Emotion, Deterrence, and Securitization:

Reconceptualizing IR Theory since the Russian Aggression against Ukraine



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Emotion, Deterrence, and Securitization: Reconceptualizing IR Theory since the Russian Aggression against Ukraine

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AFFECTIVE DETERRENCE AND SECURITY COMMUNITY FORMATION: EMOTIONAL NARRATIVES OF DISPLACED UKRAINIANS IN EUROPE AFTER 2022 [1]

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Abstract. *Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine has transformed European security not only through military and diplomatic responses but also through the everyday emotional practices generated by mass displacement. This article examines how the narratives of displaced Ukrainians contribute to what we conceptualize as affective deterrence and to the bottom-up formation of a transnational European security community. Drawing on oral-history interviews with displaced Ukrainians collected in European countries in 2025 and a qualitative survey of 41 respondents conducted in 2024, the study combines insights from the affective turn in International Relations, affect theory, and security-community theory. It distinguishes between affective restraint, through which displaced persons regulate fear, anger, despair, and resentment in their interactions with host societies, and affective deterrence, through which narratives of suffering, responsibility, gratitude, resilience, and solidarity acquire broader social and political significance. The analysis identifies a four-stage mechanism linking embodied experiences of displacement to their narrative articulation, circulation through interpersonal and civic networks, resonance within host societies, and, ultimately, the legitimation of sustained European solidarity with Ukraine. The article argues that displaced Ukrainians should therefore be understood not merely as recipients of protection but as affective political actors whose everyday practices of self-regulation, testimony, and solidarity contribute to European social cohesion while also revealing the fragility of security communities under conditions of prolonged war and declining public empathy.*

Key words: *affective deterrence, affective restraint, security communities, forced migration, emotional narratives, Russo-Ukrainian war, international relations*

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Introduction

Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 catalyzed profound shifts across Europe, triggering the largest wave of forced displacement on the continent since World War II. While the resulting transformation of military, political, and diplomatic security dimensions is extensively debated in the global information space and analyzed by experts, the impact extends far beyond traditional geopolitical metrics. As millions of Ukrainians were forced to flee their homes and integrate into new social and cultural contexts, this mass migration redefined the humanitarian landscape and touched the emotional and psychological core of European societies. Consequently, forced displacement has evolved beyond a matter of physical mobility; it has brought to the forefront critical questions of security, solidarity, and belonging, where the key drivers are no longer just policy shifts, but the powerful emotions, affects, and narratives of lived experience.

Within the framework of contemporary security studies, the concept of affective deterrence is gaining increasing significance, moving beyond traditional rationalist models to focus on the emotional mechanisms that shape trust, fear, solidarity, and moral responsibility. This approach operates in tandem with the theory of security communities, which analyzes how non-violent perceptions of a shared destiny and mutual accountability are constructed between states and societies. In the context of the war in Ukraine, these two paradigms intersect within the daily practices and narratives of displaced individuals who are not merely adapting to new environments but are actively participating in the reimagining of the European security space. However, in current public, political, and academic discourses, the mass displacement of Ukrainians since 2022 is predominantly interpreted through the restrictive lenses of trauma, resilience, and integration. While these frameworks are essential for understanding individual experiences of war and host-country adaptation, they often narrow the analytical field by relegating the emotional dimension of migration to a purely private or therapeutic sphere. Consequently, such perspectives frequently treat the emotions of migrants as internal psychological states to be managed or compensated for, viewing displaced persons as passive carriers of vulnerability rather than active agents in broader social and security processes.

This article proposes an alternative analytical perspective by framing emotions not as isolated individual reactions, but as social practices embedded within the daily narratives, interactions, and forms of solidarity among displaced Ukrainians. To address this gap, the paper adopts an analytical framework that explicitly links micro-level emotional narratives to macro-level security mechanisms and policy legitimation within the European Union. In this context, affect emerges not merely as a consequence of war, but as a strategic resource capable of performing a deterrent function—specifically by mitigating the escalation of fear, intergroup tensions, and potential radicalization within both migrant communities and the broader European social landscape. By conceptualizing narrative expressions as a form of "affective labor," the study demonstrates how the personal, embodied trauma of displacement is converted into social cohesion and political agency, thereby underpinning collective European security

responses. It is through emotional narratives of gratitude, responsibility, mutual support, and moral positioning that an affective security infrastructure is constructed, effectively complementing the institutional and political mechanisms of wartime response.

This article aims to analyze the emotional narratives of displaced Ukrainians in European countries following the 2022 invasion as a key factor in affective deterrence and the formation of security communities. Drawing on oral history interviews and qualitative narrative analysis, the study explores how experiences of war, loss, gratitude, and the "survivor's guilt" associated with displacement, intertwined with a sense of responsibility for Ukraine's future, are transformed into a language of security, solidarity, and political agency. Consequently, this work offers an interdisciplinary perspective on forced migration by synthesizing affective approaches, memory studies, and critical security studies, thereby revealing the role of emotions as a vital resource for European security in the context of prolonged warfare.

1. Conceptual Framework

The theoretical framework of this publication can be outlined in a combined approach, which is defined by the "emotional turn" in international relations theory, the concept of "affect."

The "emotional turn" in International Relations theory

The Russian-Ukrainian war has already exerted a profound influence on the practice of contemporary interstate relations, the domestic and foreign policies of numerous global actors, the collective security architecture, and the realms of economics, ecology, and technology. This conflict has also precipitated a significant impact on International Relations (IR) theory—the field of scholarly and applied research dedicated to analyzing, explaining, and forecasting interactions between modern international actors. Beyond these structural changes, Russian aggression against Ukraine (and beyond) has resulted in the formation of new collective traumas, alongside tectonic shifts in the psycho-emotional domain at both collective and individual levels. Within this framework, an intensification of debates surrounding the so-called "emotional turn" in International Relations theory is to be expected; the empirical cases of the emotional component within the Russian-Ukrainian war, and its influence not only on the belligerents but also on Ukraine's allies and those sympathetic to Russia, will necessitate rigorous scholarly investigation and discourse.

The discourse regarding the role of emotions in international relations constitutes a relatively recent debate and a pivotal shift in International Relations (IR) theory, conventionally termed the "emotional turn." While emotions have been indirectly present as a component of international relations within classical theories—exemplified by Hans Morgenthau's assertion that fear drives nation-states toward war, thereby transforming individual apprehensions into national anxiety—they were historically not treated as a distinct object of scholarly analysis. During the 1970s, emotions were primarily examined within the framework of political psychology; however, a significant breakthrough in the study of emotions in a global context occurred between the late 1980s and early 2000s.

This period saw feminist scholars challenge the traditional “reason-emotion” binary, while concurrent advances in neuroscience empirically demonstrated that emotions are indispensable to both rational decision-making and the construction of identity (Koschut, 2022).

This has led to a new conceptualization of international actors as emotional entities. Since the beginning of the 21st century, there has been a consistent output of monographs and peer-reviewed articles investigating the role and influence of emotional states in the formulation of foreign policy and international interaction (Sasley, 2013). The intellectual foundations of research on emotions in international relations are drawn from a diverse range of disciplines, most notably psychology, neuroscience, sociology, history, and cultural studies (Августюк, 2025, p. 5).

German professor Simon Koschut identifies two primary research trajectories: the psychological and the sociological. In his view, the psychological approach treats emotions as individual attributes moving "from the inside out," directly influencing perception and behavior (Koschut, 2022). Consequently, in international relations scholarship, the focus is placed on the role emotions play in political decision-making, diplomacy (such as trust), foreign policy, and security – a framework sometimes referred to as “psychological constructivism.” Conversely, the sociological (or cultural) approach views emotions as collective products moving "from the outside in," embedded within social structures and practices. Research within this dimension concentrates on how emotions shape global identities and participate in rituals and symbolic performances, such as security narratives and practices of securitization (Koschut, 2022).

Ukrainian professor Mariia Avhustiuk identifies two primary directions for studying emotions in international relations: first, the investigation of the interplay between individual and collective emotions, and second, the examination of emotions in relation to the dynamics and structures of power institutions (Августюк, 2025, p. 9). The author also pays particular attention to the concept of the "everyday politics of emotions," which enables researchers to explore which emotions are perceived as (il)legitimate or (un)desirable, who is permitted to express them, and how they circulate. In this context, Avhustiuk differentiates between the politics of emotional duty (the drive to impose specific emotions), the politics of emotional rights (the pursuit of the freedom to feel or not to feel certain emotions), and the politics of emotional protection (determining whose emotions deserve priority) (Августюк, 2025, pp. 10–11). These contemporary approaches allow for a nuanced reinterpretation of the onset and initial weeks of the Russian full-scale invasion, as well as the subsequent reactions from European nations and the global community. For instance, the emotional phrase “Russian warship, go f*** yourself,” which became a symbol of defiance for the Ukrainian soldiers defending Snake Island, rapidly gained worldwide popularity as a hallmark of resistance against Russian aggression and transformed into a global meme. This narrative was embraced by international media, echoed at rallies, and even resonated in various European parliaments, demonstrating how an emotion expressed in this manner became a driving force for international solidarity with the Ukrainian people.

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Within the scholarship situated in the context of the "emotional turn" in international relations theory, a distinction is drawn between "political emotions"—emotional reactions such as fear, anger, and pride that actively shape political processes—and "emotional politics," which refers to the strategic cultivation, manipulation, and simulation of emotions for political objectives, often through discourse. Despite these advancements, the emotional turn continues to face challenges regarding the definition and conceptualization of emotions. Simon Koschut identifies three primary clusters of debate, which can be summarized as "emotion versus cognition," "spontaneity versus strategy," and "nature versus culture" (Koschut, 2022). Furthermore, intense debates persist over the distinction between "emotion and affect," as well as the methodological hurdles in researching emotions, particularly collective ones, within the sphere of international relations.

One of the primary challenges remains the theorization of collective emotions, particularly as international relations theory focuses on collective actors such as states and organizations. According to Simon Koschut, the conceptualization of collective emotions is a cornerstone of contemporary debates within the field. He notes that the collectivization of emotions occurs through three primary pathways: first, emotional contagion, a spontaneous "bottom-up" process where emotions spread rapidly among large groups, as seen in mass protests or social media virality; second, shared group membership, where collective emotions emerge from a common identity and shared interests, such as a collective fear of an external threat; and third, emotional management, a "top-down" process where emotions are institutionalized and regulated by social expectations or norms that dictate what a group ought to feel (Koschut, 2022).

American researcher Brent E. Sasley notes that social psychology provides Intergroup Emotion Theory (IET) as a ready-made framework for conceptualizing emotions. This theory is built upon social identity theory and other analyses of collective identities and behavior, offering a four-stage process that explains how emotions become group-level attributes. In the first stage, individuals begin to identify themselves as part of a group. The second stage involves the appraisal of a specific situation, in which individuals who identify with the group evaluate events based on their impact on the collective. The third stage entails the generation of intergroup emotions. Finally, the fourth stage involves transforming these emotional reactions into action tendencies or collective behavior (Sasley, 2013).

Applying these approaches to the analysis of foreign policy and international relations allows for a focused examination of decision-makers, as they both reflect and shape the emotions of the group. In the case of states, this implies that a researcher must consider at least three key elements: (1) public opinion polls and other data that provide insight into the public's sentiments; (2) authoritative leaders who issue statements that reproduce and echo these emotional responses; and (3) the specific foreign policies implemented by these leaders, which can then be understood as the channeling of particular national emotional reactions. It is within this very context that numerous cases of communication by global and national politicians during the Russo-Ukrainian war

should be investigated to derive new interpretations of the contemporary state of international relations.

Consequently, the emergence of interdisciplinary approaches to the analysis of emotions in international relations indicates a fundamental shift in their status: from being viewed as marginalized and irrational phenomena to being recognized as a foundational component of international politics. Reflections on emotions within international interactions can provide profound insights into all forms of international behavior. The social, collective, and political nature of emotions is of significant importance for international and global politics and its study. Beyond the purely theoretical debates ongoing in this burgeoning field of international relations, researchers have identified several promising directions for further inquiry. Brent E. Sasley emphasizes the need for rigor in developing theories and models while carefully tracing empirical evidence. Mariia Avhustiuk proposes a three-tiered approach that involves explaining the propensity of societies to interact through systems of values, norms, and emotions; clarifying the specifics of interstate and intrastate relations; and examining the nexus of time, memory, emotions, and feelings on the international stage. Similarly, Simon Koschut advocates for integrating the study of emotions in international relations with an historical approach to uncover the historical evolution of collective emotions. Ultimately, these frameworks will inevitably be applied to the analysis of the current Russo-Ukrainian war, enabling a disclosure of Russia's aggressive actions and Ukrainian resistance specifically through the lens of emotions, thereby solidifying the "emotional turn" in international relations theory as a logical stage in the discipline's evolution.

In this context, the study of affective deterrence and security community formation becomes particularly salient, as the emotional narratives of displaced Ukrainians in Europe after 2022 serve as a vital empirical site for observing how individual trauma and collective resilience transform into a shared affective infrastructure that reinforces European security.

Affect and migration

Another approach employed in the preparation of this publication is the concept of "affect," which in contemporary mobility and migration studies draws increasing attention to the conceptual distinction between affect and emotion. Affect is not identical to emotion; it precedes the verbalized expression of feelings, remaining pre-discursive and embodied as it forms at the intersection of bodily experience, the social environment, and institutional structures. To ensure conceptual and methodological rigor, this study establishes a strict analytical distinction between affect and emotion: affect is conceptualized as pre-discursive, embodied intensities—the bodily shocks, visceral anxieties, and physiological tensions of war trauma that precede linguistic expression (Massumi, 2002), whereas emotion represents the socialized, linguistically articulated, and discursive translation of these affects into structured narratives (such as articulated feelings of gratitude, guilt, fear, or solidarity). Analyzing affect allows for an exploration of how the experiences of war, loss, and displacement are transformed into mechanisms of social interaction, support, and solidarity, even before they are articulated through

words. Furthermore, affect circulates between the individual and the community, creating affective economies (Ahmed, 2014), in which feelings of gratitude, fear, responsibility, or anxiety are converted into social resources. The analytical bridge between pre-discursive affect and verbalized emotional narratives is "affective labor" (Hochschild, 2003; Ahmed, 2014), through which displaced individuals engage in continuous emotional regulation to convert raw bodily trauma into structured social practices. Similar to the concept of emotional labor (Hochschild, 2003), migrants invest emotional effort into maintaining interactions with the host society, thereby shaping practices of solidarity and coordination within their new environment. Within the field of migration and affect studies, it has been demonstrated that such circulations of affect do not merely define the individual experience of adaptation; they also construct collective perceptions of security, belonging, and social support under conditions of forced mobility.

This perspective is bolstered by the foundational work of Canadian philosopher Brian Massumi (2002), who interprets affect as a bodily, pre-verbal potential for action—a force or capacity of the body to affect other objects or be affected itself. Consequently, the affect of displaced Ukrainians can be viewed as an "embodied experience," a continuous lived intensity that directly influences their social agency. Complementing this, Melissa Gregg and Gregory Seigworth, in *The Affect Theory Reader* (2010), explain affect as a flow of force capable of shaping social processes and the very contours of political interaction. By blending migration research with affect theory, we can interpret the emotions of migrants as socially and politically significant drivers that circulate within communities to form specific social practices.

In the context of the Russo-Ukrainian war, affect functions not as a private or therapeutic category, but as a social practice that organizes interaction between migrants and host institutions, operating through the dual dimensions of affective restraint and affective deterrence. To fully analyze the narratives of Ukrainian refugees, one must account for both: while affective restraint involves the internal regulation and moderation of destabilizing emotions—such as anger or despair—to prevent social friction and radicalization, affective deterrence functions as an active resource that projects resilience and solidarity to influence the broader security landscape. These mechanisms allow displaced persons to move beyond the role of passive victims, instead becoming active participants in constructing a "security community."

To connect these individual experiences to the formation of a "security community" (Adler & Barnett, 1998), this study operationalizes the bottom-up construction of an affective security community through three core indicators: (1) a shared sense of destiny and mutual moral responsibility between displaced persons and host societies; (2) high levels of interpersonal trust and the absence of expectations of violence or social conflict in host environments; (3) everyday horizontal practices of solidarity (joint volunteering, cultural initiatives, and civic cooperation).

Furthermore, to demonstrate how micro-level experiences inform macro-level EU security policies, the study outlines a four-stage causal/social mechanism:

1. Micro-level (embodied affect & narrative translation): pre-verbal trauma and displacement intensity (embodied affect) are converted through "affective labor" into structured narratives of gratitude, responsibility, and restraint.

2. Meso-level (circulation & amplification): these emotional narratives circulate through volunteer networks, digital platforms, diaspora groups, and public events across host societies.

3. Socio-affective level (public resonance & empathy): narrative circulation fosters a shared moral orientation in host publics ("this is not just Ukraine's war, but a shared security imperative").

4. Macro-level (policy legitimation & affective deterrence): this public affective alignment expands the "corridor of legitimacy" for European governments, sustaining public backing for sanctions, financial assistance, and arms deliveries. Here, affective deterrence operates not via military threats, but by establishing moral barriers that prevent empathy fatigue and the normalization of aggression.

Through mutual recognition, empathy, and the "affective labor" of gratitude, Ukrainians and their host societies build everyday practices of solidarity that mitigate fear and tension. Ultimately, this affective infrastructure rooted in collective trust and mutual responsibility and it serves as a vital resource for social stability, transforming individual narratives of trauma into a powerful collective force for European security.

2. Research Methodology

The empirical basis for this publication consists of the results of two distinct studies based on qualitative methods—specifically, the analysis of surveys involving Ukrainians who moved abroad due to Russian aggression against Ukraine.

The research is grounded in qualitative methodology, utilizing oral history interviews as the primary method of empirical data collection. The interviews were conducted with Ukrainian citizens who were forced to leave Ukraine following the start of the full-scale invasion by the Russian Federation in 2022 and are currently residing in European Union countries. This approach allows for the documentation of individual and collective narratives of war, displacement, and adaptation from a long-term perspective.

The selection of respondents was carried out using a purposive sampling approach, ensuring diversity in terms of age, gender, marital status, educational and professional background, as well as the duration of stay abroad. Methodologically, the demographic structure of the sample reflects the broader socio-legal realities of Ukrainian wartime displacement, where female respondents constitute the absolute majority due to martial law regulations restricting the departure of men aged 18-60 from Ukraine. This gender dynamic allows the study to capture the distinct affective practices and domestic/social burdens of displaced female scholars, mothers, and professionals navigating host societies. The study was conducted in accordance with the ethical principles of qualitative and oral history research: all respondents participated on a voluntary basis under the conditions of informed consent; anonymity and confidentiality

of personal data were strictly maintained; particular attention was paid to sensitivity regarding traumatic experiences and the respondents' right to terminate the interview at any time.

The analysis of the collected material was performed using narrative and thematic analysis. To operationalize the theoretical framework outlined in Section 2, the coding process deliberately focused on identifying how pre-discursive affective states (bodily shocks, anxiety, trauma) were converted through "affective labor" into structured emotional narratives of gratitude, responsibility, and social adaptation (Massumi, 2002; Ahmed, 2014). Furthermore, thematic coding categorized narrative markers of "affective restraint" (internal regulation of anger or despair to avoid host friction) and "affective deterrence" (projecting moral agency and resilience to sustain European public support). This method allows for the exploration of how participants construct meanings of war, security, and mobility through emotional and affective narratives, and how these narratives both reflect and shape social practices and perceptions of community and safety.

The empirical materials of the first study consist of oral history interviews collected within the framework of the European Union's Research and Innovation program, Horizon Europe (Project № 101182968 – HORIZON TMA MSCA, Peace and Mobilities). The Faculty of History and International Relations of Zaporizhzhia National University has been an active participant in this program as part of an international university consortium since 2024. The "Peace and Mobilities" project aims to conceptualize the issues of war and peace through the experiences and perspectives of migrants, with a particular focus on their narratives, memory, and daily practices. Within this project, researchers from the Faculty of History and International Relations at Zaporizhzhia National University conduct a systematic study of war and peace based on the oral history narratives of Ukrainian displaced persons in EU countries. In 2025, field research was conducted in Bielefeld and Leipzig (Germany), Madrid (Spain), and Thessaloniki (Greece), during which approximately 100 in-depth interviews were collected from Ukrainian citizens forced to leave the country following the full-scale invasion by the Russian Federation.

The surveys were conducted across diverse socio-cultural locations, specifically within civic, educational, religious, and volunteer activity settings. This institutional diversity allows for the examination of displaced persons' emotional narratives not merely as individual testimonies, but as socially embedded practices shaped through interaction with host communities. The research focus encompassed experiences of spatial and social mobility, adaptation strategies, and integration challenges, as well as perceptions of war, peace, and the future amidst a prolonged crisis. Analyzing these contexts enables us to trace how the narratives of displaced Ukrainians interact with local structures, forming affective mechanisms of solidarity, trust, and security within their new environments. The interviews are now stored in the Manuscript Department of the Zaporizhzhia Branch of the M. Hrushevsky Institute of Ukrainian Archeography and Source Studies of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine (Фонд 8).

Empirical data from another study were collected during the implementation of the individual DUSS (Disrupted Ukrainian Scholars and Students (DUSS), the University of Alberta's Initiative, Canada) project research grant "The Russian-Ukrainian war: the main narratives of the migration issues". The research was designed around a survey conducted in January – February 2024 by the questionnaire survey method (Google Forms, 2024). 41 respondents took part in the survey, among them there were 38 females and 3 males, age from 77 to 22 years old. 35 of the respondents fled to Europe (Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Finland, Germany, Ireland, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Slovak Republic, Spain), five to Canada, one to the USA.

The study utilized an online survey instrument comprising both closed-ended and open-ended questions to examine the complexities of wartime migration. A critical methodological feature of this approach was the deliberate inclusion of open-ended queries, which functioned as a narrative tool, empowering refugees to autonomously define the scope of their contributions. Rather than being constrained by pre-determined categories, participants were granted the agency to prioritize and articulate the specific impressions, sentiments, and experiences they deemed most significant. These open-ended reflections provided rich qualitative data on how micro-level personal reflections align with broader socio-affective dynamics and bottom-up security practices. This qualitative flexibility was instrumental in capturing the authentic "voice" of the respondents, facilitating a comprehensive exploration of personal migration trajectories, perceptions of the ongoing conflict, and the nuances of resettlement within host societies. Conducted through a purposive sampling strategy among individuals who migrated following the full-scale Russian aggression of February 24, 2022, the survey sought to gather rich, in-depth data focused on the construction of migration narratives. Ultimately, the methodology emphasized the subjective agency of the displaced, allowing them to self-select the aspects of their journey they wished to disclose, thereby shifting the research focus from rigid sociological metrics to the lived emotional reality of the participants.

The collected empirical material serves as a foundation for preliminary analytical findings and subsequent research steps, particularly regarding the identification of factors that influence how displaced persons perceive their own future. The analysis also focuses on the ways in which individual and collective memories of the war are transformed into emotional narratives that define life strategies, social practices, and perceptions of security within the European context.

3. Results of the Research

Affective landscapes in survey narratives

An analysis of the survey results allows for the reconstruction of the emotional landscape of the initial migration stage, which is dominated by states of anxiety and disorientation. In accordance with the theoretical framework outlined in Section 2, this section traces the empirical operation of the first two stages of the causal/social mechanism: Stage 1 at the micro-level, where pre-discursive bodily affects (panic, grief,

visceral shock) are discursively translated into structured emotional narratives, and Stage 2 at the meso-level, where these emotional narratives circulate through social, civic, and volunteer interactions within host societies.

An overview of the responses to the question "What was the most difficult thing for you at the beginning of your stay outside of Ukraine?", obtained through surveying, allows for the identification of the most challenging moments in how forced migrants perceived the starting point of their journey in their host countries. If summarized, one can distinguish the following four key emotional narratives that illustrate how individual trauma intertwines with the process of adaptation in a new environment.

The first can be characterized as a narrative of emotional rupture and transborder anxiety, primarily related to the fact that the most painful aspect for respondents was the destruction of family integrity. This is not merely a longing for loved ones, but a constant state of affective "disconnection," manifesting in several different dimensions. For some, it is the separation from husbands and partners, and the resulting sense of loneliness caused by the fact that loved ones remained at the front or in Ukraine ("separation from my husband," "the absence of relatives nearby," "the absence of parents and husband," "life without a husband," "husband is in Ukraine," "loneliness"). For other respondents, it is the fear for relatives who remained under occupation. Worrying about them creates an emotional tension that hinders focusing on adaptation in the new country ("living with the thought that dad is on the front line, and mom and brother are under occupation," "fear for relatives who ended up under occupation"). Another dimension of such an emotional rupture was the loss of one's usual circle of friends and the support of parents, which intensifies the feeling of vulnerability in the new environment ("Longing for the motherland. Pain and fear," "the absence of 'one's own social bubble'"). At this micro-level, these responses highlight how raw, embodied trauma—the visceral shock of displacement—is initially verbalized through narratives of profound loss and relational fragmentation.

The second narrative can be characterized as an emotion of existential disorientation, primarily associated with the necessity of starting life "from scratch." This narrative reflects a profound psychological shock from the sudden loss of a former identity and the need for a radical reconstruction of life. Some respondents described their state at the beginning of their time in emigration as a "depressive state," "fear of realizing the situation," "lack of desire to adapt," and even "disillusionment with humanity, because the news of March 2022 was shocking." There is a palpable "understanding that life will never be the same as it was," while phrases like "split personality" point to a conflict between past experience and the new role of a refugee imposed by the war. Respondents note a "lack of understanding of what to do next," "the hardest part is not understanding what comes next," which testifies to the destruction of the planning horizon and a certain "loss" of the future.

The third narrative concerns "language and mental barriers," which became a unique security challenge for migrants. In the narratives of Ukrainians, language appears not merely as a tool for communication, but as a factor of security and control over one's own life. Lack of language proficiency and a different mentality amplify the feeling of

"strangeness": respondents feel lonely among "strangers," so the presence of a language barrier generates a sense of isolation and communicative tension; the inability to speak the language is perceived as an obstacle that prevents one from explaining their pain or understanding the systems of another state, which only exacerbates stress.

The emotional state of displaced persons is closely linked to the difficulties of integrating into the social system of the host country. Everyday problems become a source of additional anxiety, and the experiences of institutional and domestic instability form the fourth narrative. Its main characteristics are mentions of the loss of usual comfort (for some, it was "moving from the capital to a village," for others – unsatisfactory living conditions or the need to share a household with others, such as living together with German families or with a husband's parents), as well as a certain bureaucratic vulnerability that creates a sense of domestic "incapacity" (for instance, difficulties in finding a family doctor or a kindergarten for a child, or the inability to buy medicine without a prescription).

The analysis shows that at the beginning of their stay abroad, the emotional narratives of Ukrainians fluctuate between deep fear or depression and the necessity of immediate rationalization of daily life. For them, the formation of a "security community" from the bottom up (Adler & Barnett, 1998) begins precisely with overcoming these barriers: through the support of "complete strangers," language learning, and the gradual acceptance of a new social role.

In response to the multiple-choice question "Have the difficulties you faced at the beginning of your emigration disappeared?", 7 out of 41 respondents chose a positive answer ("yes," they have disappeared), 8 respondents gave a negative answer ("no," they have not disappeared), and the vast majority (26 respondents) chose the answer "partially." At the same time, when asked "Do you consider yourself to have already adapted to life in another country?", 17 respondents chose an affirmative answer, 20 respondents answered "partially," and only 3 respondents chose "no," while one other female respondent indicated that she had returned to Ukraine. It is perfectly clear that these data do not constitute a classic sociological study; thus, they only illustrate the opinions of the group of Ukrainian refugees who took part in the survey.

Summarizing the responses regarding the adaptation experience and current challenges, one can distinguish three dominant emotional and semantic narratives that illustrate the complex transition from individual vulnerability to attempts at integration into the collective structures of European countries. First, the primary affective background of adaptation is the sudden transition from collective family security to radical individual responsibility. Respondents keenly feel the need to "solve everything on one's own"—from daily chores to legal matters that were previously delegated to other family members in Ukraine ("all by myself," "the main difficulty is solving issues that other family members used to help with in Ukraine after leaving, all of this had to be done independently while working at the same time," "at first, it was very difficult without outside help"). This creates a sense of exhaustion and a "psychological abyss." This transition demonstrates the engagement in "affective labor" (Hochschild, 2003; Ahmed 2014), where displaced individuals actively spend emotional energy to regulate despair

and exert control over their daily environments. Second, respondents' feedback points to a sense of social "invisibility." Despite outward assistance, internally, displaced persons often feel like "strangers" who will never become "one of their own" ("you are a stranger in the country," "no one needs you except yourself"). Third, the responses of Ukrainian refugees also reveal a trauma of unpreparedness because, unlike conscious emigration, the refugee experience is described as a "forced and unexpected move," which strips a person of the psychological resources for preparation, making adaptation painful.

Just as at the beginning of their stay outside Ukraine, forced migrants' impressions of adaptation in their host countries are accompanied by the realization of the necessity to overcome the language barrier; a lack of language proficiency or the inability to express one's own views leads to the marginalization of the individual ("I can only explain myself in primitive situations"). This lack of proficiency results in the "other" society being perceived as silent or hypocritical (when "everyone is polite, but you are not sure if they understood you," "when you have seemingly come to an agreement and resolved all your issues, but due to the language barrier you were misunderstood and everything went wrong"). This forms a feeling of "existing in a capsule," where the migrant is physically integrated into the space (walking through Lisbon, visiting museums) but remains mentally outside the community.

The lack of language proficiency also creates barriers in interacting with the state systems of host countries. Frequently, the other society is perceived through the filter of bureaucracy ("piles of papers," "strange laws"), which creates a sense that in this system, the migrant "will never be one of their own." Thus, narratives of "paper-chasing" and "complex laws" indicate that the system, which is supposed to ensure security, is often perceived as a hostile or incomprehensible structure, further intensifying stress. The impossibility of finding qualified work without "local experience" or high-level language skills creates a threat to identity (the transition from a "highly qualified specialist" to a "factory worker in three shifts," "it is difficult to find decent work," "my husband cannot find a job even though he is a highly qualified specialist," "the qualifications of many specialists do not meet the country's requirements").

The responses of Ukrainian refugees also reveal a certain affective duality and a "crisis of the future." Respondents describe a state of constant choosing between the "desire to build a new life" and the "desire to give everything up and return." The impossibility of long-term planning is the primary indicator of affective destabilization. New difficulties described by displaced persons are related to "legitimizing oneself," the renewal of permits, and the fear of an unknown future after the war ends. This forms a state of "suspension," where a person lives across two countries without fully belonging to either. At the same time, one can trace the emergence of a narrative about the "growing abyss between Ukrainians who left and those who stayed," which indicates the fracturing of former security communities and the difficulty of forming new ones.

The analysis shows that the process of adaptation for forced migrants is a constant balancing act between gratitude for support ("the government helped," "local colleagues supported") and deep internal pain from the loss of home. For displaced persons, a security community is formed through small groups (the church, the Ukrainian

community, social services), which become “buffers” between the traumatized individual and a new, often bureaucratized reality. Here, “affective restraint” operates as a vital coping mechanism: refugees consciously manage destabilizing feelings of resentment or trauma to avoid creating social friction with host communities, thereby maintaining constructive social interactions. The main challenge remains the transformation of the “state of survival” into a “state of living” amidst the ongoing war.

In the statements of Ukrainian refugees, another dimension of balancing can be traced: life in emigration emerges as a complex combination of functional integration into a new society and affective attachment to Ukraine. A typical day for the respondents is characterized by an extremely high event density and a “double burden.”

The generalized structure of their daily routine can be divided into three vectors related to work, language learning, and news monitoring. Thus, many migrants continue to work online for Ukrainian institutions, combining this with local part-time jobs, studies, or language courses. Working at a computer is described as being “the same as in Ukraine,” which creates an effect of virtual presence at home while being physically abroad. Language learning (German, Slovak, Polish, etc.) occupies a central place in the schedule. This is perceived as “playing by new rules,” in which intellectual effort is devoted to overcoming the barrier between “oneself” and the “other” society. A vital component of an ordinary day is “news monitoring.” Mentions in the responses of starting the day with “Kyiv Digital” or a call to a relative indicate that the refugees' emotional focus remains in Ukraine (“news from morning to night, interrupted only by some tasks,” “news every day (checking 10-15 times),” “the morning begins with monitoring news from Ukraine, that is, if I wasn't already woken up by the air raid siren on the Kyiv Digital mobile app,” “constantly – monitoring the news”). Their psychological state is described as an “internal struggle,” where routine serves as a way of self-soothing and escaping from depression.

For instance, one respondent briefly described their typical day: “The same kind of day as in Ukraine. Routine. And also the effort to calm my psychological state. Because there is an internal struggle, like how good it was at home and that you don’t want to immigrate, but then, having calmed down, you continue to study, to learn the new rules and laws by which you must now play.”

The new environment for forced migrants who fled the war is significantly safer when compared to the situation in Ukraine. However, the security community for Ukrainians abroad is “hybrid” in nature. An ordinary day is focused on building functional security (work, language, housing), while affective security continues to be nourished by news from Ukraine and connections with loved ones.

The daily lives of Ukrainians abroad are further enriched by acts of affective solidarity and volunteering, through which displaced persons interact with local communities. This dynamic illustrates Stage 2 of our mechanism (meso-level circulation and amplification), where individual emotional narratives transition into collective civic engagement. Notably, according to the survey responses, only one respondent indicated that they do not communicate with other Ukrainians who left Ukraine due to the war. Meanwhile, 27 of the 41 participants reported contact with the local Ukrainian diaspora

("I met quite good people who helped with advice," "they often organize events in support of Ukraine, in which I try to participate"). Days dedicated to rallies, fundraising, or successful auctions provide respondents with a sense of agency, transforming the migrant from an object of assistance into an active participant in the struggle, which serves as a powerful means of affective deterrence by asserting moral resilience and maintaining public visibility for Ukraine's defense.

The perception of the host society remains fragmentary: it is recognized as safe and orderly, but often emotionally cold or unreachable for full integration. To the survey question "Do you feel like a 'stranger' in the society of your host country? How strong is this feeling?", the vast majority of participants (22 out of 41) rated their emotions in the middle ground between "I do not feel like a 'stranger'" and "I feel like a complete 'stranger.'" Thirteen participants identified themselves as close to the host society (7 of whom do not feel like "strangers" at all), while 6 respondents admitted to feeling like "strangers."

Perceptions of the host society fluctuate between idealization and deep alienation. Emotional reactions associated with the language barrier and the rejection of local bureaucratic systems have already been mentioned. However, there are many positive reviews and examples of assistance provided to migrants by ordinary members of European communities (respondents were struck by the "support I encountered here," "receiving humanitarian aid"). Respondents were impressed by the hospitality of the Irish, the kindness of Polish friends, and the punctuality of the Germans. The host society is perceived as an "absolutely different world," where everything is striking: from the medical system and the attitude toward rules to the local architecture.

Survey participants shared their stories, which they interpreted as a kind of miracle that softened the trauma caused by the rupture of social ties resulting from forced migration. One of the female respondents described her experience in Germany: "For the first year, we lived in an apartment belonging to a German family, which they usually used as an office. We had to vacate this apartment, but we couldn't find anything else. And suddenly they informed us that they had decided to buy an apartment specifically to rent it out to us".

Here are a few more emotional examples: "On our first day in Bratislava, a volunteer named Robi helped us; my nephew even named a teddy bear, given to us by Slovak volunteers, after him and took the toy back to Kyiv when we returned"; "Last year, a German family invited us to celebrate Christmas. It was very interesting and pleasant"; "They helped a lot; volunteers drove us to the cities we needed and helped with our luggage"; "There were no stressful situations! In any non-standard situation, you can always get help from anyone"; "I can say that we were warmly welcomed and supported. Now we are much more independent"; "When we arrived here, the local Community of Sant'Egidio helped us immensely. They assisted with housing, the initial stages of settling in, filling out documents, and trips to the doctors since the children were ill. We are very grateful to them; they are wonderful people."

Another example provided by a respondent: "I had just crossed the Ukraine-Poland border. Two in the morning! The signal vanished! I needed a new SIM card for my mobile.

I approached a police officer... We drove to a shop where I could buy a SIM card. The salesgirl gave me a card and tried to register it on the network. The attempt failed, as the card was either local or something else. She said: you need to buy a new one. ... The police officer, the salesgirl, and a Polish customer from the queue bought me a new card with their own money, and it activated successfully. I moved on, towards Germany. I can recall more than one such example!".

An analysis of the respondents' stories allows for the identification of key vectors in the interaction between migrants and their new society. These stories demonstrate, on one hand, awareness of its real and often ambiguous structure, and on the other, the perception of the foreign space as a "lifebuoy." The most prominent aspect of interacting with the new society is the experience of unexpected help from strangers. Methodologically, these micro-level encounters fulfill the core empirical indicators of a bottom-up security community: high levels of interpersonal trust, mutual moral responsibility, and the total absence of expectations of conflict or violence. Support from specific institutions (besides the Community of Sant'Egidio, Charles University was mentioned in the survey, and another respondent noted that "there was help from local colleagues (my supervisor, in particular, 'secured' a room for my mother and me in the university dormitory)") or individual volunteers (such as the story of Robi the teddy bear) creates a sense of being protected. For the respondents, this serves as proof that the new society "accepts" them into its perimeter of care. A palpable emotional convergence is evident in the responses. For instance, the previously mentioned invitation to a German family for Christmas indicates that interaction extends beyond formal assistance, acquiring the characteristics of an affective bond. Among the testimonies of forced migrants, there is a poignantly expressed thought that strangers have become closer than blood relatives ("Shock... that strangers are better than relatives"). This illustrates the crisis of former social ties and the formation of a new identity through solidarity with representatives of the host community.

Thus, the identified narratives indicate that overcoming individual psychological shock is the first essential prerequisite for the subsequent inclusion of migrants into the social structures of host countries. By transforming pre-discursive trauma into everyday practices of gratitude, solidarity, and civic agency, these personal narratives provide the empirical foundation for a bottom-up security community, bridging individual micro-experiences with broader European socio-affective dynamics.

Personal histories of displacement: Insights from oral history interviews

While the survey captured general trends in emotional states, the in-depth interviews allow for the tracing of the mechanisms by which these feelings are actively transformed into concrete social practices.

The narratives and emotions identified through the survey are further validated and explored in depth through oral history interviews with forced migrants. An analysis of these interviews primarily highlights prominent narratives of restraint, which can be interpreted as manifestations of affective deterrence (or affective containment).

Affective deterrence is defined here as a conscious emotional and discursive strategy aimed at regulating the public expression of trauma, loss, or vulnerability during interactions with the host society. Rather than representing the suppression of emotions or forced silence, it constitutes an active choice regarding the forms and boundaries of one's speech.

This strategy manifests in several interconnected dimensions. First, it involves linguistic control: a careful selection of words and the avoidance of overly charged descriptions that might provoke fear, "compassion fatigue," or rejection in the listener. Second, it entails situational self-censorship of emotions, in which the individual temporarily softens their narrative in response to the communicative context. Third, affective deterrence includes an ethical responsibility toward the host society. This stems from an awareness of the asymmetry in emotional resources between those who have directly experienced war and those who perceive these stories indirectly.

Importantly, "affective restraint" operates not merely as a personal psychological adaptation technique, but as a vital micro-mechanism of social stability within the host security community. By consciously moderating despair, anger, or radicalized demands, displaced Ukrainians prevent friction and social conflict in host societies. This internal regulation directly supports the internal cohesion and threshold of trust within the security community (Adler & Barnett, 1998), ensuring that refugees are perceived not as a source of decommunity or social disruption, but as responsible civic actors.

Typical formulas of this narrative include directives such as "not to complain," "not to frighten the locals," and "to remain grateful." These serve as socially acceptable frameworks for emotional behavior, allowing displaced individuals to maintain their agency and dignity in a new environment. Importantly, this restraint is not a sign of weakness or "non-traumatic silence." On the contrary, it emerges as a form of affective labor directed at preserving social ties, preventing secondary traumatization, and sustaining one's own subjectivity. In this capacity, affective restraint bridges micro-level individual comportment with macro-level security policy: by preventing empathy fatigue and public resentment in host nations, it preserves the "corridor of legitimacy" required for European governments to sustain long-term military, financial, and humanitarian support for Ukraine. Thus, affective deterrence should be viewed as an active stance that combines emotional discipline, moral choice, and strategic thinking.

For instance, respondent Olha D., a native of Kyiv who has resided in Bielefeld, Germany, since March 2022, notes in her interview that one of the key problems of forced migration is the complicated access to professional employment, even for individuals with higher education and research experience (Фонд 8). Possessing a background in mathematics and experience in the IT sector in Ukraine, the respondent indicates that after relocating, she was forced to suspend her scientific activities and focus on language acquisition, while the process of entering the German labor market proved to be lengthy and competitive. She emphasizes that many Ukrainian migrants characterize their experience as a loss or decline in their previous professional and social status, which is linked to language barriers, institutional requirements, and the need for additional qualifications. At the same time, the respondent avoids direct criticism of the host society,

emphasizing her own responsibility for integration and viewing current difficulties as temporary.

Describing her experience of forced departure from Ukraine in February–March 2022, Olha D. presents the events of the start of the full-scale invasion in a chronologically detached, factual form, focusing on the sequence of actions (gathering documents, staying in a bomb shelter, the evacuation route) rather than on emotional experiences. Even when mentioning the explosions in Kyiv and the chaotic situation at the train stations, she uses restrained phrasing ("it was difficult," "it was anxious" (Фонд 8)), which testifies to the control of her affective narrative and an avoidance of dramatizing her own experience. In her account of life in Germany, the respondent consistently demonstrates a "not to complain" narrative, emphasizing the support available from university structures and social services while avoiding public grievances or accusations against the host society. Even in the context of difficulties with finding housing and the lengthy integration process, she highlights rational causes (housing shortages, high competition); this allows her position to be interpreted as ethically motivated affective deterrence aimed at maintaining social correctness. By reframing systemic institutional obstacles as rational causes rather than as accusatory rent-seeking or public anger, her affective restraint mitigates potential host-guest conflicts, thereby actively safeguarding the stability of the local security community.

The manner in which the respondent speaks about her own status as a migrant deserves separate attention. Olha D. explicitly states that forced emigration has led to a decline in her socio-professional status and the interruption of her career trajectory; however, she articulates this without appealing to a sense of injustice or resentment. Instead, the respondent emphasizes the necessity of personal efforts to adapt to labor market requirements ("I am currently going through interviews," "I have both language skills and education," "I am trying to get into this groove"), thereby positioning herself as an active subject of integration rather than a passive victim of circumstances ("it only remains to find my place, and I hope it will happen soon") (Фонд 8).

When speaking about the war from a distance, the respondent acknowledges a constant emotional connection with Ukraine and regular monitoring of the news, yet again avoids excessive emotional expression. She describes the pain and anxiety caused by losses and shelling in the form of cautious, generalized statements, which allows her speech to be viewed as an example of situational self-censorship of emotions, aimed at preventing the secondary traumatization of the interlocutor and ensuring self-preservation.

An example of affective deterrence through linguistic control and the non-dramatization of events is found in the testimony of Liudmyla D. (a native of the Vinnytsia region who lived in Kyiv for a long time). In describing the start of the full-scale invasion, she also records events in a detailed, chronological, yet emotionally restrained format: explosions, moving to a bomb shelter, a night in the shelter, evacuation to Vyshneve, and subsequent departure. Particularly revealing is the respondent's involvement in volunteer activities (weaving camouflage nets, making candles, participating in the operations of a Ukrainian aid warehouse). She explicitly articulates that action replaces emotional

verbalization: "I think that if I am doing at least something that is within my power" (Фонд 8). Thus, affective deterrence here is transformed into a practical form of agency, in which silence and restraint do not signify apathy but, on the contrary, serve to channel emotions into socially significant action.

The narratives demonstrate a transformation in the emotional reactions of the displaced persons. For instance, respondent Alyona O. (originally from Kherson) notes that the war caught her off guard, yet her initial shock quickly gave way to a sense of responsibility for her child and other civilians. She recalls: "When I saw a plane so low that our ears popped, my son just fell to the ground and covered his head. And at that moment I realized – I cannot panic; I must pull myself together, because if I get scared, he will break" (Фонд 8). This interview fragment demonstrates that fear is not articulated as a destructive affect but is instead recoded into maternal responsibility, which dictates a subsequent behavioral strategy: not losing control and "keeping oneself together."

Fear at the onset of the war, as the most potent emotion, is present in many interviews. In the narrative of Valentyna R. (originally from Izyum, Kharkiv region), fear is not verbalized as panic but rather manifests through bodily reactions and restrained descriptions. She recalls that after arriving in Germany, she reacted to the sounds of aircraft for a long time: "When a plane flew over, or helicopters – I wanted to crawl into some crevice so that no one could see or hear me" (Фонд 8). At the same time, she emphasizes that over time she learned to control this reaction, indicating a gradual transformation of fear: "It is only now, in the third year, that I react normally to this droning of planes" (Фонд 8). Thus, we observe how fear is transformed into habituation and internal discipline rather than external emotional expression.

Another respondent, Nadiya Kh. (originally from Nizhyn, Chernihiv region), describes the beginning of the full-scale war through the bodily experience of fear, while simultaneously limiting its public articulation. She recalls the first day of the invasion as a moment of sudden realization of danger: "I woke up on the twenty-fourth from an explosion… and I thought – this is war" (Фонд 8). Fear in her narrative is treated as legitimate but not dramatized; it is presented as a "normal" state for a person in war conditions: "It was scary, of course… we were running around… all those air raid sirens" (Фонд 8). At the same time, the right to pain is almost never claimed for herself; her pain is instead externalized and linked to others, primarily to her son who is fighting: "It's like a thorn in my heart, that my son is there." Thus, her own experience of forced migration does not become the center of suffering, yielding to the "more legitimate" pain of those who remained at the front.

In the refugees' interviews, the host society appears as a source of order, stability, and emotional regulation, while their own feelings remain restrained and controlled. The formation of security communities in Nadiya Kh.'s narrative occurs through situational, often informal interactions. Safety and reassurance are localized not within oneself, but in the actions and reactions of others: "The Poles had already fed us a hot lunch… they looked after us," "Here, they already welcomed us properly" (Фонд 8). Particularly revealing is an episode during the journey, which Nadiya described in considerable detail: her trip to Bielefeld became a true ordeal, as it involved a complex transfer in Berlin that

was impossible to manage without knowledge of the German language. A compassionate German railway conductor came to the aid of Nadiya and her companions; noticing the disoriented Ukrainians, he personally searched the train for a passenger who spoke Ukrainian and asked her to help. From Nadiya's account: "[the conductor] found a woman somewhere there on the train, and she said: 'Don't worry, I will travel with you wherever you need to go.' And once she told us that, our hearts felt at ease; she brought us exactly where we needed to be..." (Фонд 8). This woman did not just calm the refugees but accompanied them all the way to their destination, where other caring people helped them board the correct connection. Thanks to the coordinated support of the railway worker and random passersby, the Ukrainians successfully overcame the language barrier and reached a place of safety on time.

The host society is perceived as emotionally "non-threatening," with forced migrants experiencing stability and trust. For instance, Oleksandra L. (a native of Zaporizhzhia) shared her experience of communicating with local residents: "I have interactions with a real German woman, she is my neighbor. And whenever I constantly apologize for my poor German, she always says: 'Oleksandra, I don't know a single word of Ukrainian at all, and for me, it would be a catastrophe to learn Ukrainian now.' And she says: 'I understand you.' And this understanding is genuine" (Фонд 8). Stability is described through material yet emotionally significant details – constant electricity, food, and housing: "The lights were on all the time, both day and night," as recalled by Nadiya Kh. (originally from Nizhyn, Chernihiv region). Trust in the host society is formulated not politically, but rather emotionally and through everyday life: "I am so grateful to the Germans..." (Nadiya Kh.), "they treat us with great understanding" (Oleksandra L.), "we crossed the border into Slovakia, and there were many volunteers, a lot of attention to people from Ukraine"; "housing in Poland was offered by my husband's work acquaintances... we felt uncomfortable staying as guests, so we looked for other housing," shares Yuliia (a native of Kyiv) (Фонд 8).

Active interaction and the formation of security communities can be illustrated by Nadiya Kh.'s account of how local residents and Ukrainians who had lived in Germany for years united from the first days of the war to help refugees and the front line. In the city of Bielefeld, one of the local churches was transformed into a kind of humanitarian hub, where humanitarian aid was collected and sent to Ukraine, camouflage nets were woven, and displaced persons were assisted.

Consequently, the daily emotional self-regulation of the respondents serves not only as a means of adaptation but also as a form of responsible participation in the life of the host society. By transforming raw bodily trauma into a practice of restraint and expressions of empathic gratitude, displaced Ukrainians actively de-escalate social friction. In doing so, they function not as passive recipients of European protection, but as essential co-creators of a bottom-up security community that reinforces stability, reciprocal trust, and moral solidarity across transnational European spaces.

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The emotional dynamics of interaction with local residents and institutions demonstrate the gradual formation of a shared security space through acts of solidarity and gratitude.

The narratives of Ukrainian displaced persons (war refugees), collected through interviews and surveys, are further reinforced by the communication of forced migrants on social media. It was precisely with the start of the full-scale invasion that a vast number of social media groups emerged or intensified their activities, created to coordinate assistance for war refugees. These groups became platforms for exchanging information on searching for housing and employment, and for accessing aid at both the local level (within a specific settlement) and the national level (within the host country). For example, on the social network Facebook, such groups include Ukrainians in Croatia, Ukrainians in Ireland, Ukrainians in Norway, Ukrainians in Denmark, Ukrainians in Germany, Ukrainians in Italy, UK Accommodation, Job & Sponsorship for Ukrainians, and Ukrainians in Bratislava, Ukrainians in Barcelona, Ukrainians in Cluj-Napoca, Romania, Ukrainians in Romania (Bucharest, Iasi, Timisoara, Cluj-Napoca, Constanta), Ukrainians in Milan, Ukrainians in Milan ads, work, housing, transportation, etc.

It should be noted that the analysis of such social media groups warrants a separate study; therefore, we will not dwell on this in detail within this publication. However, even a cursory review of these communication platforms demonstrates that they are joined not only by Ukrainian war refugees but also by representatives of the Ukrainian diaspora and local residents. The latter often provide consultations and advice to Ukrainians regarding their stay in the host countries. In addition to inquiries and issues concerning daily life, these groups also feature news about events related to Ukraine, the Russian-Ukrainian war, its victims, Russian attacks, and the massive shelling of peaceful settlements. Consequently, local residents who are members of such groups have the opportunity to familiarize themselves with the interpretations of Ukrainian displaced persons and discussions that possess a profound emotional dimension.

At the meso- and macro-levels of transnational security discourse, emotional narratives cease to be merely private expressions of trauma and transition into instruments of systemic influence. They act as affective micro-mediators that translate bare bodily vulnerability directly into the realm of high-level policymaking and European legislative debate. By personalizing the statistical and abstract reality of war, these emotional narratives generate a form of “moral danger” and “affective deterrence” within European public spheres. This ethical imperative prevents compassion fatigue, forecloses societal indifference, and weaponizes empathy as a structural constraint against political disengagement within host nations.

For example, in December 2025, an emotional story about the speech by 11-year-old Ukrainian Roman Oleksiv at the European Parliament circulated widely in these Facebook groups. Roman’s story became well-known after July 2022, when the boy and his mother were caught in a Russian “Kalibr” missile strike in Vinnytsia, Ukraine. The boy's mother perished, while he sustained severe injuries and burns; he underwent lengthy treatment, including in Germany, and as of early 2026, he has survived 36 surgeries and

a series of rehabilitations. For two years, he had to wear a compression mask on his face, yet he did not lose heart. Roman resumed his ballroom dancing, returned to playing the accordion, and became one of the symbols of Ukrainian courage and strength. During his treatment, the boy had the opportunity to meet Pope Francis and Prince Harry, and gave interviews to foreign media outlets.

The video of Roman's speech at the European Parliament on December 10, 2025, garnered particular attention because the interpreter providing the translation broke into tears during his address to the parliamentarians. This emotional breakdown of the interpreter symbolized the unfiltered breakthrough of bodily affect into formal legislative spaces. It demonstrated how an individual narrative serves as a transnational emotional mediator, forcing macro-level institutions to confront war crimes not as abstract legal violations, but as an immediate moral imperative for continued European protection and security commitment. This emotional video was subsequently shared by many global and national media outlets in the United Kingdom, Germany, Poland, and other European countries, as well as in the USA, Canada, and other regions of the world. This story was also posted on the pages of several politicians. For example, Johanna Baxter, Member of British Parliament, wrote in her X account: "I had the privilege of hosting Roman in the House of Commons, so he could share his story with UK MPs, & I have visited the site of that strike in Vinnytsia. He is an extraordinary young man" (Baxter, 2025).

Johanna Baxter is renowned for her steadfast support of Ukraine and her vocal presence in the British Parliament, where she frequently addresses the issue of Russian war crimes targeting Ukrainian children. By the Decree of the President of Ukraine №68/2026, 22 January 2026, she was awarded the Order of Merit (Third Class) for her significant contributions to Ukraine's sovereignty, territorial integrity, and international cooperation, as well as for her extensive charitable work and efforts in promoting the Ukrainian state (Президент України, 2026). This is just one example. There are many politicians with a clearly expressed active pro-Ukrainian position in European countries, and this issue deserves to be studied separately.

The voices of Ukrainians and their experiences are also heard in public spaces across Europe. These are not only speeches at numerous rallies and marches in support of Ukraine, which are also joined by local residents of the countries where forced migrants are staying. Thus, emotional narratives that tell about different sides of the war are spread through various channels.

In February 2025, 17-year-old Olha, who survived ten years of Russian occupation and has returned to Ukraine, was among the speakers in the Dutch parliament. She shared her story of life under occupation: "Living under occupation means living in fear. Always being afraid to be who you are. I lived under occupation from the age of seven" (Yerokhina, 2025). Yaroslav Bazylevych, whose family was killed in a Russian strike in Lviv in the summer of 2024, also shared his story with the Dutch parliamentarians.

In December 2025, during the 24th Assembly of States Parties to the International Criminal Court (The Hague, the Nederland), Liza from Oleshky in the Kherson region told her story about the life in the city that has been under occupation since March 2022, when she and her family spent the first months of the war in the basement of their own

home without electricity, gas, or heating. She spoke about the fear of sexual violence, about the cases when girls were taken straight off the streets. Liza concluded her speech with the words: "I'm standing here not to be pitied. I'm here to be heard, so you know what is happening to children in occupied territories right now" (Didenko, 2025a). Testimonies delivered at venues like the Dutch parliament and the International Criminal Court function as critical emotional mediators that bridge the gap between experienced personal trauma and institutional decision-making. By explicitly rejecting pity in favor of agency ("I'm here to be heard"), these survivors convert personal affliction into an instrument of moral deterrence. They leave no room for European audiences to maintain comfortable ambiguity or political apathy, regulating public emotions so that solidarity becomes an unquestioned moral duty rather than a fleeting act of charity.

Voices of Ukrainian children spread via European media. In July 2025, the Daily Express (UK) shared the emotional story of two girls from different regions of Ukraine, both forced to leave their homes to survive. The first story is about eleven-year-old Liza Horshenina, whose childhood and beloved cello were destroyed by shelling in Siverskodonetsk (Luhansk region), and who initially struggled with the profound grief of displacement and the trauma of losing her home. After fleeing to Germany via Zaporizhzhya and Kyiv to escape constant explosions, she eventually found a path to healing through the support of her new school community, which encouraged her to return to the music she once loved. Though she deeply misses her past life and friends, rediscovering the cello has become a vital step in reclaiming her joy and resilience while living so far from home. The second story is dedicated to sixteen-year-old Sophia Ogagifo. After fleeing to Switzerland, she initially struggled with deep depression and the painful separation from her homeland, finding it difficult to even communicate with her family during the first month of displacement: "The first month here, I was depressed. I was crying the whole time and not talking to my family at all - just staying at home all the time. And that was just horrible …". While she misses Ukraine dearly, the reality of the ongoing danger has led her to focus on building a future in Switzerland, where she plans to study psychology or pursue an apprenticeship. Despite her decision to remain in safety, she maintains a strong Ukrainian identity by actively fundraising for children affected by the war and showcasing her culture from abroad (Robinson, 2025).

In European media, we can find not only Ukrainians' emotional narratives but also European readers' reactions. For example, in April 2025, the Spanish outlet *El Confidencial* shared a story about the Russification of Ukrainian children in the occupied territories. One reader commented with deep emotion: "I see that photo and tears of pain well up in my eyes. I have a teenage daughter, and if I imagine her in that photo wearing one of those uniforms, I'm already dead inside. Can't anyone stop this barbarity?" (Redondo & Alamillos, 2025). This reaction exemplifies how emotional narratives break down geographic distance and foster empathic identification. By enabling European citizens to project their own familial vulnerabilities onto Ukraine's victims, these media representations act as a social engine of affective containment and moral deterrence, reducing the psychological disjunction between "their war" and "our peace."

As a manifestation of solidarity and active cooperation, a large number of initiatives have emerged to form associations that help Ukrainians overcome the problems of the war and its consequences. Just two examples. In October 2025, during the International Conference on Pediatric Psychology (Málaga, Spain), which brought together world-renowned researchers and practitioners, colleagues from the European Pediatric Psychology Network (EPPN) agreed to establish an EPPN chapter in Ukraine. This initiative aims to integrate Ukrainian psychologists into the European professional community by creating a platform for active knowledge exchange and joint research projects, enabling a more effective implementation of advanced practices to support children who have endured the traumatic experiences of war (Voices of Children 2025). Another example is the support provided by the UK Government through the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO) to the Ukrainian national consortium PULSE (Protection, Unity, Leadership, Support, and Empowerment). The PULSE consortium unites several Ukrainian NGOs that respond to requests from people in need of humanitarian or other forms of assistance during the war (Didenko, 2025b).

During the years of full-scale invasion, in addition to the involvement of various institutions and organizations in cooperation with Ukrainian immigrants, many different initiatives to support Ukrainians emerged among ordinary residents of Europe. We can name various forms of manifestation of solidarity with Ukraine and support for Ukrainians.

Namely, since February 24, 2022, the Czech News Agency (ČTK) has made its news service available free of charge to the Ukrainian national news agency Ukrinform. In the first five days of the conflict, from 24 to 28 February, the ČTK published more than 1,500 news items (including flashes and versions), more than 700 headlines, and 60 profiles with the keyword “Ukraine” (ČTK, 1 March 2022). ČTK organized the fast news service, which delivered the fastest breaking news about the war in Ukraine. It runs on about 40 web portals in the Czech Republic and Slovakia. Media, deputies and senators of the Parliament of the Czech Republic, as well as the Foreign Ministry, have shown interest in it. ČTK also sent its correspondents and photojournalists to the Ukrainian-Slovak and Ukrainian-Polish borders. On the one hand, it was a natural desire to respond to the new, informationally attractive topic, but on the other hand, it led to the spread of the first information about the refugees and influenced on the Europeans solidarity actions towards the Ukrainian people. It corresponds to the testimony of Yulia (1971) from Kyiv, who reports that when her family crossed the border with Slovakia, many volunteers helped the refugees and that there was a very positive and supportive attitude towards Ukrainians (Фонд 8).

Since 2022, Dutch journalist and volunteer Patrick van ’t Haar has organized the charity initiative. It started in the summer of 2022, when he witnessed at the Polish-Ukrainian border thousands of people fleeing the war. He personally helped evacuate several women with children to his hometown of Leeuwarden. Patrick wrote about them for the newspaper he works for: “I wrote about ordinary people – young and old, families with children. I listened to their stories and shared them with Dutch readers in the Leeuwarder Courant” (Didenko, 2026).

After initially organizing a fundraiser for the residents of Irpin, Patrick proposed a joint initiative in support of Ukraine to his newspaper's editor-in-chief. The success of the initial fundraiser, which delivered nine shipping containers via Hope4Ukraine and raised €490,000, laid the foundation for a long-term humanitarian mission. Beyond these results, Patrick began making regular trips to Ukraine, up to 7 times a year, to deliver essential aid in his own van. This grassroots effort eventually evolved into a structured annual tradition held during the Dutch Christmas holidays. By December 2025, the initiative reached a new milestone as three northern Dutch media outlets (Friesch Dagblad, Leeuwarder Courant, and Dagblad van het Noorden (DVHN)) joined forces. This latest campaign raised a record-breaking €885,000, bringing the four-year total to over €2.5 million (Didenko, 2026).

One more example of the transition from individual philanthropy to collective social action, which is exemplified by the work of Rick Green, a retired educator from Boston, United Kingdom, whose personal commitment to Ukrainian youth catalyzed the formation of the "Boston Skyjive" movement. Established in 2022, this initiative demonstrates a significant "multiplier effect" in which a single actor's agency inspires broader communal solidarity. By 2025, Green's third fundraising skydive involved twenty volunteers and raised approximately £20,000 for the Voices of Children Foundation (Ukraine) (Facebook. Friends of Boston Skyjive). The movement's efficacy is rooted in a multi-channel fundraising strategy ranging from high-impact aerial events to community-based activities such as charity quizzes, dance nights, and the promotion of literary works. This model of grassroots mobilization has extended beyond its original borders, inspiring independent regional efforts (such as other people's flight-based fundraisers). Ultimately, these sustained efforts address the critical humanitarian gap created by the war, illustrating how individual-led movements can effectively mobilize transnational resources to mitigate the profound psychological and physical toll on displaced and affected children.

Taken together, these initiatives—from media broadcasts by ČTK to long-term volunteer movements led by Patrick Van 'T Haar and Rick Green—function as meso-level institutional bridges. They systematically channel individual affections and moral reflexes into sustained social movements and financial structures. By constantly translating individual trauma into strategic public action, these meso-actors prevent emotional attrition, making solidarity an enduring social norm and strengthening the moral deviation from passivity.

To conclude , these examples suggest that the micro-level of interpersonal trust serves as the primary foundation for the formation of a European security community. Through the mechanisms of affective and moral deterrence operating at the micro-, meso-, and macro-levels, individual narratives are elevated into macro-political realities, safeguarding long-term solidarity and unifying displaced Ukrainians and host societies within a single resilient security community.

However, the resilience of these transnational bonds is not absolute; it remains continually contingent upon the broader socio-political context in host countries, which has recently exhibited signs of growing ambivalence and compassion fatigue.

Dynamics of public sentiment and the fragility of affective security communities

It is worth noting that a detailed analysis of the dynamics of public sentiment in host countries warrants a separate sociological study; this subsection presents only a preliminary analytical sketch, as the primary objective of this article is to highlight the emotional narratives of the displaced persons themselves. However, the 'bottom-up' formation of security communities is currently experiencing significant turbulence, marked by the cooling of the initial 'wave of empathy' and the emergence of so-called 'war fatigue.' Although micro-level interactions remain a vital source of stability, macro-level data suggest that the affective foundation of European solidarity is becoming more complex and demanding. In this context, empirical survey data must be analyzed not merely as descriptive statistical metrics, but as sensitive gauges that reveal the structural limits and inherent fragility of an affective security community when confronted with prolonged existential tension.

Emotional bonds between Ukrainians and Europeans facilitate a more rapid 'integration' of Ukraine into the shared security sphere. But despite the successful integration of Ukrainians and a generally welcoming atmosphere, a degree of public wariness persists, fueled by war fatigue and evolving economic concerns within European societies. Let us illustrate this with the example of the Czech Republic, which, as of late 2025, hosts approximately 400,000 Ukrainian war refugees. It ranks as the third EU country, after Germany and Poland, in terms of the number of Ukrainians received, who now account for nearly 4% of the Czech population (Andrle, 2025).

During the full-scale war, more than half of the respondents in the Czech Republic had a positive attitude towards Ukrainian refugees staying in the country. But according to data from the STEM Research Institute, the percentage of those who agree that Ukrainian refugees may stay in the Czech Republic is slightly decreasing. On the question "In your opinion, is it right that the Czech Republic continues to allow the Ukrainian refugees it has taken in to stay?" in June 2023, the agreement level was 56%; in January 2024, 53%; and in June 2025, 52% (STEM, 2025; Brno Daily, 2025).

Despite a generally positive attitude toward Ukrainians, the inflationary crisis has sparked economic concerns within Czech society, rooted in the perception that Ukrainian refugees are costing the Czech Republic too much money. Indeed, a significant percentage of Czechs agree that Ukrainian refugees represent more of a threat to the country's development than an asset. In September 2023, Ukrainian refugees were perceived as a 'threat' by 57% of respondents, falling to 49% by January 2025. Conversely, while 26% of Czechs viewed Ukrainian refugees as an 'asset' to society in September 2023, this figure rose to 34% by January 2025. Despite the gradual decline in the perception of refugees as a threat to Czech society's development, in January 2025, 64% of respondents supported the claim that the state should ensure no more new refugees arrive in the Czech Republic (up from 61% in June 2024). Additionally, 61% favored government action to reduce the number of Ukrainians already residing in the country (compared to 59% in June 2024). Nevertheless, 84% of respondents agreed that Ukrainian families may stay in the Czech Republic long term, provided they work, learn the Czech language, and respect local legislation (STEM, 2025).

These STEM survey findings demonstrate that the boundaries of affective solidarity are highly conditional and constantly negotiated through pragmatic criteria. Rather than indicating an absolute rejection, the shift toward conditional acceptance ("if they work and learn the language") highlights the inner fragility of emotional embrace when abstract empathy replaces conditional reciprocity. Public opinion in host societies thus marks the precise threshold where unconditional moral solidarity transforms into demands for high integrational standards and low social conflict.

Such mixed attitudes can be found in many European societies. The latest data (as of September 2025) show that, in general, there is strong support for accepting refugees from Ukraine: in the EU, it is 57% (much lower than in March 2022 – 86%) (Hoffmann 2026). A survey conducted by YouGov and Datapraxis in January 2024 reveals a consistent trend: while immigration fears remain prevalent, they are largely directed toward migrants from the Middle East or Africa. In contrast, Ukrainians are generally perceived through a positive or neutral lens, similar to citizens of other EU member states. On average across these countries, 28% of respondents view Ukrainian migrants as an opportunity, 23% as a threat, and 36% as neutral (Krastev & Leonard 2024).

The most recent data released by Gallup in early 2026 provides a critical empirical foundation for understanding the shifting architecture of "affective security communities" under the pressure of prolonged conflict (Vigers & Zapryanova, 2026). These polls are particularly revealing not merely as retrospective popularity gauges but also as indicators of the boundaries and structural weaknesses of bottom-up security infrastructures. These findings highlight a concerning trend: the emotional advantage Ukraine previously held in neighboring countries is gradually diminishing. By the end of 2025, the median approval of Ukrainian leadership across the region settled at 24%, while Russia's approval ratings began to stabilize at approximately 22% (Ibid., 2026). This narrow two-percentage-point gap, the smallest since the full-scale invasion, suggests an erosion of the initial "empathy wave" that served as a primary resource for affective deterrence during the first year of the war. This quantitative shift implies that the emotional capital of Ukrainian narratives now requires reinforcement through the visible social contributions and successful integration of the displaced population.

Furthermore, Gallup's findings reveal a geographical polarization within the security community. While the Baltic States continue to show a resolute rejection of Russian influence, a significant decline in Ukraine's approval ratings has been recorded in Romania, alongside a growing trend toward "neutrality" or non-alignment in Slovakia and Hungary (Ibid., 2026). In these regions, the mechanism of affective deterrence appears at its most fragile, as "war fatigue" is increasingly instrumentalized by local populist movements. The survey also points to a dangerous "normalization" of the aggressor in the public consciousness of some neighboring societies, where the active disapproval of Russian leadership has begun to soften. This shift in Gallup data directly exposes the vulnerability of an affective security community: when emotional impulses cool, rationalized self-interest and narrative manipulation easily erode the shared moral horizon. For displaced Ukrainians residing in these fragile spaces, such erosion heightens their "affective vulnerability," making their strategy of individual restraint and responsible

comportment an essential shield against open friction and for maintaining social acceptance.

Ultimately, the Gallup data confirms that a security community built solely on humanitarian impulse is reaching its limits (Vigers & Zapryanova, 2026). As the emotional gap narrows, the "affective labor" of the refugees—their industriousness, linguistic adaptation, and low-conflict profile becomes the decisive "soft tool" maintaining European solidarity. If Ukrainians are no longer perceived as culturally and emotionally "familiar," the political corridor for sustained macro-level support for Ukraine will inevitably tighten.

The efficacy of the "bottom-up" influence on the European security architecture is most vividly documented in the official timeline of EU solidarity measures, which serves as a record of an unprecedented shift from humanitarian empathy to hard security commitments. A longitudinal analysis of the decisions taken by the Council of the European Union since February 2022 reveals a unique political phenomenon: the conversion of widespread social resonance into a systematic framework of "affective deterrence." The timeline demonstrates that the most radical steps, such as the first-ever activation of the Temporary Protection Directive and the mobilization of the European Peace Facility (EPF), were implemented with a speed that defies traditional bureaucratic inertia. Since the start of the full-scale invasion, the EU and its member states have made available over €138 billion in financial, humanitarian, and military assistance, including more than €45 billion specifically dedicated to military support (Council of the EU and the European Council, 2026). This rapid institutional response was not merely a top-down strategic calculation but a direct reflection of the immense pressure generated by European civil societies, which responded to the emotional narratives of displaced Ukrainians.

As the conflict progressed, the EU's trajectory shifted from immediate relief toward long-term security investments. The evolution of aid, moving from basic necessities to the delivery of sophisticated air defense systems and the approval of the Ukraine Facility, a dedicated instrument providing up to €50 billion in stable funding for 2024-2027, illustrates a deeper transformation in the perception of Ukraine within the "security community". This progression is further evidenced by the EU's unprecedented sanction policy, which, as of early 2026, has reached 14 comprehensive packages aimed at weakening Russia's economic and technological base, including measures against the energy, banking, and military sectors (Council of the EU and the European Council, 2026). This trajectory suggests that the initial affective bond created a foundation of trust that allowed European leaders to escalate support from "assisting a victim" to "partnering with a defender." In this context, the continued social integration and "affective labor" of the over 4 million Ukrainians enjoying temporary protection provided the necessary political legitimacy for governments to sustain military aid, including the training of more than 60,000 Ukrainian soldiers through the EUMAM Ukraine mission.

However, the official chronology also highlights the struggle to maintain this consensus amid emerging domestic challenges. The continuous renewal of financial support mechanisms and the adoption of the European Defence Industrial Strategy

indicate that EU solidarity is being institutionalized as a permanent pillar of regional security. This process relies heavily on maintaining a favorable public climate, in which the absence of significant social conflict involving the displaced population remains a critical factor. By examining the EU's strategic timeline, it becomes evident that the "security community" is a dynamic construct where micro-level interactions and macro-level policy are linked. The success of "affective deterrence" depends on translating the shared emotional experience of the war into a sustainable partnership, ensuring that the "political corridor" for supporting Ukraine remains open despite the pressures of economic fatigue and internal socio-political shifts. Thus, the EU's documented response, characterized by mobilizing tens of billions of euros and imposing the most extensive sanctions in its history, serves as a testament to a security policy rooted in the collective conscience of its citizens.

We also can talk about the securitization of fear and European public readiness to the specter of global conflict. The resilience of the European security community is increasingly defined by a pervasive sense of existential anxiety, as evidenced by recent pan-European polling data that highlights a significant shift in the public's perception of global stability. Research conducted by YouGov and Datapraxis reveals that a substantial segment of the European population, including 38% of respondents in the United Kingdom and 32% in Germany, now considers the outbreak of a third world war within the next five to ten years to be a likely or very likely scenario. This "securitization of fear" serves as a powerful undercurrent for the mechanism of affective deterrence, as the emotional narratives of displaced Ukrainians have effectively "humanized" the abstract threat of large-scale aggression, bringing it into the immediate psychological horizon of Western European citizens. The data indicates that this heightened sense of vulnerability has translated into a cautious yet notable willingness to bolster regional defenses; for instance, significant portions of the public in countries like Germany (50%), the UK (53%), and Denmark (45%) support maintaining or increasing current levels of defense spending, even amidst broader economic pressures (Ross, 2026).

However, this widespread apprehension also underscores the inherent fragility of the affective security community. While there is strong consensus on the necessity of non-combat support, such as maintaining sanctions against Russia and providing intelligence and logistical aid, there remains a profound reluctance to pursue direct military involvement. The polling shows that fewer than 10% of respondents in major European nations would support deploying national troops to the battlefield in Ukraine, reflecting a "cautious egoism" that characterizes the current state of public solidarity. This "cautious egoism" dynamic marks the ultimate fragility of affective solidarity: it illustrates how public emotion can rapidly oscillate between empathic mobilization and self-preservative withdrawal. This reluctance highlights the critical importance of the affective labor performed by Ukrainian migrants; by maintaining a low-conflict profile and focusing on economic and social integration, they help manage the "escalation anxiety" of host societies. Their presence serves as a bridge, allowing European citizens to feel a sense of moral and strategic partnership without being immediately dragged into the "existential abyss" of total war.

Ultimately, the findings published by Politico suggest that the formation of a security community "from below" is currently balanced on a thin line between solidarity and self-preservation. The high levels of support for maintaining diplomatic and economic pressure on the aggressor, with 50% of Germans and 65% of Danes favoring the severing of all diplomatic ties, demonstrate that the affective bond with Ukraine remains a potent political force (Ross, 2026). Yet, the persistent fear of nuclear escalation and the desire to avoid direct confrontation indicate that the security community is not a static alliance but a dynamic emotional space. In this environment, the continued efficacy of affective deterrence depends on the ability to frame the Ukrainian struggle not just as a distant tragedy, but as a manageable and necessary bulwark that protects the European way of life from the very global conflict that the public so deeply fears. Thus, the public's readiness to invest in security is inextricably linked to their perception of Ukrainians as disciplined and integrated partners who reinforce, rather than destabilize, the fragile peace of the continent.

Conclusions

The findings of this study confirm that the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022 transformed the European security architecture not only through official diplomatic and military channels, but also through the micro-level emotional practices of displaced civilians. Theoretically, this research advances international relations scholarship by demonstrating that security communities are not merely top-down institutional constructs, but dynamically evolving, affectively driven networks anchored in everyday social practices. By linking individual lived experiences of forced migration with macro-level security outcomes, this paper provides a comprehensive framework for understanding how emotional narratives contribute to the bottom-up formation of a transnational security community and sustain affective deterrence.

The theoretical and empirical contributions of this research are summarized in three key insights:

First, the study demonstrates that affective deterrence operates fundamentally differently from conventional military deterrence. Rather than relying on coercive physical force or strategic threats, affective deterrence functions by constructing moral, emotional, and ethical barriers against the normalization of military aggression. The emotional credibility of Ukrainian war narratives humanizes existential threats, transforming abstract geopolitical risks into an immediate moral imperative for host societies. This emotional alignment prevents compassion fatigue and creates a socio-ethical threshold that constrains political disengagement within host nations.

Second, the emergence of a transnational security community is sustained from below through continuous affective labor and affective restraint. Displaced Ukrainians act as active security actors by consciously regulating destabilizing emotions—such as anger, despair, or resentment—to avoid social friction with host communities. This daily emotional discipline, combined with horizontal practices of solidarity, volunteering, and mutual gratitude, minimizes intergroup conflict and builds deep interpersonal trust,

proving that security communities are anchored in everyday social practices rather than top-down institutional mandates alone.

Third, the paper delineates a distinct causal chain connecting the micro- and macro-levels. The core theoretical and empirical contribution of this study lies in conceptualizing the four-stage causal/social mechanism connecting micro-level affect to macro-level outcomes:

1. Micro-level (*embodied affect & narrative translation*): pre-verbal bodily shocks and displacement trauma are converted via affective labor into structured narratives of responsibility, gratitude, and moral agency. Through this narrative structuring of their lived experience, displaced Ukrainians frame their presence not as a passive burden, but as a constructive contribution to shared European values.

2. Meso-level (*circulation & amplification*): these narratives are amplified through diaspora networks, volunteer hubs, digital platforms, and direct testimonies in international legislative bodies (e.g., the European Parliament and the ICC).

3. Socio-affective level (*public resonance & empathy*): public engagement with these testimonies fosters empathic identification among European citizens, framing Ukraine's defense as a shared European security necessity and sustaining long-term public solidarity despite growing geopolitical inertia.

4. Macro-level (*policy legitimation & affective deterrence*): this public alignment expands the "corridor of legitimacy" for European decision-makers, providing sustained public backing for unprecedented EU commitments, including weapon deliveries, financial aid packages, and comprehensive sanctions regimes

Finally, the study highlights the inherent fragility of affective security communities. As initial emotional waves cool under the pressure of economic fatigue and geopolitical uncertainty, unconditional empathy transforms into a conditional social contract. In this evolving context, the continued integration, low-conflict profile, and affective discipline of displaced Ukrainians serve as the vital soft tool maintaining European cohesion.

Perspectives for further research: further scientific work in this direction may focus on a comparative analysis of the affective practices of Ukrainians across different cultural regions (for example, Western Europe vs. North America), which will allow for a deeper understanding of how cultural context influences the mechanisms of affective deterrence. The role of digital platforms and social networks as tools for "digital affective deterrence," in which the viralization of personal stories directly influences the dynamics of international aid, warrants a separate study. Also promising is research into the long-term consequences of "affective restraint" for the mental health of displaced persons themselves and the possibility of "affective burnout" in host communities, which is critical for maintaining the stability of transnational security communities in the future.

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Emotion, Deterrence, and Securitization: Reconceptualizing IR Theory since the Russian Aggression against Ukraine

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