

Between Fear and Belonging: Ukrainian Jewish Refugee Women in Warsaw and the Decision to Postpone *Aliyah* after October 7, 2023 and the Gaza War¹

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Abstract

This article examines why Ukrainian Jewish refugee women who arrived in Warsaw after Russia's February 2022 invasion of Ukraine refused or postponed *aliyah* to Israel following the Hamas-led attacks of October 7, 2023, and the subsequent Gaza war. Drawing on qualitative semi-structured interviews conducted in Warsaw between November 2024 and February 2025, the study identifies

¹ The idea for this research emerged within the framework of the 1st edition of the Ofir Program – A Bridge for International Jewish Leadership, established in memory of Ophir Libstein, who was murdered during the Hamas-led attacks on October 7, 2023. This article constitutes the initial stage of a broader research initiative developed in that context. The authors' positionality and the potential conflict of interest related to the Ofir Program and community-based recruitment are addressed explicitly in the Methodology section.

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trauma-related fear, heightened risk perceptions, and anticipatory anxiety about renewed violence as key factors shaping decisions to remain in Poland. Over time, respondents developed a tangible sense of rootedness in Warsaw, reinforced by sustained assistance from local Jewish communities, non-Jewish civil society, and public institutions. In respondents' accounts, the depth and continuity of this support emerge as a distinctive feature of the Warsaw context when compared with more episodic forms of aid described in wider refugee research. At the same time, interviewees reported enduring emotional, cultural, and spiritual ties to Israel, reflecting transnational and situational forms of belonging rather than a linear model of "return." The findings complicate conventional assumptions about homeland, safety, and migration choice, and contribute to debates on diaspora identity under conditions of overlapping geopolitical crises.

Keywords: Ukrainian Jewish refugees; trauma-informed migration; belonging and integration; transnational diaspora; *aliyah*

Introduction

Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 reshaped migration patterns across Europe and produced one of the most significant refugee movements of the twenty-first century. Among those displaced were Ukrainian Jewish families, many of whom were eligible for Israeli citizenship under Israel's Law of Return. In periods of acute insecurity, *aliyah* is often framed (politically and symbolically) as a primary path of refuge for Jews worldwide (The Forward 2024). Yet after the Hamas-led attacks of October 7, 2023, and the subsequent escalation of violence, a notable deviation became visible: many Ukrainian Jewish refugees who had already settled in Poland (especially single mothers with young children) did not proceed with *aliyah*, despite eligibility and logistical support. Media reports likewise noted a post-October 7 decline in *aliyah*, commonly linked to heightened safety concerns and perceptions of instability in Israel (Associated Press 2024; The Forward 2024). In this article, "after October 7" is not used to isolate a single event from its aftermath. Rather, it refers to the broader political and security conjuncture triggered by the Hamas-led attacks of October 7, 2023, followed by Israel's military campaign in Gaza, the hostage crisis, the humanitarian consequences of the war, growing international controversy, and regional escalation. For potential migrants, perceptions of Israel were shaped not only by the attacks themselves but also by the subsequent war environment, the policies of the Netanyahu government, and debates within Jewish communities worldwide about security, solidarity, and moral responsibility.

This phenomenon challenges conventional assumptions about homeland security and diasporic identity. The present study examines an under-researched contemporary case at the intersection of diaspora studies and geopolitical analysis. Rather than offering a psychological diagnosis, the article adopts an explicitly historical-interpretive perspective: it asks why present realities appear to depart from patterns in which crisis tended to intensify Jewish migration to Israel. Unlike studies focused on refugees who either make *aliyah* or integrate permanently into a single host society, this research

centers on a third outcome: the deliberate decision to remain in Warsaw and refuse *aliyah* despite immediate citizenship, institutional encouragement, and facilitation.

Accordingly, the study addresses the following research question: *Why did Ukrainian Jewish refugee women living in Warsaw refuse or postpone aliyah after October 7, 2023, despite having the legal right and organizational support to immigrate to Israel?*

The analytical significance of this question lies in what it implies for contemporary diaspora theory. In classical formulations, return – whether actual, deferred, or idealized – remains central to diasporic consciousness. Safran argues that diasporas commonly sustain a collective memory and moral orientation toward an ancestral homeland, often treated as an authentic locus of cultural and political commitment and, under favorable conditions, a desired destination of return (Safran 1991: 83–84). The refusal to undertake *aliyah* among eligible and supported refugees complicates this model, not by negating Israel’s symbolic centrality, but by showing how strong attachments to Israel may coexist with an explicit decision against physical relocation. The Warsaw case thus points to forms of belonging that are territorially detached yet emotionally, culturally, and spiritually engaged.

Three hypotheses guide the study. **First**, war-related trauma and cumulative displacement heighten sensitivity to threat and amplify anticipatory fear, making security assessments decisive in settlement choices; in this context, October 7, 2023, intensifies risk perceptions and strengthens a preference for stability over ideologically framed migration (Butler 2001; Hirschberger, Ein-Dor 2020). **Second**, the decision to remain in Warsaw reflects a growing sense of rootedness produced through sustained institutional support and communal infrastructures. Despite Poland’s complex Jewish past shaped by the Nazi German Holocaust, Warsaw has also been described as a site of Jewish communal revival and identity reconstruction (Lehrer, Meng 2015). **Third**, refusal of *aliyah* does not imply disengagement from Israel: refugees may sustain strong transnational ties through media, language learning, religious and cultural practices, and ongoing relationships, reflecting contemporary approaches that emphasize relational proximity and transnational belonging alongside (or instead of) physical return (Clifford 1994; Brubaker 2005; Shain 2007; Shenhav 2006; Mizrahi 2024).

Methodologically, the article draws on semi-structured interviews conducted in Warsaw between November 2024 and February 2025 with **25** Ukrainian Jewish refugees. One author’s active participation in Warsaw’s Jewish community facilitated access and trust, while requiring careful ethical boundaries and reflexive attention to positionality to maintain analytical rigor. By foregrounding refugees’ narratives, the study contributes to scholarship on trauma-informed migration decisions, diaspora identity formation, and the ways in which geopolitical instability reshapes the meaning of “homeland” and “safety” in Jewish migratory imaginaries.

Finally, while this article analyzes reasons for refusing *aliyah*, it does not seek to prescribe policy or to diminish Israel’s historical and contemporary significance

for Jewish life. Its purpose is explanatory: to document and interpret an emerging decision-making logic under overlapping crises, and to clarify how contemporary diasporic identities can be sustained through simultaneous attachments to multiple places, including a homeland that may remain symbolically central even when relocation is deliberately deferred.

Context: Ukrainian Refugees in Poland and the Post-October 7 Israeli–Gaza War Context

To situate the Ukrainian Jewish refugee experience in Poland, this section briefly contrasts it with other recent cases of Jewish displacement and resettlement. The comparison helps clarify why the Polish case is frequently described as distinctive in terms of the speed of institutional response, the breadth of assistance, and everyday pathways to integration.

Historically, Jewish refugees' settlement outcomes have varied widely depending on host states' political priorities, administrative capacity, and social climates. Refugees from the former Soviet Union in the late twentieth century often encountered extensive bureaucratic procedures and delayed access to social services in parts of Western Europe and North America (Lewin-Epstein, Ro'i, Ritterband 2013). In other contexts, refugees from conflict-affected regions have faced restrictive immigration regimes, lengthy adjudication processes, and significant cultural and linguistic barriers. DellaPergola links these divergent outcomes to broader demographic shifts and to changing national migration policies that structure vulnerability and settlement trajectories (DellaPergola 2020).

Against this background, Poland's response to refugees from Ukraine, supported by local institutions and communal organizations, has been characterized by rapid assistance and relatively straightforward access to core services such as schooling and healthcare, alongside forms of administrative facilitation that are often more time-consuming elsewhere (UNHCR 2024; IOM 2023; Szeptycki 2024). By comparison, several Western European states that previously maintained more expansive reception frameworks have, in recent years, moved toward tighter controls and more conditional integration measures, shaped by domestic political pressures and resource constraints (OECD 2022).

The Polish case is also frequently discussed in relation to the broader European climate of insecurity experienced by Jewish communities. Research on contemporary antisemitism emphasizes that perceptions of threat and experiences of exclusion can influence both everyday belonging and longer-term mobility decisions, including renewed interest in emigration (Judaken 2008; Judaken 2023). In contrast, participants in this study described Warsaw as a setting where institutional assistance and communal infrastructures enabled not only material stabilization but also forms of

social recognition and emotional anchoring. In practice, this was facilitated through engagement with Jewish communal life and support networks, including organizations and congregational settings commonly involved in assistance and integration.

Overall, the comparative perspective reinforces the central finding of this article: the Warsaw case is best understood not merely as “non-migration” to Israel, but as a settlement pathway shaped by the interaction of (1) risk perceptions after October 7, 2023, (2) the availability and continuity of local support, and (3) the development of everyday rootedness within a functioning communal environment.

Polish Reception Framework after 2022: State, Municipal and Communal Support

Following Russia’s 2022 invasion, Poland became one of the principal receiving countries for people fleeing Ukraine and introduced a legal and welfare framework intended to facilitate temporary protection, administrative registration, and access to basic public services. After obtaining PESEL UKR, refugees from Ukraine gained access to education, healthcare, selected social benefits, the labour market, and selected housing-related support, although the scope and accessibility of these provisions varied across time, localities, and individual circumstances (UNHCR 2024; IOM 2023; Szeptycki 2024).

Polish scholarship on migration and integration provides an important corrective to accounts based primarily on international organizations and media reports. Research conducted in Poland emphasizes that the post-2022 reception of refugees from Ukraine should be understood not only as an emergency humanitarian response, but also as part of a longer transformation of Poland from a predominantly emigration country into an increasingly important immigration and refugee-receiving state. Studies of Ukrainian migration to Poland underline the importance of legal status, access to public services, local institutional capacity, language acquisition, children’s education, labour-market participation, and the role of municipalities and civil-society actors in shaping integration outcomes (Górny, Kindler, Porwit 2023; Lesińska, Duszczak 2023; Podgórska, Trevena, Wach 2023; Lewińska 2025; Szeptycki 2024).

This reception framework can be understood as comparatively broad within the European context, but it should not be interpreted as eliminating the structural difficulties of displacement. Polish studies point to persistent challenges, including employment below qualifications, uneven local capacities, housing insecurity, language barriers, educational adaptation, psychological stress, and changing social attitudes toward refugees over time (Chmielewska-Kalińska, Dudek, Strzelecki 2023; Strzelecki 2024; Babińska et al. 2022; Leska-Ślęzak, Ślęzak 2023). These findings are important for the present study because they prevent an overly celebratory reading of the Polish case and situate respondents’ experiences within broader patterns of Ukrainian displacement in Poland.

At the same time, the interviews suggest that Warsaw offered this particular group of respondents relatively accessible pathways to stabilization. State provisions were complemented by municipal initiatives, civil-society mobilization, private hosting, and assistance from Jewish communal organizations. In the specific case of Ukrainian Jewish refugees, organizations such as the Jewish Agency for Israel (JAFI), BEIT Polska, Chabad Lubavitch, and other Jewish communal settings provided forms of material, educational, cultural, and emotional support that helped respondents navigate everyday life in Poland.

The Polish case should therefore be analyzed not as an unqualified success story, but as a reception context in which legal access, geographic proximity to Ukraine, local support infrastructures, and Jewish communal networks interacted to make continued residence in Warsaw feasible for some respondents. This combination may have contributed to respondents' decisions to postpone or refuse *aliyah*, particularly when Israel was perceived as geographically distant, politically uncertain, or insecure in the broader post-October 7 war context.

Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

Contemporary scholarship increasingly treats diasporic identity as dynamic and relational, shaped not only by origin and dispersion but also by mobility regimes, institutional environments, and transnational ties. Classical approaches, associated especially with Safran and Cohen, emphasize forced dispersal, collective memory, and an enduring orientation toward a homeland, often linked to the horizon of eventual return (Safran 1991: 83–84; Cohen 2008). Safran's model, in particular, highlights shared narratives of origin, idealization of the homeland, and a continued sense of obligation toward it as key components of diasporic consciousness (Safran 1991: 83–84). Cohen broadens the framework by distinguishing multiple diaspora "types" (e.g., victim, labor, trade), underscoring that diaspora is not a single condition but a set of varied historical trajectories and social formations (Cohen 2008).

More recent interventions complicate this return-centered paradigm. Clifford argues that diaspora may be understood as a multi-sited form of belonging sustained through ongoing cultural, social, and emotional connections that do not require physical return (Clifford 1994). Brubaker similarly proposes that diaspora is often best approached as a category of practice (something enacted through identification, community building, and boundary work) rather than as a fixed group defined exclusively by origin (Brubaker 2005). These shifts matter for contemporary analyses of Jewish diasporic life in relation to Israel, because they allow for attachments that remain intensive and meaningful even when migration is deferred or refused.

Within Zionist discourse, Israel has historically operated as the paradigmatic homeland, and *aliyah* has functioned both as a symbolic "return" and as a practical

pathway supported by state institutions. Israel's immigration regime, structured around immediate citizenship for eligible applicants and facilitated by extensive organizational infrastructures, creates an unusually direct linkage between diaspora status and potential national incorporation. Yet recent debates and reporting after October 7, 2023, point to growing hesitation or postponement among some prospective migrants, often linked to heightened security concerns and perceived instability (Associated Press 2024; Haaretz 2024). At the same time, scholarly accounts emphasize that diasporic political and emotional affiliations are shaped by networks and kinship ties across borders (Shain 2007), while Jewish identities themselves are negotiated within complex intersections of nationalism, religion, and ethnicity (Shenhav 2006). Mizrahi's discussion of tensions between deeply rooted identity formations and contemporary liberal-progressive discourses further helps contextualize how Israel can remain central in symbolic terms while becoming contested in social and political imaginaries (Mizrahi 2024).

This theoretical landscape intersects closely with trauma studies, where trauma is treated not as a purely individual psychological event but as a structuring force that shapes collective memory, threat perception, and identity narratives. Butler argues that historical and contemporary trauma can powerfully configure diasporic consciousness, influencing orientations toward both host societies and perceived homelands (Butler 2001). In the present case, the refugees' accounts suggest that cumulative experiences of war, displacement, and uncertainty recalibrate what "safety" and "future" mean in concrete decision-making. Under conditions of overlapping crises, the symbolic logic of "return" can be displaced by a more immediate logic of risk avoidance and stability seeking, even among individuals who maintain strong identification with Israel.

Poland (and Warsaw in particular) constitutes a distinctive setting for observing these dynamics. Poland's Jewish history is inseparable from the Nazi German Holocaust, yet contemporary Warsaw has also been discussed as a site of Jewish cultural revival and identity reconstruction, where new communal infrastructures and public forms of Jewish presence are actively produced (Lehrer, Meng 2015). Lehrer and Meng emphasize how post-socialist urban spaces can become arenas where traumatic historical memory and contemporary identity work coexist in tension (Lehrer, Meng 2015). Related research on Central and Eastern Europe notes that contemporary Jewish communities often reconstruct identity through cultural, educational, and community initiatives that generate hybrid and inclusive forms of belonging (Waligórska, Wagenhofer 2010). Pinto's earlier analyses of European Jewish identity also point to transnational, hybrid, and frequently secular modes of belonging that do not map neatly onto a linear "diaspora-to-return" narrative (Pinto 1996; Pinto 1999). In addition, transnationalism scholarship highlights how media, digital communication, and global networks enable sustained emotional and cultural engagement with a homeland without physical relocation (Vertovec 2009).

Polish-language scholarship on contemporary Jewish life in Poland further nuances this context. Studies by Datner and Melchior, Banasiewicz-Ossowska, and Włodarczyk show that Jewish identity in post-1989 Poland is often reconstructed through complex processes of memory, rediscovery, community participation, secular and religious identification, and negotiation between Polishness, Jewishness, and transnational attachments to Israel (Datner, Melchior 1997; Banasiewicz-Ossowska 2016; Włodarczyk 2013). This body of work is important for the present study because Ukrainian Jewish refugees in Warsaw entered not an abstract “Polish host society,” but a specific and institutionally plural Jewish communal field shaped by synagogues, progressive and Orthodox communities, educational initiatives, cultural organizations, and post-Holocaust identity reconstruction. Their sense of rootedness in Warsaw should therefore be interpreted in relation to both the broader Polish reception system and the particular infrastructures of contemporary Jewish life in Poland.

Key Concepts and Operationalization

This section clarifies the key concepts used to interpret the interview material. Although diaspora and transnationalism were introduced earlier, the definitions below specify how they are operationalized in the present analysis.

Diasporic identity is understood in line with Brubaker’s approach, which treats diaspora less as a fixed group and more as a mode of identification and practice sustained across borders through cultural, symbolic, and emotional ties, including cases where physical return is deferred or refused (Brubaker 2005). This definition is particularly suitable for interpreting narratives in which Israel remains a central reference point while settlement is pursued elsewhere.

Migration-related trauma is treated as a factor shaping both threat perception and settlement choices. Following Berry, forced displacement can generate psychological distress that affects adaptation processes and future-oriented decision-making (Berry 1997). While this article does not provide clinical assessment, the concept is used analytically to interpret repeated interview themes of fear, anticipatory anxiety, and heightened risk sensitivity after cumulative experiences of war and displacement.

To interpret processes of adaptation in Poland, the study draws on *acculturation* theory. Berry’s model highlights “integration” as a strategy in which individuals participate in the host society while simultaneously maintaining meaningful elements of their prior cultural and identity frameworks (Berry 2005). This concept helps explain how respondents describe both practical embedding in Warsaw and continued commitments to Jewish communal life and Israel-related cultural practices.

The analysis also employs Vertovec’s understanding of *transnationalism*, emphasizing that belonging can be sustained through cross-border social fields and cultural

practices that are not contingent on geographic proximity (Vertovec 2009). In this study, transnationalism helps conceptualize how participants maintain emotional, cultural, and spiritual ties to Israel while remaining physically in Poland.

A related theme emerging from the interviews is the formation of a *digital diaspora*, in which transnational belonging is mediated by online infrastructures. Respondents described maintaining ties through Israeli and diaspora media, remote Hebrew learning, livestreamed cultural and religious events, and networked community forums. These practices illustrate how technologies can intensify multi-sited belonging and sustain attachment despite distance (Vertovec 2009; Ward et al. 2020).

Finally, the article uses Derrida's concept of unconditional hospitality not as a descriptive category for Polish refugee policy, but as a contrastive ethical lens for interpreting respondents' accounts of reception, assistance, and recognition. Derrida distinguishes hospitality rooted in openness and immediacy from conditional forms governed by rules of admission, identification, selection, and institutional control (Derrida 2000). The Polish response after 2022 cannot therefore be understood as fully unconditional, since access to rights and services depended on legal status, PESEL UKR registration, administrative procedures, institutional capacity, location, and community networks. Nevertheless, respondents' narratives often framed early assistance – especially housing, school access, emergency support, and help from Jewish organizations – as an experience of being received rather than merely processed. In this article, hospitality is therefore operationalized through three empirical dimensions: immediacy of reception, institutional accessibility, and affective recognition.

Methodology

This study applies a qualitative design based on semi-structured interviews to examine experiences, motivations, and decision-making processes among Ukrainian Jewish refugees living in Warsaw. Interviews were conducted between November 2024 and February 2025 to allow participants time for reflection and to enable narrative depth. Warsaw was selected as a major destination for refugees from Ukraine and as a setting with a dense communal and institutional environment in which integration and identity negotiation can be observed. The sample comprised 25 refugees displaced after the 2022 invasion who were eligible for *aliyah* under Israel's Law of Return, including cases where eligibility remained pending confirmation of Jewish ancestry through archival documentation in Ukraine or other post-Soviet states, and who explicitly refused or postponed *aliyah* despite available facilitation. Participants were predominantly single mothers aged 25–45, a profile relevant because caregiving responsibilities and family structure strongly shape mobility decisions, particularly where husbands remain in Ukraine due to wartime mobilization regulations. Recruitment combined purposive and snowball sampling, with initial contacts facilitated

through Jewish organizations supporting refugees in Warsaw, including the Jewish Agency for Israel (JAFI), BEIT Polska, and Chabad Lubavitch, and subsequent referrals obtained via interviewees. Because recruitment was conducted through Jewish communal organizations and then expanded through snowball sampling, the sample is not representative of all Ukrainian Jewish refugees in Warsaw or Poland. It likely overrepresents women who were already connected to organized Jewish communal life, who received or were aware of institutional support, and who may therefore have been more likely to describe Warsaw's Jewish infrastructure in positive terms. Ukrainian Jewish refugees who remained outside formal Jewish organizations, avoided communal institutions, or had limited or negative experiences with such organizations are underrepresented. This limitation is analytically significant because one of the article's central findings concerns rootedness in Warsaw and trust in communal support networks. Interviews followed an interview guide addressing displacement and trauma, perceptions of safety in Israel in the broader post-October 7 war context, integration and attachment in Poland, and continuing ties to Israel. The interview guide did not include a separate block of questions devoted specifically to respondents' moral or political evaluation of the Netanyahu government, Israel's military campaign in Gaza, or the humanitarian consequences of the war. These issues were therefore analyzed only where they appeared spontaneously in respondents' narratives concerning security, media consumption, uncertainty, and *aliyah*. This limits the study's capacity to determine whether criticism of Israeli state policy was a primary, secondary, or marginal factor in decisions to postpone or refuse *aliyah*.

Interviews were conducted face-to-face in confidential settings chosen by participants and lasted 60–120 minutes. Interviews were conducted in Russian and Ukrainian, depending on participants' preferences and linguistic comfort. Both authors are fluent in Russian and Ukrainian and have academic training in English philology and translation, which made it possible to conduct the interviews without an interpreter and to translate quotations into English directly from the original interview languages. Some interviews were conducted primarily in Russian, others primarily in Ukrainian, and some participants moved between Russian and Ukrainian when discussing family history, Jewish identity, displacement, or experiences of adaptation in Poland. Quotations used in the article were translated into English by the authors. During translation, the authors prioritized semantic and pragmatic accuracy over literal wording in order to preserve the meaning, emotional register, and culturally specific references of respondents' narratives. Where necessary, translation choices were discussed jointly to ensure consistency and accuracy.

Researcher Positionality, Reflexivity and Potential Conflict of Interest

This study required particular reflexive attention because the authors were not fully external to the social field under investigation. The authors' positions, however, were different and should not be conflated.

The first author has Jewish ancestry, a Polish diasporic family background, and long-term personal and communal ties to Jewish life in Poland. She is a member of the Beit Polska Jewish community. She is a granddaughter of a Holocaust survivor from the Baranovichi Ghetto and a great-granddaughter of Holocaust survivors from Odesa. She was also affiliated with the Ofir Program, within which the initial idea for this research emerged. This position facilitated access to Jewish communal spaces in Warsaw and helped establish trust with some participants. At the same time, her personal and family history, Jewish communal involvement, and institutional affiliation may have shaped recruitment, rapport, and interpretation, especially because some participants were connected to the same or overlapping communal institutions.

The second author is a Ukrainian refugee living in Warsaw and an educator. He does not have Jewish ancestry and does not belong to the specific population analyzed in this article, namely Ukrainian Jewish refugees eligible for *aliyah*. He also did not receive support from the refugee assistance programs discussed in this article. His experience of forced displacement provided contextual sensitivity to refugee narratives but also required reflexive awareness of possible assumptions concerning war-related trauma, adaptation, and life in Poland.

To mitigate these risks, the study employed a common semi-structured interview guide, voluntary participation, anonymization of all respondents, and a clear separation between participation in the research and access to any organizational support. Participants were informed that refusal to participate or withdrawal from the study would have no consequences for their relationship with any communal organization. During analysis, the authors discussed coding decisions, attended to divergent cases, and avoided treating organizationally connected respondents as representative of all Ukrainian Jewish refugees in Poland. The Ofir Program did not determine the interview questions, data analysis, interpretation of findings, or conclusions of the article. Neither author was treated as a research participant, and the authors' personal or family histories were not used as empirical data.

Research Findings

The qualitative thematic analysis of semi-structured interviews with 25 Ukrainian Jewish refugee women residing in Warsaw identified six interrelated themes: trauma-related security concerns and fear of renewed displacement; family proximity to

Ukraine and delayed return imaginaries; institutional support and everyday rootedness in Warsaw; emotional proximity to Israel without physical relocation; practical barriers to *aliyah*; and political or moral ambivalence toward Israel in the broader post-October 7 war context. These themes are not discrete or mutually exclusive. Rather, they overlap in respondents’ narratives, where decisions about *aliyah* were shaped simultaneously by memories of war, caregiving responsibilities, family geography, institutional support in Poland, attachment to Israel, and perceptions of insecurity in the Middle East.

At the same time, the analysis also attends to divergent and ambivalent narratives, since respondents differed in whether they understood non-migration to Israel as temporary postponement, pragmatic settlement in Poland, continued orientation toward Ukraine, or transnational attachment to Israel without immediate relocation.

Table 1.

Demographic Profile of Respondents (N=25)

Demographic Characteristics	Number (N=25)
Age Range	25–35 years old: 15 respondents; 36–45 years old: 10 respondents.
Marital Status	Single mothers: 20 respondents; Married: 5 respondents.
Number of Children	1 Child: 10 respondents; 2–3 Children: 15 respondents.
Education Level	Higher Education: 22 respondents; Secondary Education: 3 respondents.
Region of Origin (Ukraine)	Kyiv Region: 12 respondents; Kharkiv Region: 8 respondents; Other Regions: 5 respondents.

Trauma, Security, and Fear of Renewed Displacement

Most participants described experiences related to the Russian invasion of Ukraine as traumatic or deeply destabilizing. Their accounts included exposure to violence, forced displacement, separation from family members, loss of relatives or friends, and prolonged uncertainty about the future. These experiences shaped how respondents evaluated Israel after October 7. *Aliyah* was not assessed only as a symbolic return or a legal opportunity, but also as a possible repetition of displacement and exposure to danger.

Respondent 1 framed her decision primarily through maternal responsibility: “I already experienced the horror of fleeing my home with my children. Moving again,

especially to Israel after seeing what happened on October 7, was unimaginable. Protecting my children from further harm is my main priority.” This statement shows how security calculations were embedded in caregiving obligations. For this respondent, the central issue was not ideological distance from Israel, but the perceived duty to avoid placing children in another unstable environment.

Other respondents described the post-October 7 situation in Israel as activating memories of the war in Ukraine. Respondent 5 stated: “Seeing news of the attacks on Israel triggered memories of the war in Ukraine. Bringing my family from one warzone to another was something I could not even consider. The fear of reliving that trauma is overwhelming.” This account illustrates how media images and news about Israel were filtered through prior experiences of Russian aggression, producing anticipatory anxiety rather than a readiness to migrate.

Similar concerns appeared in narratives of respondents who had experienced direct exposure to violence. Respondent 7 explained: “Having survived shelling in Kharkiv, facing missile alerts again in Israel terrifies me. All I seek is stability for my children.” The statement links past exposure to shelling with the fear of future missile alerts, suggesting that decisions about *aliyah* were shaped by cumulative threat perception. In this sense, refusal or postponement of *aliyah* can be interpreted as a trauma-informed search for stability rather than as a rejection of Israel.

Family Proximity to Ukraine and Delayed Return Imaginaries

A second theme concerned the continuing importance of Ukraine as home and the desire to remain geographically close to family members who stayed there. Many respondents, especially mothers with children, did not describe Poland as a final destination in a simple sense. Instead, they often presented Warsaw as a place of safety and waiting, from which return to Ukraine or family reunification might remain possible.

Respondent 10 expressed this layered attachment clearly: “I am grateful to Poland and to the Polish people for sheltering us, but my heart remains in Ukraine. My family, my business, and my roots are still there. My dream is to return home eventually.” This statement shows that rootedness in Warsaw coexisted with a powerful orientation toward Ukraine. Poland was experienced as a stabilizing environment, but not necessarily as a replacement homeland.

Respondent 14 similarly described Poland as a second home while preserving Ukraine as the primary emotional reference point: “Poland has been incredibly welcoming, and I deeply appreciate the help we received. Yet, Ukraine will always remain my true home, even as Warsaw now feels like a second one.” The formulation “second home” is important because it captures the respondents’ multi-sited belonging:

Warsaw offered safety and everyday continuity, while Ukraine remained central to family memory, identity, and future imaginaries.

Practical geography also mattered. Respondent 19 explained: “The climate, language, and lifestyle here in Poland are very similar to Ukraine, making it easy for us to feel at home. Staying here feels natural rather than moving far away.” This account suggests that proximity was not only physical but also cultural and affective. Poland’s relative familiarity made settlement less disruptive, whereas Israel was perceived as geographically and culturally more distant.

These narratives indicate that *aliyah* was often postponed because respondents were not ready to abandon the possibility of return to Ukraine or reunification with relatives. For women whose husbands, fathers, brothers, or other male family members remained in Ukraine due to wartime restrictions and obligations, Poland’s location made it possible to preserve a sense of family proximity. Israel, by contrast, was often imagined as too far away from the family geography produced by the war.

Institutional Support and Everyday Rootedness in Warsaw

A third theme concerned the emergence of everyday rootedness in Warsaw. Respondents frequently linked their sense of stability to the combined effects of Polish state provisions, municipal and civil-society support, private hosting, and Jewish communal assistance. Their accounts should not be read as evidence of an unproblematic or universally inclusive reception system. Rather, they show how a specific subgroup – Ukrainian Jewish refugee women connected to communal institutions in Warsaw – experienced the combination of legal-administrative access and community-based support as emotionally stabilizing.

This process of rootedness was closely connected to Jewish communal infrastructures. Respondents referenced support from institutions and congregational settings in Warsaw, including the Jewish Agency for Israel (JAFI), BEIT Polska, Chabad Lubavitch Poland, the Orthodox community associated with the Nożyk Synagogue, and the progressive Ec Chaim Synagogue. They also mentioned assistance from Jewish communities in Kraków, Wrocław, Łódź, and other cities. This support included material aid, temporary accommodation, employment guidance, educational activities, psychological and social support, religious life, and community-building initiatives.

Respondent 4 described the transition from emergency refuge to emotional stability: “We arrived in Warsaw expecting temporary shelter, but instead, we found genuine community. The support extended far beyond basic needs... It provided us emotional security and a true sense of belonging.” The phrase “far beyond basic needs” is analytically significant: it suggests that respondents valued not only material assistance, but also recognition, continuity, and social inclusion.

Respondent 8 similarly emphasized the role of community in emotional recovery: “Warsaw unexpectedly became our home because of the incredible community here. Jewish organizations offered not just humanitarian aid, but opportunities to rebuild our lives emotionally and socially.” This account shows how institutional support became meaningful through everyday practices: participation in events, access to educational initiatives, social contact, and the possibility of rebuilding routine after displacement.

In this sense, Derrida’s concept of hospitality helps interpret not the Polish reception system as a whole, but the respondents’ situated experience of being received, recognized, and supported within specific legal, local, and communal conditions. Their rootedness emerged from the convergence of legal access, local institutional capacity, civil-society mobilization, and affective recognition within Jewish communal spaces.

Emotional Proximity to Israel without Physical Relocation

Despite refusing or postponing *aliyah*, respondents did not describe themselves as detached from Israel. On the contrary, many maintained emotional, cultural, religious, or symbolic ties to Israel through Hebrew learning, Israeli media, Jewish holidays, family narratives, cultural events, and ongoing attention to Israeli public life. The interviews therefore complicate a linear model in which attachment to Israel necessarily leads to migration.

Respondent 3 articulated this tension directly: “My heart feels divided. While I am deeply connected culturally and emotionally to Israel, I must prioritize the physical safety of my family. This separation doesn’t diminish my attachment – it just reshapes the way I express it.” The statement distinguishes emotional belonging from physical relocation. Israel remains meaningful, but its meaning is expressed through distance, care, and selective engagement rather than immediate *aliyah*.

Respondent 6 described deliberate efforts to maintain cultural continuity with Israel: “I make sure my children learn Hebrew and celebrate Israeli holidays. It’s crucial that they understand where they come from, even if we cannot physically live there right now.” Here, transnational belonging is reproduced intergenerationally. The respondent’s decision not to move to Israel does not suspend Israel-related identity work; instead, it relocates that work into family practices in Warsaw.

Respondent 13 similarly emphasized digital and cultural proximity: “Every evening, we watch Israeli news. My children can speak Hebrew and recognize Israeli cities. We have created a small piece of Israel here – far from danger, but close in heart.” This account illustrates the formation of a digital and symbolic diaspora, where media, language, and family education sustain attachment despite physical distance.

Respondent 17 summarized the triangular structure of belonging that appeared across many interviews: "Israel remains a vital part of who we are. I would love to visit someday, but moving there, particularly after October 7, simply isn't feasible now. Our everyday lives are in Poland, our hearts belong to Israel, and our true homes remain in Ukraine." This formulation captures the central argument of the article: respondents' identities were not organized around a single homeland, but around a multi-sited configuration linking Ukraine, Poland, and Israel.

Practical Barriers to *Aliyah*: Language, Schooling, Climate, Religiosity, and Distance

Alongside trauma and security concerns, respondents identified practical barriers that made *aliyah* difficult or undesirable in the short and medium term. These included distance from relatives in Ukraine and Poland, the Hebrew language barrier, concerns about children's schooling, unfamiliar climate and lifestyle, and perceived differences in levels of religious observance.

Respondent 20 emphasized family geography and language: "Israel feels very far from our relatives still in Ukraine and those who joined us in Poland. Even with Hebrew courses provided by JAFI, the language barrier feels significant." This statement shows that the existence of institutional facilitation did not eliminate everyday barriers to migration. Hebrew courses were appreciated, but they did not fully remove concerns about communication, work, schooling, and adaptation.

Respondent 22 focused on environmental and lifestyle differences: "The climate and daily lifestyle in Israel are very different from what we're used to. Adjusting seems daunting, especially with young children." Such concerns may appear mundane, but in the context of displacement they become important. For respondents already managing trauma, childcare, employment, and legal adaptation, another major cultural and environmental transition appeared risky.

Religious and educational concerns also shaped decisions. Respondent 24 explained: "My family isn't highly religious, and Israeli society seems strongly oriented toward religious life. I fear we might not fit in well there." Respondent 25 raised a specific objection to Russian-language schooling: "I feel extremely uncomfortable with enrolling my children in Russian-language schools in Israel. It would isolate them from broader Israeli society, contradicting the integration we desire." These accounts show that *aliyah* was evaluated not only through the abstract category of Jewish return, but also through practical questions of social fit, children's integration, and the type of future respondents imagined for their families.

Political and Moral Ambivalence toward Israel after October 7 and the Gaza War

The interview material indicates that respondents' perceptions of Israel were shaped by more than a single traumatic date. In their narratives, October 7 often functioned as a shorthand for a wider and continuing security environment, including the war in Gaza, the hostage crisis, the possibility of further regional escalation, and the perceived unpredictability of Israeli political and military developments. For this reason, the decision to postpone or refuse *aliyah* should not be interpreted as a reaction to the Hamas-led attacks alone, but as part of a broader post-October 7 war context.

At the same time, the interviews did not produce a uniform or sufficiently detailed set of statements concerning respondents' moral or political evaluation of the Netanyahu government, Israel's military campaign in Gaza, or the humanitarian consequences of the war. Most respondents framed their hesitation primarily in family-centered and security-centered terms: the safety of children, fear of renewed exposure to missile alerts or military violence, reluctance to undergo another displacement, and the desire to remain geographically closer to relatives in Ukraine and Poland.

This absence of explicit political elaboration is analytically meaningful. It may suggest that some respondents preferred to avoid direct political judgment in the interview setting, or that immediate concerns related to caregiving, trauma, and personal security were more salient than ideological critique. Nevertheless, several statements about the fear of moving from one war-affected environment to another, anxiety about missile alerts in Israel, and constant monitoring of Israeli news point to a wider perception of Israel as a place marked by ongoing insecurity rather than only by the memory of October 7 itself.

The findings therefore indicate a distinction between emotional attachment to Israel and the assessment of Israel as a current migration destination. Respondents could describe Israel as culturally, emotionally, or spiritually meaningful while simultaneously perceiving relocation there as unsafe, politically uncertain, or practically unsuitable for their families. The data do not justify the claim that opposition to the Netanyahu government was a dominant reason for refusing *aliyah*. They do, however, support a more cautious interpretation: decisions about *aliyah* were embedded in the broader Gaza war and regional crisis context, and political or moral ambivalence toward the contemporary Israeli state may have shaped some respondents' perceptions, although this dimension was not explored systematically in the original interview design.

Divergent and Ambivalent Narratives

Although several recurring patterns appeared across the interviews, respondents did not frame their decisions in a uniform way. Refusal or postponement of *aliyah* should therefore not be understood as a single stable attitude, but rather as a range of situated strategies shaped by family structure, caregiving responsibilities, risk perception, institutional support, and changing geopolitical conditions.

For some respondents, the decision not to move to Israel was primarily temporary and pragmatic. It was connected to children's schooling, language barriers, the need for psychological stabilization after displacement, or the hope of remaining close enough to Ukraine to allow eventual family reunification or return. In these cases, Warsaw functioned less as a final destination than as a relatively safe and geographically proximate place of waiting, recovery, and planning.

For others, Warsaw increasingly appeared as a possible long-term place of residence. These respondents emphasized everyday routines, employment, children's education, Jewish communal support, and a growing sense of social familiarity in Poland. Their narratives suggest that rootedness was not immediate, but developed gradually through repeated experiences of assistance, recognition, and practical adaptation.

A further group maintained strong emotional or cultural attachment to Israel while describing relocation there as unrealistic under current conditions. In these narratives, Israel remained symbolically meaningful, but was perceived as militarily insecure, politically uncertain, geographically distant from relatives, or difficult to enter socially and linguistically. This distinction between attachment and relocation is important: it shows that non-migration to Israel did not necessarily mean rejection of Israel, but often reflected a cautious assessment of what was possible and safe for the family at a specific moment.

These differences complicate any simple interpretation of the findings. The respondents' decisions cannot be reduced to trauma alone, to successful integration in Poland alone, or to criticism of Israel alone. Rather, the interviews reveal a spectrum of postponement strategies: temporary waiting, pragmatic settlement, emotional transnationalism, and cautious long-term rootedness in Warsaw. This variation strengthens the central argument of the article by showing that *aliyah* decisions among displaced Jewish populations are relational, temporal, and revisable rather than fixed ideological choices.

Economic Aspect of Integration

Interviews indicate that economic integration became an important component of settlement in Warsaw. Many respondents entered paid employment or self-employment relatively quickly, describing rapid adaptation and, in some cases, attempts to

develop small businesses. Participants reported establishing language schools, cafés, restaurants, and small retail or franchise-based ventures. Others entered service sectors, especially the beauty industry, or found employment within Jewish communal institutions, where they contributed to organizational capacity and cultural programming. These patterns are consistent with Polish analyses showing relatively high labour-market participation among refugees from Ukraine, while also noting sectoral concentration, skills mismatches, language barriers, and work below qualifications (Polish Economic Institute 2022; NBP 2023; Chmielewska-Kalińska, Dudek, Strzelecki 2023).

From a broader perspective, research on refugee labour-market participation suggests that access to employment can support both individual stabilization and host-country economies through increased consumption, tax contributions, and the partial mitigation of labour shortages (OECD 2023; UNHCR 2023). Polish research confirms this broadly ambivalent picture. Analyses by the Polish Economic Institute and the National Bank of Poland indicate relatively high labour-market participation among refugees and migrants from Ukraine, while also identifying persistent barriers such as language limitations, work below qualifications, skills mismatches, unstable employment conditions, and uncertainty about long-term residence plans (Polish Economic Institute 2022; NBP 2023; Chmielewska-Kalińska, Dudek, Strzelecki 2023). Strzelecki's analysis further situates these processes within broader demographic change, labour shortages, and Poland's transition toward a more immigration-dependent labour market (Strzelecki 2024). In this context, refugees' entrepreneurial activity may contribute to local economic activity through self-employment, job creation, local spending, and the transfer of professional experience (NBP 2023; UNHCR 2023). For the present study, these findings are relevant because respondents' rootedness in Warsaw was not only emotional or communal but also material and practical: it depended on employment opportunities, entrepreneurship, schooling for children, recognition of skills, language acquisition, and access to local support networks.

At the same time, respondents' accounts highlight obstacles that may limit longer-term economic stability, including difficulties with recognition of professional credentials, language barriers in specialized occupations, and the sustainability of small businesses in competitive markets. The literature identifies several areas where targeted support may be relevant, including credential-recognition procedures, sector-specific language and vocational training, and support instruments tailored to refugee entrepreneurship (ILO 2022; OECD 2023). Rather than indicating completed integration, these barriers suggest that economic adaptation remained contingent on institutional access, language acquisition, professional networks, and the broader conditions of the Polish labour market.

Respondents' narratives illustrate these challenges in concrete terms. One interviewee, who opened a small café in central Warsaw, described encountering persistent

bureaucratic hurdles: “Starting my café was exciting, but dealing with permits and regulations in a new country was very stressful. Without initial support from the local Jewish community and guidance from experienced entrepreneurs, I probably would have given up” (Respondent 11). Another respondent emphasized linguistic barriers: “I worked as a professional cosmetologist in Kyiv, but here I initially struggled due to language barriers. Targeted professional language training helped tremendously, but many of my peers still face difficulties” (Respondent 18). These accounts suggest that economic adaptation often depended on local guidance, community contacts, and access to practical support. They also show that employment or self-employment should not be treated as straightforward evidence of integration success, since respondents continued to encounter administrative, linguistic, and market-related barriers.

Sustained cooperation between public institutions, Jewish communal organizations, and local employers may support longer-term economic inclusion, particularly where it addresses concrete barriers such as language acquisition, credential recognition, childcare, and access to stable employment. In this sense, respondents’ economic adaptation in Warsaw should be understood as an uneven process rather than a completed integration outcome. It created opportunities for self-employment, professional reorientation, and local participation, but it also depended on continued institutional support and on the broader conditions of the Polish labour market.

Psychological Aspects of Liminality and Long-Term Adaptation

Although trauma has been discussed throughout this article, the interviews also point to the psychological significance of prolonged cultural and emotional liminality. Respondents described negotiating simultaneous attachments to Ukraine, everyday adaptation in Poland, and continuing cultural or symbolic identification with Israel. Following Turner and Thomassen, liminality is understood here not as a clinical category, but as an analytical concept for describing prolonged ambiguity regarding identity, belonging, and future trajectories (Turner 2017; Thomassen 2016). In this context, liminality helps explain why respondents’ decisions about *aliyah* remained revisable, emotionally charged, and tied to changing assessments of safety, family proximity, and communal support.

Several respondents described this condition as psychologically demanding. Their accounts suggest that negotiating between multiple attachments could generate uncertainty, fatigue, and a recurring sense of being “in-between,” especially when family separation, children’s education, and unresolved migration plans remained open. This interpretation is consistent with acculturation research, which shows that adaptation across cultural environments can involve both opportunities for integration and forms

of acculturative stress (Berry 2005; Ward et al. 2020). Respondent 16 explained: “Each day, I navigate between being Ukrainian, becoming Polish, and feeling connected to Israel. Sometimes I feel lost in-between, and that uncertainty deeply affects my emotional well-being” (Respondent 16). The statement illustrates not a rejection of any single identity, but the emotional burden of sustaining several attachments under conditions of displacement.

The interviews also suggest that community-based and culturally sensitive forms of support were important for managing this uncertainty. Psychological research emphasizes that bicultural or multicultural competence can help individuals integrate different cultural affiliations into a more coherent self-understanding (Berry 2005; Ward et al. 2020). In the present study, such competence was not developed through formal psychological intervention alone. Respondents also associated adaptation with participation in cultural, educational, religious, and peer-support activities organized through Jewish communal spaces in Warsaw. These activities offered opportunities to maintain Jewish and Israel-related cultural practices while also learning to navigate Polish institutions and everyday life.

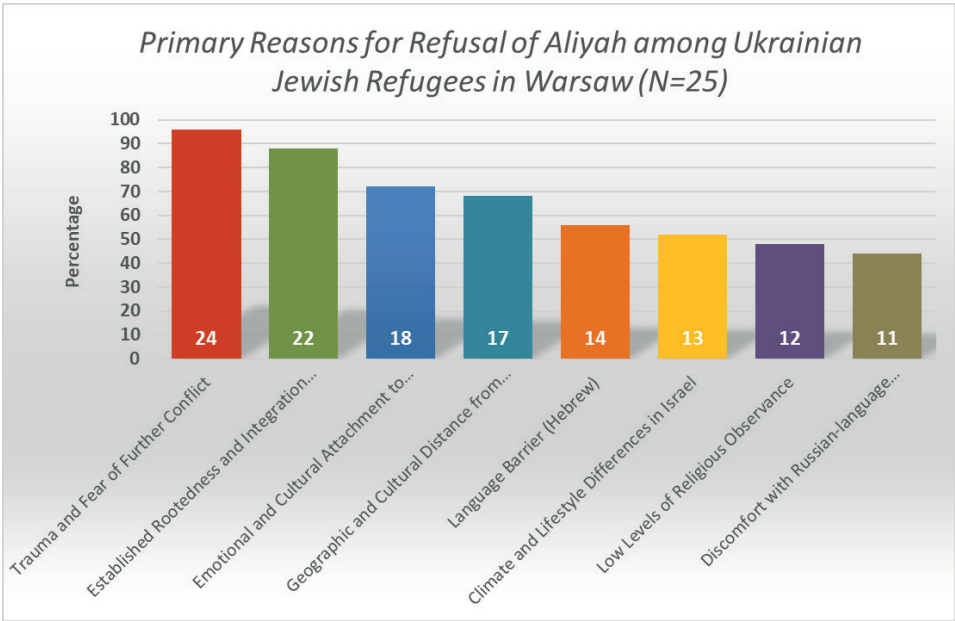
Resilience should therefore be understood here as relational and context-dependent rather than as an individual trait alone. Research on resilience emphasizes adaptive recovery from adversity, but also points to the importance of social support, institutional environments, and culturally meaningful practices (Southwick et al. 2014). Respondents’ accounts indicate that group meetings, community events, Polish-language support, remedial classes for children, and access to psychological assistance contributed to a sense of orientation and emotional stability. Several respondents also raised concerns about children’s educational adaptation in Polish schools, including language barriers, trauma-related distress, and differing academic expectations. In this context, complementary educational and psychological support provided through Jewish communal organizations was experienced as helpful for both school adjustment and family stabilization (UNHCR 2024; IOM 2023).

Respondent 9 described the importance of group-based support: “Being part of a supportive group with other Ukrainian mothers helped me cope with my anxiety and find emotional stability. It made me feel less isolated and more confident about my children’s future” (Respondent 9). Respondent 21 similarly emphasized informal communal contact: “Regular community events organized by local Jewish institutions made us feel welcomed and connected, significantly reducing our emotional stress” (Respondent 21). These accounts suggest that adaptation was shaped not only by individual coping capacities, but also by access to culturally familiar spaces, peer relationships, and institutional continuity. At the same time, the data do not allow for a systematic evaluation of the effectiveness of specific psychological or educational programs. The findings indicate that respondents perceived such initiatives as supportive, while future research would be needed to assess their longer-term impact on psychological well-being, identity formation, and children’s adaptation.

Graphical Representation of Main Reasons for Refusal of Aliyah

Figure 1.

Primary Reasons for Refusal of *Aliyah* among Ukrainian Jewish Refugees in Warsaw (N=25).



Note: Respondents could indicate multiple reasons. Bars show the percentage of respondents; numbers inside the bars indicate the corresponding number of respondents out of N=25. Percentages do not add up to 100%.

The figure summarizes the frequency of the main reasons indicated by respondents. The most frequently mentioned categories were trauma and fear of further conflict, established rootedness in Warsaw, emotional and cultural attachment to Israel without relocation, and geographical or cultural distance from Israel.

Institutional Logics of Protection and Belonging

The Polish and Israeli cases illustrate two different institutional logics of protection and belonging. Poland’s post-2022 reception framework offered geographically proximate, relatively immediate, and administratively accessible stabilization for many refugees from Ukraine. Israel’s *aliyah* framework, by contrast, offered a legally privileged route to citizenship and national incorporation for Jews eligible under the Law of Return.

The findings suggest that the existence of a formal right to immigrate does not automatically translate into migration when potential migrants perceive the destination as insecure, geographically distant from family, politically uncertain, or socially

difficult to enter. For the respondents in this study, Poland functioned as a site of everyday stabilization, while Israel remained emotionally and symbolically significant but was not perceived as a viable immediate destination. This comparison should therefore be read not as a ranking of state responses, but as an analysis of how different institutional frameworks become meaningful under conditions of war, displacement, caregiving responsibility, and perceived risk.

Discussion

Read through this combined lens, the experiences of Ukrainian Jewish refugees in Warsaw illuminate a form of diasporic positioning that is neither a simple “stay” nor a simple “return.” Israel remains present as an emotional and cultural reference point, while Warsaw becomes a site of everyday rootedness supported by institutions, routines, and social ties. The resulting identity configuration is best described as multi-sited and situational: it maintains transnational proximity to Israel while simultaneously embedding in the host environment through practices of community participation, caregiving stability, schooling, and local support networks. This pattern contributes to contemporary debates by showing how diaspora can operate as an active and durable settlement choice rather than merely an interim stage before migration.

Two implications follow. First, the findings reinforce the need to treat migration decisions not as purely ideological outcomes but as historically contingent responses shaped by perceived risk, institutional capacity, and the temporal layering of trauma. Second, the case supports theoretical approaches that conceptualize diaspora as lived practice, sustained through relationships, routines, and institutions, rather than as a condition defined solely by spatial distance from a homeland (Brubaker 2005).

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

This study has several limitations. First, it is based on a relatively small qualitative sample of 25 Ukrainian Jewish refugee women living in Warsaw. The findings should therefore not be generalized to all Ukrainian Jewish refugees in Poland or to all Jews eligible for *aliyah*. Second, the study is located in a specific urban and institutional context. Warsaw offers a dense network of public services, civil-society initiatives, and Jewish communal organizations, which may not reflect the experiences of refugees living in smaller Polish cities or outside organized Jewish communal life.

Third, as discussed in the Methodology section, recruitment through Jewish organizations and snowball sampling likely overrepresented women already connected to formal Jewish communal institutions. This may have shaped respondents’ access to support and their descriptions of rootedness in Warsaw. Refugees who remained

outside such organizations, avoided communal institutions, or had negative experiences with them are underrepresented in the sample.

A further limitation concerns the political and moral evaluation of Israel after October 7. Because the interview guide did not include a separate set of questions on the Netanyahu government, the war in Gaza, or respondents' views on the humanitarian consequences of the conflict, this article can analyze these issues only where they appeared spontaneously. Future research should examine more systematically how Jewish refugees and potential returnees assess the relationship between attachment to Israel, criticism of state policy, and decisions about *aliyah*.

Future studies could also use comparative and longitudinal designs. Comparative research might examine Ukrainian Jewish refugees in other Polish cities or in different European host countries, while longitudinal research could track whether postponement of *aliyah* remains temporary or develops into longer-term settlement in Poland. The intergenerational dimension is particularly important: children and adolescents socialized in Warsaw may narrate identity, security, and belonging differently from their parents over time. Quantitative research could complement these qualitative findings by assessing how widespread the identified patterns are among broader groups of Ukrainian Jewish refugees.

Conclusion

This article examined why Ukrainian Jewish refugee women living in Warsaw refused or postponed *aliyah* after October 7, 2023, despite legal eligibility under Israel's Law of Return and the availability of institutional facilitation. The findings are consistent with the study's initial hypotheses, but they also complicate any simple explanation based on trauma, integration in Poland, or attachment to Israel alone. Respondents' decisions were shaped by the intersection of war-related displacement, heightened security concerns, caregiving responsibilities, family geography, institutional support in Poland, and the broader post-October 7 war context, including Israel's subsequent military campaign in Gaza, the hostage crisis, and regional instability.

The interviews show that trauma and fear of renewed exposure to violence played an important role in respondents' reluctance to relocate to Israel. For many women, the possibility of *aliyah* was evaluated through the experience of having already fled war in Ukraine. Israel was therefore not perceived only as a symbolic homeland or as a legally accessible destination, but also as a place associated with missile alerts, military uncertainty, and the risk of another destabilizing move. These concerns were especially significant for mothers with children, for whom safety, psychological recovery, and everyday routine became central criteria in migration decision-making.

Family geography also strongly shaped respondents' decisions. Many interviewees remained oriented toward Ukraine as a homeland and toward relatives who had

stayed there, including husbands, fathers, brothers, and other male family members affected by wartime restrictions and obligations. In this context, Poland's geographic proximity to Ukraine made Warsaw a more feasible site of waiting, recovery, and possible future reunification than Israel. The findings also point to the gendered character of displacement: respondents were not only caregivers seeking stability for their children, but also active participants in rebuilding educational, cultural, and communal life in Warsaw's Jewish environment.

At the same time, the decision to remain in Poland cannot be explained only by fear of Israel or proximity to Ukraine. Respondents' narratives also point to the importance of legal access, children's schooling, employment opportunities, public services, civil-society support, and Jewish communal infrastructures. Warsaw functioned for many respondents as a site of everyday stabilization: not necessarily as a definitive replacement for Ukraine, but as a place where practical adaptation and emotional anchoring became possible after displacement. This rootedness was uneven and situated, shaped by respondents' connection to Jewish organizations and by the specific institutional environment of Warsaw.

The findings also demonstrate that refusal or postponement of *aliyah* did not mean disengagement from Israel. Many respondents maintained emotional, cultural, religious, or symbolic ties to Israel through Hebrew learning, Jewish holidays, media consumption, family narratives, and communal practices. Their decisions therefore reveal a distinction between attachment and relocation. Israel could remain meaningful as a symbolic and cultural homeland while simultaneously being perceived as unsafe, distant, politically uncertain, or practically unsuitable as an immediate destination for family life.

This article therefore contributes to diaspora and migration studies by showing how attachment to Israel may coexist with a deliberate decision not to relocate there. For the women interviewed in Warsaw, belonging was not organized around a single territorial destination. Rather, it emerged through a triangular configuration linking Ukraine as homeland, Poland as a site of everyday stabilization, and Israel as a symbolic, cultural, and sometimes contested homeland. This configuration should be understood not as a rejection of Israel, but as a situated strategy of safety, care, and transnational belonging under conditions of overlapping wars.

More broadly, the findings suggest that contemporary *aliyah* decisions among displaced Jewish populations cannot be understood solely through legal eligibility, institutional encouragement, or symbolic attachment to Israel. They are shaped by perceived security, family obligations, prior trauma, host-country support, practical barriers to mobility, and the moral-political meanings attached to the post-October 7 war context. The Warsaw case thus points to a more relational and temporal understanding of diaspora: one in which return may remain emotionally significant, but where non-migration can become a deliberate, adaptive, and revisable form of belonging.

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