

**Rethinking immigration: the case of Ukrainian refugees**

**Laurano Patrizia1a, Sonzogni Barbarab, Germani Darioc**

a Università dell’Aquila, email: patrizia.laurano@univaq.it; bSapienza Università di Roma, email: barbara.sonzogni@uniroma1.it; c bUniversità degli Studi di Cagliari, email: dario.germani@unica.it

**Keywords:** refugees, Ukraine, reception, EU directive, interviews.

**Working group:** GT 25: Sociología de las migraciones.

1. **Introduction**:

The aim of the project is to understand the various elements involved in the management of the Ukrainian emergency in order to verify whether the one put in place can be considered a new reception model, which can be used as an inspiration for a more effective management of recurring "refugee emergencies".

The paper proposes an analysis of both positive and negative aspects of this alternative and more flexible form of reception, exploring the hypothesis that it could represent a new approach to traditional migration policies.

1. **Theoretical-methodological approach**;

The research, which is still ongoing, adopts a qualitative methodology involving semi-structured interviews with Ukrainian refugees. The less formal nature of this type of interview allows flexibility and adaptability, within a 'thematic map' (Sala, 2010) in which to include the list of topics the researcher intends to discuss with the interviewee).

This tool, therefore, seems more appropriate and more in line with the project’s objectives, which do not aim to quantify the phenomenon, but rather to grasp its peculiar and specific aspects. This is particularly evident in the exploration of concepts such as social capital and ethnic networks. Indeed, the concept of “social capital” serves as a crucial tool for understanding how networks influence migration (Haug, 2008). According to some scholars, it is possible to define social capital concerning migration and its social, economic, and political dimensions, using two specific conceptual categories: ethnic social capital, referring to social capital embedded in associations/organizations of an ethnic nature, with internal expendability only (Esser 2004; Jacobs and Tillie 2004) and cross-cultural social capital, which connects members of ethnic associations/organisations to broader and different contexts through more flexible relational forms (Jacobs, Pahlet and Swyngedouw, 2004).

Moreover, in the analysis of the Ukrainian case, there is a gender element that could play a particularly significant role, since both the community already settled in our country (78.6%, slightly higher than the European average) and the refugees fleeing the war are predominantly female. Without neglecting the fact that women have access to a wider range of social networks due to their employment in care services (Edwards 2004; Ryan et al., 2011; White, 2010) and this element of connection with the host society may have played a significant role in managing the 'private' accommodation of those fleeing war.

The women interviewed were contacted through associations and operators involved in the reception system and also through private contacts, from which they then reached out to others, according to a 'chain' sampling whereby the same interviewee suggests other people to be interviewed. In order to define the number of interviewees, the "saturation" (information that is repeated; Bertaux, 1999) is adopted as a stopping rule: "very often the criteria to establish whether a sufficient number of interviews has been reached depends much more on the quality of the interviews than on decisions taken upstream by the researcher" (Gianturco 2005, p. 97).

3) **Results**:

Through the interviews (in progress) emerges a multifaceted and complex reality, in which both the legislation applied and the social capital of the Ukrainian community itself play a central role. A new element is undoubtedly the fact that most of the refugees found temporary accommodation with relatives and friends, while those who did not have a family or friend support network ended up in reception centres. Among the interviews carried out so far, there are very different situations: women who suddenly fled on their own, a mother with a sick daughter who contacted Italian associations to ensure a safe journey for her child, women who responded to projects promulgated by Ukrainian associations present in Italy, etc. What emerges from the words of the interviewees is a general state of satisfaction with the reception found in our country, but also a definite awareness that the slowness and cumbersomeness of bureaucracy have "jammed up" the "totally new" system that had been devised, with tasks entrusted to Third Sector organisations, the so-called widespread reception, the family reception organised by the Civil Protection and supported by state funds.

Moreover, the continuation of the war - with no immediate prospect of an end or suspension - puts a strain on the refugees' reception (in terms, above all, of the payment of the subsistence contribution, extension of the validity of the European Directive, etc.) who are distinguished - compared to other communities - by their desire to return to their own country as soon as possible. A condition that also entails less commitment to activities aimed at fostering better integration such as, for example, attending an Italian language course. According to Mario Tronca, President of the Italian-Ukrainian Christian Association, “Ukrainians return home as soon as they can, especially if the intensity of the fighting diminishes in their areas”. Moreover, a monitoring conducted by UNHCR on a sample of 1,530 refugees in Italy reveals that only 11% have found employment in our country. The primary obstacle to job placement is the language barrier, given that the main job demands involve tasks such as cleaning in households and businesses, caregiving, and services in restaurants and hotels, where a certain level of language proficiency is required. In addition, almost all refugees are women with young children: they can therefore only do hourly work that allows them to look after their children.

The interviews repeatedly reveal concern about the future: the funds made available by the Italian government were sufficient to cope with the first year of reception. The European Union has already extended the emergency period by one year, until March 3 2024. However, as of today there are difficulties in finding the necessary resources (some women are still waiting for the expected economic contribution) and also in finding availability for widespread reception. The fate of these women appears uncertain and obscure, which is often the reason why they are mobilised to return to Ukraine.

The further interviews that will be carried out will allow us to better focus on some of the evidence emerging from the research: the successful combination of new legislative instruments and the role of social capital within the migratory networks, all aimed at delineating a "new" reception model. A model, therefore, in which emerges "the strength of interpersonal and collective relations in the functioning of social structures" and the conditioning of the political/legal apparatus in directing, promoting and structuring social dynamics, in order to contribute to the realisation of a positive coexistence and an effective response to the "age of migration" (Castles and Miller, 2003).

**Reference**

Bertaux, D., Racconti di vita, la prospettiva etnosociologica, 1999 (ed.originale 1997), Milano, FrancoAngeli.

Castles, S., Miller. M. J. (2003). The Age of Migration. New York, NY: Guilford Press.

Edwards R., (2004), ‘Present and absent in troubling ways: families and social capital debates’, The Sociological Review, 52 (4): 1–21.

Esser, H. (2004). Does the “new” immigration require a “new” theory of intergenerational integration?. The International Migration Review, 38 (3), 1126–1159.

Gianturco. G. (2005). L'intervista qualitativa. Dal discorso al testo scritto. Roma: Guerini

Haug, S. (2008). Migration Networks and Migration Decision-Making. Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies 34 (4), 585–605.

Jacobs, D., Phalet, K., Swyngedouw, M. (2004). Associational membership and political involvement among ethnic minority groups in Brussels. J. Ethn. Migr. Stud. 30(3), 543–559.

Jacobs, D., Tillie, J. (2004). Introduction: social capital and political integration of migrants. J. Ethn. Migr. Stud. 30 (3), 419–427.

Mazzei, B. L., V., Uccello, S. (2023). Per l’accoglienza dei profughi dall’Ucraina spesi 754 milioni (online).

https://www.ilsole24ore.com/art/per-l-accoglienza-profughi-dall-ucraina-spesi-754-milioni-AEKHHmmC, access 6 February 2024

Ryan, L. (2011). Migrants’ Social Networks and Weak Ties: Accessing Resources and Constructing Relationships Post-Migration. The Sociological Review, 59(4), 707-724.

Sala, E. (2010). L’intervista. En De Lillo A. (Ed.), Il mondo della ricerca qualitativa (pp. 77–104), Torino. Utet.