

Open Letters from African Students from Ukraine who fled to Germany

Datum : 5. Mai 2022

This series of letters began with an introduction published jointly by [Blog Medizinethnologie of the Working Group Medical Anthropology](#) and the [Blogsite of the Working Group Public Anthropology](#) of the German Anthropological Association. More letters will be published over the next few months in order to document the experiences of African Students from Ukraine who fled to Germany.



Two volunteers during a welcome event that was organised by [Tubman Network in Berlin for Black, Indigenous and People of Colour that escaped the war in the Ukraine](#) (Photo: Kristina Mashimi).

Jack

I moved to a city in the western part of Ukraine in 2017 to study computer engineering. My family sent me there because the situation at the universities in Nigeria is very bad. There are strikes all the time because the professors don't get paid. But the university was not the only reason for my leaving. I also witnessed quarrels in my extended family, which became quite dangerous. Two years later, after I moved to Ukraine, I lost my father to these disputes. This was not only an emotional tragedy for me, but I also found myself in a difficult financial situation. Fortunately, my tuition fees were paid in full at the beginning of my studies, but I had to find a regular job to support myself while studying.

The day before the war started, I was visiting Kyiv and did not expect at all to be woken up by bombs the next morning. There was constant bomb noise, so I quickly went back to the city where I was studying. I didn't want to leave Ukraine for almost two weeks because I had all my things in my flat and I would lose everything my family had invested in my studies in Ukraine. I thought the war would end soon, but after two weeks I decided I had to leave because it was getting too dangerous. I spoke to a friend who had already travelled to Germany and decided to go to Berlin because he told me that there were many people there who were helping people from Ukraine.

On my friend's advice, I took the route through Slovakia and reached Dresden, Germany. When I arrived in Dresden, the police stopped me and I explained to them that I did not want to apply for asylum because I was studying in Ukraine. My documents were immediately returned to me and I travelled on to Berlin. Now I live in Berlin and switch between different flats that volunteers at Berlin Central Station send me to. It is difficult because the places where I live are always temporary. After each stay, I return to the train station, where I hope that the volunteers will connect me with the locals who offer rooms.

Despite these difficulties, I think the Germans are good people. The locals have helped me and my friends so much. In Ukraine, I have never experienced so much generosity, and I have also experienced racism. Of course, there are good people in Ukraine too, but landlords and

universities know that we (foreign students) bring in money and they often try to make the best of it. Ukraine was hard sometimes, but my parents sent me there because they wanted me to have a better and safer life.

After living in Ukraine for five years, I was already in my final year at university. I had to do my final exams first and foremost. But the war prevented me from doing them, and now I am afraid that I have lost everything I have achieved so far. I can't return to Nigeria because I don't have enough money to go back to Ukraine once the war is over. In Nigeria, my family is also in a very difficult financial situation, and because of the family dispute, it is not safe for me there either. That is also the reason why it took me so long to leave Ukraine, because returning to Nigeria was out of the question for me. I would like to find a way to register in Germany for a longer period than just until 23 May,^[1] so that I can attend school and learn the language, or finish my studies. I would also like to work if I stay in Germany, but I don't even have that right. I've done my best in the last few weeks and struggled to find a way, but it's all so complicated because everything is new to me and I don't understand much of it. My days now basically consist of waking up, eating, sleeping, and occasionally exploring the city. But I don't want only that.

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^[1] This was the original deadline until which war refugees from Ukraine did not need a residence permit for Germany. At the time of writing this letter, this deadline has been extended to 31 August 2022.