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**The liability of refugeeness: leveraging multiple identities to enact power in a context of displacement**

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Abstract:	<p><b>Abstract</b></p> <p>This article leverages the Jo Rowlands' typology of power (1997) and Crenshaw's intersectionality (1991) to engage in Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) of Ukrainian women refugee entrepreneurs. We ask: How do Ukrainian women refugee entrepreneurs experience their identities as mothers, refugees, Ukrainians, and entrepreneurs in a context of displacement in the UK and Romania? Drawing on interviews and field notes, we expose the lived experiences of 13 women refugee entrepreneurs and reveal how they navigate their intersectional identities by enacting their agency through different forms of power. In doing so, our study aligns with this Special Issue call for understanding 'everyday refugee entrepreneurship' in under-researched constraint contexts, thus contributing to refugee entrepreneurship research and policy.</p>

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# The liability of refugeeness: leveraging multiple identities to enact power in a context of displacement

## Abstract

This article leverages the Jo Rowlands' typology of power (1997) and Crenshaw's intersectionality (1991) to engage in Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) of Ukrainian women refugee entrepreneurs. We ask: *How do Ukrainian women refugee entrepreneurs experience their identities as mothers, refugees, Ukrainians, and entrepreneurs in a context of displacement in the UK and Romania?* Drawing on interviews and field notes, we expose the lived experiences of 13 women refugee entrepreneurs and reveal how they navigate their intersectional identities by enacting their agency through different forms of power. In doing so, our study aligns with this Special Issue call for understanding 'everyday refugee entrepreneurship' in under-researched constraint contexts, thus contributing to refugee entrepreneurship research and policy.

*Keywords: women refugee entrepreneurs, liability of refugeeness, agency, intersectional empowerment*

## Introduction

“For me, being free means being able to make my own decisions. It is a top priority in my life”.  
(LavUK)

“I don’t want to be someone’s pet”. (InaRo)

According to the UNHCR (2024), conflict, violence, and environmental disasters have recently displaced over 1% of the world’s population, an alarming milestone. In Europe, Russia’s war against Ukraine has caused refugee migration levels unmatched since World War II, with over 160,000 Ukrainian refugees in Romania ((UNHCR, 2024) and over 250,000 in the UK (Home Office, 2024). Refugees report leveraging entrepreneurship to overcome socio-economic constraints in host countries (Refai et al., 2024; Refai and McElwee, 2023). Following the World Bank (2023: 21), we characterise refugee entrepreneurs “as all those who left their country of birth to escape persecution or conflict, are unable to go back, and have established a business, whether registered or not, in the country of refuge”. Indeed, over the past decade, entrepreneurship has gained popularity as a vehicle for social transformation and socio-economic recovery (Chitac, 2023; Harima, 2022). Entrepreneurship has acquired agentic power as a proactive response to socio-economic power imbalances and adversities disadvantaged communities face (Adeeko and Treanor, 2021). However, while research on entrepreneurship is growing (Desai et al., 2021; Heilbrunn and Iannone, 2020), most of the studies overlook the individual experience of refugees in a context of forced displacement and precarity (Abebe, 2023; Ram et al., 2022; Refai and McElwee, 2023), which includes war trauma, language barriers, loss of resources, skills, and a sense of identity in host countries (Richey et al., 2023; Wauters and Lambrecht, 2006, 2008), instead, focusing on macro- (Harima, 2022; Heilbrunn, 2019) and meso-level challenges (Richey et al., 2023; Wauters and Lambrecht, 2006, 2008).

Evidence suggests that refugees exert their entrepreneurial agency to overcome contextual constraints (Christensen and Newman, 2024), reclaim autonomy, acquire competences, **negotiate** identity (Richey et al., 2023), and enhance their social status (Refai and McElwee, 2023). However, at the same time, refugee entrepreneurship might also be limited by contextual restrictions in host countries (Harima, 2022). While refugees probably face the greatest barriers to entrepreneurship compared to other immigrant groups, in some contexts, such as Adelaide,

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3 Australia, “they have the highest rates of entrepreneurship of any immigrant group” (Collins et al.,  
4 2017: 33). Faced with this paradox of refugee entrepreneurship (Kohlenberger, 2023), refugees  
5 practice subentrepreneurship (Refai and McElwee, 2023) or bricolage (Kwong et al., 2019) at the  
6 margins of society, and do with the resources at hand (Baker and Nelson, 2003) to overcome host  
7 market disadvantages. Similarly, they might blend power and constraints in the construction of  
8 their identity in the host country (Adeeko and Treanor, 2021). However, limited knowledge exists  
9 regarding refugee identities and how the experience of entrepreneurship may either limit or  
10 empower them (Adeeko and Treanor, 2021; Khademi et al., 2024). Given the increasing global  
11 political and war conflicts and the ever-increasing number of women refugees worldwide (OECD,  
12 2023), the urgency of understanding how *women refugees* address contextual constraints while  
13 handling multiple identities can no longer be ignored (Al-Dajani, 2023; Khademi et al., 2024;  
14 Martinez Dy, 2020). Intersectionality gives people “some degree of agency that people can exert”  
15 (Crenshaw, 1991: 1297) and provides a critical lens to help us understand how women refugees  
16 blend power and constraints in their identity construction and deconstruction (Adeeko and Treanor,  
17 2021).

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30 The present study leverages Jo Rowlands’ (1997) typology of power to engage in interpretative  
31 phenomenological analysis (IPA) of Ukrainian women refugee entrepreneurs. We ask: How do  
32 *Ukrainian women refugee entrepreneurs handle their identities as mothers, refugees, Ukrainians,*  
33 *and entrepreneurs in the context of displacement in the UK and Romania?* Drawing on interviews  
34 and field notes, we investigate the lived experiences of 13 women refugee entrepreneurs and reveal  
35 how they navigate their multiple identities by enacting different forms of power (*power from*  
36 *within, power over, power to, and power with;* cf. Rowlands, 1997). We acknowledge  
37 displacement (Wauters and Lambrecht, 2006, 2008) and its unique challenges, such as institutional  
38 dependency (Richey and Brooks, 2024), language barriers (Alkhaled and Sasaki, 2022), cultural  
39 and labour market exclusion (Ram et al., 2022), and a lack of recognition of prior educational  
40 attainment compared to other migrant communities (Abebe, 2023). However, we cautiously avoid  
41 the dominant focus on constraints experienced by refugees by investigating refugees’ intersecting  
42 identities as manifestations of both vulnerabilities and agentic power (Adeeko and Treanor, 2021;  
43 Khademi et al., 2024).

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3 Given increased refugee numbers, political tensions, and limited knowledge of refugee journeys,  
4 our study's contribution is timely and relevant to advance refugee entrepreneurship research and  
5 evidence-based policies. We bring two main theoretical contributions to the field of refugee  
6 entrepreneurship. First, this study responds to Refai et al.'s (2023) call for research on  
7 entrepreneurial agency in resource-constrained contexts by being one of very few studies (Klyver  
8 et al., 2022) to investigate Ukrainian refugees in the UK and Romania. Second, this study reveals  
9 that Ukrainian female refugee entrepreneurs are neither hopeless victims (Pesch and Ipek, 2023)  
10 nor invisible in the grand narrative of the masculinised nationhood (Peng et al., 2022), but rather,  
11 overcome distinctive constraints and enact different forms of power, thereby bringing an  
12 overlooked, yet critical, dimension to understanding refugee entrepreneurship (Al-Dajani, 2023;  
13 Khademi et al., 2024) through a power and intersectional lens.  
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23 Below we provide an overview of the literature on multiple identities of women refugee  
24 entrepreneurs and emphasise Rowlands' Lens of Power model (1997, 2019). Our methodological  
25 choices are presented next, followed by the research findings and our study's contributions to  
26 refugee entrepreneurship research and evidence-based policies, along with its limitations and  
27 future research suggestions.  
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## 33 Literature review

### 34 Contextualising women's refugee entrepreneurship: intersectional vulnerabilities 35 and agentic power 36 37 38 39 40

41 Women's refugee entrepreneurship scholarship needs contextualisation (Al-Dajani, 2023) and  
42 intersectionality for a better understanding of its distinctive vulnerabilities and power (Adeeko and  
43 Treanor, 2022). To contextualise these entrepreneurial journeys, we embrace everyday  
44 entrepreneurship (Baker and Welter, 2020) to examine women refugee entrepreneurs' hidden  
45 potential to overcome their unique displacement challenges and exercise their agency in host  
46 countries through enacting intersectional identities (Adeeko and Treanor, 2022).  
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52 While refugee entrepreneurship research has increasingly developed over the last few years  
53 (Abebe, 2023; Adeeko and Treanor, 2021; Khademi et al., 2024), many studies have borrowed  
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3 concepts from migrant entrepreneurship research (Ram et al., 2022) and ignored the specificities  
4 of the refugee contextual displacement, encompassing war trauma and a loss of identity. Refai and  
5 McElwee (2023) reveal that refugees use entrepreneurship to overcome institutional constraints  
6 and marginalisation, often preferring their entrepreneurial identity to their stigmatised refugee one  
7 (see also Adeeko and Treanor, 2021). Researchers claim that most refugees can overcome trauma  
8 (Yeshe et al., 2022) and are equipped to capitalise on financial opportunities in host countries.  
9 (Shepherd et al., 2020). Most studies examine non-EU women refugee entrepreneurs in the UK  
10 (Adeeko and Treanor, 2022; Alkhaled and Sasaki, 2022), except for a limited number that have  
11 explored psychological factors, such as crisis self-efficacy which appears to be the most important  
12 psychological factor explaining new venture among Ukrainian refugee entrepreneurs in Denmark  
13 (Klyver et al., 2022).  
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23 Over the last decades, Crenshaw's intersectionality has become a pillar of feminist research by  
24 advancing feminist debates (Ahl and Marlow, 2021) and allowing for an extensive understanding  
25 of the multiple and complex identities involved in refugee entrepreneurship behaviours and  
26 experiences (Adeeko and Treanor, 2022). In the context of women refugee entrepreneurs, an  
27 intersectionality lens enables scholars to emphasise the multiple disadvantages they are confronted  
28 with while engaging with entrepreneurship (Adeeko and Treanor, 2022). However, the perpetuated  
29 gendered blindness (Al-Dajani, 2023) of entrepreneurship research must be more systematically  
30 addressed to uncover both the vulnerabilities and the agency of women refugees (Khademi et al.,  
31 2024) and formulate urgently needed evidence-based programmes and policies aimed at helping  
32 refugees to overcome poverty and marginalisation in the host country (Richey and Brooks, 2024).  
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42 Recent studies have examined refugee entrepreneurship by employing gender, age and class as  
43 identity dimensions to explain why and how refugees handle resources or cope with a lack of them  
44 to overcome socio-economic constraints (Martinez Dy, 2020; Shepherd et al., 2020). These studies  
45 reveal that refugees' multiple identities both empower and hinder them (Adeeko and Treanor,  
46 2021), influencing their entrepreneurial endeavours. Thus, an intersectional lens is relevant for  
47 supporting an in-depth investigation of women refugee entrepreneurship. Intersectionality  
48 challenges the notion of refugee homogeneity (Khademi et al., 2024) and gives expression to the  
49 often-silenced voices of women entrepreneurs (Martinez Dy and McNeil, 2023), not from the  
50 perspective of what they are not, an ideal male entrepreneur, but rather, by showing what they do  
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3 (Al-Dajani, 2023). Instead of being seen as hopeless victims (Pesch and Ipek, 2023), refugee  
4 women entrepreneurs overcome unique obstacles and exercise diverse types of power. This  
5 overlooked, but crucial, aspect of refugee entrepreneurship can be better understood by exploring  
6 the agency and limitations embedded in their intersectional identities (Al-Dajani, 2023; Khademi  
7 et al., 2024). We do so by leveraging the construct of doing intersectionality (Martinez Dy and  
8 MacNeil, 2023) to reveal how Ukrainian women refugee entrepreneurs engage with their identities  
9 while negotiating power imbalances and inequalities.

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16 Identities are fluid, dynamic and contextual, with subjective experiences being continually  
17 transformed, re-enacted and re-negotiated within context (Radu-Lefebvre et al., 2021). Given  
18 refugees' displacement and distinctive constraints, their identity as refugee entrepreneurs is far  
19 from straightforward, but rather, challenging and dynamic, especially since evidence suggests that  
20 these two identities (refugee and entrepreneurial) are fragile and might seem incompatible  
21 (Shepherd et al., 2020). Indeed, refugee identity is often portrayed as a stigmatised one (Adeeko  
22 and Treanor, 2021) and a liability (Hack-Polay et al., 2021). The liabilities of newness and  
23 smallness are challenges well documented in migrant entrepreneurship literature (Hannan and  
24 Freeman, 1984). Lack of legitimacy, resource scarcity and deskilling, decontextualised roles,  
25 uncertain identities and diminished socio-economic bargaining power emerge from newness  
26 and/or smallness in the early stages of entrepreneurship (Lefebvre, 2020). Adding to the  
27 complexity of migrant entrepreneurs struggling at the margins of society is their liability of  
28 poorness, which includes literacy deficits, scarcity mindsets, non-business pressures and the  
29 absence of a safety net (Morris, 2020). The fragility of these entrepreneurial endeavours makes  
30 entrepreneurs vulnerable. In the context of refugee entrepreneurship, vulnerabilities might also  
31 trigger a loss of autonomy, skills and identity (Richey et al., 2023). Therefore, it is not sufficient  
32 to acknowledge the potential of entrepreneurship as a vehicle out of poverty and marginalisation;  
33 we must rethink how refugees' vulnerabilities can be reconciled with entrepreneurial agency.

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Considering this, researchers have explored how refugee entrepreneurs handle vulnerabilities and  
agency. Increasing evidence suggests that social arrangements emerging from intersectionality  
combine both being and becoming, giving rise to specific forms of positionality, defined as the  
juncture between "structure (social position) and agency (social meaning and practice)" (Anthias,  
2008: 15). Intersectionality moves away from static categorisation to help scholars better



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3 understand the relational intersection of gender, ethnicity, and class identities as contextual  
4 processes, each with a unique mix of advantages and disadvantages. By applying an intersectional  
5 lens, one can examine how being a refugee and the subsequent fragmentation of identity impact  
6 upon women's experiences of entrepreneurship in host countries. This presents the opportunity to  
7 look at women refugee entrepreneurs as individuals with a repertoire of social identities capable  
8 of exercising their own agency to challenge stigmatised identities.  
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10 The OECD (2023) reports that 80% of Ukrainian refugees are women, compared to 49% of non-  
11 EU waves. Importantly, refugee women flee war with their children and without their husbands,  
12 who are called for military duty. They are single mothers and breadwinners in the host country and  
13 are more likely than other migrants to be marginalised and pressured into entrepreneurship to  
14 overcome poverty and marginalisation (Adeeko and Treanor, 2021). Though resourceful, they may  
15 find it challenging to balance their refugee and entrepreneurial identities, revealing contextual  
16 contradictions between their pre-war entrepreneurial identity and their recycled entrepreneurial  
17 one in the context of displacement, when loss of resources, autonomy and identity causes life-  
18 altering socio-economic constraints (Yeshe et al., 2022). Gender has been a crucial, but  
19 contentious, identity in entrepreneurship and refugee entrepreneurship studies for 30 years (Al-  
20 Dajani, 2023). While these studies show how women struggle with gendered assumptions, pre-  
21 ascribed roles and socio-cultural expectations (Adeeko and Treanor, 2021; Al-Dajani, 2023), they  
22 overlook the relationship between refugees' temporary displacement and their role in the ongoing  
23 war as wives and mothers, rendering them invisible in the grand narrative of the masculinised  
24 nationhood (Peng et al., 2022). Scholarly consensus needs to be improved on whether female  
25 entrepreneurial engagements address disparities and discriminatory behaviours and bring about  
26 beneficial social change for themselves and others (Ng et al., 2022). For instance, Syrian women  
27 refugees in the UK feel empowered by the autonomy they achieve through selling their craftwork  
28 to provide for their families, which contradicts their identity as women raised to follow patriarchal  
29 traditions by which they were taken care of in Syria (Alkhaled and Sasaki, 2022). Such studies  
30 demonstrate how, through the interplay of their multiple identities, women refugee entrepreneurs  
31 experience vulnerabilities and exert their agency in the host country (Adeeko and Treanor, 2021;  
32 Khademi et al., 2024). To explore the dynamics of agency in the context of women refugee  
33 entrepreneurs, we use Rowland's (1997) lens of four distinct forms of power.  
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## Rowlands' lens of power model

The concept of power is essential to the conceptualisation of the process of empowerment, helping in understanding the processes that influence people' agency and choice in constrained social contexts. Prior research on refugee entrepreneurs has shown that the process of empowerment is iterative and might help marginalised communities, such as women refugee entrepreneurs in the UK, enact their agency in the host country (Street et al., 2022). Rowland's model focuses on four distinct forms of power: *power from within* (self-respect and self-efficacy), *power over* (controlling power and dominance over others), *power to* (productive power) and *power with* (collective power).

*Power from within* is prominent in the seminal work of Rowlands (1995), who argues that empowerment goes beyond agency: "empowerment is concerned with the processes by which people become aware of their own interests and how these relate to those of others [...]" (Rowlands, 1995: 87). Specifically, by exercising *power from within*, women refugee entrepreneurs might use their "knowledge, individual capabilities, sense of entitlement, self-esteem, and self-belief to make changes in their lives" (Perezniето and Taylor, 2014: 236) to overcome socio-cultural gendered constraints and challenges and drive transformative change (Rowlands, 1997). Conversely, *power over* is controlling and dominant. In female empowerment, *power over* can both enable and constrain entrepreneurship. This notion has been questioned for portraying power as self-driven interests that undermine and even create structural disparities in gender, class, and other social categories (Wood et al., 2021). The misinterpretation of financial autonomy as the "eo-liberalization of feminism (Prugl, 2015) promotes a distributive view of the power of me versus others (Wood et al., 2021), encouraging refugee entrepreneurs to compete to overcome socioeconomic constraints. When manifested as *power over*, self-empowerment is not an act of dominance over others, but rather, consists in personal development leading to transformative change (Rowlands 1997, 2016), as demonstrated by African women refugee entrepreneurs in the United Kingdom, who use their entrepreneurial skills to overcome socioeconomic constraints (Adeeko and Treanor, 2021) or Palestinian refugees in Lebanon, who use their entrepreneurial identity to exert control over their devaluing refugee status (Shepherd et al., 2020).

As for *power to*, it refers to productive power—the ability to make decisions and act, a creative force for new possibilities and activities (Rowlands, 1997). This productive power helps women entrepreneurs in the United Arab Emirates to express their self-determination through power sharing as they challenge gender stereotypes (Ng et al., 2022). Entrepreneurs might also gain agency and self-esteem by enacting their *power with*. Involvement in in-group activities can enable entrepreneurs to improve their lives, acquire support, and preserve their rights. Forced displacement in the refugee experience is a discontinuous transition that might raise identity concerns. Such jolts require entrepreneurs to engage in identity construction to create acceptable otherness, like Palestinian refugee entrepreneurs who (re)prioritise their identities to address identity stigma and social devaluation and engage in entrepreneurship at the margins of society (Shepherd et al., 2020).

Rowland's (1997) types of power should be understood as fluid, dynamic, and interrelated manifestations that shape the process of empowerment, rather than static conceptual blocks (Street et al., 2022). The table below summarises Rowland's power model.

Table 1: Rowland's (1997) power model

Power forms	Meaning
<i>Power from within</i>	Self-esteem, and self-efficacy to challenge constraints and drive transformative change.
<i>Power over</i>	Controlling power over others and personal development.
<i>Power to</i>	Productive power; the ability to make decisions and act.
<i>Power with</i>	The joint action of the community towards improving people's lives and defending their rights.
<i>Source: Researchers' own based on Perezniето and Taylor (2014), cf. Rowlands (1997)</i>	

To sum up, our theoretical background section emphasises the need for a contextual understanding of how women refugee entrepreneurs navigate intersectional vulnerabilities and power in host countries by leveraging their multiple identities. Our aim is to contribute to the nascent stream of refugee entrepreneurship research (Adeeko and Treanor, 2021; Khademi et al., 2024), challenge the overlap between migrant and refugee entrepreneurship (Abebe, 2023; Ram et al., 2022) and contribute to gendered, evidence-based practices and policies (Richey et al., 2023). These issues must be tackled to prevent the loss of the human socio-economic potential of millions of refugees

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3 struggling to overcome socio-economic constraints and exclusion (Richey and Brooks, 2024). To  
4 do so, our IPA study follows the research protocol detailed below.  
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For this study, we adopt a qualitative, interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) to uncover *how Ukrainian women refugee entrepreneurs experience their identities as mothers, refugees, Ukrainians, and entrepreneurs in a context of displacement in the UK and Romania*. The ontological interpretative perspective fits with the research question by focussing on participants' lived experiences, recognising the subjective nature of their contextual realities, and engaging interpretatively with each participant to understand the phenomena and their embodied meanings (Smith, 2019). This facilitates an understanding of the richness and complexity of the intersectional journeys of Ukrainian refugees in both contexts (Alase, 2017). Before describing the data collection and analysis, the ensuing subsection outlines the research context.

### Research context

Our primary focus is on Ukrainian women who are refugees and entrepreneurs in Britain and Romania. We select these host countries because they have welcomed some of the largest communities of Ukrainian refugees in Europe (OECD, 2023). According to Panchenko (2022), 76% of Ukrainian refugees held full-time jobs before the war, while 20% were self-employed or entrepreneurs. Since the beginning of the war, Romania has provided temporary protection to over 160,000 Ukrainian refugees (UNHCR, 2024) while the United Kingdom has temporarily housed over 250,000 refugees through the Ukrainian Family Visa and Sponsorship Scheme (Home Office, 2024). Given most refugee research has been focused on advanced economies, cross-cultural comparative studies that include emerging economies, such as Romania, are few, but crucial to understanding refugee entrepreneurship in context (Abebe, 2023; Adeeko and Treanor, 2022). The UK is known for its pro-entrepreneurial and diverse culture, as well as its advanced economy. In contrast, Romania is an emerging economy with an increasingly entrepreneurial and diverse society (GEM, 2024).

## Sampling

Drawing on the World Bank's definition (2023) of refugee entrepreneurs, we selected Ukrainian citizens based on the following criteria: (1) Participants willingly accepting to share their experiences; (2) Participants identifying themselves as a refugee; (3) Participants residing in either the UK or Romania during the study, and (4) Participants involved in formal or informal entrepreneurship. It is well known that refugees are hard to reach due to being socially stigmatised (Abebe, 2023). The researchers in this study have experience investigating different migrant communities, and two of them share an Eastern European cultural heritage with the participants. The researchers employed various convenience sampling techniques, including traditional and social media e-snowballing, to reach participants who were geographically dispersed and difficult to access due to their vulnerability (Chitac and Knowles, 2019). E-snowballing, as described by Chitac and Knowles (2019), is a distinctive sampling technique that leverages the publicly accessible social media profiles of subscribers to privately invite potential participants using platforms such as Facebook and LinkedIn. This iterative method reduces the influence of selection bias and gatekeeper reliance

The sampling process has resulted in seven participants in the UK and six in Romania. Our sample adheres to IPA's recommended practice of prioritising in-depth understanding of participants' experiences and meanings (Alase, 2017) over generalisation (Saunders et al., 2019), and reflects the interpretative tradition of refugee entrepreneurship research, which has used samples of one to seven participants (Adeeko and Treanor, 2022; Khademi et al., 2024; Street et al., 2022). Additionally, besides following the IPA tradition, the decision of our sample size was based on empirical saturation, defined as the point at which further interviews yielded no new emergent themes (Saunders et al., 2019).

Table 2 details the Ukrainian women refugee entrepreneurs' demographics.

Table 2. Research participants' demographics

Participant code	Education level	Pre-war Business sector/model - years	Business sector /model-Host country	Primary market	Residence host country
AdaUK	Bachelor	IT recruitment / hybrid/ 8 years	IT recruitment/ online	Ukrainian /European	Jun-22
YulaUK	Bachelor	IT recruitment/ hybrid/ 6 years	IT recruitment/ online	Ukrainian	Jun-22

NiaUK	Master	Travel agency & Wellness/" brick and mortar"/8 years	Travel services & Wellness /online	Ukrainian	May-22
AnnaUK	Bachelor	Interior design / "brick and mortar"/ 4 years	Interior design/online	Ukrainian	Jun-22
NaanUK	Bachelor	None	Business Club & Candle /hybrid	Ukrainian	Apr-22
IaraUK	Master	Art studio & Gallery / "brick and mortar"/8 years	Art gallery/hybrid	International	Apr-22
TayUK	Bachelor	IT recruitment & Software Development / hybrid/ 10 years	IT recruitment & Software Development/online	Ukraine & International	May-22
ValRo	Master	English Teaching & Translation/ "brick and mortar"/1 year	English Teaching & Translation & Sales/online	Ukrainian	Mar-22
InaRo	Bachelor	Business Consulting/ "brick and mortar"/ 3 years	Business Consulting & Project Management & Sales /hybrid	Ukrainian	Mar-22
OleRo	Bachelor	None	Photography & Graphic Designer /hybrid	Ukrainian & Romanian	Mar-22
TetyRo	Bachelor	Gold & Silver Jewellery Shops/" brick and mortar"/ 6 years	Custom Jewellery/ online	Ukrainian & European	Apr-23
VicRo	Bachelor	Entertainment Centre for Kids/" brick and mortar"/10 years	Career & Business Consulting /online	Ukrainian	Jan-23
MarRo	Master	Mobile Phones Business & Nutrition Consulting / "brick and mortar"/12 years	Nutrition Consulting/hybrid	Ukrainian	Mar-22
<i>Source: Researchers' own, based on fieldwork</i>					

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3 In line with prior reports by OECD (2023), the Ukrainian women refugees we interviewed in both  
4 countries had a high level of education, typically holding a bachelors or masters degree, and 5-6  
5 years of experience, except for one first-time entrepreneur in each host country. All interviewees  
6 were refugees in their host countries for one to two years and started businesses in the first three  
7 to six months upon their arrival. Furthermore, most of our participants in both countries are  
8 mothers (5 out of 7 in the UK; 5 out of 6 in Romania).  
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14 Among the two cross-cultural samples, women entrepreneurs in the UK retained their pre-war  
15 business sector, many moving to hybrid or online models. In the UK, most of the participants  
16 focused on one or two industries, such as IT recruitment and development. By contrast, four out  
17 of six Ukrainian refugee entrepreneurs in Romania reported working on entrepreneurial projects  
18 in diverse and multiple business areas simultaneously, such as business consultancy, project  
19 management, and sales. Despite refugee entrepreneurs in both countries primarily serving  
20 Ukrainians living in war-torn Ukraine and the host country, there was a notable difference.  
21 Specifically, three out of seven participants in the UK spoke about their international or European  
22 customer base, with none serving the British market at the time of the study. Whilst in Romania,  
23 two entrepreneurs spoke about serving Romanian or European customers, along with their  
24 predominant Ukrainian customer base.  
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### 34 Data collection and analysis

35 We used semi-structured interviews and first-person narratives of ideographic experiences (Smith  
36 et al., 2009). Specifically, we carried out online semi-structured interviews, with an average  
37 duration of 40-70 minutes, with only two being performed in person and the rest online, according  
38 to participants' preferences, spanning from July 2023 to May 2024. The lead researcher employed  
39 probes to encourage detailed narratives regarding the refugees' everyday experiences and the  
40 significance they attribute to their identities as Ukrainian women, refugees, entrepreneurs and  
41 mothers in host countries. 'Mother participants' explained that they preferred to be interviewed  
42 online because they were able to ensure the safety of their children, while participating in the study.  
43 In line with the IPA tradition of phenomenological reduction, the lead author used reflective field  
44 notes (bracketing) to reduce the risk of subjective interpretation. The goal was to preserve  
45 participant authenticity by limiting the influence of researcher biases on the integrity of  
46 respondents' narratives (Alase, 2017).  
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3 Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) helped us build an in-depth understanding of how  
4 Ukrainian refugees experience their identities—that is, as Ukrainians, women (mothers), refugees  
5 and entrepreneurs—as well as an understanding of the meanings of these identities for the  
6 participants. We combined *phenomenology*, which focuses on the unique experiences of refugees  
7 in their specific contexts, with *hermeneutics*, which acknowledges the researchers' position as  
8 outsiders to the refugee community, but with expertise in migration research, and *idiography*, by  
9 drawing on the researchers' knowledge of IPA analysis to recognise both the individual  
10 distinctiveness and shared similarities among the refugees. We followed strict ethical guidelines  
11 throughout data collection and analysis, which ensured informed, recorded consent to preserve  
12 participant authenticity together with detailed and transparent reporting (Smith et al., 2009).  
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21 The researchers adhered to Smith et al. (2009) phenomenological techniques of data analysis and  
22 focused on highlighting the participants' perspectives on their experiences of agency against  
23 distinctive cross-cultural constraints. An interpreter fluent in both Ukrainian and English  
24 transcribed and translated all recorded interviews, ensuring that the participants' intended  
25 meanings and the significance of their experiences were accurately preserved (Alase, 2017). We  
26 engaged in an iterative and inductive cycle of data analysis comprising the identification of  
27 thematic patterns within and between interviews. The researchers adhered to the IPA tradition and  
28 focused on “trying to make sense of the participants trying to make sense of what (is) happening  
29 to them” (Smith et al., 2009: 79). The hermeneutic circle technique was employed to analyse the  
30 respondents' contextual experience by examining its constituent elements, including individual  
31 words, whole sentences, specific excerpts and complete interviews, in a continuous back-and-forth  
32 process (Smith et al., 2009). To do so, annotations were utilised to analyse the data and identify  
33 first-order themes. We then linked the firsthand experiences of participants to relevant theoretical  
34 constructs pertaining to power and intersectionality. Specifically, we used Jo Rowlands' typology  
35 of power (1997) to help us identify second-order codes, demonstrating how participants exercised  
36 their agency, and to reveal how they navigated their multiple identities by enacting different forms  
37 of power. Next, because refugees construct multiple identities, including their refugee,  
38 entrepreneurial, gender and Ukrainian ones, we used these intersectional identities as aggregated  
39 dimensions to make sense of the data.  
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3 To sum up, we leveraged Gioia et al.'s (2013) approach to identify convergent and divergent  
4 patterns within and across interviews (see Tables 3 and 4), which resulted in informant-centered  
5 first-order themes (e.g., liability of refugeeness, empowerment through power from within, over,  
6 to), theory-centered second-order codes (e.g., intersectional identities: Ukrainian, refugee status,  
7 gender and entrepreneurial identities), and aggregated dimensions (e.g., intersectional identities).  
8 This approach enabled a qualitatively rigorous illustration of the relationships between data and  
9 theory, while ensuring proper inductive analysis and decreasing the risk of misrepresenting  
10 participants' experiences or introducing interpretative bias (Gioia, 2021). Additionally, to maintain  
11 scientific rigour, the researchers adhered to the assessment criteria established by Smith (2011)  
12 and placed emphasis on authenticity, context sensitivity, transparency and trustworthiness. The  
13 use of semi-structured interviews and direct excerpts from participant narratives effectively  
14 maintained the authentic nature of their experiences. The study's context sensitivity was enhanced  
15 by encouraging participants to use their preferred language throughout the interviews. The  
16 diligence in disclosing study methodology, evaluation of ethics application and the active  
17 involvement of all three researchers at every level of the research process guaranteed transparency  
18 and trustworthiness.  
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## 31 32 Research findings

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35 Our participant narratives illustrate their complex and dynamic intersectional journeys in a context  
36 characterised by institutional and resource constraints and the burden of war trauma they carry  
37 with them (Abebe, 2023; Wauter and Lambrecht, 2008). In this section, we reveal the participants'  
38 experiences, constraints, identities and agency as resulting from our study.  
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### 44 Ukrainian women refugee entrepreneurs' intersectional experiences in the UK and 45 Romania

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48 The narratives of the 13 Ukrainian women refugee entrepreneurs weave a unique gallery of  
49 tapestries, where each thread, represents contextual constraints and sparkles of agency, from lack  
50 of financial resources to lack of host market knowledge, profound loss, post-traumatic syndrome  
51 and survivor syndrome triggered by war trauma these women refugees experienced. Each thread  
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3 has deep personal meanings and motivates them to keep thriving against all odds. The contextual  
4 complexities of these women refugees' stories are captured in Table 3 and Table 4.  
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For Peer Review

Table 3. Data structure: Ukrainian women refugee entrepreneurs' intersectional experiences in the UK

Illustrative interview extracts	1st order themes	2nd order codes	Aggregated dimensions
<p>“The money I get from designing bedrooms for Ukrainians barely covers my son’s expenses. I used to make a lot of money on large design projects, but how can I do it now that my eighteen-month legal stay is almost up? I still need to learn about this market, learn English, and decide whether I can extend my stay here”. (AnnaUK)</p>	<p>Lack of market &amp; cultural knowledge Financial constraints Legal status uncertainty</p>	<p><i>Institutional &amp; resource constraints</i></p>	<p>Contextual displacement constraints</p>
<p>“I used to be ashamed because I was depressed, yet free compared to the rest of my family left behind in Ukraine. I hid my health problems. I started having sleeping problems, and only after two years did I start to work on my health, and now I saw a psychologist”. (NaanUK) “What motivates me now, you know, unfortunately, is that I have lots of really close friends and my relatives who died in this war and as an entrepreneur, I want to be connected to Ukrainian people who are still there for fighting, etcetera. So, I feel extremely responsible for supporting them in different ways and connecting them to my country”. (TayUK)</p>	<p>Depression Survivor syndrome</p>	<p><i>War trauma</i></p>	
<p>“This loss of identity is something that all of the refugees are experiencing because their everyday life, their homes, their routine; all of this has been replaced by a hole, just a black hole which will take lots of time to recover and its stressful journey as we don’t understand how things work”. (NiaUK)</p>	<p>Liability of refugeeness and loss of autonomy, skills and identity</p>	<p><i>Refugee Identity</i></p>	<p>Intersectional identities</p>
<p>“So, I would never have to be a hostage of these constraints anymore. The only worry I should have is to have a laptop and internet connections, to run my business, and to live my life”. (AdaUK)</p>	<p>Empowerment through <i>power from within</i> their pre-war knowledge, self-esteem, and self-belief to change their lives</p>	<p><i>Entrepreneurial identity</i></p>	
<p>“That's why I started to help them by organising the business club. So, I don’t have to feel like a refugee here. I just want to help, more than to be helped”. (NaanUK) “When I present myself as an international artist, people’s attitudes change and start communicating with me differently. It is important to let them know who I am (...) as I did in over 42 countries”. (IaraUK)</p>	<p>Empowerment through <i>power over</i> personal development</p>		

<p>“(...) If I can see what is broken, then you can fix it. It is my responsibility to fix it because I can do this, and I don't understand why I should be silent and avoid taking action to fix it. So, I strongly believe that if I have two legs, two hands, a head, and a brain, and thus, I am a fully functional human being, then my success depends on what I can do. There is not some magic that only some can do (...). I can be more successful than the local people, because I am more motivated to succeed than local entrepreneurs, because they have a place to call home, have their family and friends, and are settled. I understand that I cannot pay my rent if I'm not working. I cannot survive here”. (AdaUK)</p> <p>“It drives me (...) because I can see a future through my business. For me (my business), it is not just about having great results and making money left and right. It's mostly about (...) my personal impact”. (YulaUK)</p>	<p>Empowerment through <i>power to</i>, manifested as the ability to make decisions and act</p>		
<p>“Women are the foundation to rebuilding Ukraine. (...) My relationship with my country is like that with my family. They are both equally vital to Ukrainian women today (...) We assume responsibility for Ukraine's freedom. Many women entrepreneurs donate their earnings to buy drones. We raised \$100,000 and sent it to Ukrainian soldiers through my brother, a soldier in the army, while transitioning in Berlin for nearly two and a half months. We take very seriously the responsibility of ensuring that our Ukrainian identity is part of our world map representation. It is a war about our identity, not a crisis! People should get this correctly!”. (AdaUK)</p>	<p>Empowerment through <i>power over</i> their personal and professional development, leading to <i>power to</i> start on transformative journeys</p>	<p><i>Gender identity (women &amp; mothers)</i></p>	
<p>“It is all about freedom: freedom of speech, religion, and general freedom. You can't fully understand our past unless you have lived it. We were a part of Russia, but that's in the past. But we are not Russians, and we do not want to be. We have our own identity and journey”. (AdaUK)</p>	<p>Empowerment through <i>power with</i> their community to improve their lives</p>	<p><i>Ukrainian identity</i></p>	

Source: Researchers' fieldwork

Table 4. Data structure: Ukrainian women refugee entrepreneurs' intersectional experiences in Romania

Illustrative interview extracts	1st order themes	2nd order codes	Aggregated dimensions
<p>“Although many Ukrainians have some financial resources, have knowledge and experience as entrepreneurs back in Ukraine, we struggle to make money here, living day to day, because we do not know how things are done here, the whole business process, where to start, where to go, how to find a translator, how to communicate, what we need to open a bank account. There is a lack of knowledge, context, and knowledge of whom to contact for raw materials and resources for my entrepreneurial endeavours. Speaking English is not good, but you need to know Romanian to open a bank account or buy food”.(ValRo)</p> <p>“What is very different is that the value of earning money was much higher in Ukraine, and we could afford a great life. Yet our experience as businesspeople in Ukraine taught us how to survive here, despite not understanding the language, but not how to make real money”. (VicRo)</p>	<p>Lack of market &amp; cultural knowledge Language barriers Uncertain future Social stigma</p>	<p><i>Institutional &amp; resource constraints</i></p>	<p>Contextual displacement constraints</p>
<p>“Loss of ability to plan my life and loss of direction. I have begun planning my life anew lately, because I realise that returning home will not happen anytime soon. Many people continue living in limbo and still not planning, believing they will return home next month, or the month after. The material loss we all felt when we left Ukraine at the beginning of the war is not as significant nor hurtful, even though my company is still operating in Ukraine, without me or my beautiful house sits empty in a story-like setting, by the sea, whilst here I am struggling cramped in a two-bedroom flat with three children”. (TetyRo)</p>	<p>Depression Uncertain future Loss of human life</p>	<p><i>War trauma</i></p>	
<p>“As a refugee, I felt blind, in debt, without a present or future, in complete survival mode, feeling abandoned, torn between feeling stuck and daring to be hopeful. I stood still for the first months after the war began, in disbelief about what was happening, wondering how we got here. One day, I was living in Ukraine, unaware of what lay ahead and I'm not sure how things came to this”. (ValRo)</p>	<p>Liability of refugeeness and loss of autonomy, skills and identity Social stigma</p>	<p><i>Refugee identity</i></p>	<p>Intersectional identities</p>

<p>“I was a successful businesswoman back home. I had my own car, my flat, and my office, but now I am simply a refugee, and like everyone, I started from scratch here. It takes time to build something here; I am nobody, doing nothing of value, really. As a refugee, you are reduced to a shadow queuing to get free food and other essentials, just to make ends meet, and then occasionally, topping this up with some business projects that keep my spirit alive”. (MarRo)</p>	<p>Empowerment through <i>power from within</i> by using their pre-war knowledge, self-esteem, and self-belief to make changes in their lives</p>		
<p>“Here, as a refugee entrepreneur, I find myself constantly switching between being dependent and needing the free shampoo and the memory of never needing to be handed over this shampoo, but rather, making money selling shampoo in my business, as a metaphorical example. Yet, in the last two years, I haven’t bought a single bottle of shampoo, which causes me anxiety since, as a refugee, you need to know who will buy you the next bottle when you run out. Does this style of life preserve me or harm who I am or aspire to be? I have no idea. My trust in the temporality of being a refugee keeps me going; I still go for that free shampoo bottle. I keep telling myself that the end of the war is truly one month away and another one. And whilst I am using my business knowledge and making some money with it, I get stronger every day, although I still go for that free bottle of shampoo”. (VicRo)</p>	<p>Empowerment through <i>power over</i> personal development leads to transformative journeys</p>	<p><i>Entrepreneurial identity</i></p>	
<p>“Now, after two years, we are in a different stage of being stale. We have accepted our destiny as refugees, and we are now ready to move forward. Many Ukrainians, just like me, took our first steps into entrepreneurship instinctively, with few specific goals in mind. That is why we started the business, not because we wanted to live a good life, but because it is something we like to be and do. This is something that defines me, and I must continue to pursue it, not for any specific goal or ambition, but to ensure that I remain true to who I am, free to dream, do to, to be, whether or not I make money”. (ValRo)</p>	<p>Empowerment through <i>power to</i>, manifested as the ability to make decisions and act</p>		
<p>“I found myself here alone with the child; I had no one to speak to, and I just wanted someone with whom I could simply have coffee. It has been complete social and psychological isolation. It was quite difficult! We were both depressed for months until we started living again and accepted that we couldn’t go back. For a long time, our lives were paused. We were simply existing, not living. But as a mum, you fight until you can no longer, and then you fight some more”. (OleRo)</p>	<p>Empowerment through <i>power over</i> their personal and professional development leads to <i>power to</i> start on transformative journeys</p>	<p><i>Gender identity (woman &amp; mothers)</i></p>	

<p>“Now Ukraine is already a bit of a brand (...), and for me, it means freedom and independence. I’m feeling quite Ukrainian these days. Before that, I didn’t have anything like that; I spoke Russian. We (My family) switched to Ukrainian only after the war began”. (TetyRo)</p>	<p>Empowerment through <i>power with</i> their community to improve their lives, protect their rights; they actively support the Ukrainian army in their fight for freedom and national identity</p>	<p><i>Ukrainian identity</i></p>	
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Source: Researchers’ fieldwork

## Contextual constraints and war trauma experienced in the UK and Romania

This subsection analyses the experiences of Ukrainian refugee entrepreneurs as they navigate the unique economic, social and institutional environments of the UK and Romania. Despite the UK’s developed economy and Romania’s emerging market, both contexts provide considerable problems, such as financial vulnerability, legal uncertainty and market unfamiliarity. Specifically, in the UK, systemic impediments and bureaucratic challenges are prevalent, whereas in Romania, language barriers and social constraints intensify many of these difficulties. Furthermore, across both contexts, the trauma of war and displacement exacerbates our participants’ challenges, relegating them to survival mode instead of prioritising economic expansion, all while navigating these complex emotional, cultural and institutional landscapes.

In the UK, our participants engaged in entrepreneurial ventures with all their energy, despite the contextual hardships they faced, such as lack of host market expertise and the attendant financial constraints that spark their entrepreneurial agency. TayUK’s testimonial relative to “*knowing all the ins and outs of the labour market in the UK that holds us (Ukrainian refugee entrepreneurs) back*” reflects a widespread anxiety about starting over and being forced to navigate an unfamiliar business environment, fearing legal and bureaucratic challenges one cannot afford to face, such as hiring locals: “*so we don’t get sued by them*” (TayUK). Many participants expressed their dissatisfaction with their inability to obtain financial resources, because “*as a refugee, you are not*

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3 *credible enough, so we don't have access to any kind of loans or credits, because the company*  
4 *doesn't have any kind of history here due to our recent arrival" (TayUK). The institutional hurdles*  
5 *to banking access highlight how pervasive financial vulnerability is among women refugee*  
6 *entrepreneurs. For many, business risks are exacerbated by the distinctive institutional and*  
7 *resource challenges they face as refugee entrepreneurs, which limits their ability to make informed*  
8 *decisions, leading to a heightened sense of hopelessness, deterring some from expanding their*  
9 *business into the British market, focusing on survival instead of growth. While others proceed*  
10 *cautiously, creating partnerships, just to make ends meet, in business and everyday life, where*  
11 *"even after pulling resources from all three partners and business opportunities, we continue to*  
12 *struggle to support our family and business" (TayUK). Similarly, in Romania, Val Ro's narrative*  
13 *exposes how women refugee entrepreneurs "struggle to make money here, living day to day,*  
14 *because we do not know how things are done here, the whole business process, where to start,*  
15 *where to go, how to find a translator, how to communicate". Across both countries, participants*  
16 *reported a lack of market and cultural understanding: "During the admissions exam at the*  
17 *university, they did not see me as a person, but as a Ukrainian refugee. All their queries were: Is*  
18 *the war in Ukraine real? Will you go back to your country when the war is over? (...). These*  
19 *questions made me feel uneasy and unworthy. It's still extremely difficult for me here, even though*  
20 *I am providing for me and my family, and I am not a dependent refugee anymore" (OleRo).*  
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35 However, whilst in the UK, refugees mostly face systemic constraints due to universalist policies,  
36 in Romania, social and cultural constraints, including language barriers, add to their daily  
37 challenges. For example, *"speaking English is not good enough, for you need to know Romanian*  
38 *to open a bank account or buy food" (ValRo). This requirement to be proficient in Romanian for*  
39 *basic interactions and administrative business tasks hinders the ability to run one's business,*  
40 *restricting refugees' prospects of reclaiming some level of financial and social autonomy.*  
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47 Not only are the lives of these women refugees constantly altered by the complex web of  
48 institutional and resource constraints, for they also continue to suffer from the war trauma that has  
49 caused them to experience depression and survivor syndrome. Their narrative puzzle consists of  
50 experiences of apocalyptic losses, as NiaUK related her profound sense of loss: *"One day, we woke*  
51 *up, and our home was gone. Uh, we lost our jobs, and I lost my business. This emptiness, inside*  
52 *and around me. I lost everything!"*. The survivor syndrome, which is reminiscent of AdaUK's  
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3 narrative, further exacerbates their depression: *“I am ashamed that people are living their lives*  
4 *every day in war-torn Kyiv or Ukraine, while I can live in freedom (...). During my first three to*  
5 *four months here, I determined to buy only the essential items for survival, and we (myself and my*  
6 *husband) lived only out of our suitcase. Every time I visit a museum or art gallery or go out for a*  
7 *coffee, I cannot stop thinking of how other people are dying while I enjoy this life. And that’s not*  
8 *nice. Everybody’s suffering, and you are not? This duality is what I have in my head. It’s really*  
9 *hurting!”*. Similarly, ToryRo recalled: *“To come here, for example, I had to choose between*  
10 *saving my father’s life and staying here to save my children’s lives. How does someone choose*  
11 *and live normally with such choices? No matter what I would have chosen, I would have been*  
12 *wrong in this situation. Isn’t that true? As a result, I lost loved ones, because, like many other*  
13 *Ukrainians, I had no choice”*. The shared tragedy of displacement, along with the ongoing conflict  
14 in Ukraine, has a significant impact on their mental health. Their feelings of loss and psychological  
15 strain from leaving family and friends behind increase their difficulties in adjusting to new  
16 situations, causing *“many Ukrainians to question the meaning of their lives, as many (of us) have*  
17 *lost our identities as a result of losing control over (our) lives”* (ValRo). Furthermore, ValRo  
18 described how the sudden displacement and uncertainty of their stay in Romania contributed to a  
19 more severe identity crisis, which *“began when we got here at the beginning of the war, and we*  
20 *realised that we were powerless, because we failed to figure out how to be entrepreneurs again”*.  
21 This complex interplay of multiple losses, including loss of social and economic power, and the  
22 need to start from scratch in a foreign country creates a sense of displacement and loss of identity  
23 and life direction: *“I (felt) just (...) cold, incomprehensible, a strange country, because of the*  
24 *language barrier, which gave me no chance to adapt or to prove myself”* (InaRo). Next, we get a  
25 unique look at their intersectional journeys in the UK and Romania as refugees, entrepreneurs,  
26 mothers, women and Ukrainians.  
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## 48 Refugee identity: liability of refugeeness

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51 When asked about their experience as a refugee in the UK or Romania, all participants refuted  
52 being labelled refugees. This reflects not only the preferential treatment they received from host  
53 countries, by getting immediate access to the labour market (OECD, 2023), but also their  
54 determination to stand up for themselves and use their pre-war entrepreneurial experience and their  
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3 high educational attainment, not to overcome, but to avoid feeling oneself as a refugee, which they  
4 regard as “*hopeless victims*” (IaraUK), “*hostage of these constraints*” (AdaUK) and “*a black*  
5 *hole*” (NiaUK). This is because, as NiaUK highlighted: “*we (Ukrainian refugees) are educated,*  
6 *living within society instead of camps, and having rights. By comparison, “normal refugees are*  
7 *uneducated, live in camps, and have no rights as we do*”. The belief that “*not all refugees are*  
8 *created equal*” leads them into creating a refugee hierarchy, where they feel emotionally protected  
9 and worthy of the top position, which makes their lives as refugees liveable. Respondents’  
10 discomfort with being labelled as refugees is anchored in the belief that accepting the refugee  
11 identity would mean giving up their autonomy; their ability to exercise their agency, while “*being*  
12 *fearful and weak*” (YulaUK), and thus, succumbing to a life of compromise, defined by a vicious  
13 cycle of “*trying, failing, and learning from the failure (...) to meet the (host) expectations*”  
14 (ValRo), as they wonder if the cost of meeting host country socio-cultural expectations would be  
15 greater than the benefits, since “*having two Master degrees and learning the Romanian language*  
16 *used only here, might not be enough to get a white collar job (...) just because you are new, a*  
17 *foreigner*” (ValRo).  
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30 However, their journeys as refugees are far more complex, revealing novel experiences of what  
31 we might call the *liability of refugeeness*. Compared to migrant entrepreneurs who experience the  
32 liability of smallness and newness, our respondents experience the *liability of refugeeness*, that is,  
33 a loss of autonomy, competencies, and identity due to displacement and contextual constraints:  
34 “*Being a dependent person, not knowing the language, my 17 years of expertise being good only*  
35 *for putting tomatoes on shelves in Kaufland. I don’t want to be someone’s pet*” (InaRo). The  
36 association of being a refugee with “*being someone’s pet*” (InaRo) is dehumanising, emphasising  
37 a complete loss of control and belonging. While the liability of refugeeness reinforces their  
38 emotional and economic burden, it also pushes participants to act as if they believe that they have  
39 what it takes to overcome difficulties: “*Well, this does not suit me very much (...) but although I*  
40 *can’t find a job and I cannot look after myself and my family, I refuse to be a passive consumer*  
41 *(...) getting food here and money there. I couldn’t live like this and that’s why I started doing some*  
42 *business dealings*” (InaRo).  
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54 Despite facing similar obstacles and depicting their lives as precarious, our respondents’ life stories  
55 reveal *two contextual nuances*. Firstly, whilst acknowledging the profound loss they have suffered,  
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3 UK-based refugees are hopeful that their liability of refugeeness is a temporary constraint that they  
4 can overcome, because they believe British entrepreneurial culture will allow them to take charge  
5 of their future by *“us(ing) all my energy, power and the meaning of being a public figure, my brain,*  
6 *my communication skills, to change my life from a victim into the artist I am”* (IaraUK). By  
7 contrast, in Romania, InaRo hopes to overcome her liability of refugeeness by creating her own  
8 emotionally balanced reality and life: *“I believe we are all creators of our own reality and lives,*  
9 *and I want to have a say in mine”* (InaRo). However, she struggles to find the optimal personal  
10 and economic compromise to see through the *transformational pain* she suffers from reclaiming  
11 some degree of autonomy, competencies and relatedness in the future, while continuing her  
12 *business dealings* at the margins of Romanian society. She knows that *“Romania is a safe,*  
13 *temporary hub”* (InaRo) and that her *business dealings* will ensure short-term survival for her and  
14 her family. Still, they will not secure the life she wants, nor the life she has lost, and she tries to  
15 reclaim: *“I see Ukrainians choosing to either return to Odessa/Kyiv, to our cities for opportunities*  
16 *and be willing to take the risk even during the war, or wait here for the war to end so they can*  
17 *return to Ukraine, or choose a country with a more flexible system for entrepreneurs. I think that*  
18 *the inflexibility of the Romanian system plays a very big role here”* (InaUK).  
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32 This uncertainty and unworthiness limit their ability to fully commit to their entrepreneurial  
33 ventures, as their primary identity remains that of a transient refugee, and their struggle for a stable  
34 and worthy identity is an important barrier to their personal and professional development. The  
35 high cost of gaining a more permanent identity underscores the structural constraints preventing  
36 access to resources for proper living conditions. Overall, participant stories are packed with  
37 references to the uncertainty of their right to remain in host countries and their worthiness as  
38 refugees or entrepreneurs, reflecting a profound identity crisis exacerbated by the uncertain legal  
39 status and societal perceptions of refugees, as well as a lack of knowledge, which perpetuates their  
40 dependence on a legal and economic system that keeps them marginalised. However, despite the  
41 distinctive challenges these refugee women face in the UK and Romania, due to institutional,  
42 social and resource constraints and war trauma, their entrepreneurial identity brings them hope in  
43 their ability to overcome the liability of refugeeness and find purpose.  
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4 Entrepreneurial identity: a constellation of *power from within, power over, and*  
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6 *power to*  
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9 Women refugees' accounts showcase the depth of their emotional struggle and revolt of being  
10 forced into a refugee identity and their motivation for embarking on an entrepreneurial journey,  
11 against all odds: *"Do you understand how devastating this loss is? I, Vic, used to be a fairly*  
12 *successful entrepreneur in Ukraine before the war, and now my entire identity has been turned*  
13 *inside out (...); I understand that as a refugee, I could not bring it (entrepreneurship identity) with*  
14 *me here, and most likely, there will be nothing left of it tomorrow (...)* But, then again, what would  
15 convince me to accept further losses by investing significant time, money, and effort in this venture  
16 and here? Maybe it is the fact that I hate being a refugee, and I love being my own boss. I cannot  
17 ignore that I am one of the people who are natural at solving problems and bringing positive  
18 changes in my community (...) Being an entrepreneur means taking full responsibility for my  
19 business, for my life. It is the least I could still do for me and my family, worth it or not" (VicRo).  
20 Despite living in a legal and institutional limbo, their fear of prolonged displacement due to war  
21 motivates them to build war-proof business models, transforming their "bricks and mortar" pre-  
22 war businesses into hybrid or online enterprises (see Table 2).  
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34 For Ukrainian women refugee entrepreneurs in the UK and Romania, entrepreneurial identity  
35 means more than a mere label; it represents the process of regaining their pre-war knowledge,  
36 autonomy and sense of self. This journey empowers them to discover novel inner resources,  
37 refusing the stereotype of being helpless victims, and instead, showcasing their ability to act, a  
38 characteristic that is crucial for many refugee entrepreneurs. IaraUK's story shows this, as she  
39 highlighted her entrepreneurial identity as a catalyst for transforming her life from that of a victim  
40 to that of an artist: *"Us(ing) all my energy, power and the meaning of being a public figure, my*  
41 *brain, my communication skills, to change my life from a victim into the artist I am (...)* When I  
42 present myself as an international artist, people's attitudes shift, and they start communicating  
43 with me differently" (IaraUK). This *power from within* nurtures her self-confidence and empowers  
44 her to exert control over the constraints she experienced as a refugee. IaraUK placed a strong  
45 emphasis on being visible to the public and reinventing oneself professionally.  
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3 Entrepreneurial identity seems to symbolically act as the participants' connection with a cherished  
4 past and a way to reclaim pre-war professional dignity. For instance, OleRo used her pre-war  
5 entrepreneurial skills to create value, despite the constant reminder of her refugee status. Her *power*  
6 *from within* enhanced her self-efficacy regarding her capacity to create and negotiate a new  
7 entrepreneurial identity and thus, move away from being seen as a refugee: "*As an entrepreneur*  
8 *here, I can create value for others, (...) I could get a second chance to create my own life here, yet*  
9 *I am always reminded that I am not a citizen; this imbalance is quite concerning. I have sleepless*  
10 *nights wondering how I could become a citizen and what do I need to do to free myself from being*  
11 *just a refugee?"* (OleRo). Our participants portrayed their entrepreneurial identity as a source of  
12 autonomy, which should expand to their business: "*my company must be as free as myself. This*  
13 *means that it doesn't matter where I am today, in Romania, in England, in Poland, or in Kherson,*  
14 *my business should work and should keep me financially free by bringing me an income. The only*  
15 *thing is that I haven't fully figured out what legal form it will have?"* (InaRo). However, their  
16 identities are fluid and nonlinear, and as researchers we were invited to witness the emergence of  
17 a "liquid cage" in which participants enact their transformative entrepreneurial agency (Refai and  
18 McElwee, 2023).  
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32 Moreover, their determination to reject the passive label of refugee and their memories of a  
33 previous successful entrepreneurial identity highlights their strong desire for empowerment. As  
34 they tell the story of how they have solved problems and fostered positive transformation,  
35 participants reframe their identity from an ascribed refugee identity seen as at the mercy of external  
36 factors to an entrepreneurial one perceived as a source of agency enabling them to create their own  
37 path through life. This change in self-perception is a hallmark of *power over*, in which personal  
38 growth and the restoration of personal power reshape the identity of these women refugees.  
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45 Whilst all women refugee entrepreneurs in our sample demonstrate a strong sense of agency and  
46 a capacity to make powerful decisions as entrepreneurs, their expressions and motivations of  
47 power varied. These ranged from the determination to achieve professional recognition (IaraUK),  
48 to economic survival (OleRo, AdaUK), personal fulfilment and impact (YulaUK). This diversity  
49 highlights the distinct experiences, and the unique personal meanings embedded in each of these  
50 women refugees' journeys as entrepreneurs. Additionally, this diversity demonstrates how various  
51 forms of power influence the ability to act and feel empowered. Collectively, these forms of power  
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3 enable women refugee entrepreneurs to overcome the liability of refugeeness. Their  
4 entrepreneurial identity has encompassed more than just economic survival; it has also involved  
5 overcoming the challenges associated with being seen as a refugee and regaining one's autonomy  
6 and business abilities through constructing oneself as an active participant, rather than as a passive  
7 victim in the host country.  
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### 14 Gender identity: *power to* as breadwinners and *power over* as army supporters

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17 By delving into our participants' stories, we acquired thorough knowledge of how they balance  
18 their multiple roles as single mothers and, to our surprise, as active contributors to Ukrainian  
19 independence, underlining the dimensions of *power to* as breadwinners and *power over* as army  
20 supporters.  
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25 Their experiences as single mothers are both uplifting and restricting. On the one hand, participants  
26 felt empowered since they could defend and provide for themselves and their families: "*I left for*  
27 *the safety of my son, both physical and mental, a difficult journey with some border crossings,*  
28 *leaving behind a privileged life in Kyiv*" (IaraUK). By controlling their emotions, they become  
29 their children's sole breadwinner and emotional support, transforming their lives. MarRo showed  
30 her autonomy and ability to act decisively by fleeing to protect her son: "*I'm a full-time mum here.*  
31 *I fled to make sure that my son received a solid education and was not drafted into the army. There*  
32 *were still kids who were not prepared to go to war, so we wanted to educate and protect them,*  
33 *rather than send them into combat*" (MarRo). But being single mothers limits their capacity to  
34 completely embrace their entrepreneurial identities and attain the same degree of success that they  
35 had before the war. Surprisingly, their gender identity transcends their role as mothers and  
36 breadwinners for their families, allowing them to become financial supporters of the Ukrainian  
37 army, rewriting the grand narratives of masculinised nationhood (Peng et al., 2022). The  
38 participants' *power to* and *power over* come to life in TayUK's story: "*I am a part of the United*  
39 *Humanitarian Front, thus together with other female businesses, I am raising funds to aid our*  
40 *military personnel and reconstruct Ukraine (...). It is something we do to cure ourselves. It helps*  
41 *me heal from the pain of not being there to fight. I'm not on the front lines, but they're always in*  
42 *my heart, and I'm there with them and for my children. They need a free Ukraine to return to*".  
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3 Through *power over* and *power to*, these women refugee entrepreneurs navigate displacement with  
4 dignity and autonomy, highlighting the significance of supporting their dual roles as mothers and  
5 entrepreneurs. Critically, their *power over* embedded in their gender identity is complemented by  
6 *the power with* embedded in their Ukrainian identity.  
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### 10 11 Ukrainian identity: *power with* as army supporters

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13 Participants talked about their path to empowerment as Ukrainians, expressing their solidarity with  
14 the Ukrainian army. Their goal was not only to secure a free Ukraine for their children, but also,  
15 to exercise their autonomy and provide financial support for the war for national independence.  
16 AdaUK shares how her Ukrainian identity is intertwined with their sense of solidarity and  
17 collective action: “*It is all about freedom: freedom of speech, religion, and general freedom. You*  
18 *can’t fully understand our past unless you have lived it. We were a part of Russia, but that’s in the*  
19 *past. But we are not Russians, and we do not want to be. We have our own identity and journey*”.

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21 NaanUK’s daily efforts to support the military brigade through her entrepreneurial activities  
22 illustrate how participants maintain their connection to their homeland and contribute to the war:  
23 “*Back home, know that my 35-year-old close buddy, who is like my brother, is now a soldier*  
24 *fighting on the front lines. So, every day, I think of him and how many candles I need to sell to help*  
25 *their brigade. Yes, Ukrainian women take on multiple roles, from supporting their families and*  
26 *our health to supporting our country and soldiers. We are like an army outside Ukraine*”.

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28 Like Ukrainian women refugees in the UK, being Ukrainian in Romania also involves a dynamic  
29 repertoire of empowerment manifested as *power with*, which includes struggle yet determination  
30 to hold one’s family together, and a responsibility to take on active citizenship by donating to  
31 Ukrainian army from the little they make with their enterprises: “*Almost everyone I know who is*  
32 *an entrepreneur, here or in Germany, or anywhere, supports the troops back home with money.*  
33 *Despite their little earnings, they consistently donate to the army. This is the least we can do; it is*  
34 *another way of fighting for our freedom. And so, it’s something like a rule, I guess, maybe our*  
35 *moral obligation to contribute to our army and stay together in good and bad times*” (ValRo).  
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39 However, in contrast with their co-nationals from the UK, in Romania, women refugees also talked  
40 about the ethnic and linguistic duality embedded in their Ukrainian identity. For instance, InaRo  
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3 tried to navigate her national identity crisis by blending one's native cultures altogether: *"I have*  
4 *big problems identifying myself only as Ukrainian, because my mother is Belarusian-Polish and*  
5 *my dad is Belarusian-Russian, and I am the first child who was born in Ukraine and who,*  
6 *unfortunately, does not speak Ukrainian well. Because of this, I am going through an identity*  
7 *crisis. Even if I feel Ukrainian, and I feel that I belong. These days, there is a new discourse against*  
8 *those who don't speak Ukrainian, and who are regarded as not being Ukrainian! And this new*  
9 *system is pushing me out just because I speak Russian. And I ask myself the question: should I now*  
10 *break myself and become what this system wants me to be? But, no, I made the decision to not give*  
11 *in (...). And I earn and send part of the money (...) not send it to ZSU (Armed Forces of Ukraine),*  
12 *because (...) I am against killing people, because Russian soldiers are also people, and my dad is*  
13 *Russian, and I love my dad"* (InaRo). InaRo's experience reveals the ethnic and linguistic  
14 complexities that hinder Ukrainians' sense of national identity due to their shared Russian history  
15 all through decades of communism. Like many Ukrainians with a dual identity, InaRo's mixed  
16 heritage and limited proficiency in Ukrainian create a struggle within, which is amplified by  
17 societal pressure to conform to a single, monolithic Ukrainian identity. This dichotomy informs  
18 her career as a Ukrainian refugee entrepreneur as she navigates personal and social expectations.  
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32 Our participants' narratives demonstrate how forms of power are interconnected and influence  
33 their overall experiences and actions. Together, they enabled the participants to overcome the  
34 difficulties associated with being displaced and build a resilient sense of self and purpose. Through  
35 the integration of these various forms of power, our Ukrainian women refugee entrepreneurs in the  
36 UK and Romania can regain control over their actions, reframe their identities and redefine their  
37 social positions, while asserting their collective power and influence.  
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## 43 Discussion

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46 This IPA study sought to explore how Ukrainian women refugee entrepreneurs navigate their  
47 intersectional identities in the context of displacement in the UK and Romania. Our study findings  
48 show that war trauma and precarious life are at the heart of our participants' stories, providing a  
49 contextual view of displacement and its unique challenges (Abebe, 2023; Wauters and Lambrecht,  
50 2006, 2008). Similar to Syrian women refugees (Alkhaled and Sasaki, 2022) and Ukrainian  
51 entrepreneurs in Denmark (Klyver et al., 2022), our participants suffered unimaginable losses of  
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3 identity, competencies and autonomy, which distinguish them from other migrants (Abebe, 2023).  
4 Ukrainian women refugees in the UK and Romania face institutional and resource challenges, such  
5 as lack of financial resources due to their low credibility as refugees, which hinders their capacity  
6 to start stable, long-term businesses. Adeeko and Treanor (2021) found similar issues among UK-  
7 based African women refugees. However, the experience of participants in our sample reveals  
8 additional cross-cultural complexities, such as facing language barriers as well as social and verbal  
9 discrimination. The importance of distinct contextual features emphasises the need for host  
10 country-specific assistance structures.  
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18 Secondly, our research demonstrates how women refugee entrepreneurs utilise multiple identities  
19 to exercise power in the context of displacement. The gendered identity of our participants, like  
20 that of Syrian women refugees (Alkhaled and Sasaki, 2022) and African ones in the UK (Adeeko  
21 and Treanor, 2021), assumes distinctive significance as breadwinners. Their entrepreneurial  
22 identity serves as a means of both socio-economic survival and empowerment. Their journeys are  
23 reminiscent of African refugee entrepreneurs' journeys in the UK (Adeeko and Treanor, 2021).  
24 The interplay between their vulnerability as single displaced mothers and their empowerment as  
25 entrepreneurs demonstrates the intersectional dynamics of these two identities, and further shows  
26 that Ukrainian women refugees turn to entrepreneurship to address contextual constraints and  
27 precarity. They hope that entrepreneurship, despite being patchy and confined to the margins of  
28 society (Refai and McElwee, 2023), might enable them to reclaim some degree of autonomy, pre-  
29 war entrepreneurial skills and relatedness, not in the host communities, but among themselves  
30 (Harima, 2022). Additionally, we present women refugee entrepreneur journeys and experiences  
31 as dynamic. This phenomenon resembles the emotional rollercoaster experienced by Syrian  
32 refugees in Germany (Yeshe et al., 2022) and by Palestinian refugee entrepreneurs in Lebanon  
33 (Shepherd et al., 2020) as they enact their entrepreneurial identity to exercise *power over* their  
34 refugeeeness. Consequently, at the intersection of their identities as mothers, women and  
35 entrepreneurs, these women refugees exert control over their refugeeeness and overwrite the  
36 rhetoric of victimisation surrounding their identity as displaced women and single mothers by  
37 exercising their agency as entrepreneurs.  
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54 Intriguingly, all our respondents denied any self-identification as a refugee. Their firm standing  
55 demonstrates their awareness of the prevailing stigmatisation and negativity in society's views of  
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3 refugees. Their refugee identity reveals significant cross-cultural complexities. Despite their  
4 challenging circumstances in both countries, their narratives convey a sense of entitlement and  
5 self-confidence derived from their advanced education. The unapologetic resistance to being  
6 labelled as refugees and the preferential treatment they receive from European nations raised  
7 concerns regarding potential discrimination against other refugees (De Coninck, 2023).  
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13 Whilst other scholars have recently acknowledged the stigma and vulnerabilities associated with  
14 the refugee identity (Adeeko and Treanor, 2021; Hack-Polay et al., 2021), our study goes further  
15 to reveal a novel experience of refugee entrepreneurs, that of the liability of refugeeness. Compared  
16 to migrant entrepreneurs, whose liabilities of newness, smallness (Hannan and Freeman, 1984)  
17 and poorness (Morris, 2020) are well documented, our participants' liability of refugeeness refers  
18 to a loss of autonomy, competences and identity, exacerbated by war trauma. They illustrate the  
19 refugee paradox, whereby refugees are supported because of these liabilities, while at the same  
20 time they are expected to lead self-determined, agentic lives as soon as possible (Kohlenberger,  
21 2023). Like Palestinian refugees in Lebanon (Shepherd et al., 2020) and Syrian women refugees  
22 in the UK (Alkhaled and Sasaki, 2022), our participants use entrepreneurship and their  
23 entrepreneurial identity as a means to navigate contextual constraints and establish a contextually  
24 empowering identity as entrepreneurs (Shepherd et al., 2020), rather than achieving upward social  
25 mobility (Refai and McElwee, 2023).  
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37 This finding supports the idea that refugees make decisions about how they might use  
38 entrepreneurship to enact identity goals (Alkhaled and Sasaki, 2022) and hide their refugeeness;  
39 perceived as discriminatory and hindering their self- and social empowerment (Shepherd et al.,  
40 2020). However, for Ukrainians residing in Romania, a nation with a developing economy, a  
41 nascent entrepreneurial mindset, and a lack of sociocultural and economic infrastructure to support  
42 refugees, the entrepreneurial journey has a long way to go before securing good standards of living  
43 and long-term solutions to overcoming precarity.  
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50 From an intersectional perspective, the identity of our participants as refugee entrepreneurs is not  
51 straightforward; rather, it is challenging due to the tension between multiple identities. They  
52 prioritise their entrepreneurial identity over all other identities, thereby underscoring their  
53 commitment to their entrepreneurial journey as a socio-economic transformative endeavour that  
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3 has the potential to address social stigma and precarity, rather than entertaining their liability of  
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has the potential to address social stigma and precarity, rather than entertaining their liability of  
refugeeness. Their meanings, constraints and forms of power can be understood only if these  
identities are considered together. The interplay of vulnerabilities and agency experienced by them  
in the UK resonates with African women refugees' experiences of addressing constraints through  
entrepreneurship (Adeeko and Treanor, 2021). In Romania, however, their entrepreneurial identity  
is mainly centred around reclaiming their dignity, rather than overcoming marginalisation or  
achieving economic success, as was the case of Syrian refugees in the UK (Kapasi and Stirzaker,  
2023). Such findings confirm that even in constrained environments, entrepreneurial refugees  
knowingly use entrepreneurship as a means of empowerment to further identity preferences, which  
might nurture some sense of ownership, even if this might not always translate into successful  
business ventures (Klyver et al., 2022). It is possible that, for Ukrainian refugees, particularly those  
living in Romania, socio-cultural and economic constraints might be incomprehensible, as our  
respondents explained. Thus, there might be limited opportunities for them to alter identities,  
leading them to engage in small but meaningful acts of resistance (Adeeko and Treanor, 2021;  
Shepherd et al., 2020). Echoing Rowland's *power over* (1997), participants overwrite refugee  
stigma and address some of the socio-economic constraints associated with being a refugee,  
making them feel worthy even if their entrepreneurial identity remains fragile, at the margins of  
host societies. Entrepreneurial identity becomes, despite its fragility, a trusted vehicle to exercise  
*power from within, power over and power to*. By enacting *power from within*, our respondents  
reclaim some of their pre-war entrepreneurial competences; by enacting *power to*, they shift from  
hopeless victims to providers for their families and by enacting *power over*, they restore their pre-  
war entrepreneurial identity to overcome refugee stigma and socio-economic constraints  
(Rowlands, 1997).

Despite gender blindness being well documented in entrepreneurship studies and refugee  
entrepreneurship (Adeeko and Treanor, 2021), comparing the experiences of African refugee  
entrepreneurs (Adeeko and Treanor, 2021) and Syrian women refugees in the UK (Alkhaled and  
Sasaki, 2022), Ukrainian women refugees in the UK and Romania do not share wrestling with  
gender assumptions or socio-cultural expectations (Al-Dajani, 2023). Instead, our participants,  
except for one (MarUK), illustrate synergy among their identities as mothers and entrepreneurs.  
Our findings indicate a significant, yet often overlooked, role that these women fulfil as active

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3 citizens and contributors to the military, influencing both their journeys and the future of their  
4 nation (Lönnroth-Olin et al., 2023). This novel finding contests the prevailing narrative of  
5 masculinised nationhood (Peng et al., 2022), which positions men as heroes and women as  
6 vulnerable victims (Williams, 2016). The empowerment of these women occurs at the intersection  
7 of motherhood, as providers for their children, and national identity, as army supporters and  
8 financiers, participating alongside their husbands, who are actively engaged in a war to defend  
9 Ukrainian nationhood and freedom. However, without undermining their pride and actions as  
10 Ukrainian citizens, ready to sacrifice themselves for their country, some of them experience  
11 identity crises, duelling between their Russian upbringing and Ukrainian citizenship.

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20 In a context of displacement and precarity, these women refugees' intersectional identities emerge  
21 as non-linear and transformative (Brown, 2021); the result of a dynamic process (Radu-Lefebvre  
22 et al., 2021) of navigating contextual constraints and exercising their agency to overcome them  
23 (Christensen and Newman, 2024). All these experiences shape their identities, with some  
24 participants choosing to reclaim or reinvent some of their pre-war identities, like Palestinian  
25 refugees in Lebanon (Shepherd et al., 2020), while others chose to silence their refugee identities  
26 to avoid further loss and stigma (Adeeko and Treanor, 2021). Overall, as Ukrainian refugees  
27 remain marginalised, their hardships embody emotional reflexivity, enacted to reconcile many  
28 challenges by mobilising "promises and hopes about new selves through offering a feeling of the  
29 possibility of agency and capability" (Muhr et al., 2019: 570) through entrepreneurship. It becomes  
30 evident that, when facing constrains, entrepreneurial action may provide a vehicle for identity re-  
31 negotiation (Chitac, 2023; Shepherd et al., 2020).

## 32 33 34 35 36 37 38 39 40 41 42 43 **Theoretical contributions**

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46 Drawing on a contextual approach of Ukrainian women refugees belonging to the first wave of  
47 European refugees since World War II (OECD, 2023), the present study uncovers their  
48 phenomenological journeys in their host countries. In so doing, we bring two main theoretical  
49 contributions to refugee entrepreneurship. First, the present study answers the call of Refai et al.  
50 (2024) to better understand entrepreneurial agency in resource-constrained contexts, which we do  
51 by taking an IPA approach to reveal the cross-cultural tapestry of constraints and forms of power  
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3 experienced by Ukrainian women refugee entrepreneurs in the UK and Romania. This tapestry  
4 blends vulnerabilities stemming from liability of refugeeness with agentic forms of power, which  
5 leads to empowerment exercised through refugee women entrepreneur roles as mothers,  
6 entrepreneurs and army providers. Second, by taking a power and intersectional lens, the present  
7 study challenges the conceptualization of women refugees as hopeless victims (Pesch and Ipek,  
8 2023) or invisible players in the grand narrative of the masculinised nationhood (Peng et al., 2022)  
9 to reveal their engagement with different forms of power through skilfully leveraging multiple  
10 identities, an overlooked, yet critical, dimension for understanding refugee entrepreneurship (Al-  
11 Dajani, 2023; Khademi et al., 2024). Indeed, our analysis draws attention to refugee  
12 entrepreneurship as a liquid cage (Refai and McElwee, 2023), where refugees, despite facing  
13 vulnerabilities, are not silent exiled prisoners, but instead, flexible, agentic and transformative  
14 contributors to their journeys and their home country's future (Lönnroth-Olin et al., 2023).  
15 Moreover, our study demonstrates that intersectionality is a useful framework for analysing  
16 women refugees' multiple identities and their impact on entrepreneurial activities and access to  
17 resources (Martinez Dy, 2020).  
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## 31 Practical and policy implications

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33 Our study offers several implications for refugee organisations and policymakers in host countries.  
34 Women refugees face distinctive challenges, such as war trauma, language barriers, loss of  
35 autonomy and competence, and socio-economic exclusion. Refugee-based organisations should  
36 be aware of these distinctive barriers and mediate the successful transfer of formal qualifications,  
37 which is critical in supporting refugees to avoid the life-altering and dispiriting loss of their human  
38 capital and socio-economic potential.  
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44 Additionally, the gendered Ukrainian refugee crisis requires evidence-based policies and gender-  
45 sensitive solutions that challenge the 'one-size-fits-all' and 'all entrepreneurs are created equal'  
46 approach to entrepreneurship (Martinez Dy, 2020; Martinez Dy and MacNeil, 2023), and correct  
47 the conceptual overlap between migrants and refugees, which has persisted in policy and research  
48 for over 20 years. Programmes, strategies, and comprehensive measures addressing refugee  
49 women's inequality (Sustainable Development Goal 10) and socioeconomic challenges are crucial  
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3 (Richey et al., 2023) to avoid 1% of the world's population being condemned to irreversible  
4 socioeconomic survival at the margins (OECD, 2023).  
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## 8 9 10 **Limitations and future research**

11 Our study's major contributions to refugee entrepreneurs, practice and policy should be evaluated  
12 considering its methodological limitations. While our study sample size of 13 participants across  
13 two host nations is in line with IPA tradition (Alase, 2017) and previous interpretative studies on  
14 refugee entrepreneurs (Adeeko and Treanor, 2021), a larger, cross-national study would be useful  
15 to determine how institutional frameworks and gendered regimes impact upon subjective  
16 experiences. A longitudinal study could also help researchers understand refugee entrepreneurs'  
17 journeys with a temporal lens (Saunders et al., 2019). For this study, we interviewed eight of 13  
18 respondents in English, their second language, due to their choice and proficiency. Qualitative  
19 research in a foreign language may decrease data quality. However, probe questions ensured depth  
20 and quality in the data collection process (Harima, 2022). To mitigate the possibility of such biases,  
21 future research could aim to use refugee entrepreneurs' native language.  
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## 31 32 **Conclusion**

33 Our phenomenological dive into the experiences of Ukrainian refugees reveals their transformative  
34 journeys as they navigate their intersectional identities to claim their agency by recovering some  
35 of their autonomy, skills and identity. It is our contention that this study of Ukrainian women  
36 refugee entrepreneurs in the UK and Romania will inspire further investigations and support policy  
37 initiatives towards designing venues to support them. To address the unprecedented refugee crisis  
38 and the economic and social challenges faced by both refugees and host nations, it is necessary to  
39 implement programmes that are grounded in empirical evidence (OECD, 2023; UNHCR, 2024).  
40 Our study provides valuable insights into the experiences of Ukrainian women refugee  
41 entrepreneurs, shedding light on their everyday challenges and accomplishments. These findings  
42 serve as evidence of their resilient determination to keep standing for what they are and believe in.  
43 Considering De Coninck's (2023) perspective, we hope that, despite the uncertainty surrounding  
44 the end of the war, host countries will continue to work towards creating a supporting pro-  
45 entrepreneurial environment from which the whole society could benefit.  
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36  
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39 Committee (ETH2122-2570) under GDPR (2018).  
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43 We are grateful to the guest editors for this opportunity, as well as the reviewers for their extensive  
44 support and commitment to sharing their knowledge and supporting the development of our article.  
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## 49 50 Data availability statement: Basic, Share Upon Request

51 The data supporting the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding  
52 author. The data are not publicly available due to containing information that could compromise  
53 the privacy of research participants.  
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January 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2025

Dear Chief Editor, Dr Robert Blackburn,

Dear Guest Editor, Dr Deema Refai,

Dear Reviewers,

We hope you are All well!

We are deeply grateful for your thoughtful and detailed feedback on our article (*Manuscript ID ISB-24-0106.R3*), titled "*The Liability of Refugeeness: leveraging multiple identities to enact power in a context of displacement*," submitted in response to Refai et al.'s call (2023) for the Special Issue on "*Entrepreneurial Agency in Constrained Contexts*."

We appreciate the opportunity to improve our article in line with your recommendations and we are grateful for your editorial's team commitment to guide us to meet the publishing standards of quality and clarity. This IPA study offers unique insights into how Ukrainian women refugee entrepreneurs handle their multiple intersecting identities—mothers, refugees, Ukrainians, and entrepreneurs—in the constrained circumstances of forced displacement in the UK and Romania. By addressing the suggested revisions, we hope to ensure that our study fulfils the International Small Business Journal (ISBJ) and this Special Issue publishing criteria.

This IPA study is one of the few that examines how Ukrainian women refugee entrepreneurs manage their identities as mothers, refugees, Ukrainians, and entrepreneurs in the UK and Romania during relocation, aside from Klyver, Steffens, and Honig (2022). In addition to Adeeko and Treanor (2021), publishing this IPA study in International Small Business will significantly contribute to the increasing academic debate on refugee entrepreneurship in constrained environments. Our research contributes to contextualising excluded entrepreneurial communities, particularly Ukrainian refugees, as highlighted in your special edition. Its importance in informing evidence-based practices and policymakers makes it an excellent addition to your high-quality publication.

## Response to revision suggestions

Thank you to the editorial team for their dedication to advancing knowledge and for their contribution in time and expertise to facilitate the publication of high-quality studies.

*We highlight some of the key revision points addressed below:*

1) *Revise the abstract as indicated*

**The abstract includes a link to this Special Issue aim (page 1)**

2) *Check the editorial amendments and recommendations in the attached file*

All the editorial amendments and recommendations in the attached file have been reviewed and all the suggestions have been addressed as suggested (**pages:1, 2, 8, 10, 23,35**)

3) *Check a few inverted commas as highlighted in the attached (pages 3,8)*

4) *Add page numbers to the referencing of a few highlighted direct quotes (pages 3, 8)*

5) *Add references to support two statements in the text as indicated in the attached (page 10)*

6) *Please do not use coloured font for your manuscript.*

We sincerely appreciate the opportunity to refine our manuscript further and contribute to your Special Issue. This study offers vital insights into the untold phenomenological experiences of Ukrainian refugee entrepreneurs and their implications for policy and practice. We remain committed to enhancing academic discourse on refugee entrepreneurship in constrained contexts and look forward to working closely with you toward publication.

Thank you for considering our article and demonstrating your commitment to spreading inclusive knowledge by supporting early-career researchers.

We declare that this manuscript is original, has never been published in this format, and is not presently being considered by any other publication. We are not aware of any conflicts of interest linked with this publication.

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3 As the corresponding author, I confirm that the manuscript has been reviewed and approved for  
4 submission by all authors listed.  
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7 We are looking forward to contributing to your special issue and to refugee entrepreneurship and  
8 look forward to a great publication collaboration.  
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14 Sincerely,  
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3 **Dr Iuliana Chitac** is a fellow researcher at Westminster Business School, University of Westminster. She  
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8 from Research England Research Culture Enhancement on behalf of the University of Westminster.  
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10 She also prioritises reporting on contextually complex methodological and phenomenological research  
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