Migration Oxford Podcast

Episode 1 ‘Leaving Ukraine’

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SPEAKERS

Rob McNeil, Jacqui Broadhead, Volodymyr Artiukh, Roxana Barbulescu, Emma Rimpiläinen

Jacqui Broadhead 00:00
Welcome to the migration Oxford Podcast. I'm Jacqui broadhead.

Rob McNeil 00:03
And I'm Rob McNeil.

Jacqui Broadhead 00:05
This is our first podcast. And we're hoping to be able to bring you insights from the extensive migration research that happens from across the University of Oxford and beyond. I am the director of the Global Exchange on migration and diversity. I work on integration and inclusion, and also questions of refugee resettlement,

Rob McNeil 00:23
and I'm the Deputy Director of the migration observatory. And I'm focused really on media and the way that the stories that are told affect policy decisions.

Jacqui Broadhead 00:33
So obviously, today, we're gonna start with a discussion around the situation in Ukraine. We're going to have a panel discussion with a number of expert researchers about some of the wider considerations, but we wanted to start off with a discussion of some of the challenges around refugee resettlement that's been happening here in the UK. Yeah.

Rob McNeil 00:57
So I mean, one of the key questions, I think, Jacqui, is this is about this idea of what the what the home secretary's described as bespoke humanitarian routes. From my point of view, these are these are something very different from what we would traditionally understand asylum ruse to be

Jacqui Broadhead 01:13
yes, I think that word bespoke is incredibly important. So refugee protection in the UK, and also internationally has always been focused on Universalist principles of protection and refuge. Whereas the trend in the UK, seeing, for example, the Hong Kong, British national overseas visa, and now this scheme, firstly, it's much more of a visa route. And secondly, it's not looking to stick to those principles. It's a visa based system rather than being around claiming protection. But I think what we've also seen as this huge outpouring of people wanting to support Ukrainian refugees, or people arriving in the, in the UK, from Ukraine, and I think that actually is very much in line with a broader trend around migration attitudes, that we've seen this big shift and softening over a long period of time, right back from 2014. And so from my point of view, this is very much seeing questions of refugee protection, much more in line with public opinion, as opposed to some of the kind of rhetoric that we've seen about migration in recent years. But that

Rob McNeil 02:22
that rhetoric is quite interesting, though, isn't it? Because I mean, as you say, I mean, we've seen like research from Pew and various other people showing the UK becoming progressively more and more open to migration broadly. And yet, government policy has been focused on this issue of deterring, particularly deterring irregular migration, obviously, but deterring people from coming to the UK to claim asylum. And this idea that these bespoke routes kind of introduces the concept that the UK should be able to be selective in who is able to come here and claim asylum, which is obviously somewhat somewhat flies in the face of what we would traditionally expect the asylum system to be to be there to do. And it's interesting that this kind of effort to demonstrate control. And I think that that that issue, is something that the the Ukrainian crisis is sort of bringing into sharp relief that actually control you know, like sort of limiting numbers limiting who can come can quite often be a major issue or a major problem. But when government narratives tell you that something's out of control, it does create the idea that among the public, that this is something a problem that needs to be solved, rather than there are people that need to be helped.

Jacqui Broadhead 03:33
Yes, and that's something that I really noticed in my research, which focuses on the local level and integration, often some of these schemes where there's quite a lot of fear and worry around migration and want to have kind of control and grip is contrasted quite a lot with a reality on the ground with something like the Hong Kong BNO scheme, where there have been relatively large numbers of arrivals. But there haven't really been the anticipated integration challenges, partly because there has been funding in place for local areas to do some proactive work. And one of the things that we really see with a lot of these schemes is just how reactive they are. So they're responding to events rather than building kind of long term infrastructure. And the second thing that I think is really important is that this is a shift from migration governance at the home office, or the kind of internal border control department through to the department that's responsible for local government, and much more focus on inclusion and integration. And it'll be interesting to watch how that develops.

Rob McNeil 04:36
And I think it's worth remembering of course, they I mean, that it's very easy for us to sit in the UK and look at the various challenges that we're encountering here that are occurring. But of course, the UK

situation is it's almost negligible compared to what's happening in the immediate area around Ukraine, Poland, Moldova, Slovakia, Romania, in terms of dealing with this massive, massive flow of people. But of course more profoundly than that what's actually happening to the people on the ground in Ukraine. So we're very, very lucky to have a panel of fantastic guests from around the University of Oxford and beyond who have real expertise in this issue. And we've got guests from Ukraine, we've got guests who've been based in and been working in Ukraine. And guess who worked on the issue of Ukrainians in the UK and the issue of the impact of that, that Ukrainian labor force has in the UK on food security. And so it's going to be a fantastic and very interesting group to listen to.

Volodymyr Artiukh 05:32
I am Volodymyr Atiukh. I am a postdoctoral researcher at COMPAS and work on the project which is called emptiness.

Emma Rimpiläinen 05:41
So good morning, everybody. I'm Emma Rimpiläinen, and I'm a postdoctoral affiliate here at COMPAS. And I recently finished my my PhD also and I was looking at displacement from the eastern Ukrainian region of Donbass.

Roxana Barbulescu 05:54
I'm Roxanna Barbulescu, I'm associate professor at the University of Leeds. And I'm now working on a couple of projects, one of which is feeding the nation that look that season, the migrant workers, and many of these in the past few years in the UK have been from migrant workers from Ukraine.

Rob McNeil 06:14
Okay, so I'm going to start by just talking to you, Volodymyr, if you don't mind, your research has looked at the question of emptiness primarily in the post Soviet world. And I wanted to ask you whether or not you felt that the loss of people in the post Soviet world whether or not people leaving Russia, people leaving Ukraine, people leaving other parts of the post Soviet region has actually played a role in creating the set of circumstances that have led up to the invasion of Ukraine.

Volodymyr Artiukh 06:39
Our project, which is called emptiness, deals with a restructuring of social relations within in those sites and areas that we that people experience has been emptied. And of course, part of this restructuring implies the out migration, loss of people, but it also implies withdrawal of the state crumbling infrastructure, withdrawal of capital investment, and overall loss of the sense of progress, changes in people's temporal imaginaries. So this is this is quite a complex concept, the question that you asked whether the loss of people contributed to the start of the war, ongoing conflict, I would say is relevant. But what is more, we need to we need to see the out migration and the complex internal migrant trajectories within post Soviet area as part of this post socialist transformation that has been happening there. And this implies, looking at drastic processes of deindustrialization, in Ukraine and Russia that underlied the political processes and the process of nation building.

Rob McNeil 08:11

So this idea that the process of nation building has been interrupted by a kind of deindustrialization, the kind of exit of capital and exit of, I guess, have a sense of, of identity within an area, does that mean that you lose the idea of the place, the idea of Russia or the idea of Ukraine or the idea of Latvia as a functioning space?

Volodymyr Artiukh 08:36
One can Yeah, like one can put it like this, I would say that what was lost was a sense of forward movement. That was, of course, the legitimizing narrative of the Soviet of the Soviet Union. And nothing came in its place nothing as encompassing and as hegemonic came in its place after the collapse of the Soviet Union, what was there was a very fragmented ideological space that comprise bits of Western ideologies prevailing at that moment in the 90s are bits of liberalism, bits of conservatism and a huge chunk of nationalism and nationalism not as, as an all encompassing project as a project of alternative modernity, but as a quite a thin ideology that lacks an idea of how society should look like within this new states. And I would claim that this lack of new hegemonic idea of the new modernity post Soviet modernity affected both Ukraine and Russia and and many other Soviet countries.

Rob McNeil 09:49
Would you say then, that the current relationship between Ukraine and Russia is that is a facet of the kind of nationalist ideas in both countries to some extent with the Russian concept I have a greater Russia that should be extended into an emerging nationalist idea of, of what Ukraine could be, there's then suddenly been really crystallized into into an identity after the the invasion.

Volodymyr Artiukh 10:15
This part of what I described, these ideas were quite thin they both in Russia and in Ukraine, the idea of Imperial nationalism in Russian case and idea of Ukrainian nationalism never penetrated deeply in broad layers of society. They underlie basic claims for legitimacy for the ruling elites, quickly changing in Ukraine and quite stable in Russia. And they required more and more violent means of sustaining this power of the ruling elites, as because as I said, they lacked hegemonic dimension, they lacked persuasion, they lacked broad acceptance within population. So because they had to be sustained by more and more violent means they contributed to the rising tensions and to the tragic outcome, which the current wars

Rob McNeil 11:14
little bit, thank you very much for that. Right. Let's turn to Emma Rimpiläinen now whose field research has been all around Ukraine and Russia. And who's seen the impact of the previous conflicts in places like Donbas on displacement and migration? Emma, how do you see the legacies of these conflicts playing out and what we're seeing now?

Emma Rimpiläinen 11:33
Yes, so I think in 2014, when the situation in Donbas started, there was some sort of initial ambiguity about what this what does this mean? What is going on? Is this a sort of a homegrown phenomenon? Or is this something that is being directed from abroad from from Russia, and I think, now now, sort of the situation has to change so that we are probably more confident in saying that the war in Donbass since 2014, has been a part of a kind of Russian strategy, probably for a long for a long time.

Rob McNeil 12:07
I mean, obviously, it's created massive internal displacement in Ukraine over the last over the last eight years. Obviously, one presumes that the people that have moved have primarily been those that are sympathetic to the Ukrainian position on what should be happening, and those that have remained are those that are probably more likely to be either ambivalent about who is in charge, or alternatively, more pro Russian. But so has the migration flows, the internal displacement created more of a justification for the Russian for the Russian action, or more willingness on the part of the local populace there to accept this kind of thing? Or is this just an irrelevance? Do you think?

Emma Rimpiläinen 12:46
Well, I don't think it's entirely fair to say that those who leave, or those who left on Donbas, were somehow pro Ukrainian and those who stayed or not, because as most of my interlocutors were, quite forcibly stressing to me was that those who managed to leave are generally the sort of lucky ones, people who have the capacity, they have the networks, they have money, they usually have education, and they're usually a bit younger. And those kinds of people left, whereas those who stayed tend to be older pensioners, people who have disabilities don't necessarily move that well. And, you know, to a degree, there were also maybe some people who supported this idea of of Donbass becoming an independent republic, or two independent republics or joining Russia. But yeah, from what I saw on my fieldwork, it's not really a question of sort of political allegiance about regarding like, who stays and who leaves. It's more about personal circumstances. And also, since I also did fieldwork in Russia, I noticed that there were some people who said that like, Well, I had the assumption, of course, as probably many of us would have, that those who went to Russia somehow supported Russian actions in Donbas. But when I interviewed people, it became quite clear that this was not always the case. And people quite often gave really practical reasons for going to a specific place like saying that, well, we could have gone anywhere, but we have relatives here.

Rob McNeil 14:07
Emma, thanks a lot. Okay, so we're gonna send her another aspect of the migration side of all of this, Roxanna Barbulescu, your project feeding the nation looks at the impact of seasonal workers, particularly those from Ukraine and UK agriculture. Would you say that the current crisis in Ukraine has really highlighted these sort of global interconnections as far as food security is concerned?

Roxana Barbulescu 14:28
Certainly Ukraine is one of the major countries of origin for seasonal workers. That is the majority of workers who arrived in the UK to do work in agriculture every year, but also UK imports a significant percentage of fertilizer and also cereals crops like wheat, barley, it contributes to about 30% of cereals that we consume on a normal basis and that is the predominant ingredient in our diet. So in that sense, Not only the work in Ukraine, but also sanctions on Russia and exporting sanctions on Russia will also have because fertilizer come predominantly from Russia. And I know that this is particularly a concern, and it will lead to food inflation.

Rob McNeil 15:15

And so just in terms of what we think that this is likely to mean, for the future for migrant viewing for this kind of globalized network of food production, I mean, does this do you think that this is going to start to push nations towards greater effort at self sufficiency or reduction of globalization? Or is this just an impossibility?

Roxana Barbulescu 15:36
I'm glad you asked that. I think we stand now at the crossroad that we're thinking. And we see how, how a small sector such as agriculture, and it's a small sector, indeed, about 300,000 people across the country, but seasonal workers, about 75,000 workers, but they really do support internal production. And we have to think about where we want our food to come from what we want migration systems to achieve. Is this the best way we have to think in questions like food miles as well? Do we want that local food to depend on overseas migrants? Do we want to have any opportunity for low skilled migrants to come to UK for short periods of time this visa was open for six months. And it was successful for the time that it was open to Ukrainians in the former Soviet Union space. And I wanted to say that well, Ukrainians made the great majority of those who use this visa second would be Russians and medallions and Georgians that use this visa. And we have to think what will happen is it does the implication go beyond Ukrainians. Although Ukrainians are the first why impacted by this change. But we have to think in in thinking better how migration system connects and contributes to sustainability questions to food security. What has happened in the past few years, because of difficulties in accessing workers and being able to recruit people directly as they used to do with freedom of movement. The farmers have had shortages, we look down and the majority of farmers had between 11 and 20%, very few less than 10%, that had no shortage last year, which meant they reduced production. And this year, we have less food being grown and able to harvest in the coming summer. So we're already in a poor weaker situation than would have been a year ago because of this situation. But I've been interviewing Ukrainian workers who have been in the UK last year, and I've kept in touch with them since the start of the world and the positions are really divided. And from my experience, it has to do more with gender, because the women could and have left the majority of them unless they are in more secure parts of Ukraine. But the men and particularly young men that came and use the program last year to come to the UK, they are still in in Kiev and around Ukraine and preparing in basements preparing to fight really,

Rob McNeil 18:29
Roxanna, thank you so much, right, We'd like to wrap up this podcast episode with a final thought from each of you on where you think this is all going. Volodymyr, let me start with you. Is there anything you've learned in your work that can help to illuminate what's happening or where this all might go?

Volodymyr Artiukh 18:45
Thank you for this question. One of the outcomes of my research was that extreme inequality in Ukraine and similarly in Russia have contributed to the failure of both state building projects. And it was both a regional inequality and the social inequality which is extremely high in both countries. Both these dimensions have contributed to the rising tensions and increasing role of violence within the countries and between those countries. So whatever international help to Ukraine and whatever international peacebuilding efforts should also include this crucial dimension. Any economic assistance should be premised on eliminating inequalities within both countries.

Roxana Barbulescu 19:47
We have to think whether there is an opportunity here to establish a list of countries where the UK recruits from I know we've been there's been this agenda Global brief and then recruiting throughout rather than targeting recruiting in certain countries. Perhaps this is an opportunity to do that and to look as well in terms of sanctions if we want because it's not only craniums there are others on that the UK for the temporary visa recruited from pity give Russia Belarus we're very high on on the recruitment list, but also Georgians, Moldovans would we want to, how do we want to organize them migration?

Emma Rimpiläinen 20:32
I think one thing is the fact that we're now seeing extremely kind of positive attitudes towards anybody fleeing war from Ukraine, were in comparison to what the situation was internally since 2014. And also, like, externally in EU countries, we see a massive willingness to help Ukrainians to like give them shelter, and give them temporary protection and so on. And none of this really existed in the previous waves of displacement that I have observed. The current situation is really different. As I said, EU countries have now implemented the Temporary Protection Directive, which means that anybody fleeing the war in Ukraine can sort of automatically get protection. And obviously, this is a very good thing, and this is what should happen. But I think this is an opportunity to also to imagine how we could have treated refugees from from other situation and other countries previously, and also to kind of think, How can we go move forward on the European level and also in the UK by sort of giving anybody who flees for the kind of opportunities and the kind of treatments that we're now seeing being given to Ukrainians.

Rob McNeil 21:37
I just like to say a very big thank you to our guests, Volodymyr Artiukh, Roxana Barbulescu and Emma Rimpiläinen and it's been a fascinating discussion. Thank you so much.

Jacqui Broadhead 21:47
That's it for this edition of the migration Oxford Podcast. I'm Jacqui Broadhead.

Rob McNeil 21:51
And I'm Rob McNeil.

Jacqui Broadhead 21:53
Please join us for our next episode where we'll be talking about citizenship and what happens when it's taken away.