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Is the impact of the refugee crisis more detrimental to women and children?

A case study of Ukraine women in Poland.

*Carmaniola Benjamin

The conflict between Ukraine and Russia has made the European refugee dilemma, even more challenging. Many individuals specifically women and children have been displaced as a result of the conflict between these two nations. Because of the conflict many Ukrainians seek safety and stability in nearby nations like Poland. But this surge of Ukrainian migrants, has also brought forward several difficulties.

Two theories, or perhaps two viewpoints, can be used to talk about this subject. One is the feminist theory, which looked at how gender and migration intersects. This viewpoint contends that women are frequently disproportionately impacted by migration and displacement because they may encounter extra challenges in gaining access to resources and services in new places. In addition, women may be more susceptible to abuse and exploitation when migrating, especially if they lack legal status or safeguards. Patriarchy is the opposing view. It is a social theory that asserts that gender inequality and masculine dominance are structural features of social and cultural systems. Moreover, how the migration of Ukrainian women to Poland in search of better economic and job opportunities may threaten gender roles for women. Russia's annexation of Crimea from Ukraine in 2014 marked the start of the ongoing war between Ukraine and Russia. Putin's warning to the West to enter Eastern Europe considering Ukraine's plan to join NATO caused the tension between Russia and Ukraine to increase. He attacked Ukraine as a result because, in his view, it is one nation. The conflict has had significant political and economic repercussions for both Russia and Ukraine, and particularly for the women and children of Ukraine.

Due to its proximity to Ukraine, Poland has become a popular destination for Ukrainian refugees. Duszczyk & Kaczmarczyk (2022) stated that “The war initiated by Russia against Ukraine in February 2022 has resulted in the largest refugee migration in Europe since World War II”. Consequently, women and children, became IDPs (internally displaced people) and the quantity has risen significantly because of the war in Ukraine. Ukrainian women and children are fleeing to Poland for a variety of positive reasons, such as employment possibilities, safety concerns, and access to healthcare and education. Economically, “Between 60 and 70 per cent of these women had found a regular job in Poland by the end of last year, according to government figures.” (Minder, 2023). Polish economic integration of Ukrainian women has continuously improved, leading to a much higher employment rate for Ukrainians than in Germany. (Minder, 2023). Next, Women and children from Ukraine travel to Poland for a variety of educational purposes. Many kids were forced out of school because of the war's severe effects on them. Polish schools were therefore ready to accommodate up to 300,000 additional Ukrainian immigrant children (Ptak,2022). However, those kids encounter challenges like a teaching shortage and a language barrier. “In 2022, there were approximately 689,000 teachers in Poland, which is 6,000 less than the previous year’ (NFP, 2022). This scarcity of teachers occurred prior to the war and had a negative effect on Polish children. With the conflict, both Ukrainian and Polish youth are affected by the shortage. In terms of healthcare, Poland established this initiative Health4Ukraine for Ukrainian citizens who passed the Ukrainian-Polish border. It enables them to purchase medicines in openly available pharmacies (Smith, 2022).

The conflict also has a negative effect on the refugee crisis. They become victims of human and sex exploitation, psychological impacts, and discrimination and prejudice. They have also been subjected to two years of increasing violence, harm, chaos, and relocation. Consequently, it exacerbates the problem for women and children.

As for human and sex trafficking, as of March 22, 2022, 3.6 million people had left Ukraine.

These people are still susceptible to various forms of trafficking due to the relocation context and accompanying flaws during the trip and upon arrival in a target country. (*Conflict in Ukraine: Key evidence on risks of trafficking in persons and smuggling of Migrants - Ukraine 2022*). In other words, once they depart Ukraine, their chances of reaching their location decrease while their chances of being trafficked increases. Children in particular “are travelling unaccompanied by their parents or guardians, placing them at a heightened risk of trafficking and other abuses.” *Conflict in Ukraine: Key evidence on risks of trafficking in persons and smuggling of Migrants - Ukraine 2022*). This increases their chances of being kidnapped and subsequently smuggled. All in all some women have been victims of human trafficking while many other Ukrainian women enter Poland illegally. This places them at risk for abuse and exploitation, which has made the issue worse. Continually, School-aged females are increasingly at risk of being forced out of school and into marriage as a means for desperate families to make ends meet. As for pregnant women “around 265,000 Ukrainian women were pregnant when the war broke out and have had to endure physical and health challenges in the past months.” (*Ukraine war-induced crisis affecting women and girls disproportionately: UN report | UN news 2022*).

When it comes to mental health during a catastrophe like the conflict on Ukraine, the mental scars of the conflict can last well into adulthood. It causes displacement, loss of loved ones, stress, and a general feeling of insecurity. This is the time to emphasize mental health for those children and women and for their future. According to new study on the psychological effects on women and children, at least one in ten describe major mental health issues. At least 10% of respondents stated that emotions and stress were interfering with everyday efficiency, and more than half (56%) said they would benefit from mental health assistance. Demographically, 59% of the refugee participants are adults, 70% of whom are women, with the 18-34 age group predominating; 41% of the refugee survey

population are under 18, with a majority of whom who are 5–14 years old. (*New research reveals how war-related distress affects mental health of Ukrainian refugees in Poland 2022*). Ultimately, Ukrainian refugees in Poland endure discrimination and prejudice. One explanation is that not all persons traversing the Ukrainian-Polish border are Ukrainian nationals or citizens. Specifically, “Around 6% are not Ukrainian nationals which includes significant numbers of African and Asian students.” (Wądołowska, 2022). According to Kalina Czwarnóg of the Ocalenie Foundation, an NGO that assists migrants and refugees,” a person that has lived in Ukraine for the last eight years but does not have a Ukrainian passport is not entitled to use public transportation for free,” (Wądołowska, 2022). In other words, you can only receive assistance if you have the proper documentation, in this instance a Ukrainian passport. Czwarnóg continues to point out that, while many people give free transportation from the frontier to refugees, it can be much more difficult for non-white people to acquire it. (Wądołowska, 2022). So those who assist Ukrainian women and children are assisting a particular race of Ukrainian refugees.

It's essential to pose this question of how detrimental the refugee is on Ukrainian women and children in Poland because the response will help Europeans understand how dire the circumstances are and just how it affects refugees. It leads to just how critical this crisis is for health social, economic, and political purposes. Another reason is that if this issue is raised, a solution will be found to enhance the process of immigration to Europe and the integration of Europeans and refugees. It helps to understand the essence and extent of the issues of mental health, sex and human trafficking and discrimination and how it is critical for creating effective and preventative policies. It is significant to international affairs for a variety of reasons. For starters, it can improve or deteriorate the countries the refugees are coming from and going to. In this case it can strengthen Poland and Ukraine's relationship politically and economically. Next, the question compels the international

community including Europe, to consider how this affects and offers an answer for a susceptible population that includes women and children.

In conclusion the refugee crisis throughout Europe after the Ukraine war is detrimental and has had major effects on the lives of Ukrainian women and children in Poland. It emphasizes the importance of providing more assistance to Ukrainian women and children. Several refugees have been victims of human trafficking, abuse, and discrimination. However, some women have been able to obtain stable employment and better their lives and the lives of their families. Considering this, Europe must find a method to reduce refugee vulnerability and work to change the way they assimilate. To resolve these issues, a comprehensive plan incorporating the governments of Poland and Ukraine, as well as nongovernmental groups and other parties engaged, would be necessary.

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***Biography:** Carmaniola is the eldest Haitian first-generation undergraduate in her family who is majoring in International Relations and Diplomacy. She is eager and inquisitive with excellent time management skills. She is strongly interested in the law, with a passion for social justice, immigration reform, and human rights. She also possesses a strong work ethic and focus. Carmaniola wants to use her education to be able to advocate for her community and those in need. After studying abroad in the spring of 2023 to advance her French, she has learned how important and integral international politics is. She would like to become an immigration attorney and human rights advocate globally. Carmaniola has the tenacity, enthusiasm, and academic excellence to serve communities in need because of her devotion to public service.