

NAVIGATING THE SOCIO-CULTURAL JUNCTURES: CHALLENGES OF UKRAINIAN INTEGRATION IN LITHUANIA



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SUMMARY. This article explores the integration challenges Ukrainian refugees face in Lithuania through the lens of Giddens' Structuration theory. By analyzing how socio-demographic factors such as age, gender, income, and education influence refugees' agency and interaction with social structures, the article seeks to identify key barriers to integration and propose insights for improving policy responses and social services to better enable and empower refugees. Anthony Giddens' Structuration theory allows us to explain the participation of Ukrainian refugees in the life of the Lithuanian state. Ukrainians are seen as social actors performing the agency while creating their lives in Lithuania, which impacts some public service institutions and, at the same time, the social practices of the population. The theory makes it possible to highlight and show Ukrainians as reflective and critical-thinking actors who act purposefully to improve their life conditions. It also shows the extent of change occurring in time and space, acting as individual actors and/or as a mobilized social group.

KEYWORDS: Ukrainian refugees, Lithuania, structure, agency, barriers, integration.

INTRODUCTION

Lithuanian society is pretty homogenous¹, functioning according to the needs of Lithuanians. However, over the past few years, because of geopolitical fluctuations, the country has experienced several waves of immigration, from the so-called "migration crisis" of "illegal immigrants" crossing the Belarus border to the arrival of political refugees persecuted by the Belarusian and Russian regimes, and finally, after the Russian invasion in Ukraine, the influx of Ukrainian war refugees². Respectively, the growth of emerging communities raised particular questions

¹ Frėjutė-Rakauskienė, M., Marcinkvičius, A., Stumbrys, D. 2023. Chapter 5. National composition and its change. Changes in demographic structures and processes of the Lithuanian population. LCSS Institute of Sociology, 2023, 119–144. ISBN 978-609-8324-11-2 (printed), ISBN 978-609-8324-12-9 (online).

² Internet access <<https://osp.stat.gov.lt/ukraine-dashboards>>.

regarding the possibilities of their participation and integration in Lithuania³. To ensure decent living conditions, the new arrivals try to form and represent their interests and thus begin to change the process of organizing and providing public services. In this work, attention is paid only to the case of Ukrainians, who reveal themselves as consciously self-aware and motivated to act, capable of making changes in the social world. Such an approach differs from the dominant discourse of the concept of war refugees in society, i.e., even though this group has experienced loss, injury, and trauma, it is in a sense dependent on the benevolence of the host country, at the same time, it is not a stigmatized or incompetent group, but capable and efficient, able to formulate and represent its interests.

Anthony Giddens' theory of structuration (Giddens, 1984) is used to analyze the participation of Ukrainian refugees in the life of Lithuanian society. Structuration describes the dialectical relationship between structure and agency – Lithuanian social structure and Ukrainian refugees. The structuration theory refers to the dualism of structure, claiming that social structure enables and constrains individual action. The agency of actors and structure is a dual entity, not two independent sets of phenomena. They cannot be examined and explained separately from each other; therefore, every social action involves a structure, just as every structure consists of an action, so agency and structure are inextricably intertwined in every human activity (Bryant, Jary 1991: 6). Consequently, the performance of Ukrainians cannot be analyzed in isolation from the social structure of host society in which they participate. Accordingly, this article aims to explore the integration challenges faced by Ukrainian refugees in Lithuania through the lens of Giddens' structuration theory, i.e., how Lithuanian social structure enables or constrains them, on the one hand, and what social reality they reproduce while performing their agency (even having limited resources and little awareness of existing rules). For example, the Lithuanian government grants some privileges to Ukrainians but simultaneously expects them to adjust and act within the existing order. By analyzing how socio-demographic factors such as age, gender, income, and education influence refugees' agency and interaction with social structures (in our case – institutional order), the article seeks to identify decisive barriers to integration and propose insights for improving policy responses and social services to better enable and empower refugees. The analysis is based on pilot research, so it raises relevant questions and advances possible conceptual structure rather than providing significant statistical data.

³ IOM Lithuania: main challenges for Ukrainians in the Baltics | IOM Lithuania; Study: Ukrainians in Lithuania face housing and language barrier problems – LRT; v01_Ukrainian-report_Janeliunas_LT_A4.pdf.

The application of dialectical analysis in the structure and agency of migration and refugee integration research is well established in academic literature, offering a nuanced perspective on the interplay between structural constraints and individual agency. For example, Koser and Pinkerton (2002) utilized Giddens' structuration theory to examine how social networks impact asylum seekers' decision-making processes. Their findings suggest that social capital is a critical factor that enables or limits migration decisions, depending on the structural barriers, such as legal frameworks that individuals must navigate. In a similar vein, Bakewell (2010) emphasized the interaction between forced migrants and the structural contexts in host countries, arguing that migration policies represent significant constraints while also highlighting the creative forms of resistance exhibited by refugees. Such interactions underscore the dynamic tension between agency and structural forces in migration contexts. Recently, Oso, López-Sala and Muñoz-Comet (2021) have emphasized that migration policies do more than just set administrative conditions – they shape how migrants are perceived and integrate into host societies. Together, these studies highlight the duality of structure and agency in migration processes. They demonstrate that while existing socio-political structures often constrain migrants, they also actively shape and transform these environments through their actions. Migration is not simply a one-way interaction where individuals are shaped by policies and societal frameworks but rather a dynamic, reciprocal process wherein migrants actively contribute to transforming social, political, and institutional structures.

The quantitative research on the attitudes of Ukrainian refugees in Lithuania, conducted by the public opinion research company *Vilmorus* in March-April 2023, utilized a face-to-face interview method to collect data from a sample of 202 respondents. The target group consisted of Ukrainian war refugees aged 18 and older residing in various regions across Lithuania, including Vilnius, Kaunas, Klaipėda, Šiauliai, Panevėžys, Alytus, Marijampolė, Tauragė, and Utena. The survey⁴ was commissioned by the Department of National Minorities under the Government of Lithuania. It aimed to capture the challenges faced by Ukrainian refugees, their experiences with integration, and their level of satisfaction with various aspects of life in Lithuania.

The empirical research was conducted to comprehensively assess the integration problems of Ukrainian refugees in Lithuania upon their arrival and their experience and satisfaction in various aspects of life. The importance of this study stems

⁴ The survey questions covered various topics such as challenges encountered upon arrival in Lithuania (housing, employment, language barriers, etc.), experiences with discrimination based on nationality or language, opinions on government support and services, and social and political engagement with Lithuanian and Ukrainian public life.

from the need to understand how these newly arrived people adapt to the structures of Lithuanian society and what challenges they face. These data are essential for formulating effective public policies and services to facilitate their integration, ensuring their needs are adequately addressed.

STRUCTURATION THEORY AND THE INTEGRATION CHALLENGES OF UKRAINIAN REFUGEES IN LITHUANIA

At the core of Giddens' theory is the duality of structure, suggesting that structure and agency are interdependent. Social structures both enable and constrain the actions of individuals, and individuals, in turn, reproduce or alter these structures through their everyday activities (1984). This way, the conditions maintaining the basis for recreating social actions are restored. Social activities are reproduced, i.e., if they are not altered by social actors, they are constantly recreated by them.

According to Giddens, structures are the rules, resources, and systems that shape human behavior. However, they are not fixed; they exist only through the actions and interactions of individuals. We relate structures for Ukrainian refugees in Lithuania with institutional order (its requirements, regulations, exceptions and privileges), which play a critical role in shaping their integration experiences. For example, without practical interaction between refugees and our migration policies as well as provided social services, it is impossible to assess its functionality.

Giddens posits that agency refers to individuals' capacity to act independently and make their own choices. Human agents actively shape and influence the structures around them through their actions. In our research, we are concerned with how Ukrainian refugees explore the existing structures from both perceptive and engagement points of view. Giddens argues that structures exist only when human agents enact them. So, individuals are both constrained by structures and reproduce or alter them through their daily activities (Giddens: 201–221 in Bryant, Jary eds.1991). As for our case, the outcome of the refugees' agency would indicate how our policies correspond with Ukrainians' needs and how/to what extent they restrict their integration. According to the theory, they would reproduce reality within the structural framework and available resources.

The term 'structuration' describes how social systems are produced and reproduced over time. It suggests that society is continually made and remade by the ongoing practices of people. Giddens (in Bryant, Jary eds.1991) emphasizes that this process is recursive, meaning that social systems are *recreated* and *reinforced* through repeated actions. Sociologists also distinguish between what people are consciously aware of when they act and what they take for granted. Much of our daily activities are carried out through *practical consciousness*, guided by tacit

knowledge of social norms and routines that we do not explicitly consider. On the other hand, discursive consciousness refers to the knowledge that people can articulate and explain. It is a set of actions that people consciously reflect on and can share their knowledge with others.

One of the principal aspects of Giddens' theory is the role of *reflexivity* in social life, the capacity to reflect on one's actions and make conscious decisions about how individuals engage with social structures (Kilminster 102–103, in Bryant, Jary eds. 1991). Reflexivity allows individuals to monitor and adjust their actions based on the outcomes of their previous behaviors, contributing to the ongoing transformation of society. Individuals are not passive actors; they actively monitor and reflect on their actions and the structures surrounding them. Giddens views structures as rules and resources that enable and constrain actions (Bryant, Jary 1991: 13–14). These structures can be formal (like laws or regulations) or informal (such as social norms or cultural expectations). However, rather than seeing structures as static, Giddens emphasizes that they only exist when used or enacted by human agents.

This reflexive engagement is interdependent with public policies and social attitudes. As refugees become more familiar with the structures they interact with, their behaviors may encourage institutions to become more responsive to their needs. Reflexivity is evident in how they adapt their strategies for integration based on the outcomes of their previous efforts. For example, refugees who experience success in finding employment or accessing social services may alter their behaviors or advice to others, contributing to the collective knowledge of how best to navigate Lithuanian institutions. Therefore, collecting and disseminating knowledge on the challenges and exemplary cases of the Ukrainians in Lithuania is essential for being equipped with available opportunities and the necessary skills. Moreover, their expectations and engagement limits would be known to relevant institutions so they would facilitate their agency and structural change.

Giddens is not interested in the individual experience of the protagonist or social formations but in social practices distributed in time and space (Urry: 161–166, in Bryant, Jary eds. 1991). Accordingly, the concept of time-space distancing is particularly relevant in the context of the Ukrainian refugee crisis. The concept refers to how social relationships are stretched across time and space, whether they match the needs arising in that particular moment due to the development of the ongoing war in Ukraine and the changing needs of Ukrainians in Lithuania (i.e., arriving, settling, routinizing, integrating, etc.). Ukrainian refugees' integration into Lithuanian society is influenced by local structures and transnational factors such as continuing connections with family members in Ukraine, global refugee policies, and even international support networks. This extended time-space context shapes the actions of Ukrainian refugees, as their efforts to integrate into Lithuanian society are often influenced by their current ties to locals, as well

as governmental and nongovernmental institutions and policy frameworks. This dimension reveals the complexity of the integration process, as refugees are navigating both local and global structures that are developing (and adjusting) over time⁵.

MAIN STRUCTURAL BARRIERS AND FACILITATORS ENABLING AGENCY

It is worth noting that structuration theory is not a specific program of empirical research; therefore, it must be applied carefully and critically, and the concepts in the theory must be seen as a sensitizing mechanism that is used depending on what the research questions or results are (Giddens 204 in Bryant, Jary eds.1991). In this research, the structuration theory serves as specific guidelines for studying the circumstances and challenges of integration. This particular conceptual framework allows us to more clearly identify the possible impact of the structure on Ukrainians and the latter's ability to adjust the structure itself. Thus, integration is not a one-way process but a dynamic interaction between Ukrainians' agency (capacities and resources) and the Lithuanian social structures (institutionalized order). Understanding these interactions provides critical insights into improving integration policies and how refugees actively shape their integration experiences.

We assume that a newly arrived Ukrainian who has experienced the horrors of war in his homeland, upon entering a new country, experiences ontological insecurity because the aid system operating here functions according to our, i.e., Lithuanians' understanding and implicit needs of what the newly arrived may require⁶. Since Giddens' theory of structuration includes both sides – the actor and the structure, it adequately reveals the interactions between refugees and Lithuanian structure, i.e., if and how refugees, through their everyday interactions with these structures, contribute to the ongoing process of structuration, simultaneously adapting to and altering the institutionalized order in Lithuania. By emphasizing the duality of structure, the empirical research will highlight how such structural elements – language and bureaucratic issues – shape the actions of refugees when trying to enter labor and housing markets while at the same time being reproduced or transformed by their agency⁷.

⁵ To fully grasp the dynamics of interactions between agency and structure, further research is needed to constantly monitor the situation and its development, testing working hypotheses and reflecting on the ongoing situation.

⁶ Social support provided by the Lithuanian government to Ukrainians upon arrival in Lithuania <<https://socmin.lrv.lt/lt/veiklos-sritys/socialine-integracija/lietuva-ukrainai/socialine-parama-ukrainieciams/>>.

⁷ It is worth emphasizing that research was conducted within a year of the respondents' arrival. The majority of them were very susceptible, for example, even in cases where the respondents were able to openly express their opinion and critically evaluate some aspects of life in Lithuania (e.g., what actions of the Lithuanian government towards Ukrainians you do not like?) they often refrained, i.e. not a single answer exceeded 2.5% and thus remained within the margin of error. It can be assumed that while being grateful to the host society, the respondents did not want to appear impolite, so they did not fully reveal their true feelings. This aspect should be addressed in further research.

As mentioned, structuration theory is based on the duality of structure, meaning that social structures are both the medium and the outcome of social interactions. Such structures as the bureaucratic and legal frameworks in Lithuania that govern refugee status and social services are formed and sustained by human actions while simultaneously shaping individual actions and choices. Below, we will look more closely at the structural challenges of bureaucratic issues and language barriers experienced by our respondents.

Bureaucratic issues (including requirements to get free healthcare and education): despite positive feedback from most respondents, some others (6.4%) indicated dissatisfaction with healthcare services, citing long waiting times and difficulty accessing medical professionals, especially for children. 3.5% of respondents highlighted the obstacles (i.e., long waiting time, limited availability) to accessing schools and preschools. Finally, few Ukrainian refugees report frustration with complex bureaucratic procedures, particularly related to renewing temporary residence permits (2.5% dissatisfied). In this context, bureaucracy operates as a formal structure that regulates access to legal status and services, constraining refugees' ability to integrate fully. However, refugees demonstrate *agency* by navigating these bureaucratic systems – filing paperwork, attending appointments, and appealing decisions, thereby interacting with the institutional rules that govern their status in Lithuania. Their engagement with these structures has the potential to transform bureaucratic practices, especially if their collective experiences highlight inefficiencies or lead to policy reforms aimed at improving the administrative processes related to migration and integration.

One of the most significant challenges for refugees has been language barriers, with 20.3% of respondents citing difficulties in learning or operating in Lithuanian. This issue affects their daily lives, including job searches, social integration, and access to services. From the perspective of structuration theory, language operates as both a *resource* and a *constraint*. It is a social structure that facilitates communication and access to opportunities, but it also becomes a barrier when refugees do not possess proficiency in Lithuanian. The refugees' *agency* is demonstrated by their efforts to learn the language and engage with Lithuanian society, but the pre-existing linguistic and educational systems constrain these efforts. Therefore, the refugees' actions reproduce and transform the structural importance of language in the integration process.

In such cases, the refugees' struggles with entering labor and housing markets demonstrate how existing social structures, such as the Lithuanian language requirement for jobs or bureaucratic procedures acquiring housing, shape their lived

experiences⁸. The barriers they face in navigating the job and housing markets reflect the power of these structures. However, refugees are also contributing to the ongoing transformation of these structures by creating new demands for services, policies, and opportunities for linguistic inclusion, as well as “refugee-friendly” bureaucratic procedures.

Refugees face challenges in finding appropriate jobs, with 14.4% stating they could only secure low-paying or undesirable work. This issue is compounded by difficulties navigating the job market due to language problems and the rigid Lithuanian public employment service requirements, which limit refugees’ access to desirable jobs, sometimes pushing them into low-paying work. However, their efforts to enter the workforce also challenge and gradually reshape the employment landscape, signaling a shift toward greater inclusion as refugees integrate into specific sectors. The agency of individuals refers to their capacity to act independently and make free choices. In Giddens’ model, even though structures constrain individuals, they do not entirely determine behavior. Refugees exercise agency in how they engage with the integration process, for example, in their willingness to learn the Lithuanian language, their decisions to embrace the privileges of the Lithuanian government towards housing and employment, or to enter housing and labor markets independently. Those who succeed in entering the job market contribute to the reproduction of existing standards of the labor market. At the same time, those who face difficulties highlight areas where structural change may be necessary, such as credential recognition and employment support systems.

Refugee agencies are evident in how they deal with housing issues. Nearly 28.2% reported struggles with finding affordable housing. This reflects how access to housing operates as a resource that is unevenly distributed. The refugees encountered this integrational challenge through their struggles to secure affordable housing. Yet, their actions – such as seeking assistance from NGOs, fellows and communities, or government programs – also challenge and reshape the refugee accommodation policy in Lithuania. The refugees’ responses (actively seeking housing solutions or utilizing networks) reflect their ability to act within these constraints. This interaction highlights how refugees shape their experiences and influence Lithuanian responses to providing affordable housing.

Similarly, satisfaction with the Lithuanian governmental support indicates the complex interplay between agency and structure. While refugees indicated some (previously discussed) structural challenges, 31.7% of respondents felt positive about the support they received (e.g., social welfare, safety). Their actions – participation

⁸ Although it is worth mentioning, for example, that answering the question “Have you experienced discrimination or insult because of your nationality or language? If so, where, in what situations?”, the vast majority (87.6%) did not encounter any or did not indicate any.

in volunteer work, engaging with local communities, or learning the Lithuanian language – also play a role in maintaining and reshaping these supportive structures.

As for Ukrainian refugees, power imbalances may play a significant role in how much agency they actually have. While refugees may try to change their situation (e.g., by organizing community support groups or advocating for better housing conditions), their ability to influence policies may be limited by institutional power. For example, landlords may hold more power than refugees in housing negotiations, making it difficult for refugees to secure adequate living arrangements, regardless of their efforts to engage.

THE INFLUENCE OF DEMOGRAPHIC FACTORS (AGE, GENDER, INCOME, AND EDUCATION) ON STRUCTURATION AND AGENCY

From a sociological point of view, it is reasonable to expect that refugees will not be a homogeneous group due to its socio-demographic parameters. Thus, it is interesting to analyze the significance of the influence of various demographic factors on the structuration and agency processes of Ukrainian refugees. Each demographic category brings specific challenges and opportunities that affect how refugees exercise agency within the constraints imposed by socio-demographic characteristics.

Age. Younger refugees (particularly working-age ones) may have more flexibility and adaptability when learning a new language, pursuing employment, and integrating socially. They might also be more inclined to engage with digital resources, which could help them access services and information more quickly, thus improving their integration outcomes. Younger refugees may exercise more agency by taking advantage of language courses or job training programs designed for quicker integration into the workforce. Age can be a constraint for older people, especially when learning a new language or adapting to a new employment system. Due to physical, cognitive, or social factors, older individuals may find engaging with structures such as education or job retraining harder.

Gender. Gender plays a crucial role in shaping refugees' experiences, particularly for women, who may face additional challenges related to childcare and household responsibilities. Traditional gender roles and caregiving responsibilities may restrict the agency of female refugees, making it more difficult for them to pursue job opportunities or navigate complex bureaucratic systems. These constraints reinforce social structures that limit women's capacity for independent action in public and economic spheres. However, women, especially those with access to community support networks or aid programs, might better cope with the barriers to employment and housing. They may also take more responsibility for social

integration, seeking education for their children or ensuring access to healthcare services.

Income. Income levels are critical to a refugee's ability to maneuver in the host society. Refugees with higher incomes or access to financial resources have greater flexibility in securing better housing, healthcare, and education services. Lower-income refugees face structural barriers such as precarious employment or the inability to afford housing, which amplifies their vulnerability. Those with more financial resources are better positioned to exercise agency by choosing where to live, affording language classes, or securing jobs that align with their qualifications. They are also more likely to bypass bureaucratic barriers by paying for services or seeking private legal assistance. Low-income refugees, on the other hand, have fewer opportunities to exercise agency. They depend more on state-provided services, often overburdened and bureaucratically challenging. Their limited economic capital restricts their ability to access social networks, housing, or better job opportunities, perpetuating a cycle of financial vulnerability.

Education. Educational background is vital in determining how effectively refugees can navigate social structures. Those with higher education are more likely to secure employment that matches their qualifications, even though they still face language barriers and credential recognition issues. Lower-educated refugees are often confined to low-paying jobs or precarious employment, reinforcing economic inequality. Highly educated refugees show more agency when interacting with employment systems and language programs. They may also have stronger social capital, enabling them to access better resources and opportunities within Lithuanian society. Refugees with limited education face greater constraints in accessing higher-paying jobs or navigating complex bureaucratic systems. The language barrier and lack of professional skills further exacerbate their marginalization, making it harder for them to exercise agency within the structural confines of the labor market or housing systems.

SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE MOST VULNERABLE AND THE MOST RESILIENT GROUPS

Giddens' structuration theory suggests that demographic factors significantly shape how Ukrainian refugees experience *structuration* and perform *agency* in the host society. Younger, educated, and higher-income refugees might generally have more agency to deal with and even challenge the structural constraints they face, such as language barriers and bureaucratic hurdles. On the other hand, females, older and lower-income refugees, as well as those with lower educational attainment, might

face considerable structural constraints, limiting their ability to exercise agency and fully integrate into society. Income and education, in particular, determine how effectively individuals can navigate employment systems and housing markets. At the same time, gender influences access to resources like childcare and employment, shaping the overall refugee experience in Lithuania.

Based on the data analysis of the integration challenges faced by Ukrainian refugees in Lithuania, we can define the critical socio-demographic characteristics, which, on the one hand, serve as an enabling agency while, on the other, might become a restrictive aspect, further challenging the integrational process. Based on this conceptual duality, we analytically project the main features of the most vulnerable and most resilient groups.

Table 1. *Socio-demographic characteristics⁹ of the most vulnerable and most resilient groups*

The Most Vulnerable Group			
Socio-Demographic Parameters			
Age	Gender	Income	Education
46 and above – 24.8%	Women – 84.2%	Under 300 Euros- 14.9%	Unfinished or secondary – 28.7%
Specific Characteristics of Sub-Group			
Older refugees (particularly those above working age) tend to struggle more with learning the Lithuanian language and adapting to the new social landscape.	Women with children, particularly single mothers, are more vulnerable due to additional responsibilities such as childcare and household management.	Refugees with low income or no financial resources are more likely to be trapped in precarious housing situations and low-paying jobs.	Those with lower levels of education face significant barriers in securing employment that aligns with their skills, often confined to undesirable or low-paying jobs.
Typical Challenges to the Most Vulnerable Group			
Housing	Difficulty in finding affordable housing is more pronounced for families with children and lower-income households.		
Employment	Constrained to low-paying or undesirable jobs, this group is stuck in precarious employment with little opportunity for upward mobility.		

⁹ It is worth noting that the article is based on pilot research, with a sample size of 202. It is insufficient for trustworthy statistical analysis indicating significant relations among (dependent and independent) variables. Nevertheless, the data reveal general tendencies and form the basis for constructing assumptions.

The Most Resilient Group			
Socio-Demographic Parameters			
Age	Gender	Income	Education
Under 34 – 33.2% 35-40 – 42.1%	Men – 15.8%	701 Euros and above – 25.7%	Higher education – 40.1%
Younger refugees, particularly work-age ones, are better positioned to learn the Lithuanian language and engage with local institutions.	Men and younger, child-free women often have more flexibility to engage with employment opportunities and language programs, as they have fewer caregiving responsibilities than women with children.	Refugees with higher financial resources or savings from pre-displacement lives are more resilient. They can afford better housing, private healthcare, and education, which helps them integrate more smoothly.	Those with higher levels of education (university degrees, professional qualifications) are able to navigate the labor market more effectively and secure higher-paying jobs that match their skills.
Typical Strengths of the Most Resilient Group			
Housing	Resilient refugees can secure better housing options through social networks or their financial means, allowing them to avoid the precarious housing situations that more vulnerable groups face.		
Employment	This group is more likely to secure employment that aligns with their qualifications or higher-paying jobs, allowing them greater economic stability and integration.		

The most vulnerable group might struggle to exercise agency and have trouble navigating social structures, which might enhance their economic and social marginalization. They tend to be constrained by multiple socio-demographic factors that magnify their vulnerability. Older refugees face greater challenges in finding employment and accessing services. Parenting responsibilities (especially for single mothers) limit their ability to participate in language courses or find stable employment, especially given the reported difficulties in securing housing. Low-income people have fewer options for private healthcare, education, or legal assistance. Less educated people are also less equipped to handle complex bureaucratic processes, compounding their difficulties in accessing necessary social services. On the other hand, the most resilient group might demonstrate greater adaptability and can more effectively interact with Lithuanian social structures, leading to better integration outcomes. This group could demonstrate more adaptability and agency in overcoming the structural barriers of language and bureaucracy.

The most vulnerable group of Ukrainian refugees might face even more challenges. They will likely rely more on informal networks and face lower trust in institutions. Due to language barriers and cultural differences, the vulnerable group may experience lower-quality interactions with public service providers. They will be more prone to experience difficulties receiving empathetic or culturally sensitive care,

particularly in securing or renewing temporary residence permits, further entrenching their vulnerability. Due to their struggles with public services, the vulnerable group will more likely depend on community-based organizations, informal networks, and ethnic support groups for assistance. These networks might play a critical role in their day-to-day survival, particularly in accessing housing, healthcare, and employment.

In contrast, the most resilient group will likely be better integrated, experience fewer barriers, and have greater confidence in public institutions, primarily due to their socioeconomic stability and language proficiency. While the resilient group will also benefit from community networks, they will be more likely to successfully access formal public services and rely less on informal channels. Their social networks will probably include a mix of Lithuanians and fellow Ukrainians, facilitating integration. Their ability to communicate in Lithuanian or English and a better understanding of bureaucratic processes will allow this group to access services with fewer barriers and navigate bureaucratic hurdles more effectively, often utilizing social capital or support networks to deal with residency permits and other administrative requirements.

CONCLUSIONS

Lithuania has enacted various supportive policies to simplify the process of granting residency, offer language classes, and ensure employment opportunities for Ukrainian refugees. While these efforts reflect sympathetic support, the degree to which these policies demonstrate effective refugee agency remains an open question. We can presume that the solidarity of Lithuanians expressed towards Ukrainians, who are seen as victims of aggression, organizes institutional order so it would enable refugees rather than restrain them. Nevertheless, specific policy interventions targeting the needs of the vulnerable group – particularly in terms of language training, housing, and availability of public services – are crucial to improving their overall integration experience.

The empirical data indicate that Ukrainian refugees engage with Lithuanian social structures, i.e., institutional order, in multiple ways – through education for their children, healthcare access, employment, etc. The empirical research indicates that Ukrainian refugees rely more on granted privileges than their ability to reproduce and reshape institutional order. When the public poll was conducted, they were more concerned with satisfying basic needs. Based on the data, we can sense a very positive evaluation of the general situation in Lithuania. Even in the case of structural restraints (language barrier and bureaucracy), the respondents remained quite positive. This will likely change when the shock and stress fade away, and refugees will better settle in and perform agency by being more knowledgeable.

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ŽVALGANTIS PO SOCIALINĖS IR KULTŪRINĖS SANDŪRAS: UKRAINIEČIŲ INTEGRACIJOS IŠŠŪKIAI LIETUVOJE

SANTRAUKA. Šio straipsnio tikslas – remiantis Anthony'io Giddenso struktūracijos teorija panagrinėti integracijos iššūkius, su kuriais susiduria Ukrainos pabėgėliai Lietuvoje. Straipsnyje analizuojama, kaip socialiniai ir demografiniai veiksniai, tokie kaip amžius, lytis, pajamos ir išsilavinimas, veikia pabėgėlių veiksnumą (angl. *agency*) ir sąveiką su ribojančiomis struktūromis (kalbos barjeru ir formaliais reikalavimais). Siekiama nustatyti pagrindines integracijos kliūtis ir pasiūlyti, kaip pagerinti politinius sprendimus ir socialines paslaugas, siekiant įgalinti pabėgėlius ir ugdyti jų atsparumą. Giddenso struktūracijos teorija leidžia geriau suprasti ir paaiškinti Ukrainos karo pabėgėlių dalyvavimą Lietuvoje. Žvelgiant iš šios perspektyvos ukrainiečiai vertinami kaip socialiniai veikėjai, kuriantys gyvenimą Lietuvoje, o jų veikla gali daryti įtaką kai kurioms viešųjų paslaugų institucijoms. Ši teorija leidžia išryškinti ir parodyti ukrainiečius kaip refleksyviuosius ir kritiškai mąstančius veikėjus, kurie kryptingai veikia siekdami pagerinti savo asmeninio gyvenimo sąlygas. Kartu tai parodo pokyčių, vykstančių laike ir erdvėje, mastą ir išryškina, kaip veikia atskiri veikėjai ir (arba) kaip mobilizuojasi grupės.

RAKTAŽODŽIAI: Ukrainos pabėgėliai, Lietuvos visuomenė, struktūra, veiksnumas, barjerai, integracija.