

CULTURAL IDENTITY AND CROSS-CULTURAL ADAPTATION OF UKRAINIAN WOMEN IN FORCED AND VOLUNTARY MIGRATION: A CASE STUDY

Iryna Soroka

Ph.D., Associate Professor, Jindal Institute of Behavioural Sciences,
O. P. Jindal Global University, Sonipat, India
e-mail: isoroka@jgu.edu.in, orcid.org/0000-0003-1132-488X

Summary

This article examines the strategies for preserving cultural identity and the peculiarities of cross-cultural adaptation among the Ukrainian women who participated in a case study. The study is based on the analysis of culture shock stages by Oberg and acculturation strategies outlined in Berry's model. Five Ukrainian women in forced migration (in Poland, Sweden, Switzerland, and the UK) and five females in voluntary migration (in India, Poland, Italy, and Germany) participated in this research. Data collection methods of the study include a survey in Google Forms, direct observation, and phenomenological interviews. A software program MAXQDA was used for qualitative data analysis. The results show that the Ukrainian women in both forced and voluntary migration encounter challenges such as language barriers, social exclusion, differences in social norms, and difficulties in medical services. They experience crisis, recovery, and adjustment stages of culture shock, with common emotions including anxiety, homesickness, confusion, frustration, curiosity, and excitement. Key adaptation resources involve social support, experiential learning, and digital media. Regardless of migration type or future plans, women maintain cultural identity through native language use, traditional celebrations, Ukrainian cuisine, and cultural events. These insights can assist NGOs, psychologists, and social workers in creating more effective programs for integration and mental health support of migrants.

Key words: integration, war, challenges, refugee, displacement, culture shock.

DOI <https://doi.org/10.23856/7133>

1. Introduction

Forced and voluntary migration are complex phenomena examined across multiple academic disciplines. Sociology, anthropology, political science, and economics investigate the cultural and policy-related dimensions of migration, while psychology and public health address its individual and community impacts. Forced migration, often referred to as involuntary migration, has emerged as an increasingly urgent global challenge in the 21st century. It describes circumstances in which people are driven to abandon their homes and communities because of factors such as armed conflict, persecution, environmental catastrophes, or socioeconomic hardship.

In contrast, voluntary migration is the movement of individuals or groups who choose to relocate based on perceived benefits or personal preferences rather than external compulsion. Such decisions are typically influenced by factors like better employment opportunities, access to education, improved living standards, and family reunification.

Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 triggered a large-scale movement of forced migrants from Ukraine to the EU and other countries. As stated by Andrushko

(2024), involuntary migration often entails a sense of loss for the homeland where a person was born and grew up, along with the disruption of confidence in their future. In addition, individuals experiencing forced migration may suffer from survivor's guilt – feelings of shame or even regret for having survived while others did not.

Research on trauma in the context of forced migration highlights the complex psychological difficulties stemming from displacement, including both acute and complex trauma, persistent stressors, and the erosion of one's identity and sense of security (*Andrushko, 2025*). Synowiec A. (2022) debates that the refugee experience involves two forms of trauma: the primary trauma of displacement itself and the secondary trauma caused by the stress of adapting to a new environment. Migrants face a heightened risk of social exclusion, which can result from unmet needs such as inadequate housing, restricted access to social services and healthcare, labour market challenges, communication barriers, and cultural adaptation difficulties.

Oberg K., the researcher of culture adjustment and culture shock, mentioned long ago that the culture of any society is shaped by its history and develops gradually over time, largely through processes that occur beyond the individual's conscious awareness (1960). Various realms of cross-cultural adjustment, culture shock, acculturation, and adaptation in forced and voluntary migration have been researched by Berry, J. (1997), Ward, C. et al. (2005), Bhaskar-Shrinivas, P. et al. (2005), Huff, K.C. (2014), Liao, Y.K. et al. (2021), Setti, I. et al. (2022), Abdyrakhmanova, K. et al. (2023), and Reic, I. (2023).

The peculiarities and challenges of culture adaptation of Ukrainian refugees in the context of the Russian-Ukrainian war have been studied by Oviedo, L. et al. (2022), Kurapov, A. et al. (2023), Oliinyk, O. & Oliinyk, A. (2024), Kolinko, M. & Aleksandrova, O. (2024), Ishchenko, Y. et al. (2024), Smetanska, M. & Rubtsova, S. (2025).

This study **aims** to fill the knowledge gap by investigating the ways of preserving cultural identity and cross-cultural adaptation of Ukrainian women aged 35-60 in forced and voluntary migration.

First of all, most Ukrainian refugees in the Russian-Ukrainian war are women and children. Ukrainian men aged 18-60 cannot leave Ukraine during wartime, except in certain circumstances. The ongoing war has caused mass forced displacement, especially among women, who are frequently responsible for protecting and relocating their families. This population can provide critical insight into the emotional, psychological, and socio-economic impacts of forced migration during midlife. According to a press release of UN Women (February 2025) "Russia's three years of mass attacks on Ukraine are having a devastating effect on women and girls, with 1,869,000 internally displaced, almost 6.7 million women in need of humanitarian assistance, and more than 3,799 women and 289 girls killed, with the actual number of deaths likely much higher."

Second, women are often seen as the biological bearers of a given culture or ethnic group (*Soroka, 2022*). Studying both forced and voluntary migration within this group sheds light on the ways of preserving cultural identity abroad. The cultural identity of Ukrainians is a very sensitive and delicate question, considering the present war, while Russia is trying to demolish Ukrainians as a nation.

Third, women in this age range often face age-specific challenges in migration, such as career disruptions, health issues, or caring responsibilities for both children and aging parents. They are often at a life stage where reintegration into new labour markets or social environments is more complex compared to younger migrants.

Fourth, studying both forced and voluntary migration within this group allows for comparative analysis of circumstances, cultural adaptation resources, and strategies.

Women's migration experiences are often qualitatively different from men's due to gender roles, social expectations, and risks of exploitation. Most migration studies focus on either youth or elderly populations, or male-dominated labour migration. Ukrainian women aged 35–60 are often underrepresented, yet they may play pivotal roles in community building and family stabilization post-migration.

Therefore, the main **research questions** of this study are as follows:

RQ 1. What are the peculiarities of cross-cultural adaptation of Ukrainian women in a forced and voluntary migration?

RQ 2. What challenges do Ukrainian women face in cross-cultural adaptation in forced and voluntary migration?

RQ 3. Which ways to preserve cultural identity in a new culture are utilized by Ukrainian women in forced and voluntary migration?

2. Methodology

The term *culture (or cultural) shock* was introduced in the 20th century by American anthropologist Kalervo Oberg (1960). He defined culture shock as the anxiety that arises when we lose the familiar signs and symbols used in social interaction. Acculturation strategies, as outlined in Berry's (1997) model, are divided into four main categories: *Integration* – individuals preserve their original cultural identity while also engaging with and participating in the new culture. *Assimilation* – individuals fully adopt the dominant culture, relinquishing their original cultural background. *Separation* – individuals focus on retaining their original culture and limit interaction with the dominant culture. *Marginalization* – individuals lose ties to both their original and the dominant cultures, often resulting in a sense of isolation from both.

Oberg's four stages of culture shock map onto Berry's four acculturation strategies. They describe different aspects: Oberg focuses on emotional adjustment over time; Berry focuses on long-term cultural orientation. But they intersect in some ways.

1. *Honeymoon stage* (by Oberg): Feeling fascinated, curious, and positive toward the new culture. Often happens before deeper adaptation challenges emerge. Berry's link: People in this stage might lean toward assimilation (embracing the new culture eagerly) or integration (showing openness to both cultures).

2. *Crisis stage* (by Oberg): Culture shock hits – frustration, confusion, homesickness, even hostility toward the new culture. Misunderstandings feel personal, and the gap between expectations and reality widens. Berry's link: This often aligns with separation (retreating into one's original culture for comfort) or marginalization (feeling disconnected from both cultures).

3. *Recovery stage* (by Oberg): People begin learning the new culture's rules, language, and customs. Frustration declines, competence increases. Berry's link: Tends to shift toward integration (balancing old and new cultural identities) or a more sustainable assimilation (adapting fully to the host culture).

4. *Adjustment stage* (by Oberg): Comfortable and functional in the new culture, while also accepting differences. Can maintain original identity, adapt fully, or blend both. Berry's link: Often seen in integration, but can also stabilize as assimilation depending on the person's choice and environment.

Berry's model and Oberg's culture shock stages were considered while designing this research.

Design and participants

The study was conducted from July 2024 to August 2025. After reviewing existing literature on forced and voluntary migration with emphasis on the Ukrainian population, the research gap was identified, the research problem was defined, and research questions were formulated. A Multiple Case Study type was chosen for comparisons across contexts.

Data collection methods of the study include a survey in Google Forms, direct observation of living conditions, household, communication within families and with neighbours, etc. Phenomenological interviews were conducted (both online (via WhatsApp, Facebook messaging) and offline (the author personally visited participants living in Italy, Poland, India).

A qualitative phenomenological interview is a research method used to explore and understand people’s lived experiences. For instance, how they perceive, make sense of, and give meaning to certain phenomena in their lives. Phenomenology is a philosophical and methodological approach that studies how people experience a particular phenomenon (e.g., cultural adjustment or identity conflict).

A software program MAXQDA was used for qualitative data analysis. 10 cases made it possible to gather information for comparison. The depth of analysis in this research is more important than the quantity.

Sampling

Purposive sampling was used. 10 Ukrainian women (five in forced and 5 in voluntary migration) were invited to take part in the research. Inclusion criteria: women aged 35-60, living abroad for at least half a year, speaking English fluently.

Research ethics

Informed consent was obtained from the participants in order to ensure the ethics of the research. Before scheduling the interview with the respondents, they were informed about the topic, details of the study, and the confidentiality of the information they provided. The sensitive topics of forced relocation and traumatic experiences of war were avoided. Also, the exact words and the details of some stories are omitted in this paper as requested by the respondents. They were allowed to withdraw from the research at any time without explanation of the reasons.

3. Results of the study

Ten Ukrainian women, who took part in this research, reported demographic information (see Table 1) and answered the survey questions in Google Forms.

Table 1

Demographic characteristics of the participants

Partici- pants	Age span	Voluntary migration/ Country	Living alone or with a family	Duration	Stage of cultural shock
P1	50-55	India	alone	about 6 years	Recovery Stage
P2	35-40	Italy	family (husband and 2 children)	more than 7 years	Recovery Stage
P3	50-55	Germany	family (husband and 2 children)	more than 30 years	Adjustment Stage
P4	45-50	Poland	alone	more than 7 years	Recovery Stage

Continuation of table 1

P5	40-45	India	family (husband and son)	more than 7 years	Recovery Stage
		Forced migration/ Country			
P6	50-55	Sweden	alone	about 2 years	Crisis Stage
P7	55-60	The UK	family (with a son)	about 3 years	Crisis Stage
P8	50-55	Switzerland	family (husband and son)	about 3 years	Recovery Stage
P9	45-50	Scotland	family (with a son)	about 3 years	Adjustment Stage
P10	50-55	Poland	family (with mom)	about 3 years	Crisis Stage

* P1, P2, etc. stand for participant 1, participant 2, etc.

In addition to the information on participants' age, country they are living in, forced or voluntary migration, whether they are living there alone or with their families, the duration of their migration, they were also asked to identify the stage of their cultural shock.

Various factors influence people's attitudes and ability to adjust: the duration of living abroad, personal experiences, an individual's "fit" to a particular culture, and others. The survey showed that four Ukrainian women in voluntary migration identified the stage of their culture shock as Recovery. Three out of five Ukrainian women in forced migration associate their stage of cultural shock with Crisis, one with Recovery. One woman who has been living in Germany with her family for more than 30 years is in her Adjustment Stage, and the woman who migrated to Scotland three years ago has already moved to the Adjustment stage. The duration of progression through the stages of cultural shock varies across individuals.

The open-ended questions in Google Forms were aimed at clarifying information about the experiences of Ukrainian women who took part in this study. They had to cope with a wide range of emotions, both in forced and voluntary migration. Anxiety, homesickness, and curiosity (Figure 1) prevail. Other emotions the participants went through were excitement, confusion, frustration, anger, relief, and happiness. Anger was experienced by participant 2 (P2) in voluntary migration and by participant 8 (P8) in forced migration. P3 got relief in voluntary migration, and P8 felt happy in forced migration.

The results for the Likert scale question: Rate the importance of cultural understanding in overcoming culture shock on a scale of 1-5, where 1 means unimportant and 5 is extremely important, are as follows: 7 participants chose 5 (extremely important) and 2 participants chose 4, which is interpreted as very important.

P2 and P3 in voluntary migration and P7 in forced migration mentioned in the survey they did they felt comfortable with such aspects of a new culture as language, food, social norms, and traditions. P1 in voluntary migration feels uncomfortable with aspects such as language and food. P6 in forced migration feels uncomfortable with language, food, and social norms, whereas P8 is uncomfortable with language but comfortable with food. As mentioned earlier, all participants are fluent English speakers, but language issues arise depending on which country they relocated to.

The results of the responses to the survey question: "What strategies have you used to cope with culture shock?" are presented in Figure 2.

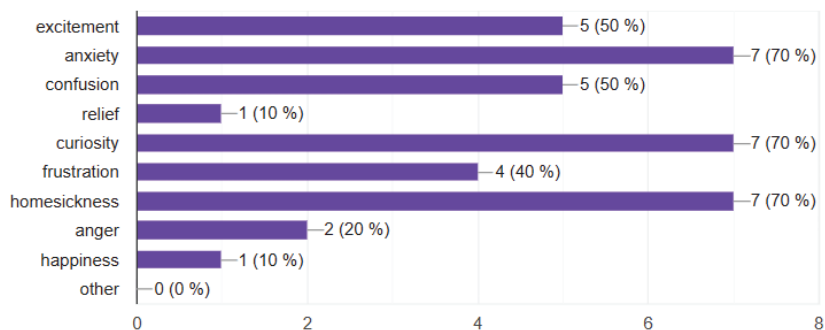


Fig. 1. Emotions experienced by Ukrainian women in forced and voluntary migration

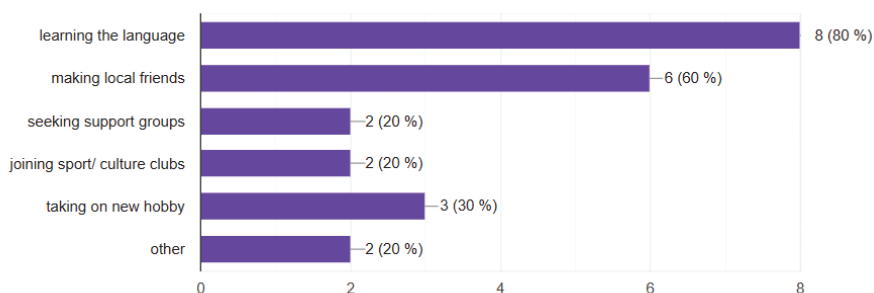


Fig. 2. Strategies used by Ukrainian women in forced and voluntary migration to cope with culture shock

Learning the language was mentioned by 4 Ukrainian women in forced and 4 in voluntary migration as one of the effective strategies to cope with culture shock. This variant was followed by making local friends and taking on a new hobby. 2 women (1 in forced, 1 in voluntary migration) prefer seeking support groups, and 2 participants in voluntary migration prefer joining sports or culture clubs.

The following aspects and elements in new cultures were listed by the Ukrainian women as the most intriguing and interesting: history, philosophy, spirituality, cuisine, festivals, cinema, music and dance, art, and fashion. The most preferred method of learning about a new culture among the interviewed Ukrainian women, both in voluntary and forced migration, mentioned by 8 participants, is excursions, followed by books (4 choices), travel guides, and movies (3 choices each).

Only P6 in forced migration will seek professional help if culture shock becomes overwhelming; other women, both in voluntary and forced migration, will unlikely do it or are not sure about it.

The Ukrainian women, who took part in this study, use various ways to preserve their cultural identity in a new culture, regardless of the reasons for migration, duration of living in a new culture, plans for the future, etc. These practices include speaking a native language with family members or with colleagues and fellow nationals (it was mentioned by all

10 participants), celebrating traditional holidays and cooking Ukrainian dishes, attending events that showcase Ukrainian culture, reading books, watching films, and media in the native language. Following or creating blogs or YouTube channels focused on Ukrainian culture was mentioned by four women as a way to keep their cultural identity abroad.

To obtain additional information on the Ukrainian women’s unique experiences, the phenomenological interviews were conducted both online (via WhatsApp, Facebook messaging) and offline (the author personally visited participants living in Italy, Poland, and India). A software program MAXQDA was used for a thematic analysis.

Thematic analysis was selected as it allows for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns within qualitative data, providing both flexibility and depth. It is well-suited for exploring participants’ subjective experiences and meanings, which were central to this study’s aims. Thematic analysis was performed following Braun and Clarke’s (2006) six-step approach: *Familiarization with the data* – Transcripts were read multiple times while noting initial observations. *Generating initial codes* – Relevant text segments were highlighted and assigned concise descriptive labels (codes) in the margins of printed transcripts. *Searching for themes* – Codes were grouped into potential themes based on conceptual similarity and relevance to the research questions. *Reviewing themes* – Potential themes were compared against the dataset to ensure they accurately represented the data and did not overlap. *Defining and naming themes* – Each theme was clearly defined, capturing its essence and distinct contribution to understanding the phenomenon. *Producing the report* – Themes were organized logically, supported by direct quotes from participants, and integrated into the analytical narrative. The results are presented in Tables 2 and 3.

Table 2

Cultural Adaptation Challenges

Theme	Codes	Examples / Quotes
1. Language and Communication Barriers	- Language barrier - Dialect difficulties - Fear of making mistakes	- “Difficulties to feel comfortable without perfect language knowledge, feeling you are a stranger, fear of making behavioral mistakes.” - “The Scottish language is often difficult to understand, especially when you talk to people living in small towns and villages.” - “People, even those at fault, were never apologetic, quite often excluded from a conversation due to a language barrier.”
2. Social Exclusion and Feeling of Inferiority	- Perceived inequality - Stereotyping - Disrespect for qualifications	- “We feel invisible here, as if we are nobody.” - “The locals often perceive Ukrainians as illiterate and poor.” - “Our education seems irrelevant to their system and lifestyle.”
3. Differences in Social Norms and Behaviour	- Cultural habits - Unreliable social interaction - Noise & alcohol use	- “Visitors (to 'my' flat) don't take their shoes off and don't wash hands.” - “People smile, promise to help or do something, but then don't fulfil their promise.” - “I don't socialize with locals as they consume a lot of alcohol and are very noisy.”

Continuation of table 2

4. Employment and Professional Barriers	- Difficulty finding a job - Devaluation of credentials	- "I still can't find an appropriate job even though there is no longer a language barrier." - "Our education seems irrelevant to their system and lifestyle."
5. Adaptation to Local Environment and Infrastructure	- Food availability - Public facilities - Child behavior	- "Problem buying food, which I used to." - "No toilet paper in public toilets." - "Children are not attended in our area and can be really aggressive."
6. Value and Mentality Differences	- Life values - Mentality gap	- "New ways of approaching life values." - "Different mentality."

It's important to mention that in addition to the themes presented in the table, some other topics arose during the communication with the women who participated in this research. The conversations were open, frank, and sentimental. Some women asked not to mention the exact words or the details of the stories they shared. For example, 7 out of 10 emphasized that in a migration, either they or their relatives, colleagues, or friends faced a negative and even aggressive attitude or behaviour from the citizens of the country they moved to.

P1 and P2 in voluntary migration, as well as P6 and P10 in forced migration, have encountered problems with health care, medical systems, and hospitals in the foreign countries where they are living now. The participants mentioned either the expensive service or the need to wait for the doctor's arrangements. It's problematic to buy medicines without a doctor's prescription. In some cases, there is no privacy (the doctors may discuss the health issues with other patients or medical staff). So, Ukrainian women choose to go to Ukraine even in wartime to visit dentists or undergo examination.

Different climates can also be problematic to get used to. P1 mentioned the absence of central heating in Indian homes, therefore, it's very cold in the wintertime. It gets around +12°C in a flat. In contrast, in summer, it's extremely humid and the temperature increases to +45°C. Such conditions affect health and work performance. Some other challenges Ukrainian women have faced in both voluntary and forced migration include different food (either extremely spicy or no possibility to buy some products), different educational systems, some customs and traditions, attitude to time and punctuality, etc.

Table 3

Resources for Cultural Adaptation

Theme	Codes	Examples/ Quotes
1. Language and Cultural Learning	- Language learning - Watching videos	- "Language learning, watching videos about the host country, and travelling around the country."
2. Social Relationships and Support	- Local friendships - Spouse as a cultural guide - Networking	- "Find local friends" - "Since my husband is Italian... I used him as a resource..." - "Personal observations, networking..."

Continuation of table 3

3. Experiential Learning	- Travel - Observation - Daily interactions	- “Travelling and learning about the place I live.” - “I prefer to communicate with the locals and observe people...”
4. Digital and Media Resources	- YouTube - Telegram	- “Reading about the culture in Telegram channels, watching YouTube videos...”
5. Institutional Integration	- Education - Employment - Volunteering	- “Studies, job” - “Later, volunteering and thus closer contacts with local organisations.”
6. Community and Religion	- Church - Ukrainian peer sharing	- “...networking, church.” - “...sharing useful information about experiences here with other Ukrainians.”

Ukrainian women who left the country because of the full-scale war in February 2022, even now, after three and a half years, are facing various psychological and physiological problems. They suffer from chronic stress, depression, hypertension, headaches, insomnia, eating disorders, and other issues.

There is a constant worry about the family members and friends who stayed in Ukraine among the women in both forced and voluntary migration. P4 is concerned about two adult sons who can’t leave Ukraine and her mother, who doesn’t want to move abroad. There has been a state of uncertainty for some of them. P1 says: “I want to return to Ukraine, but only when the war ends.” P10 doesn’t want to settle in Poland, at the same time, she doesn’t know how soon she will be able to return to her home in Ukraine. P6 doesn’t want to learn the language; she thinks she is not young enough to start everything from the beginning, she is depressed and pessimistic, and not motivated at all to integrate into a new culture. She is the person who confirmed the need for professional psychological help. Five out of ten interviewed women plan to go back to their home country. The rest, especially those with their families, will not return to Ukraine even after the end of the Russian-Ukrainian war.

4. Discussion of the results and directions for further research

Several findings emerged from this research, which enrich the existing literature by providing a remarkable insight into the nature of cross-cultural adaptation. This study filled the knowledge gaps by investigating the strategies of preserving cultural identity as well as challenges and resources for cross-cultural adaptation of Ukrainian women aged 35–60 in forced and voluntary migration.

At the same time, our results are consistent with previous research (*Synowiec, 2022; Andrushko, 2024; Ishchenko et al., 2024*) reporting anxiety, frustration, and depression among Ukrainians caused by uncertainty of the future, loss of stability, and experience of migration to new cultures. The report of Feniks (a charitable organization supporting the Central Eastern European community in Edinburgh and Scotland) also emphasized mental health issues of Ukrainian forced migrants (2023).

The majority of the respondents in this study pointed out that cultural understanding in overcoming culture shock is very important, which aligns with the idea stated in another research that it’s essential to examine to what extent individuals make efforts to understand and assimilate the new culture and identify with it (*Kolinko, 2024*).

In findings of her research, based on interviews and own observations conducted at one of refugee aid points in Poland, Synowiec A. (2022) lists the following barriers to cultural adaptation: language barrier, temporality/liminality of the situation of exile, trauma and psychological stress, limited access to childcare, stereotyping, lack of networks, high expectations of the host community towards refugees. In our case study, almost all of them were mentioned by the Ukrainian women in forced as well as voluntary migration.

Language issues emerged multiple times as a barrier, at the same time as a resource for cross-cultural adaptation, and as a strategy for preserving cultural identity. Ten women participating in this research have a good command of English from upper intermediate to proficiency. But still, they have frequently faced communication problems, which lead to misunderstanding even in English-speaking countries such as India and Scotland, owing to different accents.

In non-English language countries, the Ukrainian women face problems with foreign languages, for instance, Swedish or German. Even though those countries offer language courses, migrants either don't see the sense of studying the language if they plan to come back soon, or the language is not easy to learn, especially at their age. Sharing her experience, P8 responded: "While they perceive you as a tourist, English is enough. But as soon as they find out you are a refugee, they immediately switch to the German language." Language as a barrier for communication and cross-cultural adaptation was widely mentioned in publications of other scholars: Andrushko (2025), Kolinko (2019), Synowiec (2022).

Other problems that affect cultural adaptation are connected with service provision. Differences in performing medical services in Ukraine and abroad lead to disappointment. Oliynyk O. and Oliynyk A. (2024) emphasized that the majority of Ukrainian respondents identified issues related to the organization of medical care as their primary concern. This resonates with the results of our research.

The results of our work match other findings on the most effective methods to learn about a new culture. The Ukrainian women, both in voluntary and forced migration, mentioned excursions, books, travel guides, and movies. Apart from travelling as a way of learning about the host country, the respondents in the study done by Reic I. (2023) indicated reading books, watching television programs, and documentaries.

The findings of the present study also align with the literature on the ways of preserving cultural identity. Andrushko Y. and Lupei M. (2025) pointed out in their study that many migrants continue to value their cultural traditions while also adapting to new social and cultural settings. We have similar observations.

Smetanska M. and Rubtsova S. (2025) report that in many countries, Ukrainians "participate in cultural and artistic programs, learning about the traditions of other nations while also promoting Ukrainian culture." The researchers mention that Ukrainian communities exist in many European cities and towns. Members of these associations celebrate national holidays, organize cultural events, thus promoting Ukrainian culture and preserving cultural identity. Similar ideas were voiced during phenomenological interviews in our study.

As mentioned earlier, half of the Ukrainian women, who participated in our study, plan to stay abroad. According to polls conducted for the Center for Economic Strategy, a Ukrainian think tank, the proportion of refugees who definitely or probably want to return to Ukraine is less than 50 percent (Sysak et al., 2025). They dream about the victory of Ukraine in the cruel and devastating war. However, they envision their own future and the future of their children abroad despite the challenges they face. The reason is more stability, better education for children and job opportunities for themselves, and higher levels of economy.

Adaptation abroad is harder when the host culture is very different from one's own (Wang & Varma, 2019; Setti et al., 2022). If the cultures are very different, the person has to implement more changes, which makes the process harder. If the cultures are more alike, it is usually easier to adapt. In short, the bigger the cultural gap, the harder it is to adjust. This can also be concluded from our observations and findings. The Ukrainian women in forced and voluntary migration in Poland, for instance, reported fewer challenges in comparison with females who moved to India, Sweden, or Scotland.

The presented case study fills the knowledge gap by investigating the cultural identity and cross-cultural adaptation of the Ukrainian women in age span 35–60 in forced and voluntary migration. It provides better insight into personal experiences and contributes to migration research by showing how gender, culture, and migration type intersect in shaping adaptation.

Limitations. In spite of the similarity of some responses of women in forced and voluntary migration, their unique experiences cannot be compared. Moreover, despite the fact that there is a match to some extent with the findings in the cited literature, our results may not apply to all Ukrainian women or other migrant groups. Other limitations include sample bias and subjectivity of experiences. Participants do not represent the diversity of education, socioeconomic background, or regions of Ukraine. Adaptation is personal – different women may interpret and report their experiences differently. Besides already noted points, migrants may not accurately remember or may selectively share their past experiences, especially in traumatic situations. Findings may depend heavily on the host country's policies, support systems, and cultural environment, which limit broader application.

The implications of this study and directions for further research. The findings can help NGOs, psychologists, and social workers design more effective integration and mental health support. Further longitudinal studies can be conducted to explore how adaptation evolves over time. Studying family and intergenerational dynamics can reveal how children or spouses influence women's cross-cultural adaptation.

5. Conclusions

In conclusion, this study aimed to fill the knowledge gaps by investigating the ways of preserving cultural identity and cross-cultural adaptation of the Ukrainian women in age span 35–60 in forced and voluntary migration. The rationale for doing the case study among Ukrainian women was justified by the fact that most Ukrainian refugees in the Russian-Ukrainian war are women and children. Studying both forced and voluntary migration within this group sheds light on the ways of preserving cultural identity abroad. Women in this age range often face age-specific challenges in migration, such as career disruptions, health issues, or caring responsibilities for both children and aging parents. Ukrainian women aged 35–60 are under-represented in research, yet they may play pivotal roles in community building and family stabilization post-migration.

The results of the survey and phenomenological interviews revealed the following challenges the Ukrainian women face in forced and voluntary migration: language and communication barriers, social exclusion, differences in social norms, employment and professional obstacles. The stages of culture shock were identified. Emotions that prevail in forced and voluntary migration among the participants include anxiety, homesickness, and curiosity. The resources for cultural adaptation, such as social relationships and support, experiential learning, digital and media means, were analyzed in this study.

The Ukrainian women, who took part in this study, use various ways to preserve their cultural identity in a new culture regardless of the reasons for migration, duration of living in a new culture, and plans for the future. These practices include speaking a native language with family members or with colleagues and fellow nationals, celebrating traditional holidays and cooking Ukrainian dishes, attending events that showcase Ukrainian culture, reading books, watching films in the native language, and following blogs or YouTube channels focused on national culture. The findings of the research can help NGOs, psychologists, and social workers design more effective integration and mental health support for migrants.

References

1. Abdyrakhmanova, K. & Poór, J. (2023). *The role of emotional intelligence and cross-cultural adjustment on job performance of self-initiated expatriates with origins from Central Asian countries*. *Journal of Eastern European and Central Asian Research*. 326-338.
2. Andrushko, Y. and Lupei, M. (2025). *Acculturation Processes and the Experience of Traumatization in the Case of Forced Ukrainian Migrants*. *Int J Psychol*, 60: e70036. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ijop.70036>
3. Andrushko, Y.; Lanza, S.T. (2024). *Exploring Resilience and Its Determinants in the Forced Migration of Ukrainian Citizens: A Psychological Perspective*. *Int. J. Environ. Res. Public Health*, 21, 1409. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph21111409>
4. Berry, J.W. (1997). *Immigration, Acculturation, and Adaptation*. *Appl. Psychol. Int. Rev.*, 46, 5–34.
5. Bhaskar-Shrinivas, P., Harrison, D. A., Shaffer, M. A., & Luk, D. M. (2005). *Input-based and time-based models of international adjustment: Meta-analytic evidence and theoretical extensions*. *Academy of Management Journal*, 48(2), 257-281.
6. Clarke, V., & Braun, V. (2016). *Thematic analysis*. *The Journal of Positive Psychology*, 12(3), 297–298.
7. Feniks. *Counselling, Personal Development and Support Services* (2023). *The Mental Health Needs of the Ukrainian Refugees in Scotland*. Community Research Report. London: Feniks. Counselling, Personal Development and Support Services Ltd. Retrieved 16 August, 2025 from: https://feniks.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Feniks_2023_Ukrainian_Refugees_Mental_Health_Survey_Report.pdf
8. Huff, K.C.; Song, P.; Gresch, E.B. (2014). *Cultural intelligence, personality, and cross-cultural adjustment: A study of expatriates in Japan*. *Int. J. Intercult. Relat.*, 38, 151–157.
9. Ishchenko, Y., Rusnak, A., Artemov, V., Syniavskiy, P., & Soroka, I. (2024). *Psychological and Pedagogical Aspects of Adaptation of Students Who Received Temporary Shelter to the Educational Environment of Another Country*. *Journal of Higher Education Theory and Practice*, 24(1). <https://doi.org/10.33423/jhetp.v24i1.6766>
10. Kolinko, M. (2019). *Intercultural Communication: from Distinction to Inclusion*. In: *Intercultural Communication*, 6(1), pp.189-212.
11. Kolinko, M., & Aleksandrova, O. (2024). *Modern life experience of Ukrainian migrants in the context of intercultural strategies*. *Skhid*, 6(3), 26–31. <https://doi.org/10.21847/2411-3093.633>
12. Kurapov, A., V. Pavlenko, A. Drozdov, V. Bezliudna, A. Reznik, and R. Isralowitz. (2023). *“Toward an Understanding of the Russian-Ukrainian War Impact on University Students and Personnel.”* *Journal of Loss and Trauma* 28, no. 2: 167–174. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15325024.2022.2084838>.

13. Liao, Y.K.; Wu, W.Y.; Dao, T.C.; Ngoc Luu, T.-M. (2021). *The Influence of Emotional Intelligence and Cultural Adaptability on Cross- Cultural Adjustment and Performance with the Mediating Effect of Cross-Cultural Competence: A Study of Expatriates in Taiwan*. *Sustainability*, 13, 3374. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su13063374>
14. Oberg, K. (1960). *Cultural shock: Adjustment to New Cultural Environments (Reprint)*. *Practical Anthropology*, 7(4), 142–146. <https://doi.org/10.1177/009182966000700405>
15. Oliinyk, O., & Oliinyk, A. (2024). *Ukrainian forced migrants in Edinburgh: how the Homes for Ukraine scheme worked*. *Sociological Studios*, 1(24), 69–78. <https://doi.org/10.29038/2306-3971-2024-01-33-33>
16. Oviedo, L., B. Seryczyńska, J. Torralba, et al. (2022). “Coping and Resilience Strategies Among Ukraine War Refugees.” *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* 19, no. 20: 13094. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph192013094>
17. Reic, I. (2023). *Understanding Expatriates' Cultural Adjustment and Performance in International Assignments*. *The Qualitative Report*, 28(9), 2814–2833. <https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2023.5918>
18. Setti, I., Sommovigo, V. & Argentero, P. (2022). *Enhancing expatriates' assignments success: the relationships between cultural intelligence, cross-cultural adaptation and performance*. *Current Psychology*, 41:4291–4311. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12144-020-00931-w>
19. Smetanska, M., & Rubtsova, S. (2025). *PSYCHOLOGICAL REHABILITATION OF DISTANCE LEARNING STUDENTS DURING WAR*. *Academia Polonica*, 69(2), 75–5. <https://doi.org/10.23856/10.23856/6908>
20. Soroka, I. A. (2022). *The phenomenon of war as the booster of violent behaviour. In The Russian-Ukrainian war (2014–2022): historical, political, cultural-educational, religious, economic, and legal aspects*. Riga, Latvia: “Baltija Publishing,” 1398–1407. <https://doi.org/10.30525/978-9934-26-223-4-178>
21. Synowiec, A. (2022). *BARRIERS OF CULTURAL ADAPTATION IN THE CONTEXT OF THE INFLUX OF UKRAINIAN WAR REFUGEES TO POLAND*. *Scientific Papers of Silesian University of Technology Organization and Management Series*, (165), 371–381. <https://doi.org/10.29119/1641-3466.2022.165.26>
22. Sysak, I., Koliesnichenko, T. & Gutterman, I. (2025). *How Many Ukrainians Will Remain In Their Country After The War?* RFE/RL. Retrieved 17 August, 2025 from: <https://www.rferl.org/a/ukraine-population-war-migration-refugees/33347583.html>
23. UN Women. (19 February 2025). *Press release: Three years of full-scale war in Ukraine roll back decades of progress for women's rights, safety and economic opportunities*. Retrieved 17 August, 2025 from: <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news-stories/press-release/2025/02/three-years-of-full-scale-war-in-ukraine-roll-back-decades-of-progress-for-womens-rights-safety-and-economic-opportunities>
24. Wang, C. H., & Varma, A. (2019). *Cultural distance and expatriate failure rates: The moderating role of expatriate management practices*. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 30(15), 2211–2230.
25. Ward, C.; Bochner, St.; Furnham, A. (2005). *The Psychology of Culture Shock*. Philadelphia: Taylor & Francis e-Library.