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Ukrainian Refugee Children in Norway: challenges and empowerment in building new and maintaining existing social relationships

Master's thesis in Childhood Studies
Supervisor: Professor Marit Ursin
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Abstract

For many decades, the topic of the integration of refugee children into new countries has aroused academic interest in many scientific fields and disciplines. The solid and rich body of previous research enhanced my endeavor to present and analyze the voices and experiences of Ukrainian children who became forced migrants in Norway after the break of the Russian-Ukrainian war in 2022.

Developed in the frames of the Childhood Studies field, this Master Thesis aims to explore the challenges faced by Ukrainian children and empowerment during the process of building new and maintaining existing social relationships. Social relationships became a central theme of my research, given their pivotal role in helping children to integrate into a new society. I discovered the challenges of the process and different strategies used by Ukrainian children to address these challenges. I reflect on empowerment when I direct my attention to the resilience and agency that emerge when Ukrainian children navigate their ways in the new country that became their place of refuge and shelter home.

This research is a qualitative study with 11 participants, aged from 6 to 16 years old, settled in two different municipalities of the Trøndelag county of Norway. It involves qualitative methods and tools to allow and ensure children's voices are heard, recognizing children as experts in their own lives. Among them were drawing techniques and the photo-voice method, followed by a semi-structured in-depth interview, the ranking method, and group discussion used during focus group work.

In the analysis, I use mehods of qualitative analysis and the theoretical lens of relational agency and resilience, and employ the concept of empowerment. Furthermore, I make use of the concept of social connectedness, inherent to the field of Childhood Studies. I also employ the concepts of Integration and Acculturation and the concept of Invisible Fences adopted from Social Sciences.

My analysis is presented in three chapters. In the first analytical chapter, I focus on the barriers to building new relationships with Norwegian peers. The data that emerged during the fieldwork allowed me to discuss the language barrier and the subjective perception of differences in culture and mentality. Addressing these barriers, children employ different strategies, both proactive and coping, which are discussed in the second analytical chapter. In the third analytical chapter, I explore how children maintain close relationships with their left-behind families and friends, the challenges and the empowerment of the process.

This research was carried out with the intention to shed light on the experiences of Ukrainian children in Norway. I hope that understanding their challenges will be valuable and helpful in facilitating a smoother integration process for other refugee children in Norway in the future. Moreover, I hope that this study initiates meaningful discussions and inspires the search and development of solutions, benefiting all the actors of the process, and that it will be useful for governmental and non-governmental organizations working with refugee children of different ages, genders, ethnicities, and nationalities.

Dedication

To my beloved children: my son Illia and my daughter Mariia.

You were the reason, I began this research, and your life experiences motivated me to delve into this significant subject. For your sake, I strived to find depth and understanding of what is happening with the newcomer's Ukrainian children in Norway. My deepest wish is not for life trials to shatter your spirits, but to sculpt you into even finer souls. With unwavering faith, I envision a future where everything falls into place seamlessly for you, and every step forward is illuminated by hope.

You are my happiness and the blessing of my life!

Acknowledgments

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List of Abbreviations

UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UDI	Utlendingsdirektoratet. Norwegian Directorate of Immigration.
UNCRC	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
SIKT	Norwegian Agency for Shared Services in Education and Research
NTNU	Norwegian University of Science and Technology
USSR	Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic
SU	Soviet Union
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty
EU	European Union
OECD	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
AFU	Armed Forces of Ukraine
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
IT	Internet Technologies

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Background of the study

The war in Ukraine broke up early on the morning of February 24th, 2022. This date divided the lives of millions of Ukrainians into 'before' and 'after'. The Russian invasion, unprovoked and unexpected by civilians, threw the land into chaos and despair. Ukraine, located in the center of Europe, is a country that enjoyed its independence for more than 30 years. Ukraine led a modern European lifestyle and had bold inspirations for the future but was thrown into the fire by missiles and rockets from Russia. Russia is a neighboring country, which according to the Budapest Memorandum of 1994 had a duty to provide defense and protection to Ukraine and hold onto the principles of territorial integrity and non-intervention, signed in the Helsinki Final Act in 1975 (Synovitz, 2014). Russia violated these treaties and many other international agreements as well. The war caused massive displacement of people. Hundreds of thousands of people had to leave their houses and flee to save their lives and the lives of their children.

According to the Operational Data Portal of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), from 24th February 2022, the beginning of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, to 28th November 2023, 6.319.700 Ukrainian refugees were recorded globally. Norway has registered 67.335 Ukrainians who applied for asylum or the status of collective protection (UNHCR, 2023). The Ukrainian immigration wave is the biggest immigration wave to Norway in several decades and the biggest Ukrainian immigration wave among other Nordic countries. One-third of the refugees are children (UDI, 2023c). They are the focus of my research and this Master's Thesis.

1.2 The problem statement

Ukrainian children, who found protection in Norway, followed their mothers in most cases, and they had to leave behind their fathers and other relatives. Only a small number of children could come to Norway with both parents. Children found themselves in a difficult situation when they had to leave behind their homes, familiar lives, close ones, and friends. They faced a new system and society, a new language and way of life, peers with different mentalities, and communication cultures. Nevertheless, Ukrainian children are expected to learn a new language, adapt here, integrate, build new networks, and find their place in society. It is a big challenge for Ukrainian children, who were unprepared for such a radical change in their lives.

The situation of the Ukrainian children in the context of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and Norway's stand for the rights of children served as an initial motivation for choosing the topic for this Master's Thesis. Article 12 and Article 13 of the UNCRC (*The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. (n.d.).*) call upon the necessity for children's views and voices to be heard and their perceptions and experiences considered. Children should be given an opportunity to express themselves freely in

seeking, sharing, and acquiring information. When we are talking about children in the situation of forced migration, we can apply paragraph 123 of General Comment No.12, which says:

> Children who come to a country following their parents in search of work or as refugees are in a particularly vulnerable situation. For this reason, it is urgent to fully implement their right to express their views on all aspects of immigration and asylum proceedings (UNCRC, 2009).

That is why I emphasize the significance of studying the experiences of Ukrainian refugee children in Norway.

1.2.1 Ukrainian refugee children with the status of collective protection

Hundreds of thousands of Ukrainian children became refugees in many countries of the world. The Cambridge Dictionary gives the following definition to the word 'refugee': "a person who has escaped from their own country for political, religious, or economic reasons or because of a war" (Cambridge Dictionary).

The 1951 Refugee Convention defines a refugee as a person who

> owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of [their] nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail [themself] of the protection of that country (UNHCR, 2024).

In many European countries, including Norway, Ukrainians and Ukrainian children were granted the status of collective protection. The Norwegian Directorate of Immigration (UDI) defines a status of collective protection as one, determined by the Government in a situation of mass flight. Its legal bases are described in the Immigration Act, section 34 (Immigration Act, 2010). The status of collective protection allows group assessment of asylum applications. In such a situation, residents' permits are granted for one year and may be extended up to three years. The status of collective protection in Norway has been used only twice previously: first time, in response to the mass migration of Bosnians in the early 1990s, and the second time, in addressing the mass exodus within the population in Kosovo at the end of 1990s (UDI, 2024).

Ukrainians were given the status of collective protection on 11th March 2022 (UDI, 2024). Unaccompanied minors, children under 18 years old, without parents, were registered as minors and entitled to the same status of collective protection. This status opened the rights to healthcare, work, and school (UDI, 2024).

1.3 Previous research

Refugee children encounter a range of challenges. They encompass typical childhood and adolescence hurdles, such as identity development, schooling, and forming friendships, together with challenges inherent during the initial phase of stay in the new country: communication and language difficulties (Ottosson et al., 2017; Pieloch et al., 2016; Sleijpen et al., 2016). The field of research on experiences and integrational processes of refugee children in different countries, and in Norway in particular, is very rich. The studies cover the multiple challenges that refugee children face and raise important topics

concerning the processes of integration and adaptation (Ansell, 2017; Hart, 2014; Huang, 2022; Mirsadeghi, 2013; Ottosson et al., 2017; Pieloch et al., 2016). The previous research literature traditionally focused on the vulnerability of young migrants, but recent emphasis shifted to recognizing the resilience of child refugees and their agential strategies (Pieloch et al., 2016; Raghallaigh, 2018; Walsh, 2003). These studies focus on children's views, emphasizing the role of resilience in adapting to a new place while keeping their cultural connections. Research findings identify that a sense of belonging and connections to the home country that children acquire from the fellowship with co-nationals are key factors promoting resilience (Ryland, 2013; Tyldum, 2016; Valenta, 2008; Walsh, 2003). Authors highlight a wide range of factors—such as social support, family ties, acculturation strategies, education, religiosity, and hope—as resilience sources, mitigating stress.

Developing a theoretical base for my Master's Thesis, I also use research, focused on the experiences of refugee children in Norway, which allows me to see the peculiarities of the integration process in this country (Mirsadeghi, 2013; Mohamad, 2022; Ryland, 2013; Wang, 2022).

Such a solid body of research gives me a trustworthy foundation and a good starting point for my exploration of the situation of Ukrainian refugee children in Norway. My focus is social relationships, which children build and maintain. I am interested in studying the peculiarities of these processes. New social connections with co-nationals and Norwegian peers become very important for the integration process because they give a sense of connection, belonging, adequacy, and security (Ager & Strang, 2008). At the same time, maintaining existing connections helps to overcome feelings of sadness and loneliness, feelings of nostalgia and separation, (which are very natural for children in this period), and becomes an important element in preserving well-being, mental health, and energy (Part, 2019; Pisani et al., 2018).

1.4 The research aims and questions.

This research aims to explore how Ukrainian children (with the status of collective protection) in Norway maintain existing social relationships in their lives and build new relationships and networks. The research questions are:

1) How do Ukrainian children (with the status of collective protection) in Norway maintain existing social relationships in their lives and build new relationships?

2) How could the process of maintaining and building new social relationships be both a challenging and empowering experience for children?

To achieve the aims of the research, I set the following sub-questions which guided my fieldwork:

 1) Who are the main actors in Ukrainian children's current daily life?

 2) In what ways do children maintain existing connections with family and friends? And what is the role of those connections in children's lives?

 3) Who are the new actors in Ukrainian children's current life?

 4) What are the strategies Ukrainian children use to build new connections?

5) What are the characteristics of the process of acquiring and building new relationships with peers and adults?

1.5 Personal inspiration

On the 10th of March 2022, I came to Norway with my two children of school age. We came from Ukraine as refugees because of the war with Russia. We had a task ahead of us: to live and face every day of new life in the new country, in the new society. With time, in the new and wide Ukrainian diaspora, I met a lot of families with children, and my children found new Ukrainian friends in the reception school. Every day I saw and heard about the challenges that Ukrainian children face, trying to at least understand the new society. But they all must find their place in it with time, as our stay in Norway got longer than expected, and the future is uncertain. When I became a student in the Master's Program "Childhood Studies" at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU), new knowledge gave me new perspectives, and the Master's project opened an opportunity to dig deeper into the topic of social relationships of Ukrainian refugee children, which was alive and actual for me. I am personally interested in the outcome of the research. The experience of my children and many others whom I got to know during this period motivates me to emphasize the necessity and importance of such research. My academic background from Ukraine and Norway and my professional experience in Ukraine as a teacher allow me to have a professional and ethical approach to research. I share the common background, culture, language, and current experience of the immigrants with the status of collective protection with children, who are my target group in this research. I consider it to be a benefit of my position. I am highly motivated to make a difference with my project in the field of integration of refugee children, and I hope that the outcomes of this research can serve society and all the actors in the process.

1.6 Theoretical perspectives

Children make use of different strategies as a response to their situations. Working with the theoretical underpinning found in previous research and analyzing data and findings of my fieldwork, I was moving along existing concepts and theories, my data, and the research findings. In my Master's Thesis, I turn to the concepts inherent to the Childhood Studies field because children's situation is best explained through the Childhood Studies paradigm, which allows children's voices to be heard and considers children as active agents that construct their lives, lives of those around them and societies, they live in (James & Prout, 2003).

Agency is one of the central themes in Childhood Studies. I use the concept of agency to emphasize children's active role in the process of their integration and in the construction of meaning that integration has in their lives (Stoecklin, 2013). I also use the concept of agency to highlight the meaning of children's participation in research and show how participation in research could be an empowering experience for children.

The concept of integration helps to understand the context of this new phase and how the integration process unfolds in the lives of participants. I use the framework of the core domains of integration (Ager & Strang, 2008), which explains factors that influence the

integration process. Exploration of the acculturation process, which mutually influences its participants, allowed me to understand the context of new life and new realities of Ukrainian refugee children. The understanding of acculturation on the individual level helps explain different results and peculiarities of the integration process for different participants of my research.

I found the concept of *invisible fences*, proposed by Gullestad (2002), very useful in my attempts to understand what Ukrainian children are experiencing and in explaining the dynamics of building and maintaining new relationships with their Norwegian peers. The concept of invisible fences helped me to understand the cultural and mental background of their Norwegian peers' behavior when first enthusiasm and openness in communication with Ukrainian peers are changed with alienation and closure in some encounters.

Processes of integration, as a two-way road, tests its participants, and I find the concept of resilience very helpful for explaining different coping strategies that Ukrainian children use in response to various challenges and needs of their initial stage in a new country (Ní Raghallaigh & Gilligan, 2010; Ottosson et al., 2017).

Resilience is considered in the light of its relational nature; it is revealed in children's ability to seek and rely on help from other people and is fostered through meaningful relationships (Beazley & Ennew, 2006; Walsh, 2003). Also, I employ the concept of empowerment to reflect on the process and results of children's agential actions.

The concept of social connectedness, inherent to the field of Childhood Studies, complements the theoretical framework of my research. For refugee children, the initial phase in the new society implies various stressful experiences, which is why social connections and support play a key role in the successful outcome of the integration process (Strang & Quinn, 2021). Close relationships can mitigate the negative effects of stress and strengthen the children's ability to cope (Sarwar et al., 2022).

1.7 Recruitment, participants, and fieldwork

An assessment of the processing of personal data from the Norwegian Agency for Shared Services in Education and Research (SIKT) opened the way for the recruiting of the participants, which happened through my contacts and cooperation with the reception school of my municipality. For my research, I involved 11 participants of age 6-16 years old. The data for my research came from the fieldwork conducted with participants in different locations: their homes, my home, neutral places, and reception school.

1.8 Methodology

My methodology combines theoretical and methodological frameworks of Childhood Studies and qualitative research which allow me to interpret the social reality of children from a modern philosophical perspective and to use a wide range of participatory methods as tools, aiming at hearing children's voices and seeing children as active actors of their life and agential participants during the research. Both frameworks allowed me to use an approach that recognizes children as experts in their own lives (Punch & Graham, 2016; Woodhead & Faulkner, 2008). I used drawing techniques and the photo-voice method, followed by a

semi-structured in-depth interview for younger children (age 6-11 years old), a ranking exercise, a group discussion, and a semi-structured in-depth interview for older children (age 12-16 years old). Analyzing work is rooted in a qualitative research framework and uses qualitative analysis as a main tool of analytical work.

1.9 Value of my research

The experience of Ukrainian children offers a valuable opportunity to generate new knowledge in the field of studying refugee children's integration in the new country. The findings of the research will allow readers to understand the challenges in the way of integration of Ukrainian children and apply the received knowledge to work on solutions. This Master's Thesis provides an opportunity to listen to children's voices during their initial period in Norway. Hopefully, it will start a discussion and inspire the search for more effective solutions for easier integration processes for all the refugee children in Norway. Findings of the research could be used by different governmental and non-governmental organizations, working with refugee children in Norway and benefit all the actors in the process.

1.10 Outline of the Thesis

This Master Thesis includes eight chapters with subchapters, which help readers fully understand the research process, theoretical underpinnings, the analysis conducted, and the findings and conclusions. It begins with the Introduction chapter.

Chapter two, the Background chapter, provides context for this research. It contains a short profile of the country Ukraine, and the history of Ukrainian-Russian relations that led to the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. Chapter continues with the description of childhood in the Ukrainian context, and touches upon the immigration history and policies of Norway.

Chapter three presents theoretical concepts, that underpin this study. Chapter four is the Methodology Chapter, where the methodology approach for this research, the role of the researcher, and the ethical issues of research are presented.

Next, I present three analytical chapters. Chapter five describes and explains different barriers, that Ukrainian children experience in their attempt to build new networks and relationships with Norwegian peers. Chapter Six discusses the employment of different strategies to overcome described barriers. Chapter seven, the last analytical chapter, presents my analysis of how maintaining relationships with friends and family from Ukraine could be a challenging and empowering process for Ukrainian children. Chapter eight presents the findings of the research and provides a conclusion to this study. It presents some potential recommendations for the implementation of the research findings, as well as suggestions for future research.

Chapter 2: Contextual Background

2.1 Country profile. Ukraine.

Ukraine is Europe's second-largest country and is situated in the geographical center of Europe. Ukraine is surrounded by seven countries: Moldova, Hungary, Slovakia, Belarus, Poland, and Romania, with Russia as the biggest neighbor. The area of Ukraine is 603,550 sq. km, and the population in 2021, before the Russian full-scale invasion, used to be 41,442 million people. The median age is 44.7 years old, with a life expectancy is 68 years for men and 77 years for women. 15% of the population are children under 15 years old (Statista, 2023). 77.8% of the population are ethnic Ukrainians, and the second largest group is Russians (17.3%). Other big groups are Belarusians, Moldovans, and Crimean Tatars. Most of the population (70%) lives in urban areas[1] with high density, and the rest of the rural population mostly lives in big villages (with population from 1,000 to 5,000 people), being occupied in farming and agriculture. The predominant Religion is Eastern Orthodoxy, and most of the Christians belong to the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, protestant churches, and the Greek catholic church. Islam is practiced primarily by Crimean Tatars. Over a third of the population is not religious (Britannica, 2023; uk.gov.ua, 2023).

2.2. History of Ukrainian-Russian relations as a context of the Russian-Ukrainian War

2.2.1. Pre-Soviet History of Ukraine

War and opposition with Russia have been going on for centuries, woven into the history of Ukraine. Ukraine's history unfolds like an epic tale that began in the 11th century with the birth of the medieval state known as "Kyivan Rus". This realm played a vital role in shaping European history. The rulers of Kyiv, their offspring, and their descendants formed marital alliances with European monarchs, bringing princes, princesses, and even queens to numerous kingdoms (including Norway) of the medieval ages. However, the history of Ukraine is marked by a series of turbulent centuries (15th-16th), during which it fell under the dominion of four different kingdoms and states: Poland, Lithuania, the Crimean Khanate, and the Mongol Empire. The Russian Empire played a role in 'helping Ukraine out' from the dominion of other states, but at the same time, it led Ukraine to the "lengthy colonial enslavement" to Russia (Marples, 2007, p. 2-4). Caught in the web of shifting powers, Ukraine yearned for independence, partially succeeding in the 16th-19th centuries. The 19th century witnessed the dawn of Ukrainian nationalism, leading to the establishment of the Ukrainian People's Republic in 1917, although it endured for a mere three years until 1921. It was followed by the Ukrainian-Soviet war, resulting in the defeat of the Ukrainian People's Republic and the creation of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic (USSR) of the Soviet Union in 1922 (Субтельний, 1991).

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[1] Information about the demographical situation presents the pre-war situation and can change due to the war.

2.2.2 The tragic fate of Ukraine as part of the Soviet Union

In December 1922, the Soviet Bloc was formed through a treaty among Russia, Belarus, Ukraine, and the Caucasus region, which includes modern-day Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan. The bloc was placed under the governance of the newly established Communist Party, led by Vladimir Lenin. The Soviet Union (SU) era is notable for its ambitious focus on forced economic development and intense race with Western nations. The slogan "To catch up and overtake America" appeared shortly after Josef Stalin consolidated power as the absolute dictator of the SU in 1925. The total collectivization, forced industrialization, and the belief in the principle that "Man rules nature" transformed the republics of the SU into industrial powerhouses from predominantly agrarian nations that they used to be. However, it all happened at the enormous cost of the people's lives, which did not have value but was perceived merely as the human source for the system. People had to endure inhumane conditions to maintain relentless labor and productivity in the industrial sector. Propaganda played a significant role in maintaining the right attitudes and motivation. Politics of 'Russification' forcibly erased national expressions, aspirations, and identities. There were no nationals anymore, only 'citizens of the Soviet Union' (Marples, 2007, p.5-7, 12). Ukraine, with its constant pursuits of independence and national identification, gained much hatred from the SU, which was consistently reflected in policies against the USSR. Following the attempt to destroy the national spirit, the Soviets worked out a plan for the physical extermination of the Ukrainian nation (Kasianov, 2022).

2.2.3. Holodomor – the genocide of Ukrainian people

Famine, known as 'Holodomor' and legally recognized as a genocide of the Ukrainian people, was meticulously planned and intentionally executed. It started with total collectivization as a government strategy. It involved forming collective farms and seizing all property, including land and livestock, from individual households. By the end of 1932, 70% of peasant farms, owning 80% of cultivated land, had been collectivized. The government imposed unrealistic food quotas, burdening Ukraine, often referred to as the SU nation's 'granary'. To meet these quotas, the military and police were dispatched to Ukrainian villages in 1931. Systematic requisitioning claimed all harvested crops, nearly 50% of sown grain, and other grains, fruits, and vegetables. Many regions of Ukraine began to suffer severe food shortages, and despite pleas for help, the government turned a blind eye. In 1932, a special commission from Moscow arrived, intensifying efforts to meet the food quotas, searching houses, and leaving people with literally nothing. Even this was not enough, and by 1933, the famine reached its deadliest phase, when cannibalism was often reported (Marples, 2007, p.45-48). Millions perished during the period, with modern historians estimating the death toll at around 4-5 million Ukrainians (Грицак, 1996 p.131-134).

The Soviet regime vehemently denied the existence of famine. But the history cannot be hidden. Kasianov (2022) describes:

> the Holodomor exterminated the best of the nation, dealing a crushing blow to the Ukrainian nation and destroying its gene pool …the intellectual, energetic, actively creative force of the

nation was sapped for many years. Any resistance to the acts of violence in all the spheres of national and social life was broken (p.266).

He continues:

> the starvation of 1933 is not the historical past, it is a deep social and demographic catastrophe of the twentieth century, a never-healing moral and psychological wound that torments the memory of the eyewitnesses with sharp pain. Social and physiological fear engendered by mass purges and Holodomors lives in the consciousness of many generations (p.266).

2.2.4. Tragedies of Ukraine in the 20th century as a building block for its future independence

The 20th century brought many sufferings and hardships to the Ukrainian people, and despite all the attempts of SU to erase national identity, it awakened and was gradually strengthened. According to modern historians, the losses of two World Wars, the repressions and purges of Stalin, the famine of 1921-1923, and Holodomor constituted the loss of every second man and every fourth woman in Ukraine in the period from 1914 to 1945 (Грицак, 1996, p.3; Marples, 2007, p.43). Ukraine's history took a turn for the better after those dark days, starting with the death of Stalin in 1953. The period of the Khrushchev Thaw in the mid-20th century offered hope to the people of Ukraine, followed by the democratic reforms during 'perestroika' and 'glasnost' (translated as reconstruction and publicity), introduced by Mikhail Gorbachev in 1985. In 1991, Ukraine voted for its independence. The nationwide referendum had a single question: "Do you confirm the Act of Proclamation of Independence of Ukraine?" An impressive 84,18% of the population participated, with 90,32% of voters answering 'Yes'. This pivotal referendum marked the final collapse of the Soviet Union, and Ukraine became independent after 70 years of being part of the Soviet Republic (Young, 2015; Субтельний, 1991).

2.2.5. Living Strategies of Ukrainians during the Independence Period

Despite hopes that independence would help the country's economy, in the 1990s Ukraine experienced hardships. Standards of living were low. People managed to keep up with living conditions in numerous ways. For example, a significant part of the population grew their food, and almost every family had a private garden on the outskirts of the cities or in special sections. People were employed in 2-3 jobs at the same time, and a lot of people began transborder shuttle trade or temporary working emigration to neighboring countries. Also, it was common to get basic things through a barter economy that flourished for some time. Only by 1996 did the country manage to achieve certain economic stability, and the economy continued to grow gradually until 2014. But in 2014, the political crisis and the Russian annexing of Crimea and two of the most productive regions of the Eastern part of Ukraine hit the economy of the country, throwing the country into a state of frozen but ongoing conflict (Sutela, 2012; Thomas et al., 2013).

2.2.6. Russia's claims after the collapse of the Soviet Union

Russia still considers Ukraine as a part of its strategic sphere of influence, while Ukrainians seek to break free from Russian dominance (Kappeler, 2014, p. 1-2; Woolley, 2022) One of the strategic goals of Russia was not to allow Ukraine to become the part of the European Union, North Atlantic Treaty (NATO), or Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (Sutela, 2012). Russia consistently succeeded in this strategy through economic pressure (Ukraine depended on Russian gas and oil), political pressure, and military threads. For decades, numerous Russian agents' net secretly worked out different tasks among Ukrainian people, from brainwashing to active participation in business and influencing politics on the local and state levels. Even the Orthodox Church was used as a tool to spread the Russian language and ideology (Kappeler, 2014). Current Russian leaders, who are partakers of the Soviet Union, still share its imperialistic ambitions and claims (Atlantic Council, 2023). Their ideology prevails over common sense. Having in mind the idea of authoritarian power over Ukraine as well as over all the countries of the former Soviet Union, they present a threat to the democratic values and freedoms of countries that chose different ways of development and thinking.

To summarize, the history of Ukrainian-Russian relations is complex and deeply rooted. From the medieval era to the present day, Ukraine has faced numerous challenges in its quest for independence and national identity. The Russian-Ukrainian war reflects this historical context and the ongoing struggle for freedom and self-determination.

2.3 The Russian Invasion of Ukraine

The Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, a war unexpected by civilians, was a significant escalation in a long-standing conflict, rooted in historical tensions and geopolitical rivalries. The annexation of Crimea and two regions of Eastern Ukraine in 2014 set the stage for the invasion, which began with a full-scale military offensive in February 2022 (BBC, 2022). During the first weeks of the war, there was panic among civilians, and hundreds of thousands of people tried to leave the country at once. This mass exodus blocked many large cities and highways in traffic and led to a lack of gasoline at the petrol stations and cash in ATMs. As we know, millions of women, children, and elderly people became refugees in Europe and other countries of the world (UNHCR, 2023). This war had a profound impact on Ukrainian citizens in various ways. It shifted the political landscape, with the Ukrainian government declaring a state of emergency and implementing martial law. Millions of people were displaced, resulting in a humanitarian crisis marked by shortages of necessities, food, and healthcare. For more than two years, the active war actions and massive shelling have destroyed civilian and critical infrastructure, energy supplies, transportation networks, and industrial sectors. All these factors, in turn, led to economic downturn, inflation, and currency devaluation, causing unemployment and poverty among Ukrainians. Socially, the invasion caused psychological distress, trauma, and anxiety, particularly for those living in the war-affected areas. Thousands of families were separated when women took children to safe countries, and men of military age had to stay behind. Every family in Ukraine is affected by the terrible and sad consequences of the war. As of the current situation, fighting continues in several regions, and the Ukrainian government

and the Armed Forces of Ukraine (AFU), with the support of international allies, are working and fighting to reclaim territories and restore stability. However, the long-term consequences and prospects for resolution remain uncertain.

2.4. Childhoods in the Ukrainian context

2.4.1. Family system in Ukraine

Ukrainian families historically stood out by their strong family values and distinguished family culture. Values encompassed fidelity, care for children and parents, mutual love and intergenerational harmony, respect for ancestors, harmony, and trust among family members (Костюшко, 2018, p.74). Patriarchal foundations were gradually replaced by a democratic way of life in the family, among family values important values were hospitality, openness to public life, and having more than one child (Костюшко, 2018). According to research, in many traditional families, people still hold on to stereotypes, concerning gender roles according to who is the family breadwinner, and who provides the main childcare and is responsible for certain household chores. There is no realization of balanced allocation of duties, true partnership, and equality yet (Yablonska et al., 2020). However, in the last decades, there has been a significant shift in the attitudes towards marriage and family among the younger generation in Ukraine. A shift that resulted in the different current family system. While the family institute continues to be valued, there is a trend, similar to many European countries, towards individualization and autonomy. Young people are prioritizing education, professional establishment, and financial independence before considering marriage and starting a family.

This shift can be attributed to various factors, including the socioeconomic crisis of 1990-2000, declining living standards, and the challenges of supporting children. As a result, the timing of marriage is being postponed, and the desire to have fewer children is becoming more prevalent (Bartosh, 2021). 80% of families have only one child (Slyusar, 2022, p.58). The disruption of historical and cultural values of the family, while new values are not established yet, led to an inconsistent and unstable set of value orientations in modern families, with the focus on adaptability and achieving personal success at any cost (Кравченко, 2006). Consequently, family members are left vulnerable to external factors, and divorce frequently becomes a means of resolving conflicts and tension (Чубіна & Косяк, 2021).

Another research (Burlaka et al., 2017) presents a more positive picture, describing that with the improvement of the socio-economic situation of the families, a flexible and cooperative approach has replaced traditional roles in Ukrainian families, with relationships and activities based on shared goals, needs, perspectives, and emotions. The research also concludes that most Ukrainian families practice positive parenting strategies. Families of higher income and parents with higher education have more mature and balanced approaches to raising their children, using different available sources, including the Internet as an educational source to look for the best strategies in raising and preparing their children for a successful life in the modern highly competitive global economy (Burlaka et al., 2017).

More than 90% of Ukraine's population lived in a family before the war. Even though nuclear families mostly lived separately from their (grand)parents, many families took care of at least one of the parents of one of the spouses (Костюшко, 2018). Culturally, grandparents take an active part in helping to raise and care for children, and in many families, the relationships between children and their grandparents are very warm and close.

While many families in Ukraine face a critical situation, the conditions vary significantly, often influenced by the region, living area, and the socio-economic circumstances unique to each family. This reality directly affects the way children are raised and children's perception of themselves, society, and life as a whole.

2.4.2. Peer culture of Ukrainian children and youth

Peer groups of Ukrainian children are often characterized by shared interests, hobbies, and common backgrounds, creating a sense of belonging and identity (Bartosh, 2020, p.88-90). Ukrainian children's peer culture is influenced by societal values and norms: the importance of diligent work, respect for elders, politeness, and traditional gender roles are often emphasized. Many Ukrainian children are encouraged to value education, and academic and sports achievements. Peer groups may reinforce these values through collective support, encouragement, and competition (Bartosh, 2020).

Children in Ukraine engage in a wide range of activities during their leisure time. Sports, music, dance, and arts are popular among both boys and girls of different socio-economic classes. However, it might not be available in the same measure for children from varied economic strata. Of course, the influence of technology has led to increased participation in online gaming, social media, and virtual communities. Ukrainian children's peer culture is not immune to challenges and influences that exist in modern societies of Western countries. The rise of social media and digital communication platforms has introduced new dynamics and potential risks, such as cyberbullying and online harassment, as well as a lack of physical activities, as mentioned in the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) report (Balakireva, 2019, p.75-82).

2.4.3. School system and daily routines of Ukrainian children

Childhood of Ukrainian children and their daily routines are inextricably linked with the educational system of Ukraine. Compulsory general education in Ukraine consists of three levels of schooling:

I level: primary. Children enter school at the age of six and have four years of primary education.

II level: basic (lower secondary) school. Basic general secondary education lasts for 5 years (grades 5-9) and is provided by basic secondary schools.

III level: senior (upper) secondary school.

Study programs primarily focused on specialized training often referred to as profile education. Upon completing their general secondary education, students take their final exams and receive the Certificate of Complete General Secondary Education and the

transcript of grades. Also, children can achieve a full secondary education through the vocational training system: vocational and technical schools or colleges with I-II level accreditation (Network, 2009).

I will describe the daily routines of Ukrainian children based on my own experience of life in Ukraine, which is typical for middle-class urban citizens in Ukraine. Daily routines bear a resemblance to that of their Norwegian counterparts. Children typically awaken at approximately 7:00 in the morning and prepare for school, which typically commences between 8:30 and 12:30-15:30, depending on the child's age. Following school, extracurricular activities are pursued, including varying amounts of homework, sports, music, or hobbies, contingent upon the child's age and grade in school. Moreover, secondary school students often engage in supplementary lessons with private teachers to enhance their proficiency in specific academic subjects. Depending on whether they reside, in urban or rural areas, children may also assist their parents with familial responsibilities, such as tending to the farm or garden in rural areas, and house chores in urban areas. Typically, children spend their leisure time with friends after school, during free periods, or over the weekends. However, in recent years, there has been a growing trend among children to allocate more time to digital gaming and online socializing, resulting in less physical interaction with friends (Han et al., 2021). It is worth noting that the homework load in Ukraine is significantly heavier than it is in Norway. In Ukraine, students typically receive homework starting from the second grade, with the workload increasing as they progress through the education system. As a result, children may dedicate up to 3-4 hours each day to completing their homework assignments.

2.5. Immigration History and Policies of Norway

2.5.1. Immigration History of Norway 20th century

Norway's immigration history is relatively short. In the 20th century, Norway experienced three main waves of immigration. The first labor migrants were officially recorded in Norway only by 1960, and by the 1970s only 1.3% of the population originated from other countries: mostly Nordic countries, Europe, and North America (Horst, 2010, p.6). The first wave took place in 1969 when a small number of labor migrants arrived during the booming of the economy, following the discovery of oil in the North Sea and the development of the oil industry. Immigration policies were liberal, and the atmosphere was inviting. Later, the Labor Organization of Norway voiced concerns about foreign laborers as a potential threat to local workers. Their fears grew with the growth of the number of migrant workers, especially from Asia and Africa. This led Norway to a revision of immigration policies in 1972. Eventually, in 1975 there was a full stop to unskilled labor migration, supposedly for one year, but it was extended indefinitely. Despite a full stop to labor migration, Norway was open to receiving family members of settled labor migrants, - this was the second wave of migration (Horst, 2010). The most recent migration wave to Norway, the third one, starting in the 1980s, primarily consisted of asylum seekers. Peaks of asylum applicants from 60 different countries were recorded in 1987 and 1989, and the scale of immigration continued to grow. In 1994, the Parliament introduced the White Paper that focused on the region's temporary protection and containment (*Om flyktningpolitikken*, 1995).

2.5.2. Immigration History of Norway 21st Century

Since the beginning of the 21st century, further growth in the number of asylum seekers is connected to international agreements of the Schengen Zone, such as the Dublin Agreement, of which Norway became a part in 2001 (Horst, 2010, p.7). The number of immigrants grew from 2,400 entrants in 1993 to 26,700 in 2011 (Green & Iversen, 2022). Thus, the number of refugees, compared to the number of working immigrants substantially increased, and in 2018 refugees constituted 12, 5% of all the immigrant inflow. Certain peaks in the inflow of refugees in Norway reflect conflicts abroad such as the inflow of refugees from Balkan countries in the 1990s, the refugee wave from Iraq, Afghanistan, and Somali in the early 2000s, and refugees from Syria and Afghanistan in 2015-2017 when 30% of all immigrants were refugees (Garvik & Valenta, 2021).

Traditionally, Norway and Nordic countries had an image of immigration-friendly countries, with well-developed humanitarian asylum and refugee policies that involved a high level of social protection and integration, focusing on children's rights. The Norwegian First Aliens Act of 1988 established a legal framework for immigration, asylum, and treatment of foreign nationals in Norway (Lovdata, 1988). However, the growing immigration of asylum seekers brought calls from society for more restrictive policies in Norway. Since the immigration crisis in 2015-2016, countries had to balance immigration policies with national interests. In Norway, the Immigration Act has been changing and evolving many times, reflecting changing immigration patterns, situations in the world, and international agreements and obligations. For example, during the 2015–2016 crisis, new amendments to the Immigration Act of Norway were made, which "extended provisions of the right to refuse to assess an asylum application and an extended use of coercive means" (Garvik and Valenta, 2021, p.16). Thus, asylum seekers could be returned to their country of origin. Norway began to practice granting *only* temporary protection schemes that, in practice, could be postponed rejections. Also, family reunification, in many cases, was rejected (Garvik and Valenta, 2021). Policies have changed and "tension becomes apparent between the desire to deflect and deter on the one hand and the obligation to protect on the other" (Garvik and Valenta, 2021, p.4).

At the same time, new stricter policies and rules emerged in Europe. Examples of this are different readmission and return agreements between EU and third countries, externalization of borders, and stricter border control through the work of third organizations, such as Frontex (Triandafyllidou & Dimitriadi, 2014). Thus, the flow of immigrants ceased in 2016-2018. According to Eurostat statistics of 2022 (EMN, 2022), since 2018, only about 1500 to 2300 asylum seekers applied for asylum each year (numbers dropped during the Covid-19 pandemic due to quarantine restrictions), but up to 10% of them got a rejection. Europe, in general, became a fortress' (Widom, 2022).

2.5.4. Three waves of Ukrainian migration to Norway

The very first Ukrainian settlers came to Norway in 1941-1945 as prisoners of the Nazi regime during World War II. More than 16,000 imprisoned soldiers were supposed to be sent to Siberia after the end of the war. A few of them luckily escaped and stayed dispersed

in different villages and small harbor towns in Norway. They had to hide their identities to not be traced by the Soviet Union's security service, which is why their number is unclear. This is reckoned the first wave of Ukrainian migrants to Norway (Horst, 2010, p.41).

The second wave refers to a very small number of political migrants who faced persecution in the period 1947-1953, mostly people from Western Ukraine. They were Ukrainians who fought for the independence of Ukraine and were able to flee the death executions, they also had to keep their identities hidden. The number is unclear, but according to speculations, there could be 15-20 people. They could not feel safe if the Committee for State Security of the Soviet Union traced their destination (Horst, 2010, p.42).

The third wave of Ukrainian migration to Norway began with the fall of the "iron curtain" of the Soviet Union and became significant when independent Ukraine experienced economic hardships in 1994-1995. The initial references to labor migration of Ukrainians in Norway were recorded between 1994 and the early 2000s. Ukrainian migrants were driven by the unfavorable economic conditions prevailing in Ukraine, such as low wages and high unemployment rates (Godzimirski, 2004, p. 15-17). Norwegian Statistic Burau has information about 713 Ukrainian citizens living in Norway by 1st January 2004 (Godzimirski, 2004, p.22). The number of migrants from Ukraine grew rapidly, and by 2010, about 2500 Ukrainians had been registered in the country. Migrants of the third wave can be divided into three groups (Horst, 2010). The first group is au pairs and students: a small number, mostly women who already had a high education from Ukraine and a good level of English to be able to participate in the educational system of Norway. The second group – women, joined their Norwegian partners for marriage. The third group were professional experts: scientists who worked in research institutes, workers in the health sector, doctors and nurses, and a few IT workers. Before the war started, Ukrainian Associations were established only in Bergen and Oslo. For a long time, Ukrainians could enter Norway only after being granted a visa. It was not an easy process; it required a lot of conditions to be fulfilled, and one-third of applicants usually got rejected. However, in 2016, the visa regime was canceled, and Ukrainians could come to Norway for 90 days during 180 days.

2.5.5. Immigration Policies towards Ukrainians after the beginning of the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

Despite a recent history of strict policies towards immigrants from other countries, Norway, together with other European countries, changed its immigration policies, answering the refugee crisis when the war in Ukraine began on 24th February 2022. On the very first day of the Russian invasion, thousands of people (mostly women, children, and elderly people, due to the mobilization and ban on the departure for men of military age) began to leave Ukraine. From the first day, European countries opened their doors to give shelter to hundreds of thousands of Ukrainians, and very soon, many countries proposed collective protection status for Ukrainian refugees. The operational Data Portal of UNCRC (2023) reports that for September 2023, there are more than 8 million Ukrainian refugees registered globally in Europe and other countries of the world. Since the beginning of the war, Norway has received 16,656 children before 18 years old (about 33% of all refugees from Ukraine), but this number is expected to grow up to 30.000 during the next year.

Among children, there are 898 single minors, and their number is expected to grow up to 1560 (UDI, 2023b).

2.5.6. Status of collective protection in Norway.

> They met us with big hugs. We were amazed at such hospitality. We were foreigners in this country, but they received us as their citizens'; 'Norwegian people are so kind and empathetic; they are ready to give help and support anytime' (Hernes et al., 2022, p.44).

Norway proposed the status of collective protection for Ukrainians on 11th March 2022, the 15th day of the war. In December 2023, UDI of Norway reported about 70,000 refugees registered in Norway with the status of collective protection, 79% of them women and children (UDI, 2023d). The high influx of Ukrainian refugees could be straining the country's reception system, but the government introduced some policy changes and initiated rapid political processes. A new decision about the incoming group was introduced in the form of a new paragraph in Section 34 of the Immigration Act, in the Immigration Regulations Section 7-5a (Lovdata, 2022), which describes to whom the collective protection status applies. The collective protection status implies that Ukrainians do not need individual asylum interviews; the only relevant information concerns their citizenship and residence in Ukraine before 24 February 2022. Thus, for individual asylum application decisions, the time needed to decide on the application and grant the status varied between 3 to 61 days, compared to an average time of 255 days.

Other changes in policies included alternative ways of settlement, possibilities to leave the country without losing the status of collective protection, and adaptations in the integration program. For example, settlements became available in alternative paths, not only through reception centers but also through direct contact with municipalities. It was possible because Ukrainians did not need visas and could stay privately within the network of their family or friends. Such networks, as well as various voluntary organizations that were not part of the regular reception system, helped Ukrainians to find settlements through direct contact with municipalities. Also, new reception centers opened throughout the country to receive a growing number of people (Hernes et al., 2022). Overall, the traditional process of settlement in Norway usually takes an average of 19 months, while with Ukrainians, it happens much faster, from 1 to 5-6 months, because different procedures no longer unfold in a linear sequence but instead happen almost simultaneously.

According to UDI (2022), people who have been granted collective protection were granted such for one year, with the possibility of a protection permit being extended for one year at a time. And it has already been extended two times. People who have been granted such protection have the right to work in Norway. Also, they are entitled to health care through public health services. Children have the right to attend school and kindergarten, and adults between 18 and 55 have the right and obligation to take part in an introduction program that includes language courses and social studies.

As there is no high probability that the war will end in the nearest future, the statistical bureau of Norway asses that the number of refugees will be steadily high, counting on the "middle scenario", which is an average of 1000-1200 new applicants for collective protection weekly (UDI, 2023b).

2.5.7. Feelings around new identity as a refugee

Despite all favorable changes and welcoming reception, many Ukrainians struggled with their unexpected and sudden new identity as refugees (Hernes et al., 2022, p.42). The reasons for that vary from not feeling so because of a warm reception in the community or staying with family members in a familiar social setting to the difficulties of accepting the situation of being dependable on others and less independent in one's own decisions. For some, this identity would make the experience of trauma deeper. In the report "Ukrainian Refugees Experience from the First Phase in Norway", one interviewee shared that it was "the most painful identity I have ever had" (Hernes et al., 2022, p.42). Unlike other refugees, who might have spent months or years in transition before coming to Norway, adjusting to their life situation and being familiar with the system and procedures of asylum, for many Ukrainians this change was unplanned and too rapid. 65% of respondents in the research reported having either family or friends or remote connections and professional networks here. At the same time, 35% of respondents did not have any connections here and chose Norway as a good and stable country (Hernes et al., 2022, p.40).

Chapter 3: Theoretical Framework

The theoretical concepts discussed below formed my approach to designing the methodology and conducting the fieldwork and inspired analytical discussions in my project. The paradigm of Childhood Studies serves as the main framework of my Master's project, whose main tasks are to put children's personal experiences in the focus of research and to reflect children's right to be heard. Concepts of agency and resilience, together with the concept of social connections and notions of the `we-ness` concept, help to reflect on and explain the peculiarities of the process of building new relationships and networks in Norway and maintaining relationships with family and friends from Ukraine. Mentioned concepts reveal and explain different strategies that children use in this process. The concept of integration, together with the concept of acculturation and the concept of invisible fences, sets the platform for exploring children's experiences and challenges in different domains of integration and adapting to a new society.

The concepts explored below are interwoven. They allow me to comprehend the overall picture of children's experiences when applied together. The use of these concepts, applied for analysis, allows me to answer the research questions, which are the following:

1) How do Ukrainian children (with the status of collective protection) in Norway maintain existing social relationships and build new ones?
2) How could the process of maintaining and building new social relationships be both a challenging and empowering experience for children?

3.1 Childhood Studies

Childhood Study as a field emerged in the 1980s-1990s at the interception of various disciplines, such as the sociology of children, anthropology, psychology, pedagogy, and others. It reflects not only the study of the children and their lives but also their rights and rightful position in society. Different factors led to the emergency of the current Childhood Studies as the field of study and research. Some of them are socio-political changes in the world, fighting for the rights of `muted voices` of women and children (Charlotte Hardmann, 1973), adoption of the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) in 1989 with the focus not only on protection and providing of children, but also focus on their participation rights. Changes in the socio-political arena inspired shifts in theoretical and scientific fields, moving vectors in research from research *on* children to research *with* children (Prout and James, 1997), finally seeing children as *beings*, not only *becomings* (Qvortrup, 2009). The concepts of Childhood Studies are not isolated and fixed. Instead, Childhood Study is a multi- and interdisciplinary field of study. "Childhood is understood as a complex social phenomenon" (James & James, 2012, pp. 26), and as a discipline, Childhood Studies is placed in a wide social, cultural, political, and historical context, that is constantly evolving (James & James, 2012, pp. 1-2). Concepts of relational agency, resilience, and social connections find their roots and are used in social sciences and psychology. They are inherent to the field of Childhood Studies and will be used as my theoretical underpinnings for this research. The field of Childhood Studies makes use of

these concepts, among others, to explain how childhood is shaped and reconstructed in society today, how children are being studied in their own right, and how children are perceived as agents in their lives and active participants of the research, instead of being the research objects or subjects (Woodhead, 2008). Childhood Studies focuses on children's voices and experiences. In my research, using an inductive or' bottom-up' approach, I use children's perspectives as the main empirical data and their voices (in interviews) as a starting point for my thematic analysis. The unique lens of Childhood Studies reflected in the six key features of Childhood Studies enables me to try to comprehend and present a clearer picture of what is happening with Ukrainian children in Norway and answer my research questions.

3.2 The concept of Agency: Its reflexive and relational nature

One of the key concepts in Childhood Studies is children's agency. It acknowledges that children are active agents who contribute to their development and can make meaningful choices. Agency refers to the universal human capacity to act. The origin of the concept of agency is twofold: first, the actor-oriented approach has been explored and widely used within the field of social sciences, both as a collective ideology and later as the one that underpinned a characteristic of an individual with moral capacity and responsibility to act for himself; and second, it becomes relevant also for Childhood Studies, since the concept of agency is found in legal and moral framework of the UNCRC, highlighting children's rights of participation and self-determination (Abebe, 2019, p.4). Childhood Studies combine these two perspectives and utilize the concept of agency as children's ability to construct and determine not only their own social lives but also the lives of those around them and the societies in which they live (James & Prout, 2003). Using the concept in the legal framework makes the concept of agency wider in its application and understanding. However, it is important to consider the context in which children obtain and exercise their agential role. Such context may include children's role and their position in society, the political, cultural, and material context, as well as children's relation to their family and community, age of the children, their gender, ethnicity, and geography, along with other factors (Abebe, 2019; Valentine, 2011). By its nature, everyday children's agency can be recognized in different types. Abebe (2019) refers to thick agency and thin agency, as described by Klocker (2007). These characteristics refer to a different range of available choices and options for exercising agency, from wide choice to restrictive context and limited opportunities. Agency might also be considered as a resilience to cope with the hard circumstances of life. Payne (2012) describes an 'ambiguous agency', which is, in a way, a 'forced' agency of children who, for instance, had to become the head of the household upon the parents' absence or decease. Hence, to summarize the different types or phenomena of agency: «Children's experiences of agency change depending on who they are with, what they are doing, and where they are" (Robson et al. 2007, cited in Abebe, 2019, p.8).

In recent years, the concept of agency transformed as it shifted its focus to the relational side of the agency and to the notion that agents always act in a certain context, which includes interactions and connections with other actors (Burkitt, 2016). As described above, the concept of agency emerged in Social Sciences first as a characteristic of an individual, who does the action and thus affects the social world. For example, according to Archer and

Giddens, the agency is a possession of an individual, who can choose "a course of action in circumstances where he could have acted otherwise" (Archer, 2003, Giddens, 1979, cited in Burkitt, 2016, p.323). Other social scientists argue that it is the relationships that serve as the starting point for defining both subjects, objects, and their agency. They emphasize that individuals construct their identities and shape their lives through these relational dynamics (Donatti, 2011; Fish, 2013, as cited in Burkitt, 2016, p.330-331). The agency is perceived as inseparable from its relational nature.

The field of Childhood Studies adopted the concept of agency as one of its core concepts, and as one of the key features of the field (Prout and James, 2015, p.7): Children are active social actors. More than that, Childhood Studies contributed to the development of the relational approach within the concept (Raithelhuber, 2016, p. 90). Findings of different research within the Childhood Studies field allowed the statement: "Agency can only exist in interconnectedness and be brought about in relations" (Raithelhuber, 2016, p.96). Therefore, scholars in Childhood Studies have drawn our attention to the notion of relational agency, which is expressed through relationships and does not exist by itself as a characteristic of an individual but rather emerges within a relational context (Pardali & Ursin, 2023, p.4). Relational agency assumes that the concept of human agency is interwoven with another concept, which is 'linked lives'. The concept of linked lives acknowledges agency as relational and actors as never free or independent but constantly influenced by connections to others (Landes et al., 2019, p.2). Linked lives are defined as "lives are lived interdependently, and socio-historical influences are expressed through this network of shared relationships" (Elder et al.,2004, p. 13, cited in Landes et al., 2019, p. 4). Therefore, any action of a person is never independent but always relies on an individual's interpersonal relationships. These two, agency and linked lives, are intertwined, revealed, and confirmed by the lived experiences of people.

According to Stoeckling (2013), children practice agency through social networks in which they participate and realize themselves through their choices and their voice and social activities. For such participation, children first internalize the outside world, make sense of it, and then act in response. That is why, along with personal reflexivity, the role of the social environment, the group as a mediator, is decisive. Such a view on the children's agency explains why different children feel and act differently in the same or similar circumstances. It is because of the different ways different children see and interpret the outside world (Stoeckling, 2013, p. 447). Children's agentic actions cannot be reduced to simple actions, they include the whole actor's system, which includes life experience, relations, motivation, values, and image of self (Stoeckling, 2013, p.448). During my analytical work, understanding agency and its reflexive and relational nature helped me to provide a richer interpretation of research participants' encounters with the new environment and get a deeper understanding of their reality.

3.3 Resilience

Multiple research and exploration of refugee children's experiences, especially qualitative studies, that brought forth the children's voices and perspectives, focus on children's abilities to integrate into new societies and rebuild their lives after the change or traumatic

experiences. Children's capacities, efforts to cope, and their agential actions are considered in the light of resilience instead of the framework of vulnerability (Raghallaigh, 2018). It is, therefore, important to pay attention to risk factors and the factors that enhance children's abilities to face challenges and adversities. A set of such factors reveals themselves in the concept of resilience. On the one hand, resilience can be defined as a trait of an individual that helps him to function under pressure and stress as a reaction to a crisis in his life (Raghallaigh, 2018; Walsh, 2003). On the other hand, resilience goes beyond the individual and involves family and community as a whole (Pieloch et al., 2016). The concept of resilience emerged in the social sciences and psychology as a response to different childhood traumas. According to Montgomery (2010), "Resilience refers to a dynamic process characterized by positive development despite significant adversity" (p.479). Cultural studies across the world allowed scientists to state that resilience results from the interplay between an individual and their environment, while at the same time, resilience fosters these processes and contributes to a result (Montgomery, 2010, p. 479).

The resilience of children is demonstrated through various coping strategies, described by different researchers. Among them are maintaining continuity between the past and the present, maintaining family bonds, and keeping cultural roots, which allow one to keep a sense of self, adjust by learning and changing, and appreciate education. Also, coping strategies include engaging in a positive outlook, maintaining an optimistic perspective, and being proactive (Pieloch et al., 2016). Practicing religion gives refugee children a strong feeling of hope. Faith is a source of meaning-making for those, who believe in God. Practicing religion presents not only a very strong coping strategy but compliments other coping strategies as well (Ni Raghallaih, 2010, pp.229-232). The following strategies are also described among coping strategies: suppressing emotions and seeking distraction, keeping yourself always busy; trying to be independent, trusting only in yourself, and distrusting others (Ní Raghallaigh & Gilligan, 2010; Pieloch et al., 2016; Sleijpen et al., 2016).

Resilience has a relational aspect. Across the resilience literature, this one principle stands out: the importance of strong interpersonal connections and close relationships (Walsh, 2003). While resilience helps children to maintain connections to the sphere of their origin: maintain connections with fellow co-nationals and the culture of their homeland, these connections, in turn, help children to face the challenges of the new life and face the new local society (Ní Raghallaigh & Gilligan, 2010; Ottosson et al., 2017). Research on the resilience of children reveals that they did not overcome challenges on their own. Instead, they sought support and help from others (Pieloch et al., 2016, p.331). Their resilience was fostered through significant relationships with friends and family members, or with teachers in school, coaches, and mentors in after-school activities. The feeling of "being in one boat", and the feeling of shared challenge with others was also helpful in strengthening the ability to overcome difficulties of current situations (Walsh, 2003). The importance of the relational aspect of resilience can be further explained through the concept of social connections, described below.

Of course, children's reactions to the adversities of their life will be different, and both factors of vulnerability and strength will play in the outcome of the adaptation process. It is possible to state that vulnerability and resilience can exist side by side. We cannot treat young refugees as either "vulnerable" or "resilient", it is important to avoid a binary view of

them. Although vulnerable in many respects, children can exhibit resilience, which serves as a facilitator in the process of adaptation to the new environment.

3.4. Empowerment

The concept of empowerment is widely used in social sciences, psychology, psychiatry, and even medicine. Some social scientists define empowerment as a transformational activity, that allows one to take control of circumstances and achieve his goals (Adams, 2003), or as "a construct that links individual strengths and competencies, natural helping systems, and proactive behaviors to social policy and social change" (Rappaport, 1981, cited in Perkins and Zimmerman (1995). Empowerment includes both: the process and the result of the process, and may take different shapes in various contexts (Førde, 2007; Perkins & Zimmerman, 1995). Perkins and Zimmerman (1995) describe empowerment as a process of gaining control over own life and being able to participate in the community. In the context of current research, empowerment might present and resemble agency, which is the ability to act and influence your own life and the lives of the people around you, and the society in which you live (James & Prout, 2003). Empowerment contributes greatly to the development of resilience; results of the empowerment process reflect the characteristics of resilience (Førde, 2007, p. 96).

In my research, I will be using the definition of empowerment to describe the results of children's agential actions, when they build new relationships in the Norwegian peer community and try to maintain existing relationships with their co-nationals: family and friends, from Ukraine and Norway. Empowerment will describe the "benefits" that children gain by becoming powerful in their circumstances.

3.5 Social connectedness

The phrase "Humans are social animals" is commonly attributed to the Greek philosopher Aristotle and cooperation between humans plays a vital role in our survival as a species. With the development of civilization and humankind, social connections, which are relationships, driven by the people's "need for social interaction and positive ties with others" (Bruhn, 2011, p.1), have not lost their significance. Social connections are so important for the individual that some social scientists doubt that a person acquires or feels the significance of his life apart from the social groups or family he belongs to (Bruhn, 2011). Social networks provide support and meaning to our lives; through social connections, people acquire their sense of self and experience life through mutual investing in each other.

Social connections play multiple roles in the person's life and are of critical importance for the refugees. After analyzing the core domains of refugee integration, Strang and Quinn (2021) conclude that one of the key priorities for refugees' successful integration is creating and developing close bonding relationships essential for adaptation. Despite age, it is every person's desire to be loved, respected, and needed in society (Prilleltensky, 2020; Walsh, 2003), and this need motivates young refugees, who experience the loss of previous social connections, to build new ones. It is a part of their adaptation strategy. Bruhn (2011)

states, that "connections are the way we learn the rules of living in a particular culture" (Bruhn, 2011, p.7). Social connections are formed as a result of many interactions, which might be positive and negative. Connections develop and change their intensity or meaningfulness with time, but overall, they form the context of life and are important for the individual's life experience (Bruhn, 2011).

The concept of social connectedness makes use of definitions of *social bonds* and *social bridges* (Baillot et al., 2023), which are adopted from Putnam's (2000) concept of social capital. Social bonds are defined as connections that people form within their inner circle, with people they trust and exchange support and emotional and material safety. Social bonds start with the family but are not limited to it (Bruhn, 2011, p.6). Social bridges are relationships with people outside the family and close ties, they have a lower level of trust but are important for facilitating information and other sources of integration in the society. Both types of relationships are very important for refugees and their successful integration into Norwegian society. Newly acquired social connections give a sense of belonging, security, and adequacy in the new society (Ager & Strang, 2008) while maintaining and nurturing social bonds helps to overcome feelings of loneliness and separation and preserve well-being, mental health, and energy (Part, 2019). Social connectedness becomes especially important when talking about teenagers. Various studies show the relationship between social connections and mental well-being. Those with healthy social relationships with friends and family can manage stress better, show resilience in everyday situations, and feel more life satisfaction (Sarwar et al., 2022; Walsh, 2003). Baumeister (2017) considers social connections as a psychological drive. He states that people have an inherent desire and motivation to establish and sustain at least a few lasting, positive, and meaningful relationships with others (Baumeister & Leary, 2017).

3.6 Integration

The concept of integration and its understanding has changed across different countries and times in history. It always referred to the adaptation of immigrants, though considered earlier as an assimilation, with later alternatives of inclusion and multiculturalism. Integration was used to present an asymmetrical process of one-way integration of migrants into the hosting society (Erdal & Oeppen, 2013). Only lately, in the 1990s in Scandinavian countries, when integration policies went from assimilation to multiculturalism, it became possible to consider integration as a two-way process, impacting not only immigrants but also the host society. Immigrants and society form certain relationships that transform both (Heckmann, 2005, p.9). Two-way integration poses requirements for both host societies and migrants: migrants have to adapt their lives and contribute to the new society, but the receiving system, with its institutions, has to adapt itself and establish the necessary conditions to foster integration (Strang, 2010, p.600-601).

The concept of integration does not have a single definition. The problem with the idea is that it is used by many scholars in different fields, and with various meanings, depending on the dimension of the study. In my Master's Thesis, I will use the definition of integration, proposed by the UNCRC, the framework, that defines core domains of integration, proposed

by A. Ager and A. Strang (2008), and an interpretation of integration as a process inherent to the first phase of immigrant's stay in a new country.

UNCRC defines integration as

> a dynamic and multifaceted two-way process that requires efforts by all parties concerned, including a preparedness on the part of refugees to adapt to the host society without having to forego their own cultural identity and a corresponding readiness on the part of the host communities and public institutions to welcome refugees and meet the needs of a diverse population (UNHCR Executive Committee, 2005).

3.6.1. The core domains of integration

The work of Ager and Strang (2008) attempts to address the debates around the definition of integration by developing a framework, that would combine different domains, which reflects modern understanding of the term integration. The concept of integration is used to present and explain public understanding and policies, related to the resettlement of migrants and refugees in the host countries (Ager and Strang, 2008, p. 166). The following framework is also a tool for the analysis of outcomes and analyzes how successful this process is.
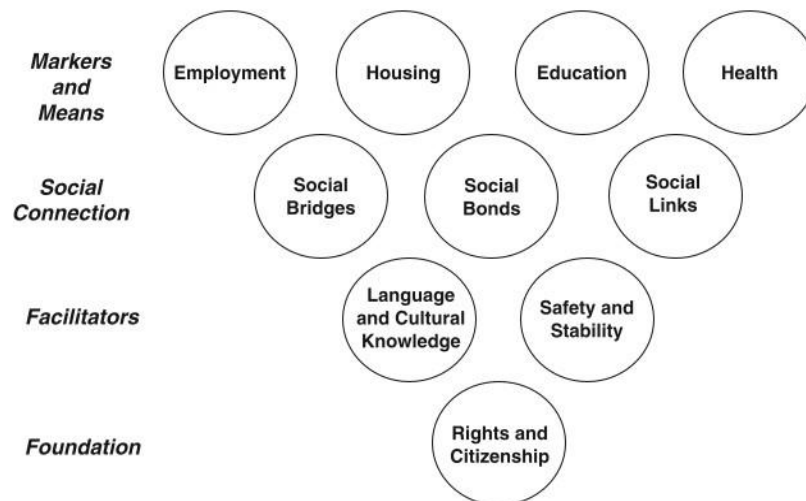
Figure 1 The core domains of integration (Ager and Strang, 2008, p. 170)

According to Ager and Strang (2008), ten domains, which are the key components of integration, are interconnected. They refer to four overarching themes: 1) achievements and access across the sectors of employment, housing, education, and health, 2) ability to exercise rights of citizenship and legal status as a foundation for these processes, 3) social practices and expectations in the social field, that describe connections between the social groups in the community, and 4) possible barriers, that are usually associated with

language and culture barriers and factors, that provide safety and stability in the local environment.

The data from my interviews with research participants reflects that children participate in or are subject to the same integrational processes as adults, facing challenges, sometimes to different degrees, in all the domains of the given framework.

3.6.2. Integration as a two-way-road

Integration is a process inherent to the first phase of an immigrant's stay in a new country. The process of integration implies the fact, that societies and migrants adapt to each other. The process of integration reflects not only the policies of the hosting countries but also the immigrant's own experiences and their perception of that process. In a way, it reminds the process of negotiations between groups or individuals (Erdal & Oeppen, 2013). While it is easier to measure some functional aspects of integration, like employment, housing, or education, there are aspects of integration, that are difficult to measure, such as the participation of migrants in the social networks and their sense of belonging and feelings of being home (Erdal & Oeppen, 2013; Snel et al., 2006). Integration is a two-way road, and people's attitudes play a crucial role in determining the success of integration (Isaksen, 2020, p.12). It depends not only on the efforts of newcomers but, in a large measure, on the policies of the hosting society.

According to Ni Raghallaigh and Gilligan (2010), refugee children, as a general tendency, want to adapt to the new society. This process includes everyday efforts not only in learning the language but also changes in lifestyle, outlook, and initiating and supporting interactions with others. The integration period might take years before refugees are absorbed by society or into a new culture.

Knowledge of the theoretical underpinning of the integration process helped me see children's experiences through the lens of the different factors in play during the first phase of their stay in Norway. Understanding these factors, together with Ukrainian children's experiences, will help me make conclusions and form recommendations for all the parties involved in the integration process. The concept of integration in the context of my research is closely related to acculturation on the individual level and Marianne Gullestad's concept of invisible fences. Both concepts are explained below.

3.7 Acculturation on the individual level

Acculturation is a multifaceted process of changes across different levels, where not only a change of culture is involved, but also a change in the family functioning and individual evolution. Acculturation, as a process, occurs within a particular context, typically where children learn, play, and gain help and necessary support. When children are immersed in the environment with its cultural norms and practices, - they change as a result of the process. (Rogers-Sirin et al., 2013, p. 12). It would be wrong to conceptualize it as a one-way process, expecting that immigrants will assimilate into the new society. According to Berry (2005):

> Acculturation is a process of cultural and psychological changes that involve various forms of **mutual accommodation**, leading to some long-term psychological and sociocultural adaptations between both groups…. At the individual level, it involves changes in the person's behavioral repertoire (p. 699, my emphasis).

The acculturation process can be stressful and have a negative impact on the mental health of children due to different factors, for example, conditions that preceded immigration, motives for immigration, and stresses that accompanied the process of immigration (Rogers-Sirin et al., 2013).

Variability is a distinguishing feature of the acculturation process: people use different strategies on their way, and they decide on the different degrees of acculturation that are satisfactory for them (Berry, 2005). Even within one family, acculturation can proceed at different speeds and aim for different goals. Of course, the general term of acculturation refers to the encounter of two cultural groups, but some sociologists and psychologists consider only the changes in the individuals who participate in the situation of such encounter (Graves (1967) cited in Berry, 2005, p.700). In this regard, "acculturation is the dual process of cultural and psychological change that takes place as a result of contact between two or more cultural groups and their members" (Berry, 2005, p.698).
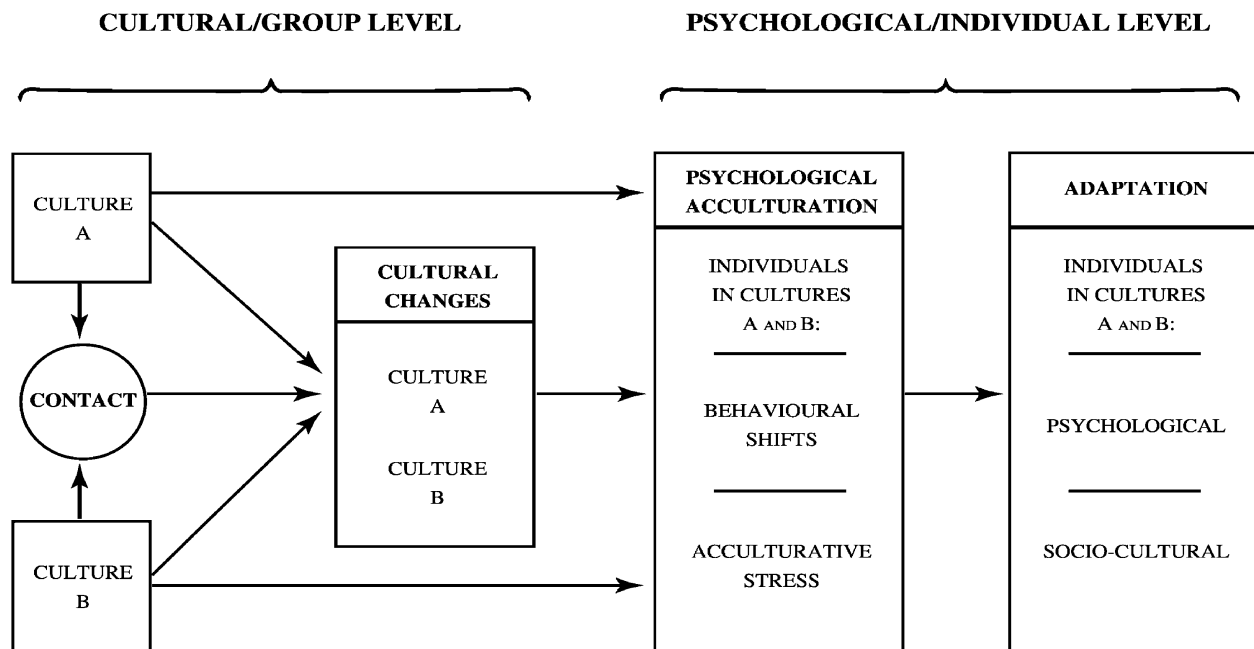
Figure 2 A general framework for understanding acculturation (Berry, 2005, p. 703)

To understand the process of acculturation of each individual, it is important to understand the context of the society of origin, as well as the context of the host society and its culture. The encounter of both contexts will influence the individual's acculturation process, behavioral shifts, and psychological changes. As described above, acculturative stress influences socio-cultural adaptation and depends on contextual factors of pre-immigrant

situation, motives for immigration, and the process of immigration. In my analysis, I will use the framework for understanding acculturation, among other theoretical concepts, to explain how Ukrainian children handle cultural differences.

3.8 Invisible fences

The concept of *invisible fences* is presented in the work of Marianne Gullestad (2002). She describes invisible fences, which are erected towards immigrants in Norwegian society, and include egalitarianism, nationalism, and racism (Gullestad, 2002, p.45). In my opinion, these fences are called "invisible" because, in the public discourse, Norway is a multicultural country that does not support racism, is open to immigrants from different countries, and publicly declares its aim to eliminate any fences among citizens in the country.

One of the fences that Gullestad (2022) mentions is egalitarianism. According to the Merriam-Webster online Dictionary, egalitarianism implies the principle of equality among all people, equality of their social, political, and economic rights and opportunities, regardless of race, gender, socioeconomic status, or other factors, as it aims to minimize the disparities and hierarchies (*Merriam-Webster Dictionary*). How, then, might equality be perceived as something negative? To answer this question, I will present Gullestad's explanation of what equality means in the Norwegian context.

Nationalism is tightly connected with the common culture in a country (Gullestad, 1992), and it creates certain boundaries for citizens with immigrant backgrounds. Cultural practices play a role in shaping and sustaining personal relationships. On the one hand, Norwegian culture is recognized as highly individualistic (Skirbekk, 1986, cited in Gullestad, 1992). On the other hand, Norwegian culture implies that people seek to feel the same as others in many aspects of life, or equal to others.

The concept of equality is synonymous with "sameness", which is very important for Norwegians: "*Likhet* is the most common translation of 'equality', implying that social actors must consider themselves as more or less the same to feel of equal value" (Gullestad, 1992, p. 46). In other words, equality encompasses equal value, rights, and status. Sameness suggests similarity in actions. It also implies similar social strata position, economic resources, political power or prestige, national background, religious beliefs, and more. The strong need to feel 'sameness' might explain why outsiders who are perceived as 'too different' are avoided.

Avoidance seems to be one of the typical strategies in communication "before a certain sameness is established and when the sameness can no longer be maintained" (Gullestad, 1992, p. 193). If sameness is not recognized and established with new participants in a group or society, avoidance can become a natural reaction for Norwegians when they try to avoid situations that might induce feelings of uncertainty or discomfort. In this way, those symbolic fences are erected, but they are not aimed against outsiders but, in a way, as protection of Norwegians' own identities.

According to Gullestad (1992), within different segments of society, different cultural codes are at work, and informal norms and unwritten rules define the behavior of people. Successful communication relies on knowing the unwritten rules in a certain society that are

not expressed directly, but participants are expected to understand. The dilemma appears because "'Immigrants' are asked to 'become Norwegian', at the same time as it is tacitly assumed that this is something they can never really achieve" (Gullestad, 2002, p. 59).

Chapter 4: Methodology

This chapter presents the methodological approach chosen for the realization of the qualitative research with Ukrainian children who came to Norway as refugees in 2022-2023 because of the war with Russia. The chapter describes the fieldwork, including the recruitment process, the peculiarities of the different research sites, and the researcher's role. The chapter also focuses on the various methods applied in the research, ethical issues, and methods of analysis.

4.1 Methodology approach

Methodology is the philosophical basis, it sets principles and guides the design, implementation, and analysis of the research. The methodology also includes ethical considerations and takes into account children's unique developmental needs, perspectives, and rights (Beazley & Ennew, 2006). According to Ennew (2009), methodology clarifies why specific methods are chosen and explains the guiding principles behind their use. How the research subject is perceived influences the research practices and is also a part of the methodology (Ennew, 2009, Manual 10, p.11). The methodological approach of this research includes a rightful foundation of the research, and it combines frameworks of Childhood Studies and qualitative research as highly effective and valued for their depth and ability to research and interpret the social reality of children from a modern philosophical perspective. Qualitative research uses a wide range of participatory methods, which will be my main tools for this research. Using these methods gives me an opportunity and hope to empower children during the process of research.

4.1.1. Rightful foundation for the research with children

Article 12 and Article 13 of the UNCRC call upon the necessity for children's views and voices to be heard, their perceptions and experiences should be considered, and children should be allowed to express themselves freely in seeking, sharing, and acquiring information (UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989). The right "to be heard," as proclaimed in Article 12, is especially important for vulnerable groups of children. When we are talking about children in the situation of forced migration, we can apply paragraph 123, which says:

> Children who come to a country following their parents in search of work or as refugees are in a particularly vulnerable situation. For this reason, it is urgent to fully implement their right to express their views on all aspects of the immigration and asylum proceedings (UNCRC, 2009, p.27).

Moreover, Article 36 of UNCRC warns against harm and exploitation, while taking part in the research. Thus, it is the responsibility of the researcher to provide an ethical strategy for research (Morrow & Alderson, 2020, chapter 1). Named articles, together with the other rights granted by UNCRC should be the rightful foundation of any research with children.

4.1.2 Childhood Studies Framework

The theoretical shifts of Childhood Studies brought a change in the methodological approaches of the research. Methods and research tools were significantly widened, aiming at hearing children's voices and seeing them as active actors in their lives and agential participants during the research, not only objects or subjects of the research (Woodhead & Faulkner, 2008). The ethics of research were revisited and re-evaluated.

A solid framework of Childhood Studies allows me to adopt the perspective of children, focusing on their personal experiences of encounters with immigration and their practical integration into a new community. All my research tools are grounded in the perception of children as active participants and actors in their lives who use their agency to form new social connections or maintain existing ones. I will not look at the children and their coping strategies from the outside, but instead, I want to allow them to share their strategies and perceptions of the situation. As James states,

> … giving voice to children is not simply or only about letting children speak; it is about exploring the unique contribution to our understanding of and theorizing about the social world that children's perspectives can provide (James, 2007, p.262).

4.1.3 Qualitative Research Framework

It was important for me to conduct qualitative research because it best meets the aims of my research and the objectives of research with children in Childhood Studies. Denzin and Lincoln (2011, p.3) describe qualitative research as an activity that positions the researcher within the context of the world. The research practices include a set of interpretive methods, which makes the world observable, making it a series of depictions, using field notes, interviews, discussions, images, recordings, and personal notes. In my quest to understand children's strategies for building new social connections and maintaining existing ones, I used an interpretive and realistic approach to the world of children by using different participatory methods. It allowed me to conduct the research in context and depth. As Mason puts it, "get insights into participants' life experiences and understandings, find out their views and intentions, and bring findings to analysis and explanation" (Mason, 2017, p.1). I chose to use a qualitative research framework as particularly useful in research with children since it allows "viewing social life in terms of process rather than in static terms, providing a holistic perspective within explained context…" (Ormston et al., 2014, p.4). The author continues, explaining that qualitative research allows researchers to use "…personal insight while taking a non-judgmental stance" (p.4). In my research, I used participatory methods inherent in qualitative research: semi-structured interviews, photo-voice, and drawing methods, method of ranking, and focus-group discussion.

4.2 The fieldwork

The fieldwork aims to provide a deeper understanding of the situation and participants of the research. Driven by the researchers' curiosity, it allows us to gain new knowledge of reality. For me, the main concerns during the fieldwork were ethics and the attitude of "do no harm". I realized that I had to prioritize the importance of these notions over personal curiosity, especially when dealing with individuals who might have experienced traumatic

events (Krause, 2017, p. 6). I tried to weigh ethical risks before entering the field, and "do not harm" was my guiding principle during planning and conducting the fieldwork. That is why I carefully chose my participants and preferred to invite children who did not have traumatic experiences connected to the war situation and were willing to share their experiences during in-depth interviews. While planning fieldwork, the researcher is answering many important questions. Among them are questions about why she is doing it, what the objective of the research is, what the context and site of the research is, what the time and timeframe is, who the participants are, and what methods she will use. Fieldwork is not just about generating data; the researcher is responsible for undertaking suitable methodologies and approaches. Jacobsen and Landau (2023, p. 185-187) emphasize the personal skills of the researcher and awareness as critically important for successful fieldwork. These factors not only help to minimize risks but also help to obtain high-quality data.

In my preparation for the fieldwork, special attention was given to preparing guides for the interviews, the different tasks, and the focus-group discussion. I conducted pilot interviews with children who were not participants in the research. Conducting pilot interviews allowed me to examine the research subject from the children's point of view. As a result, some of the questions in the interview guide were removed as not relevant, and some questions were refined or rephrased. Pilot interviews are invaluable tools for preparation for fieldwork; they allow the researcher to develop confidence in her research line and adapt research instruments, especially in the design of interview guides. It helps to get the feeling of the unknown waters of researching a particular field (Sampson, 2004).

4.2.1. The recruitment process

The current research has a dual purpose: to explore the ways Ukrainian refugee children in Norway maintain their current social connections and establish new ones, while also exploring how this process can be both challenging and empowering for them. It was therefore important to recruit participants who would be interested in active participation and exploring the topic with me. At the same time, it was important to involve participants, which reflects the diversity of children in the defined situation and the variety of their experiences. Shared Services in Education and Research (SIKT) influenced my choice of participant by providing a risk assessment of my research methods and interview guides. I was warned about the ethical risks of conducting research with residents of a reception center and about the risks of processing information concerning a person's physical or mental health, including the person's social conditions and previous experience (Meldeskjema.sikt.no). Therefore, the choice of the participants was determined by several factors. I focused on:

1) Ukrainian children, who came to Norway after the Russian invasion of the Ukraine and got the status of collective protection,

2) Ukrainian children whose families have already been through the process of settlement, and children, whose families had not been through traumatic experiences of the war,

3) Ukrainian children of school age (because this age group is easy to engage during the research),

4) Ukrainian children who showed interest in the project and were ready to share their experiences.

To find participants for my research, I considered two possible strategies: 1) to contact my Ukrainian friends with children, and 2) to contact the principal and teachers in a Reception School. Reception schools are special schools where Ukrainian children continue general education and learn the Norwegian language. This way, Reception schools could become a good platform for contacting parents and children.

4.2.2. Enrollment in action: through personal contacts

When I got an assessment of the processing of personal data from SIKT at the beginning of July, I started implementing my strategies for recruiting participants. Most of the participants I found through my contacts. The Ukrainian community has quite close ties in the region where I live and where I conduct my research. As a part of that community, I know some people who have children of school age. It was not difficult to find access to the gatekeepers and share with parents the aims and background of my research. During the next three weeks, I talked personally or on the phone with nine mothers whom I got to know during my stay in Norway and who had children of school age. I shared the idea and aim of the research, and eight mothers positively responded to my proposition and were ready to permit if their children wanted to participate. In cases with some of the teenagers over 12 years old, I first talked to the teenagers, sharing with them about my research and asking about their interest and willingness to participate. Only if they were interested in participating, I contacted their parents to ask for permission. Among the parents, I encountered a genuine interest in the topic of research, along with the willingness to offer support and understanding, and grant permission to their children's participation. Most of the children knew me already, and it helped when I shared with them what am I going to do, and what I was inviting them for. The majority showed enthusiasm and readily agreed to take part. Talking to children first, asking their opinions about the research, and answering their questions before the start of the research process, helped us to build rapport with each other, and in a big measure lessened the power imbalance, that is inevitably present in the researcher-participant format of relationships (Punch, 2002, Lange & Mierendorff, 2009). As a result, during the summer, eight participants were enrolled for the research.

4.2.3. Enrollment in action: in the Reception school

I also received a very warm reception in the Reception school, where I had an opportunity to share with the principal and teachers the aims of my research. They seemed very interested in it, and the school principal offered the use of their facilities for conducting interviews or other research-related activities if needed. Additionally, I obtained permission to share my research at the parents' meeting scheduled in August of the upcoming school year. In August, though, I did not attend the parents' meeting, partly because I already had enough participants, but also because most of the new pupils were living in the reception center, and SIKT only approved my research with children from settled families. During September I obtained permission to conduct a workshop for pupils of 8th to 10th grades,

which was a part of my fieldwork. Thus, I had an opportunity to visit children at school, during the long-recess time, tell them about the research, and answer their questions. I invited pupils in grades 8th to 10th to join in the workshop.

To ensure their participation, I obtained consent from both the children and their parents. As a result, out of the seven children approached, five agreed to take part. Out of these five, two had already given me interviews in the summer and three were new participants in the research. Two pupils were not interested in participating in the research. However, this was a relief for me since they still lived in the reception center, and their participation was not approved by SIKT. One of the boys, who expressed an interest in participating in the workshop was in the transition phase. His family was already settled and just waited for a day the following week to move to their new place of settlement. After considering his actual situation, approval from SIKT for children from settled families, and his desire to participate, I decided to include him as a participant in the workshop. I was inclined to think, that his participation could be not only a contribution to the research but also an empowering experience for him. Despite his short presence in Norway, he was very open to new friendships and communication. After the workshop, I concluded that his participation was encouraging for other pupils, and the experiences of other pupils were encouraging for him.

4.3 The participants

This group of participants is homogenous in one way: children shared a similar experience of urgent and unplanned departure from their homeland and having to face new realities in the new country. But at the same time, they are heterogeneous because they are of different ages and from different backgrounds in Ukraine, with different stories of departure after the war's outburst. Information about participants is presented in the table below.

Name[2]	Sex	Age	Period in Norway	Come with…
1. Sergiy	boy	12	18 months	Parents and sibling
2. Artem	boy	13	18 months	Mother and sibling
3. Dmytro	boy	10	14 months	Mother and sibling
4. Pavel	boy	15	14 months	Parents and siblings
5. Eva	girl	11	six months	Parents
6. Stepan	boy	9	three months	Mother and sibling
7. Alexiy	boy	7	three months	Mother and sibling
8. Viktor	boy	11	12 months	Mother and adult sibling
9. Svetlana	girl	12	14 months	Parents and siblings
10. Anna	girl	10	eight months	Aunt and cousins
11. Dariya	girl	12	Eight months	Mother and siblings

Table 1 Participants in the research

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[2] All the names have been changed to protect the identity of participants. However, during interviews only one child expressed the desire to change her name, the rest of the participants wanted to keep their real names.

Number of girls	4
Number of boys	7
Number of children who came with both parents	6
Number of children who came with one parent	4
Number of children who came without parents	1

Table 2 General information about research participants

4.4 Site of the research (home visits, focus-group location)

The context of the interview (the place, the setting, and the position of the researcher) plays an important role in the success of the interview and should be chosen with care and sensitivity. Many interview spaces could represent adult spaces (classrooms in a school, for example), and the place itself can add to an unwanted power imbalance. At the same time, a researcher should not assume, that a child's room or other children's spaces will not be perceived as invasion in their personal space (Punch, 2002, p.328). That is why it was important for me to involve children in the choice of the space for the interview with them. I usually asked children where they would feel comfortable talking to me. I had different propositions for them: the interview could be conducted at their home, at my place, or a neutral place, like a café in the city or a nature site.

Six participants chose their houses as a site for the interview, and since it was summer, three interviews were conducted outside on the terraces of their houses, and three interviews took place in the children's rooms. Often home settings are preferred for several reasons: it is easier for children to feel comfortable in a familiar environment, and they feel safe and at ease in their own space (Punch, 2007, p.228-229). Not only does a child feel at ease, but also a researcher in the home setting interview can adopt an informal appearance, being not limited by structured context, time, or agenda of the meeting. This way, nothing is associated with compulsory activities (Punch & Graham, 2016), and informal settings provide more opportunities to build rapport and create openness. In-home settings, it is easier for researchers to adopt the "least adult" role, which allows children to be more open and free in their communication (Corsaro & Molinari, 2008).

During my home visits, I met welcoming receptions both from parents and children. One of the families welcomed me with a chocolate cake, and the children drew some pictures for me. In other homes, children proudly showed me their rooms and their "things", and we talked informally about their plans and expectations for the summer. One of the participants played a piece of music for me, showing his achievements in piano lessons. I had interviews on the terraces and on the floors of the children's rooms. Sometimes, the children just lay on the bed, and I sat on the floor nearby, and we conducted an interview. The time before and after the interview was always filled with casual conversations or activities, sometimes just with the children and sometimes involving their mothers.

Two participants chose a neutral place: a nature site and café in the city. I did not ask why my participants chose these locations for the interview, but after getting to know their situation during the informal talk before the interview, I found out that one of them had siblings, and it would not be comfortable to have an interview at her home, and another participant just enjoyed nature and wanted to be in an open, but remote place to avoid any

eavesdropping during our conversation. Interviews in the neutral places - the nature site and coffee shop had quite opposite settings. During the interview at the nature site, we were sitting at quite a distance from other people and it seemed like the interviewee wanted just that: to be away from people and talk confidentially. On the other hand, interviewing in the coffee shop was more challenging because we were surrounded by other people, and sometimes it got loud around us. However, my interviewee seemed to enjoy the atmosphere and was very enthusiastic about the process. We ordered coffee and cakes, and it was the longest interview that I had in this project (almost an hour and a half). In my opinion, the fact that we were speaking a different language (Russian language was used with this participant) created a confidential atmosphere, despite being in public. The different language protected us from being overheard.

One participant came over to my place and we conducted an interview outside, on the little terrace of my house. It was obvious, that my interviewee felt free and relaxed. I had an opportunity to show hospitality and express the joy of meeting my participant with a cup of tea and some sweets. There were no other people outside, and as was described above, the use of a foreign language protected us from being occasionally overheard. Overall, it was worth it to give children the freedom to choose the place for the interview. It was the important first step in expressing my trust and desire to listen to them and admit the importance of their opinion. I think that the pleasant atmosphere during interviews helped to build rapport and openness in our communication.

The workshop for the older participants took place in the reception school, in their usual classroom, and the time was set in agreement with the principal and teachers at the school. Of course, conducting the workshop in the school during the school day could create certain challenges, because I wanted to keep the confidentiality of children's participation in the research. Workshop took longer time than just one school lesson, so it was possible to face interruptions during the break time from other children or teachers. I also took into account the likelihood of children feeling tired or being not so open in such a formal setting. That is why I planned time for conducting the workshop during the first part of the school day when children are not too tired. For the first part of the workshop, I conducted several `warming-up` activities that were not part of my research, but they were activities and games that would create a pleasant and open atmosphere before we moved to the activities of the research. I noticed that the children seemed to feel comfortable in their classroom setting. They felt almost at home and used the space freely (moving chairs and tables, organizing space to fit the workshop's needs, using paper, markers, and whiteboard). They behaved and talked freely with each other and with me. We used music for the ice-braker game and had some refreshments in the classroom at the end, as my gratitude for their participation.

4.5 Methods during the fieldwork

Considering the methods and developing the tool kit, I focused on the aims of my research: to explore how children maintain existing social relationships and build new relationships and find out about the challenges and empowerment during this process. The methods that I used, respond to my sub-questions, described in the introduction chapter.

	6-11 years old	**12-17 years old**	**Research aims**
Individual work	Creative diagram, followed by …	Creative diagram, followed by…	To find out about the main actors in the current life of children and talk about maintaining existing bonds with people (Sub-questions # 1 and 2).
	Semi-structured interview	Semi-structured interview	
	Photo-voice, followed by a semi-structured interview	Semi-structured interview	To use pictures of the places, where children might meet new people, to talk about meeting new people and making new social connections, strategies, and challenges of this process (Sub-questions # 3, 4, and 5).
	Sentence completion	Sentence completion	To explore feelings and experiences of life in Norway and the peculiarities of the process of building new social connections (triangulation tool).
Group work\ Focus group		Creative ranking_ followed by…	To talk about challenges and victories of the process of building new social connections (Sub-questions # 4 and 5) and empowering children by letting them share their experiences and generate new ideas and strategies.
		Group discussion	

Table 3 Research methods in correspondence with the age group and research aims

4.5.1 Joint advantages of the methods

Following the aims of the research, the methodological design was developed to acquire new insights into how children form social connections and explore the nuances of their lived experiences. I followed a multi-method approach, that recognizes children as experts on their own lives (Punch & Graham, 2016; Woodhead & Faulkner, 2008). The research methods were thoroughly designed to work in collaboration with each other to provide a comprehensive understanding of the topic (Morrow & Alderson, 2020). Often researchers depend mostly on the interviews as a main tool for collecting and co-constructing data in qualitative research. The interview is commonly supplemented with other methods and tools, presented in the research field in a diversity. It is done because even a semi-structured interview with open questions can put a person in a self-aware and sometimes defensive position. So, other methods are needed to avoid the resistance or serve as a triangulation tool to check and confirm the data. Such an approach demonstrated its advantages, and it allowed me to observe the emergence of data through the active

engagement of participants in the process of research, using "child-friendly" tools and methods. For example, semi-structured interviews followed the drawing task and photo-voice task for younger children, while group discussions followed the icebreaking activities during the workshop and engaging ranking exercises for older children. The sentence completion tool served not only to supplement and explore a wider range of topics, related to shared experiences through other task-oriented methods but also to cross-check data. The process of cross-checking data aided in analyzing differences or similarities in children's experiences, thus ensuring the reliability of results and conclusions (Ennew, 2009, Manual 1, p.21).

4.5.2 Drawing method

As many researchers with children mention, task-oriented methods are especially useful when combined with interviews (Beazley & Ennew, 2006; Gallacher & Gallagher, 2008; Grant, 2017; Punch, 2002). In my research, I used drawing as a tool for facilitating interviews. It helped to ease the first phase of our communication, relax children, and engage them in the process of research. Before the first interview, children were asked to divide the paper into two parts. On one part, they were asked to draw people who surround them now in Norway (drawing could include their family members, friends, and animals), and on the other part, they were asked to draw people who surrounded them in Ukraine. The children could use actual drawings of pictures, or just make a diagram, or if they were not fond of drawing, they could write names. As was expected: younger children of 7-10 years old made pictures of people, surrounding them, drawings of 10-12 years old children looked more like diagrams, and teenagers wrote names or roles of people (mama, papa, coach, friends…). Their drawings served as a tool for facilitating interviews and as an artifact or source to which they could resort to maintaining their story during an interview. Some interview questions concerned their drawings and the people depicted there.

The advantages of the drawing method for this research were that during the process of drawing children had time to think and recall people both in Norway and in Ukraine, and it provoked memories of different stories and peculiarities of their connections. The time allocated for the drawing in my research had a dual nature, serving as both the advantage and limitation of the method. Some younger children spent a lot of time drawing, and I was worried that they would lose their focus instead of setting it or would be too tired to continue with the conversation. Consequently, I had to set limitations on the time of drawing.

4.5.3 Photo-voice method

In my research, children were asked to take photos of familiar places where they met or had a potential possibility of meeting new people. Children were asked to take photos during the period between the first and second interviews. Photographs were not kept as part of the data but were used as visual aids to facilitate our interview. Photo-voice, as a tool, allowed children to share their unique perspectives, reducing power imbalance, because children had full control during this activity, and it served as a good starting point for facilitating interviews (Epstein et al., 2006). Of course, there are limitations to this

method, that I failed to consider, such as the time-consuming nature, potential photography restrictions in certain places, the potential to risk ethical frames and confidentiality, and the possibility that children may not fully understand or may change the task (Ennew, 2009, Manual 5, p. 17-19).

I faced some unexpected challenges with this method. At first, younger participants greeted the method enthusiastically, but when I came at the pre-agreed time for the second interview, some of the children had made only one or two photos because they forgot or did not find time to do it. In such situations, I had to improvise and ask them to either draw or just write names of the places they wanted to take a photo of. Some children wanted to show me pictures with them in the photographs and expressed that it was more interesting than just showing "empty" pictures of the places. All these changes or adjustments to the tool were happening during our second interview, making children, in a way, co-constructors of the design of the research. I enjoyed their enthusiasm and desire to `save the situation`. Sometimes, children needed more guidance during the interview, such as using drawings, naming places, or just their preferred photos. Overall, using photographs as a facilitating tool during an interview helped children to feel engaged and talk about different situations as they had planned.

4.5.4 Semi-structured interview

For this study, I have chosen a semi-structured design of the interview to create more opportunities for the children to share their views and opinions. Many qualitative researchers with children consider interviews as more than just a research tool: interviews offer a voice to children's experiences and provide researchers a glimpse into the world of children (Abebe, 2009; Lange & Mierendorff, 2009; Nixon, 2013; Punch, 2002). According to Brinkmann and Kvale, interviews aim to grasp the world from the subject's viewpoint, revealing the meaning of their experiences, and uncover their lived world before scientific interpretation (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015, p.3). I wanted to compile open-ended questions, that would give me the freedom to explore additional questions or follow up on responses based on participant's answers (King, 2018). In the semi-structured interview, the interviewee and interviewer have more chances to discover or create answers and make clear the meaning of the emerging themes. This kind of interview is like a conversation between two equal parties, it lessens the power inequality and the need for giving the "correct" or socially desirable answers (Punch, 2002, Wang & Yang, 2012). I would constantly provide follow-up and probing questions. For example, in one of the interviews, the participant was answering the question (while talking about her football team):

–   What attitudes towards you do you feel?

–   Well, they treat me not so well. I always feel that I am redundant there… why did I ever come there? If it were a Ukrainian team, where only Ukrainians are, where my friends are, where I can talk, where I can understand others, where I can make jokes, it would be much easier, because we had the same life… We understand each other, we understand jokes with each other, and we know what it means to be yourself.

–   Uhm.

- Norwegians have a different life, they are different, they are opposite…their culture…

- Culture?

- Yes. It is very different. That is a problem. If I think something normal, it is not normal for them. And things, that are not normal for me, - are normal for them. We cannot find… it is very difficult to find common ground, contact.

Open-ended questions, in many cases, helped children to find more meaning in their experiences and share it. So, from one topic, we came to another topic that might explain the nature of the interviewee's feelings. In some cases, it was precious for children just to "pour out" their feelings and emotions about the things, that were important to them. Such format interview gives rich data for analysis. During the interview, both me as the interviewer and the interviewee contributed to constructing the meaning. I did it with techniques of active listening, and my interviewee continued to discuss the issue, hopefully feeling that she was listened to and feeling the need to share.

The interview is "… a craft that, if well carried out, can become an art" (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015, p.19). But this art is not so easy to master. Through my interviews (see the interview guides in Appendix F), I encountered numerous challenges. I realized that my attitude to the situation and my personal experience may unconsciously be projected into my reactions, my additional questions, and even into the intonation, I was using for those questions. I could dwell longer on the topics that I felt important, just by asking a couple of additional questions. So, I was afraid to misuse my power over the children and make them talk more than they wished. At the same time, I tried to maintain an atmosphere of trust and openness and be careful and sensitive. I carefully watched the body language of the participants to not miss signals of discomfort, tiredness, or boredom. I tried to support the feeling of a fun activity for younger children, holding the interview short and engaging. With older children, I could pose deeper questions, ask more about their opinions and understanding of the situations, and express my gratitude for their help and respect for their expert views. Overall, the semi-structured interviews gave me rich data for analysis and allowed me to successfully search for the answers to my research questions, I hope that the process of interview was empowering for children who were sharing their experiences and were looking for the answers together with me.

4.5.5 Ranking method, followed by focus-group discussion

Focus groups, due to their group context, differ significantly from in-depth interviews. According to Finch et al. (2003), data emerges through the dynamic interaction among group members: participants share their views and tell their stories and experiences while listening to the stories and opinions of other people. It is a process of listening, reflecting, and forming new viewpoints. Such a process leads to further insights and additional materials. As the conversation evolves, individual responses become more refined and profound (Finch et al., 2003). As an introduction to the discussion during a focus group in my research I used a Ranking method. This method helped participants to prioritize and compare various aspects related to a chosen subject. We explored challenges that pupils

associate with their new life in Norway. Usually, this method can use words, visual images, or objects.

During the workshop for pupils of 8th to 10th grade in the reception school, we used a paper of different sizes to reflect "the size or level of difficulty", and then participants wrote their challenges and difficulties on the different size papers, made paper balls and had to goal the basket. When everybody finished with the task, we opened paper balls together, ranked them according to their "size", and discussed our findings. The creativity and game-like appearance of the method are some of its advantages: it promotes generating ideas, stimulates deep-in discussions, and allows every participant to share their opinion (Ennew, 2009; Grant, 2017).

Limitations of this method included the need to allocate enough time and the need to create an open atmosphere of mutual trust between the participants and me and between the participants. I addressed these limitations by careful time planning, locating this activity after several icebreaker games and not such a trust-demanding activity. The composition of this method put participants in the position of experts in their life situations and gave them control over the process. My intention as a researcher was not only to create opportunities for the emergence of data, but I also intended to create a space for empowering participants during the sharing of challenges and their discussions about strategies for resolving challenges or adapting to them. The data that emerged during this exercise, helped to identify certain themes and analyze different strategies of participant's behavior.

4.5.6 Tool "Unfinished sentences"

Ennew (2009) describes the sentence completion method as particularly effective for delving into sensitive issues. In this method, children are presented with several unfinished sentences to complete with their own words. The method works best when participants are asked to write the first thing that comes to their mind and do not think long about the question. In my research, I used this method for a dual purpose. First, as a triangulation tool that complemented the semi-structured interview and helped me to cross-check data. Second, to cover some sensitive topics and topics not covered in the interview (Rogers et al., 2003). Most information that was asked in this activity was general. Nevertheless, some questions concerned personal or sensitive experiences that could be easier to write about than to talk about, for example: "If I could be right now with any person, it would be …", "When I miss my home in Ukraine, I like to …" (See Appendix E). Some of the children answered that they wanted to be with their dad, who was still in Ukraine. Such a topic could be too sensitive to discuss with a child, knowing the intensity of their feelings of nostalgia and homesickness (Redd Barna, 2023).

However, I also found that the tool of `unfinished sentences` has some limitations. For example, too many questions could bore or tire children, and questions about sensitive topics could upset them. That is why, to make this task attractive to children, I inserted some fun questions, for example, about their preferences in food in Norway, the strangest or the most interesting things in Norway which they would share with their friends, etc. My sentence completion questionnaire consisted of 15 questions, three of which I consider sensitive, and six and six questions are of general and fun character accordingly. Questions

are presented in random order and are designed for 20 minutes of work. Even though some of the children spent more time on the questionnaire than I expected, they seemed to enjoy the task and completed all the questions.

4.6 Ethics of the Research

One of the general principles in the UNCRC (1989) is a commitment to the best interest of the child. Article 3 states:

> In all actions, concerning children whether undertaken by public or private social welfare institutions, courts of law, administrative authorities, or legislative bodies, the best interest of the child shall be a primary consideration.

In my research, I enrooted the ethical strategy in the principle of the best interest of the child. Since ethical issues are one of the main differences between research with children and research with adults (Punch, 2002), it is important to focus on them in every step of the research. DiCicco and Bloom (2006, p.319) define four main areas of ethical concerns that researchers with children should consider: protection from harm, protection of information, the need for proper information and consent, and avoiding risk of exploitation. I am going to answer each of those concerns in the following paragraphs.

4.6.1 Protection from harm

Protection from harm is an ethical responsibility and legal obligation that ensures and safeguards the well-being, safety, and rights of children participating in the research. Hill (2005) states that ethical safeguarding principles are children's legal rights during the research and protection from harm and discomfort is one of them. At every stage, the ethical strategy aims to protect the participants from harm. The researcher could be "carried away" by his research interest, but on the way to accessing children, every researcher meets different gatekeepers. Gatekeepers should be considered as "helpers", and not as "obstacles" on the way. They help to provide necessary protection from harm. One of the gatekeepers in my research was parents (mothers in most cases), who knew the situations and needs of their children the best. Thus, my task as a researcher was not only to build rapport with the gatekeepers (Punch, 2002) but also to be attentive to their comments and requests concerning children and the process of research. Also, in my research, I relied largely on the assessment of my research methods and tools by SIKT as one of the gatekeepers on the higher formal level as well. I wanted to make sure that my research design goes in line with the national ethical requirements for research with children. I had to answer several requests and comments from SIKT about the level of sensitivity of topics in my interview guide and even exclude potentially vulnerable groups of children from my possible research participants.

An important part of protecting children from harm is a special education of researchers that provides an understanding of ethical issues and challenges in the research with children. During our education at the MPhil in Childhood Studies, we have focused on these issues through the courses "Children's Rights", "Participatory Methods and Ethics", and "Methodology in Childhood Studies". Education and experience from my previous work with

children allowed me to express concern about and take care of the emotional well-being of children, by staying observant, focused, and sensitive to expressions of children's behavior, mood, and body language during our interactions.

It was important for me to include "micro-ethics", consider the "everyday ethics dilemmas" or be cautious in "ethically important moments", as some researchers name it (Kutrovàtz, 2017, p.71). During my interviews with children, I observed their behavior and asked questions like:

- Is it comfortable for you to talk about it?
- Is it OK, that I am asking about it?
- Is there anything you want to add or share about?
- Are you not tired?
- Are you ready to continue?

My goal was to build rapport with children and gain their trust, as well as to create a physically and psychologically comfortable space for them.

Last, but not least, among other useful functions of the pilot interview, I consider it a measure of protecting my participants from harm. It allowed me to test interview questions in a safe environment, discuss them, and see how they were reacted to. Thus, it resulted in the modification of some questions in my interview guide.

4.6.2 Providing anonymity and confidentiality

In my research, I provided anonymity by immediately replacing real names with coded ones. Other people would not know that the child is participating in the research except for present family members. I promised participants anonymity and confidentiality from my side, but of course, participants could share with others if they chose to. I explained to the children why I must keep anonymity and confidentiality and why it is important for the research, but the children were not obliged to keep their participation in secret. Alderson and Morrow (2020) describe participant confidentiality as an act of hiding the identity of individuals and withholding other details when describing them. To provide confidentiality of children, in my research, I present minimum information about the children. Only their gender, age, and general composition of the family living with the child in Norway were presented. This information has been linked to a coded name, and I hid details about the children's places of origin in Ukraine and their location in Norway or details of their move to the country.

Ensuring confidentiality in the research also includes data storage. Voice recordings and transcriptions of interviews were kept in the protected platform of Nettskjema, which provides user access control, two-factor authentication, and strict compliance with Norway's data protection regulations. Fieldwork notes were kept in a locked place, and materials for this Master Thesis were kept in a computer with access control.

During interviews and my interactions with children, we made sure to find a private and safe space where they could talk confidentially without the risks of being overheard. This was done after explaining the confidentiality of the research process to both the children and their parents.

4.6.3 Informed consents

According to Article 12 of UNCRC (1989), it is the right of the children to express their views in all the matters, concerning them. Research with children is one such, and the child has a full right to express her opinion about the aims, topics, and process of research (Bell, 2008). It is the duty of the researcher to provide a child participant with the possibility to express her views and opinions. Informed consent is one part of this necessary step. Informed consent is a well-established part of research with children, emphasized by most ethical codes (Warin, 2011, p.807). Though it could be complicated by children's capacity to be properly informed and include gatekeepers in the process, it is necessary to gain through verbal communication with children their volunteer agreement for participation. It is important to inform young participants about the possibility of withholding consent at any time by verbal or non-verbal signals (Warin, 2011).

In my research with Ukrainian children, I always started my communication with the potential participants by sharing about goals and design of the research. I first asked the children if that sounded interesting to them, and I asked about their willingness to participate. If they were interested in participating, I thoroughly explained to them all the measures that would be taken to protect their anonymity and provide confidentiality, as well as their right to consent and descent at any moment of the research process. After explaining all the details of the research process and answering their questions, I asked about their willingness to participate. Then I proposed to read and sign the informational letter with the consent part. I had two different information letters with the consent part at the end, designed for younger children (6-11 years old) and older children (12-18 years old), (see appendices B, C). Parents of children younger than 16 years old also had to read and sign the informational letter for parents (see Appendix D). The same details were explained to parents, too, and I answered all their questions and concerns, asking for guidance and advice for the best communication with their children.

4.6.4 Reciprocity and avoiding the risk of exploitation

During the design stage of the research, I considered how I could give something in return to the participants for their time and invaluable help for this research while at the same time keeping the right balance, neutrality, and objectivity (Ritchie, 2013, p.64). Different ethical guidelines and codes advise against financial rewards for participation, instead emphasizing reciprocity as a way to ethically compensate participants for their involvement (Abebe, 2009, Morrow, 2013, p. 26-28). Originally, reciprocity was one of the feminists' approaches used for in-depth interviews to attain more reflexivity and interaction (Ritchie, 2013, p.140). With such an approach, the distinction between interviewer and interviewee is less prominent, and the researcher can step out of his formal role, participating in sharing feelings and information about himself.

In my research, reciprocity was mainly expressed in giving emotional support in return, addressing their desire to be heard by practicing active listening and sharing my feelings and story. For me, such a strategy was key to building rapport with children, especially with older teenagers. I knew that it would be culturally appropriate, so, even before the formal

part of the interview, I always shared information about myself, and my story, which is in many ways similar to their stories. I talked about my challenges and feelings if I was asked to or when it was appropriate. Additionally, I always thanked children with some sweets and treats, acknowledging that children love sweets and appreciate these simple gestures even in a research context.

Lastly, I also plan to share the findings of this research (see Abebe, 2009) with families whose children participated. I also have been asked to share findings with the school staff, who knew and supported the participation of children in the workshop in reception school. As a long-term reciprocity, I consider my opportunities to talk with teachers and principals in schools and people from humanitarian aid organizations, such as Redd Barna, who are involved in helping Ukrainian children integrate into Norwegian society. I could share and discuss the challenges that Ukrainian children face and search for solutions together, that would create a win-win situation for both parties: Ukrainian children and Norwegian society and institutions.

4.7 Role of the researcher (entering the field and during the fieldwork)

It is important to note that the researcher plays an important role in qualitative research because she decides on the interpretations of the data, even when various meaningful interpretations may arise from the same set of data. That is why reflexivity and an acknowledgment of the researcher's biases are critically important in qualitative research (Wheeldon & Faubert, 2009). In any research with children, the researcher is, first and foremost, an adult for them. During the recent history of research with children, researchers have tried to find, define, and use different roles as adults in attempts to lessen power inequality as the biggest challenge in research with children and young people (Abebe, 2009; O'Kane, 2008) and create the most comfortable conditions for the research. The position and role of the researcher always consist of and reflect personal attributes, which include gender, nationality or ethnicity, formal position, age, sexual orientation, immigration status, individual life experiences, cultural background, personal beliefs, biases, theoretical viewpoints, political and ideological perspectives, as well as emotional reactions towards participants (Berger, 2015, p. 220).

For my research I planned to adopt the role of a "friendly adult" (Abebe, 2009). In this role, the researcher tries to win children's trust and develop relationships through expressing positive feelings and interest in being with children, and a friendly attitude to minimize the power of the researcher over the children (Abebe, 2009). For me, such a role was the most natural due to several reasons. First, because I already knew some of these children from my previous contacts with their families. Second, I was genuinely interested in them, in their experiences, voices, and opinions. Third, I usually find "friendly grounds" quickly with new children due to my many years of experience working with children of this age group and, additionally, having my teenage children. The participants and I were of the same nationality and cultural background, having the same immigration status, and going through the same life situation. My feminine gender was comfortably perceived because Ukrainian children face mostly women as other formal adults in their lives. Most of the teachers,

pediatricians, and medical staff in hospitals in Ukraine are women. Entering the children's lives and worlds I tried to behave not as a parent or a teacher, but as an adult friend, who is sincerely interested in their lives, opinions, and voices, expressing trust and confidence in them, emphasizing their position as experts on the matter and as important helpers for my project. As a result, the children enjoyed our interaction and expressed positive impressions and feelings during the process of research, saying that they especially enjoyed being interviewed.

Furthermore, I was also a part of the researched participants group in a certain sense because I experienced the same unplanned and unexpected move to a new country for the same reason: unleashing of the war in our home country, Ukraine, making me an 'insider' (Padget, 2016) in certain aspects. I realize and admit, that my own experience inevitably affects the research process and outcome, and I have sought to monitor this influence and tried to find a balance between processing personal experience and reaching the aims of the study. One way in which my position could influence the research – is my access to participants. This is because they might feel more comfortable opening up to the researcher who demonstrates empathy towards their circumstances. My experience and my background also affected my research questions and, as a result, my interview questions, as well as my perception and analysis of participants' answers and conclusions (Berger, 2015). Every question that I posed to the children, I filtered through the lens of my own experiences and those of my children, intending to be as sensitive and careful as possible, guided by the principle of "not harm". I cannot predict how children would feel, behave, and answer if other researchers without this shared background asked them the same questions during the interviews about their experiences. That is why I consider my position as a researcher from their world and current common reality, as a benefit for this research. The role of the insider, according to Padget (2016), gave me an easier entrance, deeper knowledge about the topic of research, insights about their situation, and anticipating and understanding the reactions of interviewees. But being an insider was not always easy. I had to be very careful not to pull or push children in certain directions when I was curious about more details than they were willing to share, or especially when their experience was very different from what I could expect in these circumstances. I had to trust and rely on their perception of their own experience, stopping my mind's attempts to compare it with my family story.

4.8 Ethical Challenges During Fieldwork

Human rights should be reflected within ethical guidelines of research with children so that a right-based approach is facilitated. However, it is only possible when the researcher reflects on the process and makes specific references to the connection between human rights and ethical issues, inevitably arising during the research (Bell, 2008, p.11). In my research I had to be especially cautious, facing potential ethical dilemmas in finding the right balance between allowing children to participate and safeguarding them from harm and exploitation (Nixon, 2013, p.183). I did not want to harm children, by addressing certain sensitive topics. However, it was challenging to define what topics could appear sensitive to them. The events that brought Ukrainian children to Norway are tragic and shocking. Families of some of my participants planned their move to Norway and had time to prepare their

children emotionally and help children to get some knowledge about the new country. However, it is never possible to be completely ready for a new place, culture, society, and language. Others came to Norway abruptly, without enough planning or even knowledge of what was expected of them here. All the participants left different "stories" behind. The participants had their level of flexibility and adaptability to the current life situation, dependent on many factors, which I will not be able to analyze in the frames of this research. With every child, I had to find unique and individually proper ways of addressing the questions and discussing topics of my interview. In doing so, I first informally talked to the children's mothers to find out about their situation and circumstances and avoid potentially sensitive topics during the conversation with the children. I also spent some informal time with children to get to know them better and tried to get "the feeling" of their general mood and attitude to the situation. Another measure that I took, was to familiarize children in advance with the questions and topics discussed in the interview and to ask their opinion about it.

During the interviews with some children, I noticed that sharing some parts of their stories or answering certain questions, for example, about new friendships, could make children sad, especially if they were not lucky to find new friends for a long time. Every time I had to make sure (by asking different reassuring questions) that the children were willing to talk further about this topic or would prefer to change the subject. In most cases, children were willing to continue and share their hearts. They wanted to be heard. During interactions and interviews with children, I showed empathy and voiced out a lot of compassion about their circumstances and feelings.

4.9 Methods of Analysis

4.9.1 Transcription of the data

During the fieldwork I used three different strategies for gathering and transcribing data: 1) using Nettskjema, 2) making field notes, and 3) personally transcribing participants-written materials. For the individual semi-structured interviews, I used the Nettskjema Dictaphone App, which is a web-based survey tool developed by the University of Oslo. Among its various functions, it allows for secure storage of confidential data and transcribes interviews, ensuring data accuracy and privacy. Nettskjema is approved by SIKT and encouraged among NTNU researchers as well. After fieldwork activities, I made field notes, that are helpful during the analysis stage of the research. During the workshop with older children in the reception school, I used both Nettskjema for the tasks where I wanted to capture children's opinions and expressions accurately, but mostly I collected physical attributes: drawings with inscriptions, notes, and written answers. After the workshop, I transcribed all the written materials accordingly.

4.9.2 Thematic analysis

According to Braun and Clarke (2022, p.4-5), Thematic Analysis is a cluster of methods of analytical work that requires "thoughtful and reflective research practice". It calls for the researcher to own her perspective and positioning. Thus, generated knowledge is

subjective. Themes are not emerging but produced by the researcher as a result of her analytical work with the data, which requires full immersion, time, and her perspective on the matters. "Data analysis is conceptualized as an art, not a science" (Braun and Clarke, 2022, p.9).

When all the interview transcriptions were ready and checked, questionaries filled and checked for clarification, and workshop notes ready, I started the analysis process. I had 19 interviews transcribed and 9 sentence completion tasks, completed by participants, fieldnotes, taken after the interviews and workshop, and transcription of tasks during the workshop with older children. According to Braun and Clarke (2012), the Thematic Analysis consists of 6 stages:

1) familiarization with the data,
2) generating initial codes,
3) searching for themes,
4) reviewing themes,
5) defining and naming themes, and
6) writing a report.

The process itself is not linear. The researcher moves forth and back between different stages. The thematic analysis starts with the assignment of codes to interview parts or phrases. According to Terry et al., (2017, p.26), «coding is the systematic and thorough creation of meaningful labels attached to specific segments of the dataset–segments that have meaning relevant to the research question».

As an underlying approach to coding, I decided on inductive coding where I would work from "bottom-up" and use data as a starting point. After reading through all the interviews and familiarizing myself with the data, I chose the manual In Vivo Coding (Saldana, 2021, p.91-95), which uses children's phrases or certain collocations as codes, and Descriptive Coding, which describes patterns and "assigns basic labels to data to provide an inventory of their topics" (Saldana,2021, p.83 – 84, 87-90). My choice relied on the fact, that some children shared similar experiences or opinions about the discussed matters, and their own words could serve as perfectly suitable codes.

After working with several interviews, I generated 24 codes that reflected different experiences, opinions, and reflections inherent tomy participants. During the consistent work with the rest of the interviews and other data, the number of codes was expanded to 30. Some examples of In Vivo codes are: "A lot of friends –is cool!", "…it was scary in the beginning", "…only because of the language…", "…Norwegian children are different- they have their vibe…", "… you did not live here, you were not born here…". Some examples of descriptive codes are: "communication during common games and activities", "loneliness", "advice to a friend", "relationships with friends in Ukraine", and "friends on the web".

In parallel with the coding of each interview, I wrote out codes, each on a separate paper. I added children's phrases that reflected similar opinions, sometimes with similar or with different words. Such detailed work with codes, providing each code (in Vivo or Descriptive) with `children's voices`, helped me with the next step of the process, which is searching for the themes, or constructing themes. After reviewing themes, using visual thematic maps of their connections and interceptions, and reflecting on them, I defined, named, and described five main themes, that captured the essence of coded data and formed "the

overall story" (Terry et al., 2017, p.22). I made sure, that they corresponded to the research questions and aims of the research. Defined themes with their descriptions and theoretical underpinning will be presented in the Analysis Chapter.

4.9.3 Ethical challenges of analytical work

The work ethic of the researcher is necessary and crucial during the process of analysis. Being ethical during the analytical work implies being honest with the data you have. It means not ignoring challenging passages in the interview transcription and not avoiding passages that convey meanings that go out of a certain frame or picture, out of common direction (Saldana, 2021, p.37). Being ethical includes the researcher's use of power and control of how she represents participants and how she is inclusive, sensitive, and politically correct in her discussions and conclusions during the analytical process (Braun and Clarke, 2022, p.17).

In my fieldwork notes, I described my feelings and thoughts during and after interviewing children. Analyzing them during my work on the Analysis Chapter raised some ethical challenges for me. It so happened, that my first several interviews presented quite a positive picture of children's integrational process, and when I faced an opposite picture with the other interviews, I had to be aware during the analyzing process to not manipulate data, highlighting certain opinions and experiences, or value and recognize one side over the other. Braun and Clark, in their lecture about Thematic Analysis, warn researchers that "… themes never simply 'emerges'… it is the product of interpretation" (Clarke, 2018). Sometimes, themes can tell readers more about the researcher than about the participants. Knowledge about that kept me in a humble position, and I tried to stick to one of my original aims for this research: to present the voices of Ukrainian refugee children. When I analyzed transcripts of the interviews, I had to be aware of giving space and meaning in my analysis for different opinions for new topics that were not in the original plot of the interview but could serve as the context for topics of discussion. During the analyzing work, all the passages of the interview transcripts are the context for each other, helping to see and interpret data in its richness and fullness.

Chapter 5: The barriers to building new relationships by Ukrainians with their Norwegian peers

After conducting research with Ukrainian children with the status of collective protection in Norway, and during my analytical work, peculiarities of building new relationships and maintaining the existing ones were discovered. I also learned about the importance for children of maintaining connections with their co-nationals, both in Ukraine and Norway. I present my empirical findings and analytical discussion in the following three chapters.

The first analytical chapter will describe and explain the barriers to building new relationships and networks by Ukrainians with their Norwegian peers. The barriers reflect different challenges children face; simultaneously, they motivate children to use different proactive and coping strategies to overcome them. These strategies will be discussed in the second analytical chapter. The third analytical chapter will discuss how maintaining relationships with co-nationals in Ukraine and Norway could be, at the same time, both challenging and empowering for Ukrainian children in Norway.

5.1. Contextual overview

it is important to pay attention to the context in which children obtain and exercise their agential role, the context in which their agency emerges (Abebe, 2019). Such context includes children's role and their position in a new society, among peers, as well as their connections to family and the Ukrainian community. Furthermore, factors such as children's age and level of maturity, gender, and leisure activities should be considered. In the Background Chapter, I described the family system and peer culture in Ukraine. Upon the move of children to Norway, they have radically changed their social status, their cultural context, and their ability to have a place in the peer communities. To allow the readers to comprehend my participants' agential role and actions in the present context, I will try to describe their current situation based on the data gathered from interviews (see interview guides in Appendix F), questionaries ("Unfinished sentences" tool, see Appendix E), and my informal observation with participants during the fieldwork.

5.1.1 Research participants

Participants of my research are children from 9 to 15 years old, seven boys and four girls. Six of the participants came to Norway with both parents, four of the participants came with just one parent (a mother), and one participant came with an aunt, uncle, and cousins while the participant's mother was still in Ukraine. Ten out of eleven participants have siblings who are staying with them. Most participants emphasized the support they receive from their families and expressed a preference for spending time in that familial environment. Some of the families left Ukraine during the first weeks of the war. Some of the families came to Norway after almost a year of living in Ukraine, affected by war, and had to leave the country for security reasons, one family came after a year in another country, where they

fled after the beginning of war. All the children know the situation in Ukraine to different degrees, depending on their age. Older children independently follow the news from different media sources. The participants and their families are settled in two different municipalities of the Trøndelag county of Norway. They describe their living conditions as satisfying. Children are aware of their status as refugees with temporary collective protection. Their families' plans for the future cannot be certain due to the temporality of the status, which is why children are not sure what awaits them in the future.

Eight of the participants attend a special reception school, where they focus on learning the Bokmål Norwegian language. Three children attend public Norwegian schools and have Norwegian language lessons alongside the Norwegian school program. Children who attend the special reception school have friendly ties with other Ukrainian children but feel isolated from their Norwegian peers. Children who attend public Norwegian schools report more opportunities to have contact with Norwegian peers, along with Ukrainian peers. All the participants in my research are placed alone in the Norwegian classes. The reason for that is that participants are of different ages and settled in different places, which is why it is rare to attend the same class or even school.

Four boys and three girls regularly participate in sports and after-school group activities. One participant has individual music lessons, but all the children participate in irregular after-school activities, sometimes organized just for Ukrainian children by various humanitarian organizations and sometimes organized for children in their municipality in general.

5.1.2. Influence of family relations

The fabric of life's context forms a system of different actors, encompassing all the connections children create and maintain. Also, this system includes their self-image and motivation. This dynamic actor system continually evolves with life experiences (Stoeckling, 2013), encouraging the agential actions of children. I regard the family situation of the children as one of the most important elements of their life context since it represents the only familiar system in the new and evolving reality children face. According to Juang et al., (2018), children and young people's reactions to various stressors of their migration experiences depend on attachment patterns and the quality of relationships with significant people (parents and caregivers). While my research initially did not aim to analyze the correlation between supportive relationships within children's close circle and the success of their integration process, an examination of interviews with children led me to a realization: I found that children who had a positive perspective on their current situation, along with positive experiences of adapting to the new society and forging connections with Norwegian peers, consistently reported receiving support from their families and having close relationships with significant adults. In the following, I present just two examples of many encounters that children, who were adapting relatively well, shared about their close relationships with their families. In the first example, I talked with Sergiy (12 yrs). Sergiy seemed like a happy boy who shared positive experiences with new peers in Norway and proudly told me that he had many friends in his Norwegian class.

> Olena: Now, when you live in Norway, who do you like to spend time with the most?
>
> Sergiy: I enjoy spending time, probably, with my family.
>
> Olena: Why specifically with your family? Why do you like spending time with them?
>
> Sergiy: With family, because it is nice when I spend time with my family. We can just watch movies together or do something else. I like it.

According to my knowledge, gained through informal fellowship with his parents, they understand the challenges, that their children are going through, and provide great support to them. And children, in their turn, love to be together with the family. Such close relationships help in the integration process. Acculturative stress, which is described in the framework for understanding acculturation (Berry, 2005, p.703), might be mitigated by positive family dynamics.

In my second example, I want to cite Anna (10 yrs), who came to Norway without her parents but with the family of her aunt. Anna shared a lot of positive stories about her newly built relationships with Norwegian and Ukrainian children in school. But the best and happiest place for her is her current family.

> Olena: Whom do you currently feel the greatest support from?
>
> Anna: My aunt and my cousin. They always, always support me… my cousin tried to make me laugh when I was sad.

Anna is living with her aunt and uncle and three cousins. She and her cousin, of almost the same age, are great support for each other. They help each other meet new Norwegian friends and are together at many after-school activities with Norwegian peers. Their parents also provide great support to them in the current situation, encouraging them to be proactive, try new things, and meet new people. In the atmosphere of support and faith in your abilities, - children's agency is strengthening, and the positive picture, that parents try to create in the minds of their children, contributes to the context in which children's agency flourishes.

According to Juang et al. (2018), "By facilitating a sense of closeness, safety, and confidence, caregivers help children navigate stressful situations and promote their social and emotional development" (p.799). In other words, children's agency emerges and is fostered in a supportive family atmosphere or with other caregivers. The same idea is reflected in the concept of relational agency. Even acting on their own, children are influenced by their existing relationships (Landes & Settersten Jr, 2019).

5.1.3. Friends as a source of support

Friends are an important element of the actor-system of a child. They are not only a source of emotional support in children's lives, but they also help each other to develop and realize proactive strategies for expanding networks and building new relationships with Norwegian peers.

The need to have fellowship and to belong is described by many sociologists and psychologists. Children who have had to change their country abruptly, nevertheless, have an ongoing urge for fellowship. The endeavors of Ukrainian children to establish friendships within the community of Ukrainian immigrants and keep those networks present is one of the agential strategies that allow them to create a secure environment, where they can receive the necessary support. Svetlana (12 yrs) shares her feelings about the only Russian-speaking girl in the new Norwegian school: "If not for her, I would burn there". Svetlana does not have other Ukrainians in her class but met in school a Russian-speaking girl who has lived in Norway for several years already. This encounter is advantageous for Svetlana since her new friend could explain to her the social and cultural norms of the school and peer community. That Russian-speaking girl has also introduced Svetlana to her friends, helping Svetlana to establish her first contact with Norwegian peers in the public Norwegian school.

When Ukrainian children encounter fellow Ukrainians in the reception school or in public Norwegian schools they attend, they easily establish connections and cultivate new friendships within the Ukrainian community. Children understand each other not only due to the same language but also due to the same situation in which they found themselves. Being in each other's company provides them with a sense of safety and encouragement. Artem (13 yrs) shares: "When I am with other Ukrainians, I don't feel lonely". Artem is a pupil in the reception school with other Ukrainian children, but two days a week, he attends a Norwegian public school, where he is the only Ukrainian in the class. And when Artem is alone there, according to his words, he feels sad and lonely. He has no one he can talk to easily during break time, and when children are outside for longer trips, he described being sometimes all alone: "Then I just go by myself and look at the sea and throw stones". Artem described to me how difficult it is for him to spend the whole day in public school, where he does not have even one friend. According to his description, he is happy for three days (when he is in the reception school with other Ukrainians) and sad and lonely for two other days (when he is in the Norwegian school without other Ukrainians).

5.1.4. Understanding the need for Norwegian peer fellowship

The urge to have fellowship is partly satisfied when Ukrainian children find contacts and build relationships with other Ukrainians. But because some Ukrainian children live far away from others, it is not so easy for them to maintain such relationships, and it is not always possible to have other Ukrainians in your class or even in your school for daily communication. It is one of the reasons, that motivates Ukrainian children to seek friendships with their Norwegian peers. Another reason is that, with time, Ukrainian children who came earlier, feel increasingly prepared to expand their networks and befriend Norwegian children that surround them. Pavel (15 yrs) shares: "I am ready to have more Norwegian friends… I think, I have enough of Ukrainians around me now". After almost a year of being in Norway, Pavel feels braver and more open to fellowship with Norwegian peers. He described his attempts to show initiative and start communication in different places: in the school, meeting friends of his classmates, or at the common after-school activities.

5.2 The Language barrier

My guide for the semi-structured interviews with children did not specifically include questions about the language. Still, the topic of the Norwegian language and language barrier came up in every interview. The subject naturally emerged when the children discussed making new acquaintances and forming connections, as well as when we talked about the challenges and difficulties they encountered in their new life in Norway. Interestingly, though, certain children, particularly boys, did not raise language concerns when discussing the process of befriending. Instead, their fellowship and friendships were built based on shared activities and participating in the sports teams, as shown in the interview with Dmytro (10 yrs):

> Dmytro: Language is not a barrier. It is easy…
>
> Olena: That is, can you [make friends easily]?
>
> Dmytro: Yes, I can. Well, it is a little hard…

Although Dmytro states that he finds it easy to make friends without knowing the Norwegian language, his response also shows some hesitation.

But for some children, language is the most significant barrier to building and maintaining relationships, as in the case of Dariya (12 yrs)*:* "It is easy to meet new children, but it is difficult after because of the language… The only difficulty is that I don't know the language". For Dariya, the language is perceived as the main barrier to having a better social connection with Norwegian peers.

Some children claimed that not knowing the Norwegian language was the reason for a different attitude towards them and described it as one of the problems they currently experience in Norway:

> They [the Norwegian children] think that you are "beneath" them if you don't speak their language… (Pavel, 15 yrs).
>
> If I could only talk! If I could only understand them! … they [the Norwegian children] don't want to make an effort themselves, repeat or explain, or speak English, they are like: "ok, guys, you are not right for me… goodbye!" … They see a huge obstacle in me because of the language, and they are not ready to overcome it, they do not want… (Svetlana, 12 yrs).

Like some new refugees, Svetlana has a language barrier. She also feels that she is not getting help from her peers, which adds to her disappointment. From her words, it seems that if people around showed more patience and put some effort into explaining or repeating what they say, it would help her and make both learning and communication easier. Communication processes are two-way actions where both parties make efforts to support it. Having patience with someone learning a language is crucial, but it seems like Norwegian kids lack this understanding or don't feel a need to develop communication, and Ukrainian children take up all the responsibility for the communication process in some situations, like the one described above.

When asked to advise a friend in a similar situation, all the children mentioned the importance and urge of learning the Norwegian language. Some of the testimonies said that it is possible to find friends in a new country if you learn the language. Some shared

experiences highlighted the idea that the language barrier is the sole distinction in the process of forming friendships in Ukraine versus Norway. The tendency was the same in all the interviews: children felt it was their responsibility to actively learn the language, and they presented it as a key to their relationships with Norwegian peers, see also Valenta, (2008, p.66-68).

At the same time, when Ukrainian children are in a situation without any language assistance, it is perceived as a very stressful experience, such as described by Anna (10 yrs): "When they ask me something, and I cannot answer, it irritates me so much…". Anna's comment confirms the fact that social connections, which are, in a way, based on mutual understanding, are very important for people to realize themselves and to feel meaningful and happy (Bruhn, 2011). The language barrier was perceived by Anna, as well as by other Ukrainian children, as the most painful or frustrating experience of their new life in Norway.

In Ager and Strang's framework of core domains of integration (see Figure 1), language, together with cultural knowledge, are two of the main structural barriers to acquiring social connections, and at the same time, they are facilitators of integration (Ager and Strang, 2008, p. 181-182). Language influences all other domains of integration and development of the process. For refugee children, these areas may include education experiences but also social reception in schools and other peer societies. Negative experiences can be presented by social exclusion, difficulties in making friends, and bullying (Ager and Strang, 2008, p. 172). I was sorry to hear the following account from Svetlana (12 yrs):

> It always seems that they are whispering about me, like discussing me for the wrong reason, and I hardly understand anything. But there are some words I know, some sentences I can translate. If they talk, then I can understand: "The girl in the red T-shirt", not to mention my name. I, of course, understand them. And it's such a mess, and then you realize they are talking about me with such disdain, with such hatred, that sometimes I think… am I doing something wrong to you?... I want to hide from them, to leave. But I understand; I like soccer; it's cool to play, but sometimes I just want to quit it because the company is not very good to me.

She described the situation with bitterness in her voice, with a feeling of helplessness and insecurity. And it seems, that not understanding the language made Svetlana an easier victim of bullying because she is not able to understand what was said behind her back and answer to it. It seemed to me that after having a happy childhood in Ukraine, among peers and friends, she was not sure how to react to the situation and how to protect herself from what seemed like hidden bullying to me.

A two-way understanding of integration entails perceiving integration as

> a dynamic and multifaceted two-way process that requires efforts by all parties concerned, including a preparedness on the part of refugees to adapt to the host society without having to forego their own cultural identity and a corresponding readiness on the part of the host communities and public institutions to welcome refugees and meet the needs of a diverse population (UNCRC, 2005).

Language competence also poses a challenge for the host communities for a two-way understanding of integration. The Norwegian reception system is doing its best, using different strategies to achieve the integration goals. Strategies vary across different

municipalities based on their respective capacities and opportunities. 7 out of 11 participants in this research live in the same municipality and are pupils of the same reception school. One of the biggest challenges they mentioned is a mismatch between the language they learn, Bokmål, and the language all the people around, including peers in the Norwegian school, speak, -which is the Trøndersk dialect. According to informal conversations I have had with Ukrainian children and parents, being isolated from their Norwegian peers in the reception school for almost a year has increased the gap and added to the difficulties children face with acquiring a new language. The good intention of a separate reception school for Ukrainians, to give a boost in language to children who live in the reception center just for a short transition period of 3-4 months before settling in the different municipalities of Norway, served as an additional barrier for children, already settled in this municipality and who were obliged to stay in the same school with the Ukrainian children from the reception center. They did not have an opportunity to develop both: the local dialect and the official Bokmål language in parallel, and after moving to public Norwegian schools, they felt helpless and ignorant because Bokmål and trøndersk bear a considerable difference for the foreigners.

5.2.1. Strategies to overcome the language barrier

Some Ukrainian children use English for communication. The level of English proficiency varies among Ukrainian children: some know it pretty well, while some have very little or no experience with using English. Knowledge of the English language was mentioned as a benefit, as in the words of Stepan (9 yrs): "If you know English, you can show initiative, you can approach Norwegians and talk". Another successful strategy for overcoming the language barrier, reported by several children, is exchanging messages with Norwegian acquaintances through online chatting. Online chatting allows children to use Google Translate to communicate. Sergiy (12yrs), who did not know much Norwegian language at the moment, shared:

> Sergiy: I have more Norwegian friends than Ukrainian friends. I have a lot of Norwegian friends here now.

> Olena: How and where did you find them?

> Sergiy: In school and on my football team.

> Olena: But how are you friends? What do you do?

> Sergiy: We communicate. We chat on social media. Then we go out and play football together.

To summarize the above, I conclude that knowing the language is a tool for expressing agency in interpersonal relationships (Landes, 2019, p.2), and children can realize themselves through finding a voice and using language (Stoeckling, 2013). Their agency emerges through their relationships with their surroundings, facilitated and strengthened by using languages and language aids. Even limited knowledge of English or Norwegian helps, as well as language aids, such as Google Translate or online platforms for communication.

Another strategy that Ukrainian children actively use is finding and engaging in social activities that do not require much verbal communication. For example, sports and arts rely

on body language and functional interactions and achievements; thus, verbal communication becomes less significant. During sports activities, players usually use the same words and commands to understand each other, and the feeling of acquiring the necessary language level comes faster. The situation of overcoming the language barrier and becoming an active actor in the frames of a sports team confirms the statement that agentic actions include the whole system and all the actors of the process (Stoeckling, 2013. P. 448). Sports and other activities that do not require much language skills are part of the system, where children are included, and all the players and participants, as actors in the process, mutually respond to each other's actions without using proficient language skills.

Despite all the challenges posed by the language barrier, in their interviews, children expressed an understanding of integration as a process of adapting to a host community that requires their everyday efforts. Acquiring the necessary level of language proficiency might take years. During the first phase of staying in Norway, children rely not only on learning the language but also on using other proactive or adapting strategies about their everyday lives that will be described in the following chapter six.

5.3 Subjective perception of cultural differences and differences in mentality

Analyzing the data and looking at the participants' perception of differences in culture and mentality, I came to an unexpected conclusion: in my research, Ukrainian children have distinct perceptions of such differences between them and their Norwegian peers. Certain children are strongly aware of differences in culture and mentality, identifying them as the most challenging aspect to adapt to. They view these differences as obstacles to inclusion and integration within the Norwegian community and hindrances to building new social connections. In comparison, other children perceive no cultural or mentality differences between Ukrainian and Norwegian children and feel no difficulties being included in the group. The concept of acculturation (Berry, 2005) explains such a difference by different contexts in which the acculturation process occurs. After my interviews with the participants and analysis of the empirical data, I connect such different perceptions of cultural differences with the level of maturity and awareness that different children have. Some children build relationships based on shared activities, while other children look for mutual understanding with their peers; they look for contacts based on similar values or interests. Motives and conditions for communication do not necessarily depend on the child's age.

In my research, younger girls expressed difficulties in forming relationships with their peers, while boys of different ages had no problems forming relationships based on shared sports or other activities. Younger children and those who are closely involved in sports teams with Norwegian peers describe Norwegian children as kind and friendly, such as Sergiy (12 yrs), who plays football with them: "Children are kind, just like in Ukraine… I have a lot of friends in school and the football team". Sergiy sounded happy about his encounters with Norwegian peers. Likewise, Ann (10 yrs) stated the following about her Norwegian friends: "They know how to be friends… They are true and helpful". Her first encounters with

Norwegian peers happened at the shared play activity and the experience did not disappoint her, even though she is, according to her words, shy at first contact with new people. Another of the younger participants, Dmytro (10 yrs), described his attempts to find friends in Norway among local peers the following way: "I have so many new friends! I meet friends everywhere! ... It is very easy to make friends here, you just come and say hello, start talking… and you have a friend". These experiences of warm reception bring children joy and, as a result, foster their agency and initiative for further contact with their Norwegian peers and give Ukrainian children a sense of belonging and adequacy in the new society (Ager and Strang, 2008).

Some participants described their perception of Norwegian peers very differently. This includes Eva (11 yrs), who described Norwegian peers as the following: "They are different people. They have their vibe. You need to be on their vibe… I will never feel comfortable with them". Eva clearly articulated the sense of differences in culture and mentality, which she noticed after just several months and a few contacts. Such a description of a "different vibe" could be explained using Gullestad's (1992) concept of invisible fences, where she describes that in Norwegian society, avoidance could be a strategy for protecting self-identity from everything that is "too different". And that, in turn, creates the barriers for building social connections. Eva, unfortunately, expressed an absence of hope for closeness, and she stated it as a fact that she should accept and live with. Likewise, Viktor (11 yrs) stated: "[Norwegian] People are different, they are very strange, to put it mildly…but this is to be expected…". Viktor accepted the situation as it was and continued to live his life with the fact that Norwegian and Ukrainian children are different, and nothing can be done about it.

Such experiences might demotivate Ukrainian children and destroy their hopes for possible friendships with Norwegian peers. However, peer community perception is important. As described in the theoretical chapter, Stoeckling (2013) suggests that children's agency emerges within social networks, when children actively engage in social activities to express themselves, their preferences, and their voices, and feel the support of peers. In this participation process, children initially internalize and make sense of the external world before responding to it. Hence, alongside personal reflection, the role of their environment and the group, as a mediator plays a crucial role.

Usually, people behave automatically and unconsciously in everyday life, and such behavior is learned from birth, during a process of socialization. This process includes taking upon norms of society, and expected behaviors, such as food, traditions, music, formal and informal language, etc. (Gjøra, 2019). While Norwegian children feel relaxed in their daily interactions, some Ukrainian children, like some other new immigrants in the society, feel themselves out of context, as Viktor (11 yrs.) described it: "as a fish out of water".

I asked myself: what is the difference between these two groups of Ukrainian children: those who feel the difference in culture and mentality and those who don't feel it so much? After deeper analyzing the difference in perception, I draw parallels between children's main leisure activities as the basis for relationships and their perception of peer community. Some boys, who had positive perceptions of their peer's community shared genuine interests in sports activities and were involved in leisure activities and participated in different sports teams with their peers. Likewise, the younger girls who had positive experiences from the

contacts with their Norwegian peers participated in the organized activities for girls, which included sports activities and social activities, such as parties, birthday celebrations, or doing things together in the company of classmates' girls during and after school.

However, for other girls, the leading activity seemed to be a fellowship, and they needed "besties" more than sports or play partners. For example, Dariya shared in the interviews about her friend in Ukraine and expressed the need to talk and share thoughts and feelings and have close and trusting relationships with loyal friends. Most of the Ukrainian girls had such friends in Ukraine, like Dariya (12 yrs) who described her Ukrainian friendships in the following: "We are very, very close, we have a friendship that went beyond mere words, it is real and genuine. We communicate very well; we tell each other everything". The way Dariya described her friendship, gave me the impression that it was something so valuable and important for her. Eva (11 yrs) also recalled and talked about her friendship in Ukraine before having to flee: "We used to spend the whole day together, like, all the free time". Being a friend presupposes the feeling of sameness, which is also very important for Norwegians, but is not easily created, according to Gullestad's (2002) concept of invisible fences, with people from different social and economic classes, ethnic backgrounds, and lifestyles (Gullestad, 1992, p.184).

Some difficulties that Ukrainian children might face in this initial phase are well described by Gullestad (1992) in her explanation of the bases for establishing and maintaining personal relationships by people in Norway. According to Gullestad (1992), establishing and maintaining personal relationships are driven by the feeling of "*sameness*" in the highly individualistic Norwegian culture (Gullestad, 1992, p. 184). The feeling of "sameness" is strongly connected to similar experiences in ways of upbringing, lifestyle, level of education, and social and economic status, which makes it difficult to match people with different experiences. Hence, refugees and immigrants often constitute their separate strata in the community (Gullestad, 2002).

All Ukrainian children in my study shared that their peers in Norwegian schools took the initiative to meet them. For younger children, such initiative was perceived positively, and with gratitude and appreciation as relationships between Ukrainian and Norwegian peers could develop. The older children described that Norwegian peers' initiative, sometimes was the first and the only contact with them. And later, those initiating contacts would not lead to the development of relationships, but just to an expression of a common everyday politeness. Svetlana (12 yrs) recounted that after she returned to the Norwegian school where she had initially begun her education during the first months in Norway, she noticed a shift in the reception. Despite the warm hospitality she experienced initially, it was not the same upon her return, after spending several months in a separate reception school: "When I came back to the Norwegian school after being in the reception school, I didn't exist for them". Svetlana expressed her feelings of exclusion, and again, as before, she sounded helpless and insecure, not knowing how to react to the situation.

Eva (11 yrs) describes one of her first contacts with Norwegian girls at the dance camp:

> Olena: So, you had a chance to meet Norwegian girls, didn't you?
> Eva: Well, how to put it? We just met, and then they were playing in their company, and I was on my own.

Olena: How did you feel then?

Eva: I felt lonely if I can say that…

Olena: Do you think that there are chances to find friends among Norwegians?

Eva: No.

The first impression of a welcoming attitude, hospitality, and genuine interest from Norwegian peers was replaced by children's detachment, and loyalty to their established friendships and companies, as described by Svetlana (12 yrs): "Even when they talk to me, I understand that our fellowship will not be long because Norwegians do not want to invest in new friendships: they don't need it", and Eva (11 yrs): "They already have their friends and their teams". Coming in the middle of the year into the new class with established friend's connections might be difficult for any child, even for Norwegian children. It was even more difficult for children, who were not ready for cultural change, for the language barrier, and for such a need to find new friendships. It is especially difficult if you are the only Ukrainian in the new class, which was true in the case of Svetlana and some other participants in my research.

The same is true for boys who are not involved in any group activities such as sports, where children have interactions through shared activities and body language. Viktor (11 yrs) reported difficulties in finding any points of contact or intersection: "I feel like a fish out of water…". Such experience can be logically explained. Ukrainian children came to Norwegian classes in the middle of not only a school year but also in the middle of barneskolen or ungdomskolen, where most of the children already had found friends and established their social circles. When you are new in a new society, that differs from your home country, and experiencing certain language barrier, it is natural to feel awkward, as Pavel (15 yrs) described, telling me about his first contact with Norwegian boys: "…it is a little scary…I don't know what to expect from them…".

The process of acculturation, according to Berry (2005), involves mutual accommodations, which lead to adaptations and changes in the behavioral repertoire of both parties, but it takes a long time. The feelings of disappointment arise when the expectations of Ukrainian children, who did not have problems establishing social contacts with their peers in Ukraine, meet the reality of the acculturation process with their Norwegian peers.

Having an open and friendly peer community in Ukraine, it was unusual and unexpected for Ukrainian teenagers to meet a different type of peer community in Norway. Some participants added negative connotations to the description of their personal experiences and perception of Norwegian peers and the overall teenage community in Norway: "People here are so different… the awareness of helplessness is dreadful!" (Svetlana, 12 yrs). Svetlana's attitude was negative, and she did sound unhappy. But I would not conclude that something is wrong with Norwegians or with Ukrainians, but rather, that Svetlana, like many other new refugees in the country, needed help and support to overcome negative feelings and see the brighter side of the peer community and over time find her place within it.

Another example of negative connotation to the description of personal experience is found in the words of Pavel (15 yrs): "Norwegians befriend those who attended kindergarten with them. It's not the same for Ukrainians". Here, he commented on certain cultural differences, that require time to get past. There is nothing negative about the fact that children keep

friendship connections from the early years in kindergarten, but it might feel disappointing when you are the one who is excluded.

Considering the described above and similar statements of Ukrainian children, I can speculate, that from the perspective of the new immigrants, the situation looks as follows: equality, which implies 'sameness' with Norwegians, is not easily achieved, and at the same time – without this feeling of 'sameness' there is no chance to establish close contacts with them and succeed in the integration process in the full measure.

The feelings that some of the Ukrainian children share are not unique. Many studies of the immigration and integration processes of adults and children focus on the challenges of the acculturation process. Immigration entails a life-changing cultural shift, that includes various challenges with potential mental health implications when the stress of the process can affect experiences of immigration in every area of a new life (Rogers-Sirin et al., 2013, p. 11). Ukrainian children notice that in Norwegian society, different norms are at play. Svetlana (12 yrs) is sharing with bitterness and disappointment:

> Well, they are different from us; they are the complete opposite of us … And that's the problem: if something is considered normal for me, it's abnormal for them, and what is normal for them is abnormal for me. In principle, we can't find a common language, a connection, so to speak…

In her description, Svetlana sounds helpless and does not know what to do with these realizations. Ukrainian children do not always understand what to do with such discoveries. The situation for participants might be unique in a way that they did not expect that it would be so difficult to integrate into the Norwegian peer community, as Norway is not so far away, geographically nor culturally. Ukrainian ethnicity resembles Norwegian ethnicity, which puts away the problem of racism and 'othering' people based on their appearances. And though, Ukrainian children do not look different, still they have different childhood experiences, speak different languages, and are used to a more open peer community. And when Ukrainian children's expectations met the reality, it brought a sense of disappointment. According to Valenta (2008), if a person wants to be accepted and recognized in interactions with Norwegian peers, he should familiarize himself with the new cultural code, and unwritten rules of the society. It is expected, but not always explained to the new members of society (Valenta, 2008, p. 59). Such misunderstanding causes disappointment and resentment, results in feelings of insecurity and inadequacy, and leads to the adoption of avoidance strategies, which will be described in the following chapter. Such strategies, in turn, reduce opportunities for communication and creating connections. And connections, according to Bruhn (2011), are the means that help people to learn the rules and customs of living in a particular culture. Such a situation may resemble a vicious circle, which is why the process of cultural integration might be difficult and long, sometimes it takes years and generations (Ní Raghallaigh & Gilligan, 2010).

The process of acculturation is mutual and can lead to diverse outcomes, ranging from harmony and effectiveness in relationships to conflict and stress for those involved (Berry, 2005, p. 699). According to Valenta (2011), social reception encompasses reactions, opinions, and attitudes. Social reception, though, may vary from person to person, from family to family, and may not always be positive in individual cases, despite the common

very warm and welcoming attitude towards Ukrainians. Social reception by Norwegian peers influences the response and reaction of Ukrainian children.

Lastly, I should mention, that feelings of discomfort and inadequacy were mostly translated by older children, from 11-12 years old, as it is a period when children begin to resemble the society of adults, when their perception of friendship shifts and starts to involve "stable emotional bonds in a relationship that is supposed to endure" (cf. James, 1993, cited in Nilsen, 2005, p.123). At the same time, younger children just play, their groups are fluid and open, as described in the research of Nilsen (2005), in the frames in which Nilsen observes relationships of children in the day-care institutions in Norway, and presents to readers the "we-ness" concept:

> "We-ness" involves an intimate relationship, with meanings such as "we are together" and "we are friends". But as this relationship is fluid, its definition is not fixed, and such meanings are temporary…and are dependent on the situation (Nilsen, 2005, p. 123).

Nilsen developed the concept of we-ness by observing children, their interactions, and their use of different ways of establishing and re-establishing relationships in the new groups in Norwegian daycare institutions.

The concept of we-ness allows us to explain the constantly changing statuses of children in the groups of friends: it is normal and acceptable to change the status in relationships from "we are friends" to "we are not friends", and we-ness could be established and re-established several times a day with different people. Younger Ukrainian children could naturally become a part of such a fluid community, and being a part of such a fluid community helps to adapt to such relationships, and do not feel excluded, even in the situation of relative exclusion.

Being a part of a fluid group helps Ukrainian children to adapt to a certain culture of relationships without feelings of being "too different", and at the same time, it helps Norwegian peers to accept them as a part of the group, where participants can change their statuses from "we are together" to "we are not together" easily without consequences of being excluded or rejected (Nilsen, 2005).

At the moment of interviews, participants in the research have stayed in Norway for three to fifteen months (Table 1). The sense of belonging that Ukrainian children lack when comparing their friendships and peer relationships in Ukraine with their experience in Norwegian peer society is not something that appears automatically upon introduction to the new group. Instead, according to Ager and Strang (2008), a sence of belonging typically emerges in the later stages of integration, and is not to be expected so soon, as after one or two years of being in the new country. These later stages of integration involve the active "mixing" of individuals from diverse groups, the appearance of devoted friendships, a mutual feeling of respect and understanding, and shared values. While people in the group get to keep their identities and accept diversities, they rather provide a broader context, in which individuals experience a sense of belonging (Ager & Strang, 2008, p. 177-178).

In conclusion, I want to highlight the difference in perception between younger children and teenagers. For younger children common activities provide enough foundation for building new friendships, while for older children it is different: they value the ability of both parties

to invest in communications, and except for the language barrier they notice differences in culture and mentality, and certain social rigidity, that is difficult to overcome unilaterally.

Chapter 6: Exploring Ukrainian children's proactive and coping strategies in engaging with Norwegian peers

This analytical chapter aims to describe and explain different strategies used by Ukrainian children to build new relationships with their Norwegian peers during their first phase in Norway, while Ukrainian children still have a language barrier and are new to the culture, norms, and customs of the society and peer community. The strategies children use depend a lot on the particular context and situation in which the child finds himself. Some of the strategies have a proactive nature, and some of the strategies are of a coping (or adaptive) nature. Both are useful and required in different situations and contexts. They complement each other for the successful integration process. In the frames of my research, I investigated how these different strategies were utilized for building new networks and relationships, what significance they have, and what role they play in children's lives.

6.1. Proactive strategies

In their pursuit of new friendships, Ukrainian children develop and use different strategies. As shared and discussed in our interviews, there are many ways of approaching and contacting children in Norway. Children described their active inner work on overcoming feelings of fear, uncertainty, discomfort, and disappointment. The proactive nature of these actions allows me to regard them as agentic strategies for building new connections. Instances of certain strategies can be observed in the participants' answers during our interviews. For example, Svetlana (12 yrs) tried to answer the question about her actions when she meets new Norwegian children in different situations, and during our discussion, she concluded that she just improvises:

> Olena: Do you have a positive experience, where you can say: "This worked for me" or "That worked for me"? Probably you have your tips…
>
> Svetlana: No. I just improvise.
>
> Olena: Do you improvise every time?
>
> Svetlana: Yes, I just improvise. Well, I have two strategies: either I just improvise, when approaching a person and start to talk with him or her, or I watch this person, I observe who he communicates with and is he a sociable person at all. If he is not sociable, I would not approach him… or if he is, - we might befriend.

Not knowing how exactly it is possible to befriend Norwegian peers, Svetlana (12 yrs) nevertheless pursues her desire to befriend them. She describes her attempts as improvisation. It means she tries out different approaches, and observation of how Norwegian peers communicate with each other is one of her strategies. Observing others

helps Svetlana to understand social rules and norms and `crack the code` of communication, to be able to make friends in the new community. For me, it is a very brave behavior: when you cannot predict the result, and you are not sure what exactly can be done in the situation. For Svetlana, as well as for other children, it means each time to overcome psychological discomfort and feelings of uncertainty to make a first step into the unknown area. Another example is found in the words of Darina (12 yrs). She describes her attempts to start communication with Norwegian peers as follows:

> Maybe I will try to ask somebody something. For example, I can ask about the time or something else, and then, maybe, I will start some kind of conversation with them. If they answer and want to talk to me, I will continue to… but if not, then I'll just listen to their answer and that is all.

Darina tries to initiate contact, and she is exploring different approaches to understanding social norms and behaviors within her new peer community. For example, Darina mentioned, that she is asking her mother about the rules and norms within the Norwegian community. She shared that she sometimes feels unconfident and uncertain, but she still is ready to take steps towards new peers. It sounds so brave because she admitted that the reactions to her initiatives vary, and they are not necessarily positive.

Despite feeling lonely when he is without other Ukrainians in the Norwegian class, Artem (13 yrs) shared a positive experience as well:

> Olena: Did somebody help you to get to know Norwegian children?
> Artem No, I met them myself.
> Olena: How did you do it?
> Artem: I would just approach a person and say: "Hi! What is your name?" And in this way, we might become friends …

Artem tried the simplest things that would most likely work in Ukraine, where the peer community is more open. In his understanding, it might as well work in the Norwegian peer community, and Artem was ready to try that as the simplest befriending strategy he knew.

Anna (10 yrs) describes her experience and feelings about meeting new Norwegian peers:

> If you are alone, and you feel really scared to approach (Norwegians)… you are really scared. But if there are several people together with you (according to context, she meant other Ukrainians), - you can approach all together… But if one refuses to go, then no one will go….

Anna described a situation, when she wanted to meet a new girl, but was too shy to make a first step, but when she agreed with her Ukrainian friends from school to do it together, it did not seem so scary and uncomfortable. Again, we can witness that agency emerges when children are together with their friends. In a way, sharing the same life experience with others fosters children's ability to overcome difficulties (Walsh, 2003). Then they are ready to show initiative and do the first steps in communication, even if they are shy or uncertain.

My fieldwork showed that children did not overcome difficulties independently, instead, they were open to receiving assistance and support from others. Their resilience was nurtured through meaningful connections with friends, family members, teachers in school, as well as coaches and mentors in after-school activities. Some of the children described the very kind and patient attitude of adults towards them. For example, Viktor (11 yrs) shared:

Olena: How would you describe the attitude of adults towards you?

Viktor: Pleasant.

Olena: How do you notice it? What signs do you see that they are pleasant?

Viktor: Because they are nice to me.

Olena: Can you explain it a little more to me? In what way do they behave, that you see them pleasant and nice?

Viktor: I have this feeling that they have a special approach to me, well, because, we are Ukrainian kids, not Norwegians, with a different character, with a different language.

Viktor described the attitude of the teacher at the gaming club to him as special, and it was pleasant to him. For Viktor, the contact with an adult, a teacher from the club, was one of just a few contacts with Norwegians, and such positive encounters may create a positive experience and encourage him to be more relaxed during his following encounters with Norwegians.

Another girl, Anna (11 yrs), was very pleased to describe the attitude of adults to her, and she was grateful for such an attitude:

Well, I don't really know English, just a little, very little. So, they (adults) wait, everyone waits for me to say something, they are very kind to me. For example, they can ask if I need something, or if I will take it myself. Well, they are very kind, they can come up to me, ask me if I want something, and give it to me.

Anna shared a situation during a classmate's birthday party (described above), but she also mentioned in her interview a kind attitude from her neighbors and teachers in school. Examples described above show the importance of adults' attitudes and their understanding of the current situation for Ukrainian children as newcomers to the country. Studies of Førde (2007) confirms shared above experiences of how important it is to being spoken to and being met with kindness and friendliness. In such context and reciprocal relationships between the child and the adult from her environment empowerment is cultivated (Tones and Green, 2004, cited in Førde, 2007, p.5).

Actively overcoming a lack of confidence and uncertainty in the situation – is one of the proactive strategies, that requires inner work and effort. Pavel (16 yrs.) shared about his constant inner dialog with himself in situations, where he does not feel confident enough: "I start to challenge myself. I start to tell myself all those proverbs: "Nothing ventured, nothing gained!", "You only live once!" and "Embarrassing, but at least not boring!" Pavel commented that enhancing self-confidence and communication skills helps him to make new connections. Pavel sounded encouraged to take risks, embrace opportunities, and find humor in the challenges, that he encountered. Such an approach to situations and Pavel's inner work suggest that he is taking proactive steps to pursue new connections and, possibly, friendships with his Norwegian peers.

Similarly, few children, when asked about advice, that they would offer their friends in the situation of being new in the country and to the peer's society, mentioned the importance of work on personal development. Stepan (9yrs.) said: "I read a lot, and it helps me to express my thoughts better…", he also continued, when asked about advice to a friend: "You

need to be able to be friends and to have this skill, you have to help others and do not be mean". It appeared to me, that Stepan was reflecting on the factors that helped him to make friends in Ukraine. Now, he is focusing on honing and actively using those skills to establish new friendships here, in Norway.

One of the most natural and easily attainable strategies to connect and befriend Norwegian peers – is participation in different sports and after-school activities (See sub-chapter 5.2.1). Some children in my research described that they found good comrades in their sports teams. Having fellowship every week, playing together as a team, and sharing the same feelings during a game after a time create fellowship, and can serve as a basis for friendship. Sergey (12 yrs) shared: "I have befriended all the pals in my football team". And at that moment in time, Sergey could not speak Norwegian or English language. Another boy, Stepan (9yrs) described a situation during his first months in Norway, during summer holidays, when he visited a rope park, and there he walked the route together with another Norwegian boy. They were helping each other all the way, using just a few English words, which they both knew. A similar situation happened, when Stepan participated in canoeing and horse riding, both times meeting new Norwegian peers. And when we talked about his experience, Stepan had a very positive view:

> Olena: so, what is your general opinion about Norwegian children that you have seen over the last week?
>
> Stepan: Well, they are kind, they can help you, they don't offend.
>
> Olena: Then could you imagine and describe the ideal situation in which it would be easiest to get to know Norwegian children?
>
> Stepan: When you know the language, and you don't offend, and when you have a good character.

For Stepan, this encounter with the Norwegian boy was one of the first and most successful encounters, that left a positive impression and influenced his expectations from future encounters with the Norwegian children. Such good experiences helped him to overcome his reservedness and shyness, enabling him to engage more comfortably in communication with each new encounter.

Even though Norwegian and Ukrainian societies have some similarities, due to belonging to a common European family, teenagers feel a "big difference" that might be expressed in the mentioned unfamiliar cultural code of a new peer society. For example, Pavel (15 yrs) mentioned that he got advice from his parents to "…observe Norwegian peers. Observe how they behave, respond…what they do…to understand them better". Interestingly, several other children mentioned the same strategy: it helps to observe how Norwegian children behave and interact with each other, and it might be a beneficial strategy for the first phase of being in a new society of peers.

Another strategy, for fostering connections- is the use of online platforms and chat applications, as described in the sub-chapter 5.2.1. Norwegian peers, as well as Ukrainian children, actively use Internet capabilities to support connection and share experiences with a wide community of peers.

The language barrier was mentioned by all the children as a difficult part and obstacle in their lives, - and while talking about getting new acquaintances, many children mentioned learning the language as an important strategy. Being able to expresee yourself on the language of the host country is an empowering experience (Erden, 2017; Valenta, 2008).

The language barrier and cultural barriers, described in the previous analytical chapter, are not the only barriers to building new connections, but rather various psychological factors: for example, the emotional risk of being rejected or feeling inadequate in communication. Also, the lack of confidence or trust in successful contact could become a limiting factor for initiating contacts and building relationships. At the same time, barriers and limitations, that children face, provoke and promote the use of various proactive strategies, attempted by Ukrainian children.

To sum up, I want to list the described above strategies to present a wide range of ways, that Ukrainian children use to initiate contacts and start building networks within Norwegian peer society. Firstly, Ukrainian children find sources of support in their families and from other adults in Norwegian society, they actively establish and maintain friendship relationships within the Ukrainian peer community, which gives them confidence and support for gaining new friendships and connections within the Norwegian peer community. They use the help of existing friends and acquaintances to gain new ones. This strategy was reported as the most favorable and popular. Some Ukrainian children engage themselves in personal growth and development to overcome insecurity and fear of inadequacy and failure. They show initiative, hone their communication skills, sometimes risks, and embrace opportunities whenever it is possible to connect with their Norwegian peers. Children get to know each other during shared activities and games, they communicate in online chats and groups. Ukrainian children reported, that in their attempts to understand the behavior of peers and customs and rules of peer society, they, firstly, ask and learn about them from parents or other friends and, secondly, they observe their Norwegian peers in everyday life.

6.2 Coping (or adaptive) strategies of Ukrainian children for overcoming challenges of the first phase in Norway

Reactions and actions of Ukrainian children in the current situation of their lives are often influenced by the stress of the ongoing war (Camilla Engeset, 2023), and by the language and cultural barriers. Ukrainian children have expectations of successful integration, they have intentions and desire to find new friends and belong to the group. However, for many reasons, it is not as easy as they would expect. Some Ukrainian children, depending on the location, where their families are settled, do not have other Ukrainians in their Norwegian class, and sometimes in the whole school. If it is so, children find themselves alone in their situations, having to navigate their ways almost without help or sufficient help and support from fellow co-nationals. Having experienced negative feelings of unsuccessful encounters with their Norwegian peers or difficulties in building new relationships and maintaining communication in the new community (for different reasons), children developed certain strategies that helped them to avoid or overcome negative feelings and experiences. Along with proactive strategies (described above), children use coping strategies in their everyday lives. Coping strategies can be defined as "an individual's conscious and volitional efforts to

regulate behavior, emotions, thoughts, etc. in response to stressful events and circumstances" (Compas et al., 2001, p.121, cited in Fangen & Lynnebakke, 2014, p. 48). The concept of resilience implies that resilience is shown not only in proactive actions but many times in using coping strategies as well, and vulnerability and resilience can exist side by side (Ní Raghallaigh & Gilligan, 2010, p.227).

6.2.1. Shifting focus inside yourself. Self-imposed isolation

In their interviews, children mentioned different ways, in which they try to compensate for the lack of friendly fellowship, new friendships, and feelings of loneliness. One such strategy, mentioned by children, was trying to change their focus and even their personality in the current period of life. For example, one of the participants, Eva (11 yrs.), described her everyday life in Ukraine as filled with a fellowship with a lot of friends, who would spend every day after school together, playing outside and having a good time. But the situation has changed with her move to Norway:

> Olena: Who do you currently enjoy spending time the most with?
> Eva: And what if it is alone? Can I answer so?
> Olena: OK. Can you tell me about spending time alone?
> Eva: Well, alone… I like going to the sea, listening to music…such a nice atmosphere. I create it for myself.

After having a lot of friendship connections in Ukraine, Eva is now residing in a new place, with a different language and not-so-open access to the Norwegian peer community. In the reception center, where she lived with her parents for several months before settlement, she did not have children of her age to befriend. So, naturally, she developed a habit of spending time alone, by herself, as she explained. She learned to create a pleasant atmosphere for herself by listening to music, watching nature, and thinking. Such behavior is opposite to how she used to spend time in Ukraine. In a way, it was her coping strategy, used in everyday life now.

Another participant, Svetlana (12 yrs.), described herself in Ukraine as a "very strong extravert", but now identifies herself as an "almost introvert":

> In the past, in Ukraine, I needed people. I had to write to some people at least one time a day. And now I realize that I don't write to some people for months… And I feel, actually, fine with that. This is it: I have a wonderful life. I don't need people. Goodbye! Even if I don't have them, I have myself. I have a book. There is a telephone, there is the Internet. I can do everything I want…

It seems to me, that Svetlana did some mental work to change her attitude concerning her need for social fellowship. It was her conscious decision to change the focus of her interests: "I have a wonderful life! I don't need people!" Not because she wanted it, but because she did not find any other way to cope with the life changes. When Svetlana shared her experiences and stories, I observed that she has a strong need for social interactions and actively seeks out opportunities to connect with others, sometimes even risking rejection or discomfort of the process. But at the same time, in her thoughts and her new behavior, she found a "resort" for herself, denying her need for other people.

Behavior, described above in the experiences of Eva and Svetlana, might be interpreted as *self-imposed isolation*. As a coping strategy, such behavior is often considered inherent to refugees in their new country. For example, Valenta (2008) mentions that if people feel risks, attached to their attempts to create new connections, risk of self-discrediting and rejection, it may become a reason for isolating themselves from peer society (Valenta, 2008, p. 220). In his article "How to Survive, being an Immigrant", Osorio (2006) concludes, that regardless of nationality, economic status, family stability, as well as other factors, there appears to be a common experience for uprooted children known as the "silent stage". During this stage, children may exhibit signs of alienation, moodiness, and fear. However, these behaviors do not stem from the lack of desire to socialize or cooperate. Instead, immigrant children yearn to fit in, blend in, and participate in the activities of their peers. Yet, the fear of inadequacy, deep loneliness, unfamiliar cultural code, and stress of adapting to a new school system can lead to overwhelming feelings of helplessness and alienation. To release the tension of these emotions and cope with this period, immigrant children often resort to the coping strategy of self-imposed isolation (Osorio, 2006 p. 148).

For example, Svetlana (12 yrs.) describes that in a sports team where she did not feel welcomed, she felt obliged just to present her name and listen to the names of her teammates:

> You need, at least, to know what their names are… to pass them a ball, to play together… But I am not going to try extra efforts. Just know me as a fact, and I will know you as a fact…

A football club is a place where Svetlana expected to find new connections but was disappointed with the reception there, and felt uncomfortable among her Norwegian peers. So, in her turn, she chose a strategy of minimal social involvement and selective avoidance. When children find themselves in a situation of exclusion, the avoidance strategy may serve as a defense in the situation. Such a reaction is caused by emotional distress. Children refrain from the situations, if not from the settings, where they may face exclusion or discomfort, instead of attempting to alter the situation (Fangen & Lynnebakke, 2014). Such avoidance can be selective and applied only in some areas of life, like, for example, in the described above situation of Svetlana.

6.2.2. Choosing kinship

An alternative manifestation of the avoidance strategy may be embodied in searching for contacts only with co-nationals. The starting point for the choice of such a strategy could be disappointment with the first contact with local peers, For example, Eva (11yrs.) described a situation, when she first met Norwegian girls at the dance club, and they showed initiative to meet her, but after first interest was satisfied, they reserved to their company, and the rest of the camp Eva spend alone, all by herself. She shared with me: "Such relations are not very cool". And we continued our conversation:

Olena: so, you don't have any Norwegian friends yet…

Eva: No.

Olena: Do you think, there is a chance – you will have them later?

Eva: No.

Olena: Can you explain, why you think so?

Eva: Well, I don't understand them. I've never had friends who speak a different language. It's very difficult.

Olena: Is it only a language barrier then?

Eva: Well, they are different somehow, like Ukrainians, they have their vibe. Some sort of nationality.

Olena: Do you think, when you learn the language, it might change something?

Eve: No… I might get along with them a bit, but it will never be comfortable for me with them.

Eva shared, that she was hoping and waiting to meet Ukrainian children in the new place, where they were going to move. Not for everyone but for some children, such a phase, where they choose to have fellowship only with co-nationals can be long, and for the current moment seems the only possible alternative for having fellowship with peers in the new country. Such expectations and the chosen strategy are understandable: the fellowship only with co-nationals protects you from discomfort, misunderstanding, or exclusion, provides a safe harbor, and nurtures feelings of acceptance and belonging, which Ukrainian refugee children lack. But in the long run, this strategy, of course, is not effective and does not foster integration, preventing children from inclusion in the host society.

6.2.5. Other coping strategies

Another strategy of helping others might be simultaneously considered as pro-active and as coping during the difficult stage of finding your place in the peer society. Dariya (12 yrs.) shared about her way of helping others as an important part of her life in Norway: "Helping my family… helping new Ukrainian children in school… do good to others". Feeling yourself useful impacts one's self-esteem and self-identity, which children might lose in the circumstances of a drastic change. Darya (12 yrs) discovers her sense of purpose by helping others. She continues, sharing her feelings of responsibility for her family in the initial period when only mother came to Norway with children: "I also strongly felt myself responsible for my mom, as she was the only adult. I felt the responsibility to help her, support her…". This feeling was a sort of burden for Darya, but she realized it through practical help to her mom with house chores and care for her siblings. Helping others is considered a common trait in the concept of relational resilience. Helping others enhances resilience as it is an integral part of good relationships, which, in turn, fosters resilience (Pardali & Ursin, 2023). Often, children feel the need to contribute to the family and significant others, thus they feel more significant themselves, and they feel the capability to influence the situation in a certain way (Pardali & Ursin, 2023, pp. 9-10).

Ukrainian children try to sustain continuity with their lives in Ukraine as one of their coping strategies. They stay within their close family circle, and spend time as they used to before the drastic changes in their life, for example: keeping familiar daily routines, cooking regular

familiar food, watching movies together, doing homework from Ukrainian online schools, going for a walk and just being surrounded by close family members in their every-day lives. All these activities children mentioned in their interviews, when we talked about how they usually spend time with their families here, in Norway. A family's `nest` helps to maintain continuity, which is one of the strategies that foster resilience (Ní Raghallaigh & Gilligan, 2010; Walsh, 2003).

Other ways of coping with the current situation, mentioned by a few children, were strategies involving redirecting their focus inside themselves and toward personal growth. For example, Svetlana (12 yrs.) mentioned, that she is working on herself, she said: "I am proud when I can be independent and not hold onto the past. It is important to support self-esteem and be yourself". Svetlana told me in the interview, that she has changed in many ways after coming to Norway, and this inner work is her coping strategy, that helps her to overcome the insecurity of being in the new situation and new community.

Some children shared that they enjoy trying new activities and sports and spending time outside the home. This strategy is especially popular with boys, who participate in different sports activities or explore nature in the neighborhood, but girls also choose such pastimes. For example, Darya (12 yrs) told me:

> Darya: I love to explore the world!
>
> Olena: Do you do that?
>
> Darya: Yes. There are people, who are very afraid of something new…and for me, if there is nothing new for 2-3 days, then I'm like… oh, my! my life is so boring!
>
> Olena: I got it. You go out in the world, and you search for something new?
>
> Darya: You know, something new…it's really cool!

Darya told me about different sports and leisure activities, that she was engaged in together with her family, friends, and new classmates. It seems, that an active lifestyle, which Darya described with the words: "You need to explore the world, and not be afraid of new things!" served her as a coping strategy to help her overcome (reported earlier in the interview) – missing her home and life in Ukraine. At the same time, such an active lifestyle serves children as a tool for integration into the new peer's community.

Some children try to replace friends in real life with new acquaintances on the Internet, and it works for some. For example, Eva (11 yrs) shared about her new acquaintances on the Internet: "Now I have a lot of friends, but they are `online friends`…and it is not just a friendship, - it is something better! It is like in reality; I cannot explain it…". For Eva, Internet friendship was a good alternative to real-life friends. She could finally find connections with her peers, who talked to her, played the same games with her, and could just enjoy time together. For her, the Internet has become a platform where she has a chance to build relationships with Ukrainian peers and fill the vacuum, after losing relationships with her friends from home in Ukraine.

In the frames of my fieldwork, I wanted to explore the ways, that serve children as anti-stress mechanisms, and to find about activities or things, that bring children immediate relief in a stressful situation, or when one is sad or depressed. A `sentence completion`

task contains an unfinished sentence: "When I feel homesick, I like to _____ to feel better". I chose the word `homesick` because I feel that this term may represent all the negative feelings, that children experience, especially when it is not easy to identify the exact reason for your negative feelings. Children described how they engage themselves in the different anti-stress activities, which could also be used as their coping strategies, bringing situational relief to them. Among others, they named: eating, and resting in quiet, which helps children to unwind and reflect all the new emotions and experiences. Listening to music, not only helps to uplift mood but also can give a child a sense of control and self-expression because one can choose the music and songs. Chatting on the telephone with close people, surfing the Internet, and spending time on social media were often named among anti-stress activities.

Coping strategies that children take up, should not be regarded as anti-agential, or as disruptive to the integration process. They are highly needed and convenient. The emotional distress that refugee children face when displaced from their homeland is not so obvious and cannot be measured, as, for example, their language proficiency. But children were uprooted from everything they knew: Their entire system of communication, culture, and sense of self-identification. When these things are not providing meaning for their lives anymore, many children experience anxiety and stress (Redd Barna, 2023; Osorio, J., 2006 p.148). Coping strategies give them needed necessary respite and means for going on with the more proactive behavior.

Chapter 7: Maintaining relationships with friends and family from Ukraine

This analytical chapter aims to explore the significance of the bonds that Ukrainian children maintain with their family members and friends who remain in Ukraine or those who had to leave the country because of the war. Additionally, it seeks to address the research question about how maintaining relationships with friends and family from Ukraine could be challenging and empowering.

7.1. The challenges of maintaining close relationships with left-behind family members

Family is very important in Ukrainian culture and traditions. Most of the participants in my research lived in a nuclear family before the war, and most of them had siblings in the family. All of them have left close people behind. Despite living far away, close family members remain important for children here in Norway. They provide emotional support and comfort when children feel lonely in a new place. Geographical distance and separation of families posed certain challenges for maintaining close relationships with the family members in Ukraine. Some of the relationships with those who were left behind have changed.

Many Ukrainian children testified the importance of keeping connections with their grandparents, they talk about them and miss them (Engeset, 2023, p.21). The loss of relationships with grandparents feels very painful for many children, because often grandparents lived in the same city and were involved much in raising their grandchildren, and children had close contact with their grandparents. Even in cases, when grandparents lived in different cities or villages, it was a usual practice, when children could visit them during the holidays and spend extended periods with them. That is why Ukrainian children feel strong ties to their grandparents. In fellowship with them, Ukrainian children could fulfill their need for support, acquire a sense of self, and mutually invest in each other through close ties, as enhanced in the concept of social connectedness (Bruhn, 2011). The feelings of missing grandparents were reported with the same frequency, as feelings of missing their fathers, for those, whose fathers had to stay behind in Ukraine. For example, Stepan (9 yrs) shares about his grandparents: "…everything used to be great, we visited each other …and now there is no free time to call them". Stepan's move to Norway and the changes in his lifestyle impacted the usual way of life and established communication patterns with his grandparents. Communication patterns, that used to be familiar and usual, like visiting grandparents at the weekend, using this time for sharing news and feelings, and maintaining close ties with them, must be adjusted now to the new reality. And it takes time and effort from both sides.

Another boy, Viktor (11 yrs), shared with bitterness: "… I lost my time with my grandma and my grandpa…but the telephone helps". He used to have very close relationships with his grandparents and spent a lot of time with them. During his interview with me, Viktor was speculating about things they would do together with his grandfather when he came back

home. Many children shared how wonderfully they used to spend time with their grandparents, visiting them weekly, sometimes daily, or at every holiday. They recalled the tasty food that their grandmothers used to cook for them, or time with grandfathers, making something together, or their plans for future leisure activities that were never fulfilled because of the war. Attempts to keep close bonding relationships with grandparents, even across the border, according to Strang and Quinn (2021), still play an important role for the refugees as an aid in facilitating the integration process successfully.

According to data from the interviews, maintaining relationships with grandparents or close relatives in Ukraine appeared to be challenging. It was especially challenging for boys: To maintain relationships in unnatural conditions, digitally. `Online` relationships can never replace `offline` relationships.

Sometimes, though, it may be challenging. Sergiy (12 yrs) explains, why it is difficult to maintain the same relationships with grandparents: "I used to have very close and warm relationships with my grandparents. But I don't really like to speak on the telephone. Often, I am not at home, I play outside". It did not take a long time for Sergiy to realize that it is not the same: To visit grandparents and do something together, just be together, and now – only talk on the phone. Not all children like to talk on the phone or retell events of their current life, especially when it is so different from the essence of communication they used to have before the war and separation.

The children expressed their feelings about missing family members in Ukraine, but they also mentioned a lack of time to call their grandparents or other relatives. Additionally, they expressed a decrease in motivation and desire to engage themselves in telephone conversations because it is less satisfactory for children than live communication, which they used to have when they visited each other or lived together. Some express, that overall, it is difficult to maintain contact with relatives in Ukraine. The only exclusion could be keeping the close communication with the fathers, who had to be left behind. Luckily, among my participants, only two families had to leave their fathers behind, and later on, at the time when I was working on my analysis, one family was able to join together here, in Norway. Stepan (9yrs) told me how he keeps communication with his father: "I call my dad every day…every day we talk. I miss him so much. I hope he can come". For children, like Stepan, who used to live in nuclear families and had close and loving relationships with their fathers, it is a great loss to suddenly lose fellowship with one of the most meaningful people in their life for an uncertain period. The situation became even more critical when on 12 December 2023, the Norwegian authorities banned Ukrainian refugees with the status of collective protection from visiting Ukraine (UDI, 2023a).

Feelings of missing family members, pets (that had to stay behind in the situations of escape), and familiar things were constantly mentioned by the Ukrainian children, see also Engeset, 2023. Viktor (11 yrs) told me about his pets, which were like family members to him: "… I often call my dad, grandma, and grandpa…but I cannot call my dog and my cat". For Viktor it was a real loss and a serious problem, he even expressed concerns that his father could not take good enough care of his pets.

7.2 The challenges of maintaining close relationships with left-behind friends

Similar experiences were shared by my participants when they were talking about maintaining relationships with friends in Ukraine. The children reported that they almost lost contact with some of their friends, even close ones, for different reasons: Some children did not know the telephone numbers of their friends because they used to keep in touch every day in school or the neighborhood. Some children complained about bad internet connections or lack of time and mood. Stepan (9 yrs) shared about `growing apart` and missing points of contact: "Even if we come back, we won't be seeing each other so often, because we grew apart…". Events that happened in the lives of children, whose families chose to leave the country and resettle in the new place, were stressful and for many unpredictably difficult. Children continually cope with the acculturation stress, and some might be struggling with the integration process and fitting into a new society. Such events change you as a person. That might be a reason why several children admitted to me that their friends, who stayed behind in Ukraine do not understand them now. Eva (11 yrs) is one of these children:

> It used to be the best [thing] in my life – the fellowship with my friends… We used to spend all the time together… I had really many friends. And now I keep in touch with none of them. My friends have changed their attitude towards me…

For Eva, to admit that she has lost the best part of her child's life – the friendships - was very painful, especially when this empty place remains empty. She feels like her Ukrainian friends no longer understand her, and it is difficult for Eva to relate to them.

For some children, a sense of change contributes to mental differences between them and their friends in Ukraine, it results in feelings of misunderstanding and alienation. And now, it seems, that some children may suffer not only from the stress of displacement but also face the challenge of maintaining connections or even losing connections with their friends left behind. For example, Svetlana (12 yrs) admitted that it became difficult to find understanding with her friends from Ukraine: "I don't want to continue our fellowship… I don't feel comfortable". During her interview, Svetlana shared a feeling that Ukrainian friends, who stayed behind, cannot understand her and everything she is going through. According to Svetlana's explanation, they cannot understand that the new country is not a fairy tale or just a cool place to be, but also involves a lot of challenges you must go through.

The situation of Darya (12 yrs) is more fortunate, as she still has a close friend in Ukraine: "I have a friend, but I cannot tell her everything on the phone. It should be face-to-face, and not online". Despite keeping a friendship, Darya admits that relationships are less satisfying now, she expresses concern that they may not remain as close and intimate as they used to be, when she and her friend saw each other every day, shared common events and experiences, and had a strong sense of mutual understanding. This sense of shared experiences allowed them to openly discuss their feelings and impressions with each other and stay their best friends. But now, when they have lost such common ground of the shared experiences, Darya is concerned, that it might influence their close friendship.

Still, some children shared about keeping in touch with their friends on online chats and Internet platforms, even if it was irregular contact. Dmytro (10 yrs) described the following about his friends in Ukraine: "I had three close friends, and we used to see each other every day. Now I make a video call maybe once every two months". He sounded sad and disappointed, but as described above concerning their relatives in Ukraine, the reality has changed for the children who have moved to Norway. They have different schedules for the day. Besides, common meeting places, like schools, neighborhoods, playgrounds, and sports clubs do not exist anymore to support friendship naturally.

Such experiences might place children in a situation of vacuum: When they gradually lose meaningful connections with their friends in Ukraine but have not yet established close relationships in Norway. Overall, challenges in maintaining relationships with family and friends in Ukraine arise because it is natural for Ukrainian children to invest (time and effort) in the relationships, to keep them meaningful and satisfying. Generally, Ukrainian children make acquaintances easily, but then they usually make efforts to keep friendships that they value highly.

7.3. Reflecting on empowerment through maintaining relationships with loved ones

When reflecting on the empowerment gained through maintaining relationships with family and friends in Ukraine, it is important to recognize, that remaining connected with loved ones, including family members and friends from one's homeland, is very important. Ukrainian children report maintaining close relationships with their families here in Norway, together with the more challenging task of maintaining close relationships with family and friends in their homeland. Ager and Strang (2010) explain such importance through Putnam's (2008) formulation of social capital, which promotes the integration process. Bonds with close people play an important role in preserving mental well-being and health and give strength to refugees in their vulnerable positions. The empirical data, that emerged during my research allows me to assert that children value and use close relationships with family and friends from both sides of the border, in Ukraine and Norway, to draw support and necessary help. Social bonds have significant emotional value, but more than that, they contribute resources in three key areas: information and material resources, emotional resources, that boost self-confidence and provide a sense of belonging, and provide the capability to create new resources and build new bridges with the host society (Ager and Strang, 2010, p. 597 - 598). A good example of that is presented in the story of Dariya (12 yrs), who shared about overcoming her fears of initial contact with Norwegian children and, therefore, having successful results in building connections with girls from school. She answered my question about the main source of support, and shared, that she gets it from her aunt in Ukraine: "…my aunt always tells me: You are so wonderful! Is it ever possible not to like you? Everyone will like you, of course…". Such support boosts self-confidence and gives strength to move forward. This way, relatives and friends from Ukraine also create a context in which children exercise their agency (Abebe, 2019). Family and friends might influence children, their self-identity, their actions, and feelings, empowering them (Førde, 2007; Robson et al., 2007). Children turn to close ones, when in need of empowerment. Viktor (11 years old) shared: "When I am sad, I call those I miss here", in this way he can

receive the emotional support, that he needs in his current situation. Pavel (15 years old) said, that when he feels homesick, he imagines, that he is there (at home, in Ukraine), and it helps him to handle his feelings and move on.

It is impossible to underestimate the role of relationships, that Ukrainian children maintain with loved ones, who stayed in Ukraine. Despite difficulties or inconveniences, Ukrainian children continue to find a source of support in these relationships. And this support is mutual. Some children shared with me that they realize the importance of a simple call to grandparents, fathers, or friends, because people, left behind also suffer from separation and parting. The situation of close ones in their homeland is so important for refugees in general, that "they could not begin to think about integration until they knew that their families were safe" (Ager and Strang, 2010, p. 596). When children engage themselves in maintaining relationships with friends and relatives, who miss them in Ukraine, it gives them not only the support they need but also the feeling of self-significance.

Chapter 8: Conclusions

In this chapter, I aim to present the findings of this research and reflect on the research questions that guided my study. In the first chapter of this thesis, I posed questions to explore how Ukrainian children, who were driven here, to Norway, by the war with Russia, navigate building new relationships with their peers and maintaining connections with family and friends both in Norway and back in Ukraine. I am going to present my reflections on how these processes influence children, presenting both challenges and empowering experiences. I will conclude the chapter by offering policy recommendations and suggestions for future research.

Building new relationships and befriending new peers does not happen automatically with time. The process requires effort, and for Ukrainian children, it bears certain challenges, that in the frames of my research were discovered, discussed, and analyzed. I think it is important to define the challenges of the process first because they motivate Ukrainian children to search for and apply different strategies for overcoming them.

8.1 Barriers to building new relationships

8.1.1. The language

The subject of the language barrier is not unique to new immigrants. It has been thoroughly explored and discussed in previous research. For example, Igoa (1998) mentions that language barriers can lead to isolation in school settings. Language barriers might be an obstacle to forming stable social connections with peers (Mirsadeghi, 2013; Ní Raghallaigh & Gilligan, 2010; Ryland, 2013). As mentioned above, the language barrier did not pose a unique problem for Ukrainian children. But the attitude of Ukrainian children to this barrier is, in my opinion, special because they take the task of overcoming it as solely their responsibility. They admit that they need to work hard. Some of my participants take this responsibility seriously, while some hope, that they will acquire the language with time.

Even though, communication is a two-way action, in many cases Ukrainian children take sole responsibility for supporting this process and overcoming the language barrier. Help from their Norwegian peers, for example, talking slower, repeating sentences, or using English, is not always available. According to data from one of the interviews, Norwegian children do not want to stress themselves or make extra efforts, when talking to peers, who don't speak their language. It is easier for them to have fellowship with their co-nationals.

Many children use Internet tools and platforms for translation, and it is their way of overcoming a barrier currently. Some children found a way of mutual understanding through participation in sports and common activities, which do not require excessive use of language.

To many Ukrainian children, overcoming the language barrier seems to be a key factor for building new connections and forming relationships. Language makes it possible to express your identity in encounters with peers and make you a part of the community (Stoeckling, 2013). In line with Ager and Strang (2008), language is also one of the main facilitators of integration, the factor that is so tangible and obvious. Language barrier is not only an

obstacle to better communication but also perceived as painful in certain situations. Some children in my research experienced, what I define as a hidden bullying, where Norwegian children spoke about Ukrainian children, presumably in a negative manner, in the presence of the Ukrainian children, knowing that they would not understand them.

Another unique aspect that drew my attention was how Ukrainian children perceived the language barrier, particularly their adaptation to the dialect specific to the region of Norway where my research was conducted. Children felt acutely the mismatch between the language they learned in a reception school or reception class – Bokmål, and the language spoken by everyone around them, including their peers in school, which was trøndersk. For foreigners, Bokmål and trøndersk dialects bear a considerable difference. Therefore, for some children, who did not have contact with local children, and only attended reception school, for children who were not exposed to the local dialect along the way, it appeared to be a problem, when they started to attend local public schools: they had a language barrier all over again. After almost a year of acquisition of Bokmål, they felt helpless and ignorant, like in the first days upon their arrival to the new country.

Luckily, this problem is also dynamic, and some children acquire the new language faster and easier than others. In my research, children who could speak English or have spent enough time in the country to feel more confident with the language reported readiness to expand their network of friends and befriend Norwegian peers.

8.1.2. Differences in culture and mentality

The children perceived the differences in culture and mentality between themselves and their Norwegian peers in different ways. For some children, these differences pose a gap between two ethnic groups while for others, their Norwegian peers were seen as similar to them. I connect this variance in how Ukrainian children perceive their Norwegian peers to differing levels of maturity and awareness, as well as to distinct underlying needs and expectations concerning friendship. To address this dilemma, I posed a question to myself: which expectations of friendship were fulfilled in the fellowship with Norwegian peers for those who didn't express a sense of differences in culture and mentality?

Children who easily found friends were usually involved in sports and leisure activities together with their Norwegian peers. These activities did not imply the excessive use of the language. Hence, engaging in shared sports and leisure activities could serve as a foundation for forming friendships and satisfy the social connection needs of Ukrainian children. More than that, participation in common activities helped children, both Ukrainian and Norwegian, to get to know each other better, to form a sense of similarity, and to foster mutual sympathy.

8.1.3. Insights into interactions during the initial phase

A notable contrast in the relational dynamics of the initial phase between Norwegian and Ukrainian children of different age groups was reported.

Younger children engage in fluid, open group dynamics characterized by the concept of "we-ness" (Dyblie Nilsen, 2005), where relationships are constantly redefined based on

situational context. Such fluidity allows Ukrainian younger children to seamlessly integrate into Norwegian peer groups, experiencing cultural adaptation without a feeling of exclusion. At the same time, it enables Norwegian peers to accept them without fear of discomfort or social consequences, fostering an inclusive environment where relationship statuses can change effortlessly.

While for older children (in my research I can relate to participants of 11 years and older), there is no instruction, that would help them to successfully join the peer community in Norway. They have to navigate their way in unknown areas, sometimes without help. The communication process presumes two-way efforts. However, the uniqueness of making initial connections with Norwegian peers is revealed in the repeating model, reported to me in many conversations: As a rule, when Ukrainian children first enter a Norwegian school class or other Norwegian peers' community during extracurricular activities, Norwegian children show sincere interest in meeting them. They behave very warm, welcoming, and friendly. Such a kind attitude makes Ukrainian children feel very good and relaxed. But such an attitude lasts only for a short period. When the first enthusiasm or interest fades, Norwegian children retreat to their established companies and `do not notice` newcomers. The language barrier becomes a too difficult obstacle for Norwegian children to overcome, and they naturally choose the easier way, which is retreating to familiar surroundings and companies. Desire to protect yourself from everything, that is "too different", described by Gullestad (2002) in her concept of invisible fences, also plays a role in such dynamic. In their turn, Ukrainian children do not understand the reasons for such behavior and begin to feel themselves as a `new toy` that became uninteresting after a couple of weeks of play. It leads them to feelings of frustration, loss of confidence and trust in the Norwegian peer community.

8.2. Proactive strategies

The research questions I aimed to address through my fieldwork, theoretical inquiry, and analytical work, have directed my focus toward defining the ways and strategies Ukrainian children employ to establish networks and relationships within new peer communities, as well as maintain existing relationships with friends and family in Ukraine.

Participants of the research are children from 9 to 15 years old, and of course, the context in which they find themselves and act, shapes and influences their behavior and strategies. Such context may include family dynamics and the school environment, among others. Factors, such as age, reflected in the level of maturity, dominant interests, activities, and motivation for forming new connections, as well as gender, play significant roles in determining the approaches that Ukrainian children use to start and foster relationships with their peers in Norway.

The first conclusion, that I made analyzing the employment by children of different proactive strategies, is that family relationships contribute significantly to children's resilience, their ability to rebuild their lives after the change, and to act proactively (Montgomery, 2010; Raghallaigh, 2018). Children in my research described the support they consistently receive from their family members. Family is the place they like to return to, as it is the only familiar space in the multitude of changes and new experiences they

encounter. In the family nest, they find help in building their self-esteem and confidence to go out and meet the world: new things and new people.

Another significant factor that consistently emerged in our interviews as beneficial for forming relationships with new Norwegian peers is already having friends from the same nationality. And being together with them when meeting new ones. In many conversations, children mentioned that it is very important to have a safe community before expanding it further. Existing friends serve multiple goals: they not only provide children with emotional support, but some of them can also be guides in new communities, guiding children within unfamiliar rules and norms of peer society. They share experience and knowledge, and they share their friends, helping new children meet more people. For many children, similar experiences and backgrounds serve as a social glue, and Ukrainian children quickly find and establish friendships with their co-nationals. Some children reported a lucky chance to meet in school other Russian-speaking children, who have spent many years in Norway and could help them to navigate life in the Norwegian peer community. Other Ukrainian children told me about helping other Ukrainians, who came to Norway several months later, and required help and guidance from those, who have longer experience in the new community.

When Ukrainian families are settled far from each other, children do not have an opportunity to meet other Ukrainians in their class, and sometimes in the whole school. In some cases, for many months children are doomed to loneliness. It is not easy to find a place in the community of Norwegian peers. Such a situation is not unique for the Ukrainian kids. Other researchers with different ethnic groups of children, coming to Norway, describe similar experiences (Mirsadeghi, 2013; Ryland, 2013; Wang, 2022). If there are no co-nationals around, the child feels isolated and lonely. The relatively short period of stay of Ukrainian children in Norway does not allow me to conclude how and how successfully such situations will be resolved. Sometimes children find co-national friends in extracurricular activities or on the Internet.

In the frames of fieldwork, children shared many ways, in which they attempted to befriend or, at least, connect with their Norwegian peers. For some children, the desire to establish social connections and not to be alone and isolated is a strong motivator for making efforts and showing initiative in finding friends. Their efforts include participation in different activities with their Norwegian peers, where they could connect with them. Often, such activities do not imply excessive use of language, but are more functional: different sports or hobbies, dance classes, hikes, or other outdoor activities of leisure time. Inner work and work on self-improvement were reported by many children. In their interviews, children shared, that they do inner work to overcome feelings of uncertainty and discomfort, and in many situations, they have to process the feelings of disappointment and fear and overcome them to move forward. Family and friends are a great source of help and support for such inner work. Ukrainian children observe their Norwegian peers in everyday life, trying to understand the rules and norms of the peer community and to adopt communication patterns, used by their peers. A very popular among Ukrainian children strategy of acquaintanceship – is approaching new peers alongside their friends: other Ukrainian or Norwegian children. Also, Ukrainian children might present their friends (Ukrainians and Norwegians) to the newcomers Ukrainian children, expanding their communities of friends.

8.3. Coping and adaptive strategies

Along with proactive actions that witness children's resilience and agency, that emerge in their current circumstances, from time to time children retreat to different coping strategies. Coping (or adaptive) strategies effectively complement children's everyday efforts to adapt to their new reality. The novelty of life in the new country is not the only challenge children have, because they are constantly influenced by the ongoing war situation in their homeland, where they have left behind their family members and friends. Escape from the country-in-war is not the same as the planned and expected move to a new country with the family. It is a stressful and painful uprooting, unexpected and unprepared. The integrational process is vague, children's lives are full of uncertainty about their future, fear for their loved ones, and natural children's insecurity in the face of new and unknown reality. Things, that they would easily navigate and manage in their homeland, being together and moving along with their peers, in Norway seem challenging. As described above, not only language is a barrier to communication and navigating your ways, but in equal measure psychological barriers, differences in culture and mentality complicate navigating everyday life for children. That is why children find a safe place and place for emotional restoration, using coping strategies along with proactive actions. Among the findings of my research, I want to describe peculiarities of coping strategies, used by Ukrainian children.

One of the strategies is self-imposed isolation, which is not unique to Ukrainian children. This strategy was described by researchers with refugees in the new countries, including refugee children (Ní Raghallaigh & Gilligan, 2010; Osorio, 2006; Valenta, 2008). Some Ukrainian children resort to this strategy to avoid the discomfort of new acquaintances and the necessity to develop new connections, having different barriers to overcome. Other children resort to such strategy as a forced choice, as a defensive reaction, because they were not successful in finding a place in the Norwegian peer community. They use this strategy at least situationally, in certain communities, or in certain circumstances. Osorio (2006) described such a behavioral strategy for releasing the tension of negative emotions of disappointment or helplessness.

Another sad finding is some children's choice of kinship and conscious fellowship only with co-nationals. I regard this strategy as a variation of self-imposed isolation. Several stories shared during interviews, recount negative experiences in befriending Norwegian peers, which led Ukrainian children to make choices in favor of co-nationals only. If it is possible, and Ukrainians had co-nationals in their class or school, they could resort to fellowship with them only, consciously isolating themselves from the fellowship or even opportunities for fellowship with Norwegian peers. Such a strategy is not efficient in the long term, and it does not foster an integration process but is used by some Ukrainian children as a reaction to failure in making successful contacts with their Norwegian peers.

Along with such self-imposed isolation and choosing kinship only for fellowship, children described alternative approach to overcome negative feelings or the absence of fellowship with Norwegian peers: they change the focus of their interest in fellowship with them and direct it to other things, like, for example, nature, music, books, new hobbies, or directing focus inside themselves, working on personal growth: meditating, reading, making crafts, learning.

Absence of fellowship with peers (for different reasons): both with Ukrainian and Norwegian, encourages children to seek other opportunities for communication. In such cases, the Internet and friends online and from social media were found to be a good alternative to friends in offline life.

One of the discovered coping strategies is spending time in a family circle. This strategy is highly beneficial, and all the participants of my research noted that. Ukrainian children shared, first of all, emotional support and a sense of security in the family as the only familiar environment during a first phase in Norway. Secondly, children value family as a place where they can use their native language and be immersed in the familiar culture and social expectations. Providing a community that speaks native language, family, in some cases, became the only place, where children could share their experiences, feelings, and emotions freely, which can help alleviate stress and foster resilience (Ní Raghallaigh & Gilligan, 2010). Additionally, common activities, described by many children, help to strengthen familial relationships and deepen bonds among family members. This way family becomes a reliable rear and a place of refuge, providing support and reassuring children, that they are not alone in facing the challenges of resettlement.

During the interview with Darya (12 yrs), another coping strategy emerged, shedding light on the significance of helping others. The importance of helping others is often emphasized in the frames of the concept of resilience (Johansen & Studsrød, 2019; Pardali & Ursin, 2023). Helping others contributes to good relationships, and thus fosters resilience. When children help their family, like Darya described in her story, they feel good about themselves, and their confidence grows, allowing for agency to emerge in various situations, even beyond the family environment.

I also explored what activities children use as anti-stress activities for situational stress management or long-term stress relief. Among others, children named enjoying food that reminds them of their homeland, or just eating tasty junk food as a way of stress relief, resting in quiet, that helps to `recharge batteries` in emotional or sensory overwhelming of every day sometimes; listening to music helps to uplift or create the right mood, find peace or serve as a form of self-expression. Chatting on the telephone or online video chats with loved ones, family members and friends enhances the sense of belonging, that refugee children lack. Surfing the Internet and social media, children get distracted greatly, and it is one of the most widely reported children's anti-stress activities.

8.4. Relationships with close relatives and friends in Ukraine

For many Ukrainian children, grandparents are an integral and familiar part of their lives. Culturally, relationships with them are closely intertwined in the child's life context. It was not surprising to discover how strongly children lack their grandparents here, in Norway. Reporting missing grandparents is noted in different reports from different countries about Ukrainian children on the flee (Camilla Engeset, 2023; Preissová-Krejčí & Macková, 2023; Toros et al., 2024). It was emotional when children shared stories about their grandparents. Their simple, sometimes funny stories, reflect their love and their lack of close relationships, and, most importantly, - time spent together with their grandparents. Stepan (9 yrs) shared

with notes of despair in his voice: "Everything used to be great, we visited each other… and now there is no free time to call them". Similar feelings I heard in the words of Viktor (11 yrs): "I lost my time with my grandma and my grandpa". Children mentioned the lack of free time and the different schedules of their new life that influenced their communication with grandparents. Also, many children share that online communication is not as satisfactory as offline communication: the format has changed. The new format assumes talking and having conversations. Not all children love to recite stories and retell their experiences and events. The mutual pleasure from fellowship may be lost with such a format. Special relationships, that were nurtured over the years, cannot be replaced: exchange is not equal. A similar painful discovery could be made about the children's fellowship with fathers, who had to stay behind. Even regular online fellowship cannot replace everyday offline fellowship and familiar family dynamics.

The same holds true for the relationships with friends, whether they remained in Ukraine or fled to other countries. My research indicates that these relationships have become more challenging, often undergoing significant changes in quality. Children, experiencing different life situations, find it difficult to fully understand each other. The absence of common experiences deprives them of feelings they could share together. Life experience could drastically change the personality of children, and former friends might find it difficult to find points of contact. One of the participants reported "growing apart" with his friends. The loss or change in the quality of friendship in Ukraine motivated children to seek new relationships, make new connections, and build new friendships. Participants of my research told me about new Norwegian friends, co-nationals, that they have met in Norway, or new friends online. With time, many children naturally find new acquaintances and build new friendships, realizing their need for bonding connections (Part, 2019; Strang & Ager, 2010). Naturally, children seek or create relationships, that will sustain their well-being, and provide emotional support and fun in their life. A social network of family and friends, their supportive presence fosters children's agency in their current situations and helps to expand their net of relationships further. In their turn, Ukrainian children in Norway might provide the necessary support to their friends and family in Ukraine, Norway or other countries, where their loved ones need them. Such mutual support empowers children, making them feel their significance and helping them to overcome challenges and become stronger, and hopefully, become better people: compassionate, kind, understanding, and helpful.

8.5 Policy and Research Recommendation

All my adult life I have been working with children and teenagers. Their feelings and needs have always been important to me. Conducting research with Ukrainian children, I pursued not only academic interests but also followed my heart. Listening to children's voices, I reflected on possible ways to help children overcome barriers to successful integration and create networks and friendships in a new country, with new peers. Since the situation of Ukrainian children is not unique from other ethnic groups of kids, coming as migrants or refugees to Norway, I hope that my recommendations will be useful for different ethnic groups.

The need for fellowship and social connections is the biggest for children in the new community. Overcoming the barriers to successful communication seems to be the main

task, where the encouraged help of local children and adults in schools, humanitarian organizations, and the help of policymakers could be decisive.

Without the possibility to communicate, subjective perception of differences in culture and mentality creates a growing gap, which becomes even more challenging to overcome over time. The intentional creation of opportunities for communication will address this problem. Children need to get to know each other better, in a safe environment, through mutual efforts and investment into communication. Such intentionally and strategically planned activities could include language café (språk-kafe), peer help with schoolwork, and leisure activities with Norwegian peers who are interested in providing additional assistance and support to their Ukrainian peers. Maybe some of the Norwegian children would be glad to become friendly guides in the cultural code and unwritten rules of the peer society to the newcomers. Intercultural events might help to get to know and respect the cultures of different ethnicities better.

I would recommend not to isolate Ukrainians in separate reception schools. Or, if they are isolated, it is critically important to create special dialect courses and provide effective language practice. It would help to organize a dialect `crash course` for some time, to help children in different regions of Norway acquire the local dialect along with the official language Bokmål. Learning the difference in pronunciation of familiar words, stable expressions and the local slang of peers might be very helpful for understanding them. I would argue, that learning and practicing local dialect has the same importance as learning the official language.

Along with the intentional creation of opportunities for communication, it is important, if possible, to place new refugee children in Norwegian schools together with their co-nationals: This way they will be able to integrate faster into local peer society, but at the same time they will have an alternative for fellowship and will not feel isolated or lonely. The research findings proved, that it is easier to befriend new Norwegian peers with the support of co-nationals.

In terms of further research recommendations, along with exploring the challenges within the integration process, I think it is important to study the successful experiences of immigrant children and the factors and strategies that helped them overcome difficulties. Research should be directed toward finding practical solutions to effectively utilize the potential capabilities of the reception system. It is important to explore solutions for the education system to adjust its approaches to help children integrate into their peer communities as quickly as possible.

I am confident that many strategies are already working successfully, which is why it is important to study and compile existing positive experiences. Strategies for younger children and youth might be very different, so age and maturity in addition to gender could be considered for future research.

Moreover, beyond just hearing the voices of refugee children, it is imperative to also acknowledge the perspectives and experiences of Norwegian children amidst the arrival of newcomers with diverse ethnicities and native languages. The insights gained from Norwegian children navigating these situations could offer valuable perspectives for addressing the challenges faced by newcomers, ultimately benefiting both groups.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Assessment of processing of personal data by SIKT

Appendix B: Informational letter and consent for younger children

Appendix C: Informational letter and consent for older children

Appendix D: : Informational letter and consent for parents

Appendix D: Tool "Unfinished sentences"

Appendix F: Interview guides

Appendix A:Assessment of processing of personal data by SIKT

07.07.2023
Reference number
345832

Assessment type
Standard

Date
07.07.2023

Title
Research for Master Thesis "Challenges and empowerment in building new and maintaining the existing social relationships in the life of Ukrainian refugee children in Norway"

Institution responsible for the project
Norges teknisk-naturvitenskapelige universitet / Fakultet for samfunns- og utdanningsvitenskap (SU) / Institutt for pedagogikk og livslang læring

Project leader
Marit Ursin

Student
Olena Hrabchenko

Project period
19.06.2023 - 15.05.2024

Categories of personal data

- General
- Special

Legal basis

- Consent (General Data Protection Regulation art. 6 nr. 1 a)
- Explicit consent (General Data Protection Regulation art. 9 nr. 2 a)

The processing of personal data is lawful, so long as it is carried out as stated in the notification form. The legal basis is valid until 15.05.2024.

Comment

ABOUT OUR ASSESSMENT

Data Protection Services has an agreement with the institution where you are a student or a researcher. As part of this agreement, we provide guidance so that the processing of personal data in your project is lawful and complies with data protection legislation. We have now assessed that you have legal basis to process the personal data.

TYPE OF DATA

The project will process special categories of personal data about health.

LEGAL BASIS

The data subjects give their consent to the processing of their personal data. The legal basis for the processing is art. 6.1 a) of the GDPR. The data subjects give their explicit consent to the processing of special categories of personal data. Thus, the conditions in art. 9.2 a) are met and the prohibition against processing special categories of personal data does not apply.

PARENTAL CONSENT

The project will gain consent from the parent for the processing of personal data about the children under the age of 16.

CHILDREN CONSENT THEMSELVES

The project will gain consent from minors from the age of 16 to process their personal data. Our assessment is that children from the age of 16 may consent to the processing of special categories of personal data and the project facilitates for consent in compliance the necessary requirements under art. 4 (11) and 7, in that it will be a freely given, specific, informed, and unambiguous statement or action, which will be documented and can be withdrawn.

LEGAL BASIS - third persons

During the data collection, some general categories of personal data about may appear about family members and friends. The planned processing of personal data is necessary to perform a task carried out in the public interest, as referred to in Article 6(1)(e) of the GDPR. According to Article 6(3)(b), the basis for such processing shall be further determined by national law. Section 8 of the Norwegian Personal Data Act confirms that the processing of personal data for archival, research, or statistical purposes is in the public interest and can be based on Article 6(1)(e). The project takes necessary measures to safeguard the rights and freedoms of the data subjects, as stated in Article 89(1).

In our assessment, we have emphasized that the purpose of the project has social value, as it aims to analyze challenges and empowerment in building and maintaining social relationships for refugee children, the data will only be used for the purpose described in the project, only general categories will be collected and the amount of data is small, only

project members will have access to the data, personal data will be removed during transcription and the duration of processing is short.

So long as data subjects can be identified in the collected data they will have the following rights: access (art. 15), rectification (art. 16), erasure (art. 17), restriction of processing (art. 18) and protest (art. 21). The data subjects will not be provided with individual information since it would prove disproportionately difficult to inform them, cf. General Data Protection Regulation Art. 14 (5) b.

The personal data is processed for research purposes, and the data controller will take appropriate measures to safeguard the rights and freedoms of the data subjects. In our assessment we have emphasized that the researcher does not have contact details, the processing of data about third persons is of low risk, and the duration of processing such personal data is short.

ASSESSMENT WHERE DPIA IS NOT REQUIRED

The project will process personal data that is sensitive (special categories of personal data about health) about vulnerable individuals. In most cases this would require a more comprehensive assessment (DPIA). Nevertheless, we assess that the data protection risk is not high, and therefore will not need a DPIA.

This is based on an overall assessment where the following elements are emphasized: All participating data subjects will be provided with information and will give their consent (parents consent on behalf of their children under 16), the project ensures that participation is voluntary, the amount of personal data processed is limited and not highly sensitive, few people have access to the data and the duration of processing is short.

DATA PROCESSOR

We presuppose that the processing meets the requirements of data processors under the General Data Protection Regulation, cf. Art. 28 and Art.

FOLLOW YOUR INSTITUTION'S GUIDELINES

You must store, send and secure the collected data in accordance with your institution's guidelines. This means that you must use data processors (and the like) that your institution has an agreement with (i.e. cloud storage, online survey, and video conferencing providers).

Our assessment presupposes that the project will meet the requirements of accuracy (art. 5.1 d), integrity and confidentiality (art. 5.1 f) and security (art. 32) when processing personal data.

NOTIFY CHANGES

If you intend to make changes to the processing of personal data in this project, it may be necessary to notify us. This is done by updating the information registered in the Notification Form.

FOLLOW-UP OF THE PROJECT

We will follow up the progress of the project at the planned end date in order to determine whether the processing of personal data has been concluded.

Appendix B: Informational letter and consent for younger children

UKRAINIAN CHILDREN IN NORWAY

1. I AM DOING MY SCHOOL PROJECT AND WANT TO INVOLVE YOU.

2. I AM ASKING OTHER CHILDREN TO HELP ME OUT TOO.

3. I WANT TO KNOW

- IF YOU ARE HAPPY TO HELP OUT WITH MY SCHOOL WORK;

- IF YOU CAN UNDERSTAND WHAT I AM ASKING YOU.

I will ask you to draw your friends and family from Ukraine and from Norway. And then we can talk about them.

Also, I will ask you to take some photos of the places, where you meet your friends in Norway, and we will also talk about your photos.

I really want to know what you think about your life in Norway and your friends.

**There are no right or wrong answers!**

4. WHEN I DO MY SCHOOL PAPER, I WANT TO INCLUDE THE THINGS WE HAVE TALKED ABOUT.

5. I WILL HAVE LOTS OF ANSWERS FROM YOU AND OTHER CHILDREN WHO WERE HAPPY TO JOIN MY SCHOOL PROJECT.

6. I WILL USE MY MOBILE TO RECORD OUR CONVERSATIONS SO THAT I DON'T FORGET THE THINGS YOU TELL ME.

7. YOU CAN CHANGE YOUR MIND ABOUT JOINING IN WITH THE RESEARCH AT ANYTIME.

8. WHEN I DO THE PAPERWORK, I WILL MAKE SURE YOUR NAME AND OTHER PRIVATE THINGS YOU TELL ME, IS NOT INCLUDED. NOBODY WILL KNOW WHAT YOU HAVE SAID APART FROM ME AND YOU.

9. PLEASE TELL ME IF YOU WANT TO SEE, CHANGE OR DELETE THE ANSWERS YOU GAVE AFTER WE HAVE FINISHED CHATTING ABOUT YOUR DRAWINGS AND PHOTOS.

10. WHEN I HAVE FINISHED WITH MY PAPER, I WILL DELETE ALL THE RECORDINGS I HAVE ON MY MOBILE.

11. AFTER HEARING THIS, ARE YOU HAPPY TO TAKE PART IN MY PROJECT?
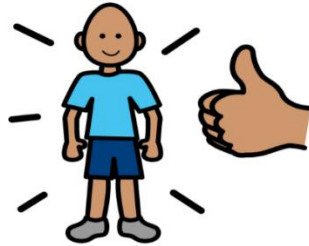
12. IF YOU WANT TO ASK ME ANYTHING ABOUT THE PROJECT, YOU CAN CONTACT ME DIRECTLY AT TEL. 46949723 OR SPEAK TO ME NEXT TIME YOU SEE ME.

13. BEFORE WE START THE PROJECT, YOUR PARENTS SHOULD ALSO AGREE TO THAT. SO I PREPARED A LETTER FOR THEM TOO. THEY HAVE TO READ AND SIGN, IF THEY ALLOW YOU PARTICIPATE.
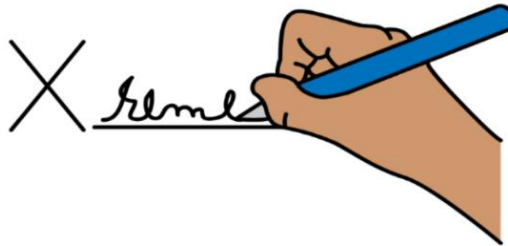
14. IF YOU ARE HAPPY TO PARTICIPATE IN MY SCHOOL PROJECT, COULD YOU SIGN THIS PAPER PLEASE?

PRINT PARTICIPANT'S NAME _____

SIGNATURE OF PARTICIPANT _____

SIGNATURE OF RESEARCHER _____

DATE _____

Appendix C: Informational letter and consent for older children

Are you interested in taking part in the research project

"Ukrainian children in Norwegian society"?

Hi! My name is Olena Hrabchenko. I came to Norway from Ukraine after the Russian invasion and became a Master's Student at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology in the program of Childhood Studies.

I want to invite you to participate in my research project about Ukrainian children and their experience of new life in Norway. I am interested in how children find new friends and build social relationships in Norway, is it difficult or not? But also I want to find out, how children maintain connections with friends and family, who are not with them now.

Who is responsible for the research project?
The university in Trondheim, also called the Norwegian University of Science and Technology

Why are you being asked to participate?
I invite Ukrainian children, ages 7 to 18, who came to Norway after the beginning of the war.

What does participation involve for you?
If you agree to participate – we will meet 2 times for some activities (drawing, making photos and interview). For older children, we will have some fun group activities, where you can share and discuss your experience of life in Norway. In the interview, I will ask you about your life in Norway: what is difficult in your life here and what do you enjoy? I will ask about your old and new friends and everything else, that you will be willing to share. I will record our interview, but everything you will share with me will be confidential and anonymous. This means that I will change your name in the thesis. I will keep the information you give me safely secured, on the safe server, or locked away. All the information will be only used for the writing of my Master's thesis.

Participation is voluntary
Participation is voluntary. If you are under 15, you also need the consent of one of your parents to participate in research and also sign consent for yourself. If you agreed to participate – you can still withdraw your consent at any time and stop participating. You don't have to explain why you have changed your mind. I will respect your decision. There will be no consequences and all the information about you will be deleted from research materials.

Your personal privacy – how we will store and use your personal data
Only I will have access to your data. I will only use your personal data for writing my Master's Thesis.

What will happen to your personal data at the end of the research project?
This project will end on the 15ᵗʰ May 2024. After the end, all the data, digital and non-digital materials, and recordings will be deleted and destroyed.

Your rights
So long as you can be identified in the collected data, you have the right to:
- access the personal data that is being processed about you
- request that your personal data is deleted
- request that incorrect personal data about you is corrected/rectified
- receive a copy of your personal data (data portability), and
- send a complaint to the Data Protection Officer or The Norwegian Data Protection Authority regarding the processing of your personal data.

What gives us the right to process your personal data?
I will process your personal data based on your consent and consent of your parent if you are under 15.
Based on an agreement with NTNU, The Data Protection Services of Sikt – Norwegian Agency for Shared Services in Education and Research has assessed that the processing of personal data in this project meets requirements in data protection legislation.

Where can I find out more?

You can ask me any questions any time.

If you have questions about the project or want to exercise your rights, contact:
- Olena Hrabchenko (researcher), phone: 46949723
- Marit Ursin (supervisor), Department of Education and Lifelong Learning, NTNU, marit.ursin@ntnu.no
- Our Data Protection Officer: Thomas Helgesen, thomas.helgesen@ntnu.no

If you have questions about how data protection has been assessed in this project by Sikt,

contact:

- email: (personverntjenester@sikt.no) or by telephone: +47 73 98 40 40.

Yours sincerely,

Project Leader   Student
(Researcher/supervisor)

Consent form

I have received and understood information about the project "Ukrainian Children in Norwegian Society" and have been given the opportunity to ask questions. I give consent to:

- ☐ participate in drawing (for younger children) and making diagrams (for older children),
- ☐ participate in the task of making photos on the given topic (for younger children),
- ☐ participate in the task of sentence completion,
- ☐ participate in an interview,
- ☐ participate in group activities and discussions (for older children).

I give consent for the personal data of my child to be processed until the end of the project.

(Signed by participant, date)

Appendix D: : Informational letter and consent for parents

Are you interested in taking part in the research project "Adaptation of Ukrainian children in Norwegian society"?

Purpose of the project

You are invited to participate in a research project where the main purpose is to learn how Ukrainian children in Norway build new relationships, new friendships and maintain existing relationships with friends or relatives in Ukraine. During the research, I want to find out in what ways these relationships support children. What are the challenges in building new relationships for children?

My name is Olena Hrabchenko, and I am a Master's student at the NTNU (Norwegian University of Science and Technology) with the study program "Childhood Studies". I came to Norway from Ukraine after the Russian invasion and with my research project, I want to give a voice to Ukrainian children and give them an opportunity to share their personal experience of new life in Norway.

I'm going to look for answers to the following questions:
- In what ways do children maintain existing connections with family, friends, etc.? What is the role of them?

- Who are the new people (peers and adults) in children's current life and how do children build relationships with them?

This research will be conducted with the purpose of writing a Master's Thesis in the NTNU study program "Childhood Studies". All the collected personal data will be anonymous and confidential and will be used only for the purpose of writing the Master Thesis. All the data will be deleted after the Master Thesis submission date on the 15-th of May 2024.

Which institution is responsible for the research project?
NTNU is responsible for the project.

Why are you being asked to participate?
I invite for participation Ukrainian children of age 7-18, who are in Norway with the status of
Collective Protection.

What does participation involve for your children?

If children will choose to take part in the project, they will participate in different project
activities, such as drawing (for younger children) and making diagrams (for older children),
photo-voice (making photos on the given topic), and writing methods (sentence completion),
followed by individual interviews with children. Approximate duration: 1 or 2 individual
meetings, 1 – 1,5 hours each (for younger children).

Also a group work for older children, where in a friendly atmosphere, they will be able to share
and discuss their experiences of new life in Norway. Duration of participation: 1 or 2 meetings,
1,5-2 hours each.

You may on request see the guide for the interview and guidelines for group activities in
advance.

I will electronically record interviews and make notes during group activities. All the materials
will be anonymized and safely kept on the protected website during the period of conducting
the project and deleted after completion of the project on May, 15-th 2024.

Participation is voluntary

Participation in the project is voluntary. You or your children can withdraw the consent at any
time without giving a reason. All information about your children will then be made
anonymous.

Your personal privacy – how we will store and use your personal data

I will only use personal data of your children for the purpose(s) specified here and I will process
this personal data in accordance with data protection legislation (the GDPR).
Only I will have access to the personal data. The only personal data gathered – will be the name
and age of a child. I will take all the needed measures to secure data by replacing real names

and contact details with a code and keeping all the data on the safe research server. Non-digital materials will be locked.

What will happen to your personal data at the end of the research project?
The planned end date of the project is the 15th of May, 2024. All digital and non-digital materials will be deleted or destroyed at the end of the project.

Your rights

So long as you see the possibility to identify your child in the collected data, you have the right to:

- access the personal data that is being processed about your child;
- request that the personal data of your child be deleted;
- request that incorrect personal data about your child be corrected/rectified;
- receive a copy of the personal data of your child (data portability);
- send a complaint to the Norwegian Data Protection Authority regarding the processing of personal data of your child.

What gives us the right to process the personal data of your child?
We will process the personal data of your child based on both: your and your child's consent.

Based on an agreement with NTNU, The Data Protection Services of Sikt – Norwegian Agency for Shared Services in Education and Research has assessed that the processing of personal data in this project meets requirements in data protection legislation.

Where can I find out more?
If you have questions about the project or want to exercise your rights, contact:

- Olena Hrabchenko (researcher), phone: 46949723
- Marit Ursin (supervisor), Department of Education and Lifelong Learning, NTNU, marit.ursin@ntnu.no
- Our Data Protection Officer: Thomas Helgesen, thomas.helgesen@ntnu.no

If you have questions about how data protection has been assessed in this project by Sikt, contact:

- email: (personverntjenester@sikt.no) or by telephone: +47 73 98 40 40.

Yours sincerely,

Project Leader   Student
(Researcher/supervisor)

Consent form

I have received and understood information about the project "Adaptation of Ukrainian Children in Norwegian Society" and have been given the opportunity to ask questions. I give consent that my child can:

- ☐ participate in drawing (for younger children) and making diagrams (for older children),
- ☐ participate in the task of making photos on the given topic (for younger children),
- ☐ participate in the task of sentence completion,
- ☐ participate in an interview,
- ☐ participate in group activities and discussions (for older children).

I give consent for the personal data of my child to be processed until the end of the project.

(Signed by participant, date)

Appendix E: Tool "Unfinished sentences"

Sentence completion for children 7-12 years old

1. When I first moved to Norway I felt _____

2. Leaving Ukraine and moving to Norway was difficult, because

   _____

3. One thing, that is difficult to adjust in Norway is _____

4. The best part about living in Norway is _____

5. The biggest challenge that I have now is _____

6. I have learned a lot about _____ since moving to Norway

7. I feel proud of myself when I _____

8. When I feel homesick, I like to _____ to feel better

9. Norway has very weird things, for example _____

10. My favorite food in Norway is _____

11. My favorite thing to do in Norway is _____

12. If I could show my old friends one thing about Norway, it would be _____

13. One new thing that I have learned in Norway is _____

14. One way I keep in touch with my friends or relatives in Ukraine is _____

15. Making new friends in Norway is hard\easy, because _____

16. I feel happy when _____

17. My dream is _____

18. If I could be together right now with any person, it would be _____

Sentence completion for children 12 -16 years old

1. When I first moved to Norway I felt _____
2. Leaving Ukraine and moving to Norway was difficult, because

   _____

3. One thing, that is difficult to adjust in Norway is _____
4. The best part about living in Norway is _____
5. The biggest challenge that I have now is _____
6. I have learned a lot about _____ since moving to Norway
7. I feel proud of myself when I _____
8. When I feel homesick, I like to _____ to feel better
9. Norway has very weird things, for example _____
10. My favorite food in Norway is _____
11. My favorite thing to do in Norway is _____
12. If I could show my old friends one thing about Norway, it would be _____
13. One new thing that I have learned in Norway is _____
14. One way I keep in touch with my friends or relatives in Ukraine is _____
15. Among new people I feel _____
16. Making new friends in Norway is hard\easy, because _____
17. _____helps me to build new relationship
18. I feel happy when _____
19. My dream is _____
20. If I could be together right now with any person, it would be _____

Appendix F: Interview guides

The semi-structured interview will follow the drawing activity.

Guidelines for the drawing activity:

On the upper half of the page, draw people who are important to you, in Norway. On the bottom part of the page, draw people who are important to you but who are not in Norway.

1. Can you tell me when did you come to Norway and how did you feel?

2. Who do you live with now?

3. Tell me about your picture, please. Who are the people, that you have contact (communication) now, in Norway? (I can ask clarifying questions about the nature of relationships and communication)

4. How are the adults you have got to know in Norway? What makes you think so?

5. How are the children you have got to know in Norway? What makes you think so?

6. Who do you like the most to spend time with? Can you tell me – why is that?

7. Have you made any friends since you came to Norway? Could you tell me how did it happen and about them a little? Do you have any Norwegian friends?

8. Did anyone help you to make new friends here? (Your parents, teachers or other children?)

9. Can you tell me about the people on the bottom part of your picture?
   (I can ask clarifying questions about the nature of relationships and communication)

10. How have your relationships changed after you moved to Norway? What do you think about this change? How does it make you feel?

11. What is the best thing about your fellowship with… (we can talk about several people in the picture)?

12. Is it difficult or easy to keep in touch with the people who are not here, with you? How do you do it?

Semi-structured interview, **following the task of photo-voice**. **(7-12 years old**)

Guidelines for photo-voice would be to take pictures of the places where you have met or possibly can meet new people and get acquainted with them.
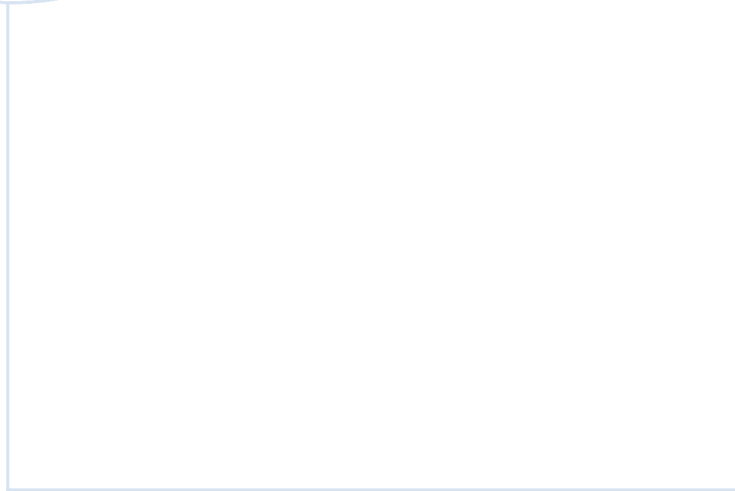
1. Did you meet a lot of new people in Norway? How and where?

2. What do you think: new acquaintances – is it a good thing or not? Could you, please, explain your opinion?

3. Do you want to show me your pictures and explain – why did you chose these places in the photos? (I can ask clarifying questions about the events or situations, that lead to meeting new people and about the nature of communication, that child has with new acquaintances)

4. How is it for you to meet new people? (Clarifying questions could be: What do you feel about it? Does it make your life better or more difficult? Can you tell me more about it? Can you explain?)

5. Do you think it is difficult to find friends in the new place? What could be difficult (for you or for other children)?

6. Is it different from making new friends in Ukraine? Why do you think so? What's different?

7. What helps you to feel better or more confident, when you meet a new person?

8. What would you wish to have, that you don't have now, which can help in the situation with new people?

9. Can you imagine and describe an ideal situation for meeting new people?

10. What advice would you give your best friend if s/he appears in your situation, being new in a foreign country?

11. Did you try to act like this yourself? What was the result?

Guidelines for group discussion. **(12-16 years old**)

Discussion guidelines:

Before the discussion, children will be asked to write on papers of different sizes their "challenges" or "success stories" about building new relationships in Norway and finding friends.

1. Where do you want to start to open your "balls": start with small or big problems and challenges or "success stories"?

2. Do you think we can come to an agreement: which problem is "the biggest" and which problem is "the easiest"? Maybe not? Is it common for all or is it individual? Is there anyone who does not find it challenging? How so? Could we learn anything from this?

3. How is it for you: to meet new people? (Clarifying questions could be: What do you feel about it? Does it make your life better or more difficult? Can you tell me more about it? Can you explain?)

4. Do you think that building new connections is different from similar situations with new people in Ukraine? Could you please explain your answer? (In what ways it is similar\different?)

5. How would you like it to change? Any ideas? (We can choose a situation or a problem)

6. What could you do for that change to happen?

7. In your opinion: what other people should do from their side?

8. What would you advise your best friends in the similar situation as you are now?