

## A MULTI-PERSPECTIVE VIEW ON THE CONCEPT OF SOCIAL PROTECTION AND THE ROLE OF SOCIAL WORK IN (NOT ONLY) WARTIME CONDITIONS

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### Abstract

The purpose of this article is to explore the multifaceted dimensions of the concept of social protection and the role of social work in (not only) wartime conditions. This is necessary, because social workers are often acting “helpless” confronted with massive global crises or even wars or war-like conditions. This article tries to sharpen the possible role and position of social work and with this the expectations on the discipline and profession of social work.

To reach this, this article wants to shed light on the subject and the understanding of “crisis” and the different perspectives surrounding the interdisciplinary and multi perspective concepts of social protection, social support, and resilience.

This perspective allows to a better understanding of the underlying principles, challenges and potential solutions related to social protection in times of crisis. In times of crisis, ensuring social protection and social support becomes an urgent priority for affected populations and even individuals. Social protection encompasses a wide range of measures designed to protect individuals and communities from the adverse effects of crises and to provide them with the necessary resources and assistance to cope with the challenges they face.

This article is on the one side a theoretical examination of the key terms. On the other hand directly affected people have their say: The co-author as a Ukrainian narrates her migration experiences and the results of a student - peer project with affected refugees from Ukraine in Eastern Switzerland are presented.

The results are concrete and surprise at some points and sharpen the task and role of social work: First, feeling safe and getting (social) support and psychological assistance in the trauma and war situation is much important even to feel welcome and resurrected. But then mobility, networks, and the change to support their families, relatives and friends at home have a great importance. It is also very important to be able to travel to Ukraine (home) from time to time and to be able to return to the host country. The task of social work is a very special one: It is not primarily the role of the benefactor and care giver, but of the professional who makes things possible and supports and empowers the people who feel it. The article also makes clear, that a one-dimensional and static understanding of crisis, flight, migration and needs no longer works in today's world global situations and crisis.

**Keywords:** Social work, social protection, social support, crises, war in Ukraine, Ukrainian refugees, needs.

## Introduction

Not only, but then finally with the invasion of Russia on Ukraine, the world and especially Europe is out of control. The world and Europe are on fire. In recent times, there have not been so many people on flight as since the Ukrainian war started in 2022. Further global crises such as Hamas attack on Israel Oktober 2023, climate crisis and the catastrophic consequences of earthquakes, storms and floods take countless people's livelihoods, often only the flight and the search for a safe and better place, temporary or for a longer period.

The importance of social, protection and social support is essential and important even the understanding of crisis and specific war time situations. However, the role and specific tasks of social work are not clear: Where does this profession differ from disaster rescue or the offers and support of the red cross, for example? What are the specific needs of the people affected and their expectations of the profession of social work?

In this article we will explicate this, using the example of the Ukraine war and the experience and needs of refugees in this context. After clarifying the central terminology, we will also draw on qualitative empirically gained knowledge: Thus, the co-author of the article *Svitlana Hrytsai* reports on her own experiences of war and flight. Subsequently, we will present a student / peer research project with refugees from Ukraine at eastern Switzerland. Together with researchers and the people concerned, students have worked out and recorded their needs and experiences as refugees from the Ukraine war. A conclusion closes the article with a summary of the finding positions and recommendations.

### 1. Social Work

International Federation of social workers defined social work as a practice-based profession and an academic discipline that promotes social change and development, social cohesion, and the empowerment and liberation of people. Principles of social justice, human rights, collective responsibility, and respect for diversities are central to social work. Underpinned by theories of social work, social sciences, humanities and indigenous knowledges, social work engages people and structures to address life challenges and enhance wellbeing.<sup>1</sup> The above definition may be amplified at national and/or regional level.

The International Council on Social Welfare describes social work as a profession that focuses on empowering individuals, groups, and communities to overcome social, economic, and environmental challenges. It involves promoting social development, equality, and the realization of human rights.<sup>2</sup>

The specific role and mission of social work in global crises and war situations in the context of flight and migration is not easy to name. Disaster relief, humanitarian aid, emergency aid and volunteer aid are difficult to delineate. If social work wants to offer some support and sharpen their role, it needs supplementary theoretical points of reference and orientation.

### 2. Social Protection, Social Support and Resilience

Social protection is defined by United Nation Research Institute for Social Development and is concerned with preventing, managing, and overcoming situations that affect people's well-being. Social protection consists of policies and programs that aim to reduce poverty and vulnerability by promoting efficient labor markets, reducing people's exposure to risks, and improving their capacity to

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<sup>1</sup> Global definition of social work // IFSW. URL: <https://www.ifsw.org/what-is-social-work/global-definition-of-social-work>. [L. s. 03.07.2023].

<sup>2</sup> Social work // ICSW. URL: <https://www.icsw.org/index.php/component/search/?searchword=SOCAIL%20WORK&searchphrase=all&Itemid=101>. [L. s. 03.07.2023].

cope with economic and social risks (unemployment, sickness, disability, or old age).<sup>3</sup> The International Labor Organization defines social protection as a set of policies and programs designed to provide individuals and communities with security against social risks, including poverty, unemployment, illness, disability, old age, and other vulnerabilities. It encompasses a range of interventions, such as social insurance, social assistance, and social services, aimed at reducing poverty and inequality.<sup>4</sup>

From the perspective of social work, the definition from the United Nations Development Programme is the most relevant: The UNDP defines social protection as a system of policies, programs, and institutions that aim to ensure individuals and communities have access to basic social services, income security, and social rights. It includes measures to promote equitable development, reduce poverty, and enhance human capabilities.<sup>5</sup>

Social support now is defined from the American Psychological Association defines the provision of assistance or comfort to others, typically to help them cope with biological, psychological, and social stressors. Support may arise from any interpersonal relationship in an individual's social network, involving family members, friends, neighbors, religious institutions, colleagues, caregivers, or support groups. It may take the form of practical help (e.g., doing chores, offering advice), tangible support that involves giving money or other direct material assistance, and emotional support that allows the individual to feel valued, accepted, and understood.<sup>6</sup> Berkman and Glass describe social support as the various forms of assistance, information, and companionship provided by social networks and social relationships. It influences individuals' health behaviors, coping strategies, and overall well-being.<sup>7</sup>

As we can see from the definitions of social protection and social support, they are interrelated, as both aim to address the well-being and needs of individuals and communities in difficult circumstances or times of crisis. Social protection and social support are seen as tools used by states to address the impact of various social risks and crises.

This is also confirmed by the resilience concept: The concept originally describes the resilience in the development of young people, how they can grow up successfully despite unfavorable conditions. In a long-term study over 30 years, Werner investigates and describes what makes people resilient to negative and stressful factors in their lifelong development. The results can be summarized as follows: One of the most important factors is "Social Support" - whether from parents, friends, relatives, or neighbors – this is one of the central protective factors. Based on this understanding, interaction with primary caregivers is of central importance in the development of resilience. Various authors today also equate the concept of resilience with the concept of secure attachment.<sup>8</sup>

### 3. Social Protection and Social Support in times of Crises

In times of crisis, social protection and social support are essential. In such circumstances, social protection systems and social support mechanisms play a crucial role in mitigating the effects of the crisis and ensuring the well-being of vulnerable people. Crises have always accompanied humanity, be it wars, natural disasters, pandemics or political crises. Of course, all these crises usually have consequences, which are primarily affected by people. In these situations, social protection systems and social support mechanisms play an important role in alleviating the impact of the crisis and ensuring the general welfare of people.

<sup>3</sup> Social protection. URL: <https://archive.unescwa.org/social-protection>. [L. s. 05.07.2023].

<sup>4</sup> Social protection // ILO. URL: <https://www.ilo.org/100/en/story/protection/>. [L. s. 05.07.2023].

<sup>5</sup> Poverty: UNDP's Social protection offer. November 23, 2022. URL: <https://www.undp.org/iran/publications/poverty-undps-social-protection-offer>. [L. s. 05.07.2023].

<sup>6</sup> Social support // APA Dictionary of Psychology. URL: <https://dictionary.apa.org/social-support>. [L. s. 05.07.2023].

<sup>7</sup> Berkman, L.F., Glass, T., Social integration, social networks, social support and health. In: Berkman, L.F. and Kawachi, I., Eds., *Social Epidemiology*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2000. p. 159.

<sup>8</sup> Werner, E. E., Looking for trouble in paradise: some lessons learned from the Kauai Longitudinal Study. In E. Phelps, F. F. Furstenberg & A. Colby (Hrsg.), *Looking at lives: American longitudinal studies in the twentieth century* (S. 297–314). New York: SAGE, 2002.

Following recent events around the world, the term “crisis” is probably one of the most used words in everyday conversations these days. The term “crisis” has become part of everyday conversation because of its relevance, emotional impact, widespread media coverage and its ability to capture the gravity of significant events and challenges facing individuals and societies. It is used to describe personal, e.g. private, situations, but more often it is used to describe a state in which society as a whole, or individual organizations and systems within it, find themselves, with potentially negative consequences. However, despite its prevalence, the term lacks a precise and consistent definition. Instead, it is subject to a variety of interpretations, often at odds with each other.<sup>9</sup>

According to International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences crisis is an event that is perceived as an intolerable difficulty, disruption, or threat to an individual, organization, or community and requires urgent attention and immediate action.<sup>10</sup> A crisis is a critical moment that tests the resilience, adaptability, and decision-making capabilities of individuals, leaders, or societies. Also, crises is defined as a specific, unexpected, and non-routine event or series of events that create high levels of uncertainty and threat or perceived threat to an organization’s high priority goals<sup>11</sup>. In an even broader perspective, the term crisis is applied to situations that are unwanted, unexpected, unpredictable, and almost unthinkable, which cause disbelief and uncertainty. Paul t’Hart has given a contemporary definition of crisis, describing it as an “unpleasant event that represents a challenge for decision-makers, tempts them to act under conditions of imperilment, time constraint and unpreparedness.” Crisis is a “serious threat to the basic structures or fundamental values and norms of a social system, which, under conditions of time pressure and very uncertain circumstances, demands the bringing of critical decisions”. Three fundamental elements define a crisis: a stressful situation, difficulty in coping, and the timing of intervention. Each crisis is unique, necessitating a flexible approach to address the client's needs and the specific circumstances.<sup>12</sup> As we can see from the above views on the definition, the term “crisis” holds significant importance in contemporary discourse due to its relevance, emotional impact, and its ability to capture the gravity of challenging events and situations faced by individuals and societies worldwide. It has become a common descriptor for various events, ranging from personal difficulties to broader societal challenges. A crisis is characterized by stressful circumstances, difficulty in coping, and the crucial timing of intervention. Each crisis is unique, requiring a flexible approach to address the specific needs and circumstances of those affected. Crises can occur in various domains, and there are several types of crises that can be identified based on their nature and context, so for example: Economic Crisis, Health Crisis, Nature Crisis, Political and Social Crisis, Humanitarian Crisis, Refugee and Migration Crises or Personal Crisis.

It is worth noting that crises do not exist in isolation from each other, very often they are interrelated and can affect each other. One crisis can trigger or exacerbate another, which can happen through a chain of events or through the impact of one aspect of life on another. For example, during a natural disaster or war, people may experience a personal crisis due to the loss of their homes, loved ones and livelihoods. If many people are affected, this can lead to a humanitarian crisis. The impact of a crisis is different for every individual, according to the circumstances and environment.

How a crisis affects an individual depends on the nature of the crisis, personal characteristics, and resources, as well as the availability of social support. That is why we are talking about the urgency and importance of social protection and social support in times of crisis. By their nature and the speed with which they spread, the consequences of the crisis require rapid decisions aimed primarily at

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<sup>9</sup> Milašinović, Srđan. Kešetović, Želimir. Crises and crises management – a contribution to a conceptual & terminological delimitation. 2008. URL: <https://www.econbiz.de/Record/crisis-and-crisis-management-a-contribution-to-a-conceptual-terminological-delimitation-mila%C5%A1inovi%C4%87-sr%C4%91an/10009935670>. [L. s. 08.07.2023].

<sup>10</sup> International Crises: A Note on Definition. URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/447735>. [L. s. 08.07.2023].

<sup>11</sup> Seeger, M.W., Sellnow, T.L. and Ulmer, R.R. Communication, Organization and Crisis. In: Roloff, M.E., Ed., Communication Yearbook 21, Greenwood Publishing Group, 1998. p. 235.

<sup>12</sup> Milašinović, Srđan. Kešetović, Želimir. Crises and crises management – a contribution to a conceptual & terminological delimitation. 2008. URL: <https://www.econbiz.de/Record/crisis-and-crisis-management-a-contribution-to-a-conceptual-terminological-delimitation-mila%C5%A1inovi%C4%87-sr%C4%91an/10009935670>. [L. s. 08.07.2023].

ending and minimizing the effects of crisis situations in the shortest possible time and preventing the transition to a long period of stagnation of social processes.

It is social protection and social support that play a key role in times of crisis, directing the necessary resources to support people in adverse circumstances. Social protection is seen not only as a reactive tool, but also as a means of building society's long-term resilience to different crisis scenarios. In times of crisis, social protection and social support serve as vital buffers to help individuals and communities weather the storm and recover from the effects of adverse events. They contribute to the resilience and well-being of societies, reduce the long-term socio-economic impact of crises, and promote inclusive and sustainable development.

The key reasons why social protection and social support are crucial in times of crisis are:

- *Reducing vulnerability:* Crises often increase vulnerability. They can push individuals and communities into poverty, homelessness, or other precarious situations. Social protection can help individuals meet their basic needs and prevent further destitution by providing immediate support, such as cash transfers or emergency assistance.
- *Building resilience:* Social protection and social assistance help individuals and communities to bounce back more quickly by providing a safety net in times of crisis. They provide stability, reduce the risk of falling into poverty and enable people to withstand shocks and build resilience to future challenges.
- *Tackling inequality:* Crises tend to have a disproportionate impact on vulnerable groups and exacerbate existing inequalities. Social protection policies can focus on those who need it most, ensuring that resources go to the most vulnerable groups of society. This will help to mitigate the unequal impact of crises and to promote social cohesion.
- *Maintaining social cohesion:* Crises can create tensions and divisions within communities and strain the social fabric. Social support mechanisms promote social cohesion, strengthen social ties and contribute to the overall recovery and healing process, such as community engagement, psychosocial support and reconciliation programs.
- *Facilitating recovery and reconstruction:* Social protection interventions are essential to support recovery efforts in the aftermath of a crisis. They can contribute to the restoration of livelihoods, support reconstruction and rehabilitation, and enable affected individuals and communities to regain stability and self-sufficiency.
- *Promoting long-term development:* Effective social protection and assistance systems are not only a response to immediate needs, but also a contribution to long-term development. Social protection can help break the cycle of poverty and build human capital by investing in education, health care, skills training and productive assets.<sup>13</sup>

Thus, to ensure the well-being, resilience and dignity of individuals and communities facing difficult circumstances, social protection and social assistance are essential in times of crisis. Their aim is to ensure that individuals and communities have access to basic necessities such as food, shelter, health care and social services. Through the combination of social protection and social assistance, societies can address the multidimensional needs of individuals and communities in times of crisis. Not only do these interventions respond to the immediate challenges, but they also contribute to long-term recovery and sustainable development.

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<sup>13</sup> Francesc, B., Loewe, M., Social protection: An effective shield against global crises. German Institute of Development and Sustainability (IDOS), The Current Column of 4 October 2022. URL: <https://www.idos-research.de/en/the-current-column/article/social-protection-an-effective-shield-against-global-crises/>. [L. s. 13.07.2023].



#### 4. The Ukraine War

War presents a unique set of circumstances and severity of consequences that have a significant, sometimes devastating impact on individuals and communities. Displacement, loss of loved ones, loss of homes, livelihoods, destruction of infrastructure and increased physical and mental health risks are just some of the challenges people face in war.

On 24 February 2022, the Russian Federation launched a full-scale invasion against Ukraine. The war in Ukraine has become a challenge for the entire international community. In addition, the war demonstrates how one crisis causes other crises, such as natural, humanitarian, migration, social, and personal. War is not isolated; all spheres are affected by war conditions. For a better understanding of the consequences of the Ukraine War and its significance, we provide some statistics data:

The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights recorded 24,862 civilian casualties in Ukraine: 9,083 killed and 15,779 wounded, including 494 children, and among them 1051 were wounded. Most civilians died in Donetsk, Kharkiv, Kyiv, Kherson, Chernihiv and Zaporizhzhia regions.<sup>14</sup>

- According to the Ukrainian Parliament Commissioner for Human Rights, almost 4,8 million Ukrainians have been officially granted the status of internally displaced persons. Of these, 30% are pensioners and people with disabilities. Kyiv, Dnipro and Kharkiv top the ranking of cities by the number of internal displaced persons. Almost 40% of Ukraine's population - 17.6 million people - are in need of humanitarian assistance.<sup>15</sup>
- During the year, according to various estimates, the occupiers abducted and transported about 1.2 million Ukrainians to the territory of the Russian Federation. Among them, between 260,000 and 700,000 are children.
- More than 15,000 people, both civilians and soldiers, have gone missing due to the war in Ukraine.<sup>16</sup>
- According to the Kyiv School of Economics and the World Bank, as of October 2022, Ukraine's direct losses from a full-scale war amounted to about \$450 billion.<sup>17</sup>
- According to preliminary estimates by the Ministry of Economy, Ukraine's GDP declined by more than 30% in 2022.
- In 2022, consumer inflation in Ukraine was 26.6%. In particular, the growth rate of fuel prices reached almost 70% in 2022. Food prices rose by almost 30% over the year, with a sharp jump at the end of the year due to electricity shortages after Russia began to systematically destroy Ukraine's energy infrastructure.<sup>18</sup>

During wartime, people face grave threats to their safety and well-being, including:

- *Safety*: During wartime, people face threats to their lives and safety. Now in Ukraine is a risk for people of physical injuries, loss of homes and property, as well as fear for their own lives and the safety of their loved ones.

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<sup>14</sup> 500 days of war in Ukraine. Real figures of Russian aggression. URL: <https://fakty.com.ua/ua/ukraine/20230708-500-dniv-vijny-v-ukrayini-realni-cyfyry-rosijskoyi-agresiyi/>. [L.s. 10.07.2023].

<sup>15</sup> A Year of War in Numbers: Zaborona's Infographic. URL: <https://zaborona.com/en/a-year-of-war-in-numbers-zaboronas-infographic/>. [Last seen 10.07.2023].

<sup>16</sup> A year of Russia's great war against Ukraine in 10 figures // BBC News Ukraine. URL: <https://www.bbc.com/ukrainian/articles/ck5ylk3rj0zo>. [L.s. 09.07.2023].

<sup>17</sup> 500 days of war in Ukraine. Real figures of Russian aggression. URL: <https://fakty.com.ua/ua/ukraine/20230708-500-dniv-vijny-v-ukrayini-realni-cyfyry-rosijskoyi-agresiyi/>. [L.s. 10.07.2023].

<sup>18</sup> A Year of War in Numbers: Zaborona's Infographic. URL: <https://zaborona.com/en/a-year-of-war-in-numbers-zaboronas-infographic/>. [L. s. 10.07.2023].

- *Loss and injuries:* Wartime leads to the loss of loved ones, the disruption of family ties, and the destruction of social networks. Individuals experience physical, psychological, and emotional traumas as a direct or indirect result of the war.
- *Instability and economic hardship:* War in Ukraine brings economic instability, decreased employment opportunities, the destruction of infrastructure, and limited access to basic resources such as food, water, medicine, and healthcare.
- *Psychological issues:* War caused post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, anxiety, and other psychological problems. People feel fear, anxiety, and hopelessness due to the dangers and uncertainty about the future.
- *Forced displacement:* War forces people to leave their homes and become internally displaced or seek refuge in other regions or countries. This led to homelessness, loss of stability, and the search for new places to live and social adaptation.
- *Lack of education and medical assistance:* War significantly limits access to education and medical assistance. According to situation in Ukraine many schools and healthcare especially on the East and South Ukraine destroyed or inaccessible due to the conflict zones.
- *Disruption of family ties:* War disrupts family bonds when individuals are forced to separate or leave their loved ones behind. This caused emotional turmoil and the loss of the support and security that families provide.

The war in Ukraine has become a challenge for the entire international community, its consequences have a global impact and require a consolidation of efforts to implement effective social protection mechanisms. In addition, the war in Ukraine has triggered other transnational crises that have created significant social protection challenges. This transnational dimension highlights the interconnectedness of social protection and the need for international cooperation and support to address the complex needs of those affected.

### 5. Global and European Reactions of the Ukraine war

As a result of Russia's armed aggression, a significant part of the Ukrainian population has become either internally displaced persons seeking safety in Ukraine or refugees abroad. After Russia's military invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022, the international community reacted immediately and demonstrated effective solidarity by supporting people in need. European countries have hosted the largest number of refugees since the beginning of the war, mainly due to their territorial proximity and the policies of both the state and civil society in these countries to create the most favorable conditions for the reception and settlement of refugees from Ukraine.

On 21 April 2022, the United States announced an assistance program to fulfil US President Joseph Biden's commitment to welcome Ukrainians fleeing the Russian invasion. The program, called "Uniting for Ukraine". "Uniting for Ukraine" and other programs provide an opportunity to admit up to 100,000 Ukrainian citizens and their immediate family members to the United States. Under the program, they can come to the United States and stay temporarily in the country for two years of the program. Ukrainians participating in the Unite for Ukraine process must have a sponsor in the United States who agrees to provide them with financial support during their stay in the country.

Canada also has a special program for refugees from Ukraine called "Canada-Ukraine Authorisation for Emergency Travel" (CUAET), which allows them to obtain a visa free of charge and obtain the right to work and study in the country. A visitor visa under this program is issued for a period of three years. In addition to this program, Ukrainians who are forced to seek temporary asylum in Canada because of the war can receive a one-time payment of CAD \$3,000.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>19</sup> What support the US and Canada offer to Ukrainians who are fleeing from the war. ULR: <https://suspilne.media/422538-kanada-rozsirue-programu-pidtrimki-ukrainskih-bizenciv/>. [L. s. 12.07.2023].

In March 2022, the EU activated the temporary protection directive, an EU emergency scheme used in exceptional circumstances of a mass influx to provide immediate and collective protection to displaced persons and reduce pressure on the national asylum systems of EU countries. Rights under the temporary protection scheme includes Residency rights, access to the labor market, access to housing, social welfare assistance, medical assistance, legal guardianship and safe placement for unaccompanied children and teenagers and Access to education for children and teenagers.<sup>20</sup>

As of 26 June 2023, according to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees collation of statistics made available by the authorities, there are 5,977,800 refugees from Ukraine in the European countries. The dynamics show that this figure is still tending to increase, as the situation in Ukraine continues to be threatening.<sup>21</sup>

Most Ukrainian refugees reside in Poland (38%), Germany (20%), the Czech Republic (12%) and Italy (6%). Women and children represent approximately 86 per cent of the total number of refugees.

In total, 8 million 173 thousand Ukrainian refugees have been registered in Europe since the beginning of the conflict, including those who have already returned home or left for other regions of the world.

Overall, the ongoing war in Ukraine has resulted in a substantial number of displaced individuals seeking safety and support in other countries, both within Europe and globally. The situation remains dynamic, with the number of refugees continuing to increase, emphasizing the need for ongoing humanitarian efforts and support from the international community to assist those affected by the crisis.

## **6. Leaving Ukraine – coming to Switzerland**

Since the outbreak of the war in Ukraine, European countries have become a host to millions of Ukrainians, and Switzerland is no exception. As of 23 June 2023, 85,080 Ukrainians in Switzerland have applied for a temporary residence permit.<sup>22</sup> The most common reasons for leaving Ukraine and going to Switzerland include: the need to be safe, the need to protect the child (children), constant and heavy shelling, explosions, possibility of evacuation from the place of residence, the place of residence is occupied by the Russian military, destruction of a house or an apartment and fear for personal life and the lives of relatives.

According to the survey, Ukrainians chose a country for temporary residence for a variety of reasons. The most common of these (52% of respondents) is, of course, security. Another 15% moved to a particular country because of family ties. For 11% of respondents, the availability of employment was the deciding factor. Other reasons for choosing a country were: language of communication (5%), social ties (4%), advice from others (3%), education (3%), proximity to Ukraine (3%) and asylum procedures (3%).<sup>23</sup>

Among the reasons why Ukrainians chose Switzerland are the following:

- Family members, friends and acquaintances living in Switzerland. This is one of the main reasons why Ukrainians choose to seek asylum in Switzerland. In addition, family reunification, support from relatives and living together are an important basis for speeding up the process of integration into new living conditions.
- On the recommendation of other Ukrainians who have arrived earlier. Very often Ukrainians share information on social media about the conditions for receiving refugees and the attitude

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<sup>20</sup> Infographic - Refugees from Ukraine in the EU. URL: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/infographics/ukraine-refugees-eu/>. [L. s. 12.07.2023].

<sup>21</sup> Operational data Ukraine refugee's situation. URL: <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/ukraine>. [L. s. 15.07.2023].

<sup>22</sup> Operational data Ukraine refugee's situation. URL: <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/ukraine>. [L. s. 15.07.2023].

<sup>23</sup> Lives on Hold: Profiles and Intentions of Refugees from Ukraine #1. URL: <https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/94176>. [L. s. 11.07.2023].



of the local population towards refugees. Good recommendations and personal experience give Ukrainians confidence in choosing a country of asylum.

- **Stability and security.** Switzerland is known for its long-standing political stability and high level of security. Switzerland has not been involved in war for more than 200 years. In addition, the absence of internal conflicts and Switzerland's ranking as one of the safest countries in the world make it attractive to refugees, as these are key factors for most Ukrainians.
- **Humanitarian traditions.** Switzerland is known for its long and recognized tradition of humanitarian asylum. Switzerland has long been a haven for refugees from the Balkans, Syria, Iran and Turkey. The long experience of receiving refugees has allowed Switzerland to develop an effective refugee protection system.
- **Social assistance.** Switzerland has activated the S status for Ukrainian refugees and provides significant social support to refugees, including housing, medical care, education and vocational training. Ukrainians have access to a wide range of social services to help them integrate into Swiss society and secure their livelihoods.
- **Geographical location.** Switzerland is in the center of Europe, making it accessible to Ukrainian refugees. Its borders with France, Germany, Italy, and Austria offer a variety of arrival routes. Switzerland is also attractive because of its amazing nature and similar climate to Ukraine.
- **High quality of life.** Switzerland ranks high in terms of living standards and well-being, including the highest wages in Europe, quality education, safety, healthcare and social services.

For the first time in history, Switzerland has activated the S status for Ukrainians. This status was developed in the mid-1990s during the wars in the Balkans. It provides for the rapid admission of refugees. The "S" status can be applied for by Ukrainians and their family members, as well as third-country nationals who had a permanent residence permit in Ukraine before the outbreak of full-scale war and cannot safely return to their country. With this status, refugees from Ukraine are entitled to a temporary stay in Switzerland for a period of one year (the Swiss government has extended the statute until March 2024). This status gives access to the following possibilities: Residence in Switzerland, Access to housing, Access to health and accident insurance, Access to social assistance for those who need it, Access to the labour market, Access to education for children, travel abroad and return to Switzerland without a travel permit, family reunification. Each canton may decide based on cantonal legislation, how to support persons with protection status S. Social assistance is intended to secure a person's livelihood. The status is not subject to any quotas, so people may travel abroad without a travel permit. The global lump sum of CHF 1,500 per person per month, which the Confederation makes available to the cantons, finances health insurance premiums, basic daily needs, and accommodation.<sup>24</sup> People seeking refuge from the war in Ukraine and arriving in Switzerland can apply directly to one of the six federal asylum centers with a procedural function and register for S protection status.

For example, the canton covers the costs of housing, social assistance and health insurance until a person finds a job and can meet his or her own needs. The comprehensive system of social assistance makes it possible to minimize the consequences of forced refugee status, facilitates the process of adaptation and integration, gives the feeling that one is not left alone with one's problems and makes it possible to overcome various difficulties as easily as possible. Each refugee is assigned a social worker who supervises and assists in obtaining social and medical assistance and provides advice on various issues.

<sup>24</sup> Information for persons from Ukraine in need of protection // State Secretariat for Migration SEM. URL: <https://www.sem.admin.ch/sem/en/home/sem/aktuell/ukraine-hilfe.html>. [L. s. 10.07.2023].

According to the information of State Secretariat of Migration (Switzerland), about 40% of Ukrainian refugees continue to live in host families, which demonstrates the significant solidarity of society with Ukrainians.<sup>25</sup> In addition to the above-mentioned measures organized by the state for social support of Ukrainians in Switzerland, the following integration activities also play an important role and find all possible support from the cantons:

- *Language and cultural integration:* Learning the local language, in this case, German, French, or Italian, depending on the region, is a crucial step towards integration. Language skills facilitate communication, social interactions, and career opportunities. Embracing Swiss culture, traditions, and customs also helps foster connections with the local community.
- *Community engagement:* Actively participating in local community activities, events, and organizations can provide opportunities to meet new people, make friends, and build social networks.
- *Support networks:* Establishing connections with other Ukrainians in Switzerland which provide mutual support, sharing experiences, and navigating the challenges of adaptation.
- *Cultural exchange:* Ukrainians in Switzerland contribute to cultural exchange by sharing their own traditions, cuisine, and heritage with the local community (festivals of Ukrainian cuisine and culture).
- *Psychological support.* Psychological support for Ukrainians abroad is crucial to address the emotional and mental well-being of individuals who may have experienced trauma, displacement, or other significant challenges.<sup>26</sup>

Switzerland, as a country with a rich tradition of humanitarian assistance, serves as an example of how to ensure the safety and social integration of refugees to promote their safety and well-being.

## 7. Challenges and issues for Ukraine Refugees

Ukrainian refugees are the result of the war. Ukrainians did not plan to go abroad, did not prepare for it, did not study the peculiarities of the countries they came to. Thousands of Ukrainians faced many challenges related to the fact that they were forced to leave their homes and their country and come to new countries. Before the war, everyone had a well-established life with studies, work, family, friends and everyday worries. We would like to take a closer look at the most common problems and challenges faced by Ukrainian refugees in Switzerland and in other countries.

- Changing the usual environment and lifestyle. Forced migration to another country to escape the war meant that millions of Ukrainians left behind their familiar surroundings. This was a great challenge for all Ukrainians. Before the war, everyone had their usual home environment and familiar way of life. The war changed everything and forced millions of Ukrainians to accept new living conditions.
- Adapting to new conditions in an unfamiliar political, linguistic, and cultural environment. Switzerland has become a foreign country for Ukrainians, with its own system, laws, rules, culture, mentality and languages. Ukrainians need time to adapt to the new country and to accept its rules.
- Family separation. In connection with the introduction of martial law in Ukraine, it is temporarily forbidden for Ukrainian male citizens aged 18 to 60 to travel outside Ukraine. Except in certain cases. As a result, the main category of refugees are women, children and, to

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<sup>25</sup> Integration lump sums and contributions for persons with protection status S // Kanton St. Gallen. URL: <https://www.sg.ch/gesundheit-soziales/soziales/integration/fluechtlinge-und-vorlaeufig-aufgenommene/informationen-fuer-gemeinden.html>. [L. s. 11.07.2023].

<sup>26</sup> Federal program "Support measures for persons with protection status S". URL: <https://www.sem.admin.ch/sem/en/home/integration-einbuengerung/integrationsfoerderung/programm-s.html> [L. s. 12.07.2023].

a lesser extent, the elderly and people with disabilities. Children have had to be separated from their fathers, women from their husbands, children from their parents and brothers. The process of family reunification can be complex and time-consuming, causing emotional distress and uncertainty.

- Living in two realities "Torn reality". The first reality is what is happening in Ukraine, where parents, relatives, friends, and acquaintances are staying. The second reality is organizing life in a new country.
- Personal involvement in the intensity of events in Ukraine. Every day Ukraine is under fire and bombardment from Russia. It is very difficult to stay away from what is happening. The destruction of Ukraine, the death of civilians, the destruction of towns and villages is very painful to experience.
- Trauma of war. The war in Ukraine has undoubtedly had a significant impact on the population, causing widespread trauma and affecting the lives of countless individuals. War by its very nature causes various forms of physical, emotional, and psychological trauma.
- Survivor guilt. Many people feel guilty for leaving Ukraine, while their friends and relatives remain in Ukraine under fire and in constant danger, while they are completely safe and able to enjoy life in a new country.
- Despite different experiences. Understanding people with different war experiences. Everyone has their own experience of the war, some were under occupation, some were able to leave Ukraine very quickly, some lost their relatives or homes, and some are experiencing severe psychological trauma. It is important to understand that there is no better or worse experience, it is just different for everyone, and it is important to accept this.
- Problems with documents. Restoring lost documents, extending the validity of a passport, adding children to a passport, notarial powers of attorney, recognizing driving licenses.
- Language barriers. Many Ukrainians do not speak the official languages of Switzerland. Yes, there are language courses for refugees. And they attend them. But the lack of knowledge of the local language is the main reason for difficulties in finding a job, studying, every day and official communication.
- Work. Only about 20% of Ukrainians are employed in Switzerland. A small percentage of Ukrainians continue to work online in Ukraine. The rest are still looking for work or looking after children or elderly/sick relatives. The inability to find a job makes them dependent on social benefits, prevents them from changing their place of residence and slows down the integration process. In addition, many Ukrainians are forced to work in jobs below their level of education.
- Accommodation. Ukrainians are provided with free accommodation. However, for most people this means sharing a house or apartment with others. Many have misunderstandings about sharing, the inability to change accommodation, the lack of privacy or a quiet place.
- Education. Many school-age children face the problem of a double educational burden. Very often, children are forced to spend the first half of the day studying in their host country school and in the afternoon attending classes or doing homework in the Ukrainian school.
- Cultural adjustment. Adapting to a new culture, customs and social norms is overwhelming for Ukrainian refugees. They are faced with feelings of isolation, loneliness and a sense of not belonging. Community involvement, cultural orientation programs and connection to local support networks are very important for cultural adjustment.

Most Ukrainians who have left their country because of the war are not only trying to adapt to life in Switzerland and support their families who have remained in Ukraine but are also organizing

themselves to provide social support to their Ukrainian compatriots who are also here in Switzerland and to help Ukraine in the war in various ways. So-called mutual aid has become an important part of social support for Ukrainians living in Switzerland. After all, no one understands the problems and needs of a refugee better than another person who is facing the same conditions. The main forms of support that Ukrainians abroad are actively involved in are:

1. *Emotional support for relatives.* Words of support, expressions of empathy, calls for attention. Sharing personal experiences or stories of resilience can also provide emotional relief and validation. Such seemingly simple and ordinary things become very valuable during wartime, helping to maintain links with family and friends and providing moral and psychological support.
2. *Provide information and support.* Sharing accurate information about available resources, support services and avenues for assistance helps individuals access the help they need.
3. *Financial support for family members.* Financial support for relatives during the war is very important. The war in Ukraine has left many people unemployed, unable to work or care for others, and inflation has caused a rapid increase in the price of all basic goods.
4. *Volunteer remotely.* Many organizations offer remote volunteering opportunities that allow individuals to contribute their skills and time from anywhere in the world. This could include tasks such as online tutoring, language support, virtual mentoring or helping with administrative work for organizations supporting Ukrainian refugees.
5. *Participating in charity auctions, fundraising and donations.* Every Ukrainian living abroad takes part in various charity events, sending donations to the army and war victims, raising money for various types of aid and needs, or hosting virtual events to gather support and donations.
6. *Sending humanitarian aid.* Actively participating in efforts to send humanitarian aid to Ukraine, such as clothing, food, medical supplies, and other necessary items, can directly help people in need who remain in Ukraine.
7. *Spreading truthful information about the war.* Spreading accurate and truthful information about the war in Ukraine helps to combat misinformation and provides a clearer understanding of the situation abroad. This can be done through social media, one-on-one conversations or interviews, and participation in facilitated discussions and events about the war in Ukraine. Such groups can promote healing, offer coping strategies and foster a sense of community among those affected by the war.
8. *Organizing support groups.* Establishing or supporting support groups provides a space for people to come together, share experiences and support each other. Ukrainians in Switzerland unite on various platforms, organize meetings, events, actions, charity evenings, joint excursions, hikes, and also form groups via Telegram, where they exchange tips and useful information, discuss pressing issues, find friends and just talk about everyday life.
9. *Supporting newly arrived Ukrainians.* Ukrainians who have just arrived in Switzerland have many questions about organizing their life in the new conditions and may be confused. That is why Ukrainians who have been in Switzerland for a long time are organizing themselves to help newcomers. For example, by sharing their own experiences, giving advice, providing information about local online groups of Ukrainians in Switzerland where they can always find help, inviting them to events, meetings, etc.

## 8. Qualitative – empirical view to the situation and social protection and social support for Ukrainian refugees

### 8.1. Svitlana Hrytsai: a narrative perspective:

24 February 2022 is a day engraved in the hearts of all Ukrainians, dividing their lives into before and after. In this article, I - Svitlana would like to tell her story.

There is a saying: “If you have a peaceful sky above your head, you are a happy person”. One day we lost it.

On the eve of the war, there was a lot of talk and information that there was going to be a war. But most people couldn't believe it, including me. How could it be possible? There was a lot of information about how to behave in a war situation, how to pack an emergency bag, how to arrange your steps. But still, everyone hoped for the best, until the morning that changed everything, when we found ourselves unprepared for the war and the destruction, losses, deaths, and horrors it brought.

It was the early morning when our lives were divided into 'before' and 'after'. My morning on 24 February 2022 began at 05:35 with a phone call from my mother, telling me that the war had begun, that Kiev was being bombed, and a short time later I heard the first explosions nearby. My first thoughts were: This can't be happening. How can this be? What am I going to do?

At that time, I lived and worked in Chernihiv. My parents lived in the Chernihiv region and my sister lived in Kiev.

Chernihiv is a city in the north of Ukraine, bordering Belarus and Russia, on the way to Kiev.

I wanted to be with my family, so I decided to leave Chernihiv and try to get to my parents' house. The streets were filled with confusion, fear, disbelief, and anxiety, as were the long queues at grocery stores, pharmacies and cash machines.

I got to my parents' house and was with my family late on the evening of 24 February. The thoughts that occupied my mind in the first days of the war were: what's next, how long will the war last, what will happen to us.

Chernihiv, located on one of the main lines of Moscow's military activity, was besieged by Russian troops and subjected to intense bombardment.

On 3 March, I received a newsletter from the university in which I worked. This letter include tte Information that the School of Social Work at the University of Applied Sciences of Eastern Switzerland (OST) had developed a support initiative for students and staff at risk, offering them the opportunity to seek refuge in St Gallen, Switzerland, as a first place of safety.

Having previously visited St. Gallen, Switzerland as a student and having had the opportunity to meet some of the lectures and students during a project with my university, I had familiarity with this university and the individuals involved in the initiative. I decided to contact them and find out more about this initiative and the possibility of using it with my younger sister. I received a very quick reply and so the initiative also extended to family members. Additionally, there was similar interest from several university staff members.

Making the decision was incredibly challenging as I grappled with the fact that my parents and grandparents would remain at home. The Chernihiv region was facing constant bombardment and partial occupation during that time. However, despite the difficulties and hesitations, we made the decision to go.

On 14 March, my sister and I arrived in St. Gallen. The road to Switzerland was difficult, long and dangerous before the border. We were warmly welcomed directly at the railway station. Before we arrived, they found us a host family who agreed to take us in. So, on the day of arrival, we



immediately went to the host family's home. The host family was very kind to us. We still live with them. They are wonderful, kind people who have become friends over time.

Now we are safe, but the fear for your family and friends is very strong. It is very difficult to be 2.5 thousand kilometers away from your family.

We have started to formalize our resettlement in Switzerland. My sister and I have been granted permanent residence status S. Status S give us the opportunity to live in Switzerland until the end of the war in Ukraine, free accommodation, cantonal social assistance, health insurance, the opportunity to work, learn the language and participate in integration activities.

At first, it was difficult for my sister and me to accept the new reality of being in a foreign country, where you don't know the language, the rules, the structure. But our process of integration and adaptation was facilitated by the enormous support of both our host family and the university. All the time we were actively helped by our host family, university staff and students involved in the mentoring program.

It has been more than a year since my sister and I arrived in Switzerland, during which time we have adapted to the new living conditions, accepted challenges and learned to overcome them, we are learning German, we have found job, we have made new social contacts, we have learned to combine life in Switzerland with life in Ukraine.

Migration to another country is always difficult, and migration caused by war, when social ties are destroyed, everyday life changes, becomes a serious challenge for both the refugee and the host country. It is very important to have social support in the initial stage of adaptation to new living conditions.

It is very important not only to provide material support, but also to make a person feel that he/she is not alone with his/her problems, that he/she is understood, supported, and not blamed.

My story illustrates the importance of social protection and social support, because before the war I was not in a crisis and did not need outside help up, it was the war that put me in a situation whose consequences I could not overcome on my own, but only with complex social support from the state, the community and individuals.

## 8.2. Students / Peer research Project 2022/23: Needs of Ukrainian refugees

During November 2022-May 2023 students and lecturers from the University of Applied Science Eastern Switzerland OST were involved in a research project “Evaluation of the Ukraine War - how did the communities in the Rhine Valley region deal with the challenging situations regarding Ukrainian refugees at the beginning of the Ukraine crisis? What worked well, what did not work well? Best practice examples and lessons learned.”

The objective of the project was for the lecturers and students, commissioned by the Rhine Valley Integration Office, to conduct a qualitative data collection to evaluate the offerings and structures perceived as helpful from the perspective of the refugees from the war zone in Ukraine. The project aimed to document “lessons learned” and “best practice examples”.

The project was developed on behalf of the Rhine Valley Integration Office, and in collaboration with the School of Social Work of the University of Applied Sciences Eastern Switzerland OST. Twelve students were assigned to work on this project.

The Rhine Valley Integration Office supports people with a migration background in their integration via regular structures and in the specific promotion of integration to promote good coexistence with the residents in the municipalities of the Rhine Valley. To evaluate which services and structures have been used by refugees from Ukraine and where there are difficulties and challenges, the Rhine Valley Integration Office initiated this practical project.

The project focused on the 12 municipalities in the St. Gallen Rhine Valley region and examined the conditions for success in regular municipalities through one subgroup of students, while the other subgroup focused on the perspective of the affected individuals.

In accordance with the project mandate, the present project work dealt with the following questions:

- What services, structures, support, and assistance did the refugees make use of?
- How did the refugees experience their arrival in the Rhine Valley communities? What were the difficulties and challenges?

The results of this project are intended to contribute to the optimization of municipal services and structures for refugees to provide services adapted to the needs of refugees, which will then be used more frequently.

To collect data, students prepared and conducted a workshop with Ukrainian refugees. The workshop was held in three age subgroups: children aged 6 to 12, young people aged 13 to 17, and adults aged 18 and over. During the workshop students used with the participants the methods of World Café and the Three Houses, which showed their effectiveness.

An online questionnaire was also used to collect data. The questionnaire contained 26 questions and was posted online for 20 days. The target group of the questionnaire was refugees from Ukraine living in one of the 12 municipalities of the Rhine Valley and who are at least 15 years old.

The results of workshop and the questionnaire of Ukrainian refugees demonstrated pros and cons in the following areas:

*Housing:* The refugees from Ukraine appreciate being provided with accommodation. However, they often have to share living space, which they find disturbing and cramped. They desire more privacy regarding their living arrangements.

*Leisure/Mobility:* The refugees from Ukraine generously utilize and value meetings with fellow affected individuals. Therefore, it would be helpful if each community had resources available for such meetings. Increased financial support for recreational activities: The refugees from Ukraine have a strong need for mobility in their leisure activities. Therefore, they wish for discounts or financial assistance for using public transportation, cultural offerings, and sports facilities.

*Employment:* The refugees from Ukraine want to reintegrate into the job market as quickly as possible. They require support from authorities in finding job positions or training opportunities.

*Assistance and integration services:* The refugees from Ukraine have a strong desire to integrate, evident by the high demand for language courses. Therefore, it is important to maintain and make affordable language courses available to them.

*Material and financial support:* The financial situation of Ukrainian refugees is strained. This is evident from their reliance on food donations, where they perceive an unfair distribution. They fear receiving insufficient food supplies.

*Safety/Feeling welcome:* Most refugees from Ukraine feel safe and welcome in Switzerland. Providing information about available resources and opportunities would facilitate their integration.<sup>27</sup>

Based on the qualitative research results of the online questionnaire and the workshop students came up with the recommendation. The results reflect the views of Ukrainian refugees on current problems and issues. These guidelines include general recommendations on refugee registration, housing and accommodation, status specifics, financial assistance, healthcare, leisure time, finding a job, language

<sup>27</sup> Projektbericht. Evaluation der Angebote und Strukturen für geflüchtete Menschen aus der Ukraine und der 12 Gemeinden im St. Galler Rheintal. Sicht der betroffenen geflüchteten Menschen aus der Ukraine. Fachstelle Praxisprojekte St. Gallen, 2023. p. 38-42.

courses, public transport in Switzerland, schools and the education system in Switzerland, and specific recommendations for children and young people.

The findings highlighted various challenges faced by different age groups of refugees and shed light on their experiences and needs upon arrival in Switzerland. Overall, the project provided valuable insights into the experiences and needs of Ukrainian refugees in the Rhine Valley region, aiming to inform policy and service improvements to better support their integration into Swiss society.

## **Conclusion**

The topic of this article is the multi-perspective view on the concept of social protection and the role of social work in (not only) wartime conditions. In the explanations, it became clear how important and central it is that, in addition to help and support in flight and trauma situations, the factor of social security and thus of social support. The issue of resilience is of particular importance in this context. This is closely related to social networks, friends, and family. At the beginning, however, is the safe place and a place where you are welcome. This is followed by aspects of housing, securing one's livelihood, and coping with the new daily routine.

Due to the situation, the geographical proximity of the Ukraine war and the political proximity of Ukraine, the following points are particularly important:

- Social protection extends beyond immediate crisis response and trauma care. It encompasses social support, social security and resilience, highlighting the importance of long-term assistance for affected individuals.
- Immediate and professional help to cope with trauma is essential. Good and suitable housing, work, assistance with official matters and financial support form the basis for all refugees, regardless of where they come from.
- Being welcome as guests and European neighbors and being allowed to be guests and to feel comfortable is of great importance. The provision of safe and welcoming spaces is the initial step in offering social protection. These spaces serve as the foundation upon which individuals and families can rebuild their lives.
- The opportunity to temporarily leave the host country and reconnect with friends, family, and relatives in one's home country holds significance for Ukrainian refugees.
- With the rapidly changing situation in Ukraine, the prospects of staying longer in the country of protection are very different.
- All those affected would like to actively support their family at home. For this you need help and support in the host country.

The reaction to the Ukrainian refugee crisis underscores the significance of global collaboration, the embrace of humanitarian principles, and the capacity of individual countries and regions to contribute to ensuring the safety, assistance, and opportunities for those who require help.

The S-status (protection status) existing in Switzerland has proven to be very helpful. It allows the affected persons with a temporary protection status to stay legally in the country, to travel, to attend schools and to work and to get housing and financial support.

Requirements are to be put to the policy to the points mentioned above to create the conditions as a basis for that internationally and nationally.

But what does this mean now for the role of social work in Crisis and war time conditions? In short: Social work supports and empowers people. Not in a paternalistic understanding but in an egalitarian one. Social work is always a co-constructor for the people concerned to cope better with their situation and everyday life. All activities and specific methods of social work are to be included. Networking

approaches, individual case assistance or social group work or peer approaches appear to be particularly effective. But also, a specific and professional counseling approach along the needs are to be demanded. And finally, policy practice. Social workers are not only helpers in the crisis but also agents of social change. But one thing is certain: Peace and the will to work together serves as the basis for social work, for a better individual life and finally for a better world.

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