

## Leverhulme Doctoral Scholarships Programme for Interdisciplinary Resilience Studies (PIRS) University of Southampton

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**RECRUITMENT CYCLE for studentships starting: October 2025 (Cohort 2)**

### **SUPERVISORY TEAM**

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<b>Email:</b>	

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### **STUDENTSHIP PROJECT TITLE**

**Understanding Resilience among Ukrainian Displaced Persons**

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### **OVERVIEW**

This project investigates how Ukrainian refugees and internally displaced persons navigate migration trajectories and maintain resilience in the face of adversity. Using quantitative and qualitative methods, the project will provide insights into how Ukrainians are coping with the fall-out of Russia's invasion [demography + psychology]

### **SUMMARY**

Russia's invasion of Ukraine led to the largest forced displacement crisis in Europe since World War II; within the first few months of war, nearly 6 million people fled Ukraine and 5.3 million were internally displaced. Although millions have returned home, the war continues, with daily bombings, evacuations, and casualties.

Nonetheless, relatively few studies have explored the impact of war on the Ukrainian population. This mixed-methods project proposes using demographic techniques, advanced quantitative or qualitative methods, and psychological approaches to examine how war affects individuals and the overall population.

Candidates can examine this topic through a variety of perspectives and approaches, with the aim of understanding what works best to create a resilient society. Analysing surveys that interviewed Ukrainian refugees and internally displaced migrants since Russia's invasion, the candidate could use statistical methods to examine factors such as psychological well-being, witnessing violence, and strategies for maintaining resilience. The candidate could conduct in-depth interviews with refugees or individuals still in Ukraine to better understand the impact of the war and successful coping mechanisms. Research could also target specific groups, such as internally displaced persons, the elderly, or veterans. Taken as a whole, the research will allow the student to examine how displaced populations navigate crisis and adapt to new conditions.

Supervisors have links with Ukrainian Demographic and Economic institutes and research agencies, as well as the Action on Armed Violence and other NGOs. Findings will be communicated through networks in Ukraine and to UK policy makers who work on refugee issues.

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## **PROJECT CONCEPT**

This proposal aims to examine factors that promote resilience among Ukrainians, who have either remained within Ukraine or fled abroad. The entire population has been severely impacted by the war, through family separation, military enlistment and conscription, constant bombardment, injury and death of family members. Refugees have had to adapt to new circumstance, including finding employment, housing, and care for children, often without the support of close social networks. Thus, the Ukrainian population has had to deal with severe trauma and loss over the past three years (and some for longer, as they fled the armed conflict in 2014).

Given the impact of war, we are interested in what promotes resilience within communities, groups, and individuals. By resilience, we mean the ability to cope with adversity, continue to function and thrive, and maintain well-being and a positive outlook despite setbacks. We already know that migration behaviour can be a selective process depending on resources, capabilities, and characteristics (Aksoy and Poutvaara 2021; FitzGerald and Arar 2018; Guichard 2020). After Russia's invasion of Ukraine, studies have found that refugees' destination was related to education and financial resources (van Tubergen et al 2023 and Kohleberger et al 2023), as well as existing and newly established social networks (Hierro and Maza 2024). In addition, socio-demographic and language factors shaped migration trajectories and return intentions (Perelli-Harris and Torrissi 2024). Thus, certain groups have reacted differently to the threat of violence by migrating within or outside of the country.

However, less is known about the socio-economic and psychological factors that facilitate successful adaptation to new conditions in a time of war, especially in the context of Ukraine. Previous studies have addressed resilience factors in non-European refugee communities (for a meta-analysis see Zecchinato, Brackstone, et al 2024), but far fewer studies have examined Ukraine. In this PhD, we propose using mixed-methods and multiple datasets to investigate this topic in greater detail. Because resilience is a multi-faceted concept, the student could approach the topic from a range of social science perspectives, using advanced quantitative methods or qualitative analysis of in-depth interviews or focus groups.

The quantitative analyses could examine a range of surveys that operationalise resilience in different ways. In order to better understand psychological responses to the war in Ukraine, we conducted a survey among IDPs, refugees, and stayers advertised on Facebook in August-October 2023 (N=2101). The survey asks about migration histories, socio-demographic characteristics, and family members who stayed with them or were left behind. The survey included measures such as the Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale (e.g I am able to bounce back after hardship); the Daily Meaning Scale; and a list of activities used to cope with the stressful situation of war. It also included detailed questions on the experience of violence, including witnessing blast explosions and losing a family member during the war. With these measures, it is possible to investigate how psychological resources coupled with social support promote resilience in the face of violence.

Other surveys ask about economic conditions and integration, which may indicate the ability to adapt. A representative survey of IDPs in Ukraine conducted by UNHCR in 2023 asks about experiences of displacement, challenges with employment and school enrolment, and return intentions (N=4000). The nationally-representative survey of Ukrainian refugees in Germany linked to the German Socio-economic panel (which also includes a boost of Syrian refugees) (waves in 2022-2025) has indicators on subjective well-being, employment, and assimilation. Other surveys conducted in Ukraine may also be useful for triangulating on challenges, adaptation, and resilience, for example the Ukrainian Household Survey (2023/24 N=8023) and a UNICEF survey of parents (2023 N=9000). Taken together, these surveys could provide an overview of how different demographic groups are coping with their situation from an economic and psychological standpoint.

The PhD could also use qualitative methods to further investigate resilience during armed conflict. Focus groups and in-depth interviews are important methods for eliciting social norms, perspectives, and attitudes towards a particular topic. These methods could reveal how individual participants cope with the everyday stress of war or key ways of promoting resilience at the community level. The student could decide to focus on specific groups, for example the elderly, veterans, refugees or IDPs, and ask how psychological and community factors support their functioning and well-being.

One of the key challenges is how to recruit participants for qualitative interviews. Given the security situation, it is unlikely fieldwork could take place in Ukraine. However, Perelli-Harris has experience working with a survey agency in Ukraine to conduct focus group research and in-depth interviews to study fertility decision-making during war (Popovych, Perelli-Harris, and Gerber 2024). The agency recruited participants, moderated focus groups or interviews, and delivered transcriptions and translation. They would be able to recruit participants for any of the specific categories listed above. Alternatively, Brackstone collected e-mail addresses as part of the Facebook survey in order to recontact participants for video interviews, which would be conducted by local Ukrainian colleagues. Students could also conduct interviews through the many local refugee-support groups. It is important to note, however, that fieldwork would most likely require additional funding.

Finally, Perelli-Harris's contacts with academics and organisations in Ukraine, as well as Brackstone's work with the International Blast Injury Research Network (IBRN) at the University of Southampton, including the Action on Armed Violence (AOAV), provide many opportunities for the PhD student to explore interdisciplinary perspectives. The PhD would link into the Migration and Displacement Network hosted by SRI, as well as the Centre for Population Change (CPC), and the Centre for Eastern Europe and Eurasian Studies (CEEES).

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### **Contribution to interdisciplinary resilience studies:**

The project will expand the resilience literature by investigating how Ukrainians are adapting amid prolonged conflict. It will make a substantial contribution to interdisciplinary resilience studies by integrating perspectives from psychology, demography, sociology, migration studies, and trauma research. Resilience is inherently multi-faceted, involving emotional, cognitive, and social dimensions. In combining demographic techniques with psychological assessments, we will address how displaced Ukrainians manage complex stressors, such as exposure to violence, displacement, and adaptation to new environments. The quantitative components of the research will examine broad patterns of resilience across different demographic and socio-economic backgrounds, while the qualitative components will reveal individual narratives and coping strategies. These will contribute to a holistic understanding of resilience mechanisms amongst Ukrainians.

The project will address resilience at multiple levels – individual, community, and institutional – and will highlight how personal resources and community support structures interact to influence health and wellbeing. Thus, this integration will create a nuanced picture of resilience and will focus on how psychological wellbeing and socio-economic factors interact in displaced populations. It will also align with policy needs, particularly for refugee assistance, and will offer applied contributions by identifying resilience-building strategies that can inform NGO and governmental support services.

Finally, by linking resilience with social, economic, and psychological data, these findings will also inform resilience models beyond the Ukrainian context and will provide insights into how communities facing crisis worldwide can rebuild and sustain wellbeing under adversity.

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**Please list and describe any specific/additional technical training or support to undertake and successfully deliver this project.** *Note that students recruited into this programme will undertake a bespoke training curriculum. Students and their supervisory teams will also identify generic skills gaps to address through training courses offered by the University's Doctoral College.*

If students need additional training, they could take an MSc in applied statistics and demography through the Social Statistics and Demography department (with a 1+3). This degree also offers modules in qualitative research methods and machine learning, which could be used to examine open-ended responses. Alternatively, students could use methods from psychology. Psychological approaches could be developed in the Psychology Research Methods MSc course, which offers modules on critically assessing quantitative and qualitative research methods and developing skills in literature search and review.

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