

## Ukrainians in Polish Schools

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### **Abstract**

*The objective of this paper is to provide an analysis of the integration of Ukrainian students in Polish schools. The Polish educational policies include preparatory classes, inclusion in mainstream classes, additional educational classes in Polish, early childhood education and vocational training. The paper also examines the Directives of the European Union regarding the integration of Ukrainian students. The European Commission directive measures regulate European Union countries education policies to incorporate Ukrainian students. While Poland has met most of the requirements of the European Union Directives, there also challenges in the Polish education system. Language barriers, policy gaps and the lack of available resources are examined. The paper provides several perspectives on education in relationship to the rapid migration of Ukrainian students to Poland. The war in Ukraine by Russia has changed Poland from an emigrant to an immigrant country. Poland has received the highest number of Ukrainians among the European countries since the start of the conflict by Russia on February 24th, 2022. The high percentage of children among the immigrants has particularly challenged the compulsory education system in Poland.*

**Keywords:** *inclusive education, education policy, Poland, Ukraine, European Union*

### **Introduction**

Poland is changing from an emigrant country to an immigrant country. This happened without an intermediate stage. The war in Ukraine between started by Russia in February 2022 has produced the largest refugee migration in Europe since World War II. Because most Ukrainian men between 18 and 60 are required to fight in Ukraine, most war refugees in Poland are women and children (Duszcyk and Kaczmarczyk 2022). Poland has the largest percentage of Ukrainian refugees in the European Union. See Figure 1.

The outbreak of war has impacted many institutions in Poland including the labor market, social network, healthcare, housing, and education. This is apparent in the education system. In 2019/2020 there were 30,777 Ukrainian students in primary and secondary schools. By June 2022, the number increased to 200,000 Ukrainian students in the Polish education system. According to the Polish Ministry of Education there will be approximately 400,000 Ukrainian children in the 2022-2023 academic year (Pietrusinska and Nowosielski 2022).

The article will analyze the advantages and potential problems of the Polish education system and the integration of Ukrainian students in compulsory education including language and educational policy mandated by the directive of the European Union. The first section will examine the European Commission directive the existence of a “mass influx of displaced persons” from Ukraine within the meaning of 2002/55//EC (Official Journal of the European Union 2022: 1). The second section will analyze the increase in the number of Ukrainian students and attempts at integration of new Ukrainian students in Polish schools. The third section will analyze language and other barriers of the integration of the Ukrainian students in Polish schools.

The recency of the Russian conflict in Ukraine and the rapid inflow of migrants has required extraordinary measures and adaptations. A particular challenge is in education. The European Commission has made guidelines for European Union members including Poland to help Ukrainian students continue their education in a peaceful and adequate integration in new societies.

### **European Commission guidelines for a mass influx of displaced persons**

The European Commission directive pertains to Ukrainians national escaping in European countries who have been displaced on or after February 24<sup>th</sup>, 2022, and their family members. The Directive covers several aspects including who is covered, by temporary protection, ability to return in safe and durable conditions, and including the protection of family and children (Official Journal of the European Union 2022). The Directive also includes a section on children and education that is particularly relevant to Ukrainian students in Poland. The Directive relates exclusively to young individuals who migrated to European Union countries since February 24<sup>th</sup>, 2022, due to the conflict between Russia and Ukraine. The protection of migrant children arriving from Ukraine is a top priority for the European Union. The regulation that the Commission made is that “context is in order to strengthen the protection of all migrant children, irrespective of their status, remain valid in the light of the Ukrainian crisis” (OJEU 2022: 7). The Directive is specific as it relates to education to members of the European Union including Poland.

### **Access to education for minors article 14(1)**

“Access to education for minors (Article 14(1) Temporary Protection Directive)

Pursuant to Article 14(1) of Directive 2001/55/EC, Member States shall grant access to their education system to persons under 18 years old enjoying the temporary protection status under the same conditions as their own nationals and EU citizens. Member States may limit such access to the state education system. The Commission considers that the same applies to minors benefitting from adequate protection under national law, as referred to in Article 2(2) of the Council Decision. Where necessary, documents showing the level of education achieved in Ukraine (e.g., graduation of secondary school, level A1 in English, etc.) shall be taken into account” (OJEU 2022: 7).

“The Commission recommends that support measures, such as preparatory classes, be provided to children to facilitate their access to and participation in the education system. Such support measures include supporting the acquisition of knowledge of the host country language (in mainstream education through preparatory classes leading to a quick transition into regular education), assessing of pupils’ competence levels, providing guidance to pupils and parents about the host country, psychological support, and supporting to the teachers and other education professional welcoming refugees” (OJEU 2022: 7).

“Access to education for minors shall be ensured as soon as materially possible where they meet the conditions for temporary protection or adequate protection under national law, even where the procedure for issuing residence permits is still pending. This can be evidenced on the basis of identity documents of the minors or any other official documentation that can be adduced to prove identity” (OJEU 2022: 7).

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“Member States should also support access to early childhood education and care, as well as vocational training, under the same conditions as their own nationals and other Union citizens. In Member States where there is a legal entitlement to early childhood education and care or where participation in early childhood education and care is compulsory, access to early childhood education and care for children covered by the Council Decision should be provided under the same conditions as nationals of the host Member State” (OJEU 2022: 8).

### **How has Poland met the European Union conditions**

Education in Poland is compulsory for all students. Every student must receive a basic education from when they are 7 years old to 18 years old. It is mandatory for 6-year-old to receive one year of kindergarten (Education in Poland, n.d.). Currently there are 75,000 Ukrainian children who are already in the Polish schools (Education and Science Ministry, March 18, 2022). Of these the majority are in primary schools (The First News, April 7, 2022, Fergusson 2022). Poland has the highest percentage of Ukrainian women and children of the European countries. See Figure 1. Most refugees are women and children according to PESEL Children war refugees aged 0-18 comprise 47.4 percent of war refugees who are registered to obtain the PESEL in Poland. The PESEL is the registration Ukrainians required to obtain to access to public goods and services (Duszczuk and Kaczmarczyk 2022). See Figure 2. PESEL is a number provided for personal identifications that all people living in Poland, both Poles and foreigners, need to get access to public services.

Poland has significantly integrated many Ukrainian war refugees in its education system. About 10 percent of children who do not know the Polish language will attend specific preparatory classes. The predatory classes can also be in the infrastructure that is not available in schools, and this can also be used for the needs of Polish education. Preparatory classes allow for Polish children to prepare for promotion to the next grade. According to the Minister of Education and Science ‘educational changes for Ukrainian students is to not to disturb the Polish educational system but taking care of the Ukrainian children is our obligation’ (Education and Science Ministry, March 18, 2022).

Ninety percent of Ukrainian war refugee students are in classes together with Polish students. However, many of the very recent incoming Ukrainians children are outside of the public school system. Several are using the Ukrainian distance education platform to connect to their classes (Poland’s education responses (2022)). Some of the refugee war students have been on hold because their parents are uncertain if they would stay in Poland or return to Ukraine or relocate to another European country. Some parents are also concerned that their children will experience more stress after if placed in a new linguistic and cultural environment. They are also concerned that their children could be discriminated from their Polish peers. Many parents are waiting until the next 2022-2023 year to enroll their children in the Polish school system (Pietrusinska and Nowosielski 2022: 4-5).

To help the Ukrainian students there is a plan to incorporate Ukrainian teacher in classrooms with several Ukrainian students. Ukrainian teachers and assistants who have recently come to Poland who are interested in working in the Polish school system are provided with a basic language course that has

created great interest with Ukrainian refugee teachers. This is so they can teach in Polish or assist Polish teachers in classrooms (Euractiv 2022).

On March 12, 2022, the President of Poland extended support for refugees from Ukraine. The legislation included a legalized stay for 18 months with a Polish national registrar (PESEL) number which includes full access to the labor market, to health care and a one-time financial benefit of 300 PLN (approximately \$64) for the refugees and access to many social benefits. In 2022, the Ministry of Education and Science said it will allocate 180 million PLN (about 37million US dollars) to local governments to support special classes that include psychological and pedagogical assistance for Ukrainians students. According to the Ministry the funds for schools will offer three million additional hours for Ukrainian refugee students (Poland's education responses (2022)).

The March 12 mandate provided access to pre-primary and compulsory education free regardless of their legal basis of the student stay in Poland up to the age of eighteen. In addition, for preparatory classes for entering Ukrainian students for grades 1-8 and in secondary schools, textbooks were offered teaching Polish as a foreign language. While Poland has fulfilled most of the of the EU operational guidelines of education for Ukrainian students there are still many challenges to the educations system in Poland (2022).

The Minister of Education on March 30 (Poland's education to the influx of Ukrainian students 2022) noted while between 150 and 160 thousand Ukrainians students joined the Polish education system, still, most of the Ukrainian students remain outside the Polish education's system compulsory education requirements. Many students are using the Ukrainian government's distant education platform to connect to their classes. These students are exempt from the compulsory requirement of Polish students. The students are provided with thousands of used computers for the online classes. It is questionable if the internet education entirely works. The American illustration during the COVID crisis employing an almost exclusive online education is a cautionary example. After two years of school closings and distance learning amid to the coronavirus crisis, the pandemic resulted in a "significant" learning loss for students, both academically and from a social-emotional standpoint, according to a significant report by Kuhlfeld, Lewis, and Morton, (2022).

### **Every humanitarian crisis is also an education crisis.**

#### *Language barriers*

The UNICEF (United Nations Children's Fund) believed that the large influx of Ukrainian refugee students would present challenges. One of the most important is language barriers. Polish teachers will, need to teach some Ukrainian students that are not fluent in Polish incorporating students in their classrooms. In addition, they need to discuss the Russian invasion in Ukraine. The teachers are also largely responsible to provide cultural and psychological support for Ukrainian students (Poland's education responses to the influx of Ukrainian students (2022)).

According to the British Council (2016: 1) "learning language of the receiving country is extremely important. "Language teaching and learning is essential for increasing the resilience of refugees and providing them with opportunities for education, social engagement, and access to services. Without adequate provision for language teaching and learning, the long-term options for people forced to flee from violence and instability are more limited."

Language barriers exist, despite the Act of April 8, 2022, that increased that student's ability to attend up to two years in preparatory classes. Polish language classes increased to 6 hours a week for one year. Ukrainians who came before February 24<sup>th</sup> are not eligible to 6 hours in the K-12 educational system. Specialists believe 6 hours per week this is too limited for students to fully participate in lessons in Polish schools (Pietrusinska and Nowosielski 2022: 4-5, 13). The UNICEF conducted a poll to better understand the education plans of Ukrainians for the 2022-2023 school year and to access their needs

and barriers. The poll found that 45 percent planned to study in the national education of Poland and that the major barrier to enrolling in local schools was not being able to speak Polish. Twenty-five percent of those surveyed said that not being able to speak Polish was their major barrier (UNICEF 2022, September 1).

Isolating refugee students in separate classes also has barriers. According to Bandera's (1976), social learning theory suggests that observation and modeling play a primary role in how and why people learn. According to Bandura's learning theory, students can experience socialization simply by observing others' behavior. Isolation in separate classes makes this learning of Polish language and culture more difficult. For Ukrainian students this can also be difficult because they may not want to conform to the behavior of Polish students in Poland as their host country. But fitting in is often a large driving force. Blackwell observes that refugees often struggle with the relationship in which they have sought asylum (Blackwell 2005).

The uncertainty of returning to Ukraine has had Ukrainians open their own schools. The Warsaw Ukrainian School has over two hundred students in grades 1-11. The school can accept up to 270 students. The Ukrainian school was opened on April 11, 2022, in Warsaw. The Russian conflict on February 24 interrupted the school year for millions of Ukrainian students who had only three months more to complete the school year. Many parents say they want their children to get a Ukrainian education and to have their children with a Ukrainian identity. Classes are taught in Ukrainian with a Ukrainian school system (Ukrainians refugees in Poland open their own schools 2022).

This can be a problem if the Refugees do not return to Ukraine. With the Russian conflict continuing and several areas in Ukraine ruined, this is still uncertain. The faster Ukraine conflict resolves it is more likely the Ukrainians will return to Ukraine. However, as displaced individuals adapt to their changed circumstances it is more likely they will remain in Poland and in the school system (Joireman 2022). Mazzini (2022) believes although Poles have welcomed the Ukrainians Poland will make it difficult to absorb the refugees. Poland's government has done little to create a sense of shared history with minority groups.

Mazzini (2022: 2) comments that the official version of history is "excluding rather than including non-Poles." Poland has become in a brief period, emerged from an emigrant to an immigrant country. The PiS (Law and Justice Party) dominant party must figure out how to educate Ukrainians in a school system that teaches what Mazzini calls a 'narrow and distorted version of Polish history.' As Ukrainians stay longer this can be more of a problem in integrating the new Ukrainian students. Other problems also exist.

#### *Policy gaps and available resources*

One of the significant problems in Poland is related to the lack of teachers. In the August 2022 main teacher's union, Związek Nauczycielstwa Polskiego (ZNP) indicated that 10,000 teachers left the profession in Poland during 2020. Poland has many aging teachers with pensioners. Retired teachers have been employed to fill the shortages. Warsaw has the highest percentage of Ukrainian refugee war students. However, 5,000 of 30,000 of the teachers are retired or about to retire in Warsaw. The retired and planning to retire teach approximately one-third of the Ukrainian refugee students (Education in Hungary and Poland: Crisis in the classroom 2022 (Pietrusinska and Nowosielski 2022)).

Part of the problem is the low wages for teachers in Poland. A beginning teacher in Poland earns about 2,600 PLN a month (US\$535) as take-home pay. This is the cost of a basic two-room apartment in a large city. A teacher with 15 years' experience makes about 4,000 PLN about \$US823. In Warsaw there are over 1,800 vacancies to the ZNP union (Education in Hungary and Poland: Crisis in the classroom 2022). These low wages discourage some future teachers.

In Poland there is also the challenge of integrating between 200,000 and 300,000 refugee Ukrainian students. The head of the teacher union warned that the government has done little to respond to this influx. There is also the need for additional schools. Particularly, additional public schools. Approximately 100,000 new students require the building of 1,000 additional schools (Education in Hungary and Poland: Crisis in the classroom 2022). According to Pietrusinska and Nowosielski (2022: 3-4, 13) Polish educational institutions were not prepared to absorb such a high influx of Ukrainian students. There was a large inequality of educational resources between cities and towns and rural areas. The UNESCO Response to Ukraine: Children's Education Needs (2022) also observes that in the critical area of how host countries transfer credits, particularly to higher education, little has been prepared to help Ukrainian students.

### **Conclusion: the uncertain future**

The forced displacement of refugees caused by the Russian conflict against Ukraine in February 2022 is at a speed and scale that has not been apparent since World War II. Poland has received most refugees who have left for safety. Around 460,000 school-aged children have registered for temporary protection, although it is likely the number is larger. Most of the Ukrainians who have fled Ukraine to Poland are women and children (Ferguson 2022, Borgen Project 2022). It is uncertain how many of the refugees will stay in Poland if the conflict continues between Ukraine and Russia or discontinues.

The European Commission has established guidelines for education for the recent Ukrainian refugees. The directive includes educational requirements for preparatory classes, access to classes and participation in school activities in the host EU countries. The directive also includes requirements to support the integration of Ukrainian students in the host country (Journal of the European Union (2022).

While Poland has met most of the EU Directives there are still significant challenges for integration of the Ukrainian students. These include lack of teachers, language barriers, policy gaps and available resources. Preventing potential conflict between Poles and Ukrainians is also an important challenge as the influx of foreigners has had a dramatic impact on the Polish education system. In the short term, this is not a problem, because of the uniqueness of the situation (Duszczek, and Kaczmarczyk 2022).

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**Figure 1: Ukrainians in Selected European Countries**

Location	Source	Data Date	Population	Percentage
Poland	Government	8/9/2022	1,274,130	41%
Romania	Government	8/8/2022	83,827	3%
Germany	Government	8/10/2022	940,000	31%
Hungary	Government	8/9/2022	27,861	1%
Slovakia	Government	8/8/2022	87,030	3%
Chechia	Government	8/9/2022	409.008	13%
France	Government	8/9/2022	96,530	3%
Italy	Government	8/9/2022	159,968	5%
<b>TOTAL</b>				
<a href="https://data.unhcr.org/en/situations/ukraine">https://data.unhcr.org/en/situations/ukraine</a>			3,078,344	

**Figure 2:** Demographic structure of war refugees Ukrainians who registered for Public Goods and Services

Population	Number of war refugees	Percent of Total
Children 0-18	519,567	47.35
Working age	503071	45.85
Female	460,361	41.96
Male	42,270	3.89
Retirement age	74,579	6.80
Female	63,878	5.82
Male	10,701	0.98
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,097,21</b>	<b>100.00</b>

Source: Duszczyk and Kaczmarczyk 2022, Table 1