Thoughts from a young Ukrainian refugee living in the UK

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I was the person who did not believe that the war would start. From the very first statements that there could be a war, I was sceptical about it. Nevertheless, the war began. I learned about this from my mother on the morning of 24 February 2022. I felt calm. No one was especially scared except for my mother. First of all, I went to the store and bought a lot of food and medicine in case the store should close (I was unable to buy any medicine because everything was sold out and there was still a long queue). The whole day was full of turmoil. There was no electricity, the time passed and I don’t remember what anyone was doing, but I remember that we definitely were not on our phones, since we had to save battery power. We spent four more days, sitting without electricity and constantly hearing explosions. On the morning of one of the days, we decided to leave our apartment. The backpacks were heavy, but we could still only take the essential things we needed and the lightest. After the whole family realised that the war would continue for a long time, we made an extreme decision – to leave Ukraine.

We were all very tired of everything while getting to the border with Poland, by bus. We, my mum, younger brother and me, stayed in Poland for a couple of days, staying one night at a hotel. We found out that we could be received by acquaintances in Germany, so we headed there by train. It was good there, we often walked and talked in the evenings. But we could not stay there for a long time, because other relatives were going to arrive. So, after a couple more weeks of being on German soil, we went to Sweden by train. There we were supposed to be received by another friend, and to stay for a long time. But the friend who received us had a very small apartment, and there was not enough space for everyone. So, we stayed in Sweden for only two months. That is why we once again decided to change our location. Another one, this time acquaintances of acquaintances, agreed to receive us in the UK. It was a nice gift because they had enough rooms for all of us. But we did not immediately fly to England, we had to wait for a visa each, which, as a pleasant surprise, took shape very quickly. To my great happiness, this whole situation didn’t change me and my family much, because we won’t allow the war to hurt us, too much. The
only thing is that now we have begun to live without a dad, which makes us sad and we live differently without him. But there are some solutions, because we constantly call him, and make decisions, all together.

When I arrived in England, I didn’t know what the future would be. The whole future has been reduced to everyday tasks and hobbies, which I feel I cope with very well. When I came, I was pleasantly surprised. Because of all the countries that I saw, England turned out to be the most beautiful. The beginning of summer (early May) and everything, absolutely everything was covered with greenery. While I live here, I have come across very good opportunities and things to do. Such as going to some cultural events, having a rest, and earning money (washing up in a local pub). But most of all I was pleased with the tranquillity of the place where I am living. Since leaving Ukraine, I’ve still had the opportunity to talk with my family, friends and acquaintances, online and by phone. It’s not like live communication, but it’s what it is. I was also able to continue studying at my college, now online. This new life has become a little different from the one I had in Ukraine, but I still like it.

It’s now December and two months later. While I am here, I always read the news about Ukraine. And now it is absolutely clear to me what will happen next. Our military is liberating our cities from the killers bit by bit. Bombed cities are starting to clean up and beautify and the Ukrainian people are starting to feel more optimistic about their future. For me, this war has helped me to discover the true nature of people around me. Also, it gave me many different answers, to other different life questions. Thanks to England and all other places for giving me a very warm welcome. Soon I will be eighteen and I know my future, and the future of my country. It’s good that both are very bright.

Note
1 The author wishes to remain anonymous.

Conflict of interest
The author declares that there is no conflict of interest.