

Yale University

## EliScholar – A Digital Platform for Scholarly Publishing at Yale

---

Public Health Theses

School of Public Health

---

January 2023

### Decolonizing Humanitarian Aid: Addressing Racism And Health Inequities In The Context Of Africans Displaced From Ukraine

Nassim J. Ashford  
nassimashford@gmail.com

Follow this and additional works at: <https://elischolar.library.yale.edu/ysphtdl>

---

#### Recommended Citation

Ashford, Nassim J., "Decolonizing Humanitarian Aid: Addressing Racism And Health Inequities In The Context Of Africans Displaced From Ukraine" (2023). *Public Health Theses*. 2224.  
<https://elischolar.library.yale.edu/ysphtdl/2224>

This Open Access Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the School of Public Health at EliScholar – A Digital Platform for Scholarly Publishing at Yale. It has been accepted for inclusion in Public Health Theses by an authorized administrator of EliScholar – A Digital Platform for Scholarly Publishing at Yale. For more information, please contact [elischolar@yale.edu](mailto:elischolar@yale.edu).

Decolonizing Humanitarian Aid: Addressing Racism and Health Inequities in the Context of  
Africans Displaced from Ukraine

A thesis presented by,  
Nassim Ashford April 2023

Primary Advisor: Ijeoma Opara, PhD, LMSW, MPH  
Secondary Advisor: Ashley Hagaman, PhD, MPH

A Thesis Submitted in Candidacy for the Degree of Master of Public Health  
Department of Social and Behavioral Sciences  
Yale School of Public Health

## **Abstract**

The Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 led to one of Europe's largest humanitarian crises since World War II. With over 14 million people forcibly displaced from Ukraine, this thesis delves into the lesser-known aspect of anti-Black discrimination impacting displaced Africans and those of African descent during the conflict. This thesis research has two primary objectives: (1) to explore the personal experiences and struggles of displaced African persons as they encountered barriers to safety while escaping the war-torn region, and (2) to examine NoirUnited International's efforts to create a framework that addresses humanitarian crises with a focus on racial justice and community-based aid. The thesis uses a decolonial ethnographic approach to gather insights from video interviews, personal narratives, and active participant observation in collaboration with the NGO NoirUnited International to contextualize the experiences of third-country nationals (TCN) fleeing the war. Interviews were conducted with three displaced Africans from Ukraine to highlight how racial discrimination impacted their journey and overall health. Racial discrimination has compounded the effects of war trauma throughout the conflict, creating a complex challenge requiring a comprehensive approach to address the systemic inequalities contributing to it. By shedding light on the unique, intersectional challenges faced by those displaced from Ukraine, this study's findings can be used to raise awareness and provide culturally sensitive recommendations for NGOs, mental health professionals, and advocates to mitigate the effects of discrimination and better support the psychological well-being of Africans and other “Third Country Nationals” (TCNs).

**Keywords:** Decolonization, Humanitarian Equity, Social Justice, Social and Behavioral Sciences

## **Acknowledgments**

First, I would also like to thank all of my Yale School of Public Health professors for their patience and overall support throughout my master's program. Thank you, Dr. Ijeoma Opara, my primary advisor, for your guidance throughout my time at Yale and for exposing me to in-depth CBPR research and practice. I thank my secondary advisor, Dr. Ashley Hagaman, for guiding me in qualitative and ethnographic research methods. Furthermore, I'd like to express my gratitude to my partner, Macire, for embarking on this journey across Europe with me. Our cause was much larger than ourselves and opened my eyes to the systemic injustices faced by Black people throughout the diaspora. Lastly, I would also like to thank my family and friends for their unwavering support and for being with me throughout my time in graduate school and while taking on this project.

## Table of Contents

<b>Abstract .....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Acknowledgments .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Introduction .....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Literature on the Intersection of Race and Emergency Response .....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Purpose of Study.....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Researcher Positionality Statement.....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Methodology.....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Case Studies of Three Refugees .....</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>NUI Humanitarian Response Interventions.....</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>Discussion .....</b>	<b>31</b>
<b>Implications .....</b>	<b>33</b>
<b>Limitations .....</b>	<b>35</b>
<b>Conclusion.....</b>	<b>35</b>
<b>References.....</b>	<b>36</b>

## **Introduction**

February 24, 2022, Russia invaded Ukraine, creating one of Europe's fastest growing and largest humanitarian crises since WW2 (Lubrani, 2022). The invasion by Russia shifted international relations, as many countries rushed to support Ukraine to defend itself by providing financial and military support and receiving displaced people affected by the conflict. Since the beginning of the crisis, more than 14 million people have been forcibly displaced from their homes, including over 8 million refugees from Ukraine recorded across Europe and over 6 million internally displaced (UNHCR, 2023; USA FOR UNHCR, 2023). The War's short- and long-term effects have widespread implications, impacting mental and physical health, including the potential loss of life. Research has shown that displacement from war-related conflicts causes PTSD, depression, anxiety, and suicidal behavior, all of which are difficult to address due to the limited availability of mental health resources (Goto et al., 2022; Reed et al., 2018).

These health burdens are also impacted by the discrimination displaced people face while seeking safety. Though there is limited research specifically on the effects of discrimination experienced by refugees and other displaced people, there is ample evidence on the effects of racial discrimination and health (Williams et al., 2003). Racism is defined as a historical system of oppression based on the color of one's skin that systemically limits opportunities and access to resources. In addition, structural racism refers to the intentional and subliminal societal structures and policies that create and maintain power imbalances based on race and ethnicity (Gee et al., 2011).

In the context of the war in Ukraine, early reports in the media showed that Africans and other people of color were facing racial discrimination while trying to leave the country safely. At the start of the conflict, more than 76,000 international students were studying in Ukraine, of

which more than 16,000 were from African countries (Ray, 2022; White, 2023). In addition, schools in Ukraine have actively recruited African students to study since the Soviet Union. As a result, a large population of Africans also made Ukraine their permanent home. Despite fleeing the same war as White presenting Ukrainian people, African residents and other third-country nationals were segregated at border crossings and denied the same privileges to accessing safety. Those who experienced the discrimination stated that a “Ukrainian first” policy was enacted as arm patrols in the country removed them from buses and trains and separated them from Ukrainian citizens (Shoaib, 2022). At the borders of Ukraine and Poland, refugees of color were segregated from white-presenting Ukrainian citizens and refused entry into the EU. Their experiences of fleeing the war and racial discrimination created an interlocking system of trauma that only African and other “third country nationals” from Ukraine faced (Aribot et al., 2022). Since then, the barriers faced by “third country nationals” from Ukraine have been multi-faceted, as seen in the lack of safe migration in Europe, barriers to accessing temporary protection in EU countries, overt interpersonal racial discrimination on trains and at the border, lack of necessities and financial support; all of this topped with the risk of deportation (Pronczuk, 2023).

Additionally, whether intentionally or not, the classification as “Third Country Nationals” (TCN) further disenfranchised non-Ukrainian nationals fleeing the war, creating a class of people that were deemed not worthy of staying in the EU’s Schengen Area, a collection of 27 countries that enables the free movement of people across Europe with no visa required to live and work. The designation as Third Country Nationals limited the aid and attention directed to their cases as they were not considered refugees by traditional Eurocentric policymakers and humanitarian organizations. One year later, the voices, experiences, and needs of Africans from Ukraine have been glaringly absent from the global discourse.

## **Literature on the Intersection of Race and Emergency Response**

Emergency preparedness officials, policymakers, and first responders are directly responsible for planning and developing strategies to protect the public in the event of an existing or future crisis. While responding to emergencies, these practitioners must also account for emergencies' long-term and short-term impact on communities, including accessing factors such as social determinants of health and social vulnerability that can determine how well communities can adapt to crises.

Social vulnerability encompasses a range of socioeconomic and demographic factors that can influence the ability of communities to cope with and recover from adverse events (Flanagan et al., 2011). Globally vulnerable populations, including pregnant women, families with children, older adults, those disabled, racial/ethnic minorities, and those living in poverty, are disproportionately affected during emergencies due to structural barriers and the lack of advocacy and representation in emergency planning (Marshall, 2020). Historically, these social vulnerabilities place marginalized communities at a greater risk for adverse health outcomes before and during crises due to factors outside of their control; inequalities in housing, healthcare, and employment further lead to substantial health disparities among vulnerable populations (Zakour et al., 2003; Marshall, 2020). These factors can significantly impact access to quality medical care and humanitarian services during emergencies. These determinants also impact how people receive communication from official channels and their recovery post-disaster (Spence, 2007). Traditionally, emergency preparedness models and practices do not sufficiently consider underlying social conditions like race, income, immigration status, and other dynamics that predict population health and behaviors that potentially influence community resiliency (Biedrzycki et al., 2012). To address these disparities and impact countless



lives during the crisis, an intersectional approach to emergency response is needed, incorporating health equity by prioritizing those known to be socially vulnerable. Intersectional approaches to emergency response implementation should also be implemented with an antiracism lens to address the long-standing effects of racial discrimination and health (Shelton, 2021).

### **Purpose of Study**

The primary objective of this ethnographic research study is to examine the impact of anti-Black discrimination during the conflict in Ukraine. Using video interviews, transcriptions of narratives from displaced African and African-descent people, and active participant observation in partnership with NGO NoirUnited International, this thesis aims to illuminate the experiences of this marginalized group. In addition, the thesis aims to raise awareness of the unique intersectional challenges displaced Africans face from Ukraine and generate culturally responsive recommendations to promote their psycho-political well-being and mitigate the effects of racial discrimination. The final product of this research complements an ethnographic documentary that amplifies the voices of Africans affected by the conflict in Ukraine and advocates for a community-based, racial justice approach to humanitarian responses. To promote social justice and challenge power imbalances in the humanitarian sector, this thesis centers on the lived experiences of marginalized individuals within this conflict, with the following aims:

Aim 1: To explore the experiences of the African diaspora who faced institutional and physical barriers to safety while fleeing Ukraine during the war, using a qualitative analysis of three video interviews and months of observant participation in response to the crisis.

Aim 2: To analyze NoirUnited International's response to develop a framework for addressing humanitarian disasters through a racial justice lens and a Community-Based approach. This aim involves analyzing the organization's humanitarian efforts, identifying

successful strategies, and developing recommendations for promoting community-led approaches to humanitarian assistance distribution that prioritize the needs and perspectives of marginalized groups.

### **Researcher Positionality Statement**

This thesis was conducted using data collected by NoirUnited International (NUI), an NGO I co-founded, which focuses on centering Black and other marginalized people in creating development solutions for their communities. As a dual-American citizen and a Black Jamaican American, I acknowledge that my positionality places me in a relatively privileged position compared to the African refugees I work with and that I have personally experienced discrimination on the European continent.

Furthermore, I recognize that my role in providing humanitarian aid creates a power imbalance that must be ethically navigated. I understand that my privilege and power may shape my perspectives and biases in this work, and I strive to identify these potential influences and approach my research humbly. I consider myself merely a vessel of information based on my lived experience. After working on this response for an entire year, I continue to recognize the importance of centering the voices and experiences of the refugees I work with and acknowledging their perspectives as experts on their own lives.

### **Methodology**

NoirUnited aims to increase equity within the development and humanitarian space and ensure greater inclusion of communities' voices in determining what interventions work best for them. Given the ongoing conflict and humanitarian crisis in Ukraine and the reports of racial discrimination against non-Ukrainian nationals, NoirUnited responded to meet the needs of those

disproportionately affected by the situation, specifically focusing on marginalized communities such as African students and families.

The main community profile of African students in Ukraine was selected due to the number of students in Ukraine before the war and the trending social media advocacy to support their safe evacuation from the country. After seeing multiple reports on social media sites such as Twitter and Instagram, our organization connected with students and families on the ground and began raising funds to support them with humanitarian assistance. Additionally, to gain a deeper understanding of the challenges faced by African fleeing Ukraine, NoirUnited Humanitarian Response Team traveled to Europe to conduct needs assessments and document the experiences of ethno-racial trauma and systemic oppression experienced by those fleeing the war to provide humanitarian assistance.

Need assessments were conducted in each country our team visited during our community healing and empowerment workshops. During these group sessions, we used guided workshops to assist students with coping with experiences of racial discrimination and trauma from war. In addition, utilizing various forms of art and spiritual therapy, we attempted to build community and create a safe space for others to share how they had been affected by the conflict. Since April 2022, the community sessions have continued to be held virtually and in person at least twice a month. These workshops and our direct aid distribution allowed us to maintain connection and access to over 2,000 displaced African students from Ukraine.

#### Research design

Noting the decolonial lens of NoirUnited International, we considered those interviewed to be co-researchers and not just participants, centering their voices throughout each step of the project. A decolonial ethnographic approach was chosen to provide a nuanced understanding of the social, cultural, political, and historical context that influenced discrepancies displaced

Africans from Ukraine faced while fleeing the war compared to their Ukrainian counterparts. Decolonial ethnography is an approach to conducting ethnographic research to challenge the colonial and imperialist legacies that shape the production of knowledge and understanding. This research approach seeks to center the perspectives and experiences of indigenous peoples and reframes them from producing narratives that reinforce colonial power relations (Smith, 1999). Focusing on the legacies of colonialism helps to situate the historical role of Western globalization and anti-black discrimination in the lives of African people. By examining the broader cultural and institutional factors contributing to internalized, interpersonal, institutional, and structural racial discrimination, this thesis aims to illuminate the complexities of navigating racism as a Black person fleeing Ukraine.

Furthermore, an action-oriented ethnography approach was chosen due to the close collaboration and connection between myself, NoirUnited, and the affected members, which I hoped would lead to a more participatory and empowering research process. Action-oriented ethnography aims to bridge the gap between research and activism and promote social change. This type of ethnography stems from participatory action research (PAR), a type of public health research that utilizes reflection, data collection, and action by community members to improve health outcomes and reduce health inequities (Baum, 2006). My role in the research was not merely as a researcher but also as an activist committed to addressing the racial injustices witnessed by members of the African diaspora fleeing Ukraine and displaced in Europe. For over a year, I used research tools such as participant observation, interviews, rapid needs assessments, and field notes to understand better the experiences of those I worked with. Fieldwork collected through NoirUnited was not simply data collection of refugee experiences but also mechanisms used to drive much larger conversations surrounding global anti-blackness, the historical

underdevelopment of African education, and the exploitation of African communities by European nations (Rodney, 2018). Utilizing this data is a key contributor to the strategic planning and policy recommendations developed within aim two.

NoirUnited framed its response using a community-engaged approach, aiming to establish a collaborative network that involved community members (student leaders and community members working to support those from Ukraine), researchers, and organizational representatives as equal partners. The community-engaged approach employed methods from the community-based participatory approach (CBPR), which is used to help researchers build trust with community members by bridging socio-cultural differences between researchers and participants and incorporating multiple perspectives in examining an issue (Israel, 1998; Collins, 2018). The CBPR process involves communities in the following key steps: 1) Community Entry, 2) Health Problem, 3) Identification Study Design, 4) Participants Recruitment and Retention, 5) Data Collection, 6) Data Analysis, 7) Reporting Report Dissemination (Israel, 1998). We adopted our community programming based on community feedback and strived to be as flexible as possible in our response; NoirUnited engaged community members in steps 1, 2, 4, 5, and 7 of CBPR.

Following methods of the CBPR process, in step 1) we entered the community virtually by building rapport with students and families via apps like Telegram and WhatsApp; we spoke with them daily to provide physical, emotional, and spiritual support. After securing funding, we met with those affected in person to provide humanitarian assistance. In step 2) of the process, after hearing multiple reports of racial discrimination inside the country and at the border of Ukraine from those we worked with, we knew that racism was a significant health concern. We quickly realized that those who did not look to be Ukrainian were not treated the same, thus

double burdening them with racial trauma and the trauma of war, significantly impacting their overall mental, physical, and social health. In step 3) of the process, we did not actively seek community input in the study design because we were actively responding to the crisis and wanted to make sure that we, as an organization, knew our capabilities and strived to be as efficient as possible. In step 4) of the process, we recruited student leaders in each country we visited to help streamline the information that would help our response. We created a “NUI volunteers” group chat on WhatsApp and worked with students to coordinate events and distribute humanitarian aid. We also created country group chats for each country we intended to set up our official operations (Germany, 55 people, Poland, 197 people, France, 30 people). In step 5) of the process, we worked with the same student leaders to collect data and information regarding how others were affected by the crisis. We met with them often to adjust our response as necessary. In step 6) since the conflict was ongoing, we did not have the opportunity to engage, nor did we want to overburden our student leaders with data analysis, as many were still taking classes and focused on basic survival in Europe. In step 7) we worked with students in our network to help us contextualize their experiences and share what happened to them by recording interviews to create ethnographic documentary videos to help amplify their voices. After advertising through our channels, students were selected for the interviews based on their willingness to participate.

This decolonial ethnographic community-engaged approach was taken to help to shift the traditional power dynamics between researchers and participants, aid workers and refugees, and those in the “Global South” vs. the “Global North.” By identifying effective strategies for a racial justice lens on humanitarian aid and development, this thesis will inform policies and intervention programs that address racism during humanitarian emergencies and promote social

justice for all. The practical implications of this work include an increased focus on marginalized groups affected by the Ukraine crisis through inclusive policy directives and direct distribution of humanitarian resources.

#### The data collection process

Many of the students we worked with continued to travel to new locations based on the political landscape and the legal status of the country in which they were located. As a “third country national,” these refugees were not granted the same rights and liberties as Ukrainian nationals and are uniquely vulnerable. Over a year, we traveled to meet with those affected to document their experiences. We also aggregated news reports, social media posts, and our own lived experiences, responding to have the most up-to-date information on the fate of Africans and other “Third Country Nationals” experiences in Europe after fleeing Ukraine.

Each participant we met during our response had an equal opportunity to be part of our video interviews and was selected based on location and NoirUnited operations in multiple locations across Europe. We recruited video interviewees by referral sampling during humanitarian aid distribution and mental health empowerment workshops (Appendix A). Humanitarian aid distribution was provided through a partnership with NoirUnited and Mercy Corps in Poland and included food, material, and housing assistance; other support was offered with the support of in-kind donations from churches and community organizations in the US. Mental health empowerment workshops in Germany, France, and Poland were designed to address racial discrimination experiences via community healing. The interviews were also advertised via flyers in the NoirUnited WhatsApp group chats. In addition, participants were asked to click on a QR code link, to fill out a survey with basic demographic information (age, race, country of origin, and where they were studying in Ukraine).

After recruitment for interviews, prospective participants were subject to a verbal consent

process after explaining the background and purpose of the documentary and research.

Participants were told that the videos would be used in a documentary by the organization to increase advocacy efforts surrounding their experiences. Once we obtained verbal consent from each interviewee, NoirUnited staff described the purpose of the interview to the participant and told them the theme we attempted to explore, which was “examining the experiences of African Refugees from Ukraine and the impact of racial discrimination on their psycho-political and psychosocial well-being.” The meaning of “psycho-political validity” was defined as a framework that aims to evaluate the intersections between the psychological and political factors that impact well-being on an individual, relational, and collective level (Prilleltensky, 2008). “Psychosocial well-being” was defined as health's mental, emotional, social, and spiritual dimensions. These two frameworks for the interview were used to unpack how migration policies, racial discrimination, and lack of assistance impacted the overall well-being of Africans fleeing the war.

All interviews were video recorded for use in the ethnographic documentary film. Participants were informed that they could terminate the interview at any point or refuse to answer any questions without explanation. Participation in the interviews was strictly voluntary, confidential, and non-discriminatory.

#### Data analysis methods

The NoirUnited Humanitarian Response Team interviewed 27 people using the interview guide (Appendix B). Only those between 18 and 29 were selected to conduct the interviews. Video interviews were designed to be semi-structured, and the guide consisted of open-ended questions to allow flexibility in answers. The research team developed an interview guide to lead the discussion and probe the interviewees on their experiences with racial discrimination and access to humanitarian assistance. This thesis includes three video interviews and transcriptions



as case studies to accurately contextualize the narratives of the African and African-descent refugees experiencing the Russia-Ukraine conflict in the three countries we were operating in (n=3).

### **Case Studies of Three Refugees**

While conducting our humanitarian response mission, our team's main goal was to document the experiences of Africans fleeing the war and provide needed assistance. The vast majority of Africans and other non-Ukrainians fleeing the war were international students who decided to move to Ukraine for low-cost education, cost of living, and potential access to the EU job market upon graduation. These case studies do not represent all non-Ukrainian experiences fleeing the conflict but illuminate the breadth of experiences people like them have faced.

Though we collected many interviews and stories, I decided to focus on these three individual students' experiences to help to show the stark differences in their experience compared to others fleeing the conflict. Different from their classmates who were granted more accessible access to institutions and universities in Europe, African students did not, despite some being in their final year of studies. Each of these case studies helps to show the experiences of students, women and children, and double refugees in Germany, France, and Poland; and sheds light on challenges faced while fleeing the conflict and trying to continue their education. For confidentiality and respect for the experiences they faced, the names of those in the case study have been changed to pseudonyms.

The case studies of these three students illustrate just a few of the experiences of African refugees fleeing the conflict in Ukraine. These experiences, while unique to each individual, highlight **three key themes 1) the impact of racial discrimination, 2) lack of support and basic services, and 3) the effects of the war and interruption of education on mental health.**

## Ngoe

Ngoe is a male native of Cameroon. In 2018, due to the Anglophone crisis in northern Cameroon, he left his country by himself for Ukraine to study for a computer science degree at the Igor Sikorsky Kyiv Polytechnic Institute. To apply for university in Ukraine, Ngoe had to move to Nigeria to fully complete the process of obtaining a visa to Ukraine. After arriving in Ukraine, Ngoe studied there for 3 ½ years and was an active student member of several student organizations. When Ngoe heard of the Russian invasion, he was visiting a friend in Dnipro, far from his university and dorm. He was unprepared to leave the country as all his belongings were still at school. After waiting a few days and hearing bombings approaching the town, he grabbed the things he had packed and left for the train to Lviv. After waiting several hours for the train, he and his friend were turned around as Ukrainian women and children were prioritized for boarding. Here he described the experience,

**Theme 1: The impact of racial discrimination:** *“We did not make it on board the train the first day because of the huge crowd and discrimination. Boarding a train became an issue; many people were crowded at the train stations trying to escape to Lviv as well, prioritizes were made to mothers and children first, but we noticed something else, we were being discriminated from entering the trains for some reason...I just wanted to believe that it was nothing...at the train station the first time, they said, no, we cannot get into the train...It was just for ladies, and there were always a lot of ladies and children. I was like, okay. It makes sense...alright, the ladies and children, we stepped aside and went home. ...we had to come to the train station the next day to fight to get on board, still unsuccessful. And then the third day, we met with some other African students, and they had been trying to get into the train as well. And I remember that day a lady, an African lady, tried to get on the train first, and the train conductor still stopped her. And I asked them, ‘Why are you stopping her she's a lady. Why are you stopping her from getting to the train?’... we understand, you said ladies and children, but why are you stopping her?’ And she still said no... it didn't make sense. So, we agreed that day that we are going to push our way in because we were like 10 of us, and that is what we did.”*

These incidents display how African students navigated their first-hand experiences of

discrimination while trying to escape. After living in Ukraine for several years, many were shocked that they were not treated the same as Ukrainian citizens. Before reaching the trains and borders, stories, and videos of similar incidents, such as Ngoe's, began to spread among social media channels and group chats. As students tried to evacuate, they followed the reports to see which borders were easiest to move through. Ngoe recounted friends who when to the Ukrainian-Polish border, were threatened by guards, and made to wait six days in the cold while Ukrainian citizens were chosen of them to leave,

***Theme 1: The impact of racial discrimination:*** “*Learning from those who went ahead of me, I didn't want to face the same thing as them.*”

This led him to seek entry to the EU through Hungary, which was more tolerant of accepting non-Ukrainian nationalities then. However, after staying in Hungary for three months, he moved to Germany, hoping to receive temporary protection under Paragraph 24.

***Theme 2: Lack of support and basic services*** “*In Germany, I was just hoping for the best, you know, like maybe something is going to happen...But you know, for the past few months, nothing has happened, and I've had to move from place to place...It's depressing and emotionally tormenting.*”

For students such as Ngoe, leaving Ukraine presented unique challenges; not being able to travel back home because of internal conflict and lack of options to receive temporary legal residency placed further constraints on movement and access to social services. These barriers contribute to the social vulnerability of African and other third-country nationals from Ukraine and have the potential to significantly impact long-term health outcomes.

### **Nneka**

The second student, Nneka, is a 25-year-old female from Nigeria who moved to Ukraine two years before the war started to begin her master's in international relations. She enjoyed living in Ukraine and expressed happiness as a student there and traveled with her younger sister,

a Kyiv Medical School student when she originally moved to the country. During the interview, she reflected on the difficult situation she has been in since her journey began to leave Ukraine. At the beginning of the conflict, Nneka considered returning to her home country; however, she knew doing so would mean giving up her education after paying for her school fees of 4,000 USD in cash and covering her living and housing expenses for a few months. The loss of such a significant amount of money only compounded her difficulties. On top of that, she also discovered she was pregnant at the onset of the war. As a pregnant woman, leaving Ukraine was a very traumatic and chaotic experience.

Before attempting to leave, she had heard stories of stampedes and pushbacks from African people. With panic and many people rushing to flee the country, she felt her life was not valued like the others fleeing. When she arrived at the train, she experienced injustice. When reflecting on her experiences, she stated,

***Theme 1: The impact of racial discrimination*** “*Racial discrimination causes an inferiority complex and makes you feel as if you are not enough. I thought to myself, why would they choose someone over me just because I am black...the racism needs to be addressed.*”

This point emphasizes the importance of assessing how racial discrimination impacted the overall health of those fleeing Ukraine. Furthering this discussion, Nneka recounted that officers there did not allow Black people to board the train and insisted that Ukrainian women be picked first to leave. She tried to explain that she was pregnant and a woman; however, they refused to let her onto the train. Finally, after hours of waiting in the cold, she was able to make it to Lviv. However, the final train out of the country to Warsaw, Poland, had already left.

When the train finally came, Nneka described the scene as “a tug of war, and survival of the fittest to enter the train.” She shared that when she got on the train, she noticed that Black people were not allowed to sit in the chairs. Despite some seats being available, she said pets and

luggage were on the chairs instead. Nneka spoke to one of the guards on the train and told them that she was pregnant and needed to sit, the response she received was, “Go back to your own country, and Africa has no war.” While on the train, she also recounted,

***Theme 1: The impact of racial discrimination*** “ *I started crying; I was devastated, how could someone be so brutal to say something like that to a pregnant woman...the station we were going to was 8 hours away, and so they were telling me I should stand the whole time?*”

Additionally, she shared,

***Theme 2: Lack of support and basic services*** “*It was not easy leaving because there was no food...There was a point in time when we came to a stop, and some people from outside the train came to start handing out food; they shared food, water, and snacks. And they gave them only to Ukrainians. If you were Black and you stretched your hand through the window to get something, they would not give it to you...*”

Still recovering from her experience leaving Ukraine, Nneka gave birth while in Poland and with limited social and financial support,

***Theme 2: Lack of support and basic services*** “*Being alone and being a new mom, there is nobody to teach me what to do... even if I wanted to ask for help, there is a language barrier ... it has really not been easy on my end.*”

The experiences of pregnant women and those with young children, such as Nneka, during this conflict, have been significantly under-reported. Outside of giving birth, new mothers have experienced difficulty traveling with their newborns, as they have yet to receive birth certificates and passports, leaving their children temporarily stateless. For those with young children, the barriers to housing, food, and material assistance further exacerbate their circumstances and make them vulnerable to exploitation. In addition, research has shown the effects of depression and anxiety on mothers, leading to preterm delivery, reduced mother-infant bonding, and delays in the cognitive development of the infant (Cummings et al., 1994; Davenport et al., 2020). This, coupled with the emotional and mental trauma of war and racial discrimination, places pregnant African women in a uniquely isolating and vulnerable position.

## Alpha

The last student in the case study was Alpha, a 25-year-old male originally from The Republic of Guinea. In order to move to Ukraine to pursue his education, his family sold all of their property. He lived in Ukraine since 2019 and was able to find a job full-time to support those he left at home. Like the others we interviewed, the experiences of leaving Ukraine were also difficult for Alpha and those he traveled with. He recounted,

**Theme 1: The impact of racial discrimination** *“We walked like 75 km over 3 or 4 days to get to the border...and when we got to the border, that place was the most horrible part we had to go through. There were a lot of people trying to escape, a lot of people trying to cross the border. There were buses set up to drive people across, and the Ukrainian people were able to get on however, we denied and told them no because we only had the residents' permits from our schools...When we tried to cross the borders on foot, the military soldiers began beating us because they didn't want us to go...it was there that I saw some of my friends collapsing because of the wait and the cold weather...it was very cold, and nobody was eating, nobody was sleeping...two friends from Guinea eventually died during that period...we saw them, but what could we do? We could not do anything, so we left them there.”*

Because of the limited attention given to non-Ukrainian people fleeing, many of the stories of those at the borders have not been covered. Working on the ground, I know that other organizations received some reports but were slow to respond or did not know how to make significant steps to address this issue.

Later during his interview, Alpha began talking about his experience since being in France and why he decided to stay. He had been living an hour outside of the city of Paris in a hostel provided by the support of a local community-based organization and had three roommates. He had to check in with the hostel weekly to confirm his space. He appreciated that he had a place to stay; however, his main concern was that he could not continue being in school. Throughout his time, he worked to achieve legal status in France under temporary protection by becoming a student. His worse fear was being deported back to Guinea before this opportunity was available.

### ***Theme 3: The effects of the war and interruption of education on mental health***

*“Knowing the risk of deportation back home and the lack of opportunities, many people went back to Ukraine to avoid deportation...back home, there are not many opportunities to continue studying...The educational system is not that good...the way we study in Europe is not the same way as at home, sometimes it is so hard to study there. Especially if you do not have electricity or a computer... we would hope that in leaving, we would have better chances.”*

Alpha’s comment serves as a basis for why many African students were studying in Ukraine and why many chose not to return to their home countries during the onset of the war. However, the fact that students would willingly go back to Ukraine shows how strong their fight is to continue their education.

### **Overview of NoirUnited International's (NUI) response to the crisis in Ukraine**

At the onset of the Ukraine crisis and after confirming reports of racism and discrimination against Africans and other third-country nationals, NoirUnited launched its humanitarian response to support this vulnerable population. As an organization, we approached our work by adopting practices that promote local agency, empowerment, and equitable relationships. Adopting this approach allowed to advocate for systemic change to address the root causes of inequality and marginalization seen. The goal was to ensure humanitarian equity for racially and ethnically marginalized communities fleeing the war in Ukraine, explicitly emphasizing the pervasive role of anti-Blackness throughout the crisis. Throughout this crisis, it has been difficult to track the movement of people due to the varying immigration laws that impact where and when they decide to settle. Therefore, to connect with displaced students and families, we utilized social media channels such as WhatsApp and Telegram and in-person visits to meet them where they were and increase awareness about NUI's services. We made

applications to request assistance available through our website and began building an email list that we used to send updates and information to reach students across Europe. To ensure wider access to our services and programming, applications for assistance on our website were available in both English and French. Bilingual members of our team helped to translate during in-person meetings.

Those who engaged with our platforms received frequent updates on our programs and the information we provided regarding distribution and other resources. In addition, students could reach out to the NUI team daily through social media platforms such as Instagram, Telegram, and Twitter to request help. Many continued to be referred to NoirUnited by a friend who benefitted from our support services. After traveling to six European countries, including Poland, Germany, France, Hungary, Netherlands, and Portugal, we focused decided to focus our efforts on Germany, Poland, and France due to the number of people located there and their needs. NUI's response focused on these key areas:

*Distribution of goods and materials.*

When people first learned of the Russian invasion, many left their homes with only the clothes on their backs and a book bag filled with their most essential belongings. However, with the long journey to the border and days of walking through the harsh winter weather, many were forced to leave behind the things they brought to reach their destination; as a result, there was a significant need for material support. Unfortunately, despite fleeing the same war, Black people faced barriers to aid and support due to a lack of Ukrainian citizenship and the divisive categorization labeling all non-Ukrainians as 'third country nationals' instead of refugees. As a result, this classification led to widespread disenfranchisement of humanitarian resources and limited groups seeking assistance. To address this, NUI worked closely with affected community



members who settled in the EU to conduct a needs assessment and see what material support was needed. From our assessments, we concluded that there was a significant need for direct cash assistance, access to culturally relevant foods, housing assistance, and other essential items.

Research has shown direct cash assistance to be an effective and efficient mechanism in humanitarian aid distribution by increasing access to goods (Doocy, 2017). Cash assistance also gives people agency over their choices and allows them to purchase goods directly without feeling dependent on humanitarian NGOs. Ultimately, it ensures dignity and normality for those displaced from their homes. To ensure this agency, NUI partnered with Mercy Corps and HumanDoc in Poland to include African students in the direct cash assistance programs established to support Ukrainian refugees. The pilot cash assistance program was open to providing up to 50 African refugees with 200PLN for three months in Warsaw, Poland. This program also included additional financial support for those with family members who fled Ukraine. After registration, 36 people received cash support for the duration of the three months.

Regarding food assistance, NUI partnered with a local African grocery store in Warsaw, Poland, to provide students and families across the country with food vouchers to purchase groceries in person or online through delivery. Frequently, throughout humanitarian crises, in-kind donations of food and groceries are well received; however, they provide limited options in terms of choice and culturally relevant foods that reflect the community on the receiving end of donations. Therefore, by partnering with an African grocery store, those that received food assistance from NUI could obtain food items that were a part of their daily consumption before their displacement.

Other material needs included hygiene products, clothes, shoes, household items, etc. For women with children, their material needs were diapers, baby formula, clothes, and other

necessities. As the winter season approached, NoirUnited enacted its winterization plan to provide students and families across Poland with warm coats. We brought a mission group of four from The First Baptist Church of Lincoln Gardens (FBCLG), a predominantly African American church, in Somerset, NJ, to Poland to provide 50 material assistance cards and 90 coats to students from Kyiv Medical University and families in Warsaw. This response aspect aligned with our goal to foster community empowerment and cross-cultural connections amongst the African/Black diaspora to promote an equitable humanitarian response and increase advocacy for Africans displaced in Europe.

### *Culturally Responsive Mental Health Care*

Racial discrimination and war trauma negatively and disproportionately affect Black persons displaced from Ukraine. Due to the pervasiveness of the global phenomenon of anti-Blackness, this community has had to contend with psycho-political challenges such as the threat of detainment, forced deportation, the risk of becoming unhoused, and food insecurity (Aribot et al., 2022). This was confirmed when NUI cofounders spoke with a trauma therapist in March of 2022, who had volunteered their time to provide mental health support to both Ukrainians and non-Ukrainians that fled the war. Based on her evaluations, she stated that the double trauma of racism and war that Black and Asian people faced would significantly impact their recovery and ability to rebuild their lives long-term compared to white Ukrainians. Therefore, it was crucial to provide Black refugees from Ukraine with trauma-informed and culturally affirming mental health support.

NoirUnited developed programming and hosted events incorporating traditional and non-traditional therapy, healing, and wellness forms. This includes providing access to culturally responsive mental health professionals programming online and in person. For one of these

programs, we partnered with the Association of Black Psychologists (ABPsi), a US-based professional association of African American psychologists, to provide mental health support through their Sawubona Healing Circle. Sawubona Healing Circles were created to support Black people's address to the unique experiences of race-based invisibility and trauma and to “address the emotional and psychological responses to anti-Black violence.” The sessions start with an overview of traditional African healing practices. Then participants share personal reflections and “close by encouraging participants to engage in activities that activate love and healing” (Auguste et al., 2022). We had 17 people join the session and throughout the event. In addition, we hosted virtual sessions with licensed psychologists and psychiatrists based in Nigeria to provide culturally familiar support to those displaced, as many of them are from Western and Central Africa.

Another component of NoirUnited programming was art therapy and wellness sessions, which consisted of painting, poetry writing, group activities, and reflective discussions. Participants used mediums such as painting and varying colors to represent their experiences and describe how they felt after having their lives and personal goals upended by the war. Based on feedback from participants, expressing themselves through painting proved a useful activity for coping with their displacement and offered a comforting space for self-reflection. For the poetry, our team prepared prompts to help guide them with ideas for their poetry. They were not limited to writing about Ukraine and were encouraged to write from the heart to share their feelings. They wrote about their resilience and hope, love and family, political situations in their home country, and their former life in Ukraine.

Below is an example of a piece written by a Nigerian student:

*Enlightenment.  
Like a piece of white paper, blank and empty,*

*A shallow beauty, easily complimented, easily forgotten.  
With no true intentions of love and affection.*

*Wretched and worthless and vain is it to place value on pragmatism.  
Following the crowd being indoctrinated by capitalism.  
The blind leading the blind. How foolish they both are. Not knowing the consequence of  
their folly.*

*Like the middle of August, all is bright and warm but by the end of the month, none is  
prepared for the storm to come.  
One thing I hope for; the blind to see and deaf to hear that they may that death is near.  
Open your eyes and see and your ears to hear!!  
Don't fall for their deception. Align yourself with the truth and walk with intention.*

*Channel your frustration and anger to satisfy the change of which you hunger.  
Stand for your better future so you suffer no longer.  
The future, we call ourselves so let us divide and conquer.*

### Legal Assistance

Since their displacement, African refugees from Ukraine faced legal barriers to receiving temporary protective directives in the countries they settled in due to discriminatory immigration policies. When arriving at the borders at the onset of the conflict, African students experienced physical and verbal abuse, segregation, detainment, and other forms of degradation. This led to widespread human rights cases of abuse against African people and a large population with limited access to legal support. After crossing border control, “third-country nationals” from Ukraine experienced various legal and immigration challenges. Especially in Poland, TCNs were only given 15 days to register for a Temporary Residence Permit (TRC) or leave the territory. This gray area of legal status increased exposure to harassment by immigration officials and future detainment and deportation throughout the EU.

In Germany, Black and other marginalized people advocated for temporary protective status under section 24 of the Act on the Residence, Economic Activity, and Integration of Foreigners in the Federal Territory. Section 24 of the Residency Act granted legal residency and

the right to work under the EU Directive 2001/55/EC. Eligible refugees also received humanitarian residences without going through an asylum procedure. However, in its current state, Section 24 is only given to Ukrainian nationals, and due to African students' status as 'third country nationals,' they are not extended the same protections. As a result, many submitted applications for temporary residence and protection; however, they faced discrimination, denials, and delays in receiving responses from the immigration office.

Given the barriers faced by those without legal protection NoirUnited targeted countries, including Poland, Germany, France, and Hungary, to respond to the legal challenges mentioned above by working with those affected to find lawyers to process their financial documents and provide financial assistance to cover the associated cost. Of those we assisted, all are still waiting to receive a decision from immigration officials.

### Advocacy

NoirUnited's approach to advocacy was multifaceted and centered on demanding the fair and equitable treatment of Black and other people of color displaced from Ukraine. After seeing reports of racism and discrimination, our initial response focused on raising awareness through social media platforms such as Instagram, Twitter, WhatsApp, Telegram, and Facebook. We contacted several local and major news outlets in North America, Europe, and Africa to garner more attention to the situation. In addition, we sent emails and letters to African and African descent organizations and institutions seeking collaboration and increase our reach to the global Black community. Our team targeted African embassies across North America and Europe, the U.S. Congressional Black Caucus, and community organizations focused on supporting the African diaspora and addressing racial justice.

Through our efforts, we garnered the support and attention of larger institutions and humanitarian organizations, such as the Open Society Foundation and Mercy Corps, who

decided to fund our efforts amplifying the need for racial and humanitarian equity. As a result, we increased our reach. We supported Black student organizers and local grassroots organizations across Europe, raising awareness of the unequal treatment of Black and Brown people once living in Ukraine. For example, in Germany, we worked with local non-profit organizations and community groups self-organized by Black and Brown students from Ukraine to advocate for the right to legal residence and enrollment in higher education institutions. Some of our partners include Each One Teach One , an organization that supports Black, African, and Afrodiasporic people in Berlin in all cases of discrimination, and their project Community United in Support of BIPOC from Ukraine (CUSBU) and also BIPOC Ukraine and friends in Germany, a mutual aid community of BIPOC who fled the war in Ukraine without Ukrainian or EU citizenship and are now based in Germany (EOTO, 2023; BIPOC Ukraine, 2023).

NoirUnited hosted community empowerment and advocacy workshops in countries such as Poland, Hungary, Germany, France, and Portugal to provide a space for communal gatherings and to help people understand how to navigate the challenges of racism while seeking refuge in Europe. Given NoirUnited's focus on understanding the historical implications of current challenges that Black and other marginalized communities face, our empowerment and advocacy workshops focused on analyzing the role of colonialism and slavery in African and Black majority countries across Africa and the Caribbean. Considering that majority of those displaced were international students once studying at Ukrainian universities, we also discussed the underdevelopment of higher education systems in their home countries, which were created through European colonial frameworks and remained severely underfunded following independence. For instance, at the end of the 1960s, Sub-Saharan Africa had only six universities for a population of 230 million, and some countries, including Cape Verde,

Djibouti, Gambia, Guinea- Bissau, Seychelles, and Sao Tome and Principe, had no universities at all (Teferra & Altbach, 2004). While this number has increased today, African students have had to search for educational opportunities outside their countries. Through these conversations, students discussed their challenging experiences seeking education and why it was best for them to go abroad to Ukraine as it was affordable and had more resources for advanced degrees such as medicine, engineering, computer science, and others. After investing all their resources into gaining an education in Ukraine and forced to flee the war, they have been left with little to no access to education and told to return to their homes without any support. As a result, for example, in Germany, students felt obligated to advocate for their right to finish their education that they began while in Ukraine and organized several demonstrations for policy change and the need for access to education and legal residency under Paragraph 24 Residency Act. This act grants war refugee's temporary protection, legal residency, and the right to work. Despite having fled the war in Ukraine, African students faced delays or permit denials due to their third-country national status.

Overall, we hosted 10 community workshops, providing culturally relevant foods from various African countries and creating a communal space for students to engage in meaningful and constructive organizing. In addition, our team conducted a needs assessment and used focus groups to collect detailed reports on the current needs and obstacles faced by African refugees.

#### Closing the Technology Gap

For displaced people leaving their lives and homes in Ukraine also meant leaving behind valuable technological assets such as computers, laptops, and other electronics. In addition, while traveling long distances by foot or crowding into trains or buses, many of their mobile devices were lost, stolen, or destroyed during their journey. This issue is particularly important because while traveling to the borders, people relied on their mobile devices to determine the best routes

to reach safety. Through group chats on Telegram and WhatsApp, people shared constant updates on about the long queues at the border, experiences of racism and segregation, and detainment and abuse. Access to this information allowed vulnerable individuals to navigate better which borders to go to during the dangerous journey in an attempt to avoid racist encounters and increase their chances of reaching a place of refuge unharmed.

Even after reaching the safety of the EU, the technological challenges for those displaced, especially students, did not end. Many students who had been attending universities in Ukraine were required to continue their education online. For instance, the team at NoirUnited traveled to Krakow, Poland, where they met with over 50 Central and West African students who spoke about the difficulties they were facing. Despite the circumstances, these resilient students were still completing their courses online, with some struggling to complete assignments due to damaged mobile devices. It was clear that access to reliable technology and resources was critical for these students to continue their education and build a better future. For others who were not students, there was a clear need for access to laptops and phones to search for resources, critical information, and job opportunities. Recognizing this need, NUI sought to address this technology gap by providing new, used, or refurbished laptops, tablets, and cell phones for individuals to gain access to the support needed and for students to complete their education online adequately. This allowed them to remain connected to the broader community, access information that would be useful to their survival in neighboring countries and communicate their needs with community members.

## **Discussion**

In 2020, we were reminded of the global “anti-Blackness” that still existed as people stood up to contest the death of George Floyd and other forms of state-sanctioned violence worldwide. The social movement for racial equity in the United States ignited others globally as



organizers connected online to share experiences and mobilize for global social action to address racial discrimination (Shahin, 2021). NoirUnited was established during this time to raise awareness of the issues facing Black and other marginalized communities globally and to offer community-based approaches to address them. With a decolonial lens, we can trace how historical injustices and imbalances have shaped the implementation of humanitarian development and aid (Shelton, 2021). These historical legacies are prevalent in the humanitarian sector and play a significant role in the response to support those affected by the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

Throughout the case studies, **three key themes were highlighted: (1) the impact of racial discrimination, (2) the lack of support and basic services, and (3) the effects of the war and interruption of education on mental health.**

(1) *The impact of racial discrimination:* The experiences of Ngoe, Nneka, and Alpha reveal the detrimental consequences of racial discrimination experienced by refugees leaving Ukraine. Research has shown that racially stigmatized communities are more at risk for adverse health outcomes than their counterparts (Williams, 2013). In addition, experiences of overt racial discrimination exacerbate psychological distress and can lead to adverse mental health outcomes, such as depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Paradies, 2006; Williams, 2013).

(2) *Lack of support and essential services:* Structural racism refers to the societal practices of discrimination seen in policies, practices, and norms that inhibit communities from accessing services vital to health, such as housing, legal, and healthcare services (Bailey, 2017). All the students' narratives emphasize the scarcity of support and essential services available to African refugees in Ukraine. These barriers hinder their integration into European countries,

limiting their access to education, employment, and social support networks, all of which are crucial for their long term well-being and success.

*(3) Effects of war and interruption of education on mental health:* The stories in the case studies underscore the adverse effects of war-related trauma and disrupted education on mental health. According to Article 26 of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), “Everyone has the right to education” (United Nations, 1948). Obtaining education leads to better health outcomes and stability that allow people to accumulate wealth that can be used to improve health for them and their families (Zajacova, 2018). Each of the students in the case study clearly expressed that their ultimate goal was to continue their education and that the lack of opportunities to do so created mental stress. As seen in their stories, they were all impacted by the effects of being a student in the middle of a war; their experiences were further magnified by their race and nationality.

The personal accounts of these individuals substantiate the struggles encountered by African refugees in Ukraine and emphasize the importance of these findings in enriching the conversation and research on racism and the immigrant experience. While studies have addressed the impact of racism overall, there is a gap in significant research on racism and immigrant experiences, particularly in the context of humanitarian crises. These case study insights underscore the necessity for tailored interventions that address their concerns, mitigating the unique challenges displaced Africans from Ukraine face.

## **Implications**

Establishing a social hierarchy among those escaping the conflict in Ukraine significantly impacts all non-Ukrainian nationals' physical and mental health and make it difficult for them to feel a sense of belonging in their new environment. Moreover, throughout the conflict, racism

has aggravated the impact of war trauma, creating a compounded challenge that requires a comprehensive approach to address the systemic inequalities that contribute to it.

NoirUnited International's response to the Ukraine crisis provides insight into strategies that can be applied to promote racial justice and address disparities in humanitarian assistance. After analyzing NoirUnited's response, we have identified several recommendations for promoting health equity in the humanitarian space. First, NGOs and humanitarian organizations should adopt practices that promote local agency, empowerment, and equitable relationships. This encompasses speaking directly with those affected to build trust and ensure community perspectives are reflected in program objectives. This approach allows for extensive advocating for systemic change to address the root causes of inequality and marginalization seen during crises in communities around the world. NoirUnited did this early on during the conflict by creating forums for those affected to share their experiences and provide suggestions on best meeting their needs. Though this is an essential first step towards a community-engaged approach to humanitarian aid and development, it must also be mentioned that an ample amount of time, human capacity, and funding is needed to fulfill this objective. During the initial phases of our response, we utilized digital methods of communication to connect with those still stuck inside the country. We meet with them daily in group settings and were able to volunteer from the group to distribute information and assistance and plan our community events. The student leaders helped us to conduct needs assessments to see what assistance was needed for the group. We also used this information to submit for funding and to advocate on their behalf.

The second identified recommendation was to prioritize the distribution of goods and materials that align with the needs of the affected community. Partnering with local businesses can ensure that culturally relevant foods and other essential items are distributed to those in need.

We also utilized direct cash assistance to increase the distribution of aid by increasing access to goods, giving people agency over their choices, and ensuring a sense of dignity. Lastly, we recommend that organizations provide trauma-informed and culturally affirming mental health support, recognizing the unique experiences that race-based trauma can have on displaced populations. Programming should strive to incorporate different forms of wellness to account for different cultural backgrounds. Due to the unique nature of the situation concerning Africans leaving Ukraine, and the racial discrimination faced, we aimed to promote empowerment and resiliency in all our mental health programs.

Every humanitarian response will require flexible and adaptable approaches to addressing the needs of marginalized communities. These recommendations provide a starting point for organizations to adapt and incorporate current and future operations.

### **Limitations**

As with any research, there are limitations to this ethnographic study. While this thesis provides rich and detailed insights into the experiences and perspectives of the participants, it needs to capture the full scope of the outcomes of NoirUnited's response efforts. Due to limited resources and time, the study focused only on NoirUnited's humanitarian response in Germany, Poland, and France; thus, the findings may not be generalizable to those living in countries or regions affected by the crisis. Additionally, the thesis relied on qualitative data collection methods, which may limit the ability to quantify and measure the impact of NoirUnited's interventions. Despite these limitations, this study provides valuable insights into the challenges faced by African refugees from Ukraine.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, this ethnographic study highlights the need for community-based

approaches and a racial justice lens in responding to humanitarian crises. Despite the limitations of this study, the insights gained through my work with NoirUnited International are invaluable. This research was conducted using a decolonial approach to ethnography, which acknowledges the power dynamics inherent in research relationships and strives to center the voices and experiences of marginalized communities. I envision the organization and this project serving as a vehicle for change for continued advocacy on behalf of those affected by the crisis in Ukraine. After seeing the apparent discrepancies in the treatment of Africans vs. Ukrainian people, I argue that refugee status should be expanded to include all those living in an area and forced to flee because of conflict. Doing so would increase access to services and restore humanity for those in these settings.

## References

- Aribot, Macire; Ashford, Nassim; and Badio, Koree S. (2022) "Black Minds Matter: Exploring the Double Trauma of Anti-Blackness and War on the Psycho-Political Well-Being of African and African-Descent Refugees from Ukraine," *Young African Leaders Journal of Development: Vol. 4, Article 2*. Available at: <https://digitalcommons.kennesaw.edu/yajlod/vol4/iss1/2>
- Auguste, E., Lodge, T., Onwong'a, J. R., Zollicoffer, A., Collins, D., London, L., & Jackson, T. (2022). Seeing one another: The creation of the Sawubona Healing Circles.
- Bailey, Z. D., Krieger, N., Agénor, M., Graves, J., Linos, N., & Bassett, M. T. (2017). Structural racism and health inequities in the USA: evidence and interventions. *The Lancet*, 389(10077), 1453-1463.
- Baum, F., MacDougall, C., & Smith, D. (2006). Participatory action research. *Journal of Epidemiology and community health*, 60(10), 854.
- Biedrzycki, P. A., & Koltun, R. (2012). Integrating social determinants of community preparedness and resiliency in 21st-century emergency management planning. *Homeland Security Affairs*, 8(1).

- BIPOC Ukraine. (2023). About us - BIPOC Ukraine & friends in Germany. -. Retrieved April 21, 2023, from <https://bipocukraine.org/about-us/>.
- Collins, S. E., Clifasefi, S. L., Stanton, J., Straits, K. J., Gil-Kashiwabara, E., Rodriguez Espinosa, P., ... & Wallerstein, N. (2018). Community-based participatory research (CBPR): Towards equitable community involvement in psychology research. *American Psychologist*, 73(7), 884.
- Cummings, E. M., & Davies, P. T. (1994). Maternal depression and child development. *Journal of child psychology and Psychiatry*, 35(1), 73–112.
- Davenport, M. H., Meyer, S., Meah, V. L., Strynadka, M. C., & Khurana, R. (2020). Moms are not OK: COVID-19 and maternal mental health. *Frontiers in global women's health*, p. 1.
- Doocy, S., & Tappis, H. (2017). Cash-based approaches in humanitarian emergencies: a systematic review. *Campbell Systematic Reviews*, 13(1), 1-200.
- EOTO. (2023). Each One Teach One. EOTO. Retrieved April 21, 2023, from <https://www.eoto-archiv.de/ueber-uns/>.
- Flanagan, B. E., Gregory, E. W., Hallisey, E. J., Heitgerd, J. L., & Lewis, B. (2011). A social vulnerability index for disaster management. *Journal of homeland security and emergency management*, 8(1).
- Gee, G. C., & Ford, C. L. (2011). Structural racism and health inequities: Old issues, New Directions. *Du Bois review: Social science research on race*, 8(1), 115-132.
- Goto, R., Guerrero, A. P., Speranza, M., Fung, D., Paul, C., & Skokauskas, N. (2022). War is a public health emergency. *The Lancet*, 399(10332), 1302
- Lubrani, O. (2022, March 24). *"the war has caused the fastest and largest displacement of people in Europe since World War II" in Ukraine*. United Nations. Retrieved from <https://ukraine.un.org/en/175836-war-has-caused-fastest-and-largest-displacement-people-europe-world-war-ii#:~:text=One%20month%20since%20the%20invasion,borders%20in%20search%20of%20safety>.
- Marshall, J., Wiltshire, J., Delva, J., Bello, T., & Masys, A. J. (2020). Natural and manmade disasters: vulnerable populations. *Global Health Security: Recognizing Vulnerabilities, Creating Opportunities*, pp. 143–161.
- Paradies, Y. (2006). A systematic review of empirical research on self-reported racism and health. *International journal of epidemiology*, 35(4), 888-901.
- Prilleltensky, I., Prilleltensky, O., & Voorhees, C. (2008). Psychopolitical validity in the helping professions: Applications to research, interventions, case conceptualization, and therapy. *Liberatory Psychiatry: Philosophy, politics, and mental health*, 105-130.
- Pronczuk, M. (2023, April 5). ‘If I Stop Now, I will Have Nothing’: The African Students Who Fled Ukraine. *The New York Times*. Retrieved April 20, 2023, from

- <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/04/05/world/europe/ukraine-african-students-europe.html>.
- Ray, R. (2022, March 3). The Russian invasion of Ukraine shows racism has no boundaries. Brookings. Retrieved August 9, 2022, from <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/how-we-rise/2022/03/03/the-russian-invasion-of-ukraine-shows-racism-has-no-boundaries/>.
- Reed, R. V., Fazel, M., Jones, L., Panter-Brick, C., & Stein, A. (2012). The mental health of displaced and refugee children resettled in low-income and middle-income countries: risk and protective factors. *The Lancet*, 379(9812), 250–265.
- Rodney, W. (2018). *How Europe underdeveloped Africa*. Verso Books.
- Shahin, S., Nakahara, J., & Sánchez, M. (2021). Black Lives Matter goes global: Connective action meets cultural hybridity in Brazil, India, and Japan: new media & society, 14614448211057106.
- Shelton, R. C., Adsul, P., Oh, A., Moise, N., & Griffith, D. M. (2021). Application of an antiracism lens in the field of implementation science (IS): recommendations for reframing implementation research with a focus on justice and racial equity. *Implementation Research and Practice*, p. 2, 26334895211049482.
- Shoaib, A. (2022, February 27). African students fleeing the Russian invasion say they have been prevented from crossing to Poland due to a 'Ukrainians first' policy. *Business Insider*. Retrieved April 20, 2023, from <https://www.businessinsider.com/african-students-ukrainians-first-policy-preventing-them-leaving-war-zone-2022-2>.
- Smith, L. T. (2004). *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*. Zed Books.
- Spence, P. R., Lachlan, K. A., & Griffin, D. R. (2007). Crisis communication, race, and natural disasters. *Journal of Black Studies*, 37(4), 539–554.
- UNCHR. (2023). Operational Data Portal. Situation Ukraine Refugee Situation. Retrieved from <https://data.unhcr.org/en/situations/ukraine>.
- United Nations. (1948). Universal Declaration of human rights. United Nations. Retrieved April 30, 2023, from <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights>.
- USA FOR UNHCR. (2022). Ukraine emergency: Aid, statistics, and news: USA FOR UNHCR. Ukraine Emergency: Aid, Statistics, and News | USA for UNHCR. Retrieved from <https://www.unrefugees.org/emergencies/ukraine/#:~:text=About%20the%20War%20in%20Ukraine&text=As%20a%20result%20of%20heavy,and%20other%20countries%20across%20Europe>.
- White, N. (2023, February 24). 'forgotten': The black, international students caught up in Ukraine conflict. *The Independent*. Retrieved April 20, 2023, from

<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/black-students-ukraine-war-forgotten-b2288128.html>.

Williams, D. R., & Mohammed, S. A. (2013). Racism and health I: Pathways and scientific evidence. *American behavioral scientist*, 57(8), 1152-1173.

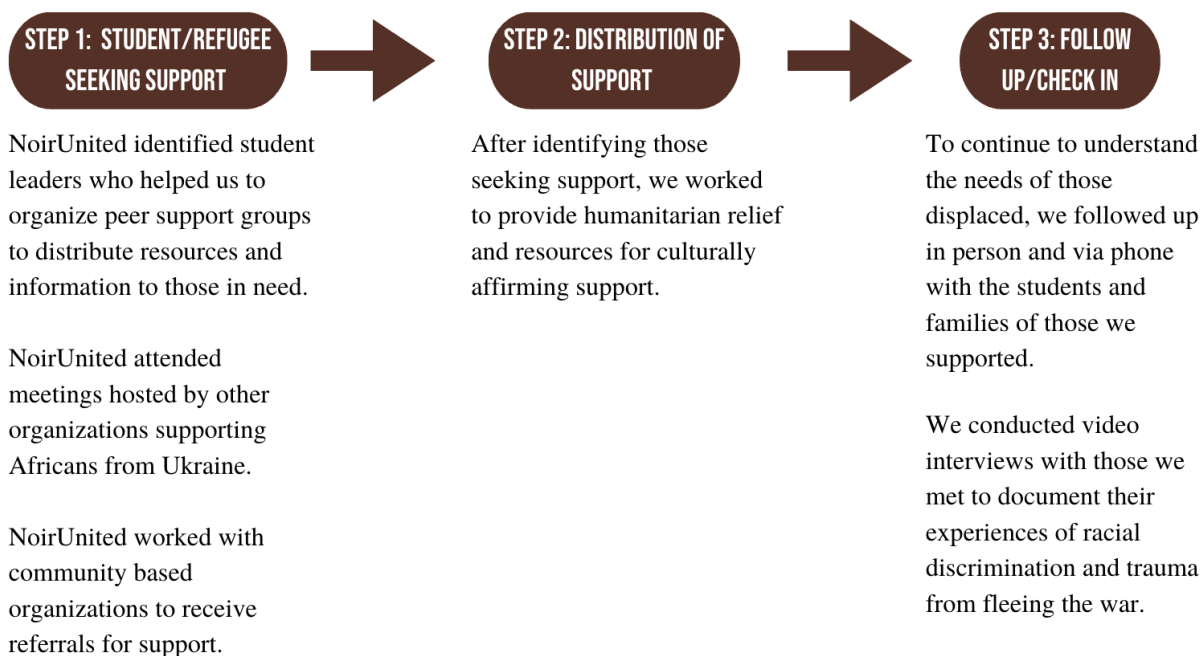
Williams, D. R., Neighbors, H. W., & Jackson, J. S. (2003). Racial/ethnic discrimination and health: Findings from community studies. *American Journal of public health*, 93(2), 200–208.

Zajacova, A., & Lawrence, E. M. (2018). The relationship between education and health: reducing disparities through a contextual approach. *Annual review of public health*, 39, 273-289.

Zakour, M. J., & Harrell, E. B. (2003). Access to disaster services: Social work interventions for vulnerable populations. *Journal of Social Service Research*, 30(2), 27-54.

## (Appendix A) NoirUnited Referrals For Assistance and Programs

### NOIRUNITED REFERRAL PATHWAY



## Appendix B: Final Interview Guide

### *Building Rapport*

- What were you studying in Ukraine? What school did you attend?



<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● If in medical school, what inspired you to be a doctor and/or go to medical school?</li> <li>● What is your country of origin?</li> </ul>
<p><b><i>Life in Ukraine</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● How did Africans navigate life in Ukraine?</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● What was the process like getting to Ukraine? Experience with agents, etc.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● How was life in Ukraine? What was your experience like as a student?</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● How did you feel when you learned of the war?</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● What was your experience like leaving Ukraine?</li> </ul>
<p><b><i>Racism and Psycho-political well-being</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● What is the relationship between experiences of racism among African Refugees and health and wellness?</li> </ul>
<p>Have you ever experienced discrimination or racism while fleeing the war?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Probe: At the border? In certain countries?</li> <li>● [If yes] Can you elaborate? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ How did you react to the situation? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Did you talk to anyone or take steps to report it? If not, why?</li> </ul> </li> </ul> </li> <li>● [If no] Have you ever experienced discrimination or racism while in Europe in general?</li> </ul>
<p>As an African Refugee, how do you feel your experience during the war has affected your health?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Mental, Physical, and Emotional?</li> </ul>
<p><b><i>Humanitarian Support</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● How did African Refugees receive support during the war?</li> </ul>
<p>Can you tell me about any support you've received so far?</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● To someone who's never experienced this situation, what would you want them to know?</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● If you were speaking to an African leader, what would you tell them?</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Given your current circumstances, what would be your best next steps?</li> </ul>
<p><b><i>Demographic Questions</i></b></p>
<p>What's your name?</p>
<p>Did you go to school in Ukraine?</p>

Where are you from?

How old are you?