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## **The situation of Ukrainian refugees as perceived by the teenagers from Dobrogea, in a post-pandemic context**

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**Abstract.** This study explores changes in attitude and coping strategies to some pressures and stressors generated by global social problems, felt at the individual level. The aim of the study was to identify how teenagers / civil society perceive the (difficult) situation that refugees are going through, and how they (teenagers) have adapted to the new reality and design ways out of the crisis in case of would face a similar problem. The specific objectives of the study are 1) how civil society adapted to the pandemic; 2) how civil society adapted to the wave of refugees following the war. The study took place between March 1-15, 2022 and targeted the Dobrogea area, especially Constanța county.

**Keywords.** civil society, adolescents, pandemic, war, refugees, virus SARS-CoV-2

### **Introduction**

Coping strategies are a set of psychological and behavioural efforts used to manage stress, adversity, and trauma. In the context of social problems like war and massive waves of refugees, coping strategies can help individuals and communities to deal with the challenges they face and promote resilience. The ongoing conflict in Ukraine and the resulting displacement of millions of people provide an example of how coping strategies can be applied in the face of social problems. In this context, the Ukrainian refugees that arrived in Romania are seeking social support: in the face of adversity, people often turn to their family, friends, and community for support. Social support can help individuals to feel connected, cared for, and less isolated (Cohen, S., 2004; Kawachi & Berkman, 2001; Sarason, & Sarason, 2002; Wills, 1991). As many of these relations were abruptly broken, most of the refugees who have been affected by the conflict have sought support from the “new-host” institutional & social networks and community-based organizations.

Based on these realities generated by the wave of refugees and using as a proxy factor the experience and resilience generated by going through the COVID-19 pandemic, we aimed to identify to what extent the local community (with examples of teenagers as part of civil society), on a on the one hand, they can offer some forms of support (Lakey & Cohen, 2000), on the other hand, they would seek, in similar crisis situations, this kind of support (Uchino,

2009). In situations of massive disorganization and social dislocation, when social networks break and the usual strategies and routines to face daily challenges no longer work, the affected people look for and apply the most effective survival strategies in the new given conditions. Identifying local social support networks is therefore a priority. So we wanted to explore to what extent: a) is engaging in self-care important: self-care activities can help individuals to manage stress and maintain a sense of normalcy in their lives (Burke, & Richardsen, 2002; Cohen & Wills, 1985), adding a plus in the attempt to cope with the new challenges they face; b) having a sense of purpose can help individuals to feel motivated and focused (Baumeister, 1991; Damon, Menon, & Cotton, 2003), even in difficult circumstances (Steger & Kashdan, 2010). It is important that refugees to continue to be active in self-generating as many as possible resources for covering their necessities, to find a job and work, to volunteer, or pursue their education despite the challenges they face; c) Seeking professional help that can provide individuals with additional support and resources to cope with the challenges they face. In Romania, but not only, many organizations have provided various types of support to people affected by the conflict and displacement; d) Developing resilience (as an ability to bounce back from adversity and maintain a positive outlook) can help individuals to cope with ongoing challenges and promote long-term recovery (Bonanno, 2004).

Our research was based on the following assumptions:

- The pandemic has "matured" people who were more immature;
- The pandemic has strengthened the bonds between people;
- The war strengthened the bonds between people of distinct nationalities;
- If war is tomorrow's reality, people know their priorities.

### **Materials and Methods**

The participants in this study were 277 students from the final year (12th grade) of high schools in Constanța. The sample was one of convenience, unbalanced by gender (215 girls, 62 boys), the research being an exploratory one, without being able to make generalizations at the level of the entire population of teenagers in Romania, or the population as a whole. We excluded from the analysis the cases of non-answer to each question separately, therefore there are differences in the number of analysed cases (frequency distribution) for each question.

The research instrument used was the omnibus questionnaire, using the Likert scale and was self-administered. The questionnaire intended to collect data from the teenagers' point of view regarding the perception of the refugee crisis in a post-pandemic context and what the coping strategies and development of resilience would be.

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### **Results and discussion**

In order to better understand the pandemic context and the reaction of the local population to the wave of Ukrainian refugees, we tried to see how the study participants described their life before the emergence of covid and the perceived psychological impact during the lock-down and quarantine period (Brooks & al., 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic has brought about significant changes in people's lives across the globe. Before the pandemic, people enjoyed relatively unrestricted mobility and social interaction. Travel was easier, and people could easily attend social events and gatherings without any concern for their health or

safety. Businesses operated normally, and employees went to work without fear of contracting a deadly virus. People were able to enjoy recreational activities, such as going to the gym or visiting amusement parks, without restrictions or limitations (Rambøll, 2021). However, the pandemic has completely transformed people's lives in various ways. Many businesses have been forced to close or limit their operations, resulting in massive job losses and economic downturns. The pandemic has also taken a toll on people's mental health. The fear and uncertainty surrounding the virus have caused anxiety and stress in many individuals. Social isolation and quarantine have led to loneliness and depression, particularly among the already vulnerable individuals.

In this new stressful context, we tried to see how the subjects of the study perceived their life before COVID and what were the changes produced. When asked "*Describe in <three words> your life before the advent of COVID*", respondents described life before the pandemic as full of freedom, quiet and normal.

The words used to describe life before the pandemic, in addition to those mentioned above, were: carefree, good, active/fun, socializing.

**Tabel 1. Describe in <three words> your life before the advent of COVID N = 277**

	<b>Female</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Total</b>
<i>Freedom</i>	27,4%	30,6%	27,5%
<i>Calm</i>	26,0%	24,2%	25,0%
<i>Normal</i>	9,8%	14,5%	10,6%
<i>Beautiful</i>	8,8%	8,1%	8,5%
<i>Active/ Fun</i>	7,9%	6,5%	7,4%
<i>Good</i>	5,6%	12,9%	7,0%
<i>Socialization</i>	6,0%	0,0%	4,6%
<i>Lack of worries</i>	5,6%	0,0%	4,2%
<i>NA</i>	2,8%	3,2%	2,8%
<b>Total</b>	100,0%	100,0%	97,5%

The choice of the "freedom" attribute met the highest percentage - over a quarter of the participants in the study (27.5%) - which shows that they felt quite acutely the restrictions imposed by the pandemic and the deviation from the natural course of life, perceived so before the pandemic. The next two attributes - "Calm" (25.0%) and "Normal" (10.6%) – are practically from the same category and complete the overall picture regarding the perceived "normality" pre-pandemic and the "abnormality" felt during the pandemic.

Even if the sample is unbalanced, we observe few significant differences between adolescent boys and girls in the perception of personal life before COVID through the attributes chosen as relevant to their life and condition. The most significant differences are found in the identification of one's own life as "Good" (by 7.3% more in boys compared to girls) and in terms of "Socialization" and "Lack of worries" (by 6.0% and 5.6 respectively) % more in girls compared to boys – who, in fact, did not nominate these attributes at all).

The choice of the "freedom" attribute met the highest percentage - over a quarter of the participants in the study (27.5%) - which shows that they felt quite acutely the restrictions imposed by the pandemic and the deviation from the natural course of life, perceived so before the pandemic. The following two attributes - "Calm" (25,0%) and "Normal" (10,6%) - are

practically from the same category and complete the overall picture regarding the "normality" perceived pre-endemic and the "abnormality" felt in during the pandemic.

Even if the sample is unbalanced, we observe few significant differences between men and women in the perception of personal life before COVID through the attributes chosen as relevant to their life and condition. The most significant differences are found in the identification of one's own life as "Good" (by 7.3% more in boys compared to girls) and in terms of socialization and lack of worries (by 6.0% and 5.6% more in girls compared to boys who did not nominate these attributes at all).

The emergence of the SARS-COV2 virus has created worldwide panic for a significant proportion of citizens, ever since its detection in 2019 in China. Mixed feelings of panic and fear, on the one hand, but also mistrust and indifference on the other, characterized that troubled period at the beginning of the worldwide pandemic (Balkhi & al., 2020; Waqas & al., 2020; Parlapani & al., 2020; Saravanan & al., 2020; Enea & al., 2021). The initial fear installed in Romania at the beginning of 2020 (Silistraru & al., 2021) turned into panic already in March 2020 (Ionescu & al., 2021).

In this context, we asked the teenagers what feelings they experienced after the detection of the virus in Romania.

**Table 2. After the detection of the virus in Romania, what feelings tried you? N=268**

	<b>Female</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Total</b>
<i>Panic</i>	28,0%	9,7%	23,1%
<i>Fear</i>	29,1%	22,2%	27,6%
<i>Indifference</i>	19,6%	29,2%	22,0%
<i>Distrust</i>	21,7%	36,1%	25,4%
<i>Worry/ Curiosity/ Happiness/ No feeling</i>	1,6%	2,8%	1,9%

The most acute feeling felt was that of "fear" - more than a quarter of the respondents (27.6%), but the differences are small compared to the weights of the other feelings tried ("panic" - 23.1%). Basically, the studied population was divided into two: half experienced feelings of panic and fear, while the other half experienced feelings of indifference and distrust.

Female respondents tended to panic or felt fear regarding the virus in a significantly higher percentage compared to boys (57.1% and 31.9%, respectively). Probably as a result of the differentiated gender socialization and the roles learned and assumed, boys "brave" and display in a greater proportion feeling of indifference and distrust (65.3%) compared to girls (41.3%).

During the pandemic, the Government took various measures to avoid the spread of the virus and combat it. These measures affected the respondents with different intensity, some having a greater impact compared to others. To the question "*In these years (2019-2022) the government has taken various measures. Using a scale from 1 to 5, how did each measure affect you?*", the answers were distributed as follows (table 3):

**Table 3. How did each measure affect you? N = 240**

	Not at all	Very little	Neither much nor little	Quite a lot	A lot
<i>Freedom limitation</i>	6,3%	7,9%	10,0%	18,8%	57,1%
<i>Wearing masks</i>	6,7%	12,1%	15,4%	16,3%	49,6%
<i>Social distancing</i>	11,3%	10,8%	16,7%	14,6%	46,7%
<i>Closing schools</i>	15,8%	12,5%	10,4%	21,3%	40,0%
<i>Vaccination</i>	20,4%	12,9%	18,3%	10,8%	37,5%
<i>Closing malls</i>	19,6%	12,5%	17,9%	13,8%	36,3%
<i>Green certificate request</i>	17,5%	13,3%	19,2%	16,3%	33,8%
<i>Reduced store hours</i>	13,3%	19,6%	22,5%	18,3%	26,3%
<i>Closing the churches</i>	25,8%	14,2%	19,6%	15,4%	25,0%

As expected, "Freedom Limitation" was felt most acutely, with 57.1% saying they were very affected. If we add up the two responses (very much and quite a lot), we find that  $\frac{3}{4}$  of our subjects were severely affected by the "Freedom Limitation". "Wearing masks" and "Social distancing" were the next two measures that affected teenagers a lot – almost half of them feeling this discomfort, an otherwise expected situation, being basically two of the measures that contribute to the perceived limitation of freedom. Practically  $\frac{2}{3}$  of the subjects stated that these two measures affected them a lot and quite a lot.

Closing schools (61.3%) and malls (50.0%) were two other "unpopular" measures – schools are not only learning spaces but also socializing spaces, along with malls. The closing of the churches represented the measure that affected the respondents the least, but still  $\frac{2}{5}$  of them felt this inconvenience.

Another measure that affected them to a lesser extent was vaccination, most likely because they were not eligible subjects for vaccination, but they probably felt this stress at the family and societal level, as a result of heated pro-vaccination & anti-vaccination debates. vaccination (Cristea & al., 2022).

**Table 4. How did each measure affect you (by gender)? N = 240**

	1 Not at all		2 Very little		3 Neither much nor little		4 Quite a lot		5 A lot	
	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male
<i>Freedom limitation</i>	5,3%	8,7%	8,2%	7,2%	11,7%	5,8%	18,1%	20,3%	56,7%	58,0%
<i>Wearing masks</i>	7,0%	5,8%	12,9%	10,1%	17,0%	11,6%	17,5%	13,0%	45,6%	59,4%
<i>Social distancing</i>	9,9%	14,5%	10,5%	11,6%	15,2%	20,3%	17,0%	8,7%	47,4%	44,9%
<i>Closing schools</i>	11,7%	26,1%	11,7%	14,5%	10,5%	10,1%	21,6%	20,3%	44,4%	29,0%
<i>Vaccination</i>	17,5%	27,5%	14,0%	10,1%	20,5%	13,0%	9,4%	14,5%	38,6%	34,8%
<i>Closing malls</i>	21,1%	15,9%	11,1%	15,9%	17,5%	18,8%	14,0%	13,0%	36,3%	36,2%

<i>Green certificate request</i>	17,0%	18,8%	13,5%	13,0%	15,8%	27,5%	19,9%	7,2%	33,9%	33,3%
<i>Reduced store hours</i>	10,5%	20,3%	19,3%	20,3%	24,6%	17,4%	21,1%	11,6%	24,6%	30,4%
<i>Closing the churches</i>	25,1%	27,5%	14,6%	13,0%	17,0%	26,1%	17,5%	10,1%	25,1%	24,6%

The gender-based analysis shows a number of significant differences regarding the way in which the adolescents included in the study were affected. Thus boys seem significantly more affected ["very much"] than girls in terms of wearing masks (by 13.8%), while girls seem significantly more affected than boys in terms of closing schools (by 15.5%). If we combine options 4 and 5, we notice that in terms of "Social Distancing" girls feel a greater limitation than boys (64.3% and 53.6%, respectively).

The next topic envisaged the perception of youngsters regarding the necessary measures implemented by the government to support economic agents in the context of the pandemic. The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on the global economy, leading to an economic crisis in many countries. The pandemic forced many businesses to close or reduce their operations, resulting in significant job losses and decreased economic activity. Governments around the world implemented various measures to try to mitigate the economic impact of the pandemic (Nicola & al., 2020). These measures included financial support for businesses and individuals, such as grants, loans, and wage subsidies. Many governments also implemented monetary policy measures, such as reducing interest rates and increasing the money supply, to try to stimulate economic growth (Irawan& Alamsyah, 2021). However, despite these measures, the economic impact of the pandemic has been severe, and the recovery has been slow in many parts of the world. The pandemic has highlighted existing inequalities in society, with disadvantaged groups, such as low-income workers and small businesses, being hit the hardest.

In order to prevent a severe economic crisis, the Romanian government applied a series of measures to support economic agents. This question had the role of observing the respondents' perception regarding the level of support provided by the government for economic agents.

**Table 5. Do you think that the government has applied the necessary measures to support economic agents in the pandemic context? N = 240**

	<b>Female</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Total</b>
<i>1 Not at all</i>	20,8%	21,0%	20,8%
<i>2 Very little</i>	34,3%	45,2%	37,1%
<i>3 Neither much nor little</i>	28,1%	25,8%	27,5%
<i>4 Quite a lot</i>	14,0%	4,8%	11,7%
<i>5 A lot</i>	2,8%	3,2%	2,9%

The majority of respondents (57.9%) believe that very little or no measures have been taken to support economic agents, followed by those who believe that the measures taken to support them are neither many nor few (27.5%). At the opposite pole, there are very few respondents (14.6%) who believe that the measures have supported economic agents quite a lot

and very much. The analysis by gender shows that boys are much more critical / dissatisfied with these measures compared to girls (66.1% of boys are dissatisfied and only 8.1% are satisfied, while girls register a percentage of 55.1 dissatisfaction and 16.9% declare themselves satisfied – double the percentage compared to boys).

Not only on a social level, but also on a personal level, the pandemic has changed our way and lifestyle (Wang, 2020). The pandemic has forced many people to change the way they live, work, and interact with others. One of the most significant changes has been the shift towards remote work and online learning. Many people have had to adapt to working from home and attending classes online, which has required changes in their routines and habits. This shift has also led to changes in the way people communicate and collaborate with colleagues and classmates. The pandemic has also had an impact on people's social lives. Many social activities and gatherings, such as parties, concerts, and sporting events, have been cancelled or postponed, leading to a sense of isolation and loneliness for some people. The pandemic has also led to changes in the way people socialize, with many turning to virtual platforms to connect with friends and family. The pandemic has also changed people's attitudes towards health and well-being. Many people have become more aware of the importance of physical health and have taken steps to improve their fitness and nutrition. The pandemic has also highlighted the importance of mental health and self-care, with many people seeking support and resources to manage stress and anxiety.

**Table 6. How has the pandemic affected you? N = 227**

	Female	Male	Total
<i>It didn't affect me at all</i>	16,6%	18,8%	17,2%
<i>Social</i>	28,2%	20,3%	26,0%
<i>Financial</i>	16,6%	10,9%	15,0%
<i>Leisure / free time</i>	7,4%	14,1%	9,3%
<i>In another way</i>	31,3%	35,9%	32,6%

Only a small percentage (17.2%) of the investigated adolescents stated that they were not performed at all, with insignificant differences by gender. One in 4 states that they have been negatively affected in terms of social life, one in 10 in terms of free time, approximately one in 7 in financial terms, while a third of them – most otherwise – state that they have been affected in another way. Girls seem more affected than boys in social and financial terms, while boys seem to be more affected in terms of spending free time.

Isolation has been a necessary measure during the COVID-19 pandemic to slow the spread of the virus. However, prolonged isolation and social distancing can have significant consequences on people's mental health and well-being. One of the main consequences of isolation during the pandemic has been an increase in feelings of loneliness and social isolation. Isolation can also have a negative impact on physical health (Fegert & al., 2020). Lack of physical activity and exposure to natural light can lead to reduced fitness and an increased risk of chronic health conditions such as heart disease and obesity. Children and adolescents may also be at risk of negative consequences from prolonged isolation during the pandemic. Social isolation can lead to reduced socialization and a lack of opportunities for physical activity and other forms of stimulation, which can impact their cognitive and social development.

The next question had the role of observing the behaviours of the respondents during the pandemic, whether they complied with the rules or were afraid of this pandemic, also having the role of a control question.

**Table 7. Did you stay at home more during the pandemic than before the pandemic? N = 256**

	Female	Male	Total
<i>Yes, I self-isolated;</i>	8,8%	6,7%	8,2%
<i>Yes, I only went out when I had business in town;</i>	45,3%	34,7%	42,2%
<i>Yes, I went out occasionally to meet friends;</i>	24,9%	20,0%	23,4%
<i>No, I went on with my life as normal;</i>	20,4%	38,7%	25,8%
<i>I took advantage of this period in the following way:</i>	0,6%	0,0%	0,4%

In general, the respondents respected the rules and went out only when they needed to, but there are also people who were afraid or panicked when the covid appeared and isolated themselves. One in four respondents said that they tried to live their lives the same as before the pandemic and thus went out occasionally with friends or even did not respect the restrictions at all. It seems that the boys "braved" more than the girls, stating in a significantly higher proportion, compared to the girls, that "*I went on with my life as normal*" (with 18.2%) and in a significantly lower proportion as "*I only went out when I had business in town*" (-10.6%).

The next topic introduced was related to pro-social behaviour in the pandemic and its importance, which refers to actions that benefit others or society as a whole (the level of respondents' involvement in volunteer actions or helping the vulnerable population or that has been affected by COVID). During the pandemic, pro-social behaviour has played a crucial role in mitigating the spread of the virus and supporting those who have been affected by it. Pro-social behaviour during the pandemic is essential for promoting the collective well-being of society and reducing the negative impact of the pandemic (Shachat & al., 2021). It can also provide a sense of purpose and social connection during a time when many people are experiencing isolation and uncertainty.

**Table 8. Did you participate in support actions during the pandemic of vulnerable people? What kind of actions? N = 245**

	Female	Male	Total
<i>Not</i>	81,5%	84,8%	82,5%
<i>Yes (no other details)</i>	3,2%	0,0%	2,2%
<i>Volunteering/ Donations/ Charitable actions/ Elderly/ Children/ Young people with disabilities/ Relatives/ Friends/ Neighbors</i>	15,3%	15,2%	15,2%

In Romania, volunteering, although it has gained momentum in the last 20 years, does not represent too much social value compared to what happens in Western European countries (Voicu & Voicu, 2003; Cutler, 2015). The research data show that the vast majority of respondents did not participate in helping or volunteering actions carried out both at the individual level and at the collective/group level.

Fear and dread are feelings that frequently appear in unfamiliar situations, perceived as dangerous and for which we do not have an adequate answer at the moment (Stănculescu E., 2022). In the conditions of panic (on a global level) created by the emergence of the SARS-COV-2 virus, it was expected that some people would panic in Romania as well (Armean K. & al., 2021). In this context, we asked the teenagers in the sample to evaluate the level of panic/fear they felt related to the emergence of COVID and the alarmist information.

The level of fear or even panic increased as the world became convinced that it was real and after people started dying from covid. Many did not believe in the virus until they got sick themselves.

**Table 9. Rate the level of panic/ fear you felt about COVID N = 246**

	<b>Female</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Total</b>
<i>1 Not at all</i>	12,1%	31,9%	17,9%
<i>2 Little bit</i>	23,0%	26,4%	24,0%
<i>3 Not much, not a little</i>	28,7%	25,0%	27,6%
<i>4 Fear</i>	21,8%	12,5%	19,1%
<i>5 Panic</i>	14,4%	4,2%	11,4%

A little over a quarter of the respondents (both boys and girls) did not feel an increased level of fear, but neither did it decrease. Practically 7 out of 10 respondents state that they did not feel fear (cumulation of the first 3 answer options), with the emphasis that 8 out of 10 boys affirmed this and only 6 out of 10 girls. Feelings of fear and panic were reported by a third of them, again girls (36.2%) registering higher levels compared to boys (16.7%).

The start of the war between Russia and Ukraine on February 24, 2022 generated concern throughout the world. Romania, having a common border with Ukraine, could and still can expect much more serious consequences compared to countries that are not in the vicinity of Ukraine and Russia.

Suddenly, the fear of pandemic was replaced by the fear of war. A new social problem - the war - was made aware and became manifest, while the social problem called "pandemic" went into the latency phase (see Merton's theory, R.K. Merton, 2016).

In this context - post-pandemic and of the war - we wanted to see how the impact of the war was perceived on a personal level in our sample.

**Table 10. On February 24, 2022, the War between Russia and Ukraine broke out. What impact did it have on you? N = 260**

	<b>Female</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Total</b>
<i>Panic</i>	24,0%	19,1%	22,7%
<i>Fear</i>	36,5%	23,5%	33,1%
<i>Indifference</i>	12,5%	20,6%	14,6%
<i>Distrust</i>	9,4%	14,7%	10,8%
<i>Empathy with the refugees and the population left in Ukraine</i>	16,1%	20,6%	17,3%
<i>It happened to me / I am a Ukrainian refugee</i>	1,6%	1,5%	1,5%

COVID was only the first problem that changed the way of perceiving life. The war followed which, although we are not directly involved, affected the way of life of the population

and - from the increase in anxiety to the decrease in the standard of living (inflation, increase in energy prices, etc.). Almost 1 out of 5 teenagers (17.3%) from our sample showed empathy with the refugees and the population left in Ukraine - a percentage similar to the one related to involvement in volunteer activities (see table 8).

Comparing with the reaction to COVID (see table 2), the fear of war registered only a slight increase among the teenagers in the sample (50.7% respectively 55.8% fear / panic about war), although it is not present in our country.

With the possibility of being directly affected by this war at any time, being so geographically close to the theatre of war / military operations, we tried to further explore to what extent our teenagers empathize with the refugees from Ukraine and the motivation behind the empathy or lack thereof this one.

**Table 11. Do you empathize with refugees from Ukraine?  
If so, why? If not, why? N = 217**

	<b>Female</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Total</b>
<i>Yes (no other details)</i>	10,3%	6,6%	9,2%
<i>Yes, I feel pity...</i>	65,4%	63,9%	65,0%
<i>No comment</i>	12,2%	4,9%	10,1%
<i>No (no other details)</i>	5,8%	8,2%	6,5%
<i>No, we are poor, they refused lb. Romanian in schools, etc.</i>	6,4%	16,4%	9,2%

An overwhelming part of the respondents (3 out of 4) empathize with the refugees, with the dominant explanation being that they are not to blame for this war, but they feel, in many ways, its effects.

The respondents who empathize with the refugees, offered motivations such as:

- *Yes, of course, I can imagine what I would have done, if I had had to leave my house, the city, maybe even my friends, and go who knows where. It's awful and I feel very sorry for them.*
- *Yes, because they have no fault;*
- *Yes, because the war affected their lives very negatively, I, like them, would not feel good if I had to leave my country for fear of dying and ending up at the mercy of other countries or staying and risking to die at any time from projectiles or bombs;*
- *Give a lot of empathy, because they are scared people and with nothing they left everything behind and left with children in ignorance without knowing the language and without knowing for sure if they will be helped or run away from fear;*
- *Yes, because what is happening doesn't seem normal to me, war seems stupid to me and people leave because of someone who doesn't think.*

Among those who do not empathize with refugees, the most relevant motivations were:

- *No, because if it happened to us, they would not help us, as our country does;*
- *No, because they are not interested in the children in Romania who are dying of hunger;*
- *I cannot empathize with a state that refused lb. Romanian in schools;*

- *No. Rather, I empathize with the Romanians who sleep on the streets;*
- *No, because I have not had direct contact with such people.*

The next topic introduced was "putting yourself in the situation of a refugee", so we asked our subjects "If you were in the situation of a 'refugee' what would you take with you?" We tried to observe how prepared the respondents think they are, in case they find themselves in the situation of becoming refugees. In other words, what would be their priorities in a situation like this?

**Table 12. If you were in the situation of a 'refugee', what would you take with you? (Multiple answer N = 439)**

	<b>Female</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Total</b>
<i>Family/ Pets</i>	18,3%	22,6%	19,4%
<i>Phone/ laptop</i>	9,0%	8,5%	8,9%
<i>Legal papers</i>	20,4%	24,5%	21,4%
<i>Money/ Jewellery</i>	15,3%	10,4%	14,1%
<i>Bare necessities</i>	3,0%	0,9%	2,5%
<i>Food/ Water</i>	6,3%	7,5%	6,6%
<i>Clothes</i>	13,5%	14,2%	13,7%
<i>Drugs</i>	1,2%	1,9%	1,4%
<i>I do not know...</i>	12,9%	9,4%	12,1%

Analysing the answers of the respondents, we can conclude that they generally know what the priorities are in such a situation. The respondents' priorities were in the following order:

- "Legal papers" and "Family/ Pets " - 1 out of 5 respondents.
- For ~ 14% of them, among the priorities were "money and jewelry", but also "clothes".
- A small percentage of respondents (6.6%) said that among their priorities would be "food and water", and 8.9% - the "phone and/or the laptop".
- A significant percentage (12.1%) said that they do not know what they should take with them in such a situation.

Other answers, but expressed by a small number of respondents, were pragmatic and referred to: *radio station; first aid kit; lantern; external battery; the charger; gun, bullets and I would stay to fight for the country!* There are respondents for whom objects with a religious charge are a priority, such as: *Holy Water; Anaphora; the Bible* - but also personal or less common objects: *family photos; sentimentally important objects; personal objects; beds; personal care products.*

Observing a civic attitude by participating in volunteer activities was our next topic. Even if our respondents are teenagers, which implies a lower level of awareness and involvement, we wanted to see to this extent that they managed to get involved in volunteering or helping the population affected by the war, regardless of whether we are talking about people of another nationality.

**Table 13. Have you participated in refugee support activities?  
What kind of actions? N = 229**

	Female	Male	Total
<i>Donations/ fundraising/ food/ clothes/ volunteering</i>	28,2%	16,7%	24,9%
<i>No/ Not yet</i>	71,8%	83,3%	75,1%

After analyzing the answers given by the respondents, it can be found that the vast majority of respondents (3/4) did not participate, until completing this questionnaire, in helping or volunteering actions carried out both at the individual and collective/group level. But the share of those who participated in these actions is slightly higher than those who participated in such actions in the case of covid (see table 8). An explanation could be the removal of restrictions (isolation, mask, etc.) - so a greater degree of freedom / spatial mobility as well as the elimination of the fear of contamination (as in the case of COVID).

Among the 25% respondents who participated in actions to support refugees, the most relevant were:

- Distribution of food and necessary items and for transporting people.
- I went to a border post where I handed out food and took a family to the airport.
- Within the institution, teams were organized to intervene in case of need.
- I collected things they need, blankets for small children or newborns.
- We promoted on social networks the places where people can donate.
- I helped with food, clothes, things for personal hygiene.

*"The Romanian has two great enemies: pity for foreigners and hatred for his own."* It is a statement full of meanings (and prejudices?) made by a great Moldavian poet - Grigore Vieru. The underpinnings of this expression lead us to what a columnist published in an online publication<sup>1</sup>: *"for how many of the lonely, old and sick Romanians, for how many of our poor children or for those in hospitals, was such a mobilization made? For those around us why don't we have mercy and compassion except at Christmas and Easter and why don't we give them money from the government's reserve fund?"*

Most of the respondents chose not to answer this question, on the grounds that they did not know how to interpret the statement made by the poet Grigore Vieru. 70 respondents, who, in one way or another, agreed with this expression, brought arguments such as:

- *I honestly believe that we should always help, not only when needed.*
- *I believe that, in Romania, there are hundreds of cases of families without shelter, without food, who die every day and measures are not taken or not taken, but they are judged much faster. For the refugees, contrary to the situation in our country, the Romanians mobilized in a fraction of a second, because there is no room for empathy in this country!*
- *The situation is contemporary, during the war it was proven that the Romanian is an empathetic nature for the refugees from Ukraine, but he would not have reacted so urgently for his own citizens. Yes, it is true that every human being deserves help, but we should also help each other.*

<sup>1</sup> *Doi mari vrājmași are românul*, by Tudorița Tarniță, 06 Mar. 2022, <https://www.infoest.ro/stiri/editorial/Doi-mari-vr%C4%83jma%C8%99i-are-rom%C3%A2nul.htm>

- *We don't help our neighbors or the people on the street or in general those Romanians, but those around us (with reference to the Ukrainians) yes we help them, because the Romanians have become a merciless people [with their own fellows]. If an old man falls on the street, people ignore him thinking he is drunk or on drugs. We sabotage each other!*

Those who did not agree with this statement argued:

- *I don't think we should generalize, it's just the poet's opinion.*
- *Who is willing to help, will help anyone, regardless of nationality, who is not, will do nothing for anyone;*
- *I don't think that "having pity for foreigners" is an enemy of the Romanian; before all evil, we are human, our highest quality.*

The next topic envisaged the effects of war on Romania, but also on the personal level of the respondents. All countries have been and will be more or less affected, mainly European countries, but especially countries in the vicinity of countries involved in armed conflict, therefore our country will also be affected by this war.

**Table 14. What do you think will be the effects of the war on Romania? N = 270**

	Female	Male	Total
<i>Economic crisis/ price increases/ financial</i>	43,5%	47,1%	44,4%
<i>political</i>	2,0%	2,9%	2,2%
<i>Social effects/ poverty</i>	16,0%	8,6%	14,1%
<i>Medical effects</i>	4,0%	2,9%	3,7%
<i>Educational effects</i>	1,5%	0,0%	1,1%
<i>Fear/ Panic/ Stress/ Disastrous/ Destruction</i>	4,5%	4,3%	4,4%
<i>I do not know</i>	9,0%	10,0%	9,3%
<i>Other</i>	16,5%	21,4%	17,8%
<i>I don't think/ they won't be</i>	3,0%	2,9%	3,0%

Most of the respondents (almost half) believe that the biggest consequences will be those of an economic-financial nature that will lead to price increases and high inflation.

Other consequences of the war would be:

- *Political effects at a general level and at a particular level the distrust in politicians.*
- *Social effects, and one such effect is poverty, which is also the most visible, accentuated by inflation and rising prices. In other words, this effect is a direct consequence of economic and social problems.*
- *Effects related to the emotional sphere were also chosen by the respondents. They believe that the effects of the war on Romania will be panic, fear and other feelings of insecurity.*
- *There are respondents who also thought about medical and even educational effects.*

There is also a minority of respondents who believe that the effects of the war will not be felt until Romania.

At a personal level, one in four respondents does not believe that there will be effects of the war that will affect them directly.

**Table 15. What do you think the effects of the War will be on you? N = 233**

	<b>Female</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Total</b>
<i>Economic/ Financial/ Expensive</i>	16,8%	18,2%	17,2%
<i>Fear/ Anxiety/ Panic</i>	10,2%	6,1%	9,0%
<i>No/ I don't think/ they won't be/ No effects</i>	25,1%	28,8%	26,2%
<i>I do not know</i>	16,8%	13,6%	15,9%
<i>Others. Please specify...</i>	31,1%	33,3%	31,8%

Another significant percentage of respondents (17.2%) believe that the effects on them will be of an economic-financial nature. The fact that all goods are becoming more expensive, from food to gasoline / energy, induces a concern regarding the decrease in the economic-financial level that the respondents may feel as a direct consequence of the war on them.

We also noted a large array of free answers, which prove that uncertainty, confusion and panic are massively present among the teenagers studied.

- *I won't have a future;*
- *I will feel insecurity at every step and fear wherever I go, so it will have a huge impact on my life;*
- *Panic, with the thought that maybe I would lose my loved ones. The effects are negative from all points of view;*
- *The war will bring a lot of suffering, panic and despair, I'm only afraid of losing my loved ones;*
- *If I live, I will be marked by human losses and the horrors of war;*
- *Mentally - as I have relatives and friends who work in the military, but also financially;*
- *Social life, education and freedom and adaptation to extreme conditions;*
- *Fear for tomorrow will set in.*

### **Conclusions**

Following this research, we can conclude that the hypothesis according to which the pandemic has "matured" and increased the awareness of teenagers regarding current social issues, in particular the war. As teenagers we are tempted to be "rebellious", to disregard the rules. The real, devastating effects on our loved ones, respectively from our families, led many of the teenagers to become much more responsible, to timidly start contributing to the development of civil society through volunteering. This can be seen by the behavior of the respondents to respect the restrictions during the pandemic.

The hypothesis that the pandemic has strengthened the bonds between people is not confirmed in a clear way. If at the family level, the time spent together determined the strengthening of family ties, at the societal level the respondents' relations did not improve. This can be seen in the lack of actions to support vulnerable people during the pandemic.

The hypothesis according to which the war strengthened the ties between people of distinct nationalities is largely not confirmed. Although in this sense improvements can be seen regarding the respondents' involvement in actions more than in the actions carried out in the midst of the pandemic. Nor can it be about actions in which they feel obliged to participate, since the beneficiaries of these services are people of different nationalities.

The hypothesis that if war is the reality of tomorrow, people know their priorities, we can conclude that it is confirmed. People had the opportunity to think and see "live" the difficulties faced by refugees.

Following this research, we can conclude that people can mobilize when needed if they are coordinated and know what they have to do. During the pandemic there was a lot of confusion and no one knew how to help. Things were different during the refugee crisis, caused by the war. During that period there was better coordination, this being seen in the answers of the respondents who participated in particular in coordinated actions, volunteering, etc. The result is that civil society still works, even if it is not an eminently solidary civil society on the one hand, and on the other hand Romanian do not act in a coordinated manner in an active policy of social involvement. Although the social system in which we live is a democratic one, in order to reach a consolidated democracy, with strong and sustainable social capital, to that social bond based on real, solid values, a series of steps, time and resources are still necessary.

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