods for adopting better practices.

2 CHAPTER TWO: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK FOR INTEGRATION APPROACHES

According to Bradbury-Jones, Taylor, and Herber ([2014](#)), it is hard to underestimate the value and usefulness of theory in qualitative research. In the qualitative research approach, theory can serve multiple purposes, such as providing a rationale or factual basis for the methodological approach followed, providing a relative background or an understanding of the methods for analyzing and processing information, or acting as a system for showing findings. This study considers two main theoretical aspects, one is the theory of change for achieving integration, and another one is Bronfenbrenner's ecological system theory. And these two theories will link with social capital theory. Both of these theoretical frameworks describe the study's direction and provide guidelines for conceptualizing the data gathered during the investigation.

2.1 Theory of change for achieving integration

The Theory of Change (ToC) cannot be defined in a single way, nor can it be created or applied in a possible manner. It is described as a sequence of circumstances that is anticipated to result in a specific intended goal by some experts. Whatever the exact definition, it is acknowledged that a ToC is a tool and a strategy

that helps the efficient design, execution, and assessment of a program (Antoniuk, [2020](#)). It accomplishes this by clarifying (and documenting) the causal chain(s) that are anticipated to connect a program's actions to its intended final objectives (ibid). In addition for the cause to contribute to the consequence, a ToC must also explicitly state the implications that are being applied.

The easiest way to compare two documents with the same name is to show how the Theory of Change approaches integration: 'Integration Indicators' were published by and on behalf of the Home Office, the Ministry in the authority of all integration-related issues, in 2004 and 2019 (Home Office Indicators of Integration Framework, [2019](#)). The paper 'Indicators of Integration' was published in 2004 (MacMullen, [2004](#)). Alastair Ager and Alison Strang of Queen Margaret University College Ed-Edinburgh submitted their final report. It was adopted by the Home Office to carry out the recommendations made in the "Full and Equal Citizens" report in 2001(ibid). The Indicators of Integration study initially sought to aid individuals in understanding what integration of refugees meant in the particular UK environment before serving as a guide for the Home Office's future work in this area (Home Office, [2004](#)). It was emphasized that the study addressed refugee integration and was created to serve as a catalyst for action in this regard.

However, the report is organized around 10 areas that are divided into 4 categories: means and markers, social connections, facilitators, and foundation (Fig. 1) (ibid). The paper has made a set of indicators for each of them, also with the suggestion that they be evaluated in reference to this specific field. According to the data gathered to create the study, these are the major areas that are most important for facilitating refugee integration into the host community.

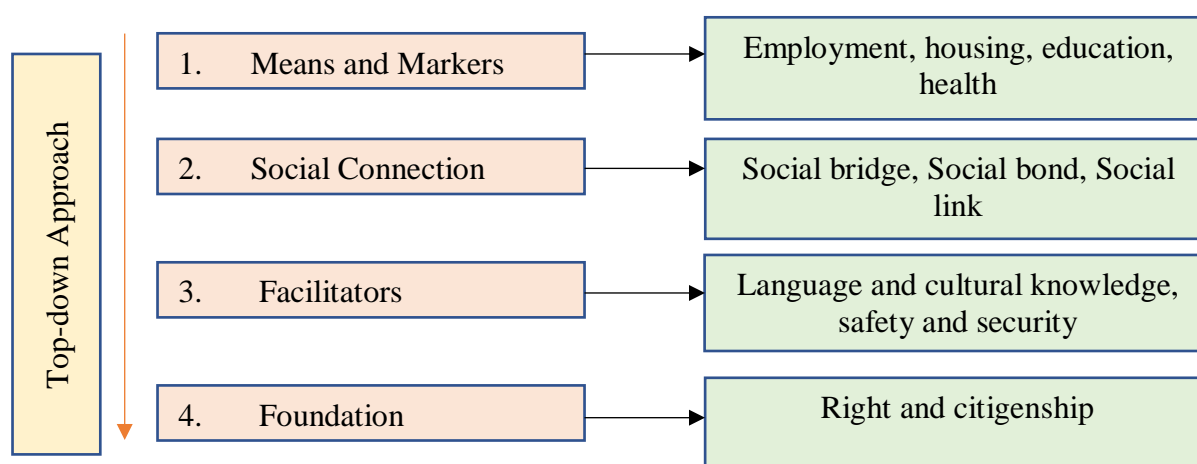


Figure 1: Indicators for achieving refugee integration

Source: *Indicators of Integration, Home office, UK* ([2004](#))

Firstly, the four components under the Means and Markers are employment, housing, education, and health. They were defined as the key accomplishment domains that are commonly acknowledged as essential to

the integration process. This was motivated by the types of integration indicators developed by the Council of Europe (MacMullen, [2004](#)). They obviously act as a "means" for this objective while also serving to highlight the "result" of integration (Home Office, [2004](#)). Although they can be used to support accomplishments in other domains, they can also be utilized to show progress toward integration through analysis. As a result, these domains serve as markers since their success or failure reflects the positive or unfavorable outcomes of integration. They are tools because success in certain areas typically leads to accomplishment in other ones, which facilitates the expansion of the integration process (ibid).

Secondly, the social connections framework has three aspects: social bridges, social bonds, and social links (Home Office, [2004](#)). They were added because it was necessary to explain the social component of integration to comprehend the process as a whole; the scholars refer to the areas as the "public face" of integration, but they do not adequately convey what integration is about (ibid). The procedure must be presented from the viewpoint of the participants. The best approach to both defining and achieving integration is the relationships between individuals and their groups and institutions. Three types of social interactions are used to demonstrate links with people of other societies, the closest connections inside a certain type of community, and links with institutions, including authorities at different levels, according to the notion of social capital.

Thirdly, to integrate with the community, build relationships, and obtain access to the essential resources that define the level of integration, facilitators were recognized as crucial components of this theory (ibid). Moreover, two domains language and cultural knowledge and safety and stability were noted (ibid). These are crucial elements that aid in the integration process, important areas of cultural competency that are essential for humans to successfully integrate into the community (ibid). Language and cultural knowledge were emphasized as being equally important to the integration process and its outcomes. In the paper, it is emphasized how important it is to show respect for one another's cultures and linguistic abilities. The importance of stability and safety was also mentioned. People can establish a sense of identity, stability, and consistency, form relationships in a variety of directions, and integrate when they are free from the burden of ethnic oppression, racism, and violence.

Finally, the foundational element of the framework for the Integration Indicators is the domain of Rights and Citizenship (ibid). It is a statement of the belief that everyone involved in the integration process has similar views and that rights and obligations are crucial to the process. This belief is supported by a study into the notion of integration and qualitative investigations. The objectives and duties associated with the integration process are formed on the basis of this. The concepts of citizenship and nationality, as well as the rights and responsibilities that come with them, profoundly influence the level of integration. An important indicator of a person's level of integration is whether or not they have obtained citizenship or the right to live somewhere permanently. This assumes the use of a language, understanding of and recognition

of social rules, legal principles, and culture, as well as a certain degree of reciprocal social connections and availability to and use of assets based on personal needs and abilities.

Since this research focuses on Ukrainian refugees' family integration into the host community with socioeconomic and cultural contexts, as well as different dynamics of integration experiences, the notion of this theoretical framework is relevant to this current research purpose. The connectivity of the individual, family, organizational, and social levels is crucial to comprehending the integration process, according to the theoretical model that guides this study. Moreover, the ToC theoretical model instructs the use of a comprehensive strategy to understand the indicators of integration that the study intends to conduct by looking at several domains, for example, social, economic, and cultural contexts in a certain refugee group and location. Furthermore, the theoretical framework serves as a reminder that context and time are important, as the refugee integration approach might change over time, in various living circumstances, and among various refugee groups. Additionally, the indicators of the Ukrainian refugee integration process that this research aims to explore (employment, housing, education, health, social bridges, social bonds, social links, language and cultural knowledge, safety and stability, and rights and citizenship) reflect on the theory that aids in understanding the circumstances and requirements for the Ukrainian refugees to integrate successfully in a particular society.

2.2 Ecological systems theory

The ecological approach, which developed from the early works of Germain ([1973](#)) and others Barker, Grinnell, and Hartman, provides practitioners with a strong theoretical foundation that they can use to create successful social work practices (Pardeck, [1988](#)). The ecological approach currently offers methods that enable the social worker to work from micro-level engagement to macro-level social care. In addition to assisting the social worker in changing policy and planning processes, the ecological perspective also supports counseling and other micro-level interventions (Pardeck, [1988](#)). As a result, when using the ecological method to deal with a client system, active and passive practice strategies for involvement can be integrated into a coherent practice orientation (Anderson, [1981](#)). According to current thought regarding the ecological perspective, the fundamental theory of human problems results from the dynamic interaction of psychological, social, economic, political, and physical elements (Hernandez et al., [1985](#)). Such a framework gives the functional interaction between environmental factors and human situations an equal amount of attention. With this viewpoint, the practitioner is able to address the needs and issues of individuals, families, local groups, and the greater community on a variety of systemic levels (Pardeck, [1988](#)). In summary, within the context of the ecological perspective, the practitioner can simply transition from a therapeutic position to a policy and planning position. From the ecological framework, six unique professional positions have currently emerged (Fig. 2) (ibid). A number of authors have also noted these positions as a complex component of advanced specialist practice (Anderson, [1981](#); Hernandez et al., [1985](#)).

The practitioner can perform several tasks with the five basic client structures (Fig. 2), such as the individual, family, small group, organization, and community by utilizing these six professional positions (Pardeck, 1988). The following list of the six professional positions is provided:

1) Conferee: This position, which was inspired by the conference concept, refers to the actions that are conducted when the practitioner acts as the client's primary resource for aid in problem-solving. 2) Enabler: The enabler role is concerned with the activities that are made when the practitioner constructs, organizes, and manages interactions, gatherings, and environmental factors in order to support and improve system efficiency. 3) Broker: The acts conducted when the practitioner's goal is to connect the client with products and services or to regulate the quality of such goods and services are referred to as this job. 4) Mediator: This function refers to the activities conducted when the practitioner's goal is to bring the participants together in a coordinated action by bridging diverse or conflicting points of view. 5) Advocate: This function is described as the actions conducted when the practitioner gets resources or services on behalf of a client despite protests that have been observed or create services and resources in situations where they are insufficient or unavailable. 6) Guardian: When a professional undertakes a social control system or takes a protective role because the client's competency level is regarded insufficient, this is referred to as playing the position of a guardian. Consequently, when a practitioner adopts an ecological approach to development, roles get complicated (Pardeck, 1988). For instance, it can be challenging to distinguish between the conferee and enabler roles at times. Professionals may also discover that they are allowing and advocating while they carry out the broker role (ibid). It is important to recognize how the abovementioned functions support one another and how they tend to cluster instead of staying separate. The ecological approach produces a strategic process of practice roles, which marks a substantial shift from the traditional approaches (Casework, Groupwork, and Community Practice) used in practice (ibid).

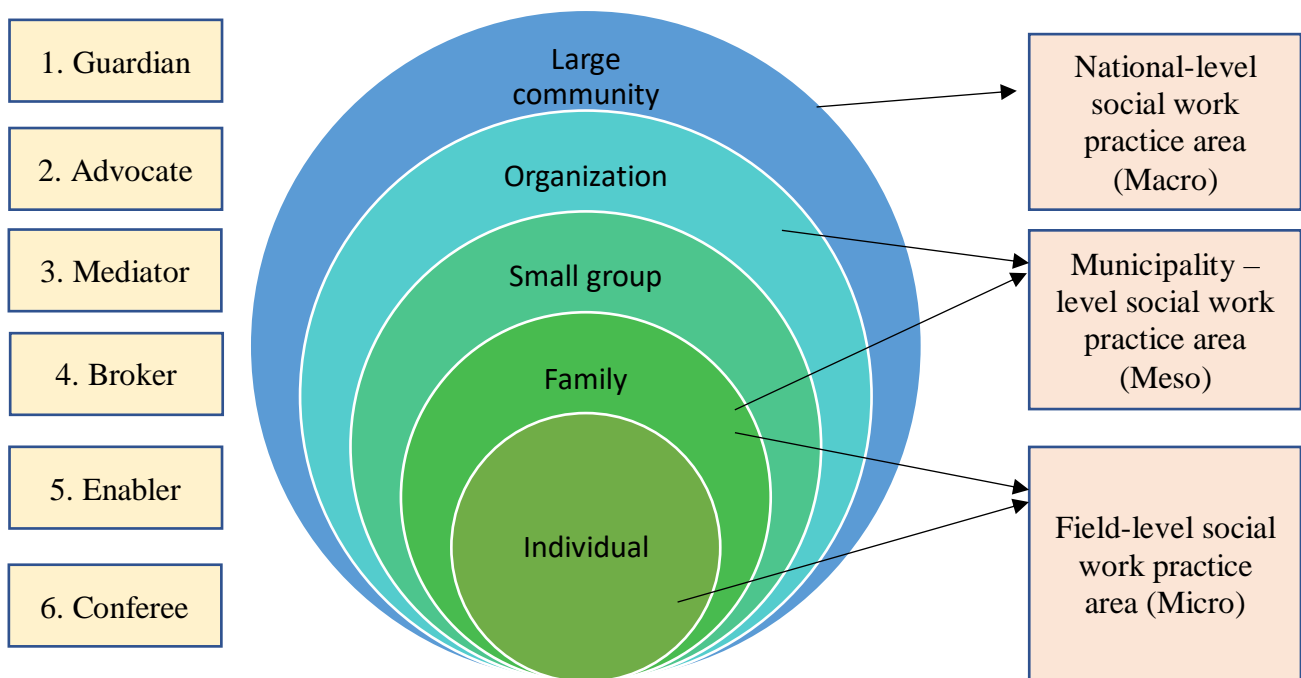


Figure 2: Ecological theory for social work practice

Source: Pardeck (1988)

As a result, this theoretical perspective provides guidance for understanding social work practice with a specific community at various social systems, including field level (micro), municipality (meso), and national level (macro), as well as their function in the different layers of a community that needs support. Eventually, this theoretical model also emphasizes how various systems, interactions, relationships, and alternatives assist the group to manage and overcome the challenges.

2.3 Social capital theory

The concept of social capital is complicated and diverse, including a range of cultural and social functions. Social capital has a long record that can be traced back to classical economists like Adam Smith and John Stuart Mill as well as sociologists like Max Weber who offered a cultural explanation for economic events (Bhandari & Yasunobu, 2009). Perhaps in the late 1980s, the idea of social capital became a popular issue, and since then, study interest has increased (ibid). However, the word was highly popularized among social scientists and grabbed the attention of researchers and policymakers because of Robert D. Putnam's groundbreaking work from 1993. It is difficult to consider a single concept of 'Social capital' because it is multi-dimensional (Putnam, 2001). Depending on their own objectives, different scholars defined social capital in various ways. According to Bourdieu, social capital is an asset that is owned collectively and gives its users credits, or personal benefit (Siisiainen, 2003). In order to obtain economic and social benefits from group participation, the study concentrates on the functional value of social capital and the motivation for personal engagement in such membership (ibid).

The importance of ethnic connections in immigrant economic activity and their effects on social and economic inclusion at the community and state levels are other significant topics that are covered in the literature. According to a popular agreement, migrants gather social capital from their connections to assist them in finding better opportunities, turning social capital into economic capital (Drever and Hoffmeister 2008; Engbersen et al. 2006; Van Meeteren et al. 2009). However, obtaining a job within an ethnic demographic, may not be helpful for effective economic integration as it may limit people get access to choices and limit them to low-paying jobs, reducing the likelihood of socioeconomic development. Moreover, several studies under consideration a very broad definition of integration, usually referring to societal integration and replicating Durkheimian concepts of coherence (Laurence, 2011). Others examine the integration of the individual, looking at things like the degree of job market engagement or educational achievement. A few studies combine the interpersonal level of integration with that of the group or community (Tillie, 2004).

However, a social science paradigm known as social capital is utilized in macro social work practice to emphasize the significance of interpersonal connections, partnerships, and relationships in the process of strategic planning (Healy & Hampshire, [2002](#)). The idea of social capital is helpful for social work that is progressive. There are similarities between the focus on community development that community social workers place on and the concepts of "bonding" and "bridging" that are promoted in the social capital area (ibid). Similar to how the principles of advocacy and policy action are commonly known in modern forms of social work, the linkage components of social capital do the same. Social workers and social policy experts may be better able to assess the social capital impacts of their activities if social capital is seen as a multidimensional notion (ibid). This is crucial for both evaluating the many types of social capital created and allocating resources to the different types of social capital we want to build. For instance, if our aim is to maximize social ties among people in order to improve social integration, we may use one set of techniques; but, if our goal is to increase access to jobs and education, we will need to use another set of techniques.

Therefore, the social capital concept is crucial for understanding the establishment of social networking in the refugee integration process, which stage is highly critical and associated with the foundation, means, and markers phases. At the same time, this theoretical idea also clarifies how to comprehend social workers' roles in advocacy and policymaking at a macro level, a level that is linked to the meso and micro levels of social work practice. As a result, comprehension of the social capital theory is unquestionably essential for this study's exploration of the integration of Ukrainian refugees and social work practice in this area.

2.4 Model of effective integration approach

To provide guidance for the research as well as a framework for conceptualizing and analyzing the findings, the three contents, the theory of change for achieving integration, ecological system theory in social work practice, and social capital theory are combined as interrelated phenomena. Most importantly, all of these theoretical concepts point to several interconnected systems at different social levels that serve to explain how refugees integrate into host societies and the function of social workers in this process. For instance, the second phase of the theory of change is associated with social capital for refugees, whereas, social capital (information, knowledge, common purpose, and skills) assists in the development of stronger social connections, which helps in the acceleration of the facilitator and foundation phases for refugee integration. On the other hand, the ecological system theory of social work claims that social capital for social workers (partnership, advocacy, and policy) is connected to macro-level (guardianship and advocacy) social work practice.

At the same time, meso and micro-level social work practices are linked to macro-level social work practice. Additionally, the ecological system theory for social work practice states that social workers' roles in

various social levels are not always distinct from one another; rather, they occasionally overlap and change their responsibilities with respect to other social levels. For instance, social workers at the meso level can also serve in an advocacy role alongside social workers at the macro level. Consequently, it is stated in the ecological system theory for social work practice that the social worker's role in a particular community is very diverse and occasionally adjustable depending on the environment and time. In the end, the ecological system theory's elements for social workers' responsibilities and the theory of change's components for achieving integration are connected and dependent on one another. And it is anticipated that an effective integration approach (Fig.3) for the refugees will be implemented when all the components of the three concepts are functioning efficiently.

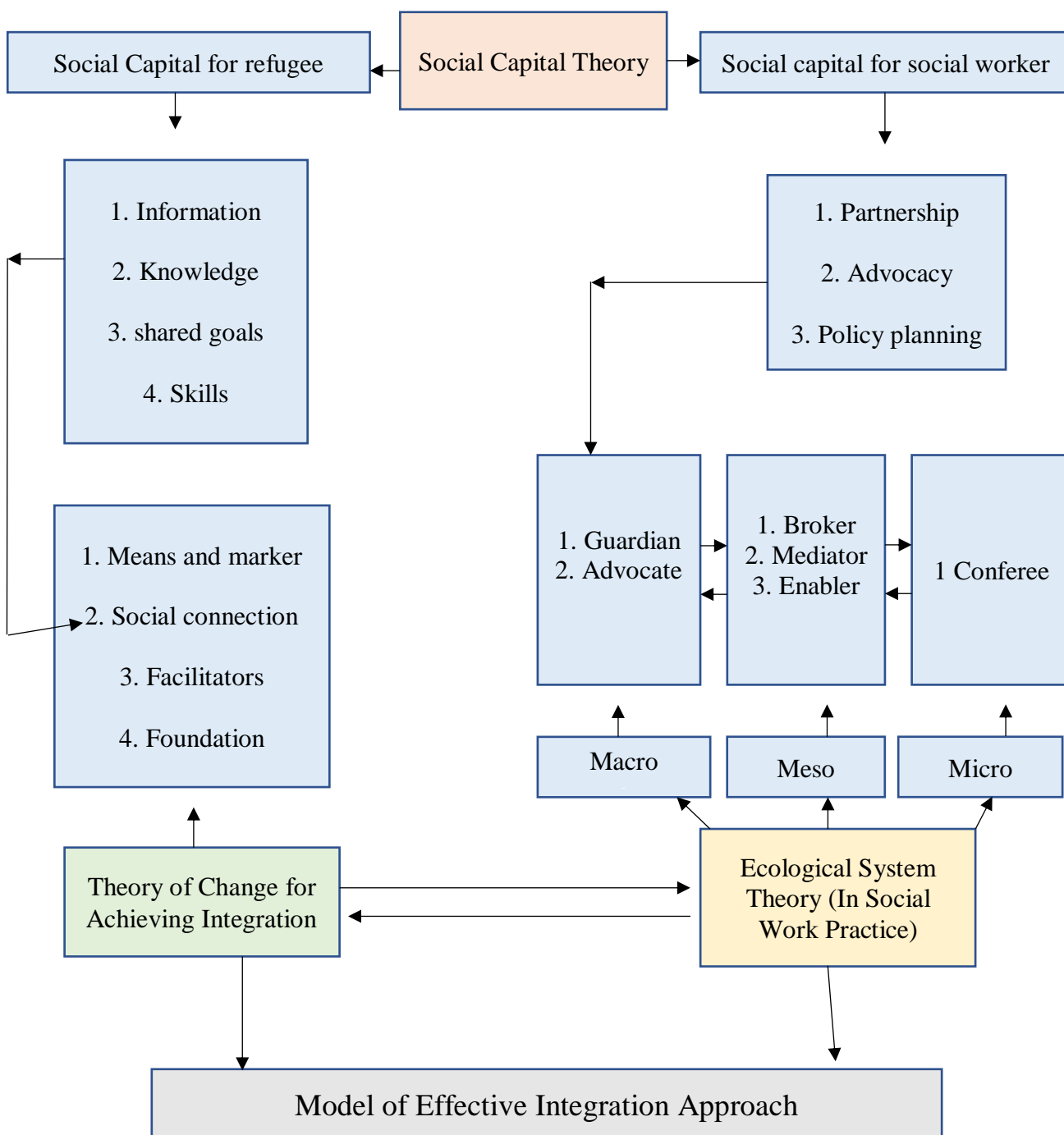


Figure 3: Model of effective integration approach

Source: Author

3 CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

This chapter examines the study methods used to investigate the family integration process of Ukrainian refugees as well as the role of social workers working with refugees at different social levels to assist in their integration into host societies. Moreover, the chapter provides an overview of the procedures used to carry out this study, including how participants were selected, the selected category, methodological approaches, research design, research area, tools for data collecting, analytical procedures, and techniques. In addition to these, it has also covered the study's limitations and ethical considerations.

3.1 Research approach and research design

In this study, the qualitative research approach has been applied to address the research objectives. The study's focus is to understand how the integration process is being worked to integrate Ukrainian refugees into Slovak society. To fully comprehend the experience of the Ukrainian refugees in this situation, a subjective approach and representation of different perspectives are required. At the same time, from a social work perspective, it is also crucial to explore their roles at different social levels to integrate the Ukrainian refugees into the host society. Therefore, the qualitative research method is perfect to understand the experiences of the Ukrainian refugees in socio-economic and cultural contexts, as well as, the social work services, and their role to integrate them into the host community. This type of reasoning should typically be related to qualitative research, also known as inductive reasoning, because the findings are always connected to the refugee and social workers' contexts. Additionally, there is a preference to recognize feelings and emotions in qualitative research to comprehend the perspectives of refugees. Besides that, by using precise refugee experiences, qualitative research enables the researcher to thoroughly analyze the socio-economic and cultural facts. Shank (2002) asserts that qualitative research is a type of systematic empirical investigation into interpretation. The terms "systematic" and "empirical" in this context refer to research that is "planned, ordered, and public" and is based on the actual experience that could be certainly connected to social work professionals who work with Ukrainian refugees on three different levels (Field, municipality and national). This thesis is qualitative in approach and exploratory in design.

Research designs illustrate the nature of the inquiry and the appropriate conceptual framework for the study (Bryman, 2012). In this study, a qualitative research approach has been adopted to investigate the experiences of Ukrainian refugees and their difficulties with the integration process, as well as the roles and strategies used by social workers in their interactions with Ukrainian refugees. Since this research is

more exploratory in nature, the author has been able to attain a deeper insight into the lives of Ukrainian refugees in socio-economic and cultural dimensions as well as social workers at different social levels. Additionally, Creswell (2014) noted that exploratory qualitative research findings use verbs like "explore," "understand," or "discover" that the author used in the research questions and begin with research questions like "how". As a result, the exploratory research approach allowed this study to explore how social workers work and their practices with Ukrainian refugees at three different social levels (field, municipality, and national) while also addressing the research topics of how Ukrainian refugee integration is being implemented in social, economic, and cultural dimensions in the context of Slovakia.

Literature search technique

This study is exploring the Ukrainian refugees' family integration process into Slovak society and the role of social workers to integrate Ukrainian refugees into the host society; therefore, the literature search was, "How does the integration process being implemented for the Ukrainian refugees? Then different types of refugee integration into the host societies, for example, integration in the context of social, economic, and cultural dimensions. At the same time, what are the challenges in terms of getting a job, enrollment in schooling, communication with the locals, getting health care facilities in the hospitals, and basic requirements as a refugee? On the other hand, from a social work perspective, what are the roles of a social worker to integrate refugees into the host society? Afterward, the practices of social work at different social levels, for example, field level, municipality level, and national level. Furthermore, what are the social work tools and resources and the challenges of social work practice for integrating refugees in the host community?" As a result, according to the research questions and research plan, "Ukrainian refugee", "family integration", "socio-economic integration", "cultural integration", "social worker's role", "social work practice", "social worker's tools", "challenges", "Slovak Society" were used as keywords.

3.2 Sampling and participant selection

This research applied a purposive sampling method to select the participants. This method was most appropriate because the research intended to explore the Ukrainian refugee integration process especially socioeconomic and cultural perspectives in the context of Slovakia, and also the social work practice in the area of refugee integration. According to Bryman (2012), purposive sampling allows researchers to choose participants in accordance with the study's aim and relevance to the research questions. Therefore, purposive sampling helped me to specifically select participants who represented the Ukrainian refugee's family (single parent and two parents family) and for the social workers who are working at different social levels, for example, field level (social workers who have direct contact with Ukrainian refugees), municipality level and national level. Since this study had a diversified population in both Ukrainian refugee and social worker groups, the use of purposive sampling helped the author to specify the participants according to this research goal and objectives.

Study area selection

According to Creswell (2014), qualitative research is done where the research subjects actually experience the challenge that is being addressed. Since this research is about Ukrainian refugee family integration into Slovak society, the author selected Ruzomberok, one of the municipalities of the Slovak Republic as a study area (Fig.04). However, Ruzomberok is a small town in the northern part of Slovakia, located in the region of Liptov, between the mountain ranges of the Low Tatras and Velka Fatra².



Figure 04: Study area (Ruzomberok, Slovakia; marked as a red point)

Source: Google

For a number of reasons, Ruzomberok, Slovakia, is a crucial site for research on the integration of Ukrainian refugees. First of all, Ruzomberok is quite close to the Ukrainian border and Slovakia is a neighboring country to Ukraine, making it a potential destination for Ukrainian refugees. Additionally, Ruzomberok is a relatively small town, making it a special place to study how refugees integrate into a small-town setting. Besides that, Slovakia has a history of hosting refugees, including Ukrainians during the Soviet era, which may have influenced the nation's strategy for integrating refugees. The author gained knowledge about the difficulties and opportunities for successful integration in a small-town setting as well as the efficiency of present integration policies and practices in Slovakia in the context of social work practice by exploring the experiences of Ukrainian refugees in Ruzomberok. Overall, Ruzomberok in Slovakia offers a useful setting for researching the integration of Ukrainian refugees and figuring out ways to facilitate their successful integration into local communities.

² Ružomberok – town in NSlovakia, population with suburbs around 57 thousands. Population – 96% Slovaks. Religion – 75% Catholics. Source: www.statistics.sk (in Slovak). Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic. 2022-03-31

Study population and sample size

This study investigated the Ukrainian refugee's family integration process into Slovak society (Ruzomberok) considering their socio-economic and cultural inclusion. At the same time, this research also explored the social worker's role at different social levels to integrate the Ukrainian refugees in Ruzomberok. Therefore, both Ukrainian refugees and social workers who are involved with this Ukrainian integration process were selected as study populations or participants in this research. In this study, Ukrainian refugee families were selected based on the number of parents, single-parent families, and both parents families. The study involved a total of three families with a single parent and three families with both parents. In this case, families were selected only based on the number of parents, there were no other factors, such as parents' educational qualification, socio-economic background, and the number of children did not take into consideration for selecting the participants. A pilot survey was conducted before starting the main data collection process and changes were made to the instrument in accordance with the pilot study. Data were collected from 6 families (three single-parent families and three both-parent families). After two interviews the information was repeated, therefore, because of the data saturation the author decided to take three interviews with each group of Ukrainian families

Social workers were selected from three different groups: Social workers on the field level, municipality level and national level. Policy analyses showed that social workers who work with the Ukrainian refugees at the field level, might have direct communication with the Ukrainian refugee's family, secondly, social workers who are working at the municipality level, and finally social workers who are working at the national level. All three types of social workers were working or were involved with the Ukrainian refugee integration process was the criteria to select the participants from the social worker's group. Nonetheless, there were two social workers were selected from each category. Therefore, it was a total of six social workers from three different categories. one pilot survey from each group of social workers was conducted before the main data collection procedure

However, social workers were selected from three different backgrounds. Social workers who are working with the Ukrainian refugees at the field level, in this case, they have direct communication with the Ukrainian refugee's family, secondly, social workers who are working at the municipality level, and finally social workers who are working at the national level. Moreover, all three types of social workers were working or were involved with the Ukrainian refugee integration process was the criteria to select the participants from the social worker's group. Nonetheless, there were two social workers were selected from each category. Therefore, it was a total of six social workers from three different categories. one pilot survey from each group of social workers was conducted before the main data collection procedure. The author talked about 17 social workers (4 from the field level, 5 from the municipality level, and 8 from the national level), but only collected data from two social workers from each group, which means a total of 6 social

workers from three different categories who were willing to share their experience about the Ukrainian refugee integration in Slovakia. It was also observed that after one interview the information was repeated, therefore, because of the data saturation the author decided to take two interviews from each group of the social workers. Data was collected from two social workers from each group, which means a total of 6 social workers from three different categories who were willing to share their experience about the Ukrainian refugee integration in Slovakia. It was also observed that after one interview the information was repeated, therefore, because of the data saturation the author decided to take two interviews from each group of the social workers.

Demographic information of the participants

In this research, a total of 6 Ukrainian refugee families were selected, and the goal was to know in detail about the integration experiences in Ruzomberok (Slovakia) through semistructured interviewing. For the single-parent refugee family Interviews were conducted with the mother because their husbands were in the Ukraine and fighting for their country. Men in Ukraine who are physically fit and are not minors are required to fight for their country, and they are not allowed to leave with their families unless they have three or more children. Therefore, all the participants were women from single-parent refugee families, had one to two children, and were under the age of 18 for all their children. On the other hand, 3 interviews were conducted with two parent's refugee families who were all female. If a family has 3 children or more, just as it is permitted for men to visit their families outside of Ukraine, the same rule applies to families with both parents. Participants from both categories were typically working from home or performing odd jobs (like cleaning) while some participants were volunteering at non-profit organizations in Ruzomberok, where they had no prior experience (Table. 2) The following Table 2 lists the participants' demographic data (for the Ukrainian refugee's families). The participants' names are excluded here and other information is left as it was during data collection in order to protect their confidentiality.

Table 2: Demographic information about Ukrainian refugee families

S1	Family Types	Gender	Age	Number of Children	Current Occupation (Ruzomberok)
01	Single Parent	Female	46	02	Cleaner & Freelancer
02	Single Parent	Female	40	02	Medical Company (remotely)
03	Single parent	Female	49	01	Psychologist
04	Two Parents	Female	35	03	Musician
05	Two Parents	Female	37	03	Working in an NGO, graphic designer (remotely)

06	Two Parents	Female	46	03	Volunteer (NGO)
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Source: Author (study data)

However, through semi-structured interviewing, social workers from three different organizational levels (field, municipality, and national) shared their insights into the integration of Ukrainian refugees in Slovakia. Two interviews were collected from the field-level social workers who were working directly with the Ukrainian refugees. In this case, social workers work as a volunteer, and they do not have social work background. Moreover, two interviews were conducted too with social workers who are working in the Office of Social Affairs and Family at Ruzomberok (municipality level), they both were female. Even though they have limited social work expertise, it was their first experience with a refugee. On the other hand, two interviews were conducted with social workers at the national level who were employed by the Central Office of Social Affairs and Family in Bratislava (national level); both experts have extensive experience working in the social work field as well as with refugee integration (Table: 5).

Table 3: Demographic information about social workers

S1	Category of social worker (area of providing services)	Age	Gender	Occupation	Total Work Experience in the Social work Field	Work Experience with refugee
01	Field	32	Male	Architecture	7 years	7 months
02	Field	40	Male	Spokesperson to Mayor	9 years	7 months
03	Municipality	32	Female	Department of AOTP and ESF	15 months	7 months
04	Municipality	25	Female	Department of Consultation and Education	9 months	9 months
05	National	59	Female	advisor Office of Social Affairs and Family	35 years	15 years

06	National	57	Male	Advisor of social services	23 years	9 years
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Source: Author (study data)

3.3 Data collection and data analysis

The methods and tools used for data gathering, as well as data processing and analysis, are covered in this section.

Data collection methods

The researcher contacted or emailed the participants for the first time after obtaining their contact information to briefly explain the project and extend an invitation to participate in this research. Following their confirmation of participation, the researcher sent a follow-up email to determine the time and method of the interview based on the participant's preferences. It was necessary to connect with an interpreter during the interview process due to the language barrier.

Semi-structured interview process

The data was collected through semi-structured interviews, which helped get detailed information about the Ukrainian refugee's experiences with their integration process in Slovakia as well as the social workers who were working for the integration of the Ukrainian refugees. Semi-structured and more unstructured interactions were used during the interviews. That entails asking open-ended questions that encouraged participants to elaborate on and discuss their experiences in their own unique manner. This type of interview assists this study in understanding the participants' personal and emotional problems as well as their ideas, sentiments, and views regarding their experiences with the specific topic. Instead of using predetermined regimented sets of questions, semi-structured and open-ended inquiries allowed to acquire participants own opinions. An interview guide was created using the research questions and objectives that help the researcher during the interview process and ensure they do not miss any crucial questions. Nonetheless, some participants were not agreed to participate in the interviews rather they preferred to write down their answers and email them to the researcher.

On average, each participant was interviewed for forty-five minutes. Since the research field was in Slovakia the interview language was Slovak and English for the Social workers and Ukrainian language for the refugees and there was an interpreter to translate the languages. The questions were translated into the participants' preferred languages for those who wanted to write their answers. All interviews were recorded with the participant's consent. Along with the record, the researcher also made some backup notes.

Procedure for taking an interview

According to the convenience of the participants, the researcher took seven interviews via Zoom and five interviews in written format (participants who did not agree to do face-to-face or online interviews). These interviews were all recorded with the participant's consent. The researcher was able to watch the participant's facial expressions through video conversations or online interviews while they discussed their challenges, supports, successes, and needs. The written interviews were effectively explained, making it simple for the researcher to visualize the situation from the participant's point of view. The researcher also further spoke with the participants if the answer was not clear enough.

Data transcription and translation

Due to the fact that the interview was conducted in Slovak, Ukrainian, and English languages, the data was first transcribed in that particular language before being translated into English with the aid of an interpreter. However, Pauses, stumbles, silence, unintentional movements, and repetition of sentences that looked habitual were all eliminated during transcribing. The facts and content were more important than the way it was stated without providing any missing information. However, certain expressions, such as crying while discussing their suffering, were noted in brackets in the transcriptions. Following transcription (in English), the researcher revised the language to ensure that it conveyed the participants' ideas about their personal circumstances and experiences.

Data analysis

Creswell (2013) asserts that the preparation and organization of the data represent data analysis in qualitative research. According to Bryman (2012), data analysis is organizing and understanding the data. In this research, thematic analysis is used to manage and analyze the data.

However, Research on the integration of Ukrainian refugees has found that thematic analysis is a useful technique for analyzing qualitative data in a variety of contexts. Integration of refugees is a complicated and comprehensive topic with several actors, procedures, and results. Due to the thematic analysis, the different indicators that influence Ukrainian refugee integration, such as social, cultural, economic, and political issues, were easier to identify and analyze. Depending on their background, status, and environment, Ukrainian refugees have a variety of integrating experiences and perspectives. Thematic analysis assisted in identifying and comparing the numerous themes and patterns that emerge from diverse refugees' families experiences. In the context of the integration of Ukrainian refugees into Slovakia, the thematic analysis also assisted in identifying and analyzing the different factors that impact social workers' roles in refugee integration, such as their skills, knowledge, attitudes, and resources.

Additionally, the researcher outlined the event and the participants' descriptions, which are crucial for this investigation and pertinent to the research questions as well as the goal of the study to narrow down the theme. One of the major components of selecting themes for analysis is to code each transcript by placing keywords next to the information written in each line or sentence. As a result of this procedure, themes were manually recognized, and information was then extracted from each transcript under the relevant theme and entered into a new file with the categorization of various interviews. The analysis was then conducted by breaking down the themes into several subthemes.

Ethical considerations

Participants in this study were properly informed about the study's objectives, methods, advantages, and concerns, as well as their rights, the researcher's role in the study, and how the information would be used. They were also made aware of their ability to refuse to participate in the study and the fact that their participation was voluntary. In addition, participants received a comprehensive permission form outlining their rights as participants. Since most of the interviews were conducted via Zoom, informed consent was obtained from each participant regarding their participation and preferred method of participation. Furthermore, maintaining participant confidentiality is essential to protect them from harm and give them the freedom to express their experiences. Participants in this study were given the assurance that their answers would be kept confidential, and their anonymity was maintained the entire time. To protect their rights and avoid harm, the identities of the participants were all excluded from this study. The researcher and participants built a respectable and trustworthy relationship. The interviews were recorded with the participant's consent to reduce the possibility of information being misinterpreted and double-checked. In this situation, to protect anonymity, all the recorded interviews and their transcripts were stored in a safe and secure folder on the author's computer and were only used during the research's intended purpose.

Quality assurance of the study

The procedure of gathering data is crucial to the validity of the research. Additionally, Lincoln and Guba (1985) use particular terms to determine the "trustworthiness" of a qualitative study, including integrity, honesty, transferability, trustworthiness, and confirmability for evaluation, quality assessment, reliability, and rationality.

The data used in this study were gathered in accordance with ethically acknowledged principles, making the findings reliable. Moreover, in this study, to see the scenario of Ukrainian refugees' family's integration from different perspectives, data was collected from the Ukrainian refugee families and social workers who were working to integrate the Ukrainian refugees through semi-structured interviews using standards and probing questions. Furthermore, the findings and analyses of the study were validated by earlier literature and the theoretical framework. The study is authentic since it interprets and explores experiences from the

perspective of a Ukrainian refugee and social worker. The statement of the problem, theoretical approach, research methodology, and all other relevant processes were all well stated in the research. Finally, the study assures reliability as the gathered information or finding was not influenced by the researcher's personal beliefs because this study on Ukrainian refugees' family integration into Slovak society was a completely new experience for the researcher where research ethics, independence, and integrity were strictly maintained.

Limitations of the Study

Although some evident difficulties experienced during the research process have been adequately addressed by this study. The researcher would point forth a few of the difficulties that seem to have in some way constrained this study as part of being reflective and to advise future researchers on what could be done better.

Firstly, Although the researcher attempted to interview from the father's side and ensured a gender balance, they were unable to manage their schedules, so the fathers from both parents' categories of refugee families were not included in this study. If it were possible, it would be interesting to hear from the father's perspective and observe the integration process from the perspective of the men. Consequently, conducting interviews with only women for both categories (families with a single parent and families with two parents) could be a limitation of this study.

Secondly, the research was limited by the language barrier. The survey would have been a little less challenging if the researcher and the participants were able to communicate in the same language during the interviews, despite the fact that an interpreter was hired to fill this gap. If the researcher had conducted the interviews himself, he could have guided them toward other perspectives to produce deeper insights. The interviews were conducted in Slovak and Ukrainian, and their translation into English may have influenced to change of some meanings that might be best expressed in the original language. Eventually, a specific study timeline may be mentioned as a constraint. The study's limitations will expand the possibilities for additional research in this area and reduce the knowledge gap.

4 CHAPTER FOUR: UKRAINIAN REFUGEE FAMILIES' EXPERIENCE OF INTEGRATION INTO SLOVAK SOCIETY

The findings of the study, which were obtained from the field through interviews, are presented in this chapter. Themes are used to examine the data in accordance with the goals and research questions of the study. The findings respond to the study's research question; this research has two main research questions, one of the research questions of the study is, how do the Ukrainian refugees describe (characterize) their integration experiences in terms of socioeconomic and cultural dimensions? Mainly, this chapter explores and discusses the findings to comprehend the different dynamics of experiences with their integration process in Ruzomberok. To obtain a clear idea of the integration process in Ruzomberok for Ukrainian refugee families and indicators that are influencing the integration process, this chapter intends to discuss the integration from the social, economic, and cultural points of view, and also the challenges that Ukrainian families are facing during the integration process in Ruzomberok, Slovakia.

Besides, this study explores and discusses the social worker's role and their practice with the Ukrainian refugees at different social levels in Slovakia. Data were collected on 3 different social levels, for example, field level, municipality level, and national level (meticulously discussed in the methodology part). For the convenience of presentation and discussion of the findings, social workers' contributions (every specific role) for integrating Ukrainian refugees on three different levels will present and compare together. Eventually, challenges of the social work practice with the Ukrainian refugees will also be focused on in this chapter.

4.1 Social integration

The social integration of Ukrainian refugee families in Ruzomberok would entail a multidimensional process designed to help their successful inclusion into the local community. However, community acceptance, social bonds, education facilities, local language religious freedom, and family reunification will be discussed as the indicators of social integration for the Ukrainian refugees in Ruzomberok.

4.1.1 The acceptance from the Slovak community

The study's findings revealed insight into how Ukrainian refugee families were initially accepted in Ruzomberok, Slovakia, demonstrating a general atmosphere of a warm welcome from the local community. This acceptability was seen across both types of families, including single-parent households and two parents' families. The 'host community's acceptance' was recognized by the Ukrainian refugees' families through the positive behavior of the local people toward the Ukrainians, which also included helping the

Ukrainian refugees in finding accommodation, assisting them in obtaining employment, and promoting the development of social networks. These findings also suggest that, regardless of personal circumstances, the people of Ruzomberok are sympathetic to the plight of Ukrainian refugees. At the same time, these findings show the importance of a warm welcome in promoting the integration and well-being of Ukrainian refugees in Ruzomberok.

“We were welcomed by a generous Slovak family when we arrived in Ruzomberok. By assisting us in finding our own apartment and a job for my husband, they provided us with a fresh start. People in Slovakia welcomed us warmly” (Ukrainian refugee: two parents' family).

Moreover, one of the participants from a single-parent family was initially surprised and happy to see the warm reception from the host community.

“Honestly, I didn't expect that I would find such warm reception from them. It was initially difficult to cope in a new country with my two children whereas my husband is not with us. But after our arrival in Ruzomberok, the locals helped us a lot and they did everything for us” (Ukrainian refugee: single-parent family).

However, the willingness of the local community to accept and integrate refugees into their society is referred to as ‘host community acceptance’ (Ali, [2014](#)), whereas access to basic requirements including housing, healthcare, education, and employment possibilities, as well as social support networks, are just a few examples of how acceptance might manifest (ibid). According to the first statement, the locals from Ruzomberok showed genuine hospitality and went above and beyond to offer the Ukrainian refugee family a fresh start. They strongly supported the family's integration into the community by providing housing and job involvement. The participant who comes from a single-parent family makes the second statement. This person expresses shock and satisfaction at the gracious welcome they received from the host community. The person initially anticipated challenges in moving to a new nation as a single parent with two children and without having a spouse. The experiences of Ukrainian refugee families in Ruzomberok, Slovakia, are reflected in both comments, which also attest to the welcoming reception they first received. According to these experiences, the host community actively participates in helping the refugees by providing practical assistance, which significantly aids in their effective integration into the community.

4.1.2 Learning Slovak language

It seems from the research data that the Ukrainian refugees in Ruzomberok have tried to learn the Slovak language. The participants claimed that the Slovak language is similar to the Ukrainian language. As a result, they can maintain basic communication with the locals, and they can ask for help in the local language.

“Slovak language is very similar to the Ukrainian language. So that I understand a lot of things in Slovak, but I can’t fluently speak in Slovak. But I think, my fluency in the Slovak language is enough to ask something or read something which is needed for me” (Ukrainian refugee: single-parent family).

On the other hand, some participants do not speak Slovak, they occasionally use Russian when speaking with locals. Additionally, when they need to connect with the locals or ask a question, they use Google Translate or sometimes ask people to be an interpreter. Nonetheless, it is not a convenient way to use Google Translator or ask someone to interpret the language. Because of the language barrier, Ukrainian refugees are facing some difficulties in terms of communication and access to the job market.

“I hardly understand Slovak. So, most of the time I use Russian to communicate with the local people. Sometimes I use the translator to communicate with locals” (Ukrainian refugee: two parents' family).

However, language is thought to be crucial for refugees to successfully integrate into their host society. For instance, speaking the local language of the host community is commonly quoted as being essential to the integration process (Age and Strang, [2008](#)). The outcomes draw attention to the difficulties and linguistic dynamics faced by Ukrainian refugees in Ruzomberok, Slovakia. It shows that the language barrier still poses a substantial difficulty despite the efforts made by some refugees to acquire Slovak and the use of other communication methods. Their capacity to integrate into the community and find career prospects may be hampered by communication issues. According to the theory of change, language is one of the indicators for the refugees to integrate into the host society, which is interlinked with the social connection and foundation phases that leads refugees to achieve rights and citizenship in the long-term destination (Home Office, [2019](#)). Therefore, to facilitate successful integration and overcome obstacles in daily life and the labor market, local language fluency is crucial. It implies that Ukrainian refugees in Ruzomberok might considerably benefit from more assistance and resources to advance their language abilities.

4.1.3 Education facilities for Ukrainian refugee children

The participants do not attend school in Ruzomberok; in most cases, they have already graduated from school. The educational institutions will therefore be concentrating on the demands of their children in this section. The study discovered three distinct scenarios for Ukrainian refugee children attending schools in Slovakia or Ukraine (Online school). The Ukrainian refugee children who are attending schools in Ruzomberok understand Slovak, and Slovak is the language of instruction there.

“They are going to the local school. Because my children understand the Slovak language, and Slovak is the language of instruction in their schools” (Ukrainian refugee: two parents' family)

The second group of Ukrainian children is attending online schools in Ukraine. Because they do not understand Slovak. Their parents also claimed that sometimes it is difficult to attend online schools in Ukraine because of power cuts and poor internet connection but unfortunately, they do not have any other choices.

“They don’t understand Slovak, they don’t go to the local school. So, they attend Ukrainian schools at online, and it’s easier for them but sometimes their study hampered because of power cuts and internet problems in Ukraine. In this war situation, you can’t expect more” (Ukrainian refugee: single-parent family)

The third group of Ukrainian children was attending schools in Ruzomberok, simultaneously they were attending online schools in Ukraine. But after a few months, they realized it was difficult for them to maintain two schools at the same time and then they left schools in Ruzomberok, but now they are attending online schools in Ukraine, whereas the language barrier was one of the reasons they chose schools in Ukraine.

“They went to school here in Ruzomberok, but in September they realized that they had both schools (Ukraine and Slovakia) at the same time, therefore they could not continue school in Ruzomberok. Also, they are not fluent in Slovak” (Ukrainian refugee: single-parent family).

According to a study by Kruszewska & Lavrenova (2022), it is essential to modify education policy to meet the needs of Ukrainian children. Host countries have established transition programs, either inside schools or at specialized education institutes, as students develop their knowledge and language skills (ibid). However, the outcomes reflect the challenging educational environment faced by Ukrainian refugee children in Ruzomberok. Their possibilities for attending school are significantly impacted by the language barrier. While some children can able to enroll in the local school system due to their local language proficiency, others depend on online education programs in Ukraine. It should emphasize the significance of offering suitable assistance in Ruzomberok schools, such as transitional programs or specialized educational facilities solely for children of Ukrainian refugees. In order to get around the linguistic barrier in the educational system, they might also recruit Ukrainian teachers in the classrooms.

4.1.4 Building social network with Slovak people

A crucial indicator of a refugee's integration into the host society is the development of a social network and connections with the locals. This section explores social networks from two distinct angles. One is from the participant's (parents') perspective, and the other is from their children's perspective. However, the local language also contributes significantly to the fostering of relationships between the locals and the Ukrainian refugees. Some participants also stated that they have local friends and maintain good relationships with

the locals as well as their landlords and neighbors. Additionally, they claimed that speaking the local language allows them to connect with the people and forge relationships with them. These participants also indicated that local acquaintances had initially assisted them in finding employment and that they had previously taken part in most local events because of their local connections.

“I have local friends here. I have a very good relationship with locals, especially my neighbors. Not only neighbors but also other locals. They are so friendly, and they are always ready to help. People are so nice and kind here. They helped me to get a job here. I also participate in social gatherings and events with them. They always try to make me happy. They are treating me like their family members. (Ukrainian refugee: two parent’s family).

On the other hand, some participants reported it was challenging to interact and make friends with locals because they could not speak Slovak. These individuals also mentioned they do not have local friends, but they have a good bonding with their landlords or neighbors. There is a possibility sometimes the participants are not also open with the locals but with the neighbors and landlords to secure their places and get support from them. On the contrary, some locals are not often approachable enough to develop bonds with Ukrainian refugees.

“Unfortunately, I have no friends or acquaintances here. But I communicate with my neighbors if I need to ask about something emergency. My neighbors are very good people, and they are helping me a lot. Sometimes, I am feeling isolated when people behave rudely, you know all people are not the same. I experienced it twice when I found the locals behaved very badly with me” (Ukrainian refugee: single-parent family).

Moreover, Ukrainian refugee children have almost the same experiences as their parents. According to their parents, children who do not understand Slovak, it is difficult for them to communicate with the local children and form friendships with them. But occasionally children use Russian to communicate with the locals. However, children who speak Slovak have more local acquaintances in Ruzomberok.

“My children can speak Slovak. They have some local friends here. They have a good bonding with the locals” (Ukrainian refugee: two parent’s family).

“They do not speak Slovak, so it's difficult for them to make local friends. But sometimes they use Russian with the local children” (Ukrainian refugee: single-parent family).

However, the ‘Theory of Change for Achieving Integration’ social bond/network is one of the indicators of the social connections phase (Home Office, [2019](#)). The scholars refer to the areas as the "public face" of

integration which may help refugees to get knowledge about the local culture and secure a job with the help of local friends (Home Office, [2019](#)). The outcome highlights the value of encouraging local language learning opportunities and creating inclusive environments to help Ukrainian refugees and their children in social integration. In order to establish a welcoming and inclusive social network, it also highlights the necessity of mutual openness and understanding between the host community and the Ukrainian refugees.

4.1.5 Ukrainian refugee's religious freedom in Ruzomberok

Ukraine is primarily a Christian country, making up the majority of the population identifies as Eastern Orthodox. It has been discovered that many Ukrainian nationals and Ukrainian refugees in Ruzomberok practice Eastern Orthodoxy or other branches of Christianity. Moreover, participants also said that there are no issues with practicing religious beliefs and principles in Ruzomberok.

“I'm a member of the protestation church. Therefore, we practice the same religion here in Ruzomberok, and everything is okay. But many Ukrainian people are Pravoslavne (Orthodox). It means, they have some mixed with paganism and they have different religious functions. But for me, everything is fine here” (Ukrainian refugee: two parent's family).

Despite being Christians, Ukrainians belong to a variety of churches based on their religious values. One of the participants stated that the location of her home is somewhat remote from the church. But she does not consider it to be a huge difficulty for her to follow her faith in Ruzomberok because she only attends Church on weekends and on special occasions.

“We practice the same religion here in Ruzomberok, and everything is okay. The only issue is that the churches we attend are outside of our city. But it is not a problem for us. since we only attended church during holidays and special occasions” (Ukrainian refugee: single-parent family).

However, people cannot just describe one another based on their nationality or ethnicity (Kalupe, [2017](#)). The role of religion is another, whereas the freedom of religious practice should be one of the major priorities in the integration of refugees (ibid). In addition, study shows, there are not many substantial barriers to the religious practice of Ukrainian refugees in Ruzomberok. They can uphold their religious customs and take part in religious events because the city has churches with a Christian majority. Even while there may be some practical difficulties, such as the distance to some churches, they do not seem to interfere with the participant's ability to follow their religion.

4.1.6 Family reunification for the Ukrainian refugees in Ruzomberok

The Ukrainian refugee in Ruzomberok is allowed to visit their family in Ukraine. At the same time, they can visit their friends or family members in different parts of Slovakia. It is significant to remember that adult and physically fit Ukrainian men are required to serve in the military and must remain in Ukraine unless they have three or more children, in which case they are permitted to live together with their families. However, family members from Ukraine are also allowed to visit the Ukrainian refugees in Ruzomberok. But it has been allowed entry through the Slovak border (as a rule, they have a Slovak entry stamp in their passport) and is allowed a short-term stay of up to 90 days in any 180-day period. The participant's responses indicate that due to the high cost of travel, their family members rarely visited refugees in Ruzomberok.

“I am allowed to visit my family in Ukraine. I can also visit my friends in other cities in Slovakia. At the same time, my family members from Ukraine are also allowed to visit me here. My mom visited me once in Ruzomberok, but the air cost is expensive, so people cannot frequently visit my family here” (Ukrainian refugee: two parent’s family).

The lack of family reunification opportunities for Ukrainian refugees can increase to a higher risk of divorce. When Ukrainian refugees are compelled to flee their homeland and leave their families behind, they often suffer significant emotional and psychological stress due to separation from their loved ones. One of the participants reported that the absence of communication and family reunions led to her divorce from her husband.

“My husband was in Ukraine, and we didn’t have contact for a long time after I came here to Ruzomberok. He never visits me and one day he called me and said he don’t want to continue the relationship because the war situation made him frustrated, and he divorced me” (Ukrainian refugee: single-parent family).

However, the analysis highlights the significance of family reunification for Ukrainian refugees and the requirement for policies that promote and give priority to family reunification. The difficulties Ukrainian refugees have keeping in touch with their families, along with the emotional effects of conflict and displacement, can make it difficult to maintain stable and healthy relationships. The overall well-being and perseverance of the Ukrainian refugee community in Ruzomberok can be improved by offering financial assistance and chances for family reunions.

4.2 Economic integration

The integration of Ukrainian refugee families into the Slovak economy includes developing possibilities for them to work in the labor market. However, labor market access, housing facilities, empowerment

programs, financial assistance, the standard of living, and healthcare facilities will be discussed as the indicators of economic integration for the Ukrainian refugees in Ruzomberok.

4.2.1 Ukrainian refugee's access to labor market in Ruzomberok

Having access to the labor market for the Ukrainian refugees in the host community is an essential indicator of their integration and self-identity. In addition to giving Ukrainian refugees a way to sustain themselves and their families, being able to find work promotes social inclusion, self-determination, and a sense of dignity. The current employment situation of Ukrainian refugees in Ruzomberok, their experiences entering the labor market, and the difficulties encountered in finding employment in Ruzomberok will all be covered in this section. First, most of the Ukrainian refugees have education and professional qualifications. However, some of them are working as cleaners due to a lack of employment opportunities in Ruzomberok. The number of people who were hired based on their qualifications and work interests is quite small. The change would be visible if we compare their current and former professional roles (Table 4).

Table 4: Current and previous professions of the Ukrainian refugees

Participant (Ukrainian refugee)	Previous profession and work experience (years)	Current Profession
Single parent family- 01	Accountant (for 18 years), school teacher (9 years)	Cleaner
Single parent family- 02	Nurse (20 years)	Jobless
Single parent family- 03	Psychologist (11 years)	Psychologist
Both parents' family-01	Musician (7 years)	Musician
Both parents' family-02	Event manager (12 years)	An employee in an NGO
Both parents' family-03	Teacher (21 years)	Jobless

Source: Author (Study data)

Second, the participants indicated that even for experienced Ukrainian refugees, finding work in Ruzomberok is quite challenging. Moreover, most jobs demand knowledge of the local language, and occasionally they also ask for certifications, but because of the war, Ukrainian refugees left their homes and left their certificates behind; they neither speak the local language nor have the certificates (qualification documents) with them. On the other hand, a small percentage of participants who are familiar with the local language and have acquaintances in the community succeeded in finding their jobs in Ruzomberok.

“Initially, it was difficult to get a job in Ruzomberok as a refugee. I was working here as a cleaner for a little amount of money. Then when I got my local friends, they help me a lot to get the job. Especially friends from Church helped me to get the Christian project where I perform music” (Ukrainian refugee: two parent’s family).

“It’s difficult to get a job in Ruzomberok as a refugee. Having experience as an accountant for 18 years, and a teacher for 9 years, I am working here as a cleaner for a little amount of money” (Ukrainian refugee: single-parent family).

Third, in terms of the difficulties in finding work in Ruzomberok, the research data indicate that the language barrier is the first difficulty. Along with this, Ukrainian refugees lack knowledge about where they should look for work, which prevents them from using a specific platform to look for employment, and ultimately, the job market in Ruzomberok is extremely insufficient for Ukrainian refugees. The job contract is also temporary and sometimes strict for the Ukrainian refugees; for instance, when they need to travel to Ukraine, they typically resign from their jobs in Ruzomberok and when they return, they need to search for a new job.

“For sure, I don’t know all the rules and regulations. If I need to go to Ukraine for an emergency, sometimes I don’t for how long I will be there and I must quit my job, and I face the same struggle when I come back to Ruzomberok” (Ukrainian refugee: single-parent family).

“We didn’t know how and where we should apply for the job, even though we didn’t have local friends initially. So overall, it was difficult. My husband was waiting a long time for getting a job, and finally, he got a job through an online platform. And when I went to a music school in Slovakia for the job, all my documents needed to translate into the Slovak language, and I couldn’t be able to do it because it was expensive and I didn’t have all the certificates with me, and they didn’t have enough positions in their schools for a singer” (Ukrainian refugee: two parent’s family).

However, recognizing the knowledge and expertise that refugees bring with them and taking advantage of their potential labor market contributions in the host community is crucial (Ali, [2014](#)). Many refugees have valuable skills, expertise, and management experience that can boost the regional economy and encourage innovation (ibid). The analysis highlights the issues created by Ruzomberok's lack of employment opportunities, which exacerbates the challenges encountered by Ukrainian refugees in finding employment. To ensure a comprehensive study of the problem, it might benefit from adding viewpoints from a larger spectrum of individuals.

4.2.2 Housing facilities for Ukrainian refugees in Ruzomberok

According to the ‘Theory of Change for Achieving Integration,’ housing is one of the fundamental components that should be provided at the very beginning of the integration process (Home Office, [2004](#)). Housing facilities for the Ukrainian refugees in Ruzomberok are essential to their integration and adjustment processes. To ensure their welfare, safety, and stability, it is essential to provide them with appropriate and suitable housing. In this section, the housing facilities for Ukrainian refugees in Ruzomberok will be discussed. The research data reveal that participants are comfortable and satisfied with the accommodation facilities in Ruzomberok. Ukrainian refugees are given free homes, and the Slovak government covers all their housing expenses. Moreover, refugees from Ukraine also indicated that the quality of housing is good, that they have enough space for living, and that their homes are well-equipped and contain all the necessities for a comfortable life. Along with accommodation, their house owners also treated them well.

“We live for free under the Slovak government's support program for Ukrainians, we have comfortable apartments with everything you need. So overall, it's very comfortable and good for living” (Ukrainian refugee: two parent’s family).

“We live in guest apartments near the center of Ruzomberok, under the program of free housing for Ukrainians, we have a separate room, the possibility of self-cooking, and everything necessary for everyday life. My landlady is a very friendly woman” (Ukrainian refugee: single-parent family).

However, considerable factors for the housing facilities include things like the types of housing options for refugees, the support systems in place, and any difficulties or achievements encountered by the participants (Home Office, [2004](#)). The study demonstrates that the housing options in Ruzomberok satisfy the requirements and demands of Ukrainian refugees. The Slovak government has helped to improve the health, security, and stability of the Ukrainian refugees by offering them free housing in comfortable apartments with all the services they need.

4.2.3 Financial assistance for the Ukrainian refugees

Financial assistance for Ukrainian refugees from the host nation's government is a crucial component of their support and integration processes. To assist the Ukrainian refugees in meeting their basic needs and adjusting to their new environment, the Slovak government typically offers a variety of financial aid programs. The research data reveal that Ukrainian refugees got financial assistance from the Slovak government when they initially came to Ruzomberok for a few months. Moreover, the rest of the time, it is

UN organizations, for example, UNICEF provide them with essential financial assistance. Furthermore, participants also brought up the fact that the Slovak government's financial support is not available for Ukrainian refugees who have found employment.

“Well, when we came here, we got once financial assistance from the Slovak labor office. As we are working now so we don't get any financial support from the Slovak government. But we are still getting some financial assistance from UNICEF only” (Ukrainian refugee: two parent's family).

On the other hand, several participants asserted that the Slovak government had provided them with financial assistance for the first two months. After that, UNICEF provided them with financial assistance till they went to Ukraine. because UNICEF did not provide them with any financial aid when they returned to Ruzomberok. Another participant expressed dissatisfaction over not receiving a winter stipend and occasionally being paid less than others by the Ruzomberok labor office.

“Yes, from March to May 2022, we received financial aid from the Slovak government, and from May to August - from UNICEF, then I went to Ukraine for a few months, and when I came back to Ruzomberok, they refused the assistance” (Ukrainian refugee: single-parent family).

“I got help from the Slovak government for a few months. The Labor government neither gave me the 100 euros that other mothers received in the winter nor did they pay me for three months at the rate of 169 euros. I, therefore, received less than individuals who did not even work” (Ukrainian refugee: single-parent family).

However, the financial support programs and conditions for the refugee may differ based on the legal, resources, and funding provided by the host countries (North, [1984](#)). The amount and duration of financial aid may fluctuate as the circumstance of the refugees changes over time (ibid). However, concerns about the winter allowance and payment inconsistencies from the Ruzomberok labor office provide a critical perspective. Although the author did not have the opportunity to address this matter in detail, it would be beneficial to have identified any potential causes or institutional systemic difficulties that might have contributed to such encounters.

4.2.4 Empowerment programs for the Ukrainian refugees in Ruzomberok

The goal of empowerment programs for Ukrainian refugees is to give them the knowledge, abilities, and tools they need to take back control of their life, improve their well-being, and become self-sufficient in their new surroundings. These programs often concentrate on a variety of topics, such as education, career

development, language learning, job placement, and psychosocial assistance. The research data indicate that Ukrainian refugees only enroll in the Slovak language course as professional courses, whereas most of the participants enroll in online courses (paid version), for example, graphic design courses at ‘Udemy’ or other online platforms based on their interests and pay for the courses by their own money.

“Here, I didn’t join any training program for improving my job skills rather I am improving my skills myself on the Internet or online courses” (Ukrainian refugee: single-parent family).

“No, unfortunately, I didn’t join any training for improving my skill except the Slovak language course. And I joined a course for graphic design” (Ukrainian refugee: two parent’s family).

Offering a range of specialized training opportunities that complement refugees' skills and interests is important for ensuring the efficacy of empowerment programs. The findings suggest that, with the exception of the Slovak language course, Ukrainian refugees are not actively participating in professional training programs. The effectiveness and accessibility of empowerment programs in addressing the unique needs and ambitions of Ukrainian refugees in Ruzomberok are brought into question by this outcome. There are a number of reasons for the low enrollment in professional courses. The different skill sets and interests of the Ukrainian refugees in Ruzomberok may not be sufficiently catered to by the existing training programs. Additionally, there are challenges that come in the way of Ukrainian refugees enrolling in or gaining access to these programs, such as financial limitations, a lack of knowledge, or difficulty balancing training with other obligations.

4.2.5 Standard of living and health care services for the Ukrainian refugees

The standard of living for Ukrainian refugees in Ruzomberok is influenced by a number of variables such as access to housing, healthcare facilities, education system, employment possibilities, social services, and overall community support. The research data show Participants are not satisfied and happy with the standard of living in Ruzomberok. There is a low pay scale but a high cost of living. They also stated how difficult it is to survive here without a good job and how difficult it is to find one. They asserted that while they are comfortable and secure in Ruzomberok, the balance between their income and living expenses is not stable.

“I worked two jobs in Ukraine and made a monthly salary of roughly 800-900 euros. Because the prices were lower there, I could afford a lot. For instance, here, food and household items are more expensive than in Ukraine, but I don't have enough money to buy this pricy stuff” (Ukrainian refugee: single-parent family).

“My income level is not quite sufficient. I have a family of five members. My husband is still jobless. So far, we are compensated for housing, and my salary is barely enough for groceries and necessary household items. With our little salary, it is too difficult to lead a good life” (Ukrainian refugee: two-parent family).

For Ukrainian refugees, access to healthcare is essential to maintaining their well-being, meeting their medical needs, and facilitating their integration into the local community. However, emergency medical care is available to Ukrainian refugees in Ruzomberok. People who have been granted temporary asylum in Slovak Republic territory do not enroll in the public health insurance system. Slovakia would not provide them with public health insurance, but they are allowed to pay for urgent medical care, provided by the Slovak Republic's Ministry of Interior. According to findings, Ruzomberok does not have a hospital specifically for Ukrainian refugees. Therefore, the Ukrainian refugees frequently face challenges due to language barriers, inadequate hospital doctors, a lack of emergency care, and the possibility of doctors refusing to visit patients at home.

“If I compare it with the Ukrainian medical service, it is not enough for sure. In Ukraine, we can go to any time in the hospital for any medical services or medicines but here access and resources for medical services are not available all the time” (Ukrainian refugee: single-parent family).

“When my child had hyperthermia (a very high temperature), we had to go to the hospital by taxi (which was quite expensive), because there was no appointment with a local doctor that day, and local doctors do not come home” (Ukrainian refugee: two parent’s family).

Host nations have generally given extended healthcare benefits to Ukrainians fleeing from war, although to different degrees (OECD, 2022), whereas the findings reflect the difficulties Ukrainian refugees in Ruzomberok have in getting access to medical treatment. Finding adequate and timely treatment might be challenging due to exclusion from public health insurance, a lack of a dedicated hospital, restricted access to specialized care, language challenges, and other factors. The healthcare experience and well-being of Ukrainian refugees in the host community can be greatly improved by addressing these issues through better insurance coverage, language support, and the accessibility of specialized medical services. However, the participants express their dissatisfaction with the low pay scale and high living costs, which pose financial difficulties and restrict their ability to pay for necessities. Improved employment possibilities and support networks can be combined with these economic concerns to help Ukrainian refugees in Ruzomberok reach a more secure and balanced level of living.

4.3 Cultural integration

The cultural integration of Ukrainian refugee families in Ruzomberok includes establishing an accepting atmosphere that respects and appreciates their cultural background while facilitating their engagement in the local culture. However, for the Ukrainian refugees in Ruzomberok, community cohesion, cultural identity, and a feeling of belonging will be discussed as indicators of their cultural integration.

4.3.1 Ukrainian refugee's cohesion with Slovak people

The cohesion between the Slovak and Ukrainian refugees in Ruzomberok is crucial for their integration into the community. The fundamental well-being and successful integration of the Ukrainian refugees in Ruzomberok are influenced by the development of positive connections, mutual understanding, and social cohesiveness. The study discovers that there are several elements that influence the cohesion between Slovaks and Ukrainian refugees, including cultural similarities, community support systems, strong social bonds, and positive attitudes and perceptions (fig.5).

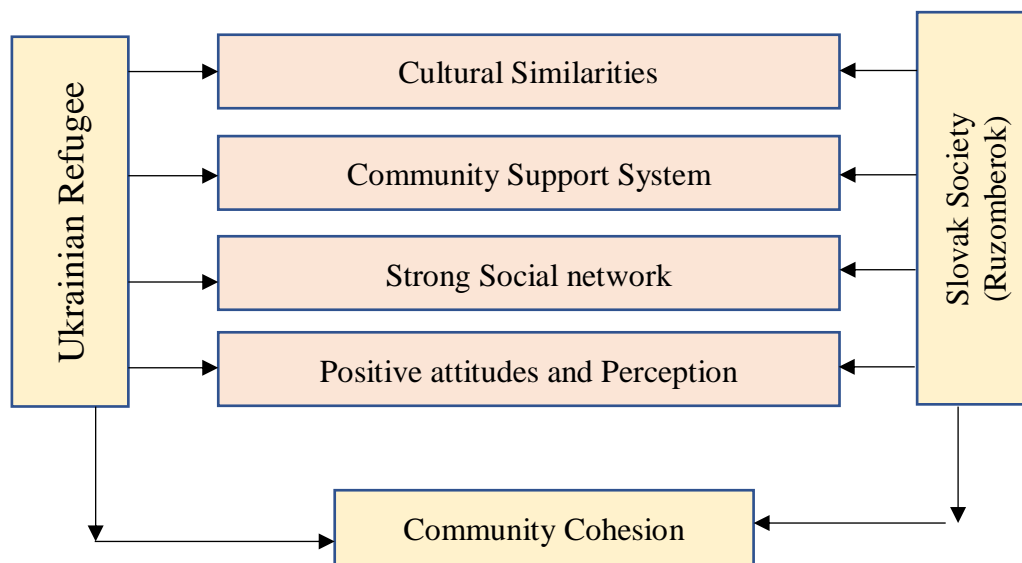


Figure 5: Factors for community cohesion between Ukrainian refugees and Slovak people.

Source: Author (Study data)

Additionally, research data show that locals and Ukrainian refugees are able to maintain a positive and strong relationship. They also highlighted how friendly and helpful the locals are to them, which helps to foster mutual respect between the two groups. On the other hand, some participants believe there was more closeness between the locals and the Ukrainians prior to their initial outpouring of sympathy and assistance.

The locals' attitudes toward the Ukrainian refugees have changed over time. But the participants don't regard this as a cause for concern; instead, they are pleased with their relationships and bonds with the locals.

“Well, I think, we have a good bond with the locals. I see the same support and care from their side. I didn't notice any change in the relationship between us rather I can say the relationship is getting better day by day with the locals” (Ukrainian refugee: two parents' family).

“We have a good relationship with the locals. There is no change so far. Everything is okay and normal. But at the beginning people were so emotional and sympathetic about us. I felt that relation was stronger, maybe, day by day people take it easy. But they all the time trying to help us” (Ukrainian refugee: single-parent family).

However, the participants' positive experiences indicate that there is relatively good cohesion between the Slovak people and Ukrainian refugees. The participants see the locals as helpful and caring, and they think these things are becoming better over time. This suggests a feeling of inclusion and acceptance within the community. Conversely, some participants feel that compared to when they first arrived, the locals' level of compassion and emotional support has slightly decreased. The participants show no evidence of concern or displeasure, despite the possibility that this shift may be seen as weakening cohesion. They consider their interactions with the locals as positive and satisfying.

4.3.2 Ukrainian refugee's cultural identity and values in Ruzomberok

The acknowledgment of the locals' support and assistance by Ukrainian refugees in their new country raises the possibility that the community would recognize and value the preservation of their cultural identity and values. The research data indicate that Ukrainian refugees are belonging and holding their own culture and values in Ruzomberok. Moreover, participants discovered that they have cultural similarities with Slovakia. But in Ukraine, religious holidays like Christmas and Easter are widely celebrated.

“Yes, we can practice our own culture here. But In Ukraine, we celebrate Christmas and Easter in a bigger way, here I missed it. It may happen because of fewer people. Sometimes I feel the city is empty because where I came from, I had a huge population” (Ukrainian refugee: single-parent family).

Regarding cultural adaptability, the Ukrainian refugees think they are beginning to incorporate local culture; for instance, Ukrainians appreciate Slovaks' emphasis on family bonding and their friendly and helpful attitude towards the common people. The Ukrainian refugees are actively participating in and incorporating components of the Slovak culture into their own lives. Some participants have an interest in the local dishes, music, and traditional dances.

Here, people, have a good family bonding. Especially, on Sunday they get together and go out and enjoy time with family. I really like it. I can remember, Ukraine, even on weekends, we didn't have time for our family. I think this Slovak culture helps people to develop their mental health. (Ukrainian refugee: two parents' family).

I like their behavior. They are kind, polite, and helpful. I try to adopt their values and norms. And they are family oriented which touched me the most. I like their food. At home, I try to cook their dishes. And I also like their songs and dances. (Ukrainian refugee: single-parent family).

On the other hand, participants also said that Slovaks admire Ukrainian culture as well, particularly the food, music, and traditional dresses. Furthermore, participants stated that the Slovaks regularly take part in their national celebrations and rituals with them.

I think we share each other culture. Because locals are interested in Ukrainian culture, they like our songs and clothes, they always try to join our traditional events and functions. (Ukrainian refugee: two parents' family).

Maintaining a refugee's cultural identity and principles may include a variety of factors in the host country (Shihadeh, [2016](#)). This can involve preserving their language, way of life, rituals, beliefs, and norms (ibid). At the same time, promoting opportunities for cultural exchange, intercultural communication, and programs that encourage refugees and the local community to share traditions and practices (ibid). However, the outcomes suggest a healthy and harmonious cooperation of the Slovak community in Ruzomberok with Ukrainian refugees. Besides, mutual respect, comprehension, and unity are fostered by both parties' willingness to respect and participate in one another's cultures. It draws attention to the value of cultural diversity and the positive experiences that result from cross-cultural interaction and integration.

4.3.3 Ukrainian refugees' feeling of belonging in Slovak society

The process of integrating Ukrainian refugees into Slovak society depends greatly on their sense of belonging. It includes their experience of belonging, acceptance, and identity to the host community. The research data demonstrate that the people of Ruzomberok are kind to and accepting of Ukrainian refugees. The Ukrainian refugees value the help, compassion, and understanding they get from the Slovak people. The participants underlined the warm ties they have formed with the locals, expressing a sense of connection and bonding with them.

“I think I have a feeling that I am belonging this society. Because here I am so active with different activities than in Ukraine. I have a very good bond with the locals that feels good to stay in this society”

On the other hand, the deep attachment that Ukrainian refugees feel to their own country as well as its culture, customs, and societal standards. It implies that even if they are grateful for the help and support, they get in Slovakia, they would rather go back to their native country and be with their own community. This feeling could be caused by a desire for familiarity, a sense of identity-related to one's native land, or a desire to help their culture recover from its difficulties by rebuilding and strengthening it.

“Slovakia is not our native land. This is another culture, other habits, and mentality. We respect this all and we are thankful for taking care of us. But we want to go back to our country, we belong to our country, our society”

However, by recognizing both the refugees' commitment to their home country and their sense of connection to Slovak society, the research data offer a balanced picture. It captures the complex feelings and contradictory affiliations that refugees could feel as they go through the integration process. These opposing emotions simultaneously underline the difficulty of the refugee experience and the significance of comprehending and assisting their integration journey while respecting their cultural identity and longing for their home country.

4.4 Challenges for the Ukrainian refugees in Ruzomberok

The Ukrainian refugees in Ruzomberok encountered several challenges during their stay in Ruzomberok. These challenges can affect various factors in their lives, including their social, economic, and emotional well-being. Some of the common challenges experienced by Ukrainian refugees in Ruzomberok include:

Family structure (single-parent family Vs two parents' family): There are primarily two types of families among the Ukrainian refugees in Ruzomberok: single-parent families (mother and children) and two-parent families (spouse and their children). According to the study, single-parent households are more at risk for socioeconomic and emotional well-being than families with both parents. Table 5 shows the challenges that single-parent Ukrainian refugee families are facing in Ruzomberok compared to both parents' Ukrainian refugee families.

Table 5: Challenges for single-parent Ukrainian refugee families in Ruzomberok

Areas of concern	Single-parent Ukrainian families	two parents' Ukrainian families
Financial strain	Single-parent Families of Ukrainian refugees frequently struggle financially because only one parent has to support the entire household.	Two parents can share the expenses for their families.

Quality time with family members	It can be challenging to balance work, children, and other obligations, leaving little time for social interactions and integrating activities.	Two parents can share their time with their children. Social interaction and integration processes are easier for them.
Emotional support	Lack of a companion may cause emotional difficulties. One single-parent participant in this study reported being divorced because of a long-distance relationship.	Two partners can emotionally support each other and make support each other in a new environment.
Lack of social network	May have fewer social networks and support systems. For single-parent Ukrainian refugee families, establishing a social network and finding support within the host society is more difficult.	Have their own social networks and friend groups. They can have more access to information and networking than single-parent Ukrainian families.
Employment challenges	In host society like Ruzomberok, employment opportunities relate to social network and access of information. Therefore, single-parent families face challenges to find the jobs.	Since both parents used to have more connection and access of information, it would be easier for them to manage jobs. If one of the partners secures employment, they may divide profits with the other partners.
Childcare responsibilities	They do not have enough time to take care of their children if they have a job.	If one parent go to job other parent can give time for caring their children.

Source: Author (study data)

Slovak language: The language barrier in Ruzomberok is one of the main problems for the Ukrainian refugees there. Slovak proficiency is often lacking among Ukrainian refugees, which makes it difficult for them to communicate and integrate. Their ability to access jobs, education, healthcare, and social connections is constrained.

Employment possibilities: Finding suitable employment is a significant challenge for Ukrainian refugees. There is a huge job scarcity in Ruzomberok for Ukrainian refugees. Sometimes local language requirements and certification of the Ukrainian refugee's qualifications add an extra challenge to securing a job in Ruzomberok.

Access to healthcare: For Ukrainian refugees in Ruzomberok, getting access to healthcare services is very difficult. Firstly, the refugee from Ukraine is not covered by the government's health insurance program. Secondly, there are not enough Ukrainian doctors working in the hospitals, and the local medical staff does not speak Ukrainian. Thirdly, medical professionals and their services are not always available at hospitals. In Ruzomberok, public transportation is inadequate, making it challenging to reach medical help in an emergency.

Access to information: Another issue in Ruzomberok is the lack of information regarding employment and housing options for Ukrainian refugees. Since it is unknown to the Ukrainian refugees where or how they would find employment. There is no clear information or dedicated site for job searching. A resource center or website specifically for Ukrainian refugees could ease this problem.

Education and children's schooling: In Ruzomberok they do not have a dedicated school for the Ukrainian refugee children. Therefore, Ukrainian refugee children are integrated into Slovak schools where the Slovak language is the medium of instruction. As a result, a large number of refugee children dropped out of school and now rely on online education in Ukraine. Children are unable to engage in online classes due to power outages and a poor internet connection caused by the war situation there.

Daycare center: For families of Ukrainian refugees, finding affordable and accessible daycare centers is a problem in Ruzomberok. Families with single-working parents find it challenging to bring their children to their workplaces. Motherhood versus career is thus posing another challenge for them.

Empowerment program: Ukrainian refugees attend only the Slovak language course as a professional empowerment program. Along with this language course, more professional courses (graphic design, interior design, and web design, etc.) should be offered to involve them in the active labor market. Therefore, the availability of proper opportunities for skill development and vocational training in Ruzomberok is one of the major problems for Ukrainian refugees. Vocational training provided by empowerment programs can give Ukrainian refugees competitive skills and improve their employability.

Uncertainty about the future: For Ukrainian refugees, not having an idea how long they will stay in Ruzomberok is a big challenge. The uncertainty and lack of clarity surrounding their future can lead to a variety of issues and impair their capacity to make thoughtful choices and plans.

5 CHAPTER FIVE: ROLE OF SOCIAL WORKERS IN INTEGRATING UKRAINIAN REFUGEES' FAMILIES INTO SLOVAK SOCIETY

The role of social workers who assist Ukrainian refugees in Slovakia is the primary focus of this section. For this study, three different types of social workers are considered (see the methodology for details). First, this research concentrates on "Field Level Social Workers," or social workers who interact directly with the families of Ukrainian refugees in Ruzomberok. Second, "Municipality Level Social Workers" are defined as social workers who support the Ukrainian refugee in Ruzomberok and work at the municipal level. Finally, "National Level Social Workers" refers to social workers who are related to the process of refugee policy but may not necessarily be working directly with Ukrainian refugees. Therefore, this section concentrates on social workers' competencies, the services they are providing to Ukrainian refugees, social work practice with Ukrainian refugees, and the challenges social workers are facing in Ruzomberok (field and municipality level) as well as at the national level to discuss the role of social workers in the context of the integration of Ukrainian refugees in Slovakia.

5.1 Social worker's competencies

Social workers are crucial in helping and supporting Ukrainian refugees through the process of integration and resettlement. When working with Ukrainian refugees, social workers in Slovakia are following the skills:

5.1.1 Social worker's profile working with Ukrainian refugee

The skills, education, and experience that the social workers bring to their role in supporting Ukrainian refugees during their resettlement and integration process are demonstrated by their professional work experience with Ukrainian refugees in Slovakia. The educational background and work experience of social workers with refugees, including Ukrainian refugees, will be explored in relation to the profile of work experience with Ukrainian refugees. The findings reveal that field-level social workers in Ruzomberok mostly work as a volunteer or occasionally as part of governmental or nongovernmental groups. Moreover, most field-level social workers lack a social work degree or relevant educational background. However, the study discovered that social workers employed by the Office of Labor, Social Welfare and Family in Ruzomberok (municipality) and the Central Office of Labor, Social Welfare and Family in Bratislava (national) both possess social work degrees and relevant educational backgrounds (Table 6).

Table 6: Social worker's educational background and work experience

Social Worker's working area	Educational Background	Organization	Work experience in social work field	Work experience with Ukrainian refugees
Field level	Engineering (Architecture)	Community Center	7 years (volunteer)	7 months
Field level	Political science	Mayor office	9 years (volunteer)	7 months
Municipality	Social Work	Office of labor, social welfare and family in Ruzomberok (Department of Consultations and Education)	9 months	7 months
Municipality	Social Work	Office of labor, social welfare and family in Ruzomberok (Department of AOTP and ESF)	15 months	6 months
National	Social Work	The central office of labor, social welfare and family in Bratislava (Department of the social legal protection of Children and social guardianship)	35 years	15 years Not with the Ukrainian refugee but refugees or minority groups in general.

National	Social Work	The central office of labor, social welfare and family in Bratislava (Department of AOTP and advisory department)	14 years	9 months (Ukrainians and other minority groups)
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Source: Author (study data)

The research data also suggest that in Ruzomberok, social workers at the field level have more experience than those at the municipal level in the field of social work. Just before the Ukrainian crisis and in the aftermath of the arrival of Ukrainian refugees in Ruzomberok, municipal social workers were recruited for the position. However, while not directly working with Ukrainian refugees, national-level social workers have a vast amount of expertise in the field of social work. One of these experts has been involved in the Ukrainian refugee issue since the Ukrainian crisis began.

However, the analysis demonstrates the education and professional background of social workers who have worked with Ukrainian refugees in different contexts. It demonstrates that even though field-level social workers lack formal social work education, they are aware of the needs of Ukrainian refugees. However, while having social work degrees, municipal social workers have little experience with Ukrainian refugees. Social workers at the national level have social work expertise, but not specifically with Ukrainian refugees. The diversity of social workers' educational backgrounds and professional experiences may have an impact on and present difficulties in delivering effective support to Ukrainian refugees in Ruzomberok.

5.1.2 Social worker's perception of their job requirements

Understanding social workers' perspectives on the responsibilities they must accomplish when assisting Ukrainian refugees in Slovakia is crucial to understanding their role and approach. These perceptions shed light on the objectives, difficulties, and demands social professionals confront when assisting Ukrainian refugees. Research data reveal that field-level social workers think that one of the prerequisites would be an understanding of the cultural and ethical background of the Ukrainian refugees. Additionally, they noted that it would be preferable if they could bring on the experiences of refugees who had previously adapted well to the host society. Finally, field-level social workers emphasized the value of knowing Ukrainian to assist the Ukrainian refugees in Ruzomberok with their integration.

“Social workers should understand cultural and ethical backgrounds. Using some of the refugees who have been adopted well or better and who may serve as positive role models for the new refugee is very useful.

The advantage for the social workers if they know the language and the culture of the Ukrainian refugee”
(Social worker: Field level).

On the other hand, social workers at the municipal and national levels highlighted the need of having social work knowledge as a prerequisite for working with Ukrainian refugees. Municipal social workers recognized the significance of fluency in both Slovak and Ukrainian. Moreover, social workers from the municipality added patience and empathy for the Ukrainian refugees to their lists of job requirements while social workers at the national level prioritized having a greater knowledge of how to work with Ukrainian refugees.

“For me, the main requirement is the knowledge of social work and especially working with Ukrainian refugees a social worker needs to know the language of both Slovak and Ukrainian. And I can also mention, the social worker should be empathetic, patient with a sense of helping the refugees” (Social Worker: Municipality Level).

“In my department, it is primarily the acquired higher education and the deeper knowledge and skills associated with the refugee. But these requirements may vary from department to department” (Social worker: National level).

However, the outcomes show how social workers at various levels (field, municipal, and national) perceive their responsibilities when assisting Ukrainian refugees in Slovakia. The incorporation of these various perspectives offers insightful information about the various expectations and priorities of social workers in assisting Ukrainian refugees. The diverse viewpoints of social workers at various levels are a reflection of the complexity of their roles and the unique demands they must meet. Municipal and national social workers place more emphasis on the broader social work knowledge and abilities required for effective support, whereas field-level social workers concentrate on urgent practicalities and cultural awareness.

5.1.3 Social worker’s legal competencies working with Ukrainian refugees

To assure the provision of proper support and assistance within Slovakia's legal framework, social workers who work with Ukrainian refugees should possess the requisite legal expertise. These skills include an understanding of relevant laws, rules, and policies relating to social welfare, immigration, and refugee rights. The research data demonstrate that field-level social workers in Ruzomberok who assist Ukrainian refugees are aware of their legal rights and can inform them of their entitlements so they can prevent employer exploitation, domestic violence, child abuse, and black labor in the job market. Additionally,

field-level social workers collaborate with the local police to reduce illegal activity and protect Ukrainian refugees from any dangers.

“Social workers should know and understand the fears and potential dangers of the refugees and their rights and provide them with this information. For example, child abuse, domestic violence policies, employer exploitation, etc. Also, it helps them to orient and avoid the black work labor market, and where they can get more information or get help in case of need. In case of suspicious activity social workers contact the local police to investigate and provide the actual information” (Social worker: field-level).

On the other hand, social workers at the municipal level in Ruzomberok provide consulting services to Ukrainian refugees. If the Ukrainian refugees are taken advantage of by employers, they consult with the Labor Inspectorate in Žilina and encourage them to get in touch with the appropriate authority. Furthermore, municipal-level social workers are working as a mediator. They mediate with the Trade office if the Ukrainian refugees want to start a business. Nonetheless, Social workers from the national level who are mainly working as an advisor or an expert, are following the guidelines of the ministry. Since the Ukraine crisis is a new challenge for them, they do not have long-term plans for them, rather in an emergency situation, they take immediate initiative and collaboration with other governmental organizations and NGOs if needed.

Well, it happened that Ukrainians came here who was refused to pay by their employer, and in such cases, we send them to the relevant institutions that deal with the issue. In this case, it was the Labor Inspectorate in Žilina. If they are interested in running a business, we contact with the Trade Office and then send them to the trade office for further processing. Basically, we can recommend more or less those who need help. (Social worker: municipality-level).

Since the Ukrainian crisis is a new issue for the Slovak government that we have not met in practice so far, we acquire knowledge and competence on an ongoing basis, be it from methodological guidelines of the ministry, following laws, collaboration with the municipalities, sometimes NSOs, and take initiative in an immediate situation. (Social worker: national level)

However, outcomes emphasize the significance of legal competencies for social workers working with Ukrainian refugees in Slovakia and offer insights into how social workers at different levels approach legal aspects. Municipal and national-level social workers concentrate on giving consultation, mediating disputes, and following rules and regulations to establish the policy, in contrast to field-level social workers who take a proactive approach to protecting Ukrainian refugees and working with local authorities. The critical analysis highlights the significance of these legal competencies in protecting Ukrainian refugees'

rights and welfare while also emphasizing the necessity for ongoing learning and flexibility in response to new circumstances.

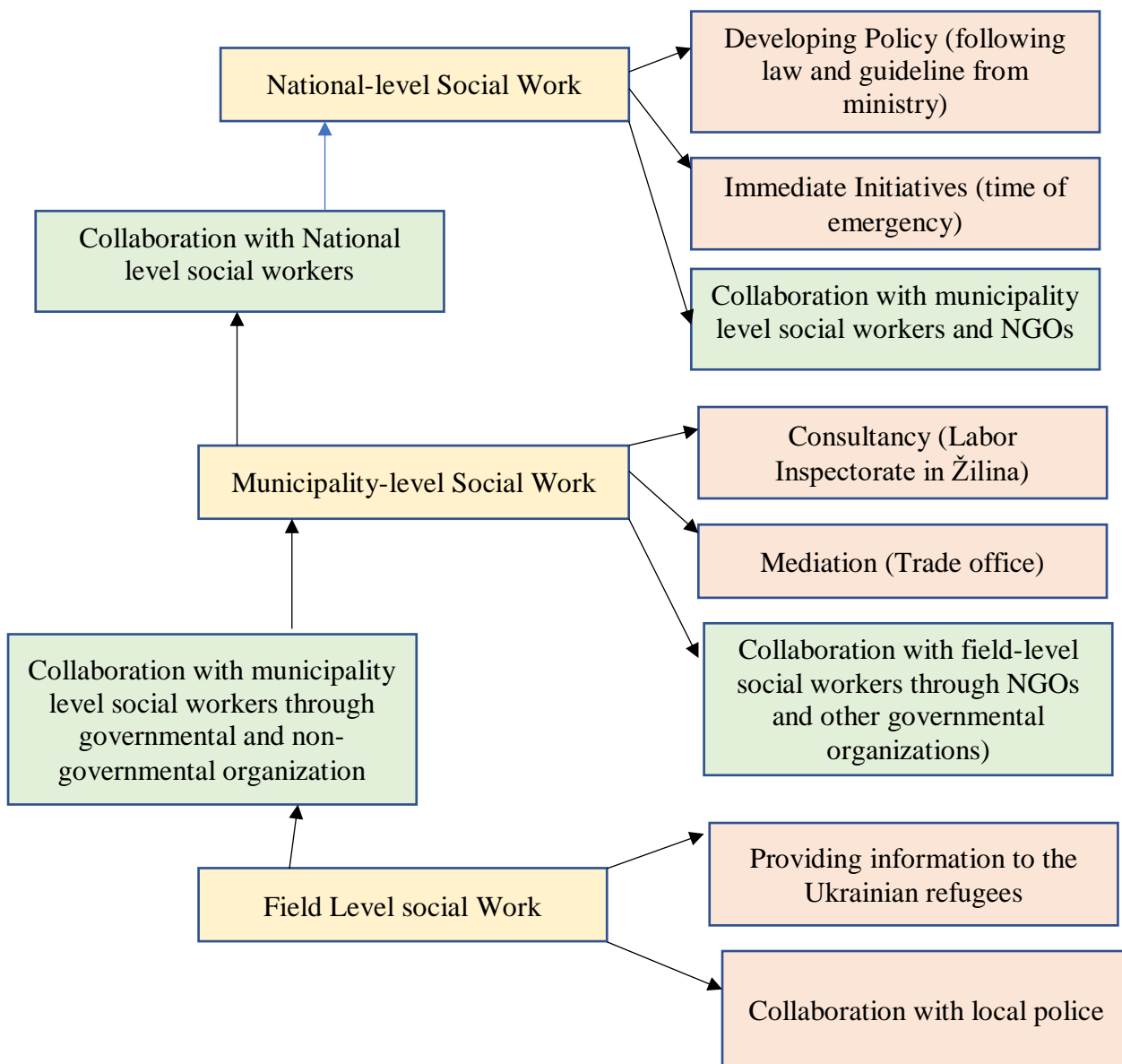


Fig 6: Social worker’s legal competencies for the Ukrainian refugees in Slovakia

Source: Author (study data)

5.2 Social work Services for the Ukrainian refugees

Social work services for Ukrainian refugees in Slovakia are crucial in supporting their resettlement, integration, and overall well-being. These services encompass a range of support and assistance provided by social workers to address the specific needs and challenges faced by Ukrainian refugees. This section will focus on the social work services from different social levels for Ukrainian refugees in Slovakia, for example, housing, employment, health care, education, and financial assistance.

5.2.1 Securing accommodation for the Ukrainian refugees' families

Social workers are particularly effective in helping Ukrainian refugees with housing-related concerns and making sure they have access to adequate and sustainable housing options. Research data show that field-level social workers in Ruzomberok are groups of people who are working as a volunteer under governmental or non-governmental organizations. For assisting Ukrainian refugees with housing, field-level social workers play the primary role. They make other big volunteer groups and divided them into small groups and send them to help the Ukrainian refugees. At the same time, field-level social workers in Ruzomberok contact their partner organizations, hotels, and property owners for making a rental deal on a temporary basis for the Ukrainian refugees.

“So firstly, we created a big volunteer network, then this network was divided into smaller groups based on the type of offered help. We had a crisis meeting with our partners from the private sector, whose hotel was its property, and we made a rental deal. So, they gave us a building to create a temporary shelter. Also, many volunteers provided their own properties to rent” (Social worker: Field-level).

On the other hand, social workers who are working in the municipality do not have direct involvement to secure housing for the Ukrainian refugees in Ruzomberok. Nonetheless, they communicate with different programs, websites, and groups to manage housing for the Ukrainian refugees which are funded by the Slovak government. On the contrary, national-level social workers monitor and collaborate with the municipalities or local authorities for arranging housing for the Ukrainian refugees. And the minor children are placed in CDR (Children Dispute Resolution). Therefore, social workers at the national level primarily keep an eye on the local authorities and support the Ukrainian refugees with funds set by the Slovak government.

“Social workers do not have a direct influence on the establishment of accommodation for emigrants. However, Social workers talk about various programs, websites, and groups in social networks, where you can find free housing, which will be paid for by the state of Slovakia” (Social worker: Municipality-level).

“Accommodation is arranged by the local authorities either through the owners of various accommodation facilities, further provided by the municipality or they look for it themselves, via the Internet site, children are placed in the CDR, which follows from the legislation of the Slovak Republic” (Social worker: National level).

However, the analysis focuses on the various roles and strategies used by social workers at different levels to help Ukrainian refugees with housing challenges. According to outcomes, field-level social workers in Ruzomberok are responsible for setting up volunteer networks and temporary housing through rental agreements with associate organizations. Their proactive attempts to solve the immediate housing

requirements of Ukrainian refugees are demonstrated by this grassroots strategy. On the other hand, it appears that social workers at the municipal and national levels have a more indirect role in helping Ukrainian refugees find housing. Local social workers are portrayed as interacting with groups, websites, and programs, while national social workers are seen as keeping an eye on local authorities and working with them to find housing for Ukrainian refugees. Their main responsibility appears to be monitoring the implementation of legislative directives and offering assistance and financial support to local governments.

5.2.2 Assisting employment for the Ukrainian refugees' families

To facilitate integration and self-sufficiency, social workers need to help Ukrainian refugees find employment in Slovakia. Social workers offer a range of services and support to assist Ukrainian refugees in finding jobs and navigating the labor market. Findings reveal that field-level social workers in Ruzomberok assist Ukrainian refugees discover and accessing the job market in Slovakia, especially in Ruzomberok. They accompany the Ukrainian refugees to the worksites and assist them in understanding the requirements, application processes, and required paperwork. Additionally, field-level social workers help Ukrainian refugees navigate job websites, get information about job openings online, and explore a variety of employment opportunities. Finally, field-level social workers in Ruzomberok offer guidance and assistance in making application documents like cover letters, portfolios, and resumes (CVs).

“We help them to understand the local labor market. Informing them and bringing them to the place where they can apply for work and have access to the labor market. We also help them to research information on the Internet. Finally, we assist them to make their own application, CV, portfolio, etc.” (Social Worker: Field-level).

On the other hand, social workers from the Ruzomberok municipality also help Ukrainian refugees find employment opportunities. Findings highlight how municipal social workers continue to seek to support refugees in their employment search even though there are now few job prospects owing to inflation. Moreover, municipal social workers make an extra effort to help Ukrainian refugees find jobs by contacting employers on their behalf. Additionally, the social workers discover which companies are prepared to employ Ukrainian refugees despite their limited Slovak language proficiency.

“We offer vacancies to Ukrainians, but currently, there are very few vacancies, which is a consequence of inflation. Some jobs are suitable directly for Ukrainians and are marked with the national flag of Ukraine. However, we help them by calling the employer on their behalf and finding out the necessary information, as well as whether they would hire a citizen of Ukraine even though Ukrainian do not know the local language” (Social Worker: Municipality-level).

“We have several projects for Ukrainian refugees to involve them in our labor market. Some of our projects are running with the collaboration of our municipalities. Though our municipalities are autonomous we also run projects together like job counseling for the Ukrainian refugees, offering them educational courses, commuting allowance, Volunteer work allowance, and acquiring work skills so that they can be skillful and have knowledge before entering the labor market” (Social worker: National level).

Nevertheless, by helping the Ukrainian refugees find employment, social workers at the national level are doing a remarkable job for them. They are working on several projects that will involve Ukrainian refugees in the Slovak labor market. First, a dedicated website³ for Ukrainian refugees is operated by national social workers, where Ukrainian refugees can find jobs in every Slovakian municipality that fit their qualifications. Second, through the municipal authorities, social workers from the national level support the Ukrainian refugees financially. Ukrainian refugees are given a monthly stipend of 234.42 euros under the program "Acquiring Work Skills" for a maximum of three months. Finally, social workers at the national level set up "Job counseling" for the Ukrainian refugees through the municipalities.

However, the comprehensive efforts undertaken by social workers at various levels to help Ukrainian refugees find jobs in Slovakia are highlighted by the critical analysis of the outcomes. Social workers play a crucial role in the integration and self-sufficiency of Ukrainian refugees in the labor market by offering support and advice in job applications, establishing connections with employers, and carrying out initiatives. They play a vital role in assisting Ukrainian refugees in rebuilding their lives and contributing to the labor force in Ruzomberok through their proactive approach and dedication to meeting their employment demands.

5.2.3 Providing healthcare facilities to the Ukrainian refugees' families

To ensure the physical and mental well-being of Ukrainian refugees in Slovakia, social workers play a crucial role in providing healthcare services. Findings show that Ruzomberok's field social workers actively help Ukrainian refugees find their way around the healthcare system. They also give information and advice about the healthcare facilities that are accessible in Ruzomberok, such as hospitals, clinics, and specialist healthcare providers. Additionally, field-level social workers accompany Ukrainian refugees to emergency medical appointments, facilitating effective communication with medical staff and Ukrainian refugees who might experience language barriers. Eventually, field-level social workers also work as advocates for Ukrainian refugees, making sure that they receive proper healthcare services.

³ <https://www.ukraineslovakia.sk/en/employment/>

“We provide the information of contact for health care and help to navigate or escort to the facility. We assist Ukrainian refugees in overcoming communication barriers in the hospitals and sometimes help them to get emergency appointments” (Social worker: Field-level).

On the other hand, social workers at the municipal level in Ruzomberok engage with regional healthcare organizations and providers to meet the medical requirements of Ukrainian refugees. They support access to necessary medications and treatments for Ukrainian refugees and assist with registration with healthcare facilities, including primary care doctors and specialists. Additionally, the municipal social workers in Ruzomberok collaborate closely with medical specialists to ensure that refugees receive the right medical support and attention for their particular medical issues.

“We can only provide them with contacts to health care providers who can help them in this direction. One of our colleagues consults Ukrainian refugees to see whether they receive appropriate medical care and what kind of challenges they are facing in the hospitals” (Social worker: Municipal level).

Nevertheless, to develop and implement healthcare systems, national-level social workers in Slovakia work with healthcare authorities and other national, and international organizations. For instance, national-level social workers in Slovakia working with UNICEF to provide psychological intervention for Ukrainian refugees. They advocate the inclusion of Ukrainian refugees in the urgent state healthcare insurance program and work to prevent any obstacles or difficulties that may prevent them from receiving medical care. National social workers support and guide local, municipal, and field social workers to ensure a systematic approach to providing healthcare for Ukrainian refugees, such as when a particular municipality requires a dedicated hospital or medical personnel for Ukrainian refugees.

“We are providing healthcare facilities to Ukrainian refugees in accordance with government law, and guidance. Initially, we didn’t have public health care insurance for them, later it became urgent state health care insurance for all Ukrainians. Upon arrival from Ukraine, psychological intervention was provided. At the same time, UNICEF cooperates with them. I also want to mention, probably, in January, a medical care center for children and the disabled was opened in Ružomberk and Ukrainian doctors work in the center” (Social worker: National level).

However, outcomes demonstrate social workers' involvement in helping Ukrainian refugees with healthcare services. It highlights their efforts to disseminate information, break down barriers to communication, make healthcare services more accessible, advocate for refugees, and work with relevant stakeholders to meet their special health requirements.

5.2.4 Assisting in education for the Ukrainian refugees' families

When it comes to helping Ukrainian refugees in Slovakia with their schooling, social workers are a valuable resource. Their participation encompasses a variety of settings, including local, regional, and national initiatives. Findings demonstrate that during the initial phase of the Ukrainian crisis, assisting Ukrainian refugee children to integrate into the Slovak educational system was not a top priority for the field-level social workers in Ruzomberok. However, in the aftermath, they actively assist and direct Ukrainian refugee children to integrate into the Slovak educational system in Ruzomberok and their families for job retraining courses. They help with the enrollment process and offer information about the various educational options, including schools and language programs. Due to the disparity in language and educational systems, field-level social workers in Ruzomberok also collaborate closely with educators and school administrators to assist the children of Ukrainian refugees with their academic needs.

“During the first days of the refugee crisis school system wasn't the question of the day. We sorted it eventually into a close relationship with the municipality (the municipality organizes primary schools in Slovakia) and with the state government. We provide an opportunity for job requalification courses for the parents. We also help children to integrate at school by voluntarily providing education assistance” (Social worker: Field-level).

In contrast, the municipal social workers in Ruzomberok provide the information and consultancy they require to enroll their children in Slovak schools. Through the schools' JOY and ZARAZ programs, municipal social workers also offer free classes to parents, including a Slovak language course and several professional courses. Additionally, their program is flexible for Ukrainian refugees; these individuals can enroll in the classes online, however, there is also a face-to-face option. Municipal social workers in Ruzomberok provide two professional courses to Ukrainian refugees who can communicate in Slovak after which the Ukrainian refugees are placed in the job market in accordance with their interests by the municipal social workers in Ruzomberok.

“We provide them with free courses. It is mostly a Slovak language course because if they want to integrate as well as possible and find a job in Slovakia, they need the language first and foremost. Here in Ruzomberok, we have two educational schools, namely JOY and ZARAZ. Ukrainians can decide whether they want to take the course online or face-to-face. They can also choose a Slovak language course anywhere in Slovakia except the Bratislava region. If they already speak Slovak and can communicate, they can also choose professional courses: hairdresser, beautician, barber, accountant... They have the option of choosing 2 courses, one of which must be focused on the Slovak language, and after successful

completion, they can apply for a course with a professional focus in the field they are interested in or where they would like to work” (Social worker: Municipality- level).

Nonetheless, to develop and implement programs that specifically meet the educational requirements of Ukrainian refugee children, Slovakia's national social workers work together with educational authorities and international organizations. The national level social workers help to offer online Ukrainian courses specifically created for Ukrainian refugee students in Grades 5–11 and Grades 1-4 are currently being prepared to serve Ukrainian refugee children who wish to enroll in Ukrainian schools via distance learning. The priority of the national social workers is also to ensure that children of Ukrainian refugees in Slovakia receive free primary and secondary education. It demonstrates their dedication to making sure that these children, despite being displaced, have access to educational opportunities. Finally, social workers support Ukrainian students financially as part of the project "Allowance for Food and School Supplies"⁴ to promote their attendance in Slovak schools.

“We are considering their difficulties in Slovak schools. We, therefore, made taking Slovak language lessons in school compulsory for them. We are working with the local government. We provide online Ukrainian courses for Grades 5-11 and Grades 1-4 in preparation for Ukrainian students who wish to enroll in Ukrainian schools via distance learning. We provide them with free basic and secondary education in Slovakia. Also, we also provide financial support to Ukrainian refugee children who are attending Slovak schools” (Social worker: National level).

However, the analysis indicates that early stage of the Ukrainian crisis, field-level social workers in Ruzomberok did not prioritize integrating Ukrainian refugee children into the Slovak educational system. Positively, field-level social workers' involvement in Ruzomberok increased over time as they actively assisted and directed families of Ukrainian refugees enrolling their children in Slovak schools. Moreover, the municipal social workers in Ruzomberok are acknowledged for offering crucial support by arranging free classes, including Slovak language and professional training, through institutions like JOY and ZARAZ. But the effectiveness of those courses for the Ukrainian refugees can be questioned. The availability of online Ukrainian courses for distance learning for national-level social workers is commendable, but it's critical to evaluate the quality and accessibility of these courses. Giving Ukrainian refugee children free access to primary and secondary education is a good step, but further research is needed to determine how well financial aid programs can help the Ukrainian refugees integrate into the Slovak educational system.

⁴ <https://www.ukraineslovakia.sk/en/state-benefits/>

5.3 Social work practice with Ukrainian refugees

Several strategies and assistance are used in social work practice with Ukrainian refugees in Slovakia in order to address their particular needs and improve their integration and well-being. This section focuses on social work practice with Ukrainian refugees at the field level, municipality level, and national level separately since this research discovers the social worker's role in three distinct areas for integrating Ukrainian refugees in Ruzomberok.

5.3.1 Social Work Practice at field-level with Ukrainian refugees

Social work practice at the field level with Ukrainian refugees engages in assisting comprehensive support to address their special needs and support their integration in Ruzomberok. To identify the individual strengths and problems of Ukrainian refugees and create individualized support plans, social workers from the field level participate in direct, person-centered interventions.

“We are Making and actualizing the list of available housing and job opportunities as well as contacts for language and job requalification courses and government-supported help. Stay in contact with the client by providing a safe environment for meeting and socializing refugees with local culture and allowing them to apply biculturalism to help them adapt to the new environment” (Social worker: Field-level).

“We can help the refugees to get housing, provide food, help to access the labor market, and help to get medical services. We all the time cooperate with healthcare professionals, legal professionals, community workers, teachers, and municipality personnel” (Social worker: Field-level).

Collecting resources for the Ukrainian refugees: The collection and mobilization of resources for Ukrainian refugees in Ruzomberok is greatly supported by field-level social workers. The resources that can meet the Ukrainian refugee's needs, such as food, clothing, hygiene items, and housekeeping supplies, are pursued for and supplied by field-level social workers. Social workers build networks and collaborations with neighborhood groups, governmental organizations, and community stakeholders to make resource gathering easier.

Active communication with the Ukrainian refugees: Field-level social workers in Ruzomberok create face-to-face communication with Ukrainian refugees to offer them the assistance they need and to ensure their well-being. Social workers may evaluate the requirements of the Ukrainian refugees, address their issues, and assist in their integration into Ruzomberok due to this direct and active communication.

Provision of information for the Ukrainian refugees: The Ukrainian refugees in Ruzomberok, field-level social workers work as a main information source by giving them crucial information and direction about different facets of their lives there. These social workers serve as a vital link between the resources accessible to refugees and the refugees themselves. They gather information from a variety of sources, such as access to housing, education, health care, and the labor market.

Social integration and community engagement: To promote social integration between Ukrainian refugees and the local people in Ruzomberok, field-level social workers frequently arrange community events, cultural activities, and support groups. They set up platforms for Ukrainian refugees to connect and network, encourage involvement in local programs, and promote acceptance and understanding between individuals.

Cooperation with stakeholders: Field-level social workers in Ruzomberok actively engage and work with many stakeholders to ensure that Ukrainian refugees receive complete care and assistance. For the sake of the Ukrainian refugees, field social workers in Ruzomberok must collaborate with stakeholders from the medical field, the legal profession, volunteers, educators, and municipal staff.

5.3.2 Social work practice at municipality-level with Ukrainian refugees

A collaborative and holistic approach is used in social work practice at the municipal level with Ukrainian refugees to address their needs and promote their integration into the local community. At this level, social workers collaborate closely with local government officials, offering to counsel to the Ukrainian refugees, protecting their personal data, helping them to access the labor market, and supporting their materials needs.

“We contact Ukrainians by phone and provide them with information about the facilities that the Labor Office (municipal social work office) provides for them, and soon we will contact them again in person and continue to inform them about the provision of free facilities. We also signed a form on the protection of personal data, that is, we do not transfer information about Ukrainians outside the workplace or within other departments” (Social worker: Municipality-level).

“We are working in three departments that help Ukrainian refugees. The guardianship department is aimed at providing temporary care for family members. Then there is the department of material Needs, which is in charge of paying the allowance in case of material needs. Then there is the department of Active measures on the labor market, which is aimed at supporting mobility/commuting for work, volunteering, and employment with an employer” (Social worker: Municipality-level).

Meeting with Ukrainian refugees: Municipal social workers in Ruzomberok communicate with the Ukrainian refugees by phone call. This is how the first engagement with the Ukrainian refugees goes. The social workers then instructed them to report to the office so they could discuss their issues in depth during face-to-face consultations.

Protection of personal data: In order to consult or obtain information, Ukrainian refugees visit the Ruzomberok municipal social workers' office. Social workers always get personal information from Ukrainian refugees either verbal communication or through the issuance of personal documentation. Social workers from the Ruzomberok Municipality always keep their personal information private and preserve their conversations confidential.

Counseling with Ukrainian refugees: Counseling services for Ukrainian refugees are primarily provided by municipal social workers in Ruzomberok. They provide emotional support, direction, and assistance to help refugees deal with the barriers to education, employment opportunities, access to healthcare, and housing.

Guardianship for the Ukrainian refugee's family: Three departments of the municipal social work office in Ruzomberok work with Ukrainian refugees. The first is the guardianship department, where social workers strive to provide temporary care for family members. For instance, they assist families when two siblings arrive together but only one of them has reached legal age, or when grandparents seek to take custody of their grandchildren. The department's social workers advise the Ukrainian refugees on how to submit their applications.

Materials support for the Ukrainian refugees: Municipal social workers in Ruzomberok are also responsible to provide materials support (blankets, sleeping mats, and protection services) to the Ukrainian refugees. This is the Ruzomberok social work office's second department (labor office, social welfare, and family). While assessing the number of family members and their income, social workers in this division are responsible for paying the allowance for any material needs of Ukrainian refugees. Additionally, social workers are accountable for providing a disability allowance.

Active measuring in the labor market: A municipal social worker facilitates the Ukrainian refugees' active participation in the labor market. The social work office in Ruzomberok has a third department called "Active measuring labor market." Social workers organize volunteer opportunities for Ukrainian refugees, assist mobility for employment, and make job connections with employers.

5.3.3 Social work practice at the national level with Ukrainian refugees

A comprehensive and policy-oriented strategy is used in social work practice at the national level with Ukrainian refugees to address their needs and guarantee the protection of their rights. In order to design and execute policies and programs that assist the integration and well-being of Ukrainian refugees, social workers at this level collaborate closely with governmental organizations, decision-makers, and international organizations.

“As a social service advisor, mainly responsible for advocacy but sometimes it is needed to visit the field for the purpose of monitoring projects. Our office is also responsible to provide financial support in the form of a contribution for mobility, volunteering, and employment within the framework of governmental law. And collaboration with mayors, municipal offices, INGOs, and Humanitarian Organizations” (Social worker: National level).

Policy development and advocacy: National social workers collaborate closely with government organizations and decision-makers to create strategies and policies that address the needs and rights of Ukrainian refugees. They support giving refugees access to social welfare programs, as well as to basic services like healthcare, education, and jobs.

Program development and implementation: Slovakian social workers at the national level cooperate with NGOs, international agencies, and regional partners to create and carry out programs and initiatives that are adapted to the needs of Ukrainian refugees. Programs for language and cultural integration, career development, psychosocial support, and community development activities may all fall under this category.

Case management and support: National social workers supervise the case management procedure for Ukrainian refugees, making sure they get thorough and well-coordinated assistance. They may carry out assessments, create individualized care plans, and facilitate access to a range of resources, including social assistance, housing, healthcare, and legal services.

Capacity building and training: For professionals and frontline workers (field-level social workers) who deal with Ukrainian refugees, national-level social workers coordinate training programs and capacity-building initiatives. This encompasses providing knowledge on cultural competency, trauma-informed care, and other relevant abilities to improve the efficiency of service delivery.

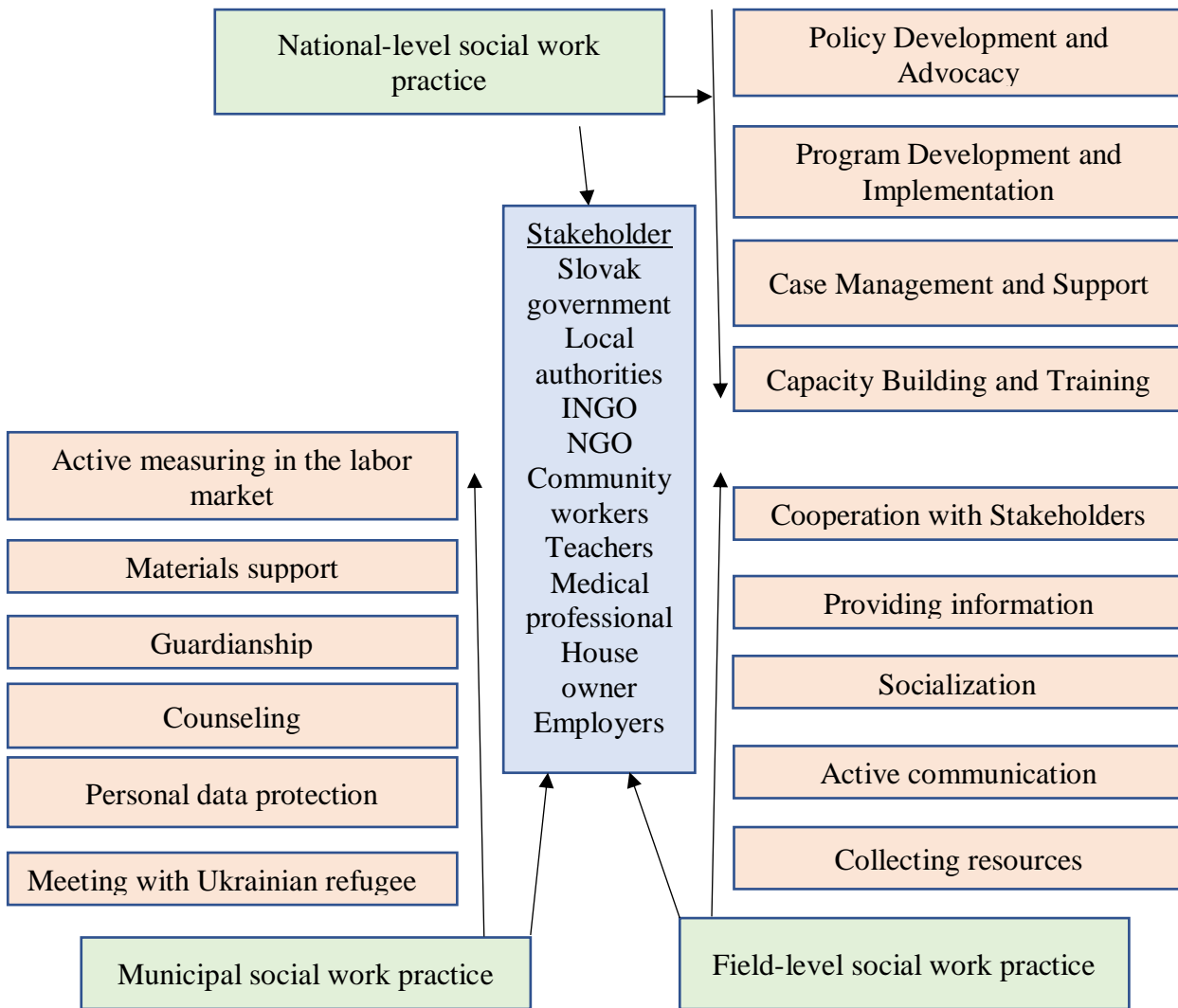


Figure 7: Social work practice at three different levels with Ukrainian refugees in Ruzomberok

Source: Author (study data)

5.4 Challenges of the social workers working with Ukrainian refugees

To effectively support and help Ukrainian refugees in Slovakia, social workers must overcome a number of challenges. Some of the key challenges for social workers are:

Trust issue with Ukrainian refugees: Conflict, displacement, and loss is one of the painful circumstances that Ukrainian refugees experience frequently. These incidents may cause social workers to lose some of their credibility. Due to mistrust, Ukrainian refugees are constantly reluctant to disclose their personal information and vulnerabilities to social workers. As a result, it is challenging for social workers to meet their needs.

Lack of information: This challenge comes from both sides. Social workers do not have enough information about job vacancies, housing, and the government support system in Ruzomberok. On the other

hand, Ukrainian refugees do not give them information about their families and identity. Consequently, social workers do not have enough information about their clients as well as the community resources and capabilities for the Ukrainian refugees.

Language barrier: Communication difficulties and understanding are hindered by language. Social workers are unable to communicate in Ukrainian, and Ukrainian refugees are unable to converse in Slovak. As a result, it is difficult for the social workers to connect with and gain the trust of the Ukrainian refugees. The relationship between social workers and Ukrainian refugees is further eroded by miscommunication or misunderstandings.

Lack of social work professionals: One of the major difficulties in managing the crisis, according to social workers in Slovakia, is a lack of social workers. Because there are not enough social workers, those that are employed must take on more cases. As a result, it may be difficult to fully address the complex needs of Ukrainian refugees due to a lack of time and resources, long work hours, and high levels of stress.

Lack of government support: Social workers assert that INGOs, NGOs, and private organizations provide the majority of the funding. Though it is not a common opinion among the social workers, one of the social workers thinks, the Slovak Republic's government does not have a sufficient mechanism in place to assist the Ukrainian refugees in Ruzomberok. As a result, social workers are constrained by a lack of proper government funding, staffing, and infrastructure. Their ability to offer comprehensive and efficient support to Ukrainian refugees is affected.

CONCLUSIONS

The master thesis aims to explore the Ukrainian refugees' family integration experiences into Slovak society, especially in Ruzomberok, and analyze the factors that influence their integration process in the socio-economic and cultural context. On the other hand, this study also discovered the role of social workers to integrate Ukrainian refugees in Ruzomberok at different social levels (field, municipal and national).

Firstly, considering the social integration for the Ukrainian refugee families in Ruzomberok, some indicators like acceptance of the Slovak community, learning the Slovak language, education facilities, social network, religious freedom, and family reunification were discussed to understand their social integration process. According to the study, the local people of Ruzomberok were quite welcoming to the families of Ukrainian refugees. The welcoming community in Ruzomberok actively supported the integration of Ukrainian refugees by helping with housing and employment. However, communication and access to the employment market are limited by language barriers. Ukrainian refugee children are enrolled

in schools. Due to language issues, some Ukrainian students attend Ukrainian online schools, some students attend Slovak local schools, and other students find it challenging to manage both schools. Ukrainian refugees' social networks with locals vary in extent; some develop tight bonds with their neighbors and landowners, while others find it difficult to communicate with the community. In general, the Ukrainian refugees' integration in Ruzomberok promotes religious liberty and permits Ukrainian refugees to follow their religion. Family reunions are allowed for Ukrainian refugees, although the expense of travel frequently prevents visits between relatives in Ukraine and Ruzomberok.

Secondly, the integration of Ukrainian refugee families into the Slovak economy places a focus on several factors, including access to the labor market, housing options, financial support, empowerment initiatives, and healthcare services. Despite their education and credentials, Ukrainian refugees in Ruzomberok commonly find up in low-skilled employment because of a lack of opportunities and a lack of communication skills. The Slovak government's housing facilities have been shown to be of high quality, and Ukrainian refugees seem content with their accommodations. The government initially provides financial support but usually turns to agencies like UNICEF. Slovak language and professional courses are the main emphases of empowerment initiatives; however, their efficiency and accessibility are under question. Due to their low income and high living expenses, Ukrainian refugees in Ruzomberok struggle financially. This highlights the need for better employment prospects, support systems, insurance coverage, language assistance, and specialized medical services for their integration and well-being.

Thirdly, regarding the cultural integration of Ukrainian refugee families in Ruzomberok, the cohesion between Slovak and Ukrainian refugees in Ruzomberok is influenced by cultural affinities, neighborhood support networks, social relationships, and positive attitudes even though some Ukrainian refugees noticed little change over time, the good ties with the local community. Ukrainian refugees rely on the support of Slovaks and feel a sense of belonging there. They also indicate a desire to adopt certain features of Slovak culture. Similarly, to this, Slovaks value Ukrainian culture and take part in their festivals. Both groups place significance on maintaining cultural identity and principles. However, while getting on with their lives in Slovakia, Ukrainian refugees still feel a strong commitment to and want to return to their home country.

Fourthly, the challenges experienced by Ukrainian refugees in Ruzomberok include single-parent households who confront financial strain, a lack of social networks, and difficulties finding employment. For Ukrainian refugees in Ruzomberok, major obstacles include the language barrier, limited information, lack of access to healthcare, difficulties in children's education, and future uncertainty.

Fifthly, the role of social workers in the integration of the Ukrainian refugees in Ruzomberok is highlighted by their professional competencies, available services, practice area, and challenges they are facing working with the Ukrainian Refugees. Social workers working with Ukrainian refugees in Slovakia at different

social levels (field, municipality, and national) have distinct educational backgrounds and work experiences, which affect their abilities and perspectives. Social workers offer Ukrainian refugees a range of services, such as helping them find housing and employment. Assisting temporary housing is generally the responsibility of field-level social workers, while municipal and national-level workers engage with local governments and give financial support. Regarding employment, field-level social workers help refugees in navigating the labor market, while municipal social workers and national-level social workers counsel employment opportunities and get in touch with local and international organizations.

Sixthly, to help Ukrainian refugees integrate into the host society in Ruzomberok, social workers practice several strategies at different social levels. Field-level social workers gather and distribute resources, engage with Ukrainian refugees personally, offer essential information, encourage social integration, and collaborate with partners, whereas municipal social workers communicate with refugees over the phone and in person, protect their personal information, provide counseling and guardianship, provide financial support, and facilitate their integration into the labor market. On the other hand, national-level social workers assist in case management and support, program development and implementation, capacity building and training, and policy development and advocacy on a national level. The study also discovered the challenges faced by social workers, including issues of trust, lack of information, communication difficulties, lack of social work practitioners, and insufficient government support.

Finally, the author combined three theoretical concepts- theory of change, ecological system theory in social work practice, and social capital theory to develop the "model of effective integration approach." These theories are linked together and give insight into the integration of refugees into host societies and the roles of social workers in this integration process. When these three concepts work together, it is anticipated that the integration strategy for Ukrainian refugees will be successful. Eventually, in this research, the "model of effective integration approach" was successful and effective for the families of Ukrainian refugees in Ruzomberok.

Implication and Recommendation

A comprehensive list of recommendations can be put into practice to alleviate the difficulties that Ukrainian refugees are experiencing in Ruzomberok. These include creating family support initiatives that give single-parent families access to financial aid, reasonable daycare options, and socialization activities. Programs for learning Slovak that are focused to the needs of Ukrainian refugees can help them become more fluent in the language and make it easier for them to integrate into society. Programs for employment support, such as job placement assistance and vocational training, can contribute to the creation of job openings and expedite the qualification-validation process. Better healthcare access can be ensured through accessible healthcare services that include interpreter services and medical personnel who speak Ukrainian. The

educational requirements of refugee children can be met by education assistance programs including language learning initiatives and employing Ukrainian refugee teachers in Slovak schools. Comprehensive information about job, housing, healthcare, and community integration initiatives can be found at information and resource centers. Daycare facilities that are commonly accessible and more reasonably priced can help working Ukrainian refugee parents, while empowerment and professional development programs can improve job prospects and labor market integration.

On the other hand, the recommendations for social workers include fostering trust through cultural sensitivity training and open communication, improving information sharing between social workers and Ukrainian refugees, offering language support through training and interpretation services, attempting to address the shortage of social workers through recruitment initiatives, asserting for more government support and resources, and combating stigma and discrimination. Through these initiatives, social workers will be able to support Ukrainian refugees in Ruzomberok more successfully, promote trust and communication, and improve their general well-being and integration.

In the context of social work with children and youth, this study highlights the significance of comprehending the particular challenges that children and youth experience during the integration process, establishing cultural competency, enhancing family support networks, encouraging cooperation and advocacy, and guiding policy and program development. Therefore, social workers can improve their practice and effectively promote the integration and well-being of children and youth from Ukrainian refugee families by including these areas, facilitating their successful adaptation to the new cultural and social environment.

Future research scope

Future research in this particular area could examine well-being, long-term socioeconomic integration, cultural adaptability, and social cohesion, the role and effectiveness of social workers, policy and practice implications, and undertake comparative studies. These research areas will provide knowledge of integration opportunities and difficulties, provide guidance for evidence-based interventions, and support the successful integration and well-being of Ukrainian refugee families in host nations.

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ANNEXES

Annex 1. Non-plagiarism declaration

Submitted to the Erasmus Mundus Master's Programme in Social Work with Child and Youth:

- Has not been submitted to any other Institute/University/College
- Contains proper references and citations for other scholarly work
- Contains proper citations and references from my own prior scholarly work
- Has listed all citations in a list of references.

I am aware that a violation of this code of conduct is regarded as an attempt to plagiarize and will result in a failing grade in the programme.

Date: 27/05/2023

Signature: *Md Habibur Rahman*

Name (in block letters): MD HABIBUR RAHMAN

Annex 2: Guideline for the interview with Ukrainian Refugee

Theme	Main question	Probing questions
General information	Please Introduce yourself and tell me about your family	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Name, gender, age • What was your occupation in Ukraine? • Who lives with you in Ruzomberok? • How many children do you have? • How old are they? • Do you have other dependents? • What work does your wife\ husband do in Ruzomberok?
Social Integration	Tell me about your experience in the host community.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When did you come to Ruzomberok? • What do you do in Ruzomberok now (Work or Study)? • Do you currently attend any courses (language or professional)? • Do you speak the Slovak language? • Which language are you using to communicate with the local people? • Which Language do your children speak in? • Do they have local friends/ acquaintances? • do they go to local school? Do they learn on-line at Ukrainian school? • What is the language of instruction at school?

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What language do they speak with their local friends? • Do you have local friends/acquaintances? • How can you describe your relationship with local people? • Are they helpful with you and your family members? • Have you participated in community events and social gatherings? Please tell about last event! What was that about? • What is your religion? • Are you able to practice your religion in the host society? • Do you face any difficulties to practice your religion here? • Is it easy for you to take your own decision in host society? • Do you have right to move one city to another? • Are you able to vote in the election (in Ruzomberok)? • Do you have the right to report any kind of injustice to the authorities? • Are you able to visit your family in Ukraine? • Have you visited family member in Ukraine so far? How many times? Have you visited Ukrainian friends in Slovakia (in other towns, countries)/ • Are your family members able to visit you in Ruzomberok?
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		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Did they visit you in Ruzomberok yet?
<p>Economic Integration</p>	<p>Please tell me about your economic situation in Ruzomberok.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What do you do for living? • What job skills do you have? • What is your experience to get the job in Ruzomberok? • What challenges have you faced so far in your professional life in Ruzomberok? • Please tell about your housing (Is it comfortable, good price and big enough for your family?) • Have you had a need for health services (Hospital services, community health care, medical insurance etc.)? Did you get a health insurance? • Do you face any difficulties in terms of getting health care services? If yes, tell me in detail. • Are you getting any financial assistance from the government or any other institutions? Tell me, please, what kind of assistance you receive! Has it changed during your stay? • Have you joined any training for improving your job skills? If yes, how has the training helped your empowerment? • What do you think about your living conditions in Ruzomberok?

		(Level of income and availability of services)?
Cultural Integration	Tell me about your cultural adaptation in the host society	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How's your relationship with your neighbors? • Have your relationships with the locals changed in any way? • Do you practice your own culture? Please tell me in detail. • Do you think, you are adopting local's culture and values in your life? • Do you think, you and local people sharing each other's culture? Please tell me in detail. • Do you have feeling of belonging in the host society? Why?
Challenges	<p>Please tell me about the overall problem in your life in the host community</p> <p>What are the crucial steps that should be taken to help Ukrainian refugees live in Slovakia?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can you name the most crucial problems in education, health care, finances, economic life, cultural life? • Is there anything that should be done differently (or What else could be done) to improve the life of Ukrainians in Slovakia?

Annex 3. Guideline for the interview with Ukrainian Refugee in the Ukrainian Language

Тема	Основне питання	Контрольні питання
Загальна інформація	Будь ласка, представтеся та розкажіть мені про свою родину	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ім'я, стать, вік • Чим ви займалися в Україні? • Хто живе з вами в Ружомберку? • Скільки у вас дітей? • Скільки їм років? • Чи є у вас інші утриманці? • Яку роботу виконує ваша дружина/чоловік у Ружомберку?
Соціальна інтеграція	Розкажіть мені про свій досвід у приймаючій спільноті.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Коли ви приїхали в Ружомберок? • Що ти зараз робиш у Ружомберку (працюєш чи навчаєшся)? • Чи відвідуєте ви зараз якісь курси (мовні чи професійні)? • Ви володієте словацькою мовою? • Якою мовою ви спілкуєтеся з місцевими жителями? • Якою мовою розмовляють ваші діти? • Чи є у них місцеві друзі/знайомі? • вони ходять до місцевої школи? Чи вчать в українській школі он-лайн?

	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Якою мовою ведеться навчання в школі?• Якою мовою вони розмовляють зі своїми місцевими друзями?• Чи є у вас місцеві друзі/знайомі?• Як ви можете описати свої стосунки з місцевими жителями?• Чи допомагають вони вам і членам вашої родини?• Чи брали ви участь у громадських заходах і соціальних зборах? Розкажіть, будь ласка, про останню подію! Що це було?• Яка твоя релігія?• Чи можете ви сповідувати свою релігію в приймаючому суспільстві?• Чи стикаєтеся ви з будь-якими труднощами при сповідванні своєї релігії тут?• Чи легко вам прийняти власне рішення в приймаючому суспільстві?• Чи маєте ви право переїжджати з одного міста в інше?• Чи можете ви проголосувати на виборах (у Ружомберку)?• Чи маєте ви право повідомляти владі про будь-яку несправедливість?
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		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Чи можете ви відвідати свою родину в Україні? • Чи відвідували ви родича в Україні? Скільки разів? Чи відвідували Ви друзів-українців у Словаччині (в інших містах, країнах)? • Чи можуть члени вашої родини відвідати вас у Ружомберку? • У Ружомберок вас уже відвідували?
Економічна інтеграція	Розкажіть, будь ласка, про вашу економічну ситуацію в Ружомберку.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Як ти заробляєш на життя? • Які професійні навички ви маєте? • Який ваш досвід отримання роботи в Ружомберок? • З якими труднощами ви стикалися досі у своєму професійному житті в Ружомберку? • Розкажіть, будь ласка, про своє житло (чи воно зручне, за доступною ціною та достатньо просторе для вашої родини?) • Чи були у вас потреби в медичних послугах (лікарняні послуги, громадська медична допомога, медичне страхування тощо)? Ви отримали медичну страховку? • Чи стикаєтеся ви з труднощами в отриманні медичних послуг? Якщо так, розкажіть детальніше. • Чи отримуєте ви будь-яку фінансову допомогу від уряду чи інших установ?

		<p>Скажіть, будь ласка, яку допомогу ви отримуєте! Чи змінилося воно за час вашого перебування?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Чи проходили ви тренінги для вдосконалення ваших професійних навичок? Якщо так, то як тренінг допоміг розширити ваші можливості? • Що ви думаєте про свої умови життя в Ружомберку? (Рівень доходу та доступність послуг)? • Чи проходили ви тренінги для вдосконалення ваших професійних навичок? Якщо так, то як тренінг допоміг розширити ваші можливості? • Що ви думаєте про свої умови життя в Ружомберку? (Рівень доходу та доступність послуг)?
Культурна інтеграція	Розкажіть мені про свою культурну адаптацію в суспільстві приймаючої країни	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Які у вас стосунки з сусідами? • Чи змінилися якось ваші стосунки з місцевими жителями? • Чи практикуєте ви власну культуру? Розкажіть, будь ласка, детальніше. • Чи вважаєте ви, що ви приймаєте місцеву культуру та цінності у своє життя? • Як ви думаєте, ви та місцеві жителі поділяєте культуру одне одного? Розкажіть, будь ласка, детальніше. • Чи відчуваєте ви приналежність до приймаючого суспільства? чому

<p>Виклики</p>	<p>Розкажіть, будь ласка, про загальну проблему вашого життя в приймаючій громаді</p> <p>Які найважливіші кроки необхідно зробити, щоб допомогти українським біженцям жити в Словаччині?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Чи можете ви назвати найбільш гострі проблеми в освіті, охороні здоров'я, фінансах, економічному житті, культурному житті? • Чи варто щось зробити інакше (або що ще можна зробити), щоб покращити життя українців у Словаччині?
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Annex 4. Guideline for the interview with social worker

Theme	Main Question	Probing questions
General Information	Please tell me about yourself, and your work experience in the social work field (with Ukrainian refugees).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Name, gender, and occupation • How many years are you working in the social service field? • How many years have you worked in the social work field? • What department?
Integration Strategies	Tell me about the approaches in social work practice to integrate refugees into the host community.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the integration strategies/ approaches in social work practice to integrate refugees into the host society? • How do social workers assist refugees in setting up accommodation in the host society? • How do social workers assist refugees to include them in the local education system? Or do the social workers think refugees need special education based on their needs? If so, then how social workers help them? • How social workers help refugee for creating social bond with local community and friends in the host society?

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How the social workers help refugees to adapt in the new culture? • How social workers assist refugees to empower (labor market access) them in the host society?
<p>Social Worker's Requirement</p>	<p>Please tell the requirements that social workers need to work with refugee</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the requirements for the social workers to work with refugees? • What are the legal competencies (knowledge about law, policy, and refugee right) that social workers need to work with refugees? Tell me about your legal competencies in this field. • What soft skills (Empathy, communication skill, time management, patience) are important to work with refugees? Tell me about your soft skills in this field. • To what extent does the social worker need to be culturally knowledgeable to understand the needs of refugees? Tell me about your ability to work with refugees across cultures. • How important to know the boundaries of social work practice to work with

		<p>refugees? Please share the boundaries of social work practice with refugees.</p>
<p>Social Work Services</p>	<p>Tell me about the social work services for the refugee integration</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What social work services do social workers offer refugees in their integration process? • What social work services do social workers offer refugees as their legal guardians? • What social work services are being given to improve the refugee’s language competencies? • What social work services are being provided to help the refugees’ engagement in the schools? • What are the social work services that promote bonding between refugees and local community? • What social work services are being provided to empower refugee in the labor market? • What social work services are being given to improve the health/mental health of the refugees?
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the social worker’s activities in practice with the refugees?

<p>Social Workers in Practice</p>	<p>Tell me about the social worker's activities in practice with the refugees</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How can social workers in social work practice provide information to refugees? • How social worker ensure safety and trust of the refugees while working with them? • What kind of supports can social workers offer when they work with refugees? And how? • What kind of resources social worker can allocate among the refugees in their integration process? And how? • Which other professions might social workers cooperate with to support refugees? And how? • What are the aspects that social workers may do advocacy for the refugees? • What are the areas that social workers can work as a mediator for the refugees?
	<p>Please tell me the challenges that social</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are challenges for the social workers to work with the refugees?

<p>Challenges</p>	<p>workers facing to work with refugees</p> <p>Tell me the crucial steps that should be taken to integrate Ukrainian refugees in the host society.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do you think, knowledge gap about refugees and their rights can be a challenge in the refugee integration? • Please tell me in detail, how communication barrier, lack of professional social workers, lack of support and heavy workload in social work profession can be the challenges to work with refugees' integration? • Do you have any recommendation to improve the situation? Tell me in detail.
<p>Social Workers (Policymakers Only)</p>	<p>Please tell me about the policies that have been updated or changed to support the Ukrainian refugees.</p> <p>Please tell me about your recommendation in the context of refugee integration policies.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do you know the policies that have been updated or changed to support the Ukrainian refugees? Tell me in detail. • What are the challenges of working as a social worker (policymaker) at the national level for the integration of Ukrainian refugees? • Do you have any recommendation?

Annex 5: Guideline for the Interview with Social Workers in the Slovak Language

Téma	Hlavná otázka	Skúšobné otázky
Všeobecné informácie	Povedzte mi prosím o sebe a svojich pracovných skúsenostiach v oblasti sociálnej práce (s ukrajinskými utečencami).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meno, pohlavie a povolanie • Koľko rokov pracujete v oblasti sociálnych služieb? • Koľko rokov pracujete v oblasti sociálnej práce? Aké oddelenie?
integračných stratégií	Povedzte mi o prístupoch v praxi sociálnej práce k integrácii utečencov do hostiteľskej komunity.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aké sú integračné stratégie/prístupy v praxi sociálnej práce na integráciu utečencov do hostiteľskej spoločnosti? • Ako sociálni pracovníci pomáhajú utečencom pri zriaďovaní ubytovania v hostiteľskej spoločnosti? • Ako sociálni pracovníci pomáhajú utečencom začleniť ich do miestneho vzdelávacieho systému? Alebo si sociálni pracovníci myslia, že utečenci potrebujú špeciálne vzdelanie na základe ich potrieb? Ak áno, ako im potom pomáhajú sociálni pracovníci? • Ako sociálni pracovníci pomáhajú utečencom pri vytváraní sociálnej väzby s miestnou komunitou a priateľmi v hostiteľskej spoločnosti? • Ako sociálni pracovníci pomáhajú utečencom prispôbiť sa novej kultúre?

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ako sociálni pracovníci pomáhajú utečencom posilniť ich postavenie (prístup na trh práce) v hostiteľskej spoločnosti?
Požiadavka sociálneho pracovníka	Povedzte, prosím, požiadavky, ktoré sociálni pracovníci potrebujú pri práci s utečencami	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aké sú požiadavky na sociálnych pracovníkov pri práci s utečencami? • Aké sú právne kompetencie (vedomosti o práve, politike a právach utečencov), ktoré sociálni pracovníci potrebujú na prácu s utečencami? Povedzte mi o svojich právnych kompetenciách v tejto oblasti. • Aké mäkké zručnosti (empatia, komunikačné zručnosti, time management, trpezlivosť) sú dôležité pri práci s utečencami? Povedzte mi o svojich mäkkých zručnostiach v tejto oblasti. • Do akej miery musí mať sociálny pracovník kultúrne znalosti, aby pochopil potreby utečencov? Povedzte mi o svojej schopnosti pracovať s utečencami naprieč kultúrami. • Aké dôležité je poznať hranice praxe sociálnej práce pri práci s utečencami? Prosím, podel'te sa o hranice praxe sociálnej práce s utečencami.
Služby sociálnej práce	Povedzte mi o službách sociálnej	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aké služby sociálnej práce ponúkajú sociálni pracovníci utečencom v ich integračnom procese? • Aké služby sociálnej práce ponúkajú sociálni pracovníci

	<p>práce pre integráciu utečencov</p>	<p>utečencom ako svojim zákonným zástupcom?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aké služby sociálnej práce sa poskytujú na zlepšenie jazykových kompetencií utečenca? • Aké služby sociálnej práce sa poskytujú na pomoc pri zapájaní sa utečencov do škôl? • Aké sú služby sociálnej práce, ktoré podporujú väzbu medzi utečencami a miestnou komunitou? • Aké služby sociálnej práce sa poskytujú na posilnenie postavenia utečencov na trhu práce? • Aké služby sociálnej práce sa poskytujú na zlepšenie zdravia/duševného zdravia utečencov?
<p>Sociálni pracovníci v praxi</p>	<p>Povedzte mi o aktivitách sociálneho pracovníka v praxi s utečencami</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aké sú aktivity sociálneho pracovníka v praxi s utečencami? • Ako môžu sociálni pracovníci v praxi sociálnej práce poskytovať informácie utečencom? • Ako sociálny pracovník zabezpečuje bezpečnosť a dôveru utečencov pri práci s nimi? • Aký druh podpory môžu sociálni pracovníci ponúknuť pri práci s utečencami? A ako? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aké zdroje môže sociálny pracovník prideliť medzi utečencov v ich integračnom procese? A ako? • S akými ďalšími profesiami môžu sociálni pracovníci spolupracovať pri podpore utečencov? A ako?

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aké sú aspekty, ktoré môžu sociálni pracovníci obhajovať pre utečencov? • Aké sú oblasti, v ktorých môžu sociálni pracovníci pôsobiť ako sprostredkovateľ pre utečencov?
Výzvy	<p>Prosím, povedzte mi, akým výzvam čelia sociálni pracovníci pri práci s utečencami</p> <p>Povedzte mi kľúčové kroky, ktoré by sa mali prijať na integráciu ukrajinských utečencov do hostiteľskej spoločnosti.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aké sú výzvy pre sociálnych pracovníkov pri práci s utečencami? • Myslíte si, že medzera vo vedomostiach o utečencoch a ich právach môže byť výzvou pri integrácii utečencov? • Povedzte mi prosím podrobne, ako komunikačná bariéra, nedostatok profesionálnych sociálnych pracovníkov, nedostatok podpory a veľké pracovné zaťaženie v profesii sociálnej práce môžu predstavovať výzvy pri práci s integráciou utečencov? • Máte nejaké odporúčanie na zlepšenie situácie? Povedz mi to podrobne.
Sociálni pracovníci (Len politici)	<p>Povedzte mi, prosím, o politikách, ktoré boli aktualizované alebo zmenené na podporu ukrajinských utečencov.</p> <p>Povedzte mi, prosím, o svojom odporúčaní v kontexte politík integrácie utečencov.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poznáte politiky, ktoré boli aktualizované alebo zmenené na podporu ukrajinských utečencov? Povedz mi to podrobne. • Aké sú výzvy práce sociálneho pracovníka (tvorca politiky) na národnej úrovni pre integráciu ukrajinských utečencov? • Máte nejaké odporúčanie?

Annex 6. Informed consent

Dear Sir/ Madam,

You are being invited to participate in an Erasmus Mundus Joint Master Dissertation research under the Institution named, Catholic University in Ruzomberok, Slovakia about Ukrainian refugee integration into Slovak society (Ruzomberok) in terms of socio-economic and cultural dimensions. You would be asked some questions related to your integration experience in Ruzomberok (Ukrainian refugee interviewee) and existing social services, support systems, and policies for integrating Ukrainian refugees in Slovakia (expert interviewee, e.g. social workers and policymakers). The information provided below will present you with a basic understanding of this research study and your role and responsibilities as a participant. Please take your time and go through this paper carefully and do not hesitate to ask if you have any concerns regarding this study. Please sign at the end of the document in accordance with the instructions after confirming your participation.

Research Objectives: The main objective of this research is to explore the integration experiences of the Ukrainian refugees in terms of social relations, access to the labor market, cultural diversity, and challenges at different social levels. Furthermore, the study attempts to figure out the requirements and roles of both social workers and policymakers to protect and ensure the rights in the context of refugee integration in Slovakia.

Research Goal: This research is a part of the master's program and the master's degree is fully funded by Erasmus Mundus Scholarship. Therefore, the general purpose of the study is educational along with the contribution as a future research reference, and policy reference. The findings of the study may be used for national, and international publications and conferences as well as other useful avenues available.

Research Procedure: Once you decide to participate in this study, you would be expected to participate in an in-depth interview. Interviews will be held at your convenient time through video calls (online platforms) or face-to-face (in person). With your consent, the interview will be recorded to ensure that no information is missed, but you have the right to ask for the recording to stop at any moment if you do not feel comfortable. The researcher will translate the data from its native language (Ukrainian or Russian) to English before transcribing it in its original language and saving it in a password-protected file. You would also receive the transcription to verify its accuracy.

Risks and Benefits to Participation: There is no recognized risk associated with taking part in this study, but you have the freedom to refuse to answer any questions that make you uncomfortable or to stop taking part immediately. For taking part in the study, there will be no monetary or material compensation.

Confidentiality: In this research identities of the respondents will be anonymous to protect the participants from any kind of harm. At the same time, the respondents and the researcher will use a pseudonym instead of an original name. No one would listen to your response unless you give them permission, and all the information and electronic data would be placed in a secure location.

Voluntary Participation and Withdrawal: Your participation is voluntary, which refers you are able to leave the consent and withdraw from the research anytime if you change your mind.

Further Contact and Questions: The researcher of the project is Md Habibur Rahman (Email: mdrahman1@stud.mruni.eu) you can reach me at this email if you have any further questions about this research. The name of the supervisor of the research is, Ilze Trapenciere (Email: ilze.trapenciere@lza.lv). You can also contact her if you have any additional queries regarding this study.

Statement of Consent:

I have read properly the information on this consent paper and I believe, I understand the study.

So, here, I, Participant's Name _____ / Signature _____ give my consent to be a participant in the study. Date _____.

Researcher's name _____ / Signature _____,
Date _____.

Annex 7. Consent to conduct interviews



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To Whom It Might Concern,

By this I certify that Md Habibur Rahman, is the 2nd -year full-time student in Erasmus Mundus European Joint Master Social Work with Children and Youth (ESWOCHY) program and is carrying out research for his Master thesis on the topic "Ukrainian refugees' family integration in Slovak society: Socio-economic and cultural dimension".

The aim of his research is to gather data by conducting interviews with Ukrainian refugees, social workers and policymakers, who are related to Ukrainian refugee integration. All three groups have to be interviewed because in the thesis he is looking for the integration process and experiences in different levels of host country.

I hereby confirm that Md Habibur Rahman is acknowledged about the research ethics in social science and social work ethics in his research activities.

ESWOCHY is implemented by the universities of the Consortium that is Mykolas Romeris University (Lithuania), Riga Stradins University (Latvia), The Catholic University in Ružomberok (Slovakia) and ISCTE University Institute of Lisbon (Portugal).

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