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RESEARCH ARTICLE

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Who is willing to help Ukrainian refugees and why? The role of individual prosocial dispositions and superordinate European identity

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Abstract

In 2022, Europe experienced unprecedented citizen mobilizations to help Ukrainian refugees. Based on two parallel lines of scholarship, we examined individual prosocial dispositions and superordinate identities related to intentions to help Ukrainians. Employing a French-speaking student sample in Belgium ($N = 374$), in Study 1, we showed that dispositional prosociality and European identification were both positively related to intentions to help Ukrainians. An interaction qualified these main effects, so that highly prosocial European identifiers were particularly willing to help. With a nationwide quota sample of the French-speaking population in Belgium ($N = 371$), in Study 2, we identified two processes mediating the relationship of dispositional prosociality and European identification with intentions to help Ukrainians. On the one hand, dispositional prosociality was positively related to empathy with Ukrainians, which in turn predicted participants' helping intentions. On the other hand, European identification was positively related to both empathy and identity fusion with Ukrainians, which further predicted participants' helping intentions. Overall, these findings suggest that individual prosocial dispositions and superordinate identities represent two cumulative pathways to intergroup helping. Concluding, we discuss common and specific

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processes related to intentions to help Ukrainians, compared with other refugee groups.

KEYWORDS
empathy, European identity, identity fusion, intergroup helping, prosociality, superordinate identity, Ukrainian refugees

The invasion of Ukrainian territories in February 2022, caused Europe's fastest-growing refugee inflow since World War II (Pita & Costa, 2022), with millions of Ukrainians fleeing the country and a third of the population displaced (UNHCR, 2022). In the name of unity and common faith between European and Ukrainian people, humanitarian corridors were immediately deployed, and solidarity initiatives multiplied across Europe (Paul, 2022). The vast mobilization of volunteers was unprecedented, highlighting the capacity of civil society to react quickly and extensively to help Ukrainian refugees, and the revitalization of European unity in the face of a common enemy.

These two phenomena participate in the growing scholarly debate on the psychological processes favouring intergroup helping (Louis et al., 2019; Van Leeuwen & Zagefka, 2017), and willingness to engagement in humanitarian actions in favour of refugees (Kende, Lantosa, Belinszky, Csaba, & Lukács, 2017; Politi, Gale, & Staerklé, 2017). Making a novel contribution to this scientific endeavour, in the present research, we build on two frameworks: individual prosocial dispositions (Batson, Lishner, & Stocks, 2014; Caprara, Alessandri, & Eisenberg, 2012) and superordinate identities (e.g., Dovidio et al., 1997; Levine & Manning, 2013). Across two studies among Western European participants, we examine if dispositional prosociality and a particularly relevant superordinate identity in the context under study—that is, European identification—predict intentions to help Ukrainian refugees. Furthermore, we test indirect effects of both predictors via two mechanisms: empathy and identity fusion with Ukrainians.

1 | TWO RESEARCH TRADITIONS ASSOCIATED WITH INTERGROUP HELPING

1.1 | Individual prosocial dispositions and helping

People hold different propensities to help others in need, based on stable individual differences (Batson et al., 2014; Caprara et al., 2012; Habashi, Graziano, & Hoover, 2016). This so-called "prosocial personality" is conceived as a trans-situational altruistic inclination to transcend one's own interests (see Thielmann, Spadaro, & Balliet, 2020 for a meta-analysis). Differences in individual dispositions have been observed across diverse helping situations, including volunteering (Habashi et al., 2016), donations to disaster victims (Zagefka & James, 2015), bystander responses (Hortensius & de Gelder, 2018), activism and civic engagement (Omoto, Snyder, & Hackett, 2010).

Individual prosocial dispositions seem to matter also when helpers and help recipients do not share any group membership (but see Zagefka & James, 2015 for a discussion). For instance, Politi, Van Assche, Caprara, and Phalet (2021) showed that the same prosocial dispositions predicting "bonding" types of prosocial behaviour directed towards ingroup members, also predict "bridging" types of prosocial behaviour directed towards outgroup members. Hence, we expected that individual differences in dispositional prosociality would also predict intentions to help Ukrainians.

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1.2 | Superordinate identities and helping

Besides individual differences in prosocial dispositions, people are generally more inclined to help those who are perceived as psychologically close, such as relatives, neighbours, and fellow nationals, compared with those who are psychologically distant, such as acquaintances, strangers, and foreigners (Baron & Szymanska, 2011; Stürmer & Siem, 2017). In line with the basic tenets of self-categorization theory, situational cues about who is (re)categorized as an ingroup or an outgroup member impact helping behaviours (Levine & Manning, 2013; Subašić, Reynolds, & Turner, 2008). Past research has shown that recategorization processes were at play in a number of helping situations, including aid towards immigrants following a natural disaster (Andrighetto, Vezzali, Bergamini, Nadi, & Giovannini, 2016), willingness among consumers to pay extra for fair-trade products to support sweatshop workers (Subašić, Schmitt, & Reynolds, 2011), or mobilizations in Bulgaria against the deportation of Jews in World War II (Reicher, Cassidy, Wolpert, Hopkins, & Levine, 2006).

As the Russian–Ukrainian conflict has made salient the geopolitical borders and psychological boundaries of Europe, European identity as a superordinate entity emerges as a pertinent level of self-categorization to explain helping intentions towards Ukrainians. Indeed, research has shown that the role of European identification in intergroup relations is contingent to its level of inclusiveness in a given context or situation (Schlenker, 2013; Visintin, Green, & Sarrasin, 2018). Levine and Thompson (2004), for instance, demonstrated that helping intentions towards disaster victims among British participants were highest when European identity was made salient, and when the site of the disaster fell within the geographical boundaries of the relevant superordinate identity (i.e., Europe instead of South America). Because of the similarities between Ukrainian and European people stressed in the current public debate, we expected that European identification would predict intentions to help Ukrainians.

2 | PROCESSES UNDERLYING INTERGROUP HELPING

2.1 | Empathy with Ukrainians

Empathic responses towards Ukrainians might be a relevant process intervening in the effect of dispositional prosociality and European identification on helping intentions. As a complex, multi-dimensional phenomenon, situational empathy involves several components, including sympathy, concern, or compassion (Goetz, Keltner, & Simon-Thomas, 2010), perspective-taking (Eisenberg et al., 1994), and emotion contagion (Hatfield, Cacioppo, & Rapson, 1994). Research has also suggested that empathic responses are linked with intergroup helping, including collective action against inequality (Saab, Tausch, Spears, & Cheung, 2015), and humanitarian aid offered to refugees (Thravalou, Martinovic, & Verkuyten, 2021). Contributing to this line of enquiry, in the present research, we analyse the role of empathy with Ukrainians, in bridging the effect of dispositional prosociality and European identification on helping intentions.

On the one hand, people who are dispositionally prosocial are more likely to feel empathy for specific people in need (Carlo, Eisenberg, Troyer, Switzer, & Speer, 1991; Davis, Hall, & Meyer, 2003). Accordingly, Graziano et al. (2007, Study 3) found that empathic concerns experienced immediately after hearing about a victim's situation mediated the relation between agreeableness (i.e., a prosocial personality trait) and subsequent intentions to volunteer. Accordingly, we expected that empathy with Ukrainians would mediate the relationship between prosocial disposition and helping intentions.

On the other hand, recategorization processes are also likely to inflate empathic concerns directed towards outgroup members who are included in a superordinate identity (Cikara, Bruneau, & Saxe, 2011; Tarrant, Dazeley, & Cottom, 2009). Exemplary are experiments where White and Asian Americans showed empathic neural responses watching an ingroup member's being pricked by a needle, whereas these responses were absent in case of an

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outgroup member (Xu, Zuo, Wang, & Han, 2009; Zhou et al., 2020). Accordingly, we expected that empathy with Ukrainians would mediate the relationship between European identification and helping intentions.

2.2 | Identity fusion with Ukrainians

Another eligible factor bridging the effect of dispositional prosociality and European identification on helping intentions is identity fusion with Ukrainians. Identity fusion has been framed as perceptual "closeness" with an individual or a group that motivates personally costly altruistic behaviours (Aron, Aron, & Smollan, 1992; Gómez et al., 2011). In a series of experiments, identity fusion was related to charity donations (Swann, Gómez, Huici, Morales, & Hixon, 2010). Furthermore, research revealed that identity fusion was an independent and stronger predictor of helping intentions than empathy (Cialdini, Brown, Lewis, Luce, & Neuberg, 1997). Contributing to this line of enquiry, in the present research, we analyse the role of identity fusion with Ukrainians in bridging the effect of dispositional prosociality and European identification on helping intentions.

On the one hand, people who are dispositionally prosocial are more likely to feel connected with outgroup members. Prosocial people tend to have a more accessible relational-interdependent self-construal, thus including the others more readily in their self (Agnew, Loving, Le, & Goodfriend, 2004; Tu, Chen, & Mesler, 2021). Similarly, people high in agreeableness were more likely to feel close to people in need, regardless of whether these are ingroup or outgroup members (Graziano et al., 2007). Accordingly, we expected that identity fusion with Ukrainians would mediate the relationship between dispositional prosociality and helping intentions.

On the other hand, identity fusion with outgroup members (e.g., Ukrainians) increases as identification to a common superordinate category (e.g., Europeans) increases (Schubert & Otten, 2002; see also Dovidio et al., 1997). For instance, Stone and Crisp (2007) demonstrated that British participants reported less psychological distance and more perceptual closeness towards outgroup members (i.e., French), when European identity was salient. Accordingly, we expected identity fusion with Ukrainians to mediate the relationship between European identification and helping intentions.

3 | OVERVIEW OF TWO STUDIES

To test the main and indirect processes of dispositional prosociality and European identification on intentions to help Ukrainians, we designed two correlational studies in French-speaking Belgium. In Study 1, we tested the relationship of dispositional prosociality and European identification with intentions to help Ukrainians among a student sample. In Study 2, we replicated these associations in a well-powered study using a nationwide quota sample, and we estimated indirect effects via empathy and identity fusion with Ukrainians. The overarching conceptual model is presented in Figure 1. Operational hypotheses will be formulated for Study 1 and Study 2 separately.

4 | STUDY 1

Study 1 was conducted in April 2022 on a student sample, 6 weeks after Russia invaded Ukraine. The questionnaire was originally designed for a broader research project on civil society involvement in refugee reception, yet questions related to this study were added before ethical clearance was granted and data collection started. We expected that participants who scored higher in dispositional prosociality (H1) and who scored higher in European identification (H2) will report stronger intentions to help Ukrainians. Furthermore, we explored potential interaction effects between dispositional prosociality and European identification to qualify our main hypotheses.

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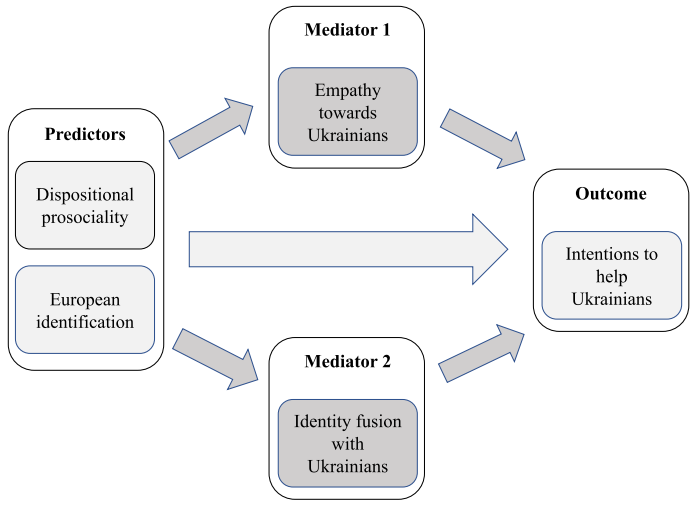

FIGURE 1 Conceptual model. Variables and main effects measured in both studies are reported in lighter shades of grey, while variables and indirect effects measured only in Study 2 are reported in darker shades of greys. Arrows represent expected positive relations between variables.

4.1 | Method

4.1.1 | Participants

Three-hundred seventy-four bachelor psychology students enrolled in a French-speaking Belgian university participated in exchange of course credits (84.5% female, $M_{age} = 20.30$, $SD = 3.52$, ranging from 18 to 42, with 90% of the sample 23 years old or younger).[1] Of the total, 38 participants (10.2%) were active members of movements or aid groups supporting refugees and migrants, or they had been in the past. Two-hundred-forty-nine participants were Belgian citizens (66.6%), yet 47 (12.6%) reported that they themselves, or family members, had experienced an asylum procedure. Because no participant was Ukrainian, we maintained the full sample in the analyses. These socio-demographic variables were controlled for in additional robustness checks.

4.1.2 | Measures

Dispositional prosociality was measured using the French validation of the adults' prosocialness scale (Caprara, Steca, Zelli, & Capanna, 2005; Carrizales, Perchec, & Lannegrand-Willems, 2019). One of the original 16 items was not included in the questionnaire ("I am available for volunteer activities to help those who are in need") due to a conceptual overlap with helping intentions. Participants indicated on a five-point Likert scale whether each of the 15 statements was *Never true* (1), *Occasionally true* (2), *Sometimes true* (3), *Often true* (4), and *Almost always true* (5), for instance: "I try to be close to and take care of those who are in need". Principal Component Analysis showed that a one-factor solution fit the data well, all factor loadings being higher than .50 ($\alpha = .89$).

European identification was adapted fromthe original scale proposed by McFarland, Webb, and Brown (2012). The scale measured to what extent participants identified with social groups at different levels of abstraction, ranging from one's own local community, Belgians, Europeans, and humanity all over the world. Participants indicated their degree of identification with each of the four groups on a five-point Likert scale with options *Not at all* (1), *Not*

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really (2), *Moderately* (3) *Fairly* (4), and *Strongly* (5). Although our hypotheses concerned European identification only, we included the other levels of self-categorization in the questionnaire to assess whether the effects of European identification held above and beyond the effects of other levels of self-categorization.

Intentions to help Ukrainians was adapted from the scale used by Roblain, Hanioti, Paulis, Van Haute, and Green (2020), who assessed intention to engage in helping asylum seekers and undocumented migrants. Participants indicated their motivation to undertake a number of actions to help Ukrainians in Belgium (e.g., "provide temporary accommodation for one or more Ukrainians arriving in Belgium") on a five-point Likert scale including options *Not at all motivated* (1), *Not really motivated* (2), *Moderately motivated* (3) *Fairly motivated* (4), and *Strongly motivated* (5). Principal Component Analysis revealed that a one-factor solution fit the data well, all factor loadings being higher than .61 ($\alpha = .88$).

4.2 | Results and discussion

Table 1 shows descriptive statistics and bivariate correlations for all measures in this study.

To test our hypotheses, dispositional prosociality and European identification were included as predictors in a multiple regression model using SPSS (version 28). Overall the model provided a good fit to the data, F (2, 371) = 25.68, $p < .001$, with a total variance explained of $R^2 = .12$. Both dispositional prosociality, $b = 0.40$ (0.07), $p < .001$, 95% CI [0.26, 0.55], and European identification, $b = 0.14$ (0.05), $p < .021$, 95% CI [0.05, 0.24], were positively related to helping intentions, confirming H1 and H2, respectively.[2]

In a second step, we centred predictors and included their interaction term in a moderation analysis using the PROCESS macro (version 3.5, Model 1). The interaction between dispositional prosociality and European identification was significant, $b = 0.21$ (0.07), $p = .002$, 95% CI [0.08, 0.34], and increased the total variance explained, $\Delta R^2 = .02$, F (1, 370) = 9.55, $p = .002$. Figure 2 shows visual probing of the interaction term at ±1 *SD* from the mean distribution of dispositional prosociality and European identification (see Hayes, 2018 for analytical details). Simple effects of dispositional prosociality on helping intentions were weaker but significant for lower European identifiers, $b = 0.20$ (0.09), $p = .035$, 95% CI [0.01, 0.39], and stronger for higher European identifiers, $b = 0.62$ (0.10), $p < .001$, 95% CI [0.43, 0.82]. Furthermore, simple effects of European identification on helping intentions were non-significant for people who reported low levels of dispositional prosociality $b = 0.02$ (0.06), $p = .69$, 95% CI [−0.09, 0.12], and stronger and significant among those who reported higher levels of dispositional prosociality, $b = 0.27$ (0.06), $p < .001$, 95% CI [0.16, 0.39].

In other words, European identification inflated the positive effects of dispositional prosociality but was unrelated to helping intentions among participants who reported lower dispositions to help others. This significant interaction is in line with Stürmer, Snyder, and Omoto (2005), who demonstrated that perceived similarities in terms of group membership increases the effects of prosocial dispositions on volunteering (see also Park & Schaller, 2005). Yet, our results deviate from evidence showing that prosocial dispositions override different propensities to volunteer based on group membership (Graziano et al., 2007). Besides these few empirical exceptions, literature has hardly analysed whether prosocial dispositions and superordinate identities interact in

TABLE 1 Descriptive statistics and bivariate correlations between main variables (Study 1).

	M (*SD*)	2.	3.
1. Dispositional prosociality	3.94 (0.60)	0.15**	0.31***
2. European identification	3.37 (1.02)		0.21***
3. Intentions to help Ukrainians	3.18 (0.85)		

***$p < .001$.**$p < .01$.

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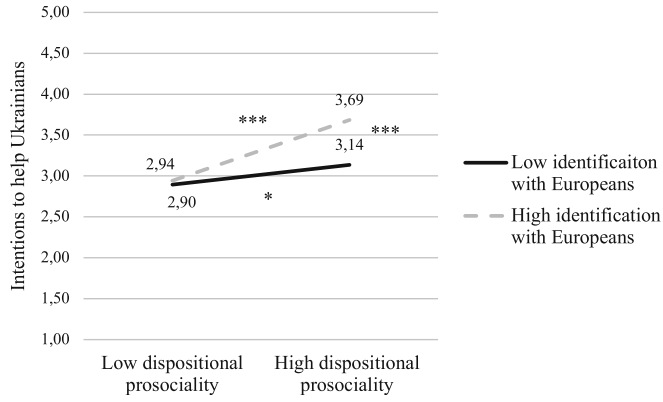

FIGURE 2 Probing of the interaction effect on helping intentions at relatively low and high levels of dispositional prosociality and European identification (Study 1). Simple effects are reported at ±1 *SD* from the mean distribution from the estimated mean. ***$p < .001$, *$p < .05$.

predicting helping intentions. Given the ambivalence of previous findings, we collected more data to test the robustness of this interaction effect.

5 | STUDY 2

In June 2022, we conducted a second well-powered correlational study, to replicate and generalize results of Study 1 to a nationwide sample, while also testing the underlying processes. To maximize the chances to replicate the unexpected interaction between dispositional prosociality and European identification, an a priori power analysis was conducted using G*Power 3.1.9.4, indicating that a sample size of 387 participants was needed to detect the effect size of the interaction term ($R^2 = .02$, .80 power, $\alpha = .05$). As in Study 1, we expected a positive relationship of dispositional prosociality (H1) and European identification (H2) with helping intentions. We also expected an indirect effect of dispositional prosociality via empathy with Ukrainians (H3) and via identity fusion with Ukrainians (H4). Finally, we hypothesized an indirect effect of European identification via empathy with Ukrainians (H5) and via identity fusion with Ukrainians (H6).

Once again, we estimated an interaction effect between dispositional prosociality and European identification to predict helping intentions. In the event of a significant interaction, we intended to proceed to test a mediated moderation and estimate conditional indirect effects (in line with Muller, Judd, & Yzerbyt, 2005).

5.1 | Method

5.1.1 | Participants

Four hundred Belgian citizens were recruited from a national representative panel managed by Kantar (www.kantar.com) and matched the Belgian population in gender and age distribution. We excluded five participants below 18 and additional 24 due to a failed attention check. The final sample was composed of 371 participants (47.7% female, $M_{age} = 43.72$, $SD = 15.13$, ranging from 18 to 85 years old). Among the total, 27 participants (7.3%) were members of movements or aid groups supporting refugees and migrants, either presently or in the past. Ten

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participants (2.7%) reported personal or family experiences with the asylum procedure. No participant was Ukrainian. These socio-demographic variables were controlled for in additional analyses.

5.1.2 | Measures

Dispositional prosociality (15 items; $\alpha = .93$), **European identification** (single item), and **Intentions to help Ukrainians** (8 items; $\alpha = .92$) were assessed as in Study 1 (as well as identification at other levels of self-categorization).

Empathy with Ukrainians was assessed using a 9-item Measure of State Empathy scale ($\alpha = .88$, Powell & Roberts, 2017). Participants responded on a 7-point Likert scale (0 = *not at all*, 6 = *entirely*) to what extent they experienced cognitive (e.g., "I understand what Ukrainians are feeling"), affective (e.g., "I have feelings of empathy with Ukrainians"), and compassionate empathy with Ukrainians (e.g., "I feel the same way as Ukrainians").

Identity fusion with Ukrainians was measured with a single classic, pictorial item commonly named "Inclusion-of-the-other-in-the-self-scale" (Aron et al., 1992; Gómez et al., 2011) assessing, on a 7-point scale, the extent to which participants viewed a *complete separation* (1) versus *complete overlap* (7) *between themselves and Ukrainians*.

5.2 | Results and discussion

Table 2 shows descriptive statistics and bivariate correlations for all measures used in this study. In line with our hypotheses, all predictors showed strong and positive correlations with intentions to help Ukrainians.

As in Study 1, a multiple regression analysis was conducted to test the main effects of dispositional prosociality and European identification on intentions to help Ukrainians, F (2, 367) = 60.94, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .25$. Replicating results of Study 1, dispositional prosociality (H1), $b = 0.40$ (0.06), $p < .001$, 95% CI [0.29, 0.52], and European identification (H2), $b = 0.25$ (0.04), $p < .001$, 95% CI [0.16, 0.33], were both positively related to helping intentions.[3] However, the interaction from Study 1 did not replicate with the present sample, $b = 0.05$ (0.05), $p = .279$, 95% CI [−0.04, 0.15]. The inconsistent and weak effect size of the interaction term suggests that these two pathways are not multiplicative but rather cumulative. This interaction was therefore omitted from subsequent analyses.

Next, a path analysis was conducted with Mplus version 8.2 (Muthén & Muthén, 2012) to assess the indirect effects of dispositional prosociality and European identification on intentions to help Ukrainians, via empathy and identity fusion with Ukrainians, respectively (see Figure 1).[4] We used full information maximum likelihood estimates with robust standard errors, computing indirect effects with 5,000 bootstraps and using 95% confidence intervals. Unstandardized effects and standard errors for each path are reported in Table 3.

Based on the estimates reported in Table 3, we tested and found a significant indirect effect of dispositional prosociality on intentions to help Ukrainians via empathy (H3), $b = 0.17$ (0.03), 95% CI [0.11, 0.24], $p < .001$, but not via identity fusion with Ukrainians (H4), $b = 0.02$ (0.01), 95% CI [−0.00, 0.05], $p = .073$. That is, participants who

TABLE 2 Descriptive statistics and bivariate correlations between main variables (Study 2).

	M (*SD*)	2.	3.	4.	5.
1. Dispositional prosociality	3.30 (0.74)	0.35***	0.42***	0.20***	0.43***
2. European identification	3.13 (1.02)		0.36***	0.24***	0.40***
3. Empathy with Ukrainians	2.95 (0.75)			0.52***	0.61***
4. Identity fusion with Ukrainians	2.37 (1.41)				0.42***
5. Intentions to help Ukrainians	2.24 (0.90)				

***$p < .001$.

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TABLE 3 Unstandardized effects and standard errors for each path in path analysis (Study 2).

	Empathy with Ukrainians		Identity fusion with Ukrainians		Intentions to help Ukrainians	
	b	*SE*	*b*	*SE*	*b*	*SE*
Dispositional prosociality	0.35***	(0.05)	0.26*	(0.11)	0.21***	(0.06)
European identification	0.18***	(0.04)	0.28***	(0.07)	0.14***	(0.04)
Empathy with Ukrainians					0.49***	(0.07)
Identity fusion with Ukrainians					0.09**	(0.03)

Note: Predictor variables are depicted in the rows, outcomes variables are depicted in the columns. The covariance between Empathy with Ukrainians and Identity Fusion with Ukrainians was significant ($b = 0.41$, $SE = 0.05$, 95% CI [0.32, 0.51], $p < .001$).
***$p < .001$.**$p < .01$.*$p < .05$.

scored higher on dispositional prosociality reported more empathy with Ukrainians (but not more identity fusion), which in turn bridged the relationship between dispositional prosociality and helping intentions. Furthermore, there was a significant indirect effect of European identification on intentions to help Ukrainians via empathy (H5), $b = 0.08$ (0.02), 95% CI [0.04, 0.13], $p < .001$, and identity fusion with Ukrainians (H6), $b = 0.02$ (0.01), 95% CI [0.01, 0.04], $p = .012$. That is, participants who scored higher in European identification reported more empathy and identity fusion with Ukrainians, which both bridged the relationship between European identification on helping intentions.[5]

6 | GENERAL DISCUSSION

The rapid escalation of Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022 was accompanied by rising solidarity across European countries. Although similar enhanced humanitarian actions had emerged during previous refugee reception crises (Kende et al., 2017; Roblain et al., 2020), the vast mobilization of the European society in favour of Ukrainian refugees was somewhat unprecedented. By examining factors related to intentions to help Ukrainians, in the present research we identified two cumulative pathways, bringing together two lines of research on intergroup helping. First, we tested a well-established dispositional explanation, confirming the general trans-situational tendency of prosocial people to engage in intergroup helping. Furthermore, we added a situational explanation, finding that people who identified more strongly with Europe were more willing to help Ukrainians. Net of this dispositional explanation, the positive association between European identification and helping intentions contributes to explain why European society has been particularly favourable to Ukrainian refugees. Innovatively, we identified two underlying processes that linked individual prosocial dispositions and European identification with intentions to help Ukrainians, namely empathy and identity fusion with Ukrainians.

6.1 | Individual prosocial dispositions and helping intentions

Corroborating previous research on individual differences in intergroup helping (Habashi et al., 2016; Politi et al., 2021), individual prosocial dispositions were related to intentions to help Ukrainians. Interestingly, dispositional prosociality was related to helping intentions via empathy with Ukrainians (Saab et al., 2015; Thravalou et al., 2021). In contrast, identity fusion did not mediate the relationship between dispositional prosociality and helping intentions, disproving the hypothesized link between prosociality and inclusion of Ukrainians in the self-concept. Most likely, the increased helping intentions observed among highly prosocial people is independent from the recategorization of Ukrainians as close to the self. In other words, this first pathway tackles social–psychological processes that may generalize to any helping intention directed towards others in need, even in the absence of identity fusion.

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6.2 | Superordinate identities and helping

Our findings also indicated that European identification was related to intentions to help Ukrainians, above and beyond dispositional prosociality, and consistent with prior evidence on the role of inclusive identities in motivating intergroup helping (Levine & Thompson, 2004; Subašić et al., 2011). Interestingly, European identification was related to helping intentions via both empathy and identity fusion with Ukrainians, corroborating both hypotheses that a superordinate European identity can stimulate empathic reactions (e.g., Cikara et al., 2011), and the recategorization of outgroup members into a fused common ingroup (Stone & Crisp, 2007). Although previous research has demonstrated the ambivalence of European identification in intergroup relations (Schlenker, 2013; Visintin et al., 2018), the current humanitarian crisis seems to activate inclusive representations of European identity. In line with this idea, European identification predicted intentions to help Ukrainians more strongly than other levels of self-categorization, including identification with all humanity (McFarland et al., 2012). Most likely, this propensity among high European identifiers to help Ukrainians does not extend to other outgroup members perceived as more distant, either geographically or psychologically, from European borders. In other words, this second pathway is particularly relevant to helping intentions directed at Ukrainians, given the dominant narrative of the war in Ukraine that has propagated across European society. Although less effective than appeals to a common European identity in promoting intentions to help Ukrainians, appeals to higher-level superordinate identities (i.e., humanity) may foster helping refugees irrespective of their origins, and support for pro-refugee policies more generally.

6.3 | Limitations and future directions

In the two correlational studies comprising the present research, we tackled the social–psychological mechanisms underlying intentions to help Ukrainians. In support of our model, the independent variables in both studies (i.e., dispositional prosociality and European identification) were measured together with other socio-demographic variables at the beginning of the survey and did not explicitly refer to Ukrainians, but to more general dispositions and self-categorization dynamics. Furthermore, the dependent variable referred to specific behavioural intentions (i.e., helping Ukrainians), clearly distinguishable from the two psychological mechanisms: empathy and identity fusion with Ukrainians. Nevertheless, both studies were correlational, and all focal variables were endogenous, meaning that causality cannot be claimed. Furthermore, the studies were presented as an investigation of civil society involvement in refugee reception, perhaps inducing participants to think about this specific issue when answering questions on general prosocial dispositions and self-categorization dynamics. To tackle these limits, longitudinal designs would more successfully tease apart general processes from reactions to specific target groups and capture dynamic fluctuations in public opinion (Górska & Tausch, 2022).

Further limiting our conclusions, both studies uniquely focused on intentions to help Ukrainians as a target group. To address commonalities and specificities in the social–psychological processes related to intergroup helping, future studies should examine reactions to different target groups. Indeed, one of the most contested matters of public debate is the double standard currently applied to Ukrainian refugees compared with other non-Western culturally stigmatized ethnic groups (Dahinden, 2022). In all likelihood, at the time of writing, a substantial body of research is focusing on the causes and implications of this double standard, identifying strategies to reduce it. This same type of comparison between social groups should be applied to studying individual prosocial dispositions and superordinate identities related to intergroup helping.

Future research should also go beyond behavioural intentions and study specific mobilization trajectories among volunteers and activists who are currently engaged in humanitarian actions (e.g., Kende et al., 2017; Roblain et al., 2020). Although we did assess these dimensions in our studies, the question on mobilization experiences was too broad, and the percentage of participants who were involved in any kind of pro-refugee mobilization too small, to detect any sizable effect. Although we included this variable as a statistical control in our models, no significant

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differences emerged. Because helping intentions are only likely to transform in humanitarian actions in the presence of opportunity structures (Alcalde & Portos, 2018; McCarthy & Zald, 1977), we call for more research on mechanisms through which contextual affordances transform intentions to support refugees into action.

Another promising direction for the future studies is the role of gateway group members in relation to intergroup helping, that is, those who have themselves undergone an involuntary migration trajectory (Love & Levy, 2019; see also Deschamps & Doise, 1978). Increased identity overlap, but also heightened conflict for limited resources, may foster or dampen helping intentions among gateway group members (Sarrasin, Green, Bolzman, Visintin, & Politi, 2018). Once again, the limited number of participants with direct or indirect experiences of the asylum procedure in our samples did not allow this question to be considered in analyses (beyond its inclusion as covariate). Yet, the role of inter-minority conflict and solidarity may be particularly relevant in relation to the recent Ukrainian migration flow into European societies already marked by substantial cultural diversity.

Despite these limitations, this is one of the first scholarly attempts to apply general social–psychological processes to the study of the current humanitarian crisis in Ukraine. By advancing our understanding of the processes involved in intergroup helping, our findings serve as a blueprint for future investigations and policy recommendations on how to promote citizen involvement in specific initiatives in favour of Ukrainians, with potential spill-over effects for other refugee communities and humanitarianism more broadly.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are openly available in Open Science Framework at https://osf.io/xkrbn/?view_only=51c83cbf202244729b3809f94cecfc42.

ETHICS STATEMENT

This research was approved by the Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Psychological Sciences and Education at the Université Libre de Bruxelles (dossier number: 530/2020). The material produced is the authors' own original work, which has not been previously published elsewhere. The paper is not currently being considered for publication elsewhere.

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ENDNOTES

[1] A sensitivity power analysis conducted using G*Power 3.1.9.4 suggested that with this sample size ($N = 374$), a minimum effect size of $R^2 = .02$ could be detected (.80 power, $\alpha = .05$).

[2] Results were robust when participants' gender, age, origin, experiences with the asylum procedure, volunteering, and other levels of self-categorization were controlled for. Importantly, among all levels of self-categorization, only European identification was significantly associated with intentions to help Ukrainians.

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[3] Results of this multiple regression analysis were robust when participants' gender, age, origin, experiences with the asylum procedure, volunteering, and local, national, and humanity levels of self-categorization were controlled for. Importantly, and in line with Study 1, European identification was the strongest predictor among all levels of self-categorization. Differently from Study 1, a residual positive effect of identification with the local community and humanity on helping intentions were also found.

[4] Path analysis was preferred because, differently from the PROCESS macro, it allows for the inclusion of more than one predictor variable and the covariation between parallel mediators.

[5] Indirect effects were robust when all controls variables were included in the model (including other levels of self-categorization). Only the indirect effect of European identification on identity fusion became non-significant when identification with humanity was included in the model.

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