

PERSPECTIVES OF YOUNG PEOPLE IN UKRAINE FOLLOWING THE AGGRESSION OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION

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Abstract: *The war launched by the Russian Federation against Ukraine marks a stage in contemporary history that led and continues to lead to changes on several levels, economic, social, political and even cultural. This crisis creates challenges for the international community, among which we highlight supply chain disruptions, market volatility, resource insecurity, human migration and significant geopolitical changes. In this research, is considered to identify, observe and analyze the perspectives of the youth of Ukraine in the current situation caused by the war. For the present study, I interviewed a group of students from Ukraine, who participated in an Erasmus+ project carried out in Romania in the municipality of Tulcea at the end of October 2022. Unfortunately, I was limited by some aspects during the conduct of these interviews, such as the fact that all the interview participants were female, which was caused by the martial law established in the neighboring country, which prohibits men over the age of 18 from leaving the territory of Ukraine. Because of this aspect, only young women between the ages of 17 and 30 took part in the interview. The interviewees are students at the National University of Uzhhorod. The interviews were conducted both in English and in Ukrainian, being a connoisseur of the Ukrainian language, so the information was transmitted in a much clearer way, many of the students not knowing English very well. The results of the study were summarized and presented in the article in a descriptive form.*

Keywords: *perspectives; youth; Ukraine; war.*

JEL Classification: **D70; D74; I20; I30; N40.**

Introduction

The war launched by the Russian Federation against Ukraine marks a stage in contemporary history that led and continues to lead to changes on several levels, economic, social, political and even cultural. This conflict has its origins in 2014, when Russian troops invaded Crimea and began supporting pro-Russian separatists in eastern Ukraine. It soon became known as the "Cold War" causing severe tensions between Ukraine and Russia. The conflict has resulted in numerous military actions, including bombings, assassinations, kidnappings, as well as suffering in civil society. Both countries are important global players in the generation of resources, especially energy, food and fertilizers. The economic sanctions from the responsible bodies resulted in an explosion of prices for the respective resources. This crisis creates challenges for the international community, among which we highlight supply chain disruptions, market volatility, resource insecurity, human migration and significant geopolitical changes. The conflict represents Europe's biggest security crisis since the violent breakup of the Yugoslav Federation in the 1990s. This situation has called for unprecedented decisions on security and defence, humanitarian aid, EU enlargement and energy security.

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At the moment, this conflict is still not over, unfortunately there are no clear indications that define its ending in the near future. Ukraine continues to defend its territorial integrity and citizens against the aggressor. The conflict has led to political and economic tensions both between Ukraine and Russia and around the world. Numerous countries and international organizations provide support to Ukraine. The European Union (EU) is providing assistance for the economic and political restructuring of Ukraine and for strengthening the rule of law. The United States provides aid to Ukraine consisting of food, energy, security and infrastructure. NATO provides security assistance to Ukraine and supports political and economic reforms.

In this research, it is considered to identify, observe and analyze the perspectives of the youth of Ukraine in the current situation caused by the war. More specifically, I want to identify how young people report on Russian aggression against their country, what are their perspectives in terms of education, finding a job during the conflict and post-conflict. It is also desired to identify their opinion on who was more involved in helping the citizens of Ukraine during the aggression from the Russian Federation. I believe that this research is important, because through it we will identify what are the prospects for young people in Ukraine in terms of continuing their studies, finding a job, whether or not they want to stay in their native country. This study will contribute by providing a forecast of what the labor market will look like in Ukraine and in Ukraine's neighboring areas.

Young people in Ukraine have been directly affected by the conflict with the Russian Federation. Many of them being forced to move from the affected regions, separated from their families and at risk of being recruited into the armed forces. Charting life perspectives is one of the developmental tasks of adolescence. Expectations about one's future are shaped by cultural and contextual factors. However, there are few cross-cultural studies and researches that include countries affected by war and conflict.

Following the launch of the attack on Ukraine, millions of citizens chose to leave the territory of the country in their flight from the path of war. As a direct response to this migration, the European Union adopted a temporary protection scheme for people fleeing Ukraine as a result of the war, thereby facilitating access to fundamental rights including basic healthcare, education, housing and welfare rights (Pirozzi N. and Dzidzic L., 2022). Since the beginning of the conflict, the situation in Ukraine is deteriorating day by day, the number of victims is increasing day by day, and the number of people choosing to leave the territory is also increasing. The main countries that Ukrainian citizens choose to move to are nearby countries such as Poland, Romania, Republic of Moldova, Slovakia and Hungary. Poland and Romania offered their help and openness to refugees fleeing the war, an aspect due to the high solidarity and involvement of the citizens of the two countries.

Although at the moment the evolution of the conflict is not very clear, the Ukrainian people are solidly unified, this fact emerges from a survey carried out in mid-March 2022 by the Rating Group of Ukraine, "here it was found that 93% of the participants believe that Ukraine will emerge victorious and 98% consider Russia as a hostile nation" (Rating Group, 2022). In the event of a Ukrainian victory, the post-war prospects will be enhanced by significant Western assistance and funding, as well as a potential acceleration of the EU accession process.

The conflict situation has generated very serious ramifications for the food and energy markets of the world, which with the passage of time could have a domino effect on the economy and culture of other countries. Both countries are major players in the global energy, food and fertilizer industries. Russia is the third largest producer and exporter of oil in the world; the second largest producer and exporter of natural gas and the third largest exporter of coal. Russia is also the world's largest exporter of wheat and the second largest exporter of sunflower oil (Statistical Review of World Energy, 2022). As the main exporter of sunflower oil, the fourth largest exporter of corn and the fifth largest exporter of wheat, Ukraine is equally important to the world's food markets (Chatham House, 2020). The likelihood of catastrophic "cascade effects" on economies and

societies around the world will increase as the influence of the Ukraine crisis on global resource markets increases. This is because it is doubtful that the conflict in Ukraine will be resolved in the near future.

This aspect ends up falling directly on the residents of the affected country, in the present situation, referring to Ukraine, when a household's income ends up being extremely low, it has to make difficult decisions, such as choosing between food and heating. Living without heat poses serious health risks, especially for the elderly, and energy poverty can lead people to engage in dangerous behaviors such as using stoves and other life-threatening means as heating sources.

The years following the war are often characterized by land disputes resulting in violence and social disorder within communities (Betancourt T. S., McBain R. K., Newnham E. A., and Brennan R. T., 2014), economic hardship, and an increase in family violence (Catani C., Jacob N., Schauer E., Kohila, M. and Neuner F., 2008). These aspects are highlighted and confirmed in research from countries that have experienced similar conflicts.

The purpose of this article is to identify what are the prospects for young people in Ukraine and whether the conflict generated by the Russian Federation affects their lives and future in terms of educational progress, finding a job. These children's hopes and concerns for their own futures seem all the more important because they will play a significant role in rebuilding and reorganizing their towns and shaping their nation's destiny, not just their own. The effects of war are much worse in low-income environments and areas, which are unable to recover in a short period of time, facing the effects of poverty, broken families, destroyed public services, political instability and potential military conflicts.

Armed violence and homelessness can have negative effects on young people in Ukraine, leading to suicide, living in a state of constant stress, substance abuse and other such problems. Over time, they end up affecting both the physical and mental health of the young generation. The normal rhythm of life of modern young people is disrupted by war, which causes moral trauma and makes it difficult for them to achieve their goals and make their values stand out. The ongoing armed war and difficult socio-political circumstances have a negative effect on all young people in Ukraine, not only those attending educational institutions in the occupied regions.

Materials and methods

For the present study, it was used to interview a group of students from Ukraine, who participated in an Erasmus+ project carried out in Romania in the municipality of Tulcea at the end of October 2022. The mobility for youth was called "Boost the European feeling", in that mobility a number of 60 young people participated, 30 young people arrived from Ukraine, and the other 30 were young ethnic Ukrainians from Romania. The Union of Ukrainians from Romania was the organizer of this mobility carried out in partnership with the University of Uzhhorod and financed by the European Commission. During this action, I received the acceptance of a number of 21 people from Ukraine willing to give an interview related to the situation and prospects of young people in Ukraine.

I decided to use a structured interview consisting of 19 questions of interest for the writing of this article. The first part of the interview was centered around aspects related to demographic elements, such as age, level of education, current situation (pupil, student, full or part-time employee), religious orientation and residence of the participants. After this part of knowledge, I moved on to questions about their future in Ukraine, continuing their studies in the country, finding a job in Ukraine or outside the borders of Ukraine, the impact of the conflict on the citizens of their country, how difficult it is finding a job during the war and how it was before it started, involving others by offering help to both refugees and those who remained in the country. Unfortunately, I was limited by some aspects during the conduct of these interviews, such as the fact that all the interview participants were female, which was caused by the martial law established in the neighboring country, which prohibits men over the age of 18 from leaving the territory of Ukraine.

Thus, only young women between the ages of 17 and 30 took part in the interview. The interviewees are students at the National University of Uzhhorod. The interviews were conducted both in English and in Ukrainian, being a connoisseur of the Ukrainian language, so the information was transmitted in a much clearer way, many of the students not knowing English very well. The interviews took place in the location where the mobility took place. I chose to conduct the interviews with one person at a time, these being carried out individually, thus there is no risk that some answers will be influenced by the answers given by the other respondents.

The results of the study were summarized and will be presented in this article in a descriptive form.

Results

The problem of training and orientation of young people is a very complex one, even more so in situations like the one in Ukraine. The pressure of the war years had a significant impact on how young people formed their ideals, especially on the meaning of civic and national values such as patriotism, freedom, tolerance and humanism. The young generation represents the social group that has the greatest impact on the trajectory and character of a nation's future through their ability to accumulate positive trends in terms of social and economic development. Since the future status of society is based on the ideas that are rooted in young people, studying and analyzing how conflict affects their perspectives is important.

The study sought to understand and identify how Ujhorod National University students report on the war waged by the Russian Federation against their country and its effects, such as how it affected their prospects for schooling, finding a job. 21 people participated in the interview, all of them female, aged between 17 and 30 years. According to the discussions, most of the young people are responsible young people who care about the future of the nation and the world as a whole.

Regarding the demographic aspects of the interviewed people, if we refer to their age, 15 people are between 18 and 24 years old; 5 people were under 18 years old and one person was 30 years old. In the case of the 5 people under the age of 18, they are young women who have not yet reached the age of 18, and will turn 18 in the next period, but have started their studies at the respective university. Regarding the level of education and the last completed level of studies of the interviewed young women, we identified 13 high school graduates, currently students, and 8 people being graduates of higher education. The 8 people who graduated from higher education are currently following a new stage of professional training, being students at the master's programs of the University of Ujhorod. Regarding their status on the labor market, a number of 15 people declared themselves as students, 3 people were students and at the same time part-time employees, 3 people declared themselves as full-time employees, and a person as unemployed. From the point of view of religious orientation, 15 people have the Orthodox religion, 6 people declared themselves as having another religious orientation, namely Greek-Catholic. Most of the respondents are from the rural environment, counting 11 people, and 10 people from the urban environment. This shows the fact that most families preferred to stay in the countryside to carry out their activities, the young people being sent to college in the city, but some expressed their desire to return to the countryside after completing their studies.

According to the answers given during the interviews, young Ukrainians are in favor of bringing peace through peaceful solutions, and their main goal is for the war to end as soon as possible without the need for so many human losses. Also, young Ukrainians are vehemently against the use of weapons and believe that more emphasis should be placed on resolving the conflict through negotiations and dialogue. They believe that a way must be created to reach a common understanding and solution that is acceptable to both parties involved. They argue that there should be more channels of communication and more opportunities to reach a mutually acceptable solution. In addition, they argue that the emphasis must be placed on respect for human

rights and respect for the rights of minorities. These young people are worthy citizens and patriots of their nation, working to promote peace and unity as well as social, economic and political stability of their country. This can be seen through their contribution to the development of their communities, by participating in cultural and educational activities, by engaging in charitable activities and by supporting the reforming policies of local and national authorities. This also follows from their efforts to promote tolerance and respect for other ethnic and religious groups in Ukraine.

The conflict has created a formidable new obstacle to the preservation of Ukraine's youth. A considerable number of young people have joined the armed forces, volunteer organizations and civil society opposition. On the other hand, a large number of people have become refugees, and if they are successfully assimilated abroad, they are likely to end up staying there.

The first question asked is related to their future in terms of education, so the young people were asked if in the future they plan to continue their studies in Ukraine, the majority, 16 people, answered that they want to continue their education in Ukraine, the rest of 5 people answered that they were undecided about continuing their studies in their own country, some mentioned that they would leave the country to pursue certain studies at prestigious universities in Europe, but nevertheless, they emphasized that upon completion of their studies they wanted to return to Ukraine. And the next question was related to the education system, young people were asked if the education system suffered because of the Russian aggression, 16 people answered that the education system suffered because of this aggression, but they managed to cope, being somewhat prepared following the COVID-19 pandemic, a pandemic that affected the entire globe, 3 people claimed that the system did not suffer because of this aggression, considering that there were no major changes in the conduct of teaching activities, 2 people were more reluctant, preferring to say that they did not know whether or not this war had an impact on the education system in Ukraine.

After these questions that included part of the future study stages in their life and the educational system in Ukraine, the next question was related to finding a job, so they were asked if after completing their studies they choose to work in Ukraine or they will leave the country in search of a job. To this question, a good part of the respondents, 11 people, were undecided, specifying that they do not know what they will do in terms of finding a job, 7 people said that they want to find a job with them in the country to be able to support and develop the country economically, and 3 people answered that they do not want to stay in Ukraine to find a job, they motivated their decision by the fact that salaries in Ukraine are much lower compared to the countries of the European Union, but also the unstable situation in which Ukraine finds itself at the moment, not knowing what tomorrow may bring. Another question referred to the possibility that more and more Ukrainians will choose to leave the country in search of a secure job, 10 people believed that with the passage of time and the escalation of the situation in Ukraine, more and more citizens will choose to leave the country for a safer job, 5 people said that they do not believe that more and more compatriots will choose to leave the country, 4 people answered that they do not know whether the number of these people will increase or not, and 2 people have preferred not to provide any answer for this question.

Young people were also asked if they think that Ukraine will need a long time to recover from this conflict, here, 17 people said that their country will need a very long time to recover from all points of view, but that everything will also depend on how much they will also be involved in this process, 2 people considered that it does not take a long time for their country to recover, they arguing that they will also benefit from the help of partners and those who provide aid at these times as well, so with the help provided the recovery will be much faster, 2 people did not pronounce themselves regarding the recovery of Ukraine.

When asked if they had thought about leaving Ukraine before Russia launched aggression against them, 16 people said no, they would only do so for tourist purposes, and 5 people said they had thought to leave Ukraine. They were asked if, from their point of view, because of this

aggression more and more people will choose to leave the country, 14 people said so, considering that more and more people will choose the path of migration, 5 believed that this aggression does not will make people leave the country, one person did not know how to give an exact answer and one person did not want to answer this question.

To the question related to how difficult it is to find a job in Ukraine at the moment, most answered that it is not very complicated, some of the respondents conveyed the fact that they found a job even in this period, this crisis contributing to the creation of new jobs, especially in the field of assistance in such crisis situations, 7 people answered that it is quite difficult to find a job, because the economy no longer works just like before the start of the conflict, 3 people said it was very hard and only one person answered that it was easy, specifying that he found a job during the conflict in a non-governmental organization. The next question was also about finding a job, only this time, young people were asked if before the aggression started finding a job was easier, 10 people confirmed this hypothesis, saying that before Russia started aggression against Ukraine, finding a job was much easier, 7 people answered that they did not know if it was easier to find a job, and 4 people answered that even before the start of the war it was not easier to find a job.

Regarding the option of leaving Ukraine if it had not been affected by the war, 10 people said they had no plans to leave the country, 6 people said they would have left the country, but would leave only for to find a job or for education, they would not choose a permanent move to another country, 4 do not know whether they would choose to leave or not, and one person preferred not to give an answer to this question.

Regarding the future involvement of the international community in terms of stopping Russia's violation of the laws of war, 11 people said that they would like more involvement from the international community, 6 answered that they do not know if more involvement is needed, and 4 people answered that these international bodies should be less involved. When asked if the laws of war were better respected by combatants do you think the civilian population would be less tempted to migrate to other countries, here 8 people answered that if the laws of war were fully respected, far fewer civilians would suffer and they would no longer make the decision to leave the country, 7 people do not know, 5 believe not, even if the laws were respected, for fear that people would choose to migrate, and one person preferred not to answer.

I asked them if they would like to see more or less involvement from Romania in terms of the humanitarian assistance offered to Ukrainians, most of them answered that they wanted to see more involvement, being 10 people, 7 preferred not to answer, and 4 people said they don't know. Asked who they think the most help came from, 11 respondents said civil society, 6 think NGOs have been more involved in help, and 4 think governments.

Conclusions

These are the main findings that emerged from the identification of the perceptions of young Ukrainians about the war taking place in their country:

1. The vast majority of those involved in the conduct of this study said that they want to continue their studies in Ukraine, because they want to be close to their country and to those who live here to be able to offer help, many being also involved in volunteering actions.

2. Regarding the educational system, most of the young people believe that it suffered and continues to suffer because of the war, they say that they feel lucky to have the opportunity to participate in such experiences as mobilities Erasmus+, because thanks to them they manage to distance themselves to a certain extent for a short period of time from the atrocities taking place in their country.

3. Regarding staying in Ukraine after completing the studies, there was some reluctance, a good part of the respondents answered that they do not know what to do in the present situation, on the one hand they would like to stay in Ukraine, but on the other another part would choose to leave

the country to find a much better paying job, and in the current conditions for the safety of both their job and their personal and loved ones.

4. Most people believe that this war will cause more and more people to choose to leave the country, all because no one knows exactly when this conflict will end. Before the start of the war, most respondents answered that they would not have left the country, but now they are also considering this option.

5. At the moment, finding a job in Ukraine is not very difficult, with most respondents saying that the degree of difficulty of finding a job is moderate, some of them even managing to find a job in wartime.

6. If the country was not affected, many respondents would not even consider the idea of leaving Ukraine, which means that this war has quite an impact on young people, who are worried about the safety of tomorrow.

7. They conveyed that they want more involvement from Romania, although from my point of view Romania was and is actively involved in supporting both refugees and Ukrainian citizens remaining in Ukraine, and I reinforce this aspect based on my own experiences, being present from the first days as a volunteer from the Union of Ukrainians in Romania, so I could observe how Romanian citizens got involved in offering support to our neighbors.

8. Most of the young people interviewed believe that the greatest help came from civil society, then from NGOs, and the fewest believed that the greatest help came from governments.

Young people are aware that the battle in Ukraine is not a local, peripheral one, nor is it a civil conflict, but rather an ongoing military occupation and armed attacks by Russia against Ukraine. They also believe that Ukraine will win this conflict and recover its lost regions. This study showed that the war has an impact not only on the youth, but also on the adults in Ukraine. However, young people remain with their country and support it by all possible means, hoping that one day everything will return to the way it was moments before the start of this aggression from the Russian Federation. More research is needed to understand the multiple effects of war on young people.

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