



Original article

Housing experiences of Ukrainian migrants and refugees in Polish cities – a case study of Łódź, Poland

Ewa Szafrńska^{1*}, Margaux Baudoux²
¹University of Lodz, Faculty of Geographical Sciences, Kopcińskiego Str. 31, 90-142 Łódź, Poland

²University of Lodz, Doctoral School of Social Sciences, University Lumière, Lyon, France

E-mail address (*corresponding author): ewa.szafranska@geo.uni.lodz.pl

ORCID ID: Ewa Szafrńska: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6779-3100>; Margaux Baudoux: <https://orcid.org/0009-0005-6672-7223>

ABSTRACT

The unprecedented scale of emigration of Ukrainian citizens, dramatically intensified after the Russian attacks on their country in 2022, has aroused great interest among scholars. This article is dedicated to the housing experiences of Ukrainians who arrived in Łódź, one of the largest Polish cities facing rapid population decline. The study was conducted using a qualitative methodology, specifically through monographic analysis, in order to provide a detailed and contextualized understanding of the case under investigation. The data were collected in 2024 through interviews conducted with two groups of Ukrainians: those who arrived prior to 2022, mainly for work and educational purposes (migrants), and those who found refuge there after Russia's attack (refugees). The aim of the research was to make a comparison between the residential experiences of these two groups and to understand the specificity of their housing strategies in a city characterized by affordable rents and house prices. The results showed that there was little difference between refugees and immigrants in terms of their situation on the housing market, and that this difference persisted in their socio-economic profile. The most vulnerable benefited from specific subsidies and programs implemented by the state, the local authorities and NGOs. The others have undergone increasing difficulties in finding accommodation in the private market. It seems that the ongoing depopulation of Łódź has no significant impact on the inflow of migrants or the availability of housing but mainly results in lower rents and a lower cost of living compared to other large Polish cities.

KEY WORDS: migration, war refugees, housing market, shrinking city, Ukraine

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1. Introduction

Traditionally known as a country of emigration, Poland recently became a country of immigration, rising from the bottom to the top of EU countries in terms of migrant inflows since 2015. This shift in the net migration trends led scholars to consider Poland as a migration transition state (OKÓLSKI, 2021). In 2023, Poland issued the highest number of first residence permits to non-EU nationals (SCHENGENVISA NEWS, 2024). The largest number of these residents

came from Ukraine, the biggest group of non-nationals in Poland since 2014, a date marked by the annexation of Crimea (EUROSTAT, 2025). Thus, Ukrainian migration to Poland became the largest mass migration on a scale not recorded in Europe after World War II.

Between February and May 2022, around 3.5 million Ukrainian refugees crossed the Polish border (DUSZCZYK & KACZMARCZYK, 2022). In the first weeks after the war escalated, large numbers of refugees crossed the border each day. However, by late March 2022, daily crossings had stabilized at around 30,000.

By the end of 2024, over 1,5 million Ukrainians were living in Poland, including over 550 thousand people who had moved prior to the war (UNHCR, 2024). In this context, accommodation became an urgent essential need and an unexpected challenge for the host country.

According to LOZANOVSKA (2019), housing is a fundamental aspect of a migrant's trajectory. Housing paths are largely constrained by barriers encountered in the host country (KLEININGER-WANIK & WANKE, 2024). Discrimination in the rental housing market is one of the main challenge migrants must face (AUSPURG ET AL. 2019; VAN DER BRACHT ET AL. 2015; WAYLAND, 2007). These prejudices arise from various sources and vary in intensity depending on the group of refugees (KENTMEN-CIN, 2025). They also evolve over time. For instance, the attitude of Poles towards Ukrainians, was firstly very favourable (DUSZCZYK & KACZMARCZYK, 2022), but later changed. This attitude turned into greater discriminations in the labour and rental markets as the war continues (DŁUGOSZ & IZDEBSKA-DŁUGOSZ, 2024; CBOS, 2024).

One can observe a preference for settling down in large urban areas because of better opportunities (KOIZUMI & HOFFSTAEDTER, 2015; BIELEWSKA ET AL. 2025). In the early 2010s, migration was concentrated in Warsaw, Cracow and Wrocław (UMP, 2022a). After 2015, this spatial distribution became slightly modified in favour of other urban areas. Thus, cities facing depopulation became a destination, like Łódź, the fourth-largest city in Poland. However, such a large influx of migrants creates significant challenges for a city's authorities in meeting refugees' needs. Among these, housing is an important challenge due to the current state of the housing market in Poland. Data on housing show that Poland faces an important shortage in addition to overcrowding in accommodation and the limited availability of social housing (MILEWSKA-WILK, 2022; SAMOREK & CICHOCKI, 2023). The share of municipal and social housing (TBS) investments remains low with an average of about 1–2%, cities are thus unable to address refugee housing needs in the medium and long term (MILERT ET AL., 2022). Similarly, the market is dominated by private actors, mainly individual's focusing on renting small flats or single rooms for expensive prices (MILEWSKA-WILK, 2022). Finally, the massive influx of refugees has driven a sharp increase in prices. In 2023, prices rose by over 50% in some cities (e.g., Wrocław) and by 20% in Łódź. The number of available rental units fell by 60% in Wrocław and

by 50% in Łódź (MILEWSKA-WILK, 2022; MILERT ET AL., 2022).

The refugee population is predominantly composed of women (often with children), elderly, and disabled people, whereas pre-war migration - primarily driven by the labour market and linked to the gradual liberalization of migration policies for non-EU citizens - consisted mainly of men. In December 2021, 875,090 foreigners were registered in the Polish social insurance system, with the main groups being Ukrainians (71,7%), Belarussians (8.1%), Georgians (2,75%), and Russians (1,6%) (ZUS, 2022). Moreover, the Ukrainian labour migrants were on average relatively young - under 40 and well-educated (BIELEWSKA ET AL., 2025). According to the Central Statistical Office (GUS, 2023), as of the end of February 2025, after the return of many workers to the Ukrainian army, women accounted for over 60% of those remaining, and half of them were children.

The authorities of some Polish cities viewed the inflows of Ukrainians as an opportunity to counter depopulation. Łódź is one of the fastest shrinking cities in Poland. By shrinking, we refer to the Polish definition, which is linked to population decline due to rapid deindustrialization, unemployment and urban transformation (see KAZIMIERCZAK & SZAFRAŃSKA, 2019). It leads to higher residential vacancy. Nevertheless, depopulation did not increase the availability of affordable housing in Poland.

This article examined the housing experiences of Ukrainians migrants and refugees who settled in Łódź before and after February 24th 2022. Two groups were studied, one composed of “pre-war migrants” (BUKOWSKI & DUSZCZYK, 2022; GOŃDA, 2025), arrived prior to February 24th 2022, for work or educational purposes and the “forced migrants”, who arrived after 2022. The aim of the article was to draw a comparison between the residential experiences of these two groups and to understand the specificity of their strategies in a city characterized by affordable rent and housing prices. The research question was: what are the residential experiences of Ukrainian migrants and refugees in a city experiencing depopulation, such as Łódź? The research, which was designed to be a monographic analysis, focused on the differences between the two groups. It was hypothesized that refugees experience more housing difficulties than pre-war migrants. The research also aimed to examine the people's motivations to settle in Łódź, their satisfaction with the local living conditions and their ability to find accommodation

in a more affordable post-industrial city facing population decline.

2. Literature review and research gap

As a result of the unprecedented scale and pace of Ukrainian migration beyond the country's borders, the past decade has seen a growing body of literature exploring various aspects of how this community functions in host countries, including Poland (DUSZCZYK & KACZMARCZYK, 2022). Studies have focused, among other things, on the impact of Ukrainian migrants on the labour market, both in economic terms (DUSZCZYK ET AL., 2023) and with respect to their integration (KUBICIEL-LODZIŃSKA ET AL., 2023), their position as workers (FILIPEK & POLKOWSKA, 2020), and their contribution to Poland's economic growth (STRZELECKI ET AL., 2020). Other studies have examined the personal experiences and motivations of migrants, as well as their settlement plans (KAŁUŻA-KOPIAS & GOŃDA, 2023; GOŃDA, 2025), and their spatial distribution across Polish cities (UMP, 2022a, 2022b; KAŁUŻA-KOPIAS, 2023). There is also research addressing the education of Ukrainian children (HERBST & SITEK, 2023), the impact of Ukrainian migration on Poland's welfare system (NECEL, 2024), and the implications for social policy management (CIEKANOWSKI ET AL., 2025). Furthermore, several authors have examined the role of civil society in Poland, which since 2022 has become a key factor in the response to the refugee crisis (BIELEWSKA ET AL., 2025; FOMINA & PACHOCKA, 2024). These studies underscore the strong engagement of Polish society in the reception of and provision of humanitarian assistance to people fleeing Ukraine. Studies have also addressed the migration policies of Polish cities and the strategies used to respond to the influx of migrants (WACH & PACHOCKA, 2022).

The most comprehensive study capturing different aspects of the living conditions of war refugees based on their firsthand experiences in Poland is that of DŁUGOSZ ET AL. (2022). The essential aspect of the situation of migrants and refugees is shown by research on the evolving attitudes towards Ukrainians in host societies (DRAŽANOVÁ & GEDDES, 2022; KENTMEN-CIN, 2025). As these authors demonstrate, the initially very welcoming approach in the first weeks after February 24th 2022, gradually shifted toward less favourable reception. This trend has also been observed in Poland, as documented by DŁUGOSZ & IZDEBSKA-DŁUGOSZ (2024) and in national-level surveys conducted regularly

by Public Opinion Research Center (CBOS, 2024). In Poland, these attitudes are specific. When examining earlier work on labour migrants from Ukraine, GRZYMAŁA-KAZŁOWSKA & BRZozowska (2017), highlighted the ambiguous position of Ukrainian migrants constructed as "neither the strangers nor the same".

The topic of migrant housing is typically analyzed from two main perspectives: that of the host country or city, where migrants concentrate and that of the migrants themselves. The first group of studies focuses on the housing markets in host cities, assessing their physical and economic accessibility to migrants and the impact of migration on housing market dynamics. For instance, studies by BAS (2024) and GLUSZAK & TROJANEK (2024) examine the response of Poland's largest urban housing markets to the arrival of Ukrainian refugees, highlighting a shortage of available housing and a sharp increase in prices driven by surging demand. This is also noted by KISS ET AL. (2023) who examined the issue of accommodation for Ukrainian refugees in Poland and several other European countries. The second body of work, to which the present study contributes, focuses on the housing search practices of migrants, emphasizing the barriers and limitations they encounter and how these experiences shape their current housing conditions. These issues are discussed in the literature as migrant residency practices (see KLEININGER-WANIK & WANKE, 2024). This body of literature also addresses various stereotypes and prejudices towards migrants, which hinder their settlement and integration. However this topic was largely absent in earlier Polish scholarship due to the country's relatively short experience as an immigration destination, it has been widely discussed in countries with a long history of immigration, such as the United States, Canada, and most Western European countries (e.g. ROBINSON ET AL., 2007; WAYLAND, 2007; VAN DER BRACHT ET AL., 2015; AUSPURG ET AL., 2019). In Poland, the interesting study conducted by KLEININGER-WANIK & WANKE (2024) among diverse groups of different non-EU migrants has shown three major problems that concern them in the housing market: the precariousness of their living condition, the prejudice faced predominantly during the search for accommodation, but also in the relationships with landlords, and bottom-up "institutionalization" of the accommodation endeavours and the instant saturation of the field with semi-official solutions and networks.

The article addresses a gap in the existing literature by focusing on the housing experiences of Ukrainian migrants and refugees in Poland, a topic that has received limited scholarly attention despite its growing relevance. By examining this issue in shrinking city like Łódź, the study contributes to the existing knowledge, helps to fill a research gap, and may be an impulse for the development of city policy towards this groups of people.

3. Study area: Łódź (Poland) as the spatial context for the research

Łódź is a large city located in central Poland, 140 km from the capital, Warsaw. It is the fourth biggest Polish city in terms of population size with 648,7 thousand residents - after Warsaw, Cracow and Wrocław (STATISTICAL OFFICE IN ŁÓDŹ, 2024). Founded for the textile industry during the 19th century, the city experienced the collapse of this industry following the political and economic changes initiated in 1989. In consequence, the economic structure of the city changed significantly, resulting in high structural unemployment, the increase of poverty and social exclusion, the physical degradation of urban space, and rapid population decline (TOBIASZ-LIS & WOJCIK, 2013; ZASINA ET AL., 2020).

In the 2000s, new branches of industry and services were developed in Łódź. Due to Polish integration into the EU in 2004, its favourable location, its industrial traditions and its cheaper residential and commercial rents/prices Łódź underwent a new growth (JAKÓBCZYK-GRYSZKIEWICZ, 2021). However, this did not stop the rapid depopulation, the highest among the larger Polish cities. From 1985 to 2024, the city lost over 200 thousand inhabitants (over 23% of its population). Due to this significant depopulation, Łódź is currently recognized in the literature as a shrinking city (SZAFRAŃSKA ET AL., 2019). Simultaneously, the population of Łódź was affected by the rapid ageing process, combined with a relatively low migratory attractiveness for young Poles (SZAFRAŃSKA & MICHALSKA-ŻYŁA, 2021). In light of these demographic trends, the local authorities had begun to consider encouraging migrants to settle in the city from 2010s, hoping this would mitigate the effects of ongoing depopulation (GOŃDA, 2025). However, unlike other large urban centres such as Cracow or Wrocław, no official migration policy or institutional framework to support integration was implemented (GOŃDA, 2021).

From a migration perspective, Łódź became more and more attractive to foreigners over the past few years, attracting both, unskilled and highly skilled migrants (UDSC, 2025). Before 2022, Ukrainians were mainly working in transportation, manufacturing and construction in Łódź due to local revitalization (ZUS, 2022). During Spring 2022, approximately 97,000 Ukrainians (migrants and refugees) were residing in Łódź, accounting for around 14% of the city's population (UMP, 2022a). Due to subsequent returns to Ukraine, as well as secondary migration to other Polish cities or abroad, this number declined to an estimated 29,000 by the end of 2023 (SELECTIV, 2023).

As noted by GOŃDA (2025), although previous studies suggested that migration to Łódź was primarily temporary and circulatory (JAKÓBCZYK-GRYSZKIEWICZ, 2016), more recent data indicate a shift in this pattern, with an increasing number of Ukrainians choosing to remain in the city for longer periods. This is evidenced by the growing number of long-term work permits issued to Ukrainian nationals (KAŁUŻA-KOPIAS, 2022), as well as settlement plans expressed by migrants themselves and the rising presence of entire families (GOŃDA & KAŁUŻA-KOPIAS, 2023). Their integration into Polish life goes through learning Polish, establishing businesses and enrolling their children in local schools (GOŃDA, 2024). In the 2024/2025 school year, 7% of all pupils in Łódź were Ukrainian – around 7,000 individuals. It was the highest share among large cities in Poland after Wrocław with 7,8% (CEO, 2024; ŚWIDROWSKA & STANO, 2024).

The different legal status of the two groups of Ukrainians means they are entitled to different forms of public support. Depending on their visa, pre-war economic migrants can access public services. Since their stay was seen mainly as a way to fill Polish labour shortages. The authorities in Łódź provided them with work permits but offered little support in other areas (GOŃDA, 2025). In contrast, refugees received much broader assistance. Support was made available immediately after they registered in the Polish social security system (ZUS, 2022). The access to new rights for Ukrainian refugees was due to the activation of the 2001 European Temporary Protection Directive (TPD) meant to give immediate protection to displaced populations and asylum seekers throughout the EU.

It was activated for the first time in March 2022¹ in the context of the full-scale invasion of Ukraine followed by its implementation into Polish law few days later (Law of March 12th 2022: *Ustawa o pomocy obywatelom Ukrainy*). Ukrainian nationals who arrived in Poland after February 2022 were granted similar rights to Polish citizens.

These rights included access to job placement services, vocational training, healthcare, education for children, childcare, family benefits, and one-time financial aid to cover initial expenses (KUBICIEL-LODZIŃSKA ET AL., 2023). Nevertheless, the support provided by local authorities went little beyond the implementation of state-level obligations. The city also lacked available public housing stock that could be allocated to newcomers, as the pressure on municipal housing resources had long exceeded capacity to meet demand. Therefore, despite being a city affected by ongoing depopulation, the housing situation in Łódź, although gradually improving, remains unfavourable in terms of accessibility for Ukrainian newcomers. As in other large Polish cities, the housing market is dominated by private ownership, with a minimal share of affordable public housing for low-income residents. Furthermore, the condition of the housing stock (e.g. the prevalence of old, substandard buildings in need of renovation) places Łódź at a disadvantage compared to other large Polish cities (KAZIMIERCZAK & SZAFRAŃSKA, 2019). Łódź's "advantage" in terms of housing accessibility stems from its lower property prices and rental costs compared to other large cities. At the end of 2023, the average transaction price per square metre was PLN 6,700 in Łódź, compared with 11,200 in Warsaw, 9,900 in Cracow and 8,700 in Wrocław (NBP, 2023). However, this advantage is offset by lower average incomes in the city. As of the end of 2024, the average monthly gross salary in the enterprise sector in Łódź was PLN 8,200, compared to PLN 9,400 in Wrocław and over PLN 10,500 in Warsaw and Cracow. The overall cost of living is also lower in Łódź, which is frequently cited by migrants, including Ukrainians, as one of the factors influencing their decision to settle down (SZAFRAŃSKA & MICHALSKA-ŻYŁA, 2021; GOŃDA, 2025).

4. Materials and methodology

In order to examine the residential strategies of Ukrainian citizens in a city coping with depopulation, this article adopts a qualitative methodology, through a monographic analysis, to provide a detailed and contextualized understanding of the case under investigation by focusing on the experience of several individuals. Due to the lack of statistical data on the topic, a qualitative approach was needed to understand the invisible dynamics of how Ukrainian respondents found access to housing in Łódź. The authors discuss the kind of accommodation they had access to, the status that the respondents were granted and the difficulties they faced. It is a well-used methodology in the literature.

The data collection is diverse. Primary data were collected through a questionnaire from June to September 2024. It gathered the housing experiences of Ukrainians (n=46) divided in two categories: individuals who arrived before February 24th 2022 (migrants) and individuals who arrived after February 24th 2022 (refugees). The qualitative questionnaire was composed of a series of open questions about the respondents' housing experience and their integration in Łódź. Respondents were found after the questionnaire was sent through local institutions such as a local NGO (Łódź Multicultural Center), the University of Łódź and local international communities leading to a snowball effect. The questionnaire was available in English, Polish, Ukrainian and Russian in order to gather the testimony of people from different backgrounds, and directed respondents to be natural and clear in their answers. As a result, the study gathered qualitative data and narratives about the background of the respondents, their housing strategies and their sense of integration and belonging in a Polish post-industrial city coping with depopulation. The answers were coded and thematically analyzed using SPSS software.

Secondly, data was collected through semi-structured interviews conducted between June 2024 and March 2025 with Ukrainian immigrants and refugees. Interviews focused on housing experiences, migratory and residential trajectories and perceptions of Łódź as a place of residence. Participants were selected using snowball sampling to ensure diverse profiles considering legal status, gender, and arrival date. First participants were found through field trips and observations, participation in events, contacts with institutional and academic

¹Activated on March 4th 2022 by the Council of the European Union and addressed to Ukrainians and foreigners living in Ukraine.

organisations and local NGOs. Finally, field notes were compiled from direct observations during social events and informal gatherings in Łódź. Informal conversations provided valuable insights into everyday residential practices. Nevertheless, a significant majority of respondents were middle-aged women, while men were more difficult to reach, suggesting a possible gender bias. Males were less present, less responsive and less open to accept interviews than women.

All interviews followed ethical guidelines (approved by University of Lodz, Poland, and University of Lyon, France in March 2024), especially concerning sensitive data such as housing and location. Participants were informed about the study's aims, assured of anonymity through pseudonyms and secure data storage, and each gave consent at each stage.

5. Results

5.1. Profile of the respondents

The socio-economic profile of the respondents interrogated between June 2024 and March 2025 can be categorized into two distinct groups: Ukrainian nationals who arrived in Łódź prior to 2022 (n=15) and those who arrived following the onset of the full-scale Russian invasion in 2022 (n=31). We assume that the former group primarily migrated to Łódź for employment or educational opportunities, whereas the latter group largely comprises individuals who were granted refugee status.

In terms of age, gender, and socio-economic background, the sample demonstrates considerable heterogeneity. Participants range in age from 20 to 77 years, with a mean age of 44. This broad age span enables the analysis of migratory decisions across different stages of their course of life. Respondents who arrived in Łódź before 2022 tended to be younger, with a mean age of 38.46 years, compared to a mean of 46.58 years for those who arrived after 2022. In addition, the gender distribution within the sample is uneven: out of 46 respondents, only five were males (aged 28, 29, 42, 44, and 55), and among them, only one settled in Łódź after February 2022.

Finally, the group of respondents of this monography reflects social diversity. The pre-2022 group included fewer individuals of intellectual or highly skilled professions. Despite being more

qualified, the first group also included older adults, retirees, and unemployed individuals (Table 1).

Table 1. The socio-economic diversity of the research sample: Ukrainians respondents who arrived prior and post 2022 in Łódź

Occupations	Before 2022	After 2022	Total
Craftman	2	2	4
Entrepreneurs and independent workers	1	2	3
Farmer	1		1
High skilled worker	2		2
Intellectual profession		5	5
Intermediate profession	5	7	12
Manager and executives		3	3
Medical profession		3	3
Personal and commercial service worker	1	1	2
Unskilled worker	2	1	3
Student		1	1
Unemployed	1	3	4
Pensioner		3	3
Total	15	31	46

5.2. Settlement motivations and perceptions of Łódź

One of the central objectives of this study was to identify the factors that motivated the respondents to settle in Łódź, with particular attention to whether both groups encountered similar challenges in accessing housing or not. Findings indicate that the majority of individuals who arrived prior to 2022 relocated to Łódź primarily for employment or educational purposes (11 out of 15). Their motivations were diverse and depended on individuals' personal life trajectories. During interviews, most of the respondents highlighted their eagerness for better living standards and the chance for more opportunities in Poland: "I had to face low wages in Ukraine and the inability to support my family" - (*Мне пришлось столкнуться с мизерными зарплатами в Украине и невозможность содержать семью*) (F. 38). "I did not see a future for my children in Ukraine, I wanted stability and development" - (*Не видел будущего для своих детей в Украине, хотели стабильности и развития*) (F. 42). The economic motive emerged as the main one in the interviews with the first group. Thus, Łódź was perceived as a place for new opportunities in an affordable environment.

A smaller subset of this group (n=4) appeared to have been influenced by other factors, such as family reunification or pre-existing social networks that facilitated the knowledge of academic programs at the University of Łódź or employment opportunities that facilitated their integration. Besides, the lower cost of living emerged as a decisive factor in choosing Łódź over other Polish cities.

In contrast, the group of respondents who arrived after 2022 relocated to Łódź primarily as a result of the war and were in search of asylum. Consequently, the question differs in this case. Rather than examining the broader motivations for leaving Ukraine, we focus on understanding the specific factors that influenced their decision to settle in Łódź specifically, as opposed to other locations in Poland. Our findings can be categorized. Some individuals chose to relocate to Łódź due to previous visits during which they had enjoyed the place ("I enjoyed the city" (*Сподобалось місто*) (F. 42), some others had relocated because they already had a local network or knew settled relatives. Most of the mid-aged respondents evoked younger relatives previously living in Łódź for their studies and were able to host them. Thus, among the sample of respondents, around six declared that they knew relatives or acquaintances and could benefit from their pre-existing networks for housing and job opportunities.

Another subset of the second group ultimately arrived in Łódź, and their relocation had occurred in a largely unplanned manner as respondents could be quoted as saying "I ended up in Łódź randomly", "I don't know how I ended up in Łódź, there is no reason, it just happened" (*Я не знаю, як я опинився в Лодзі, немає причин, так склалося*) (F. 36). The relocation of these respondents was the result of structural work led by NGOs and local authorities whose work implicitly drained inflows of Ukrainians to Łódź. These processes influenced the residential trajectories of the respondents: some were sent onto the local private market and others were provided with emergency housing right after their arrival, sometimes even for free. As a matter of fact, the presence of relatives appeared as the main factor influencing respondents' trajectories to Łódź among the second group due to a smaller representation of refugees being influenced by local relocation programs.

Lastly, respondents expressed ambivalent perceptions of Łódź as a place of residence. In both groups, approximately half of the individuals were

willing to move out. On the one hand, among the reasons cited were the desire to return to Ukraine once the conflict ends, or to relocate to a more dynamic Polish city, often due to the perceived monotony and a lack of leisure activities in the local environment of Łódź. Others expressed aspirations to move abroad to another EU-member state in case of a job opportunity. Refugee participants emphasize the relatively high cost of living, particularly the private rental market in spite of the city's reputation to be an affordable destination and known as the cheapest bigger city in Poland.

On the other hand, Łódź was also viewed positively by a significant portion of respondents in both groups. Approximately half highlighted the favourable living conditions, specifically emphasizing the city's safety and tranquility. The green areas were also quoted by respondents, especially in the second group highlighting a better presence of parks and green areas in Łódź than in their hometowns in Ukraine. The positive perception of the city is usually linked to the presence of relatives in the second group.

5.3. Types of accommodation in which Ukrainians live in the city of Łódź

Findings from both the questionnaire and the interviews provided insights into the type of accommodation occupied by the respondents, as well as expenditure, legal residential status, dwelling size and household composition. From the descriptions made by the participants, the authors have drawn a typology of the types of accommodation: a flat in a block of flats, a flat in a tenant house, a flat in another type of building (e.g. loft or new apartments' building), multi-family house, hostel and emergency accommodation, other. The majority of respondents lived in apartments: half in blocks of flats and a quarter in tenant houses. Refugees have access to specific forms of accommodation such as hostels.

All the respondents were renting their accommodation: 11 were living in small sized apartments (below 30 m²). 16 lived in small accommodation between 31 m² and 50 m² and 13 lived in a flat bigger than 51 m². Households of respondents from the first group tended to be smaller being composed of two or three people. Among the second group, an important share of these households were composed of four or more people (cf. Table 2). Finally, for 21 respondents the monthly rent went from PLN 1.000 to 2.000 and 18

of them paid between PLN 2.000 and 3.000. A distinct group of refugees benefited from free accommodation.

In terms of the length of time needed to find suitable accommodation and complete the rental agreement, respondents could find a place relatively quickly. Out of 46 respondents, 23 found an apartment in less than 4 weeks. For the others, 13 considered it easy to find an apartment since they could sign a contract in less than a week. This case does not take into account people living at their relatives’.

Table 2. Household composition of Ukrainian respondents

Household composition (in persons)	Before 2022	After 2022	Total
One	2	4	6
Two	4	9	13
Three	4	4	8
Four	3	6	9
Five		2	2
More than 5	1	2	3
N/A	1	4	5
Total	15	31	46

Finally, 8 respondents were relocated to Łódź because they were advised of this by local authorities and NGOs when they entered Poland. These respondents benefited from resettlement programs. Resettlement policies highlight the complexity of migratory trajectories. Several participants reported a sense of having been "sent" or "relocated" to unfamiliar destinations, with little or no agency in the decision.

Two respondents who were directed to Łódź, had been assisted by volunteers at Katowice train station. Since then, they have been living for free in hostels while awaiting allocation to municipal housing. Four respondents benefited from practical and financial help as part of Program 40+ (the benefit of PLN 40 per day for accommodation and meals for Ukrainian citizens which was an extra-ordinary benefit for Poles hosting refugees, introduced in 2022). They lived in hostels from April 2022 to July 2024. Two of them had been living in municipal apartments.

The living condition in hostels and emergency housing remained acceptable but insufficient, especially regarding privacy: "I don't have privacy" (*Не має приватності*) (F. 57). Also, they must face

the uncertainty of the programs which could be cut at any moment. They eventually stopped in July 2024, forcing refugees to look for an accommodation on the private market: "I'm afraid I can lose my apartment if the program is cancelled" (*Можу залишитись без житла, якщо програму допомоги пенсіонерам закриють*) (F. 77). These programs remain poorly studied in the scientific literature.

6. Discussion

The findings indicate that the differences between the immigrants and the refugees are small regarding access to housing. Nevertheless, a few points can be discussed.

6.1. Settling in Łódź, a choice motivated by a cheaper cost of living

One of the main differences between the two groups lies in their socio-economic profiles. As the findings show in Łódź, respondents from the refugee group included both older women and elderly individuals, as well as younger people with higher levels of education. This aligns with broader research on Ukrainian refugee migration to Poland (see [KUBICIEL-ŁODZIŃSKA ET AL., 2023](#)). National data from the National Bank of Poland ([NBP, 2023](#)), Central Statistical Office (GUS), and regional institutions ([UMP 2022a](#)) confirm similar trends, suggesting that Łódź, despite demographic decline, reflects migration patterns typical of other major Polish cities. Motivations for migration include higher education, labour market entry, and family reunification. Their relatively smooth integration is partly due to legal instruments such as visa exemptions, work permits, and the "declaration on employment of foreigners" (*Oświadczenie o zatrudnieniu cudzoziemca*), which have favoured Ukrainians within Polish migration policy since 2018. For both groups, Łódź's relatively low cost of living, especially housing, was a key reason for settling. However, some of the respondents were more critical. Accustomed to lower costs in Ukraine, they viewed Łódź as merely "acceptable" (*приемлемо*), referring to higher local prices in rent and everyday goods. These contrasting views illustrate the heterogeneity of experiences among the respondents.

Finally, the data remain gender-biased: only a small number of male respondents were included in the interviews. A deeper analysis of male-specific

migration and housing experiences would offer a more balanced understanding of the situation.

6.2. A weak dichotomy in residential trajectories in Łódź

The dichotomy between the immigrant and refugee groups was only found in terms of access to the private housing market. On the one hand, the first group was already settled and experienced an easier access to housing in Łódź. The second group arrived in numbers and suddenly, which often leads to unjustified increases in rental prices in the local scale. This process was common to the whole country. As a consequence, finding accommodation became more difficult over time for Ukrainian refugees who faced higher discrimination (6.3). Thus, respondents from the two groups face similar difficulties, even if the immigrant group experienced facilities when they first arrived.

On the other hand, a subset of the second group gained help from local authorities and NGOs. The location of refugees is linked to the location of their relatives or of the free accommodation they accessed through relocation programs. At the start of the war, Poland implemented national support for the first time through these programs. Others were elaborated by the regional and local levels, either by public authorities or by NGOs. It is part of the already quoted relocation policies for refugees.

At the national scale, refugees had benefited from the Program 40+ (from March 2022 until July 2024). This program was implemented by the government aims to provide refugees with 40 PLN/day, meals and free or cheaper accommodation. The types of accommodation they were allocated was broad: rooms in a private accommodation, a room in a hostel or an entire municipal flat. The program ended in June 2024.

At the local level, it is possible to address the issue of countering population decline by questioning the mechanisms and objectives pursued by local authorities when draining inflows of refugees. While a potential demographic benefit could be analyzed, it was not explicitly said by local officials, who tended to picture these inflows as logistical and administrative challenges whilst still promoting their territory as a cheaper place with lower costs.

At all regards, there is not much difference between refugees and immigrants who arrived prior to 2022. The results do not indicate any

potential correlation between the status of the migrants and any indicator related to housing.

6.3. Slowly increasing discrimination and other difficulties to accessing housing

We observed a scattered spatial distribution of the respondents. This finding indicates that there is no sign of spatial segregation in Łódź at the present time is not a result of citizenship but of the socio-economic background. Ultimately, regardless of group affiliations of the respondents, Ukrainian nationals seeking housing on the private market in Łódź increasingly encounter difficulties. On the one hand, owners have raised the prices of rentals. These rises were attributed to Ukrainians by public opinion. A comparative analysis of the interviews of both groups revealed a growing trend of discrimination against Ukrainians on the housing market. Several respondents reported that landlords abruptly ended phone calls upon hearing a foreign accent or learning that caller was Ukrainian. As a result, some respondents expressed a desire to move out but were unable to due to their low income. In the long term, such discrimination could influence the spatial distribution of Ukrainians in Łódź, potentially relegating them to peripheral areas. However, this assumption requires further verification, particularly as other respondents reported no experiences of discrimination. These contrasting experiences of integration do not appear to be linked to refugee status or arrival date.

7. Conclusions

Housing is a fundamental aspect of a migrant's trajectory. The article has explored the housing experiences of Ukrainian migrants in Łódź, comparing those who migrated before February 24th, 2022 (pre-war immigrants) with refugees who arrived after the Russia's invasion (forced immigrants). We found minimal differences in access to housing between these groups, with the main variation being their socio-economic backgrounds. Vulnerable refugees received targeted support from the government and NGOs, while others struggled to access accommodation more in the private rental sector. Thus, our hypothesis that refugees face more housing difficulties than pre-2022 migrants was not supported. Furthermore, depopulation in Łódź did not significantly impact migrant inflow or housing availability, although it contributed to lower rents.

The article has contributed to the existing literature by focusing on a topic that has received limited scholarly attention despite its growing relevance. By placing our analysis within the context of Łódź, a shrinking city, the study not only enriches current knowledge but also has the potential to stimulate the formulation of urban policies responsive to the housing needs of immigrants. Furthermore, considering the scale and dynamics of international migration and its shifting spatial patterns, there is a pressing need for continued research into housing conditions and adaptive strategies of migrant communities in Poland's challenging housing market.

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