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Using the Holistic Integration Model and anchoring to understand integration challenges and opportunities

Based on the example of the reception and support of Ukrainian forced migrants in Poland since the Russian aggression of 2022, Aleksandra Grzymala-Kazłowska and Michaela Hynie (who cooperate within the [COPOCS](#) project) jointly apply their conceptual framework: the Holistic Integration Model and the concept of anchoring to better understand integration at the social, interactional and subjective levels.



*One of the accommodation centres for Ukrainian forced migrants in Warsaw
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The reception and support of Ukrainian forced migrants in Poland in the context of uncertainty

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Introduction

As we write this manuscript, tensions, violence, and armed conflicts are increasing within and between existing states, forcing even greater numbers of people to seek safety across international borders. In this context, the protection of vulnerable groups and the reception and support of those seeking protection, gain particular importance.

The concept of integration remains a key tool in the adaptation and settling of forced and voluntary migrants in Europe, Australia and North America, despite more critical and reflective readings of the concept. Although widely discussed and debated, the meaning of "integration" remains vague and undefined in both policy and public discourse and changes depending on who is using the term and in which context (Rytter, 2019); nonetheless, its functional position in research, practice and policy does not seem to be decreasing (Grzymala-Kazlowska and Phillimore 2018). Hynie (2024) summarizes the debates regarding integration in terms

of three basic issues: which dimensions of settling are emphasized and which neglected; intersectionality; and a focus on changes within migrants versus society as a whole. Within these debates, Grzymala-Kazlowska and Phillimore (2018) further note that commonly used constructs of integration often fail to 1) acknowledge the complexity of integration, usually overlooking significant dimensions such as psychological and emotional elements; 2) capture refugee agency and the processuality and nonlinearity of adaptation processes; 3) reflect the temporality and uncertainty of refugees' lives within uncertain, unstable and unpredictable conditions, not only in countries of origin but also in host societies (e.g. related to rapid changes in host societies, their shifting policies and refugees' temporary and indefinite statuses); and 4) the interconnectedness of different components and adaptations needed in receiving societies.

We are sympathetic to calls to move away from the concept of integration altogether in light of the impoverished manner in which the term is often defined and applied, but given its widespread global use in policy and practice, we propose that there is still value in considering how the concept can be refined. We have taken up the challenges in the definition and application of the concept of integration through the Holistic Integration Model (Hynie, Korn and Tao 2016), complemented by the notion of anchoring (Grzymala-Kazłowska 2020).

The Holistic Integration Model offers a comprehensive framework for analysing different aspects of integration, the connectedness between levels, including changes that need to occur at the level of the host society, and both contextual and individual factors contributing to the process of integration, which may be useful in the planning of policies and programs. The concept of anchoring emphasises and expands on the complexities of belonging and a sense of safety and stability, placing migrants' strategies of achieving security at its core. This is particularly important in the context of multiple uncertainties accompanying adaptation and settling processes. Anchoring also acknowledges the non-linear nature of migration and integration, shifting attention to the ongoing process of settling and away from static notions of integration as "being settled".

In the present article, we outline these two frameworks, and apply them to the analysis of challenges and opportunities of Ukrainian

forced migrants in Poland, and community and institutional responses to their needs. The chosen case is of particular significance as it represents a situation when large numbers of people abruptly seek refuge in a country with previously low levels of established settlement immigration or refugee communities, and underdeveloped integration policies. Moreover, the case of Ukrainian migrants is one of relatively fluid movement across the international border (International Organization for Migration, 2024), making the non-linear temporal nature of integration processes particularly salient. We argue for the usefulness of the combined framework to understand the complexities of integration challenges and opportunities related to the reception and support of Ukrainian forced migrants in Poland in the context of instability and uncertainty.

Holistic Integration Model

The Holistic Integration Model, proposed by Hynie, Korn and Tao (2016), was developed from the influential Social Integration Model of Ager and Strang (2008). The Ager and Strang model identifies the following ten interrelated domains of integration: 1) employment, 2) housing, 3) education and 4) health (referred to as 'markers and means'); 5) social bridges with members of other communities, 6) social bonds within one's own community and 7) social links with institutions (forming 'social connections'); 8) language and cultural knowledge, 9) safety and stability (referred to as 'facilitators'); and 10) rights and citizenship (representing

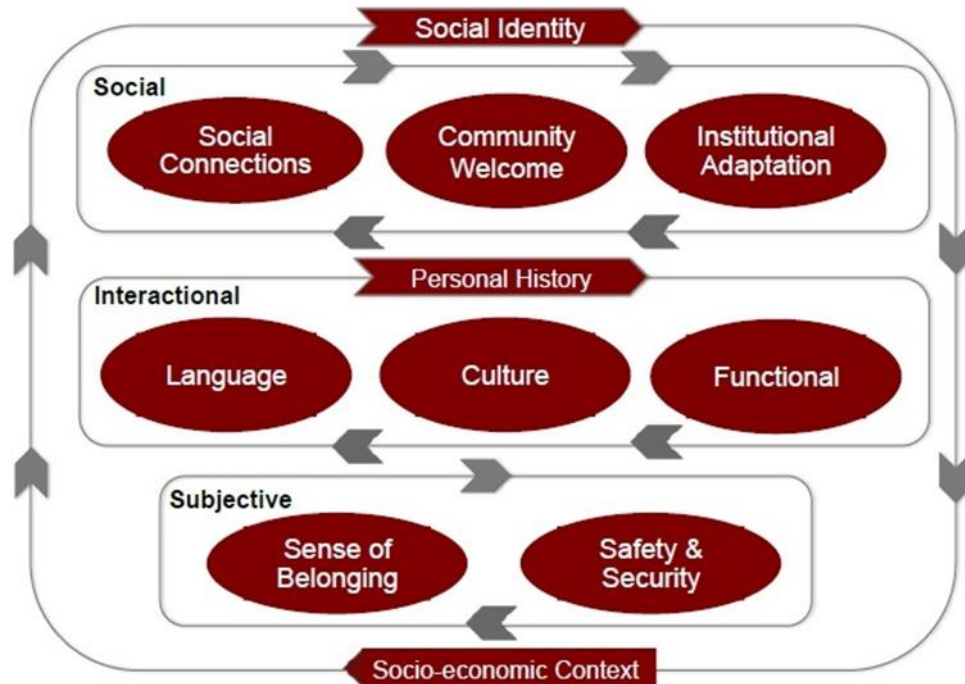


Figure 1. The Holistic Integration Model (source: Hynie et al. 2016)

the ‘foundation’ of integration). In empirical research with forced migrants in the Canadian context, Hynie, Korn and Tao modified Ager and Strang’s (2008) model to isolate and strengthen the missing elements identified by other authors in ways also consistent with Ager and Strang’s own recommendations. This Holistic Integration Model emphasizes the importance of considering subjective variables such as feelings of belonging and being at home, draws attention to adaptations in institutions and agencies, and more clearly emphasizes the holistic nature of the integration process.

The model identifies three main levels of integration: 1) a social or contextual level; 2) an interactional or material level; and 3) a subjective or intrapersonal level. The Holistic Integration Model not only distinguishes

these different aspects of integration, but also shows how different elements are interconnected both within and between levels to capture the complexity of the integration process (see Figure 1). The overall processes are influenced by the socio-economic context migrants are settling into, and by the migrants' social identities (gender, age, religion, race, etc.), all of which shape the opportunities and challenges in the environment (Phillimore 2021).

The process of integration cannot be assessed only in terms of refugees fitting into new settings, it is a two-way process (Hynie 2024). This is highlighted in the social level, which includes social connections (social bridges and bonds), community welcome (attitudes towards migrants) and institutional adaptation. Social connections

relate to relationships and the process of embedding in different social networks, both with ingroup members and with members of other social groups. These networks reflect social capital, which can leverage material, social and emotional resources to facilitate the integration process (Hynie et al. 2019). Community welcome reflects the nature of attitudes towards migrants and specific migrant groups in neighbourhoods, wider communities, the general public, and media and political discourses. Experiences of welcome, as opposed to discrimination and social exclusion, shape how refugees can build networks and access opportunities and resources, such as employment or housing (Hynie et al. 2016). Institutional adaptations describe the ways that policies and practices recognize and adapt to (or fail to adapt to) refugees' needs and characteristics. For example, it can include making language classes accessible to diverse refugee groups or providing adequate healthcare coverage for refugees' needs (Hynie et al. 2020; Kornthueur et al. 2022) These adaptations should be multi-sectoral, involving policies at the government level and those implemented by agencies and institutions, as well as related practices. Institutional and agencies' adaptations are necessary to facilitate integration processes. Understanding the scale of the challenges and changes to create opportunities for refugees and forced migrants requires further study by academics to ensure that broader systemic institutional adaptations

be envisioned and implemented by authorities and policy makers.

The interactional level refers to language, culture, and functional aspects, with the latter corresponding to the markers and means in Ager and Strang's Social Integration Model (2008), namely education, housing, employment and health services. Intersectionality is further recognized by noting that the ease with which migrants can navigate these more material aspects of integration is to a large extent determined by their personal resources and histories, such as their level of education, literacy and language ability, and whether they previously lived in a rural or urban setting. Moreover, individuals have different goals and expectations, thus experiencing comparable functional opportunities and outcomes differently in terms of success and desirability (Bridekirk, Hynie and SyRIA.lth 2020).

The Holistic Integration Model also underscores the importance of the subjective level in the integration of refugees (Hynie et al 2016). Similarly, Phillimore and Goodson (2008) demonstrated the importance of including the subjective feelings of belonging through the concept of 'feeling at home' when studying integration. The Holistic Integration Model points to safety and security as well as a sense of belonging not only as a goal in the settling process but also as aspects of the integration process that can facilitate or hinder other integration dimensions. For example, Steel and co-authors (2011) note

that a sense of stability and security accelerates asylum applicants' language acquisition, while a lack of it contributes to isolation and demotivation. Feelings of belonging and the psychological experience of exclusion/inclusion affect not only well-being, but also psychological and physical health (Correa-Velez, Gifford and Barnett 2010; Raphael 2006; Wilkinson 2005).

Extending socio-psychological perspective on integration with the notion of anchoring

Although the Holistic Integration Model explicitly emphasises the crucial socio-psychological perspective on integration, the notion of anchoring can be used to further examine these aspects of adaptation and settling and make the overall model more appropriate for a broader range of migration settings. The concept of anchoring has been developed to understand the dynamic and complex processes of adaptation and settling in the context of current temporariness and uncertainties (Grzymala-Kazlowska 2013, 2020). It may be defined as the process of establishing footholds and reference points that allow refugees to achieve relative psycho-social stability and a sense of safety and security, and to function effectively in a new environment. Anchoring underscores the sense of safety and security that is typically undervalued in the integration paradigm despite constituting a basic need, just one step higher after physiological needs in Maslow's oft-cited hierarchy of needs. In this way, anchoring provides a focus for understanding why and how migrants strive

to achieve specific goals, and the impact of achieving these goals.

Moreover, the concept of anchoring links the issues of belonging, security, adaptation and settling while capturing the multidimensionality and unevenness of these processes. For example, anchoring can be shallow in some dimensions while deep in others. Similar to many ecological models (e.g., Tudge and Rosa 2024), it can be viewed from the perspective of layers: the outermost, related to work and relationships with institutions; the middle composed of the social sphere and everyday practices; and the innermost, linked to one's spiritual or cognitive world. The concept of anchoring underlines human agency, but it is agency in relation and response to the structural constraints, unequal opportunities, and barriers that refugees encounter, centering the relationship between individuals and their context. Anchors can be identified analytically and pointed to, which provides a useful tool, especially when analysing early stages of adaptation and settling. Anchoring also acknowledges the reality that while attempting to establish new footholds in the host country, refugees may still have anchors in their home country (for example, in the form of family ties, property or citizenship rights) and seek to establish footholds in different states or geographically undefined spaces (such as virtual communities). The concept of anchoring thus captures the transnational character of adaptation and settling that can be both parallel and complementary.

The notion of anchoring acknowledges the flexibility, dynamism and nonlinearity of adaptation with the possibility of different simultaneous processes of anchoring, unanchoring, and reanchoring. The above characteristics of anchoring can be useful for studying the processes of adaptation in the face of so called unsettling events such as the ongoing war in Ukraine (Kilkey and Ryan 2020). Of crucial importance are the early stages of migration, when it is key to create conditions that allow for the establishment of adaptive anchors that can contribute to refugees' sense of safety and security, and relative stability as well as strengthen their agency and resilience.

Thus, both theories emphasize the interconnected nature of the multiple dimensions of adaptation or integration. Both theories highlight social and contextual factors in a way that recognizes how structures and systems influence subjective experiences of integration, with differences in how the relationships between the different levels are represented. The Holistic Integration Model, designed in the context of evaluating programs supporting refugee integration, specifically identifies a wide range of factors within each level that should be considered and the importance of evaluating the relationships between them. The concept of anchoring highlights the centrality of security and the agentic nature of migrants navigating this process to achieve different forms of security, belonging and identity, while also acknowledging how these strategies and feelings change in response to

circumstances at multiple levels over time, and thus provides a lens for understanding the unique choices and experiences of individual refugees and other migrants.

The complexities of integration challenges and opportunities in the case of the reception and support of Ukrainian forced migrants in Poland

As has been alluded to earlier, the abruptness and scale of people fleeing to Poland from the full-scale war in Ukraine has constituted an unprecedented immigration challenge in post-war Poland. The state has been largely unprepared for a humanitarian response, accommodating diversity and supporting vast numbers of people seeking refuge. According to the statistics of the Polish government, the cumulative number of registered applicants for temporary protection due to the conflict in Ukraine was over 1.5 million as of 20 February 2023, among whom women under 18 constituted 19.3%, those between 18 and 65 – 47.2%, and over 65 – 3.1%, while the respective figures for men were 19.1%, 10%, and 0.9% (Otwarte Dane 2023a). This number rose to almost 1.8 million, recorded on 9 April 2024 (Otwarte Dane 2024a). The stock of registered Ukrainians fleeing the war residing in Poland in February 2023 was 985,301 (Otwarte Dane 2023b) and slightly decreased to 953,086 in April 2024 (Otwarte Dane 2024b).

While looking at the social level of the Holistic Integration Model, we can describe the reception and support of Ukrainian

forced migrants as exceptionally positive and compassionate. The extraordinarily fast response of non-governmental and church organisations reflected rapid institutional adaptation to ensure the availability of resources tailored to the migrants' needs. Moreover, the private sector, and – what was crucial – countless individuals, engaged in different forms of welcoming and assisting Ukrainian forced migrants, including spontaneous accommodation at private homes, reflecting a strong positive community welcome, at least initially. The general hospitable and empathic attitudes towards Ukrainian forced migrants after the outbreak of the full-scale war could be explained by a configuration of factors comprising empathy, cultural proximity, the previous experience of Ukrainians as 'useful' migrant workers and interpersonal contact with them, alongside a need to support the Ukrainian fight for freedom due to the fears of being in danger if Russia wins the war in the neighbouring country (Kossowska et al., 2023). Although the above-mentioned positive attitudes have been fading over time, the beginning reception and support have provided a formative experience, facilitating the generation of social capital and energy. That capital supported access to material resources like employment, healthcare, education, and language learning, at the interactional level, and facilitated feelings of belonging and security among migrants at the subjective level. Moreover, perceiving greater success in refugees' functional integration can have

positive effects on community welcome (Hynie, 2018).

In a Polish survey conducted by the Public Opinion Research Centre (CBOS) between 28 March and 7 April 2022, 63% of participants declared personal or a household members' involvement in helping refugees fleeing Ukraine. High levels of acceptance of Ukrainian forced migrants were also indicated by our representative surveys in May and December 2022, delivered by Ipsos (Grzymala-Kazłowska et al. 2023). What is more, our studies showed that only financial assistance decreased over the mentioned months (from 42% to 39%), while other forms of assistance even increased: spending time together (from 8% to 18%), assisting with finding a job and/or enrolling children in school (8% to 17%), helping with administrative tasks (from 10% to 15%), teaching language (from 11% to 13%), and sharing an apartment/providing accommodation (from 7% to 13%). The Institute of Catholic Church Statistics informed that 98% of Catholic and Greek Catholic parishes declared that they were taking part in supporting forced migrants from Ukraine in Poland. This reception has been vital for establishing and developing interpersonal connections between Polish residents and Ukrainian forced migrants, building social bonds that can facilitate settling and adaptation, and furthering positive attitudes and community welcome through contact (Hynie 2018). The substantial migration from Ukraine to Poland prior to February 2022, on a larger scale and in a more long-term form after the

beginning of the Russian expansion in Ukraine in 2014, led to the development of relationships between Poles and Ukrainian migrants and the creation of Ukrainian networks and institutions in Poland, which formed a significant base for the reception and support of Ukrainians fleeing the full-scale war.

The importance of social bridges with local hosts in facilitating Ukrainian migrants' early settlement in Poland echoes research on the importance of private sponsorship in the Canadian context (Ali, Zendo, and Somers 2022; Kaida, Hou, and Stick 2020). However, as Ali et al. (2022) point out, early bridging relationships through private sponsorship in Canada may not extend beyond the subset of the population with positive attitudes towards migrant groups overall, reflecting the importance of broader community welcome, and the barriers refugees can face when trying to form bridging relationships in the face of a stigmatizing or unwelcoming community (cf. Hanley et al. 2018). The presence of widespread community welcome for Ukrainian migrants in Poland, grounded in shared history and cultural background, may make the experience of Ukrainian migrants in Poland unique at this level.

The importance of community welcome is not only the effect it has on migrants but also on political actors, who influence but are also influenced by public opinion (Hynie, 2018), affecting institutional adaptation of local services and policies. In Poland, an institutional response quickly followed the

spontaneous involvement of civic society, firstly organised at the level of municipal authorities and regional government authorities (voivodes), and later at the level of central government and institutions. On March 12, 2022, the Polish government adopted the act on assistance to citizens of Ukraine fleeing the war (the so-called special act), which gave Ukrainian migrants the right to apply for a Personal ID Number in Poland (PESEL-UKR) and equal rights to Polish citizens in the Polish labour market, education, healthcare, and social assistance benefits. In addition, the act offered financial support to companies and individuals who were providing accommodation and meals to refugees – 40 PLN per person per day for up to 120 days (initially 60 days), paid under an agreement with a local government (commune), and giving additional one-off benefits. This type of mainstreaming inclusion approach has also been noticeable in simultaneous governmental attempts to develop, in conjunction with civic society partners, a general inclusion strategy regarding various vulnerable groups (not only forced migrants from Ukraine). In general, the implementation of the special act and other activities facilitating the reception and support of Ukrainian forced migrants required fast institutional adaptation (e.g. regarding processing Ukrainians' applications, supporting their employment, providing assistance by voivodes, local governments and other public institutions).

While considering the interactional level of integration, it is worthwhile to again point to

relatively close cultural and language proximity between Ukrainian migrants and Polish residents, reinforced by both a shared historical past (however with some divisive events and symbols) and contemporary contacts. These characteristics, alongside relatively advantageous social conditions related to community welcome, social connections and general formal inclusion and institutional adaptation, facilitated functional integration, particularly in the context of employment. Research shows a particularly high level of participation of Ukrainian forced migrants in the Polish labour market, estimated at 65% in November 2022 (OECD 2023).

The comprehensive mainstreamed integration policy for Ukrainian forced migrants in terms of education, health and social support provides them with formal full access to these services, but forced migrants from Ukraine may still face actual problems in exercising their rights, especially in an inefficient public health system. Although it is also a problem for Polish citizens, Ukrainian forced migrants encountered additional barriers and challenges in navigating the public health services.

Emphasizing the role of the larger socio-economic context, another challenge is the lack of affordable housing, which also affects Polish citizens, especially in the context of skyrocketing rents. According to the special act, Ukrainian forced migrants were provided places in collective accommodation points – free before March 2023 and since then at no costs only for a

period of up to 120 days from the refugee's first arrival in Poland, when the exemptions are then only applied for people meeting the following conditions: people with disabilities and their carers, children, people of retirement age, pregnant women, people bringing up a child up to 12 months old, carers of at least three children, and people in a difficult situation. Half a million people stayed in collective accommodation centres in various regions of Poland, while the current stock is estimated at the level of 100,000 (Jarosz and Klaus 2023). It is noteworthy that these residents have often remained in places of collective accommodation since the beginning of Russia's full-scale war against Ukraine, and may be characterised by various types of vulnerability (e.g. families with several children, people with serious health problems), as those in vulnerable circumstances are entitled to stay for longer, but also may face the greatest challenges in finding alternative housing. For this reason, there are calls to make this type of help more accessible, to enforce minimum living standards for such places, to expand the supply of housing for forced migrants – both subsidised and public – and to continue providing financial support to private individuals who provide accommodation to forced migrants (Jarosz & Klaus 2023). It should also be noted, however, that community welcome may wane if Polish citizens start to perceive themselves as competing with Ukrainian refugees for housing or employment, or feel resentful of support offered to Ukrainian refugees when

they themselves are facing socio-economic challenges (Hynie 2018).

Despite favourable basic conditions for integration mentioned above, the defining feature of the reception and support of Ukrainian forced migrants is its temporary nature, uncertainty, and the unpredictability of their situation. This is a result of the unclear prospects of the course of the war, and the mechanism of temporary protection applied to Ukrainian forced migrants in the EU and Poland, as well as the transient and transnational practices of the above-mentioned war migrants (e.g. maintaining various transnational ties, circulating between Poland and Ukraine). It affects not only the functional sphere of integration, but even more so other interactive dimensions and the subjective aspect of integration.

In Poland, the temporary protection of Ukrainian forced migrants fleeing the war has so far been extended until 30 June 2024, with a plan to extend it until 30 September 2025. It is worth noting that since 1 April 2023, according to the special act, Ukrainians under temporary protection can apply for a temporary residence permit in Poland to work or run a business, but they will lose their TPD status after receiving the permit. After being granted a temporary

residence permit based on work or business activity, they can later apply for a permanent residence permit if they meet the relevant conditions. Thus, although Ukrainian forced migrants have been given the opportunity to leave their temporary status, this option may be accessible mainly to those who feel sufficiently secure in their economic activity.¹

Temporariness is linked to and results from family separation, when migrant women and children living in Poland are separated from their husbands and adult sons and older generations remaining in Ukraine. This leads to forced migrants maintaining transnational social ties, which may also involve transnational work. While family separation is a common issue among forced migrants with implications for psychological well-being and belonging (e.g., Liddell et al., 2021), Ukrainian forced migrants may experience and exert stronger transnational ties than other forced migrants in Europe given the recency of their migration, the relative ease of maintaining livelihood ties in Ukraine while in Poland, and the very uncertainty of the situation.

Another significant effect of insecurity and transience is manifested in education. More than half (54%) of Ukrainian children and adolescents born in 2005-2016 residing in

¹ The above-mentioned new draft act amending the act on assistance to citizens of Ukraine in connection with the armed conflict on the territory of that country, and some other related acts, proposes a simplified pathway for a temporary residence permit. It emphasizes school support and inclusion of Ukrainian pupils, e.g. offering extension of additional free Polish language lessons from 24 to 36 months, while withdrawing from the 40 PLN subsidies for accommodation and food, and only allowing approved institutions to run collective accommodation centres for more than 10 people for those in particularly difficult situation.

Poland did not attend a Polish school in the first semester of 2023/2024, with only some of them participating in online Ukrainian schooling (Chrostowska 2023). This phenomenon can be explained by the combination of the above-mentioned uncertainties and temporary nature, the unwillingness of the Ukrainian government to endorse the more effective inclusion of Ukrainian children into Polish education in order not to increase the chances of migrants staying in Poland instead of returning to Ukraine, and the alleged concern of the Polish government of overburdening the Polish education system with larger numbers of foreign pupils and a need for accommodating growing diversity. This is criticised by experts and practitioners, who see the non-education of Ukrainian minors in Polish schools as an obstacle to integration, with potentially significant long-term negative social, psychological and economic consequences for Ukrainian children and youth who do not attend regular schools, again highlighting how different levels of integration are interconnected.

Experiences of war, ongoing violence, fears for those left behind and the future of Ukraine, combined with the transience and uncertainty of current life in Poland, contribute to a low sense of belonging and security. In this context, the process of anchoring migrants can be of crucial importance. Psychological support as well as coping strategies for stress, anxiety and unpredictability can help with adaptation and settling. Previous research prior to the

outbreak of full-scale war in Ukraine shed some light on the spontaneous anchoring processes of Ukrainian migrants, pointing to dimensions such as values and beliefs (e.g. activity, spiritual anchors), daily practices, sense of closeness to other people and cultural heritage (Grzymala-Kazłowska 2020).

Conclusion

Facing the unprecedented challenge of receiving large numbers of Ukrainians fleeing the war, the Polish state and civil society were immediately mobilised to respond. These two frameworks, anchoring and the Holistic Integration Model, are useful in underlining the unique characteristics of Ukrainian migration to Poland during this time. These conceptual frameworks help to draw attention to the favourable structural and interactional aspects of the reception and support of Ukrainian forced migrants in Poland, in particular the welcoming attitudes, linguistic and cultural proximity, substantial institutional adaptation and support and access to functional aspects of integration, but also the need to take into account the uncertain and transient nature of the situation.

Uncertainty and transience are central features of the experience of Ukrainian refugees in Poland, which pose particular challenges not only for migrants but also for the adaptation of host societies. Anchoring asks us to consider how refugees' motives and strategies fluctuate in the face of this

uncertainty, and to take into account their anchoring in Ukraine, and how this too is influenced by uncertainty and transience. Incorporating the anchoring lens in considering the situation in Ukraine also amplifies the interactional nature of the Holistic Integration Model. The current political transition, following the recent change of the Polish government, an uneasy coalition of different political parties, and wider internal and external economic and political pressures, could diminish the potential for further institutional change towards a more equal, inclusive and open society. Keeping a focus on the various elements of uncertainty in the environment reinforces how elements within the social level of the Holistic Integration Model are mutually influential, and how changes at these levels will have implications for the other levels of the integration process, such as access to employment and housing and feelings of security and belonging for Ukrainian refugees in Poland.

A challenge remains in translating a description and analysis of what is, or has been, occurring into insights that can support long-term planning. While short-term solutions can be generated quickly and flexibly, integration requires comprehensive and long-term vision and commitments, strategic changes, and stable and sustainable mechanisms. These frameworks call for reflections on the complex interactions between different levels of integration and a recognition that the needed long-term goals and commitments cannot be developed without understanding

how and why refugees are navigating the process of settling. The conditions for migrants' anchoring, both individually and through institutions (e.g. through schooling for children), and the consequences of institutional policies and programs on all levels of integration, including that of community welcome, must also be emphasised in order to make the settling process more predictable, and to be better able to meet refugees' needs.

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