







CREATIVE COMMUNICATION IN THE SOCIO-PSYCHOLOGICAL CONTEXT: DRIVING AND HINDERING FACTORS OF THE ACCULTURATION OF UKRAINIAN MIGRANTS

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Abstract. This study explores the economic acculturation of Ukrainian migrants through the lens of psychological, communicative, and contextual factors. In this study, we investigate the challenges, hindering factors and psychological drivers affecting employment and self-employment outcomes abroad. Based on 36 semi-structured interviews conducted across nine host countries. The findings reveal shared difficulties such as language barriers, bureaucratic complexity, and gender differences in adaptation experiences. While men more frequently pursued entrepreneurship, women reported greater emotional and situational barriers to employment. Successful economic integration was associated with internal factors such as motivation, perseverance, and communication skills, alongside external supports such as family and institutional assistance. Communication and creativity emerged as key resources for resilience. The study contributes by bridging the gap between economic participation and psychological adaptation in forced migration contexts and offers a foundation for future quantitative research on migrant acculturation processes.

Keywords: acculturation, communication, creativity, economic acculturation, migrants, psychological factors.

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1. Introduction

In recent years, the scale of Ukrainian migration has grown significantly, shaped both by long-standing economic factors and, more urgently, by the consequences of Russia's full-scale invasion. According to demographers, nearly nine million Ukrainians currently live abroad, with approximately three million classified as labour migrants (Hulyychuk, 2023). The economic strain imposed by the Russo-Ukrainian War has deepened vulnerabilities, with the World Bank reporting a rise of 1.8 million people living in poverty since 2020, bringing the national poverty rate to nearly 29% (Shalal, 2024). Although many Ukrainians have secured employment in host countries, most notably Poland, the United Kingdom (UK), and Sweden (Glas, 2022; Kubiciel-Lodzińska et al., 2024; Madzhumdar, 2023; The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2023). The integration into the labour market does not automatically translate into smooth psychological and socio-cultural adaptation. Migrants often face challenges that extend beyond economic participation, including identity negotiation, cultural dissonance, and limited access to support systems.

Acculturation is the process of cultural and psychological change that occurs as a result of sustained intercultural contact (Berry, 2003; Berry et al., 2006). It encompasses both collective and individual transformations. At the cultural level, these changes can involve shifts in social norms, customs, economic practices, and political engagement. At the psychological level, individuals experience changes in identity, attitudes toward their heritage and host cultures, and social behaviours mediating interaction across cultural boundaries. Ultimately, adaptation within this process is reflected in the core psychological outcomes, including well-being and the social competencies necessary to navigate complex and multicultural environments. Research on acculturation has provided a wide-ranging foundation for understanding how migrants adapt to new societies. Berry's (1992) the seminal framework distinguishes four acculturation strategies: integration, assimilation, separation, and marginalisation, and it remains central to much of the existing literature. Based on this, more recent studies have explored the nuances of individual adaptation in specific contexts. For instance, some authors (Leonidova & Yepyk, 2022) examined acculturation profiles such as ethnic, national, and diffusion identities, while others (Lyutko, 2022) investigated how these patterns vary across age groups, particularly among young migrants. In the United States (US) context, Yefimova (2023) identified psychological traits, such as assertiveness and well-being, as key to successful adaptation under forced migration conditions. Similarly, Halyts'ka and Hryshchuk (2023) investigated the socio-cultural challenges faced by Ukrainian refugees in the UK, including experiences of discrimination and cultural shock. On a broader European scale, Mood et al. (2016) and Froehlich et al. (2020) demonstrated how migrant youth navigate mental health and identity under shifting integration conditions, while Dow (2011) emphasised the role of stress and coping mechanisms in the acculturative process. These studies collectively underscore the psychological depth of acculturation, highlighting its emotional, relational, and cognitive dimensions.

Alongside these findings, a growing body of research has begun to examine the role of communication and creativity in acculturation. Studies suggest that migrants who exhibit more substantial communicative competence and creativity are more likely to demonstrate flexibility, resilience, and integration success (Falavarjani & Yeh, 2018; Lim & Pham, 2016). In particular, bicultural individuals often rely on communicative flexibility and intercultural problem solving, but the distinct contribution of creativity as a psychological resource remains underexplored. However, while these insights have enriched our understanding of migrant adjustment, research on the psychological characteristics that shape economic acculturation remains fragmented. Although the literature addresses mental health, identity, and social belonging, integrative studies that explain the interaction between psychological resources and economic participation abroad still exist. Moreover, recent research underscores the importance of creativity as a mediating resource in migration experiences, particularly in the context of psychological resilience and identity reconstruction (Diržytė et al., 2021; Kačerauskas, 2023). Creative expression, whether through language, problem solving, or artistic means, allows migrants to reframe challenges and engage more adaptively with their social environments.

This study addresses this gap by focusing on the psychological characteristics of the economic acculturation of Ukrainian immigrants in diverse host country contexts. Specifically,

it investigates the driving and hindering factors that influence the process of employment and self-employment among Ukrainian migrants. Grounded in Berry's (1992) acculturation strategies and complemented by a multidimensional, process-oriented view of acculturation (Schwartz, 2010; Schwartz et al., 2010), this research adopts a dynamic perspective on how migrants adapt across multiple domains. Through in-depth semi-structured interviews, the study aims to answer three guiding questions: (1) what main challenges do Ukrainian immigrants face during economic acculturation in the host country?; (2) what are the key driving and hindering factors influencing their self-employment?; and (3) what psychological characteristics support the successful economic integration of Ukrainian immigrants living abroad?

The structure of the paper is as follows. The introduction provides a focused review of the relevant literature, identifies the research gap, and outlines the study's aims and guiding research questions. The theoretical background synthesises existing scholarship on economic acculturation and the role of creative and communicative competencies in the acculturation process, with particular attention to the experiences of displaced people. The methodology section details the research design, data collection and analysis procedures, and ethical considerations. The results section presents the key empirical findings derived from the interviews. Finally, the conclusions and discussion summarise the main findings, situate them in relation to existing research, and reflect on their implications for theory, policy, and future studies.

2. Theoretical background

Acculturation is broadly defined as the process of interaction and adaptation between two or more cultural groups that come into contact with each other, resulting in transformations in language, customs, values, beliefs, and social behaviours (Kubiciel-Lodzińska et al., 2024). On an individual level, it involves adopting elements of another culture, either fully or partially, while negotiating one's identity and psychological well-being (Lyutko, 2022). Migration is the most common context in which acculturation takes place, and the process is particularly complex for people displaced by conflict, such as Ukrainian migrants who left their country after the full-scale Russian invasion. In such cases, acculturation is not merely a matter of cultural curiosity or gradual adjustment. However, it becomes a vital survival strategy shaped by forced dislocation, trauma, and the necessity of economic self-sufficiency.

Berry's (1992) the influential model of acculturation provides a foundational typology for understanding how individuals approach cultural adaptation. The author identifies four strategies: (1) separation, where individuals preserve their original culture while avoiding interaction with the host society; (2) integration, in which individuals maintain their heritage identity while actively engaging with the host culture; (3) assimilation, characterised by abandonment of the original culture in favour of complete immersion into the host society; and (4) marginalisation, where individuals become disconnected from both cultures, often leading to isolation and diminished psychological well-being. While these strategies offer a useful framework for categorising migrant orientations, Berry notes that individual-level variables, such as age, gender, personality traits, language proficiency, and perceived discrimination, significantly

influence acculturative outcomes. For example, individuals with substantial internal resources and social support are more likely to adopt integration strategies, which are associated with higher psychological and sociocultural adaptation (Berry, 1992, 1997).

Furthermore, some authors (Schwartz et al., 2010) proposed a multidimensional framework that views heritage and host cultural identification as distinct but interacting dimensions. In this view, acculturation is not a unidirectional process, but a dynamic negotiation that involves cultural practices, values, and self-conceptions. Their research emphasises the role of contextual factors, including ethnicity, perceived discrimination, and the receptiveness of the host society in shaping how migrants experience and respond to cultural contact. Biculturalism, where individuals successfully engage with both heritage and host cultures, is identified as producing the most favourable psychosocial outcomes (Schwartz et al., 2010). Karim (2021) expands this further by highlighting the emergence of hybrid identities that often develop as migrants adapt to their surroundings while maintaining core elements of their original culture.

These frameworks are especially relevant in the contexts of forced migration, where psychological adaptation is complicated by trauma, displacement, and instability. As Balyan (2023) points out, Russo-Ukrainian War-induced migration adds layers of psychological burden, such as post-traumatic stress and uncertainty, which can hinder integration efforts. Some authors (Babiker et al., 1980; Ward et al., 2001) have established a relationship between the depth of cultural differences, cultural distance, and the psychological stress migrants experience. The more significant the gap between the host and home cultures, the more severe the culture shock, and the more complex the adaptation. Bochner (2003) confirms that cultural distance is a critical determinant of cultural shock, which can be mitigated when cultural similarities exist. Some authors (Berry et al., 2006) further argued that maintaining ties to the heritage culture while building relationships with the host society provides a balanced pathway for successful acculturation.

These considerations are directly applicable to the domain of economic acculturation, which refers to the adaptation of migrants to the economic systems of the host country (Henrich et al., 2005; Zhuk et al., 2023). Economic acculturation encompasses learning to navigate the labour market, acquiring financial and legal literacy, engaging in employment or entrepreneurship, and adapting to consumption and taxation systems. As with cultural acculturation, the success of economic integration is closely tied to psychological and contextual factors, including motivation, perceived discrimination, and host country support structures. The integration paradox illustrates how more educated migrants may face more excellent discrimination, thereby impeding full economic participation (de Vroome et al., 2014). Rudmin (2010) also notes that migrants often rely on ethnic networks for employment, which may offer stability but limit access to more qualified or formal job sectors. Froehlich et al. (2020) demonstrate that maintaining a strong ethnic identity does not preclude engagement with the host society and that dual identities can coexist, particularly when contact with majority populations is facilitated.

The case of Ukrainian migrants exemplifies these challenges. As some authors (Leonidova & Yepyk, 2022) note, beyond cultural and structural barriers, recent Ukrainian migrants must also navigate the political dimension of adaptation. The policies of the host countries, such as access to healthcare care, employment programmes, and psychological services, play a

decisive role in shaping acculturative outcomes. These structural supports are especially critical in the aftermath of forced migration, where uncertainty and emotional distress often undermine personal agency.

Beyond institutional and psychological variables, recent literature highlights the importance of creative and communicative competencies in supporting acculturation. Refugees frequently experience identity loss and reconstruction, a process that can be mediated through creative expression and storytelling (Colic-Peisker & Walker, 2003). Furthermore, Aral and Dhillon (2018) and Falavarjani and Yeh (2018) have shown that participation in activities such as dance, writing, and performance can serve as therapeutic tools, fostering resilience and enabling cultural bridging. Creative activities provide a symbolic and physical space where hybrid identities can emerge and emotional experiences can be processed.

Similarly, communication skills, particularly those mediated through digital platforms, are critical for maintaining transnational ties while engaging in host society life. Collin et al. (2015) and Wu and Marek (2018) underscore how technological competence allows migrants to maintain relationships with their countries of origin while also building new social networks. However, as Pang and Wang (2020) note, communication technologies can also hinder acculturation if overused to retreat into cultural silos. Therefore, the balance between digital connectivity and local immersion is essential. Furthermore, some authors (Deddel et al., 2023) emphasise that communicative competence, including managing affective filters and navigating intergroup attitudes, is key to reducing social distance and improving psychological outcomes for marginalised learners. Finally, several studies link communication and creativity directly to psychological well-being during acculturation. For example, Dieterich-Hartwell and Koch (2017) argue that creative arts therapies offer a safe space for trauma recovery and identity reconstruction, while other authors (Kizgin et al., 2018) note that media portrayals of migrant groups can reinforce stereotypes, potentially undermining integration efforts. In addition to communicative competencies, recent literature highlights creativity as a critical dimension of the acculturation process. Creative expression, ranging from problem solving to artistic and narrative practices, has been shown to support psychological resilience, enable hybrid identity formation, and promote socio-cultural integration in disorienting or traumatic contexts (Diržytė et al., 2021; Štreimikienė & Kačerauskas, 2020). This perspective positions creativity not only as an individual trait but also as a socio-cultural competency that empowers migrants to re-narrate their experiences and actively shape their environments. As Baltrėnas et al. (2015) argue, a creative society enables individuals to pursue expressive aspirations beyond consumerist norms, reinforcing creativity's dual role as a psychological resource and a collective social force. These insights further align with broader conceptualizations of creativity as vital to well-being, personal agency, and adaptive capacity in post-migration settings.

In summary, acculturation is not a uniform or purely structural process, particularly in its economic dimension. It is shaped by psychological, cultural, communicative, and creative factors that mediate how migrants navigate their host societies. This study builds on these theoretical contributions to investigate how Ukrainian migrants adapt economically abroad, with particular attention to the socio-psychological conditions, individual characteristics, and expressive capacities that drive or hinder this complex process.

3. Research methodology

3.1. Research design

To structure our investigation of the acculturation experiences of Ukrainian migrants across different national contexts, we applied a multi-theoretical framework combining the acculturation model (Berry, 1992) with two complementary perspectives was developed by some authors (Schwartz, 2010; Schwartz et al., 2010). Berry's typology identifies four acculturation strategies: (1) integration; (2) assimilation; (3) separation; and (4) marginalisation. Based on the degree to which individuals maintain their heritage culture and engage with the host society. While this model offers a foundational lens for categorising acculturative orientations, it does not fully account for the individual and contextual dynamics that shape how migrants experience and negotiate these pathways. To address this, we incorporated the view of value-driven behaviour: Schwartz (2010) emphasises how personal motivations and internalised beliefs influence adaptation choices. In addition, we drew on the expanded framework proposed by some authors (Schwartz et al., 2010), which conceptualises acculturation as a dynamic, multidimensional process involving shifts in cultural practices, values, and identifications. This perspective acknowledges that acculturation unfolds unevenly across different domains and is influenced by both internal capacities and external conditions. Grounded in this combined framework, our interview protocol was designed to identify participants' acculturation orientations and capture the motivational, professional, personal, communication, social, situational, and cultural factors that shape their adaptation. This approach allowed us to view acculturation as a fluid and ongoing process, shaped by individual agency and the broader socio-cultural context in which migrants settle.

To explore the complexity of acculturation, we employed open-ended, semi-structured interviews. This format allowed for consistency across participants and the flexibility to further follow individual narratives. Given that acculturation involves diverse experiences shaped by personal motivations, situational constraints, and varying host country conditions, open-ended questions were essential for capturing the breadth and nuance of these processes. Moreover, the topic, encompassing identity, displacement, and cultural belonging, is inherently sensitive. The semi-structured interview format provided a conversational setting that fostered trust and allowed participants to speak freely, reducing the pressure often accompanying more rigid or survey-based methods. This approach was particularly suited to uncover how individual-level drivers intersect with broader cultural and structural conditions, aligning with our interest in acculturation.

3.2. Data collection and analysis

The study was conducted between November and December, 2023. Data were collected through online semi-structured interviews conducted via *Zoom Communications*, which allowed for geographical flexibility and ensured participants' comfort and accessibility across multiple host countries. The interview format was chosen for its capacity to elicit in-depth, context-rich narratives while maintaining a consistent thematic focus aligned with the study's research objectives. A combination of empirical and analytical methods was employed to

address the research questions. Empirically, data were collected through a structured interview protocol grounded in established acculturation frameworks.

A qualitative content analysis approach was applied to identify key themes and patterns within participants' responses. This method was selected for its suitability in systematically interpreting textual data while preserving contextual depth and participant meaning. The qualitative content analysis followed established methodological guidance from some authors (Bengtsson, 2016; Elo et al., 2014; Miles et al., 2014). The analysis proceeded through four key stages: (1) decontextualisation, involving familiarisation with and coding of raw data; (2) re-contextualisation, where the data were reviewed to ensure all relevant content was captured; (3) categorisation, including the development of themes and subthemes; and (4) compilation, where findings were synthesised into coherent analytical categories. This systematic and transparent approach ensured the rigour of the process.

The qualitative responses obtained during the interviews were systematically coded to enable the application of fundamental statistical analysis. Themes such as acculturation-related challenges, employment status, and driving or hindering factors were identified across transcripts and categorised into discrete, countable units. Then these thematic categories were quantified based on their frequency of occurrence, allowing for the transformation of qualitative information into categorical variables. This coding process enabled the comparison of response distributions between groups, such as gender, and supported inferential statistical techniques to examine the significance of observed differences.

Furthermore, to improve the robustness of the findings, the quantified results were analysed using basic statistical procedures. Quantitative techniques were applied to explore distributions, co-occurrences, and variation across key variables. This mixed-methods approach allowed for identifying recurring patterns and their empirical validation. Mathematical statistics methods included grouping, variation calculus, and inferential testing. The Fisher transformation (φ^*) criterion was employed to assess statistical significance. Data analysis was performed using *IBM SPSS* (version 28.0.1). The principle of information saturation guided the determination of sample size, ensuring comprehensive thematic coverage and confirming that no substantial new information emerged from additional interviews.

3.3. Participants of the study

The study sample consisted of 36 Ukrainian immigrants residing in various host countries, 66.7% of whom were female and 33.3% male. During data collection, participants lived in Austria, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Lithuania, Poland, Spain, and the US (see Table 1).

Participants were selected based on inclusion criteria directly aligned with the aims of the study. All were Ukrainian nationals who had lived abroad for at least one year, a threshold intended to ensure that individuals had sufficient time and experience to reflect on their acculturation processes meaningfully. The principle of information saturation determined the final number of respondents, and the interviews continued until no substantial new themes emerged. However, the sensitive and personally relevant nature of the research topic also led to a higher level of voluntary participation than anticipated, resulting in a robust and diverse sample. The gender imbalance in the sample reflects the demographic shifts prompted by the ongoing full-scale Russo-Ukrainian War. Legal restrictions and conscription policies

Table 1. Host countries of Ukrainian immigrants who participated in the study (source: created by authors)

Country of residence	Male, %	Female, %
Austria	8.3	4.2
France	8.3	4.2
Germany	16.7	45.7
Ireland	8.3	–
Italy	–	8.4
Lithuania	–	4.2
Poland	33.4	16.6
Spain	–	4.2
United States	25	12.5
TOTAL RESPONDENTS	33.3	66.6

have limited male emigration, while a significant proportion of women of the working-age population have left Ukraine, often accompanied by children. This trend was reflected in the composition of the study sample. It is also worth noting that several participants, both men and women, had emigrated before the outbreak of the full-scale conflict in 2022, often for employment or educational opportunities. Participation in the study was entirely voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from all individuals by established ethical guidelines for research involving human participants.

3.4. Ethical consideration

The statement of ethical principles of the European Association for Psychotherapy (2024) guided the ethical foundation of this study on assessment techniques and research. Before participation, the nature and purpose of the study were clearly explained to all potential Ukrainian participants to ensure complete comprehension (principle 8.a). Informed consent was obtained at the beginning of the study, and participation was entirely voluntary and anonymous (principles 9.f and 9.j). The research was conducted with full respect for the dignity, autonomy, and well-being of the Ukrainian immigrants involved, in line with the broader ethical and professional standards governing research with human participants (general principle 9). Given the personal and potentially sensitive nature of the data, often involving experiences of forced migration, identity reconstruction, and cultural transition, particular care was taken to ensure confidentiality and emotional safety throughout the interview process. Participants were reminded of their right to decline or withdraw from the study at any time, without consequence.

4. Results

This section presents the findings in accordance with the study's three research questions: (1) the key challenges Ukrainian immigrants face during economic acculturation; (2) the factors that hinder or drive employment and entrepreneurship abroad; and (3) the psychological

and contextual variables contributing to successful economic integration. Where applicable, gender-based comparisons are made and supported by statistical analysis.

Respondents were asked to describe the main difficulties they encountered during their economic acculturation in the host countries to address the first research question. The data are presented in Table 2, which details the frequency of reported challenges by gender.

Table 2. The main problems Ukrainian immigrants encountered during the process of acculturation abroad (source: created by authors)

Problems Ukrainian immigrants encountered in the acculturation	Female respondents, %	Male respondents, %
Language barrier	37.5	41.7
Unusual taxation system, a large number of administrative procedures, bureaucracy, ignorance of laws, rules, and guidelines	33.3	33.3
Differences in mentality and cultural differences	12.5	16.7
Problems with housing	16.7	8.3
High prices in the host country and a need for more money	4.2	8.3
Negligence in service	4.2*	
Medical problems	4.2*	
Multitasking	4.2*	
Problems with socialisation	16.7*	
Longing for Ukraine	8.3*	
Not a very good attitude from the local population	8.3*	
The need to start everything from scratch		8.3*
Lack of experience in physical labour		8.3*

*Note**: The problem was only reported by respondents of a particular gender.

As shown in Table 2, the most frequently reported issues among male respondents included the language barrier (41.7%), difficulties navigating taxation and administrative systems (33.3%), and cultural or mentality-related differences (16.7%). Housing issues (8.3%) and the high cost of living (8.3%) were also noted, albeit to a lesser extent. Notably, male participants reported some problems, such as the need to start life from scratch (8.3%) and a lack of experience with physical labour (8.3%).

Among female respondents, the most salient challenges were similarly led by language barriers (37.5%) and bureaucratic complexity (33.3%). Housing difficulties (16.7%) and cultural differences (12.5%) were commonly cited. Several gender-specific issues emerged in the female cohort, including problems with socialisation (16.7%), homesickness and negative experiences with local populations (8.3%), and concerns such as multitasking and medical care (4.2%).

These findings suggest that while some acculturation challenges were shared across gender groups, several were experienced exclusively or more intensely by one gender. Only challenges reported by both groups (language, bureaucracy, cultural differences, housing, and financial hardship) were analysed using the Fisher transformation criterion to evaluate these differences statistically.

Table 3. Challenges for Ukrainian immigrants during the process of acculturation abroad (source: created by authors)

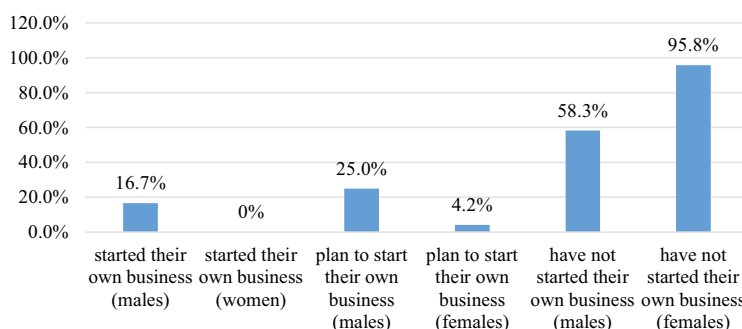
Similar problems for both genders	Male respondents, %	Female respondents, %	φ^*_{omv}	p -value
Language barrier	41.7%	37.5%	0.2432	$p > 0.10$
Unusual taxation system, a large number of administrative procedures, bureaucracy, ignorance of laws, rules and guidelines	33.3%	33.3%	0	–
Differences in mentality and cultural differences	25.0%	12.5%	0.9164	$p > 0.10$
Problems with housing	8.3%	16.7%	0.7297	$p > 0.10$
High prices in the host country and a need for more money	8.3%	4.2%	0.4837	$p > 0.10$

The results presented in Table 3 indicate no statistically significant differences in the frequency of shared acculturation challenges between male and female respondents. For instance, although men reported language barriers and cultural differences more frequently, and housing problems were more prominent among women, none reached statistical significance (all p -values > 0.10). Thus, the findings suggest these challenges are equally relevant across gender lines, despite slight variations in intensity or emphasis.

The second research question aimed to assess participants' employment and entrepreneurial outcomes and factors hindering their engagement in the labour market.

As illustrated in Figure 1, 16.7% of male respondents reported having started their own businesses, while an additional 25% planned to do so. In contrast, only 4.2% of female respondents had initiated entrepreneurial activity, and the vast majority (95.8%) had not pursued self-employment. These findings suggest that male participants were more likely to adopt entrepreneurial strategies, possibly driven by a stronger pursuit of autonomy and self-determination.

Regarding employment more generally, Figure 2 shows that 83.3% of males and 66.7% of females had secured jobs in the host countries. Conversely, 33.3% of female and 16.7% of male respondents reported unemployment. These results suggest that women experienced more significant barriers to labour market entry.

**Figure 1.** Establishment of their own business by Ukrainian immigrants in host countries, depending on their gender (source: created by authors)

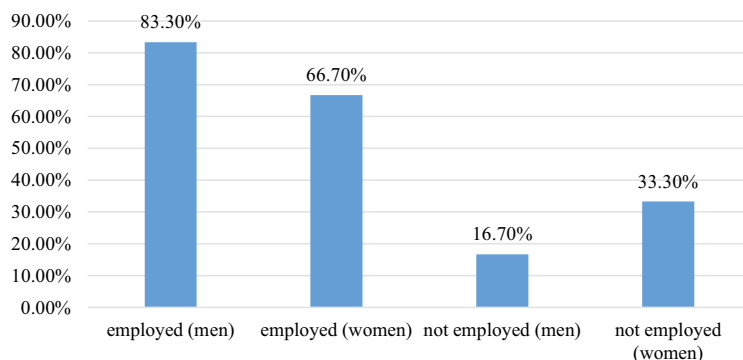


Figure 2. Employment status of respondents depending on their gender in the host countries (source: created by authors)

Participants identified specific hindering factors to explore these barriers further, presented in Table 4.

The data show that 100% of female respondents identified the language barrier as a key obstacle, compared to 75% of males. Additionally, men cited a desire for self-employment (50%) and plans to continue academic careers (25%) as major hindrances. For women, significant barriers included a lack of necessary skills (50%), fear of social marginalisation (50%), difficulty adapting to new cultural values (50%), and lack of support networks (37.5%). A smaller number also reported psychological or motivational obstacles, such as unwillingness to leave their comfort zone, dissatisfaction with available job options, or financial support from the host country, reducing the perceived need for employment. These gender-specific patterns suggest that men tended to encounter structural or strategic hindrances, while women more frequently reported affective and situational barriers. However, the language barrier emerged as a universally significant issue for both groups, aligning with broader findings on the centrality of communication competencies in economic adaptation.

Table 4. Hindering factors for employment (source: created by authors)

Factor	Female respondents, %	Male respondents, %
Language barrier	100	75
Desire to work for themselves (start their own business)		50*
Desire to continue their academic career		25*
Lack of necessary skills and abilities	50*	
Fear of feeling like a second-class citizen	50*	
Issues with adaptation to new cultural values	50*	
Lack of support from family and close people	37.5*	
Unwillingness to leave the comfort zone	25*	
Studies	25*	
It is not easy to find an occupation you like	12.5*	
The host country pays financial assistance to refugees	12.5*	
No need for money	12.5*	

Note*: Hindering factor was only reported by respondents of a particular gender.

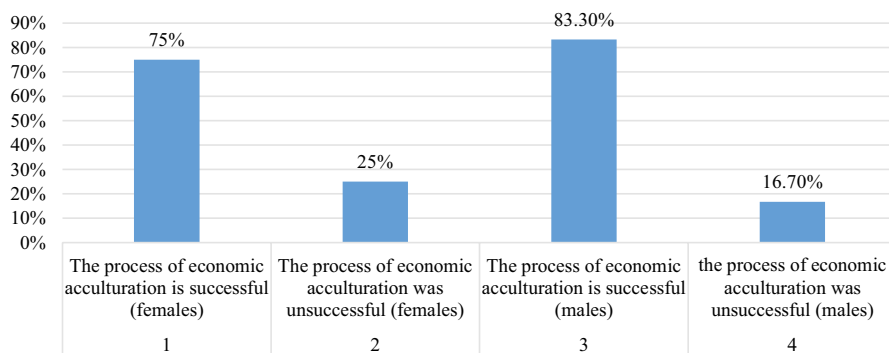


Figure 3. Results of economic acculturation of Ukrainian immigrants abroad, depending on gender, % (source: created by authors)

To address the third research question, we evaluated the self-assessed success of economic acculturation and the factors that facilitated this process.

According to Figure 3, 83.3% of males and 75% of females believed they had successfully undergone economic acculturation. The remaining 16.7% of males and 25% of females rated their acculturation unsuccessful. Notably, those reporting success had found employment, started businesses, or engaged in international entrepreneurial activities. The driving factors underlying this success are detailed in Table 5.

Several shared drivers of success emerged across genders, including motivational (*e.g.*, belief in self, desire to succeed), professional (*e.g.*, diligence, experience), personal (*e.g.*, perseverance, openness, creativity), communication (*e.g.*, language skills, sociability), and social factors (*e.g.*, support from family, friends, diaspora, and host country institutions). The role of communication and creativity was particularly noteworthy, appearing prominently in the personal and communication categories, supporting previous literature that links these attributes to enhanced adaptability and resilience. Female respondents uniquely highlighted additional factors such as situational necessity (*e.g.*, forced activity due to *force majeure*) and cultural affinity (*e.g.*, shared heritage, architecture, mentality) as significant enablers of economic adaptation. These context-sensitive elements reflect the complex and layered nature of forced migration experiences. Fisher's transformation criterion was again applied to assess gender differences in the frequency of these driving factors (see Table 6).

As shown in Table 6, no statistically significant gender differences were found in the frequency of motivational, professional, or personal factors. A marginal trend was observed in communication-related factors, where male respondents more frequently reported that language proficiency and negotiation skills were critical ($\varphi^*_{omv} = 0.9815$, $p = 0.075$), possibly reflecting their greater exposure to employment-related linguistic demands. Social factors, including institutional and community support, were equally cited by both groups (75%). No comparative analysis was possible for situational and cultural factors, as female respondents reported these exclusively.

Table 5. Driving factors of the Ukrainian immigrants to successfully implement the process of economic acculturation in the host countries (source: created by authors)

Male respondents	Female respondents
MOTIVATIONAL FACTORS	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A strong desire to succeed; - Belief in yourself; - Lack of people to rely on; - Understanding that to achieve success, you need to step out of your comfort zone. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Understanding that success depends on the individual; - Striving for higher standards of living; - Understanding that to achieve success, you need to step out of your comfort zone.
PROFESSIONAL FACTORS	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Quality performance of professional duties; - Diligence. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Extensive work experience; - Interest in business chosen as a profession.
PERSONAL FACTORS	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Perseverance; - Openness to new things; - Independence; - Creativity. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Perseverance; - Openness to new things; - Aspiration; - Perfectionism; - Courage; - Activity; - Interest; - Intelligence; - Quick response to problems; - Optimism; - Conscientiousness; - Responsibility; - Adaptability; - Lack of illusions and infantilism; - Ability to find benefits for yourself; - Prudence; - Ability to control your emotions.
COMMUNICATION FACTORS	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Knowledge of the language of the host country; - High communication skills; - Sociability; - Ability to negotiate. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Knowledge of the language of the host country; - High communication skills; - Sociability; - The ability to keep quiet.
SOCIAL FACTORS	
Support: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Family; - Friends; - Residents of the host country; - Ukrainian diaspora; - Government of the host country (there are many proposals for migrants to help them adapt (work, study, etc.)). 	Support: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Family; - Friends; - The university community of the host country; - Employees and residents of the host country.
SITUATIONAL FACTORS	
–	- Forced activity due to <i>force majeure</i> .
CULTURAL FACTORS	
–	- Similarity of mentality, architecture and cultural heritage of the host country.

Table 6. Driving factors for the Ukrainian immigrants to successfully implement the process of economic acculturation in the host countries (source: created by authors)

Male respondents	Female respondents	φ^*_{omv}	<i>p</i> -value
MOTIVATIONAL FACTORS			
6 (50%)	11 (45.8%)	0.1655	$p > 0.10$
PROFESSIONAL FACTORS			
6 (50%)	11 (45.8%)	0.1655	$p > 0.10$
PERSONAL FACTORS			
8 (66.7%)	17 (70.8%)	0.2076	$p > 0.10$
COMMUNICATION FACTORS			
7 (58.3%)	8 (33.3%)	0.9815	$p = 0.075 > 0.05$
SOCIAL FACTORS			
9 (75%)	18 (75%)	0.0	–
SITUATIONAL FACTORS			
–	1 (4.2%)	–	–
CULTURAL FACTORS			
–	2 (8.3%)	–	–

5. Discussion

This study aimed to examine the driving and hindering factors of Ukrainian immigrants' economic acculturation in diverse host country contexts, focusing on psychological characteristics, communication, and creativity. By applying an integrated theoretical framework, this study addressed a notable gap in the existing literature related to the lack of integrative psychosocial accounts of economic adaptation under conditions of forced migration. The results offer a new perspective on the acculturation of Ukrainian migrants and how they navigate employment, entrepreneurship, and psychological adjustment abroad.

The first research question concerned the key challenges migrants faced during economic acculturation. The data revealed a shared set of difficulties across gender, including language barriers, administrative complexity, and cultural dissonance, consistent with previous findings (Lyutko, 2022). However, some challenges were gender-specific. For instance, women reported higher rates of social isolation, homesickness, and multitasking stress, while men reported the need to rebuild from scratch and unfamiliarity with manual labour. Although these variations did not reach statistical significance, they suggest differentiated psychosocial burdens shaped by gender roles and expectations, echoing findings of previous studies (Halyts'ka & Hryshchuk, 2023). Notably, language emerged as a central issue for both groups, reinforcing the critical role of communicative competence in shaping acculturative outcomes (Dedel et al., 2023).

The second research question examined the conditions surrounding employment and self-employment abroad. The results indicate that while most participants found work, men were more likely to start or plan to start their own businesses. This aligns with previous research showing that male migrants tend to exhibit a higher entrepreneurial orientation, often linked to autonomy-seeking and traditional gender roles (Kubiciel-Lodzińska et al., 2024).

On the contrary, female respondents reported more affective and situational barriers to employment, including lack of skills, cultural adaptation issues, and fear of marginalisation. These findings underscore the importance of psychological safety and social support in women's labour market participation, consistent with previous studies (Froehlich et al., 2020; Leonidova & Yepyk, 2022). Importantly, the near-universal impact of the language barrier, identified by 100% of women and 75% of men, suggests that communication challenges are not merely linguistic but are deeply tied to access, self-efficacy, and social belonging.

The third research question addressed which psychological and contextual factors contributed to successful economic acculturation. The analysis identified several shared enablers across genders, including perseverance, openness to new experiences, motivation, and social support, confirming the predictive role of personal agency and relational resources as described in multidimensional models (Schwartz et al., 2010). Communication and creativity emerged as particularly influential. Male participants more often highlighted negotiation and language skills as vital to their adaptation. In contrast, female participants emphasised a wider range of personal qualities, including conscientiousness, intelligence, emotional control, and adaptability. These gendered patterns have been reported in previous studies (Dieterich-Hartwell & Koch, 2017; Falavarjani & Yeh, 2018) arguing that expressive and relational competencies, whether creativity or communicative skill, are buffers against acculturative stress. This aligns with broader research on creative societies, suggesting that migrants who engage in expressive, artistic, or inventive forms of problem solving are better equipped to manage uncertainty, rebuild social identity, and maintain psychological stability in disorienting environments (Baltrėnas et al., 2015; Štreimikienė & Kačerauskas, 2020). These creative capacities can serve both as coping mechanisms and as tools for socio-economic adaptation, especially when conventional forms of integration support are limited. Moreover, female respondents uniquely reported situational and cultural factors, such as forced activity due to war and a sense of cultural affinity with host societies. These findings suggest that smaller cultural distance reduces shock and improves psychological adjustment. While men did not report these factors, the difference may reflect differential experiences of forced displacement and caregiving responsibilities, particularly given the war-driven gender imbalance in migration patterns.

Furthermore, the lack of statistically significant gender differences in the frequency of most driving factors suggests that men and women draw on similar resources for successful acculturation, albeit sometimes differently articulated or prioritised. This supports the integrative models of acculturation that emphasise dynamic, multidimensional engagement with both heritage and host cultures (Karim, 2021). The marginal gender difference in communication-related factors ($p = 0.075$) points to a potentially important area for further investigation, especially given the documented importance of communicative competence in economic and psychological adjustment (Collin et al., 2015; Pang & Wang, 2020).

6. Conclusions

This study has explored the economic acculturation of Ukrainian migrants through the lens of psychological, communicative, and contextual factors, offering new insight into how individuals navigate employment and self-employment in host countries. The findings underscore

that economic integration is not solely determined by structural access to the labour markets, but is influenced by internal capacities such as motivation, creativity, and communication skills. External supports, including family, social networks, and institutional frameworks, further shape these.

Although no statistically significant gender differences were found in the factors most frequently cited, gendered experiences emerged in the qualitative responses. Women more often identified emotional and situational obstacles, such as social isolation, fear of marginalisation, and forced adaptation due to war. At the same time, men reported strategic hindrances, including a preference for entrepreneurship or a lack of fit in manual labour roles. Across all participants, communicative competence and psychological resilience were consistently associated with positive adaptation outcomes.

In summary, these findings highlight that economic acculturation is a complex, gendered, and deeply psychological process. It is dependent not only on structural access to employment but also on internal capacities such as motivation, creativity, and communication, facilitated by external supports and shaped by contextual factors such as war, cultural proximity, and community belonging. By advancing a more holistic understanding of acculturation, this study contributes to a growing body of research seeking to bridge the gap between economic participation and psychological adaptation in the lived experiences of migrants.

7. Limitations

The findings of this study should be interpreted with caution due to several limitations. First, the generalisability of the results is limited by the sample size and methodology. The study is based on qualitative data from 36 respondents, which, while providing rich contextual insight, may not reflect the broader experiences of all Ukrainian migrants. Furthermore, the use of self-reported data introduces potential biases, including social desirability and recall effects. In addition, participants were recruited from various host countries, but were not stratified by legal status, time of migration, or occupational background, all of which may influence acculturation. The gender imbalance in the sample, reflective of current geopolitical conditions, may also have affected the diversity of male perspectives. Finally, while statistical comparisons were made, the study was not designed for inferential generalisation but for exploratory insight.

8. Agenda for future research

Future research should aim to build on these findings through large-scale quantitative studies that test the identified psychological and contextual factors in more diverse and representative samples. The thematic categories developed in this study, particularly those related to communication, creativity, and resilience, can serve as a foundation for survey instruments aimed at measuring economic acculturation outcomes. Moreover, future studies should further investigate acculturation itself as a multidimensional process. Longitudinal designs could explore how psychological adaptation and employment trajectories evolve, especially in cases of prolonged displacement. Finally, comparative studies between different groups of migrants

or host countries could help identify structural and cultural variables that facilitate or hinder successful integration.

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