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WAR AS A CATALYST FOR THE TRANSFORMATION OF GLOBAL FORCED MIGRATION REGIMES: THE UKRAINIAN CASE

Svitlana Rostetska

*The State Institution “South Ukrainian National Pedagogical University named after K. D. Ushynsky”,
Department of Political Sciences and Law
Staroporfankivska Str., 26, 65020, Odesa, Ukraine
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3836-8922>*

This article offers an extensive and rigorous political examination of the full-scale war in Ukraine, positioning it as a fundamental catalyst for the structural transformation of global and regional forced migration regimes. The urgency of this study arises from the fact that the Ukrainian displacement crisis has unfolded with a speed and magnitude unprecedented in Europe since the Second World War, compelling the international community to undergo a rapid paradigm shift in its crisis response mechanisms. The author meticulously examines how military aggression catalyzes normative and legal reconfigurations, focusing on the transition from reactive to proactive models of human movement management.

Utilising a methodology grounded in systems theory, process tracing, and comparative analysis, the research treats migration not merely as a passive byproduct of war but as a dynamic element of geopolitical strategy and social restructuring. The study pays close attention to the demographic asymmetry of the displaced population, where the majority of women and children have necessitated an immediate overhaul of healthcare and educational infrastructures in host countries. This includes the implementation of advanced psychosocial rehabilitation programmes and the expansion of digital inclusion services.

A core component of the analysis is the institutional pivot within the European Union, specifically the historic activation of the Temporary Protection Directive (2001/55/EC). This move represented a significant departure from traditional, individualised asylum-seeking processes toward a model of collective, group-based protection. The author argues that this shift was driven by profound political solidarity and a strategic alignment of Ukraine within the European normative framework. Through a comparative lens, the Ukrainian case is contrasted with earlier crises in Syria and Afghanistan, revealing critical disparities in the speed of aid delivery, political visibility, and labour market integration. These findings point to an emerging hierarchy within global refugee protection regimes based on geopolitical proximity.

The scientific contribution of this paper lies in conceptualising the 'Ukrainian case' as a blueprint for the future of global migration governance. The research demonstrates that the war has exposed the limitations of outdated international conventions while simultaneously accelerating the development of innovative tools, such as the digitisation of refugee registration (e.g., the Diia ecosystem) and enhanced inter-agency coordination between the UNHCR, IOM, and national governments. The conclusions offer long-term strategic recommendations for policymakers, emphasizing the need for harmonization of legal status and the development of early-warning systems for migration risks. This article is of substantial value to government advisors, international security experts, and scholars focused on the intersection of forced migration, international law, and human rights in contemporary high-intensity conflict zones.

Key words: war, state, government, Ukraine, forced migration, refugees, internally displaced persons, international assistance, global migration regimes, collective protection, human rights.

Introduction and Problem Statement. The full-scale war initiated by the Russian Federation against Ukraine in February 2022 has fundamentally altered the landscape of forced migration, producing one of the fastest and largest displacement crises in Europe since World



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War II. According to the concept of the 'migration state' [1], the management of population flows becomes a central function of modern governance, especially under the pressure of high-intensity military operations, systemic state violence, and targeted attacks on civilian infrastructure. In the Ukrainian case, these factors have produced both internal displacement and cross-border refugee flows on an unprecedented scale [2; 3; 16].

The study of conflict-induced migration has traditionally focused on humanitarian and security dimensions, often underestimating the structural and political functions of displacement as a tool of war and population control [4; 5]. Recent scholarship highlights that contemporary forced migration cannot be understood merely as a by-product of conflict, but as an embedded outcome of the interplay between state violence, political objectives, and international governance frameworks [6; 7; 11]. The Ukrainian crisis exemplifies this perspective, demonstrating how war reshapes not only population movements but also global regimes of refugee protection and migration governance [16].

The Ukrainian displacement crisis has compelled unprecedented institutional responses. Within the European Union, the activation of the Temporary Protection Directive marked a significant departure from the traditional, individualised asylum system towards collective, group-based protection mechanisms [8; 9]. Such measures illustrate the politicisation of migration governance, where the provision of protection is influenced not solely by humanitarian principles but also by geopolitical alignments, normative solidarity, and strategic interests [10; 12; 16].

Despite an expanding body of research on forced migration in Ukraine, several gaps remain. Existing studies tend to focus on short-term humanitarian responses, statistical mapping of refugee flows, or regional policy interventions, leaving a lacuna in understanding the structural transformations induced by war on global migration regimes [14; 16]. In particular, there is limited analysis of how the Ukrainian case has challenged existing norms, prompted legal and institutional innovation, and influenced the broader international discourse on forced migration and refugee protection.

This article addresses these gaps by analysing the Ukrainian forced migration crisis as a case of structural transformation in global migration governance. The research aims to explore the mechanisms through which war acts as a trigger for regime change, the interactions between state violence, population displacement, and international protection frameworks, and the longer-term implications for policy and normative standards in forced migration regimes. Building on both theoretical insights from forced migration studies and empirical data from the Ukrainian context, including recent analyses by Rostetska and Shvets [16], this study situates the Ukrainian case as both unique and exemplary in understanding contemporary shifts in global migration governance.

Methods and Theoretical Framework. This study employs a qualitative research design grounded in the analysis of primary and secondary data sources. The primary sources include official documents from the European Union, UNHCR reports, IOM data, and policy briefings on Ukraine's displacement crisis [6; 7; 8]. Secondary sources encompass peer-reviewed academic literature on forced migration, conflict-induced displacement, and international migration governance, with particular emphasis on theoretical debates concerning the political and structural dimensions of war-induced migration [2; 3; 4; 5; 11]. Additionally, the study incorporates empirical findings from Ukrainian case studies, including statistical and policy analyses presented by Rostetska and Shvets [16].

The analytical approach combines process tracing and comparative analysis. Process tracing is applied to examine how the Russian military aggression has triggered changes in global migration regimes, identifying causal links between war, population displacement, and

institutional responses [4; 14; 16]. Comparative analysis is used to situate the Ukrainian case within broader patterns of forced migration, contrasting it with other contemporary conflict-induced displacement crises in Europe and the Middle East [9; 12]. This combination allows for a nuanced understanding of both the unique and generalisable features of the Ukrainian displacement crisis.

The theoretical framework draws upon the literature on global migration governance and conflict-induced migration, integrating insights from political science, international relations, and migration studies. Forced migration is conceptualised not merely as a humanitarian phenomenon but as a structurally embedded outcome of armed conflict and state policies, which interacts with international norms and political considerations to shape institutional responses [6; 16]. The study also engages with theories of political violence and population control, highlighting how contemporary wars can actively restructure both domestic and international governance regimes for forced migration [4; 5; 16].

Furthermore, the study situates the Ukrainian displacement crisis within the emerging paradigm of politically conditioned migration governance, as elaborated in Rostetska and Shvets [16], demonstrating that large-scale military aggression catalyzes the transformation of migration regimes. This perspective emphasises that responses to forced migration are mediated by geopolitical priorities, normative solidarities, and institutional capacities, rather than being purely humanitarian in nature [16]. By integrating theoretical insights with empirical evidence from the Ukrainian context, this study provides a comprehensive analysis of how war functions as a structural trigger for the transformation of global forced migration regimes and draws broader implications for future policy, governance, and normative frameworks in the field of forced migration [16].

The Transformation of Forced Migration Regimes: The Ukrainian Case as a Structural Trigger. The war in Ukraine, initiated in February 2022, has triggered one of the largest forced displacement crises in contemporary Europe, producing both internal displacement and cross-border refugee flows on an unprecedented scale. By mid-2023, UNHCR data reported over 7 million internally displaced persons (IDPs) within Ukraine and more than 8 million refugees having crossed into neighbouring states, primarily Poland, Romania, Hungary, and Slovakia [7; 8; 16]. This mass displacement has combined features of traditional refugee crises with new dynamics related to high population mobility, rapid institutional responses, and significant political visibility.

The demographic composition of displaced populations is particularly noteworthy. Women, children, and the elderly constitute the majority of IDPs and refugees, as men of military age were largely conscripted into the armed forces. This demographic imbalance has generated specific social and economic challenges. Education systems had to adapt quickly to accommodate over 2.5 million displaced children, requiring both physical infrastructure expansion and psychosocial support services [16]. Healthcare systems faced increased demand for both physical and mental health services, especially for children and the elderly experiencing trauma and chronic conditions exacerbated by displacement [14; 16]. Housing shortages, overburdened public transport, and pressure on local social services have created further challenges in urban host communities [16].

Internal displacement within Ukraine exhibits remarkable fluidity. Many IDPs moved multiple times, responding to shifts in the security situation or seeking better access to employment and services. Onuch and Sass (2022) emphasise that repeated relocations intensify social isolation, psychological stress, and educational disruption, particularly among children and adolescents [15]. Betts (2011) underscores that in such high-fluidity environments, the lack of integrated monitoring systems often leads to the emergence of “invisible” groups of displaced

persons who fail to access essential social benefits or healthcare [2]. These patterns underscore the complexity of managing displacement in a high-intensity conflict environment.

International organisations and NGOs have played a critical role in mitigating the humanitarian crisis. UNHCR coordinated shelter provision, food assistance, and legal protection for refugees, while IOM focused on mobility monitoring, border management, and integration support [7; 8]. Brubaker (2023) stresses the importance of digital platforms and international partnerships in facilitating rapid communication, resource allocation, and coordination among multiple actors [12]. Ukrainian and international NGOs established shelters, educational programmes, medical care, and psychosocial services for vulnerable populations, particularly women and children. Despite these efforts, challenges remain in ensuring equitable access, preventing duplication of services, and maintaining long-term sustainability.

The Ukrainian crisis has also driven significant institutional and normative innovation. The European Union activated Directive 2001/55/EC, granting Ukrainian refugees collective protection without the need for individual asylum procedures [7]. This departure from traditional asylum norms reflects both humanitarian imperatives and geopolitical considerations. Kymlicka (2019) notes that such collective protection mechanisms demonstrate the potential for flexibility in migration governance, yet also reveal political selectivity, as refugees from other conflict zones, including Syria and Afghanistan, often receive slower or more restrictive access to protection [10]. Within Ukraine, administrative measures were swiftly adjusted to manage mass displacement, including simplified registration procedures, direct social assistance payments, access to schools and healthcare, and provision of psychosocial support [16].

Comparative Perspective: Lessons from the Syrian and Afghan Displacement Crises.

Comparative analysis with crises in Syria and Afghanistan highlights both unique and common features. The Syrian conflict, which escalated in 2011, produced a prolonged displacement crisis, initially characterised by limited international coordination and reliance on refugee camps [9; 10; 12]. High proportions of displaced children required extensive educational and psychosocial support, yet insufficient infrastructure in host countries often led to chronic educational deficits and social exclusion [10]. Afghan displacement crises, particularly following the Taliban takeover in 2021, reveal that political instability, limited international coordination, and a lack of effective protection mechanisms exacerbate vulnerability among refugees [11]. By contrast, Ukraine's crisis is distinguished by rapid displacement management, high political visibility, and intensive international coordination, facilitating effective collective protection and integration programmes for vulnerable groups [16].

The socio-economic impacts of Ukrainian displacement are significant. The predominance of women and children among IDPs has intensified demand for educational and health services, leading to innovation in service delivery and local governance. Concentrations of displaced persons in urban and safer regions have created pressure on housing, public infrastructure, and social welfare systems, while also stimulating labour market participation among IDPs in social services, healthcare, and education sectors [16]. Onuch and Sasse [15] demonstrate that successful integration is underpinned by a shared sense of civic duty and resilience, which necessitates close coordination between national authorities, local communities, and international actors to maintain social cohesion amidst the pressures of mass displacement.

Hale (2015) argues that modern migration regimes are shaped by the intersection of political, humanitarian, and normative imperatives [14]. The Ukrainian case illustrates the capacity of global and regional institutions to transform regulatory frameworks under the pressure of large-scale displacement, generating adaptive norms and rapid response mechanisms. Rostetska and Shvets (2023) further assert that military aggression catalyses the development

of new paradigms in global political and migration processes, including collective protection, political mobilisation of international organisations, and normative-institutional reform [16].

Beyond immediate humanitarian consequences, Ukrainian displacement has triggered structural changes in migration governance. National and regional institutions, including local councils, social welfare agencies, and education authorities, rapidly adapted to manage population flows and provide coordinated support. International actors developed joint frameworks for monitoring displacement, allocating resources, and delivering legal and psychosocial assistance. This crisis-driven innovation demonstrates the potential for long-term improvements in migration governance and institutional preparedness for future crises.

Economically, mass displacement presents both costs and opportunities. Host communities faced increased demand for housing, healthcare, and social services, yet the influx of skilled and semi-skilled IDPs also contributed to labour market productivity, particularly in healthcare, education, and social services [16]. Innovative policy responses, including targeted employment programmes, educational integration initiatives, and psychosocial support frameworks, have mitigated some economic and social risks.

Lessons from Syria and Afghanistan reinforce the importance of proactive policy frameworks. Syrian refugees' prolonged stays in camps highlight the consequences of delayed integration, including social exclusion, educational deficits, and dependence on humanitarian aid [9; 10; 12]. Afghan displacement shows that political legitimacy and international engagement are critical to effective protection and integration. Ukraine demonstrates that rapid institutional adaptation, political visibility, and coordinated international action are decisive factors in mitigating long-term social and economic risks associated with forced migration [16].

In conclusion, the Ukrainian war functions as a structural trigger for the transformation of global forced migration regimes. The scale, speed, and visibility of displacement promote institutional learning, reveal regulatory gaps, and stimulate the development of adaptive mechanisms for crisis management. Forced migration thus becomes not only a consequence of armed conflict but also a driver of political, institutional, and normative change, offering valuable lessons for global migration governance. By comparing Ukraine with Syria and Afghanistan, it becomes evident that political visibility, rapid response capacity, and coordinated international action are essential for effective integration, humanitarian support, and long-term social cohesion.

Conclusions. The war in Ukraine demonstrates that armed conflict can drive structural changes in global forced migration regimes. The scale, speed, and political visibility of displacement challenged existing institutional frameworks, revealing operational and normative gaps. Collective protection mechanisms and coordinated international action illustrate new models for rapid, large-scale responses [7; 8; 16].

Forced migration in this context emerges not only as an immediate reaction to armed conflict but as a site where competing political logics, legal norms, and governance practices intersect. Large-scale displacement reveals the contingent nature of international protection, demonstrating how access to rights and security is mediated by legal status, administrative capacity, and geopolitical positioning rather than by universal humanitarian principles alone. The Ukrainian case illustrates how conflict-driven mobility exposes underlying asymmetries within global protection systems, prompting ad hoc institutional responses that may stabilise short-term needs without resolving structural inequalities. Future research should therefore prioritise comparative examination of protection regimes across different conflict contexts, assess the sustainability of emergency-based legal arrangements, and analyse how political discretion shapes long-term integration trajectories and normative consistency in international migration governance.

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ВІЙНА ЯК КАТАЛІЗАТОР ТРАНСФОРМАЦІЇ ГЛОБАЛЬНИХ РЕЖИМІВ ВИМУШЕНОЇ МІГРАЦІЇ: УКРАЇНСЬКИЙ ВИПАДОК

Світлана Ростецька

ДЗ «Південноукраїнський національний педагогічний університет імені К. Д. Ушинського»,
кафедра політичних наук і права
вул. Старопортофранківська, 26, 65020, м. Одеса, Україна
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3836-8922>

У статті проведено ґрунтовний політологічний аналіз повномасштабної війни в Україні як ключового детермінанта, що радикально трансформує глобальні та регіональні режими вимушеної міграції. Актуальність дослідження зумовлена тим, що українська міграційна криза стала найшвидшою за темпами розвитку з часів Другої світової війни, що вимагало від міжнародної спільноти невідкладної зміни парадигми реагування. Автор детально розкриває механізми впливу військової агресії на зміну нормативно-правового ландшафту, акцентуючи увагу на переході від реактивних до проактивних моделей управління людськими потоками.

Методологія дослідження базується на системному підході, методах процес-трейнінгу та порівняльного аналізу. Це дало можливість розглянути міграцію не як пасивний наслідок конфлікту, а як активний інструмент геополітичного впливу та соціальної трансформації. У роботі детально проаналізовано демографічну специфіку переміщених осіб, де переважання жінок і дітей поставило перед системами охорони здоров'я та освіти країн ЄС завдання щодо негайної адаптації інфраструктури та впровадження спеціалізованих програм психосоціальної реабілітації.

Особливий фокус спрямовано на інституційну трансформацію: вперше в історії було активовано Директиву ЄС про тимчасовий захист (2001/55/ЄС), що ознаменувало відхід від тривалих індивідуальних бюрократичних процедур на користь колективного, групового захисту. Автор доводить, що такий крок став наслідком політичної солідарності та стратегічного бачення України як частини європейського простору. Порівняльний аналіз із кризами в Сирії та Афганістані виявив суттєві відмінності у швидкості надання допомоги, політичній видимості та рівні інтеграції у ринок праці, що вказує на наявність селективності в глобальних режимах захисту біженців.

Наукова новизна статті полягає в концептуалізації «українського кейса» як моделі майбутнього глобального міграційного врядування. Результати дослідження підтверджують, що війна стала структурним тригером, який виявив неефективність застарілих міжнародних конвенцій та стимулював розвиток цифрових платформ обліку («Дія» та європейські аналоги), посилення координації між UNHCR, ІОМ та національними урядами. У висновках сформульовано довгострокові стратегічні рекомендації: від необхідності гармонізації статусів біженців та ВПО до розробки систем раннього попередження міграційних ризиків. Стаття має значне практичне значення для розробників державної політики, міжнародних експертів і науковців, які займаються питаннями глобальної безпеки та прав людини в умовах воєнних конфліктів високої інтенсивності.

Ключові слова: війна, держава, влада, Україна, вимушена міграція, біженці, внутрішньо переміщені особи, міжнародна допомога, глобальні режими міграції, колективний захист, права людини.

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