

## *What We Leave We Carry*

Nina Ramzan

I'm Nina Ramzan. I currently live in Wales, in Cardiff, but I originally came to Cardiff 10 years ago from Ukraine, and yeah, I'm Ukrainian. I was born in a small town on the west part of Ukraine, which is called Kuznetsovsk, but now it has a new name, it's Varash. So I was born there forty years ago [laughs]. At the age of 16, I moved to Kiev, which is the capital of Ukraine, and I carry on studying and receiving my higher education there.

My parents, they are originally from Russia, actually. They both graduated the university in Moscow. And then, by that time, it was Soviet Union, and they were sent to Ukraine to build nuclear power station. So this is where I was born, and my city is famous, well, it's not famous, but it's a twin town as Chernobyl, if you know, and it's also the town I live, it's Varash, it's very, very similar city, and we have five of those cities in Ukraine. My dad actually still lives in this city, in this town, but my mum moved to Cardiff, yeah, just three years ago since when the war started in Ukraine.

Even though I wasn't even in my town, but my family was visiting my grandma's village, so we were, by that time, we were closer to Chernobyl. But in general, my town was only 5-6 hours away from Chernobyl, and of course, we were all affected

by Chernobyl. So we were in the fourth zone. We were in the control group, if you know what I mean. So we were always monitored by, I wouldn't say by doctors, but we were in the area where we were always advised to go in Crimea to have summer holidays with families or school members, so this is what we were entitled every year to do. But we didn't have to evacuate from my town.

I graduated from medical university in Ukraine, so I became a doctor in lung disease and tuberculosis. So it's slightly different than here in the UK, so it's pulmonologist, we would say, but yeah, but my main focus was tuberculosis diseases. I was fully qualified doctor in Ukraine, and I even managed to do my PhD work in Ukraine. And yeah, it also took me also three years to complete it.

I always believed that I will be living in Ukraine, but there was always another part of me which always encouraged me to learn English. And I was reflecting now how English was, from the early age, it was involved in my life, and I was actually very self-motivated to learn it through my life. In Ukraine—because by that time, and living in a small town, you don't find many English speakers, we didn't have any English speakers, and then UK was something like somewhere in the atlas, you can only hear or you can only read about or somewhere in the TV, but you would never, as a child imagine, that there is another life in the world where—so yeah, basically, my answer will be I would never I would never considered that I will go.

I think I've been lucky through my life because from the year five in the school, I had a teacher who I really admired in my school, and she was an English teacher. And you know sometimes when you admire people, you kind of follow them. And I think

from that time, English became a part of my life, so it was my favourite subject. Even though I wasn't the best student in the class, but I always knew I want to be like this teacher, and I always wanted to make her happy because she knew I'm prepared for the lesson. And I think when I came to Kiev, I also decided to learn English in Kiev, and I used to go to English school in Kiev. It was also like classes on Sundays, for instance. I used to have private classes with English, to learn the English. So I always was learning, learning, learning through my life.

I mean, to be honest, England's never been my number one goal, but it was—I knew by learning English, I have more chances to explore the world, so I can travel and speak the language that most countries, like in Europe, you can communicate. So yeah, I mean, of course, I mean, I knew about London and about there's Scotland, there's Wales, and England. It's really hard to say how you feel by that time when you've never been in the country.

When I was really young, I mean, in the school time, I didn't have any access to watch movies. I mean, we had movies, but it would always be subtitled, and it was quite difficult to find any resources where you can improve English. So maybe it sounds a bit unrealistic, but this is a reality we were facing. And again, when we become older, all the technology came in, and then it became more—like you can learn from the internet, you can just switch on the BBC and listen and be more familiar with the country, politics, and everything.

I have fantastic time in Ukraine. And I think if I would never met my husband, I probably would stay still in Ukraine and keep working as a doctor. And, I mean, by

the time I had to move to UK, I had—I was like one year hesitant, *shall I really move or not?* Because I was also hoping that maybe husband will come and stay with me in Ukraine, but because also I have a stable work and stable life, and my work was only 10 minutes' drive from my home, which was completely convenient, so I didn't struggle in Ukraine at all. But I always knew that there is something better in, well, not better, but widely open for me in the UK as well.

I went to Dubai with my friend on holiday. I met my husband on the holidays. When I met my husband, he had to leave next day to England. And by that time, what we did, we only exchanged our emails, we didn't even exchange our phone numbers. So by the time I got back to Ukraine, I received email from him saying it was nice to meet me. And then we start communicating, and my main purpose was like, *oh, I can practice my English with him, and I can improve my English skills.* So it was—actually, I remember I was telling him I read article about dinosaurs, and I wanted to share it with him. And he still, even now, he would keep mentioning me to me, 'Oh, do you remember dinosaurs, you mentioned?' So yeah, I found him as the source to practice my English. And then in two months' time, he came to Ukraine to visit me, which was a big surprise. So yeah, and then it's all grow up that we become a couple. And yeah, and he asked, in one year and a half, he asked me if I can marry him. And I promise, and I said, 'Yes.' And then I still was hesitant, *is it a good time for me to move or not?* Because I've been working on my PhD work, and also, yeah, it's always hesitant. *Shall I stay home? How my life is going to look in Ukraine?* So basically, yeah, then we came to the point that I got pregnant, and I just had to leave, otherwise my son will be born in Ukraine, and it will cause lots of difficulties to us to travel. So we just decided that this is the point where I need to come to UK.

My husband is British. His parents are from Pakistan. He's a second generation of Pakistani, I would probably say. But whenever you ask him, he would probably always say, 'I'm British.' I think initially, my parents, and especially my dad, probably wasn't very positive about the marriage, I would probably say. I mean, but it's only because the lack of their understanding that actually this kind of marriage can also work. And of course, in Ukraine, we don't have multi-cultural society, so anyone who is with different nationalities always taken something like it's already something different, probably is not going to work. But, I mean, we had lots and lots of conversation within the family. And then I had to brought my husband to the small town where my father used to live, so to introduce him to the village, and just to say, 'Yes, here is he.' And I still remember some neighbours were coming to our house just to see who came, but it's only because, yes, he's maybe a little bit darker than we are, his skin. But it's never been a big issue, but we had lots and lots of conversation to work on. And to be honest, I'm very sure if you ask my husband now how his parents reacted on the marriage with the Ukrainian, I think they had lots of conversations as well [laughs]. But yeah, at the end of the day, we just decided that we will be together, and we really love each other, and nothing can stop us. And at the end of the day, if the marriage will not work, we can always have the way how to work on it. But so far, 10 years, we are together. So yeah, sometimes it's challenging, I have to admit. It doesn't work ideally, but I think any families have their own challenges in terms of cultural thing, especially if it's cultural, mixed couples. Because even though my husband was brought up in the UK, he's still very modernized and everything, but there is still some man has to be dominant, or woman has to look after the house, and man has to bring money in the house. So it's

just, yeah, it's all manageable, but sometimes it can come across. And what we do, we just start communicating, and I can see how we can solve the issues.

I have been in the UK a couple of times before my husband asked me to get married, so I already knew where I was going. I mean, my husband, by that time, my husband used to live in London, and I used to visit London quite regularly. And of course, when you are in your late 20s, coming to London, what can be a better life? [Laughs] But yeah, it was always like a romantic holiday every time you visit. I mean, I think it was three or four times I already visited the UK. But then also one time, my husband took me to Cardiff, where his parents live, so we were here a few times as well.

I moved to the UK in a high tone of love and everything, a romantic story, and what can be better to kind of come to the UK, get married? So yeah, I mean, my movement was only very positive. It was 2015, and I was on a seven-month pregnancy. I already had no choice to wait anymore, so I can wait to the end, as long as I can, but yeah, because on the flight, they weren't allowed you to fly if you are more than seven months pregnant, so we have to make sure that, by the time, I am in the UK to make sure our son has British passport and being more protected here.

My husband came to Ukraine to pick me up, and we both came to London. But because I've already been pregnant, and we've already been married, so we already, my husband, by that time, my husband already moved to Cardiff, so then once I arrived to London, we had to go to Cardiff. And first year, we used to live with my husband's parents, and then we bought our own property, and we moved.

It was very difficult to start with because, of course, when you came to a new country, pregnant, you don't have work anymore, you don't have your car anymore, you don't have your parents anymore, you don't have your friends anymore, you don't have anyone, only your husband, so it was really, really difficult. But I think my parents-in-law were very understandable that I had to have lots of support by that time, and they were always there to support me. Especially I was pregnant, so they were looking after me like I was a princess for them. So it was difficult emotionally, but again, I always had the backup of my husband and my parents[-in-law].

My parents-in-law would really keep mentioning from the early days that our boy has to be Muslim, and we have to take him to mosque, he has to learn the Quran. But, I mean, with all my respect to my parents[-in-law], we always decide, it's between me and my husband. So we usually, again, we always have conversations how we want our son be brought up. But at the same time, we always give choice to my son to choose what he wants to do. So I wouldn't say 'Oh, you shouldn't do Quran' or 'You shouldn't go to church' or 'You shouldn't go to mosque.' We don't force things, but we are very open in either way he decided to go, like if he would like to go to mosque and meet his friend there, or if I take him to church, my husband would never say, 'Oh, why did you take him to church?' We are very, very open. Our son is brought up in both traditions.

I found Cardiff very, very welcoming place to live. And especially when you have young family, it's very easy to raise your child here. Of course, I had some difficulties, like the language barrier was really, really difficult. And whenever I had to arrange

anything, I had to go to my husband and ask him to help me, constantly help me. Whether you have an appointment for a child, for yourself. And actually I, at some point, I also felt like I was a quite a huge loan for my husband. Only after maybe two or three years, after our son got older, I just realised, *oh, maybe it was really harsh on my husband, like all the support he had to give me.* And it's probably something you don't expect when you're dating somebody from a different country. You know what I mean? You don't know the systems; the systems are completely different. I remember I used to go to the supermarket, and I couldn't recognise any food. I didn't know what to bring. I would go to the supermarket, pick up bread, and come back. Because everything is new, and you don't know what exactly you need to pick up. Actually, it's interesting how you do some routine every time, and you go in supermarket, you pick up things which is familiar for you, but once you ended up in the supermarket where you don't know anything, what you can pick up, only what you recognise by vision, so ice, bread, or eggs, but very, very limited, like milk. But to buy something new, it was always a challenge for a while.

Because we are based in Wales, I found local people are extremely, extremely kind and very open to migrants. I mean, this is my personal opinion. I never come across that I felt I'm from different country.

I didn't know any Ukrainian and any Russian speakers when I came to the UK. However, when I heard first time somebody speaks in Russian in supermarket, and I already had my child by that time, I actually run for them to say, 'I speak Russian. What is your name? I came here from Ukraine.' And yeah, it was actually a gentleman with his family, and we had a very short conversation. And with the years,

I could recognise him because he lives not so far from me. But it was interesting how I was chasing him to at least find somebody who can speak my language. I mean, because, again, because I had a child, and I spent a lot of time taking him outside, taking him to different hubs and activities, of course, you do grow with the community around you. And I met some people who speak Russian, and it doesn't mean that they were from Russia, they were from Latvia, Lithuania, Ukraine, and maybe a few Russians as well, but I mean, we've never been only Ukrainian, because in Cardiff, we have very small Russian-speaking society, so it's like a mix of different.

Obviously, now the situation completely changed, and whenever I go to Ukraine nowadays, you can hear predominantly Ukrainian language in any part of Ukraine, and it is understandable. But, of course, because, as I mentioned earlier, my family are Russian, and my main language always was Russian. I used to go to Russian school in Ukraine. We learned a little bit of Ukrainian, but it's never been number one language in my curriculum. So it was always predominantly Ukrainian. So I can speak a little bit Ukrainian, I can understand everything in Ukrainian, but my dominant language is Russian. As a Russian speaker in Ukraine, for me, they are very, very similar, and we can easily recognise both languages. But I think for some Russians, Ukrainian can be quite difficult to understand. In Ukraine, we also have another language, which is called Surzhyk. It's not an official language, but it's like when you combine Russian and Ukrainian together languages. So this language is an unofficial language, but this is what the population is using. And yeah, you can come across—some Ukrainians can speak—used to speak Surzhyk language. So it's combined two languages. But, I mean, I'm sure for Russians, they also can understand basic things in Ukrainian. But because we speak Russian or heard lots of

Russian around us, for us Ukrainians, we all can understand Russian. And we, I mean, I think now new generation, they probably speak very fluent Ukrainian in any part of Ukraine.

If you ask my dad today, is he Russian or Ukrainian, he would say, 'I'm Ukrainian with Russian heritage.' But it's only, again, it's only because my father lives in Ukraine for 45 years now. And after war in Ukraine, people really want to support the country that is close to them. And yeah, they all have Ukrainian passports. Yeah, I think if you ask my dad and my mum, they would say they are Ukrainians, but with Russian heritage.

By the time I moved here 10 years ago, I had hardly met any Ukrainians in UK, and only when the war started, then you can see the big influx of people. The majority of people I was mixed up with to start with, it was probably the Russian-speaking community. I joined a social media, so this is where they were organising their meetings, like, 'If you would like to go with your child for a walk around the barrage', for instance 'we are meeting at 10 o'clock.' And all of us will go, and maybe five people from different countries who understand Russian or speak a little bit of Russian can meet and go around. So this probably was my first people I met in Cardiff. But then as I grow, of course, I met people in my work and in school. And yeah, I mean, I never been like the person who was connected to Russian community, like I don't want to have anyone else. I will always want to have like as many multinational friends as possible. And one of my best friends, she was a refugee from Vietnam, but she was brought up in Switzerland, and her husband from

Wales, so we met here. So she was one of my best friends for a while. My friend's circle is very, very wide.

I think it was really, really difficult emotionally being in a new country without your friends and your parents, and especially when in Ukraine, we are quite attached to our parents, we are quite close. And to leave them, it's always quite—we don't leave them in the way how I notice British people leave, like once you're 16, you have to leave the house. So in Ukraine, we do leave with our parents until you got married. But then even you got married, we still have very close bond with our parents. So of course, for me coming here, it was really, really difficult without my parents, and of course, my friends and colleagues. But yeah, time heals everything, and you build new life and adapt, meet new people.

I never had any hostility and any racism, but maybe it's only because I am based in Wales, and I found this country very welcoming for migrants. But again, I don't know, I never live in England or any other countries in the UK, so I can't talk. But the general idea, I personally never, ever come across. However, I was thinking at some point of my life that when I was trying to get employment and never being successful, I thought maybe somehow it is related. But it only was something I had in my head, *maybe because I don't speak language at the level that is required, and I don't know the system, that's probably why I'm not successful.* But again, I don't know. I never—people would never come back to you to say why you didn't get past the interview, but this is something I was always thinking, *maybe this is something decided that I won't be a great candidate.*

When I came to the UK 10 years ago, I was very, very ambitious, and I thought in two years' time, I'm going back to my doctor career, and I should be very interested here as a professional because we treated multi-resistant tuberculosis in our hospital in Ukraine, and I thought coming to the country which never had this experience because tuberculosis has never been a pandemic in the UK, I thought if I come there, they might be very interested in my experience. And I also, my PhD work was on the treatment of the tuberculosis, so I thought it would be something that would be appealing for local professionals. But when you came here, when your child is born, and then you hit the reality that, actually, if you do want to start working in medical sector, you have to do tons of exams. And my diploma wasn't ever accepted, and I had to do different qualification, and I had to do English, I had to go to higher level of English, and also lots of medical exams to pass on. And I actually was thinking maybe this is something I can work on, but because I had a small child, I always thought—and my husband, actually, was very, very supportive to say, 'Nina, just one step at a time, so don't do if it cause you lots of stress and anxiety.' So we decided that once our son goes to school, then maybe I can focus on my professional career. But by the time my son went to school, the COVID started, and then all the colleges were closed. It was difficult to know what happened next because, as you know, in COVID, we never know what to expect. So yeah, and then in COVID, I applied for a job, and it was successful. And I think this is where my medical career went down. But then I started to work on the NHS as well, but in the vaccination centre. And yeah, we were registered citizens to come and invite citizens to come to the vaccinate, to have their jabs.

I don't have to start again my qualification from the scratch, but I had to pass English in all categories, like writing, speaking, listening. I mean, I did try to pass exam a couple of times, but I never came that overall, I can get 7.5.

Yeah, the main reason, it was language. And fairly enough, I can also say that when I was studying English, I had lots of doctors in the group who were at exactly the same position. And by now, I still don't know anyone who made their way through and become a doctor here. I think the level of English was quite high. And I wouldn't say it's not possible, but when you have children, when you already have some things to do around, it is quite demanding. And I think, again, maybe I'll tell you something like, *you need to work on and never give up*. You have to go, *okay, I'm not getting it now, but I can get it next time*. I think I've already buried this idea, I have to admit. And it's only because it's been like 10 years since I stopped working as a doctor in Ukraine, and I can't imagine going back to it even now. It's quite a big gap to catch up on.

When the pandemic started, I was looking for the jobs around. I actually was completely clear with the idea that the only way I can improve my English [is] if I start working and being with people around who speaks the same language. And I always thought being in the environment where you can get knowledge, for instance, to be in the NHS, it would be the best place where you can learn and improve your language skills, which will help you in the future.

I applied a couple of times for nurse positions, but in the UK, doctor can't be a nurse, which is very strange. For instance, in our country, when I used to study as a doctor, I used to work as a nurse, so I have nurse skills. But here, you can't.

I applied a couple of times to work as a care assistant. I attended a few interviews, and again, I've never been successful. And then one of my friends advised me that maybe you shouldn't put that you're a doctor from Ukraine in a CV because you're overqualified. And what you need to do, you just need to maybe write you used to be a nurse in Ukraine, and then they don't consider you a doctor. So I did actually try to amend my CV, but at the end, I was thinking, *but that means I'm lying because I'm not a nurse, and if something come up, or if I need to ask—if I will be asked to give any paperwork, I would never be able to provide them.* So yeah, I just was keep trying and doing all sorts of things to get the job within the NHS, and it's never, ever been successful until the COVID hit. So when the COVID hit, they were looking for anyone who speak the language and happy to work in their vaccination centres, in the call centres to call people, to ask them to come to invite all the population in Cardiff, everyone, every citizen, to have a vaccine. I was lucky to get this job because when you're going on different interviews and you're never successful, you really lose confidence.

I think now, by looking back 10 years ago, maybe by that time I felt, *what happened if I were in Ukraine, and who I become today in Ukraine?* But to be honest, again, the work I have now at the moment in the UK brings me so much happiness. Life in the UK gave me so many opportunities to grow for myself as a person. I try not to focus

on the country. It puts me more down. I'm still striving here, and I'm really grateful for everything that I achieved here.

It was difficult without employment, I have to admit. And at some point of time, I really lost my stamina and my motivation to do anything related to it. You try to knock the door, but you never can get answer why you're not accepted. And again, I know one of my colleagues, we left Ukraine at the same time, she moved to Germany, and when she told me, even though she wasn't a qualified doctor, but she was allowed to be around the doctors in the hospital, it helped her a lot to build the knowledge about the system, to improve her language. And I think it's just the system sounds more welcoming for doctors from different countries to get the knowledge and to get the language. While for us, we were like, 'Okay, you learn the language independently, and whenever you are ready, you come, and we might get a job.' You know what I mean? It's really, really difficult. It's different approaches. And I think this is something like I always felt maybe it should be somehow improved and how unfair it is. When you move to another country as a migrant, you always feel, *okay, whatever this fun country offers me, I have to accept and be happy, even though it might be not what I used to do in my own country.*

I think my active social life started when I started to meet people who speak my language, so it helped me a lot to integrate here in the UK. Because at the end of the day, you meet people who have already been here in the UK for a while, they might give you good advice on what to do, what not to do, where to go, where to buy, where not to buy. You know what I mean? It's really helped me, personally, to start my integration in the UK. And then when my son started to go to school, I met friends

there. I met some other mums and dads there, who I also become a friend with. And then, actually, at some point of time, I also realised that I am quite a huge loan for my husband, as I mentioned, is only because all my life was about our child and him. And I had some friends, but it's never been—this is something what is my hobby or my passion. I think my hobby and passion still was my home, if you know what I mean. And at some point of life, my husband told me, 'Nina, you need to find something that you really like to do.' And one of my friends invited me to go to salsa classes. And since then, I'm still attending the classes. Not salsa anymore, not bachata, but I attend kizomba classes, which is in Cardiff. Sometimes I travel around UK to attend different festivals. Yeah, this is my passion now.

Kizomba is an African dance, which originally came from Angola. The main reason why I like Kizomba is because you meet such a multicultural society there, community, so people from, honestly, from all over the world you can meet there. So it can be like from Africa, it can be from Asia, everyone who knows Kizomba and who loves the music, they all—even though it's very traditional African dance, but it is something that keeps us all together.

I still cook Ukrainian food at home. I wouldn't say I do it very often, but I still do it occasionally. And the main reason why I do it is I want my son to get used to this food and try different tastes and my own food, the food which is from my own country. Sometimes we still cook Pakistani food in the house, which my mother-in-law taught me a few recipes, so sometimes I cook it here. But to find the food in Cardiff is not as difficult because we have quite a few international stores where you can buy [inaudible] or you can buy cottage cheese, so it's quite easy. And then the

main ingredients in Ukraine cuisine is potato, vegetables, so you can always buy it in any country. So I mean, we still cook it, and we still enjoy it, but I wouldn't say it is something that is every day on our table. It's not. I occasionally cook borscht, which is a very famous Ukrainian soup or stew, which has lots of vegetables and meat. I cook vareniki, we call them dumplings, so it can be also with different stuffing. And I cook golubtsi, it's like, again, cabbage stuffed with meat and rice. So yeah, I do cook some traditional dishes, especially if we talk about big events, like Easter time or New Year. Yeah, and since my mum [is] here in the UK, she helps me [when she] visit sometimes as well [laughs].

When I first heard about the invasion, it was at night when my friend called me and said, 'Nina, the war started.' And I couldn't believe. I said,, 'What do you mean?' Because we have two hours behind, so it started for them early morning, but for us, it was 3 a.m. in the morning. There was lots of speculation that the war will start, and we never, ever believed it will. At the end of the day, we were so close with Russia always, we were like brothers and sisters, and the last things you would think that your sister will attack you or your brother. So by the end they've done it, we all thought it would never happen. I mean, I personally thought it would never happen. And my dad and my mum, everyone thought it's just something unrealistic. So when I find out about it, of course, it was all shock for us. We start calling our friends, families. I mean, all in tears, all in shock. And what is next? And yeah, it was really, really heartbreaking to hear your friends calling you and crying, and they don't know what to expect. I think, for me, maybe it was a little bit less close, only because I've been living in the UK eight years, but it's still my pain, even today. Yeah, every day,

we just, whenever I get calls from Ukrainian friends, we always like, 'When this disaster is going to stop?' And we still have no answer to this question.

When the war started in Ukraine, I was already working in the NHS, and by that time, we were vaccinating children. And by that time, I thought how I can help personally at such a difficult time in Ukraine and what I can do here in the UK. So I started looking for volunteering jobs in Cardiff or England. I remember I was also looking in Bristol, and there wasn't many. But what I did find that there was an application as a caseworker for Ukrainian refugees. I applied for the application in Red Cross, and I put all the notes down that I am doctor from Ukraine, I speak Russian, understand Ukrainian. Actually, I think I even mentioned I can speak Ukrainian. The next day, I received their, 'It wasn't successful.' And then it was, again, something like, I thought, *how come you are a doctor from Ukraine, who lives in the UK for 10 years, all the experience I already had, and you're still not successful to get this job.* So I actually went to the park. But actually, by that time, because lots of people knew I'm from Ukraine, people were reaching out to me to say, 'Oh, is your family okay? We really with you, with your family. We really support Ukrainians.' Not only me, but everyone was giving their love. They were sending me support, that they are with Ukraine, and they feel our pain. So I met some lady in the park who said that she knows somebody who is looking for Ukrainian lady who've been in the UK for a while because then I can see—I already know UK culture, but also I know Ukrainian culture. So yeah, and then this is how I came to the CitizensUK, it became my new work, and this is how I joined Communities for Ukraine project. We only knew that we have to help Ukrainians to come here, and we decided that through our organisation, we can ask people who might be interested to support Ukrainians and

who can be interested to host Ukrainians in their homes. I can very proudly say we managed to resettle minimum 1,000 people, Ukrainians.

Now whenever I go out, you can hear lots and lots of Ukrainians around. And my mum came to the UK as well once the war started, and she's now based in Cardiff and actually maybe five minutes drive from me. There are lots of support centres in Wales now. I should definitely say that the reason why it's less Ukrainians now coming to the UK is only because the lack of the hosts. We still can welcome thousands of Ukrainians here. This stream will never stop because people always keep asking us as an organisation to help them. Once we have hosts, we still keep matching Ukrainians and bring them to the UK.

My job is shifted slightly to the Communities for Afghans project, which actually was set up only on the success on the Communities for Ukraine project and also our experience on the traditional community sponsorship where we work together with the government to [work out] how efficiently we can welcome Afghans families in the community.

Initially, British people helped us a lot to feel welcome in the UK, and I still feel lots and lots of support from them. However, sometimes it is also very surprising when some of my friends will ask, 'Oh, is war still in Ukraine?' I'm like, 'Yes, it's still', and it's not even getting better at all, it's even worse because now lots of towns are under attacks, and lots of civilians are dying. But at the same time, I understand that some people have done it once, twice, and then they can't keep doing it again and again. But also, there is not much information in the media about Ukraine's war. So I think

this is something also what is like, *doesn't people watch the news, or is it not much news there?* Sometimes it's really, really surprising when people say that, when they ask you if there is still war in Ukraine or not.

My mum loves being in Wales. I think she'll never ever come back. But I think she's actually a very active person here, and she has been studying English from day one she arrived to the UK. And now she's also learning Welsh, and she's the most successful Welsh speaker from all of us in the family [laughs], which is very positive and very inspiring. She's always very, very appreciative for the support she receives here because, as I said, even now, there is lots of hubs available for Ukrainians where they can come and get support. But of course, for her, moving to the country in an older age is quite difficult to get an employment again.

My mum came to the UK nearly three years ago now. When the war started, she was very refusal to come to the UK. And the main reason she didn't want to come to the UK is only because she had a cat who she didn't want to leave in Ukraine. And I had to persuade her that my friend will be looking after our cat while she is in the UK. But of course, we didn't know that it's going to be such a long journey in three years' time. So her cat is still fine with my friend, but for her, it was something—I know it's a pain even today. If you ask about this cat, it's tragic. For me personally, when my mum came, I was very, very happy to have her here. And she used to live with us six months in our home, then she moved to private renting. But now, we have lots of concern about our dad who is still in Ukraine. Actually, my dad had a plan to come to Cardiff this weekend, but he found traveling here is quite challenging because the

flights are not flying, and the all the trip takes more than 24 hours to travel from A to B, and it's really, really challenging when you become older.

I always have it in my mind that whenever the war stops, I really would like to go home and spend a decent time there. I mean, I personally believe I'm fully integrated now here in the UK, and this is my home, and this is where my family is, but there is always part of me which takes me back to Ukraine, and I want to experience life in Ukraine. I don't think I would go back, but you never know.

I think Wales is very similar looking place as in Ukraine. It reminds me about Ukraine a lot, especially if it's spring-summer time. One hour, you are next to the water, two hours, you go to mountains, well, it's not mountains, but it's still hills [laughs]. And yeah, and it's still, I mean, I usually call it a little bit like countryside area, but again, because I was brought up in a small town, maybe this is why it's very close to me. And I like nature, like animals, and I have ever seen it in—it's so picturesque when you travel around the Wales, and you can see the sheeps around and all the greens. And it's just beautiful. I mean, sometimes I miss social life in London, but I always calm myself down to say, *Nina, you can always go to London to socialise, but you will never feel as home as in Wales*, because it's something that was very close to me. And it does remind me about Ukraine a lot.

A recording of this interview can be found at [writersmosaic.org.uk](http://writersmosaic.org.uk)

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