



# Country on the Move: Comparing the Impacts of Service Provision During the Waves of Displacement Before and After Full-Scale Aggression Against Ukraine

Kateryna Buchko<sup>1,2</sup> · Irena L. C. Connon<sup>3</sup> · Lena Dominelli<sup>4</sup>

Accepted: 29 July 2024  
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## Abstract

The ongoing war in Ukraine demands a comprehensive and holistic state-level and social work response. This should address the psychosocial, economic, relational, and family reintegration aspects of the crisis and the needs and human rights of those affected by war-related displacement and migration. While the current global media has primarily focused on refugees leaving Ukraine, the severity of the impact of this conflict on those displaced within the Ukrainian nation's borders has been largely overlooked. This study explores Ukrainian responses to internally displaced people during the first and second waves of war-induced displacement and internal migration in Ukraine, which took place after the annexation of Crimea in 2014 and after the full-scale invasion of 2022. It also critically examines the UK's response to Ukrainian refugees arriving in the UK. Analysis of a review of the existing literature reveals significant differences in Ukraine's support provision for internally displaced people (IDPs) during each wave, as well as key strengths and limitations in UK support for externally displaced Ukrainian refugees (EDPs). During the first wave, the Ukrainian state failed to fully address the needs of IDPs and protect their human rights. Although Ukrainian support for internally displaced persons has improved with the second wave, significant limitations in the provision of support remain alongside weaknesses in the UK provision of support for externally displaced Ukrainian refugees. The article concludes that incorporation of the lessons learned from the experiences of Ukrainian IDPs and EDPs is essential for improving the provision of services both in Ukraine and in receiving countries.

**Keywords** War in Ukraine · Internal displacement · External displacement · Policy intervention(s) · Social work support

## Introduction

Internal displacement involves forced migration and relocation within a particular country of origin. Displacement commonly features in the context of war and represents a significant humanitarian challenge. This is because when people become displaced, their safety, physical and mental health, human rights, and independence suffer, and they may lack access to essential services (British Red Cross, 2023). War results in serious violations of human rights and international humanitarian law, and one of the most vulnerable groups affected are those who are internally displaced or who are forced to become refugees.

War-induced displacement and internal relocation of Ukrainian citizens have occurred in two waves. Ukraine, as an independent state, faced the phenomenon of internal migration on a large scale for the first time after the annexation of Crimea and occupation of Donbas in 2014. The number of people displaced internally within Ukraine as a result

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✉ Kateryna Buchko  
kateryna.buchko@stir.ac.uk

Irena L. C. Connon  
irena.connon@stir.ac.uk

Lena Dominelli  
lena.dominelli@stir.ac.uk

<sup>1</sup> Department of Pedagogy and Social Work, Ukrainian Catholic University, Lviv, Ukraine

<sup>2</sup> Department of Social Work, University of Stirling, Stirling, UK

<sup>3</sup> Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Stirling, Stirling, UK

<sup>4</sup> University of Stirling, Stirling, UK

of this conflict was the largest in Europe, with approximately 1.5 million people being displaced from their homes (International Organisation for Migration, 2017). Following the 2022 Russian attack on Ukraine, the wave of displacement that occurred in 2014 became known as the *first wave* of internal displacement, with the internal and external displacement of Ukrainians following the 2022 attack becoming known as the *second wave*.

The first wave of displacement in 2014 directly affected those living in particular regions of Ukraine only and new demarcation lines placed approximately 2.4 million residents of Crimea and 3.5 million inhabitants of the occupied territories in Donbas on opposite sides. Approximately, 1.8 million individuals from this population sought refuge in Ukraine, resulting in them receiving the status of internally displaced persons (IDPs) within the country (Sereda, 2023). In contrast, the 2022 war resulted in a united Ukrainian front against the full-scale invasion of Russia, with displacement-induced relocation being both internal and external (to other countries mainly within Europe) and occurring en masse. The 2022 attack on Ukraine resulted in serious violations of human rights, with disastrous effects on the Ukrainian populations enjoyment of virtually all human rights (Council of Europe, 2022). Displacement almost always leads to situation of severe hardship, suffering, and discrimination for the affected populations (Schimmel, 2022). A sizeable portion of the population have been forced to flee, with approximately one-third of the entire Ukrainian population having now left their homes, villages, and cities, resulting in approximately 14 million displaced persons (International Organisation for Migration, 2022). The majority of those externally displaced were women and children as men were compulsorily detained to fight the war.

In legal and policy terms, internally displaced persons (IDPs) and externally displaced persons (EDPs) are distinguished from one another on the basis of border-crossing for protection and assistance (Cantor & Apollo, 2020). In empirical terms however, IDPs are often seen merely as refugees who have not (yet) crossed a border (ibid.). However, research has demonstrated that the drivers of internal displacement in the context of war are not necessarily identical to what drives external refugee flows (ibid.). Furthermore, each form of displacement involves unique humanitarian, development, and wider societal implications. IDPs are particularly vulnerable owing to limitations in legal protection because, despite having explicitly recognised rights pertaining to the cause of displacement being the result of international and national armed conflict, international refugee law orients itself around the protection of individuals escaping persecution who cross an international border, thus excluding those unable to cross borders (Schimmel, 2022).

Despite these important differences between IDPs and EDPs, global media reporting of the current war in Ukraine

has focused most of its attention on the numbers of refugees leaving Ukraine rather than on displacement and relocation within the country itself (Crisis Group Europe, 2022). Existing research suggests that IDPs often receive less attention than refugees because the first legal obligation for the welfare of IDPs lies with the country in which they reside or hold citizenship, rather than with other nations or the United Nations and its specialised agencies (Schimmel, 2022). Although a growing number of studies focusing on the second wave of displacement (Sereda, 2023; Kuzemska, 2023; Goodwin et al., 2023) now exists alongside a more substantial body of research exploring the first wave of internal displacement, the research tends to view each wave as a separate, discrete process (Rizzi et al., 2022), with few efforts having been made to explore and compare the similarities and differences between each wave and critically examine the Ukrainian state's responses to each wave. Scholars studying the displacement of Ukrainian refugees and IDPs also seek to understand how the experience of responding to the situation in Ukraine and beyond may affect the future of migration in general, including the ways in which policy can adequately respond to the challenges facing IDPs and refugees in Europe as a way of preparing for future challenges imposed by climate change, as well as war and conflict (Moreau, 2023). The unique peculiarity of the situation of displaced refugees from Ukraine is the unprecedented and virtually unanimous support of almost all EU countries (Drazanova & Geddes, 2023; Odynets, 2022), which was not as evident in 2015 in the case of refugees from Syria. Support within Europe for Ukraine has been attributed to the Ukrainian situation being viewed as part of a larger ideological escalation launched by Putin against NATO countries and Western democracy (Drazanova & Geddes, 2023; Odynets, 2022). However, efforts to improve support for IDPs and EDPs through policy change and social work practice reform require greater understanding of what the existing limitations of current internal and external support provision for IDPs and EDPs actually are.

This article aims to address these shortcomings in the existing research by identifying (a) the similarities, differences, strengths, and weaknesses of Ukrainian responses to the first and second waves of war-induced displacement and internal migration; and (b) the strengths and weaknesses of the UK's response to externally displaced Ukrainian refugees following the 2022 invasion. We are focusing on the UK, although acknowledging that other countries receiving EDPs have their own narratives to explore. Drawing on the findings from a review of academic and policy-relevant literature, this study asks what are the key characteristics and strengths and limitations of Ukrainian state and social work responses to internally displaced people during (a) the first wave and (b) the second wave of war-induced internal and external displacement? Using the UK as an example, we

want to understand what features of state and social work support responses in receiving countries might be helpful or unhelpful for meeting the needs and ensuring the human rights of externally displaced refugees. The findings of these questions help identify how responses by state governments, social work services, and humanitarian organisations tasked with supporting those affected by displacement and migration amidst the context of war might be more effectively optimised to meet the identified needs of IDPs and EDPs.

## Methodology

The study is based upon the findings of a review of both the academic and policy-relevant literatures. This review combined systematic with narrative techniques, which allowed the literature searches to be conducted according to the key principles of systemic reviewing, while also allowing for subjective evaluation to determine relevance (Snilsveit et al., 2012). This approach was chosen as combining systematic and narrative techniques offers a comprehensive approach that harnesses the strengths of both approaches (Turnbull et al., 2023).

The following research themes were identified from the research questions and were used to guide the literature search: internal displacement in Ukraine, Ukrainian refugees, national (state) responses to displacement, UK responses to Ukrainian displacement, and challenges for social work policy and practice in the context of Ukrainian war-related displacement. These themes were chosen by the researchers after consultations with Ukrainian scholars and with members of the Stirling-Ukrainian network and advisory group. This is a group established by the researchers in May 2023, which is composed of Ukrainians currently living in the Stirling area of Scotland with first-hand experience of war-induced displacement and migration (both internal and external).

A total of 17 documents composed of ten academic and seven policy relevant documents were obtained via a systematic search of the academic databases and policy documents and reports available on the World Wide Web. Keyword searches of two academic databases (JSTORE and ScienceDirect) were undertaken using multiple combinations of keywords based on each of the research themes. The searches generated an initial total of 1281 articles, books, and book chapters of potential relevance. Duplicates were removed and further reductions were made by excluding sources written before 2018. Titles and abstracts were then scrutinised for direct relevance, reducing the total number of academic sources selected for inclusion to 10.

The search of the World Wide Web for policy-relevant or 'grey' literature was performed using a keyword search using the Google Scholar search engine, using the same keywords

as for the academic database search to ensure consistency. This search generated an initial total of 22,700 search engine hits, which were sorted according to relevance, with the 80 most relevant being selected for further scrutiny. Of these 80, only reports and documents which addressed (1) the subject of displacement in Ukraine, and (2) internal migration and/or external migration following either the 2014 or 2022 conflict were selected for inclusion. This brought the number of policy-relevant documents selected for inclusion to 7.

Analysis and coding of all sources selected for inclusion were undertaken using qualitative descriptive analysis (Sandelowski, 2000) and the use of MAXQDA24 software for assistance with inductive category application.

## Findings and Discussion

The literature review revealed important information about the types of state and social work service support provided in Ukraine during each wave of internal displacement and the strengths and weaknesses of these forms of support, with significant differences between responses to each of the two waves. In addition, the review identified certain strengths and weaknesses in the UK's provision of support for refugees arriving from Ukraine. The following three sub-sections detail the key characteristics of each response, including the strengths, weaknesses, similarities, and differences between Ukrainian responses to each of the two waves, as well as the strengths and limitations of the UK response to Ukrainian external migration following the 2022 crisis.

### Ukrainian Responses to the First Wave of Internally Displaced Persons

After the annexation of Crimea in 2014, Ukraine faced internal migration on a large scale as an independent state for the first time, with approximately 1.5 million people becoming displaced from their homes (Crisis Group Europe, 2022; Sereda, 2023; Mikheieva & Kuznetsova, 2023).

The study revealed that during the first wave of Ukrainian war-induced displacement and internal migration, the Ukrainian state failed to fully address the needs of IDPs. This was because the 2014 war resulted in unprecedented challenges in terms of responding to collective trauma and in the provision of psychosocial support (Semigina, 2022). Analysis of the national social work response revealed significant weaknesses in the existing model of psychosocial assistance, particularly in terms of dealing with internally displaced persons, providing rehabilitation for war victims, and in working effectively with ex-combatants (Semigina, 2022). Several of the articles also discussed significant weaknesses in the national model of psychosocial assistance provided to IDPs, and the lack of preparedness and experience amongst

social workers for working with internally displaced persons and war victims and veterans (Kuznetsova & Mikheieva, 2020; Goodwin et al., 2023). Other literature noted the lack of training among social workers in Ukraine at that time for handling emergency situations more generally and the inability of social work interventions to ensure IDPs' rights to safety, education, and work, thereby affecting their abilities to integrate and participate successfully in their new communities of settlement (Semigina, 2022; Semigina & Gusak, 2015).

Moreover, at that time, many IDPs in Ukraine were subject to marginalisation by the state, owing to problems encountered in obtaining their pensions (Kuznetsova & Mikheieva, 2020). IDP registration was required for the acquisition of social benefits by those from conflict-affected regions, including to be able to obtain disability benefits. This forced citizens from non-governmental-controlled areas (NGCA) of Ukraine to travel to government-controlled areas (GCA) to register as displaced people (Bulakh, 2020). The literature discussed how a stamp in a person's internal passport and identity documentation showing registration in a territory not under control of the Ukrainian government (areas of the Donetsk or Luhansk provinces under Russian proxy control) made displaced people 'visible' and prone to 'othering' by official institutions (Kuznetsova & Mikheieva, 2020). It can, therefore, be argued that Ukrainian IDPs became subjects of coercive social control as a result of this system, with access to welfare rights and social care being undermined by state observational power (Bulakh, 2020). IDPs from Donbas were often viewed especially negatively by government personnel, as they were often perceived as having contributed to the conflict that the country now faced (Uehling, 2021). Further 'othering' and marginalisation of people from this region also drove state responses to ethical dilemmas surrounding the allocation of social payments in conflict-affected areas and specifically in the non-governmental-controlled areas (NGCA) (Bulakh, 2020). This was also intensified by the Ukrainian Ministry of Social Policy's assertion that there were no mechanisms available to process payments in the non-governmental-controlled areas (ibid.). This resulted in social payments being framed as discretionary allowances rather than rights for conflict-affected individuals (ibid.).

Ukrainian IDPs stated that the key resources required for successful integration following displacement from their home region during this period included housing, regular income, and employment (IOM, 2017). During this period, IDPs in Ukraine were forbidden from opening a bank account without an officially registered address in government-controlled Ukraine. This was problematic for IDPs because the lack of access to a bank account presented a barrier to employment (Uehling, 2021). Inadequate provision of personal banking services, and the resulting lack of

opportunity to pursue employment in places of relocation, was cited as a reason why, alongside other concerns, some IDPs chose to return to non-governmental-controlled areas (Mikheieva, 2018).

However, the study also revealed how the efforts of women from the occupied territories of Donbas and Crimea helped lessen the effects of the consequences associated with limitation in state provision for IDPs. (Koshulko & Dluhopolskyi, 2022). Women from these regions helped support political prisoners and their children, while also promoting patriotic values and solidarity towards Crimea and Ukraine (ibid.). They also provided assistance to the Ukrainian Army in regions under temporary occupation and supported orphaned children facing the threat of relocation to Russia by occupiers (ibid.).

### **Ukrainian Responses to the Second Wave of Internally Displaced Persons**

A stronger united front against the enemy was observed following the 2022 invasion of Ukraine. However, a much greater portion of the population is now on the move, most of them women and children, with an estimated five million individuals to date having been internally displaced (UNHCR United Nations Refugee Agency, 2023). The findings from the study showed that the Ukrainian state's response to this wave of IDPs has been markedly different from that of 2014. This has been partly due to the scale of the humanitarian crisis and the profound need for adaptation to ongoing conflict, as well as increased awareness of the challenges of Ukraine's economic recovery in the post-war period amidst European integration priorities (Razumkov Centre, 2023).

As the war is still ongoing, experts remain uncertain about what to expect in its aftermath. However, efforts are currently being made to learn from the experiences of other war-affected countries regarding post-war service provision and the lessons learned from experiences during previous wars (Slozanska et al., 2023). Ukrainian social work professionals have acknowledged that they now face a challenging time ahead in supporting displaced people, service people and their families, disabled veterans, and orphaned children to adjust and for resettlement in the post-war context (ibid.). This challenge grows larger as the war continues and the number of veterans and war-disabled people in Ukraine increases. Families awaiting the return of service members also require special assistance and support during periods while family members are absent and upon their return (Slozanska et al., 2023). However, it is important to note that this desire to expand social support has not coincided with an enhancement in social protection measures as unfortunately, at present, there are no unified national approaches to implementing support for military families in Ukraine,

and no clear parallel or coherence in the regulation of social support and social protection (Slozanska et al., 2023).

Ukrainian responses to the second wave of internal displacement are also different from those demonstrated during the first wave, partly owing to what IDPs and activists from the first wave had achieved through efforts to fight for the rights of IDPs in the aftermath of the first wave (Kuzemska, 2023; Mikheieva et al., 2023). This had a positive impact on those displaced from their home cities and villages after the full-scale invasion of 2022 as these efforts led to the Ukrainian government exhibiting an unwavering commitment to the equitable distribution of pensions based on the solidarity pension system (Sereda, 2023). This system ensures that individuals receive their rightful pensions regardless of current geographical location.

Further to this, a marked change is evident in the attitude of the Ukrainian government and wider civil society towards victims and survivors of the current Russian invasion, which is demonstrated through greater empathy for the challenges faced by IDPs and reduced discrimination (Sereda, 2023). The problems of discrimination by authorities and difficulties navigating complicated state bureaucracy which limited access to economic assistance and support in the aftermath of the first wave (Mikheieva & Kuznetsova, 2023) are noted to have been largely avoided during the second wave, partly due to a change in state government attitude and partly as a result of the implementation of the government's e-governance portal tool application 'Diya'. The 'Diya' app contains an electronic national document for each Ukrainian citizen, their passport for travelling abroad, and their car registration documents. This makes it possible for internally displaced persons to register in new communities in Ukraine (Bandura & Staguhn, 2023) and receive benefits regardless of current geographical location (Sereda, 2023).

However, a number of challenges faced by the second wave of IDPs are also identifiable and can be attributed to prevailing inadequacies in the Ukrainian state's provisions for meeting the needs of IDPs. In particular, the response to the 2022 wave, like the response to the previous wave, is also marked by a lack of a comprehensive system of social and psychological support provision for war veterans and victims and a lack of preparedness in the social work sector for responding to large-scale emergencies (Semigina, 2022; Slozanska et al., 2023).

War veterans from 2014 and from the current conflict are individuals who owned businesses and worked in critical civilian occupations before entering the Ukrainian military services (Aliyev, 2023), and many of these people have experienced or are now at risk of experiencing problems finding work in the labour market upon their return from military service. These risks are especially pronounced if they must relocate owing to war-related damage to their homes and businesses after they return from active service.

As there are no mechanisms currently in place to help support their return to work in either their previous location or new surroundings, jobs and careers become lost (ibid.). This can then enhance the risks of depression and post-traumatic stress disorder amongst returning veterans — a group whose mental health is already especially vulnerable.

Importantly, while the UNHCR notes that approximately 8.9 million or 24% of Ukrainians displaced during the current conflict are over 60 years of age (UNHCR United National Refugee Agency, 2023), very little can be ascertained from existing research about the needs of older displaced people or how this is being met through current social work and humanitarian efforts. More positively however, while the majority of social work responses in Ukraine are provided by a combination of a variety of institutions — government, NGOs, voluntary organisations, and private sector — the second wave of displacement has witnessed the establishment of greater numbers of voluntary and community efforts aiming to assist displaced people and help plug the gaps in official state support (Rizzi et al., 2022). Family and friend relationships have been profoundly affected by the ongoing conflict, with displacement and internal migration placing new and enhanced strains on personal, familial, and community relationships (ibid.). However, at the same time, a strengthening of personal, familial, and community relations has also occurred simultaneously alongside the challenges resulting from ongoing occupation and physical separation of family members, with efforts being made to reach out and maintain contact with those who have been displaced (ibid.), often using smartphones. Belief in victory and a better future remains a motivational factor throughout Ukrainian society (Golovakha et al., 2023), with shared beliefs in Ukrainian national unity together with shared experiences of the challenges of war being used to facilitate the retention of social relationships across imposed geographical divides.

### **UK Responses to Ukrainian External Displacement After the Full-Scale Invasion of 2022**

Unlike during the 2014 conflict, the full-scale invasion of 2022 has led to a substantial number of displaced Ukrainian citizens migrating to other European countries to seek refuge, on either a short-term or longer-term basis. European Union (EU) member states have demonstrated a high level of support to Ukraine after the invasion of 2022 by adopting quick and efficient admission policies to support those leaving Ukraine and arriving in other countries within Europe, most notably via the Temporary Protection Directive. This Directive proved to be an effective tool for enabling the EU to provide immediate temporary protection in exceptional circumstances in the event of a massive influx of displaced persons from non-EU countries who are unable to return to

their country of origin (Pais et al., 2023; Woods & Yared, 2023). The UK has long had a commitment to upholding international human rights and refugee law, with all those who leave their country of origin to seek safety and protection elsewhere being entitled to their rights and dignity, regardless of their legal status, mode of arrival, or any other distinction (UNHCR, 2023). Also, unlike IDPs, who do not have this protection, all refugees benefit from the United Nations 1951 Refugee Convention with its explicit focus on the legal definitions and rights of refugees and the legal responsibilities of nation states to recognise their rights, and protect and fulfil them (Schimmel, 2022).

Countries like Poland and Germany have become major 'refugee hubs' for Ukrainian displaced people (Kuzemska, 2023; Sereda, 2023). However, other countries, including the UK, have also witnessed the arrival of a significant number of externally displaced Ukrainians. The UK government launched two visa programmes to support Ukrainians in 2022, which allows Ukrainians fleeing war to stay in the UK for up to 3 years. These were the Family Programme for Ukraine and the Sponsorship Programme for Ukraine known as 'Homes for Ukraine'. Data collected in April 2022 shows that approximately 82% of those arriving in the UK from Ukraine are women, with nearly half (48%) having at least one dependent child (ONS, 2022: p. 2).

The study revealed that surveys conducted by the National Statistical Office released in April 2023 were undertaken to inform the planning of humanitarian action for Ukrainians in the UK at the local and national levels. These surveys aimed to gather data about experiences of Ukrainians who entered the UK under these schemes and collect demographic data as well as data on English-speaking ability, access to English language services, labour market participation and employment services, health, and access to health care services. The survey found that 72% of Ukrainian adults who arrived in the UK have applied for a job since arriving, but that over half of these (57%) experienced difficulties in applying for work (ONS, 2022). This included lack of language skills (50%, the highest proportion), dealing with the complex forms that had to be completed, not being able to access a computer and/or internet easily, not understanding the nature of the labour market in the country, and being asked to consider jobs that they were overqualified for. Within these caveats, just over half of the applicants (56%) obtained work, many in the hospitality sector (25%). This evidences how the human rights of Ukrainian refugees are being respected as they strive to integrate into UK society.

The study also found that there has been a positive public response to Ukrainians seeking refuge in the UK, with media coverage of the UK's visa schemes for Ukrainians being largely positive (Grove-White & Kaye, 2023). This helped foster public sympathy towards Ukrainian arrivals (ibid.). This may be somewhat surprising given how immigration

represents a major political issue in the UK, with the current government being accused of having weaponised public opinion against immigration to exit from the European Union (Bellinger & Ford, 2023). However, instead of seeking to regulate every aspect of entry and accommodation, the Government encouraged the public to provide shelter to Ukrainians and provided funds for expediting settlement and integration (ibid.).

Ukrainian experiences of residing in the homes of local inhabitants also facilitated the development of robust friendships, expedited the process of language acquisition, and enhanced comprehension of refugee culture amongst members of receiving communities (Kandiah, 2023). This has also provided UK citizens with first-hand experience of the rewards and challenges associated with assisting refugees, and enhanced awareness of the challenges facing refugees (Kandiah, 2023). This is associated with increased levels of empathy for refugees and proactive demonstrations to provide and campaign for further support for Ukrainian refugees (ibid.).

However, despite these successes, many challenges have also been reported with the 'Homes for Ukraine' scheme in relation to safeguarding, finance, housing availability, mental health support, and support for obtaining employment. Worryingly, many Ukrainians are now also feeling unsettled about the fact that their visa is approaching the halfway mark, with 90% feeling either 'very' or 'slightly' unsettled (Whitstone Insight, 2023). The UK government will have to decide on whether to extend visas for Ukrainian refugees beyond 3 years, with the uncertainty over the outcome of this decision resulting in heightened anxiety and difficulties with making future plans. While the UK Government recently announced in their Autumn Statement that they would prolong 'thank you payments' to sponsors who host Ukrainian refugees (UK Government, Autumn Statement, 2023), uncertainties remain about the length of continuing support. Those participating in the 'Homes for Ukraine' scheme currently receive £500 per month — an increase from £350 in 2022. This remains in place until 2025, although discussions about extending the scheme are ongoing. This provides further evidence of the UK's effort to respect the fundamental human right for protection and safety for Ukrainians fleeing war.

The study findings also highlighted the importance of considering how, upon arrival in the UK, most externally displaced Ukrainians will have travelled a long way and undergone multiple relocations, both internally within Ukraine and through other locations in Europe before arriving in their receiving countries (Tran, 2023). Research on the reasons for this flux is scarce, but for the UK, the British Association of Social Workers (BASW) has found that the UK was chosen by many arriving Ukrainians because people in the UK offered housing through the 'Homes for

Ukraine' scheme. The 'Homes for Ukraine' scheme was easy to apply for as it was internet-based, and the parties involved made their own arrangements. Immigration controls were also limited, and some Ukrainians knew English, others had visited the country before, and some had family and friends living in the UK already and came to join them. The ease of entry into different European countries, including those nearby and which could be entered into on several occasions, makes Ukrainian experiences of external displacement multiple ones, i.e. consisting of double or even triple displacement processes. For example, some of these people had been displaced within Ukraine in 2014 before becoming displaced again in 2022 and prior to their arrival in the UK (Tran, 2023). Displacement trajectories, journeys, and personal stories of EDPs are therefore often marked with greater levels of loss, family disintegration, and trauma than those currently internally displaced and those displaced internally in 2014 (Rizzi et al., 2022). However, at present, little attention has been given towards these differentiated experiences of Ukrainian arrivals in the UK in terms of the identification of differentiated needs and in the provision of support for EDPs.

## Concluding Discussion and Recommendations

The findings pertaining to the responses of the Ukrainian government to each wave of internal displacement revealed substantial differences between the responses to each wave. During the first wave, Ukrainian social work support provision was unprepared for handling large-scale emergencies such as these, as well as for dealing with the specific needs of internally displaced people. Discrimination, lack of respect for fundamental human rights, bureaucratic hurdles, and particular inadequacies in social support for war veterans enhanced the challenges faced by IDPs (Kuzemska, 2023; Sereda, 2023). While the response to the 2022 invasion demonstrated a more united front by the Ukrainian state, a greater proportion of the population have been displaced, thereby placing increasing greater strain on state social work services. Substantial gaps also remain in terms of adequate support provision for displaced war veterans and their families, including in the provision of disability services and mental health support services. At present, little is known about the needs of older Ukrainian IDPs and the effectiveness of intervention efforts for this age group (UNHCR United National Refugee Agency, 2023).

The ongoing war in Ukraine therefore demands comprehensive state-level policy reform and innovation in social work responses to address the psychosocial, economic, relational, human rights, and family reintegration aspects of the crisis and the needs of those affected by displacement

and internal migration. Greater understanding of the varied needs of war veterans and their families affected by displacement and war-related migration, as well as of those with disabilities, including war-related disabilities, and older people, require a more holistic and empowering approach to the services they receive. It is also imperative to incorporate lessons learned from the experiences of Ukrainian IDPs to develop a more robust and resilient social work framework in Ukraine. This includes proper training, protocols for emergency situations, and a focus on empowering approaches that consider not only the holistic well-being of individuals, families, and communities affected by war, but also policy interventions. However, considerations for accommodation and economic stability, and initiatives to reintegrate family support structures also play a pivotal role in ensuring the overall welfare of IDPs.

Social work should also endeavour to use more rights-based approaches in their practice when supporting IDPs, as this can help improve the lives and well-being of individuals and communities, including veterans and their families (Frederico et al., 2023; Androff & Mathis, 2022). Specifically, the social work policy reform and training for working with displaced people should be centred to a greater extent upon human rights (Androff & Mathis, 2022). In addition, greater attention should also be given to advocacy for protecting the rights of displaced people on a national, as well as international, stage; and associations of social workers should also aim to help devise policy and strategies that consider social, economic, and environmental factors influencing displacement and migration (Drolet et al., 2014).

Likewise, while human rights and social justice can help to guide and improve the delivery of social work services for IDPs, social workers can also play an important role in identifying the limitations of conventional legal-based human rights narratives for IDPs (Karlsson & Jönsson, 2020). This is because expanding the concept of human rights to prioritise the 'human' element may also help ensure that social work responses not only meet the needs and respect the rights of IDPs, but actually enhances their well-being and livelihoods (Karlsson & Jönsson, 2020; Frederico et al., 2023). Humanitarian efforts to support resettlement and integration should therefore ensure that their interventions do not render IDPs as passive and helpless victims, but harness the agency, strengths, and capabilities of displaced people, including women, who demonstrated important leadership capacities during the first wave of displacement to self-organise and facilitate socially supportive responses aimed at enhancing well-being.

The literature exploring the UK state-level responses to displaced Ukrainians arriving is replete with examples of the effectiveness of state policy and support provision for those displaced and seeking refuge beyond their home state borders. This yields important insights to prepare for

future migration challenges and for understanding how best to address the specific challenges faced by displaced populations. Although research has explored the needs of refugees arriving in the UK from other regions of the world (e.g. McLaughlin, 2018), specific needs of Ukrainian EDPs remain poorly differentiated from other EDPs, such as Afghans and Syrians. Further research could help provide greater identification of the needs of different EDP groups for developing more differentiated interventions. Furthermore, given so little is known about the numbers and experiences and needs of older Ukrainian EDPs, this represents another important avenue for future research.

The findings from the study show that social workers are successfully applying the principles of non-discriminatory, rights-based practice in their work, including human dignity, participation, transparency, and accountability, by working to fulfil the rights and advocate for the needs of their clients, no matter their national origin (Androff & Mathis, 2022). At present, although social workers in the statutory and non-government sectors in the UK undertake a variety of roles to support refugees, resource and policy constraints place additional challenges upon abilities to fully respond to human need. For example, because refugees and asylum seekers remain ultimately subject to immigration control policies, their senses of belonging can remain fragile despite efforts to help facilitate social integration (McLaughlin, 2018). While visa programmes like the Sponsorship Programme give Ukrainian EDPs immediate refuge and support, the findings of this study show that clarity over the length of support provision is fundamental for reducing anxieties and improving the experience of EDPs in receiving countries.

Clarity regarding safeguarding, financial issues, and the provision of mental health support services for new arrivals would also help improve existing weaknesses associated with current support interventions, as would greater efforts to help support Ukrainian refugees integrate into UK culture through providing information about community organisations, social networks, and religious activities. It is also crucial to acknowledge the supportive responses from community groups for Ukrainian EDPs too, with local groups in some areas, including charities and faith networks, successfully mobilising to support new arrivals (Grove-White & Kaye, 2023). However, discrepancies exist between levels of support provision across the UK, with some regions having a more fragmented response compared to others (*ibid.*). It also is important to note that statutory social workers in the UK will not routinely have contact with Ukrainians on the special schemes unless there is a specific concern, such as in relation to adult support or child protection. Children on the special Ukrainian Schemes who are unaccompanied and matched with sponsors who have been authorised by a parent or guardian in Ukraine may also have little or no contact with social work. Problems may also occur when

safeguarding concerns are raised owing to tensions and lack of clarity between immigration legislation and policy and welfare legislation and policy (Rigby et al., 2018). For example, while social workers legally cannot become involved in immigration issues, working on life planning with a young person may render this somewhat unavoidable in practice if the person is preparing to return to their country of origin.

Social workers cannot offer immigration advice because, as the Government Office of the Immigration Services Commissioner (2022) states, engaging in offering immigration advice or services in the UK is considered a criminal offense unless the individual's organisation is regulated by the OISC or falls under the provisions of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999. Only certain professional bodies, such as the Law Society of Scotland, permit their members to provide immigration advice without OISC registration. However, to help EDPs arriving in the UK navigate legal concerns relating to their length of stay and access to services, social workers could collaborate with lawyers to obtain clarity over remit for intervention and provide accurate and up-to-date advice to lawyers about service user group needs. While rights-based approaches do not eliminate legal complexities, they can serve as a bridge for different institutions such as social workers and legal professionals to collaborate more effectively a shared mission to promote the dignity, self-determination, protection, and safety of their clients (Androff & Mathis, 2022).

Recognition of the complexity and differentiation of the Ukrainian displacement experiences would also help to improve support provision as this is not reflected in current UK policy and practice which tends to emphasise a one-size-fits-all approach. Key objectives for development of interventions therefore should include the delineation of the distinctive needs of individuals undergoing double or triple displacement and extraction of insights that inform appropriate courses of action for policy and social work. However, deeper understanding of the vulnerabilities and everyday life of Ukrainian refugees can help to motivate pressure for action and reform. Additionally, while the majority of those seeking refuge within the UK are women and children, little is known about the gendered experience of Ukrainian displacement-related migration or of the effectiveness of current support service provision for meeting the specific needs of displaced women and children. As such, these represent important areas for further research to optimise policy and social work responses for enhancing support for EDPs via new interventions that address the gender-specific needs of families. Furthermore, while research has previously explored the needs of child refugees, including unaccompanied children, from Syria, Afghanistan, Somalia, Sudan, and Iraq (Chase, 2010; Digidiki & Bhabha, 2017), little is known about specific issues facing Ukrainian children and young people fleeing hostilities and seeking refuge in other



countries such as the UK. This knowledge gap therefore represents another potential area for future research (Denov & Shevell, 2019). In January 2024, Scotland also incorporated the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) into Scots law. This represents a significant development for children and their families owing to the interdependence of children's rights as expressed in the UNCRC. Additional research could therefore also explore the impact of this development upon efforts to support the realisation of the rights of displaced Ukrainian children in Scotland.

**Acknowledgements** The authors express their thanks and gratitude to members of the Stirling-Ukrainian network and advisory group for their assistance in helping to select the themes for the literature review, upon which this study is based.

## Declarations

**Conflict of Interest** The authors declare no competing interests.

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