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## ECONOMIC STATUS, EMIGRATION, AND LIFE SATISFACTION: STRATEGIES OF ACCULTURATION AMONG BELARUSIAN AND UKRAINIAN MIGRANTS IN POLAND BEFORE AND DURING THE WAR

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**ABSTRACT.** The main aim of the study was to investigate the acculturation strategies and life satisfaction of Belarusians and Ukrainians living in Poland. The study participants (N = 423) provided socio-demographic data about themselves, when they came to Poland (before or during the Russian invasion of Ukraine), and filled in the acculturation and the life satisfaction questionnaires. The results indicated no difference in acculturation, education, or economic status between the Belarusians and the Ukrainians. The positive relationship between economic status and life satisfaction, unsurprisingly, was evident. However, it was found that marginalization, discrimination, and assimilation as acculturation strategies were salient among participants who came to Poland before the Russian invasion of Ukraine. The migrants who entered Poland during the war showed sedate attitudes towards Poland. The relationship between the migrants' economic status and the moment of migration (before vs. during the war) and attitudes towards integration became clear. Poor and middle-class migrants consistently show a rather high degree of preference for the best acculturation strategy - integration. Meanwhile, the rich participants showed the highest integration before the war, but the rich who came during the war exhibited the lowest level of integration. This is explained based on the economic literature.

**Keywords:** acculturation, war in Ukraine, income

## Introduction

The main aim of the study is to investigate the acculturation styles among Belarusians and Ukrainians living in Poland. In particular, an important question is how economic status and year of emigration may determine styles of acculturation and well-being among these people. It is difficult to create a single straightforward hypothesis due to the different political situations in Ukraine and Belarus.

## 1. Theoretical background

The problems of immigration and relationships between new settlers and old inhabitants date back to ancient times. In 'Ideal State', Plato described the position of the newcomers and divided them into several groups by economic and social position, which determined their permission to stay (Rachlewicz, 2020). The people of foreign descent are referred to as 'diaspora'. This Greek-origin word means 'to scatter the seeds'. One can understand it as people who come to the country and bring experience, culture, and self-identity from home. Thus, two cultures coexist in a person who emigrates. However, not all individuals that emigrated can be called 'diaspora'. Those, for example, who assimilate completely and have no ties to their home culture cannot be referred to as such (Lapshyna, 2019).

Ukrainian diaspora in the world is divided into three groups: post-World War Two immigrants; their descendants; and those who emigrated after the Declaration of Independence (1991). In Poland, there were only small Ukrainian communities that originated before 1991, associated with the Ukrainians' Union in Poland (Związek Ukraińców w Polsce) (Lapshyna, 2019). We assume that virtually all emigrants belong to the so-called fourth wave<sup>1</sup>. Since February 24, 2022, three million<sup>2</sup> Ukrainians were evacuated to Poland. It is estimated that some of them went on to Western Europe but the majority remained in Poland. Additionally, 10 thousand Belarusians were evacuated through the Ukrainian Border at that time. That implies there is a new wave of emigrants – refugees that can be different from the third wave. All these groups influence the labor markets of hosting communities (Al-Dalahmeh & Dajnoki, 2021) as well as social policy aims and directions (Al-Srehan, 2020; Yurchyk et al., 2023). Ukrainian community is divided also into socioeconomic groups: labour, intellectual, political, and economic. Sorochuk (2014) pointed out that the Ukrainian diaspora is bonded by the church and religion. It saves language and historical heritage, practicing rites and calendar holidays.

Belarusian and Ukrainian nations are close, as they are both East Slavic. Both nations often help each other as they can communicate easily in the country, but they don't speak the local language. Belarusian diaspora is similarly organized to the Ukrainian, as they cooperate in cultural, artistic, and political fields (Koval, 2009).

Acculturation is also affected by technology. The traditional model of adaptation: assimilation, segregation, marginalization, or integration is swayed by the new phenomena called 'transnational diaspora'. They believe in coming back home someday. Reinforce this myth by traveling both virtual and real (Iarmolenko & Kerstetter, 2015).

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<sup>1</sup> The first wave was 19th -20th Century, the second in interwar period, the third is Post-World War II, fourth is post 1991

<sup>2</sup> <https://dane.gov.pl/pl/dataset/2705,dane-statystyczne-dotyczace-sytuacji-na-granicy-z-Ukraina> accessed 03/08/2023

## 2. Strategies of Acculturation

Berry's (1997) theory of acculturation outlines two primary challenges faced by immigrants as they adapt to a new culture: preserving their original cultural identity (how much they value maintaining their own culture) and engaging in intercultural interactions (the extent to which they embrace the new culture of a hosting country). Based on their responses to these challenges, four distinct acculturation strategies emerge: assimilation, separation, marginalization, and integration. Assimilation involves fully adopting the new culture while rejecting ethnic minority culture. Separation occurs when members of an ethnic minority disregard the majority culture and maintain their ethnic characteristics. Ethnocultural marginalization arises when a migrant fails to identify with either the majority or minority culture. On the other hand, integration is characterized by embracing both native and new cultures simultaneously (Berry, 2005; Berry, Phinnely et al., 2006).

Earlier studies conducted in different countries and groups (Berry, 1997; Howard, 1998; Phinney & Devich-Navarro, 1997) showed, that integration strategy (biculturalism) is the most adaptive mode of acculturation compared to involvement with only one culture in case of assimilation and separation or rejection of both cultures in case of marginalization.

## 3. Problem and hypothesis

The most important problem is how Belarusians and Ukrainians sort out their emigration problem, their overall life satisfaction, and what kind of acculturation strategies they apply.

Generally, the better economic status the higher overall life satisfaction (Montano, 2021, Ren, Yue, Xiao, 2022). Socio-economic factors, like higher education, and marriage, have an impact not only on life satisfaction but also on health, like health care, environmental exposure, and health behavior (Lantz et al, 1998; Khalid & Urbański, 2021) and finally emigration decisions (Virak & Bilan, 2022; Mishchuk et al., 2019). Sometimes the reciprocal effect of economic status and life satisfaction is regarded. Much research supports the positive correlation between perceived economic status and positive feelings as well as positive overall life evaluation.

We propose our results shall serve as a replication of the above well-proven idea.

It is interesting, however, how economic status shapes acculturation strategies and whether the interaction effect between economic status and the wave of emigration (before vs. during the war) on acculturation strategies may emerge.

### 3.1. Participants and procedure

N = 423 volunteers, 343 women and 80 men, aged 15 to 81 years of age (M = 26.95, SD = 10.965) filled in a package of questionnaires. N= 113 Belarusians and N = 310 Ukrainians participated in the study. It is inequality of national representation. We are aware of this, however, in the difficult situations of migrants, the pattern mirrors the real situations of migrants. Ukrainians were forced to move to Poland by war.

All individuals volunteered, and they were free to dismiss at each stage of the study. Most participants lived in rather big cities in their country of origin. Belarusians and Ukrainians chose to stay rather in large cities in Poland: up to 50 000 citizens, and above 500 000 citizens. The distribution for both countries is comparable.

Participants learned in detail about the main aim of the study: how they perceive their situation in Poland, how is their overall well-being, and their economic status. They were asked

to assess their attitude towards Poles (so-called discrimination), their stay in Poland (acculturation questionnaire), and perceived overall life satisfaction.

The study was prepared online, using Google Forms and individuals were able to mark the following box only when previously they marked the preceding box.

Afterward, all individuals were thanked. There was no reward for the participation.

### 3.2. The socio-economic characteristic of the group of participants

The education in both nations was comparable (Table 1). As can be seen, most migrants are well-educated.

Table 1. Education among Belarusian and Ukrainian migrants

Level	Belarusian	Ukrainians
	Percent	
Elementary	4	2
Student	5	0
Collage	46	47
Mastery	45	51

Source: *own compilation, own data*

The group was homogenous not only according to education but also to economic status (Table 2)

Table 2. Economic status of Belarusian and Ukrainian migrants

Economic status	Belarusian	Ukrainians
	Percent	
very bad	1	1
bad	11	10
Middle	61	61
Good	24	24
very good	3	4

Source: *own compilation, own data*

Most of the migrants enjoyed middle economic status (61%). Part of them (24% of participants in each nationality) asserted good economic status. Only a small group of people suffered from very bad or bad economic status.

It was crucial to check the moment of leaving the country of origin. We take as a turning point 24.02. 2022, is the beginning of the Russian invasion of Ukraine (Fiszeder & Małecka, 2022). It appeared a similar group of people - Belarusian migrants – migrated to Poland before and after the war (49% to 51%), and Ukrainians fewer individuals (42%) settled in Poland before the war than after the beginning of the tragedy of military invasion (58%) among our participants. See Table 3.

Table 3. Comparison of Belarusian vs. Ukrainian Emigration among our participants according to the beginning of the Russian invasion

Moment of Emigration	Belarusian	Ukrainians
	Percent	
Before Russian Invasion	49	42
After Russian Invasion	51	58

Source: *own compilation, own data*

### 3.3. Acculturation questionnaire

The survey consisted of questions and statements regarding basic social and demographic factors, acculturation strategies, perceived discrimination by Poles, and life satisfaction. The survey was presented to participants in Russian for Belarusians, as this language is widely used by them, and in Ukrainian for Ukrainians. In our study questionnaires created by Berry (2006) aimed to study the acculturation of migrants were used to measure acculturation strategies, perceived discrimination, and life satisfaction. Some items were adjusted to fit the conditions of the study of migrants in Poland. The questionnaire is widely used and has strong accuracy and validity indicators.

The demographic variables were collected, including the following: age, sex, education level, nationality, financial situation, place of residence, and length of residence in Poland (up to 5 years, vs. even months; we divided the whole group by the crucial date 24 February 2022 into two groups: migrant who came to Poland before the war, and those who entered the border during the war).

In our study, 16 items were used to determine acculturation strategies. Participants were asked to rate the extent to which they agree with statements regarding each acculturation strategy on a Likert scale from 1 (absolutely disagree) to 5 (absolutely agree). (see Virglerova et al., 2021). There were 4 determining statements for each strategy: assimilation (acceptance of the new nationality, positive attitude towards the new nationality, previous nationality vanishes), separation (national politics towards keeping migrants separated from the mainstream culture of the new country), marginalization (politics which promotes exclusion of the migrants, they stay within their culture of origin), and integration (keeping the culture of origin while the new culture is accepted). The average value for each scale was calculated and evaluated.

Perceived discrimination was measured with a 5-item Likert scale. Participants were asked to rate on a scale from 1 (absolutely disagree) to 5 (absolutely agree) the level of agreement with statements that included indicators of perceived discriminatory attitudes among Polish citizens to the representatives of a given migrant's nationality. These indicators included beliefs of being treated unfairly and unkindly; feelings of not being accepted by Poles; possessing the belief that Poles have something against participants; experience of being teased or insulted; and experience of being threatened or attacked because of nationality.

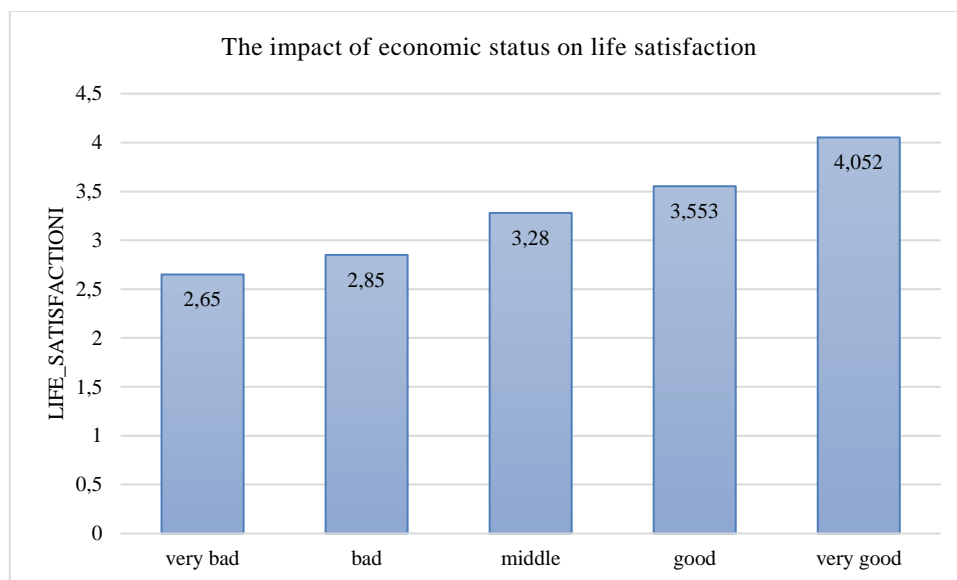
Life satisfaction was measured with a 5-item Likert scale. Participants were asked to evaluate on a scale from 1 (absolutely disagree) to 5 (absolutely agree) the relevance of their vision of their life with the following statements: 1) In many ways my life is close to the ideal; 2) I have excellent living conditions; 3) I am satisfied with my life; 4) I have everything I need in life; 5) If I could live my life one more time, I would not change almost anything in it.

#### 4. Results

The first hypothesis focused on the role of the nation of origin and economic status in acculturation strategies, and overall life satisfaction. We computed an analysis of variance 2 (country of origin) x 5 (the economic status: very bad, bad, middle, good, very good) on all the dependent variables connected with acculturation: assimilation, separation, marginalization, integration, as well as overall life satisfaction, and perceived discrimination. First of all, Levine's test checking homogeneity of variance was provided. The test appeared to be insignificant for almost all the dependent variables, so we could use parametric tests. Only perceived discrimination fails to follow a normal distribution, so we count this dependent variable via nonparametric tests, later.

Only one main effect  $F(4, 413) = 6.392, p < 0.001, \eta^2 = .06$  (6% of the variance is explained by the economic status) emerged, indicating the impact of the economic status on overall life satisfaction. Life satisfaction was shown in terms of the mean of five items. See Graph 1.

No other results emerged.



**Graph 1. The main effect of the economic situation on overall life satisfaction among all the emigrants**

Source: own data, own calculations

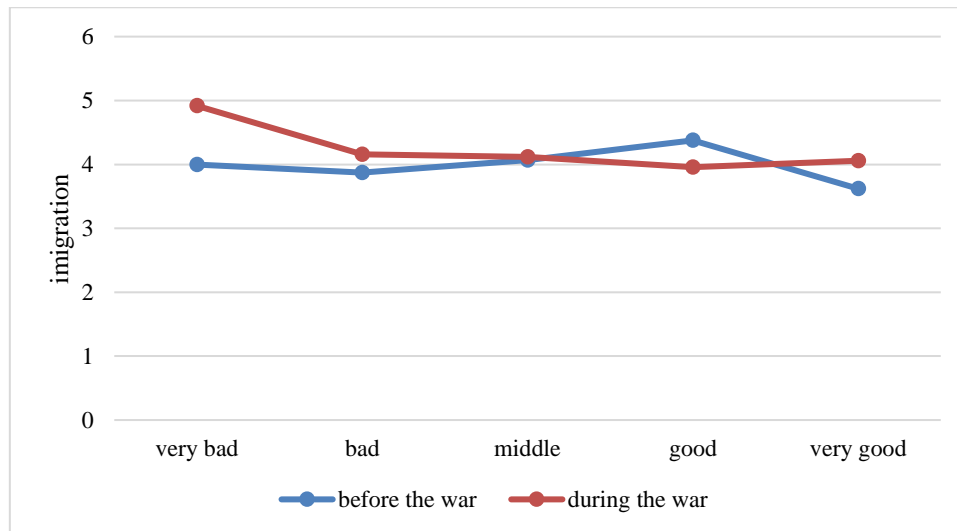
Thus in order to check another hypothesis, that is the role of the turning point of Emigration in time (before the war, or during the war), the role of the nation of origin, and the impact of economic status on acculturation strategies and life satisfaction we have conducted a three-way analysis of variance: 2 (nation) x 2 (emigration time) x 5 (economic status) for acculturation strategies and overall life satisfaction. All dependent variables were the means of appropriate items consisting of subscales.

The whole model was valid Lambda Wilks  $F(5, 401) = 1128.876, p < .0001, \eta^2 = .934$ .

Levene's test indicated the homogeneity of variance equivalent (the test was not significant. It pertains to each variable).

Once more there was no main effect of the nation, one valid main effect of economic status on life satisfaction  $F(4, 405) = 4.727, p < 0.001, \eta^2 = .05$ , indicating the increase in life satisfaction with the increase in economic status. No other main effects appeared.

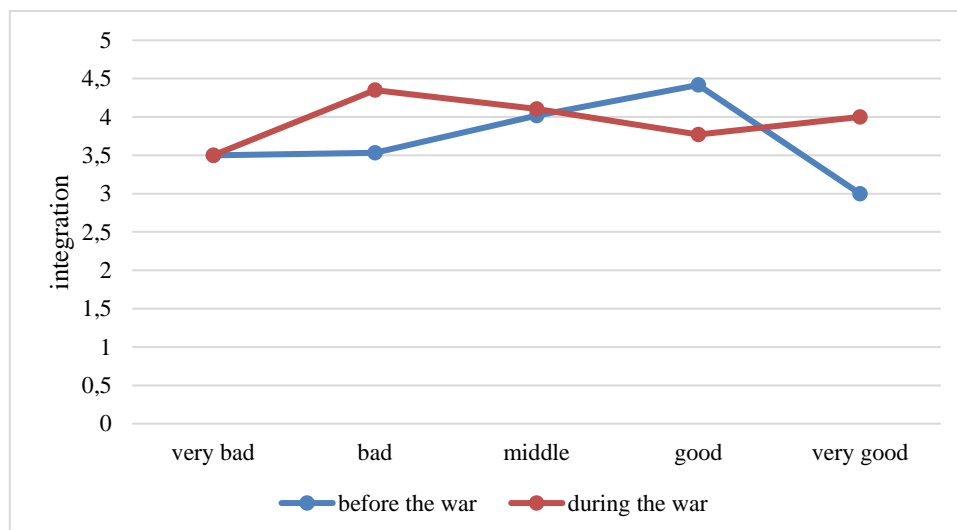
The interaction effect between the timing of emigration (before the war vs. during the war) and the economic status appeared  $F(4, 405) = 2.420$ ,  $p = 0.048$ ,  $\eta^2 = 0.023$  for integration, indicating a higher migrant tendency to integrate during the war. Before the war, when the reason for migration was rather economic the level of integration seemed to be lower among migrants in bad and very good economic situations (see Graph 2).



**Graph 2. The interaction between the timing of migration and the economic status**

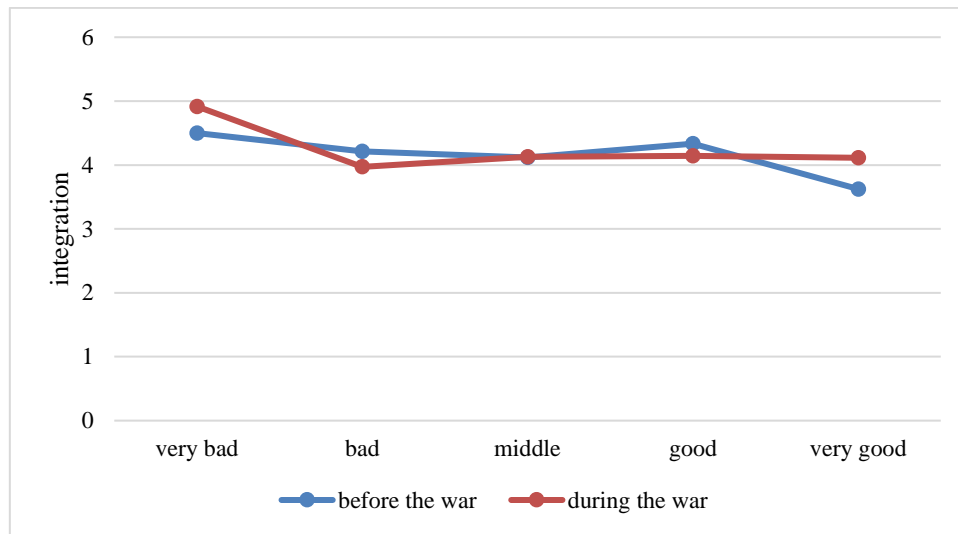
The results suggest two different diasporas – the one that came before the war, probably because of economic or political reasons. Migrants who suffered from poverty or who had been very wealthy had no reason to think about acculturation. More reasonable for them was further immigration to another country. The second diaspora individuals who came to Poland during the Russian invasion of Ukraine revealed enough rationalities for integration.

What's more three-way interaction effect nation x the timing of migration x economic status for integration emerged:  $F(2, 405) = 3.336$ ,  $p = 0.036$ ,  $\eta^2 = 0.02$ . The results are shown on graph 8, and 9.



**Graph 3. The interaction between economic status and the timing of migration for Belarusians**

Source: own data, own calculations

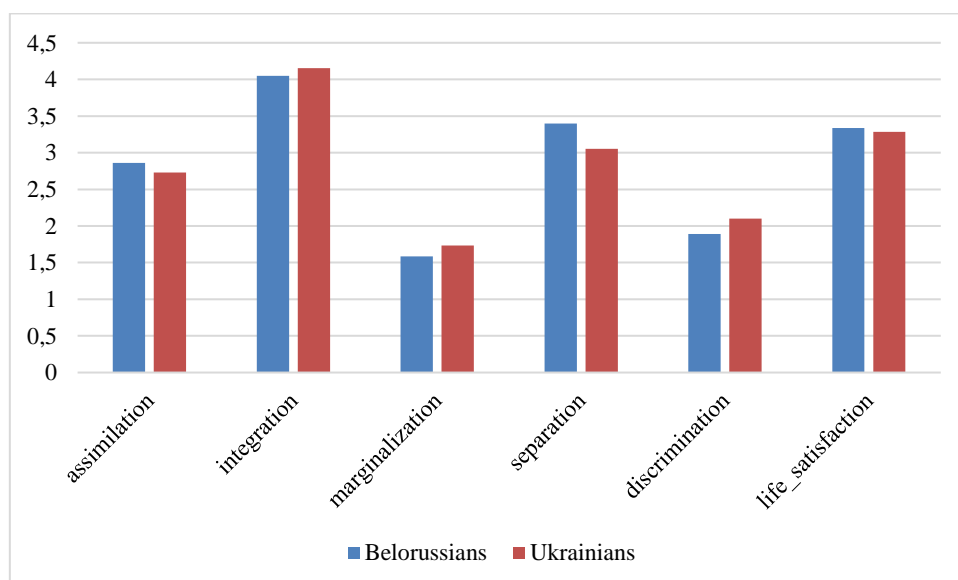


**Graph 4. The interaction effect between economic status and the timing of migration for Ukrainians**

Source: *own data, own calculations*

Graphs 3 and 4 pointed out no impact of the interaction between economic status and the timing of migration in the case of Ukrainians and valid interaction among Belarusians. The latter community showed a more stable pattern of integration when migrated during the war than before the war.

We counted the nonparametric Kruskal – Wallis test for the country as an independent variable, and perceived discrimination as a dependent variable. The test appeared to be insignificant  $H(1) = 1.77, n. s.$  We also counted the role of country for all the dependent variables using the t-Student simple test, which can be applied for equal variance as well as inequality of variance.



**Graph 5. Acculturation, discrimination, and life satisfaction among Ukrainians and Belarussians in Poland**

Source: *own data, own calculations*



The only valid difference between countries appeared for perceived discrimination  $t(421) = -2.011$   $p = 0.022$ . Ukrainians feel more unpleasant and hostile actions undertaken by Poles than Bellorussians do. It is a great work to do among Poles and a large place for education. Teaching tolerance, love, and approval for each person is needed from the very beginning of human lives.

The low level of marginalization is gleeful. However, a tendency for separation may mean a willingness to migrate elsewhere.

## Discussion

What we found is no differences between Belarusians and Ukrainians in life satisfaction and strategies of acculturation. Some differences might be suspected due to different political situations. The role of being a migrant is the same probably for humans wherever she/he goes apart from their country of origin.

The main factor determining overall life satisfaction was individual economic status. Congruently to the economic and psychological literature, the higher the economic status of the migrants the more life satisfaction participants evince. Frustration and stress become calmed down by economic safety to some extent.

The effects of marginalization, assimilation, and discrimination before and after the Ukrainian War (24th February 2022) differ significantly. Before the war acculturation strategies seemed to be salient. Probably part of the participants did not want to be close to the Polish culture, however, another part of the migrants wanted to be immersed completely in the Polish environment, even forgetting their own culture. Of the migrants who came to Poland during the war – the second wave of immigration or second diaspora, they did not express extreme attitudes toward Poland, and the level of acculturation strategies was not pronounced. The possible explanation may lie in difficult situations all over the world, uncertainty about the future, and the sense of impermanency. Razumkov, (2022) stated that crossing the border most Ukrainians (nearly 80%) had planned back home soon. After the War broke out, Ukrainians that had come to Poland could count on both government and people's help. The Government immediately introduced numerous programs and money grants to ensure the best start in the new country, this included the equal right to social, and medical care and the labor market (Gerlach & Ryndzak, 2022). In spite of the fact, that Ukrainian migrants become a diaspora in Poland, their children attend local schools they have ties with their homeland. The new situation for both nations and Poles as well acted very fast on people's attitudes. According to Mieroszewski Center's Poll (2022), 73% of Ukrainian stated that they change their opinion on Poles (improvs), however 27% stated that the help is due to possessing cheap labour. These numbers show an ambivalent attitude of part of Ukrainians and for most migrants a rather positive change toward Poles.

For all the economic groups a good perception of Poles can be associated with military and humanitarian aid for Ukraine, as it is perceived as selfless. The poorest Ukrainians improved their financial position. One should note, that unlike most developed countries newcomers start with low-paid entry-level jobs. The Polish labour market is somewhat odd. There is a shortage of labour force in many branches such as construction, tourism, industry, and retail. In 2022 mentioned branches' average wages were similar to the national average, except for tourism, but compared to 2021 raise in average wage was 12% (GUS – Polish Statistical Office, 2023). We haven't got proven comparable information about Belarusians.

Another question arises, why rich people integrate more with Poles since Ukrainian War broke out. We can discuss the motivation of rich Ukrainians and Belarusians to stay in Poland. One of them can be running a business, as both countries coming closer, economically too. In

2022 7% of all the firms in Poland had Ukrainian capital, but mostly there were one-person businesses, mainly construction, retail, and transport (Polish Economic Institute, 2023). Rich Belarusian and Ukrainian bought real estate in Poland on record, that is 5.2% and 24.3% by number of all estate bought by foreigners released from Ministry of Internal affair permission<sup>3</sup>. That implies that rich people have trust in the Polish economy and see their future here. Wealthy people often want a good education for their children. That confirms the fast-growing number of Belarusian and Ukrainian students in Poland. In 2022 state Universities studied 22 thousand Ukrainian students. In 2021 Belarusian students were 13% and Ukrainian 42% of all the foreign students<sup>4</sup>. Since the war government and universities provided vast help: dormitories, financial support, exempted from tuition. Nevertheless, yet in Poland, there are expensive costs of living, so studying without work or financial support would be hard.

The sticking point is the group with ‘good income’, so the middle class. In the Ukraine middle class is different than in western developed economies. Only couple percent of society feels that they belong to this group. On the other hand there are skilled workers, educated man, pensioners. Their characteristic is that they like to dominate and integrate only within their own social class (Razmukov, 2016). Nevertheless, migrants that came after War broke out complain on: Caring for loved ones and loved ones who stayed in Ukraine, Concern about what is happening in Ukraine and nostalgia<sup>5</sup>. So that could be the reason not to integrate with new country.

Thus, there is a strong connection between the War, economic status, and acculturation strategies toward Poland among Belarusian and Ukrainians. As Ukrainians and Belarusians for many years look for help on emigration due to close cultural ties and language, they share similar attitudes. Since the invasion, much help from the Polish people and government was appreciated and taken with kindness. That changed the attitude towards Poles to a strong positive. The most among poor people are as they get very much financial and in-kind help relative to their previous income, and rich people as they get new opportunities to allocate their wealth safely and new perspective to run a business. But this opportunities was not for all a game changer in integration with Poles. Rich people and middle class didn’t experienced government help as a injection of money, simply because they were rich before. They suffer war trauma, maybe they lost their wealth in the war, but surly they felt nostalgia, worry about family and situation in the country.

### Limitations of the study

The sample was not as large as we expected, however, the results shed new light on the acculturation of the Belarusian and Ukrainian diaspora during this year.

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<sup>3</sup> Sejm, print no. 3149, p. 53

<sup>4</sup> Forum Akademickie 2023-03-02 and Forum Akademickie 2022-11-30

<sup>5</sup> <https://razmukov.org.ua/napriamky/sotsiologichni-doslidzhennia/nastroi-ta-otsinky-ukrainskykh-bizhentsiv-lypen-serpen-2022p>

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