

# Empowering Education



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## Understanding Teachers' Needs in Multicultural Classrooms

Report prepared by the British Council exploring the multifaceted challenges faced by the Polish education system in light of the significant influx of Ukrainian refugees following Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022

**Warsaw, February 2024**

## About this report:

Report: *Empowering Education: Understanding Teachers' Needs in Multicultural Classrooms* analyses the diverse challenges facing the Polish education system in light of a significant influx of Ukrainian children and youth following the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. The document precisely outlines pre-existing difficulties, such as a decreasing number of teachers, heightened stress among students related to assessments and exams, and difficulties in integrating into the school community, presenting a comprehensive picture of a system under pressure. The analysis of participants' opinions in the study focuses on identifying key challenges in the system's structure, language barriers, resilience, and the well-being of students. Crucial findings and recommendations are directed towards representatives of institutions overseeing education and individuals involved in shaping educational policy at both national and local levels.

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# Contents

<b>1. Foreword</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>2. Executive Summary</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>3. Context</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>4. Methodology</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>5. Key Insights</b>	<b>12</b>
a. Positive outcomes	12
b. Challenges	16
– Challenge 1: Systems	16
– Challenge 2: Languages	18
– Challenge 3: Mental health	20
– Challenge 4: Community and family misunderstanding	22
<b>6. What does the future hold?</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>7. Recommendations</b>	<b>31</b>
<b>8. Conclusions</b>	<b>38</b>

# Foreword

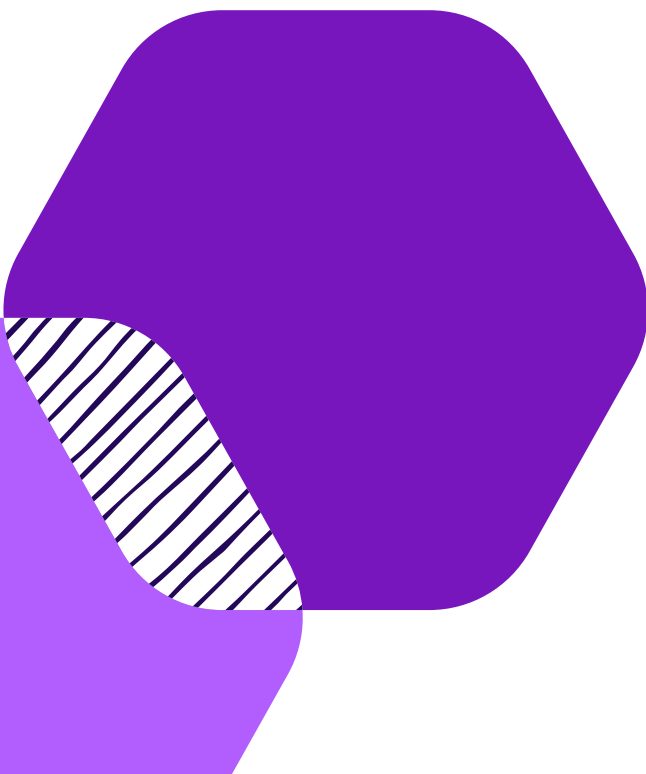
Each refugee crisis brings with it examples of the best and worst of human nature, and the period from February 2022, when millions of Ukrainians sought refuge in Poland was no different. Who will ever forget the images of pushchairs left at train stations and bus stops, gifts from Polish mothers to their Ukrainian counterparts and host families, in the certain knowledge that no person should ever have to travel a thousand miles with their baby in their arms?

Since the invasion, Poland has continued to extend refuge to up to 1.2 million Ukrainian individuals who sought safety and support. The toddlers of 2022 are now joining kindergarten, and their older brothers and sisters are in schools – or they should be – and those who were teenagers when they arrived are now old enough to leave school and join the workforce.

This report, *Empowering Education: Understanding Teachers' Needs in Multicultural Classrooms*, drawn from the voices of educators working in schools across Poland, is a step towards knowing how the British Council can support the Polish education system, the teachers working in it and children benefiting from it. The opinions presented in this report focus on various challenges exposed by the war in Ukraine while also offering recommendations for policymakers in the field of education in Poland as well as national and international organizations supporting Ukrainian students. Additionally, the report discusses the positive changes that the crisis has triggered within the educational system.

We hope the report will also inform others who are interested in working with us to help deliver a programme of support that has the best outcome for the most important stakeholders of all: our children and young adults.

Rachel Launay  
Director, British Council Poland  
February 2024



# Executive Summary

The report *Empowering Education: Understanding Teachers' Needs in Multicultural Classrooms* was prepared by the British Council based on research materials conducted by the Stocznia Foundation, aimed at understanding the situation of Ukrainian students in Polish schools during the second year of the war in Ukraine. The opinions presented in the report were gathered during a conference organized by the British Council in Warsaw in December 2023. Nearly 100 professionals, including English language teachers, directors, intercultural assistants, and representatives of international organizations, participated in focus groups, where they were asked about issues related to the education of students with refugee experiences.

The report proposes an insight into the complex challenges faced by the Polish education system in light of the need to integrate student refugees from Ukraine. It presents an analysis of existing problems, such as teacher shortages, increased stress among students, and an excessive focus on grading and exams, painting a picture of a system under pressure. The report identifies key challenges on various fronts, including difficulties in integrating classrooms, language barriers, the complex perspective of multicultural assistants, and the mental well-being of students and teachers.

To meet these challenges and mitigate associated risks, the authors of the report propose 12 recommendations. These recommendations include systemic reforms and targeted actions, such as using English as a bridging language for integration, strengthening mechanisms for psychosocial support, and creatively utilising multicultural assistants and teachers from Ukraine. Special attention is given to creating inclusive, multicultural educational spaces to establish a supportive environment for all students and strategically adapting the curriculum to alleviate pressure on both teachers and learners.

The main message of the recommendations is a call for a coherent, encompassing entire school community strategy that not only addresses its immediate educational needs but also lays the groundwork for developing resilience in the longer term.

# Context

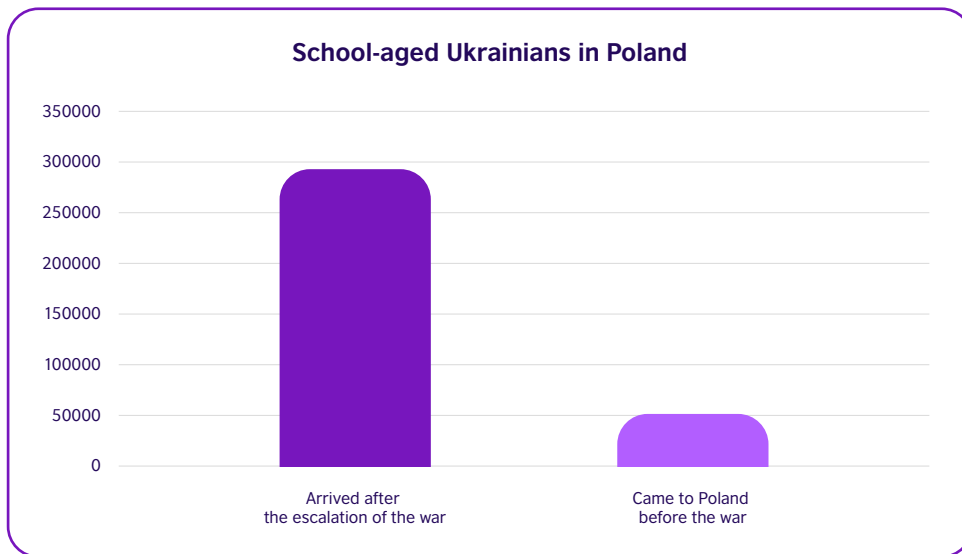
## Teaching in Poland

For years, the teaching profession has seen a decline in numbers due to low wages and diminishing prestige. This exodus from schools was further accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic and the associated lockdowns, which lasted until February 2022 – coinciding with the beginning of the Russian invasion. Post-pandemic, schools have also been grappling with a student mental health crisis. The prolonged lockdowns and a lack of contact with peers have left many students exhausted. This issue is exacerbated by the very limited access to child psycho-social support in schools, coupled with an insufficient number of school psychologists and educators. According to PISA 2022 research, students in Polish schools are struggling; they report some of the lowest scores in terms of a sense of belonging at school and confidence in independent learning<sup>1</sup>. Over a similar period, education professionals have also emphasised the need to reduce the overly extensive core curriculum requirements<sup>2</sup>.

## Refugee crisis

Within a few months of the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine, Poland registered 1.2 million refugees from Ukraine residing in the country. Among them were over 350,000 school-age children and young people. Poland has received the highest number of refugees from Ukraine compared to all other European countries. Approximately 140,000 Ukrainian children and young people with refugee experience are enrolled in Polish schools, constituting about 4% of all students in Poland.

Currently, there are **292,600 school-aged Ukrainians in Poland who arrived after the escalation of the war**, in addition to 50,000 who came to Poland before that. Young people having a refugee background in Poland can be broken down as follows<sup>3</sup>:



<sup>1</sup> OECD (2023), PISA 2022 Results (Volume II): Learning During – and From – Disruption.

<sup>2</sup> See: Fundacja Stocznia (2019), Raport z Narad Obywatelskich o Edukacji.

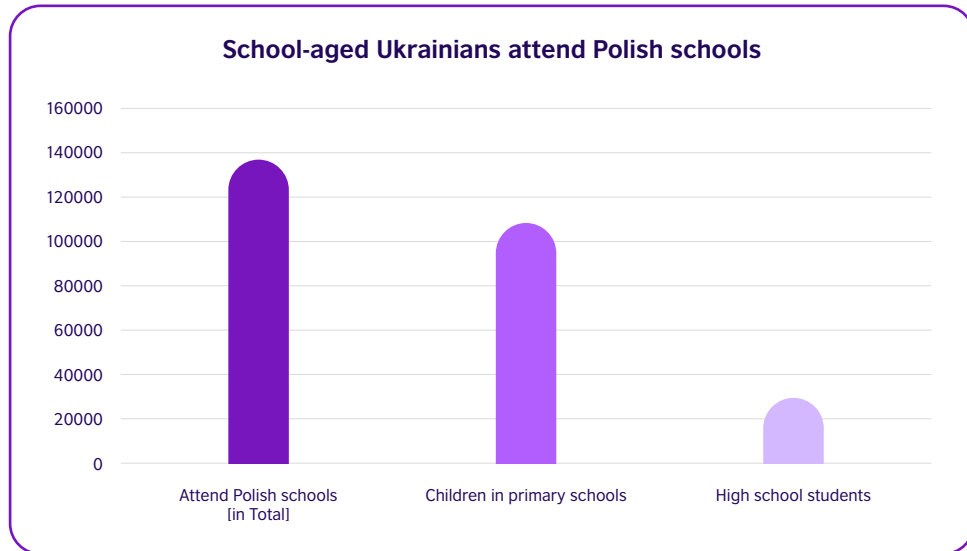
<sup>3</sup> Source: <https://ceo.org.pl/dzieci-uchodzycze-w-polskich-szkolach-co-mowia-nowe-dane/>



Over 136,000 attend Polish schools, including:

**107,700** children in primary schools

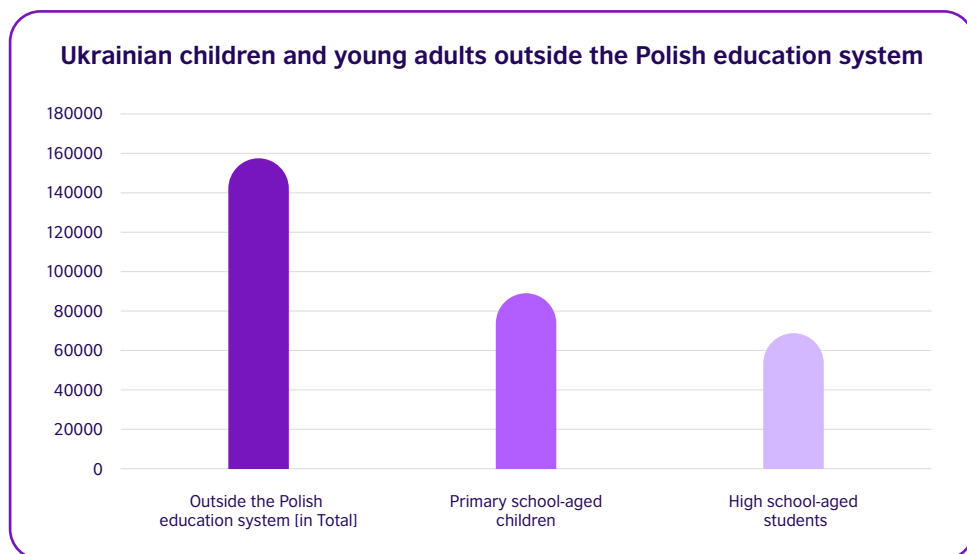
**28,300** high school students



More than 50% of the refugees are currently outside the Polish education system and there is no reliable data on whether these children and young adults are accessing other forms of education.

**88,612** primary school-aged children

**67,882** high school-aged students




# Methodology

Data was gathered by the Stocznia Foundation on 7 December 2023, in Warsaw during a two-day conference organised by the British Council, bringing together nearly 100 professionals familiar with the challenges of educating students with a refugee background. Among them were English teachers, headteachers, intercultural assistants from Ukraine, and representatives of international organisations.

The objectives of the research were to:

1. Gather an understanding of the issues facing refugee-hosting education systems from a range of stakeholders.
2. Identify strategies to mitigate some of the issues, including those that could potentially be applied by the British Council and partners.

The data was gathered using two methods: focus group interviews and *World Café* sessions. The focus group discussions aimed to gather in-depth information from a cross-section of participants which could then be triangulated. In total four FGIs (Focus Group Interviews) were undertaken with, respectively, English teachers, teachers and educational experts representing Teacher Training Centres, Headteachers, and Ukrainian multicultural assistants. In focus groups, the following questions were posed:

- Do you perceive any specific characteristics of Poland as a country receiving refugees?
  - What challenges do schools and school communities face, but also what positive outcomes may arise for them from the current situation?
  - What are the threats and opportunities in the context of the future and the long-term impact of the current situation on schools, school communities, and beyond?
  - What is the actual reception like for Ukrainian students in your schools?
  - What are the proposed solutions and needed support?
- 



The objectives of the *World Café* session were to facilitate collaborative and diverse conversations, through multiple rounds of small-group discussions in a café-style setting. There were three rounds of discussions – each participant changed tables twice and engaged in conversations on 3 out of 4 suggested topics. Participants were asked to discuss the following questions:

- What have we learned in the past two years?
- What is the current situation?
- What will the future look like?
- What do we need to make things better?

# Key Insights

## Positive outcomes

Though the refugee crisis has placed enormous strain on both individuals and systems, it has also led to some strengthening effects. Participants in the focus groups emphasised the increased

multicultural awareness among students and communities, the modernisation and enhanced flexibility of systems, the creativity of civil society's response, and – among Ukrainians – shifting attitudes towards psycho-social support and alternative education management methods.

## Schools as catalysts: fostering empathy and solidarity mid-crisis

In response to the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, Polish society initiated a significant aid effort for Ukrainian refugees. Schools played a crucial role in this action, involving teachers, students, and parents.

Polish schools demonstrated their support, welcoming tens of thousands of new students. Ukrainians express gratitude for the assistance received, and Poles take pride in their contribution.

The aid initiative has become a valuable and educational experience for students and school communities, fostering empathy, assistance, and solidarity. It has provided an opportunity to apply and strengthen these values, promoting integration within school communities.



*All hands on deck. We delve into Polish history, into the history of our ancestors who found themselves in similar situations when they had to help, migrate – everything comes back to us. There is a massive mobilisation of the entire community. Out of the COVID doldrums, students organise themselves, do something, want to contribute. Parents are actively present in schools, declaring assistance, and participating on a scale never before seen. [Headteachers, FGI]*

*Our students often said, 'Miss, we didn't know we were capable of this'. [Headteachers, FGI]*

## Cultural convergence and international understanding schools as spaces of genuine integration

The current situation offers students the chance for direct encounters with and insights into the lives of their peers from different nationalities and cultures. Ukrainian and Polish children mutually explore each other's languages and cultures, a process that also involves their parents and teachers. Such direct contact challenges preconceptions and dismantles stereotypes, transforming schools into spaces of genuine integration between Poles and Ukrainians. For Polish students and teachers, this is often their first experience of interacting with people from another culture and learning to navigate life in a multicultural society. It is enriching on one hand and demanding on the other.



*This year, we have a fair on 15 December. We are learning a song with the girls from the third grade. We take turns singing one line in Polish and one line in Ukrainian." [Assistants, FGI]*

*Stereotypes that we had about each other are peeling away..., in such circumstances. [Assistants, FGI]*

*We've returned to being a multicultural country. [World Café]*

*We started to wonder what Independence Day means because, after all, we celebrate it at school, but for children from Ukraine, it is not the same holiday. [World Café]*

## Positive changes in the Polish Education System

To meet the new challenges, Polish schools and their teaching staff had to adapt quickly. Teachers acquired new skills, including how to work with students from diverse cultures, those not fluent in Polish, and how to respond to rapidly changing situations. They also focused on displaying empathy and paying close attention to the individual needs of children. Schools sought new partnerships, such as with philology departments at universities. Students from these departments assisted Ukrainian students, helping them learn English, Polish, or other subjects like mathematics. Teaching Polish as a foreign language is growing as a specialisation.

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*In the past, handling matters took longer, but here, if a parent requested something, I was able to resolve the issue within 24 hours. I was aware that sometimes it was a matter of life and death, although I never asked them about it. [Headteachers, FGI]*

*Teaching Polish as a foreign language has developed because there is a high demand now. It's not just about being a Polish language teacher, but those who can teach people from other countries. [Assistants, FGI]*

## Changes in attitudes and opinions among Ukrainian parents

The most significant change observed by participants in the study relates to the gradual acceptance of psychological assistance among Ukrainian parents and children. In Ukrainian society, seeking psychological help is often associated with mental illness, leading to a cautious approach towards it. However, this perception is changing due to their experiences in Poland.

Another visible potential benefit for the future is that Ukrainians are getting to know Poland and its institutions. Various solutions, including those present in Polish schools, may be applied in a Ukrainian context in the future.

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*Now Ukrainians, both parents and children, willingly accept psychological assistance. In Ukraine, there is such a stigma – If you go to a psychologist, you are considered mentally ill. Unfortunately, when we invited them [parents], the reaction was 'no, I don't need it, I don't need this help.' And now, we have a queue to the psychologist.” [Assistants, FGI]*

*When it comes to education, for example, I see how the curriculum is structured. How, for instance, children are taught from an early age that patriotism is something good, not bad. And in the future, we will be able to build an education system in Ukraine similarly. [Assistants, FGI]*





# Empowering Education

Understanding teachers' needs in multicultural classrooms

Reference:  
British Council  
18 December 2023



# Challenges

In this section, we review some of the challenges to education which have emerged from the report.

The influx of thousands of students within a few months, whose main adaptive issues as a group are:

- Language
- Integration
- Overly extensive curriculum
- Excessively large class sizes, too heavy a focus on marks, exam results and league tables
- Crisis in the teaching profession: marked by a growing number of departures and a lack of interest in teaching due to deteriorating working conditions, low salaries, diminishing prestige and demanding parental expectations
- Lack of autonomy for schools and teachers
- Mental health crisis among students and insufficient psychological support.

# Challenge 1: Systems

## Exacerbation of existing issues in the Polish school system – Polish teachers under pressure

The arrival of nearly 140,000 children and young people from Ukraine in Polish schools in 2022 has only deepened the challenges that the education system in Poland has been facing for years. These issues hinder an effective response to challenges posed by the incorporation of a large group of students with refugee backgrounds and trauma, who may not be fluent in the Polish language.

Every year, thousands of Polish teachers leave their profession. In 2023, this number exceeded 4,500 (approximately 0.5% of all teaching positions in public education)<sup>4</sup>.

Demands on teachers are increasing particularly due to the crisis and the influx of foreign students. Beyond adjusting their teaching methods to meet the needs of new students, teachers are also expected to provide psychological and pedagogical support. This is especially true for Polish language and foreign language teachers, who are tasked with additional Polish as a Foreign Language lessons. These mounting challenges may lead to a rise in the number of educators leaving the profession, potentially exacerbating the crisis.

## Overload of learning in two systems

Some Ukrainian students are simultaneously enrolled in both Polish schools and Ukrainian schools (online, in the evenings). This dual-learning mode, particularly prevalent during the first year after their arrival in Poland, placed a significant burden on the children. Recently, Ukrainian schools have begun to recognise subjects completed in Polish schools, which has partially alleviated the problem. However, many students, especially those in secondary education, continue to navigate both educational systems. This leads to fatigue and diminishes their energy for integrating or learning Polish. Determining the extent of this phenomenon is challenging due to the absence of shared data on school attendance between Poland and Ukraine.



*Now, a teacher is expected to be a teacher, educator, therapist, psychologist, guidance counsellor, cultural assistant, work 40 hours a week, go on a school trip on the weekend, and have time for parents. [World Café]*

*Person 1: How many hours do you have this year?*

*Person 2: I have 42; I don't have time to think.*

*Person 1: I have 30. I'm knackered. You can't do anything meaningful with 30 hours [Teachers in a World Café]*

*We are overloaded and undervalued. Many people cannot endure this, and the war has added to the expectations without any additional compensation. Without serious changes, more and more people will leave the profession. [Teachers, FGI]*



*Some children receive education in Ukrainian and Polish schools. Imagine the pressure on these students. When the kids come in the afternoon, instead of resting, they start another set of classes. They were almost exhausted from online schooling. [Assistants, FGI]*

<sup>4</sup> Ministry of Education data as quoted in: <https://samorzad.pap.pl/kategoria/edukacja/ilu-nauczycieli-ubedzie-w-szkolach-do-konca-2023-roku-mein-podalo-statystyki-dla>



## Barriers to integration

The absence of a common language and the lack of preparation among school communities for welcoming individuals from another country and culture present significant obstacles to the integration of Ukrainian students. Moreover, there are few targeted measures in place to facilitate their integration. This issue is especially evident in schools where Ukrainian students are placed in separate, all-Ukrainian classes. Even in schools that have mixed classes, Polish and Ukrainian students frequently form separate groups, resulting in limited interaction between them.

## Intercultural assistants – few and lacking support

In most schools, there are too few intercultural assistants for the number of Ukrainian students in the Polish education system, if any. By the end of 2023, 235 intercultural assistants were employed in Polish schools to provide support<sup>5</sup>. In this situation, they can only react to the most critical cases rather than provide comprehensive support to students, teachers, and parents.

They often have refugee experiences themselves and additionally deal with the difficult experiences of the students. This means they may also require psychological support. They lack knowledge and skills in psychology which means they are unable to help children effectively and unaware of the need to prioritise their self-care.

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*In schools where there are few Ukrainian students, they rarely form peer relationships with Poles and often feel isolated. Ukrainian students tend to form cliques and stick together. Even those who are scattered across different classes still gather together during breaks, and if they participate in school activities, they often try to create their own group. [Headteachers, FGI]*

*In my class, there is one girl from Ukraine. She is very lonely – her other friends changed classes or schools. I feel like I should do more to help her, but I don't know what. Moreover, she is older due to differences in the Polish and Ukrainian education systems. This doesn't make things easier, and for teenagers between 16 and 18, it's a significant age difference. [Headteachers, FGI]*

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*When one person is responsible for 100 children, it's almost impossible to do anything effectively. You work with those children who are in the worst situation. But those who are coping a little better also need this support. They are not to blame for learning or behaving better. [Assistants, FGI]*

*I am alone in the school where there are 200 Ukrainian children. I can't effectively focus on a specific class, on a specific child, because I have to go from one class to another, then I have consultation hours, and then I go to those children. [Assistants, FGI]*

<sup>5</sup> As quoted by Polish Ministry of Education spokesperson, after: <https://oko.press/bezbronni-wojna-w-ukrainie-to-koszmar-dla-mlodych-uchodzcow>.

# Challenge 2: Languages

## Language – a missing foundation for integration and education

Language plays a crucial role in any refugee crisis, and the situation in Poland is no exception. A unique challenge here is that neither the refugees nor the host communities have experience in dealing with large populations who do not speak their language, those who are attempting to learn it, or those who require instruction in it. However, there are benefits to the fact that only two languages – Polish and Ukrainian – are involved, and literacy rates are exceptionally high in both contexts.

The primary obstacle in facilitating the education and integration of Ukrainian children and young people, as highlighted by representatives of school communities, is the lack of a common language among students, between students and teachers, and between teachers and parents. This lack of language proficiency not only deepens trauma, as it creates a sense of isolation due to the inability to communicate, but it also inhibits satisfactory

educational achievements – which leads to students dropping out of the education system – and hinders the provision of specialised interventions, which require language proficiency. Furthermore, for older children, the absence of a common language significantly complicates the formation of peer relationships. Teachers are confronted with a dilemma: should they focus on most of the class, potentially leaving Ukrainian children behind, or concentrate on the Ukrainian children at the expense of the needs of Polish students?

This issue becomes particularly acute in the context of school-leaving exams (after the 8th grade and at the end of high school). The lack of adapted exam materials and unrealistic expectations regarding language proficiency led to poor outcomes for Ukrainian students, jeopardising their educational opportunities.

## Language of communication vs. language of education

Experts emphasise that teachers and school leaders rarely understand the difference between the language of everyday communication and the language of education (specialised vocabulary used in subject lessons). The latter is often missing in language lessons provided for Ukrainian students.

Mastering the language of education takes several years, yet Ukrainian students are expected to be proficient in it within a year of arriving in Poland. Translating content into Ukrainian is not a straightforward solution, as some topics are being learnt and are already understood in Polish.

Collaboration between subject teachers and Polish language teachers (identifying the vocabulary relevant to upcoming topics) would improve chances of quickly and effectively learning the language of education – unfortunately, currently, such collaboration doesn't exist.



*For communication, a one-year preparatory class might be sufficient. But what about the language of education? This includes terminology that is challenging for our children, such as photosynthesis, anions, or participles. It takes about 5–7 years for a child thrown into the context of another country to manage without an assistant in class and to grasp the entire material on this substantive level. Most teachers are not aware of this. [World Café]*

*[In exams] there are questions in Ukrainian, but some children have already learned the topic in Polish, and don't know how to solve a task in their language. Perhaps there should be questions in both languages, allowing the use of either language depending on the level of language proficiency. [World Café]*

## Misconceptions about teaching Polish as a foreign language

Headteachers often lack expertise in teaching Polish as a foreign language, particularly with a focus on communicative and educational purposes. In the absence of standardised guidelines and a curriculum, they are tasked with organising teaching independently, which can lead to methodological errors and the allocation of inappropriate instructors for these lessons. In situations where a school lacks a specialist in teaching Polish as a foreign language, a viable solution could be to appoint a teacher of other foreign languages – who is not necessarily a Polish philologist – as the Polish language teacher for foreign students. Additionally, there is a notable shortage of materials tailored for the practical learning of Polish by students. The available textbooks tend to mirror general foreign language textbooks, with an emphasis on grammar and vocabulary, rather than on practical language use.

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*In the research we conducted in the Pomeranian Voivodeship, Ukrainian students declared that they mainly learn grammar and vocabulary. It is language theory, not practical language use. Only a few students declared that they learnt subject-specific vocabulary in such classes. And this should be an essential part! [Educational expert, FGI]*

*Headteachers may have a specific perception of what language is – that it is grammar, vocabulary. This perception is based on how they learned a language and took exams themselves, in their youth. Meanwhile, the language that students need is the classroom language. How to ask if they can go to the bathroom, the basics of mathematical vocabulary. They need that, not the names of tenses and cases. [Educational expert, FGI]*



# Challenge 3: Mental health

## Systemic elements exacerbate mental wellbeing issues

Many high-performing students who achieved good grades in Ukraine find their self-worth compromised due to a significant decline in their educational performance. This decline is attributed to language barriers, differences in curricula, and the absence of systemic solutions to facilitate a smoother integration into the new educational system. As a result, they struggle to understand the material, receive poor grades, and may even need to repeat a year. Furthermore, Ukrainian youth placed in lower grades than their age would often feel degraded and isolated among younger peers.

Additionally, the trauma of war and displacement can be worsened using typical lesson materials and topics which are often centred around “my family” and “my home”, highlighting the urgent need for special care in the preparation of trauma-informed educational materials.

## Insufficient psychological support

The ongoing issue of a shortage of mental health specialists in Polish schools is particularly impacting Ukrainian students, who are in dire need of support. A significant obstacle is the scarcity of specialists fluent in the refugees’ native languages – critical for psychological interventions, which rely heavily on language and require a high level of mutual understanding. Furthermore, especially for younger Ukrainian students, schools are often the only accessible source of such support. They cannot depend on external providers (NGOs or the private sector) due to their inability to travel independently to locations where assistance is available. This is compounded by the fact that their parents typically work late hours and have limited mobility, relying primarily on public transportation. Teachers themselves report deficiencies in skills to provide psychological interventions and a lack of support from pedagogical and psycho-social advisers.



*Some teachers don't think about the books they use. Because there are topics, for example, my family. But these children can't talk about their families. Because they have a father on the frontlines, for example. The next topic is my home. And the child doesn't have a home. Doesn't have a room. And teachers are not aware of this. When they start thinking about it, they begin to prepare for classes so as not to bring up these topics, and not to deepen this trauma. So, it's a very specific situation where teachers must be aware of what they bring to the classroom. [Assistants, FGI]*

*A seemingly innocent topic, “Talk about a weird place where you have slept”. Someone says on the beach, someone else says another location, and the girls say, “We spent two weeks in the basement.” And what do you say? How do you react? [World Café]*



*Psychologists and therapists face a serious language barrier. With teachers, basic communication sometimes suffices, without delving into details. However, with specialists, students need to talk about emotions – overcoming the language barrier in such cases is very challenging. It is frustrating – without the language, specialists cannot assist. [Educational expert, FGI]*



## Negative attitudes towards psychological support

The use of psychological assistance is not as normalised in Ukraine as it is in Poland. Ukrainian parents and the students themselves, particularly the older ones, fear the stigmatisation associated with visiting a psychologist.

In Ukraine, the role of a psychologist and a guidance counsellor is different than in Poland. Meeting with such a professional is seen as a last resort, indicating serious disorders – consequently, parents are apprehensive, and avoid contact with these specialists.

## Difficult family situation deepens mental crisis

Many Ukrainian families function as separated families – fathers are in Ukraine, contact with them is limited, and children are in Poland with their mothers. Often principal caregivers are also in a difficult situation and poor mental state, they need help.

Mothers are working, they lack the time and energy they could dedicate to their children. As a result, children can be neglected, and as a result, some of them exhibit challenging behaviour.

Additionally, older children are often burdened with caregiving responsibilities: they must take care of younger siblings in place of their working mothers.



*I have two boys in my class who... I'm not a specialist, but I'd guess they are on the autistic spectrum. Polish kids have developmental problems too. The difference is that I go to the Polish parent, and in 95% of cases, the parent rushes to the counselling centre. The Ukrainian parent says, 'No, don't tell me my child is not normal.' [Headteachers, FGI]*

*We need to change the perception of guidance counsellors in the eyes of these Ukrainian families because they don't utilise their help. In the Ukrainian system, the status of such a person is entirely different. Visiting them means it's just a disaster, right? There, you call the parent only when the child is on the verge of being removed from school. [World Café]*



*Mothers who came here are forced to work. Often, for 8–10 hours a day they are not at home, which means the child is unsupervised, and again, this entails psychological problems for the child, who has no opportunity to just talk with their mum about it. When mum comes back from work, she doesn't have the strength or resources to talk because there's still cleaning up, food preparation, shopping to do, and the day is over [...] And the child is seemingly not alone, but they really are alone." [Assistants, FGI]*



# Challenge 4: Family and community misunderstanding

## Sense of temporariness among Ukrainian students

Ukrainian parents believe that their situation is temporary. They keep their children in uncertainty about their future and the place where they will live – in Poland or Ukraine.

For students, the prolonged sense of temporariness translates into:

- Lack of a sense of belonging, disinterest in integration, reluctance to learn Polish, and not forming new acquaintances.
- Lack of engagement in learning – the Polish education system is not perceived as permanent.



*A girl in the seventh grade declared, “This is not my school. I am only here for a while, and I will soon return home. I don’t have to speak Polish at all, and besides, I was home during the holidays, and I’m just waiting to finish the eighth grade because that’s what my mum decided, and then I’m going back to Ukraine.” [Headteachers, FGI]*

*We see this in other refugee crises. For the first 12–18 months, people always think it’s a temporary situation, and that they will return home soon. After this time, there comes an understanding that this may not be true. It’s a very difficult moment. [International Organisations, FGI]*

## Challenges in cooperation with parents

Various factors hinder effective collaboration with parents, including their excessive workload, challenging life circumstances, poor mental health, and the perception that their stay is temporary. A significant obstacle to communication is the absence of a common language, which can only be mitigated if an intercultural assistant is available. School principals often expect the issue of difficult collaboration to “resolve itself” over time as parents gradually learn the language, rarely pursuing alternative and more immediate solutions.

Ukrainian parents frequently do not engage with educational platforms, facing challenges with usability and language barriers. Contrary to practices in Ukraine, they are unable to simply call a teacher, which disrupts their connection with the school. Furthermore, Polish schools seldom view parents as partners. Coercive tactics are often used to elicit desired behaviours from Ukrainian parents, further straining relationships.



*[Parents] come and declare that they only speak Ukrainian. Fortunately, we have Mrs. Svitlana employed as student support, and she helps us with the language. [Headteachers, FGI]*

*[Parents] don’t want to come to school, they are afraid. In Ukraine, when parents are summoned to school, it means serious trouble, so here too, they think that if we summon them, it means the child will be expelled from school. [Teachers, FGI]*

*I hadn’t seen [a student’s] mother for two years. I said: ‘Nikita, tell your mum that if she doesn’t have contact with the school, I’ll send her a letter with a stamp’. She was there at the first lesson on Monday, waiting by my door. [Headteachers, FGI]*

## Pedagogical and developmental issues

Teachers and school leaders raise concerns about numerous undiagnosed developmental disorders among students from Ukraine, hindering their ability to maximise their potential. Undiagnosed conditions also make it challenging for teachers and other specialists to effectively care for these students. The issue is exacerbated by a shortage of professionals who can diagnose and alleviate those disorders.

A particular challenge is the lack of specialists who work in Ukrainian or Russian. In light of this shortage, teachers, school leaders and educational experts stress the need to develop tools for diagnosing students who do not speak Polish, to be used by Polish-speaking professionals.

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*Many Ukrainian students have problems that go undiagnosed – we see that there is some problem, but we cannot make a diagnosis. A teacher or psychologist who should make a diagnosis doesn't speak Ukrainian or Russian, and the student doesn't speak Polish – here we would need a tool that allows this to be done without language. Or a specialist who speaks Ukrainian. [Teachers, FGI]*

*Our psychologists contribute to Ukrainians avoiding them. A child with suspected dyslexia comes back with the [psychologist's] opinion that she is well below the norm. I asked the student to tell me what happened. 'The teacher gave me texts, told me to read, and then asked about words from the text'. 'Did you understand what was in this text?' – I ask. She understood a little over half." [Headteachers, FGI]*



## The limited openness to diversity in Polish society and schools

For a long time after World War II, Poland was largely homogeneous, and thus, cultural, and ethnic diversity represents a relatively new challenge. Nowadays teachers are often ill-prepared to work with children and youth who are encountering individuals from other countries. They struggle to prepare their students for the inclusion of culturally distinct groups in classrooms and schools. Ukrainian students encounter discrimination and hate speech outside of school as well, further impacting their sense of safety and belonging.

## Inability to resolve conflicts – a long-standing issue

According to educational experts, the arrival of ethnically diverse groups in Polish schools has revealed a widespread lack of conflict resolution skills. Teachers are often not equipped with mediation and conflict resolution competencies, affecting their ability to handle not just cultural and national conflicts but all types of disagreements. The most common strategies for addressing conflicts in schools – assigning blame or ignoring tensions until violence erupts – tend to escalate the situation. This issue is prevalent across all conflicts, not just those with an ethnic component. However, distinctive factors, such as language differences and limited interaction between Polish and Ukrainian groups, exacerbate the perception of these conflicts as ethnically based.

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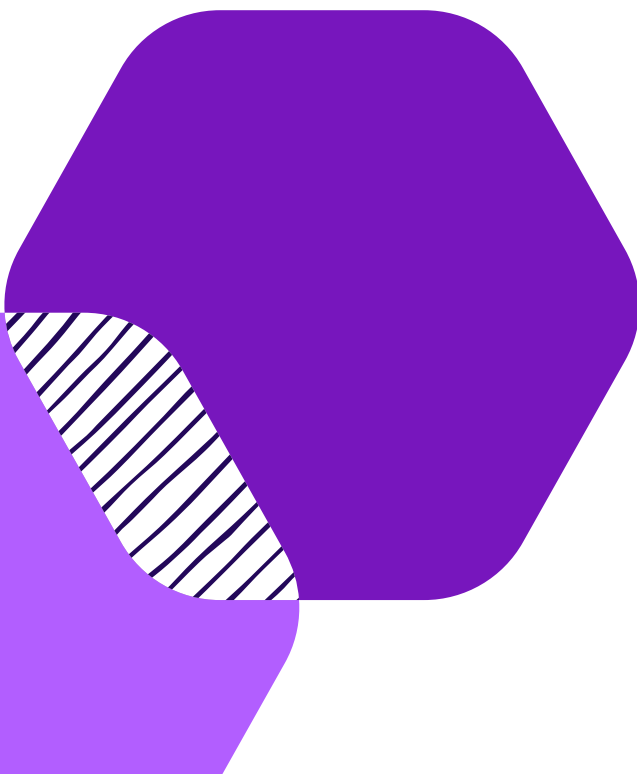
*We are not a tolerant nation. This often becomes a source of conflict. It all starts in the family and is transferred from parents to children. In my school, there was a conflict between a group of Polish and Ukrainian boys. One of the Polish boys said, ‘We don’t need you here, go back to your country! That’s what my dad says!’ [Teachers, FGI]*

*We also cannot ignore the fact of, well, bullying. That also manifests, unfortunately, in some classes. There is work to be done not only with Ukrainian students but also with Polish ones because for them it’s a kind of new reality as well. [International Organisations, FGI]*

*They hear a lot of unfriendly comments on the bus, in the city. They perceive media information completely differently than we do. [Headteachers, FGI]*

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*There was this ‘sports hooligan’ from my school, with a criminal record, as they say. During a football match, he tried to beat up a Ukrainian colleague. He miscalculated because he chose the vice-champion of Ukraine in boxing. An ambulance was called for him. A discussion began on the parents’ forum about some Polish-Ukrainian war going on here. I say: no! Yuri hit Kuba because Kuba jumped on him. If Kuba got upset and didn’t have Yuri next to him, but Marek, he would jump on Marek. Sometimes we want to see national conflicts when they are only conflicts between peers.” [Headteachers, FGI]*





## Lack of knowledge about the system leading to uninformed decisions

The lack of knowledge about the Polish education system among parents and students (not knowing which class and school to choose, having to choose an educational profile earlier than in Ukraine) can lead to difficulties for the students. Parents may opt for overly demanding schools, schools that do not allow students to pursue higher levels of education or decide to approach exams too quickly. These decisions can discourage students from continuing education and negatively impact their well-being.

The situation is especially problematic in schools focused on students' results and league tables. When, due to fear of lowering results, no special measures are introduced to safeguard students with refugee backgrounds, young Ukrainians struggle with the material due to language barriers and curriculum differences.

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*[There is a need for] consultation with parents, explaining how the education system works, and what to choose. For example, a girl came with her father. She left school in Ukraine, went to the eighth grade here, and passed the primary school leaving exam. And I'm listening, and thinking, "What did she do!?" Of course, the child received zero points on that exam. [Assistants FGI]*

*They are admitted to school in good faith. But then they fail because exams and tests come. They are frustrated. In our school, there is a girl who is repeating the year. I'm really afraid of what will happen to her because she is bound to fail again this year. [Teachers, FGI]*



# What does the future hold?

## Potential risks

Despite recognising the complex risks inherent in the still-challenging situation, participants in focus groups of teachers and school leaders remained largely optimistic. However, this optimism appeared to be grounded more in hope than in the observation of tangible changes moving in the desired direction. They believe that many issues will “solve themselves” over time: language proficiency among students and parents will naturally improve, teachers will innovate their working methods, and the cohorts facing the most difficulties will eventually transition out of the education system. Currently, the most pressing problems are not being systematically addressed at the school level but are rather tackled by individual teachers. The only risk identified concerns the premature cessation of support, particularly financial before the situation in schools stabilises.

Representatives from international organisations emphasised the risk of repeating errors observed in other host countries. They warned against the “Syrian scenario” – the normalisation of crisis conditions without significant systemic solutions, leading to a resigned acceptance of the crisis as the new normal. This approach risks diminishing support, a trend already noticeable in Poland.

A second risk is identified as the seeming resolution of the crisis: successive cohorts of Ukrainian students entering the Polish education system will likely adapt more effectively to Polish realities, becoming more familiar with the language and culture and not viewing the Polish education system as merely a temporary solution. The danger lies in overlooking the initial cohorts who arrived in Poland and faced substantial challenges – psychological issues, language barriers and integration difficulties. If these issues are not addressed while these students are still within the system, their circumstances could pose a significant social challenge.

These risks are expanded below.

### Risk 1: Ethnically homogeneous classes – a challenge for future integration

Over the coming few years, a language and educational culture-related challenge may arise for students who are currently studying in “Ukrainian-only” classes, as they transition to higher-level schools.

School leaders explain the existence of such segregation as being driven by the decisions of Ukrainian parents who convinced that their stay in Poland is temporary, prefer to enrol their children in “Ukrainian” classes. Such practices are also indirectly enforced by Polish parents who, in some schools, avoid enrolling their children in classes where a significant proportion of students are Ukrainian.



*I have two or three classes that are typically Ukrainian, and isolated. They generally function well – I can see it as I teach one of them. They are not very unhappy. However, their integration process is disrupted, and it will undoubtedly be more challenging for them soon. They feel good in our school because they have a Ukrainian teacher, so they feel safe. But shortly, they will face challenges, especially when they encounter exams and leave school, so it's a problem in the perspective of 2–3 years.” [Principals, FGI]*

*From experience, I know that the best integration for Ukrainian children is to integrate them directly into Polish classes, not to leave them in a Ukrainian class. They integrate and function best when they are with Polish children right away. [Assistants, FGI]*

## Risk 2: Crisis as the “New Normal”

Experts from international organisations, as well as teachers, note that the crisis might become the “new normal” within 1–2 years. It would mean returning to ways of functioning that do not consider the changes that have occurred in Polish schools throughout the war in Ukraine. They underline that to properly manage the crisis (both in schools and in the social dimension), awareness of the ongoing crisis is needed.

The “end of the crisis” and the “normalisation” of the situation in the case of a prolonged conflict may also translate to a sharp decline in state and international support in areas that still require intervention (psychological assistance, material support).

## Risk 3: Discontinuation of support

According to teachers and school leaders, a significant risk of disrupting the process of integrating Ukrainian students into Polish communities may be associated with the already visible withdrawal of funding support in the areas where it is most urgently needed:

- Psychological support,
- Language support (additional lessons and assistants necessary for several more years),
- Adapting educational materials and requirements – especially exams – to the student’s needs,
- Material support – students’ families not being able to fulfil their basic needs, such as food (school lunches for those in need) or housing, deepens uncertainty, prevents students from integrating and poses an additional challenge for schools.



*For some of our organisations, the longer it lasts, there’s a chance that it stops becoming a crisis. And when it stops being regarded as a crisis, it means that the Plan International can’t fund it or UNICEF can’t fund it, or the funding isn’t coming in from the donors to help us make provisions where it’s needed. [International Organisations, FGI]*



*I would like them not to be cut off from this help and attention. Just because they’ve been in school for a year doesn’t mean they cope with the language, and everything is great. For example, they move on to taking exams, and we should focus on them a bit more here.” [Headteachers, FGI]*

*We had a foundation with us for three months. They got a little room, and the guy spoke Polish and Ukrainian, helping those kids. Donors from Qatar paid for it. They paid until December, and in January, there was no more psychological assistance.” [Headteachers, FGI]*

*Accommodation centres are being closed – this is an additional destabilising factor in students’ lives. Already now in schools, we hear about situations, where Ukrainian families change their place of residence every two weeks.” [Educational Experts, FGI]*



### Risk 4: Today outside the education system – risk of exclusion in the future

All groups participating in the study concur that the extended exclusion of many children from any educational system could lead to significant social issues in the future. This concern is particularly relevant for a substantial portion of the nearly 150,000 Ukrainian school-age children and young people currently not enrolled in the Polish educational system. Children and young people who disengage from education risk encountering difficulties in the job market and may struggle to meet their life needs independently. There is a concern that, as adults, they might become reliant on social benefits or engage in risky behaviours, including substance abuse or violence.

In December 2023, there was little information about Ukrainian children and young people who were not in education – though their number may be large. A report published by Care, IRC, and Save the Children in February 2024<sup>6</sup> suggests a conservative minimum of over 100,000 individuals out of school. The report also highlights the linguistic and cultural issues faced by young people who drop out of school, the challenges related to their caregivers,

and the transfer of credits, as particularly significant. Young Ukrainians studying online may be occupied for now, and in the near future, but at some point, they will age out of education, and then their lack of experience in face-to-face development may be an issue. The earlier they can be engaged in person – whether by schools or by non-formal education – the better.



*A child thinks that in five months, they will return to Ukraine, but they don't go back, and they stay in this limbo. It can then generate social problems because they are disappointed, as they stay. It would be nice for them to get to know our education system a bit so that they learn a bit of Polish so that if they stay here, it will be easier for them to continue their education. In effect, it will be easier for Polish society, too. [Headteachers, FGI]*

*We risk having an increasingly large group of 18, 19 and 20-year-olds facing a really dull future in the job market. We will deal with a large group of young adults who have no education or chances for employment. [International Organisations, FGI]*

<sup>6</sup>Save the Children Poland, “Out of School: An Assessment of Barriers to School Enrollment for Ukrainian Refugee Youth in Poland,” [Online]. Available: <https://poland.savethechildren.net/news/report-out-school-assessment-barriers-school-enrollment-ukrainian-refugee-youth-poland>.



## Risk 5: Compulsory education for children and young people from Ukraine – an ambivalent solution

### Reluctance on the Ukrainian side

According to teachers, educational experts, and representatives of international organisations, imposing an obligation to attend Polish schools would antagonise a significant number of Ukrainian students and parents.

This matter is politically sensitive: the obligation to attend Polish schools could become a point of contention between Poland and Ukraine at the government level.



*I think it would be a very difficult decision for the Polish government because it would mean an open confrontation with the parents and with the Ukrainian government. About half of the children are outside of the system. And some of them don't want to go to a Polish school. [...] And Ukrainian government is trying to encourage them to forge a strong connection with Ukraine's educational system because they need those children after the war to come back and rebuild the country. [International Organisations, FGI]*

### Doubts on the Polish side

According to school leaders, teachers, and experts, imposing compulsory schooling is the surest way to avoid serious social consequences. However, the Polish education system would face challenges accommodating all students currently outside the system. Additionally, there is a lack of tools to enforce the obligation.

As an optimal solution, educational experts propose compulsory schooling – preferably offline – with the option to choose the system (Polish or Ukrainian) and monitor the obligation.



*There is no obligation for the impossible – there is a Latin saying. Ukrainian students are not in the Polish population registry, and schools do not have information about where they reside, so who is supposed to check whether they meet schooling obligation or not? [Headteachers, FGI]*





# Recommendations

The below-listed recommendations focus on professional development for teachers, systemic reforms, language bridging, sharing best practices, student support, cultural competence, and collaboration between schools, families, and communities. These recommendations aim to enhance the educational experience and promote inclusivity.

## 1. Systemic change

Teachers and experts from international organisations pointed out that there is no coherent strategy and coordination of actions above the school level. There is a clear expectation that such a strategy will be developed, facilitating, and harmonising the efforts of different schools and teachers – while at the same time flexing to feedback from the schools.

To effectively support Ukrainian students, according to conference participants, systemic problems that have been raised in Polish schools for many years need to be addressed. It requires:

- Reducing the curriculum requirements to leave more time for individual work with students or adapting teaching to diverse needs.
- Smaller class sizes to ensure conditions for more individualised work with students.
- Reducing the emphasis on exam results and grades in the education system – the emphasis on summative grades discriminates against and discourages foreign students, but it also puts pressure on teachers not to individualise requirements.
- Greater autonomy for teachers and school leaders in shaping the content, scope, and methods of teaching and assessment.



*There is a lack of a top-down, even ministerial, action plan. A long-term one. We don't know where this situation will lead us, and I have the impression that we are just managing somehow because we succeed. I feel that we often reinvent the wheel. [World Café]*



## 2. English language – a possible space for integration

Many students and teachers possess a certain level of English proficiency, allowing it to serve as a common means of communication when there is no other shared language between individuals speaking different native languages. It's also crucial to address the symbolic inequalities that arise from Ukrainian students' lesser command of Polish. In the realm of English, all students stand on equal footing. Headteachers have observed that incorporating English into communication among children and with children can also enhance English language learning. They view this as a potential advantage that could appeal to Polish parents.



*The appearance of new classmates is an opportunity for our students to experience real bilingualism in the class. But above all, in our school, English is a safe bridge between students, thanks to which everyone is on an equal level. A language other than Polish and Ukrainian provides a safe communication space for both sides. [Primary school headteacher, Panel discussion]*

## 3. Psychological and pedagogical support

Ensuring continuous pedagogical and psychological support is a pressing need, especially for Ukrainian students – including services in their native languages – and for Polish students, who are also significantly impacted by the current situation. Expanding assistance to Ukrainian parents is another important consideration. Additionally, caregivers should be informed about the importance and role of psychological support. Furthermore, there is an additional need for staff and resources (either in Ukrainian/Russian or not dependent on language) capable of diagnosing and supporting Ukrainian children with developmental disorders.



*Psychologists shouldn't only work with Ukrainians because they might be traumatised, but also because they're living in a new environment, so this is a more complex question. Polish students are also living in a different environment now because their classroom reality has changed, and they need assistance too. [International Organisations, FGI]*

*That's widely overlooked, but these children are undiagnosed; they have various problems – not only related to post-war trauma but simply developmental issues that children of this age struggle with. [Headteachers, FGI]*



## 4. Continuing intercultural assistants' programmes

Assistants play a critical role in providing linguistic, educational, psychological, and educational support for children, allowing them to communicate about their experiences in their native language. An important aspect of their role includes raising teachers' awareness of the students' needs. Although Poland has partially liberalised the requirements for becoming a 'teacher's assistant', the availability of assistant positions remains insufficient and has been declining since a peak in 2022<sup>7</sup>. Teachers and school leaders believe that having an assistant in every school that teaches children with a refugee background is the most viable solution for the future.

Intercultural assistants themselves need psychological support and psychological education, as psychological support for students has become a major part of their work.



*An intercultural assistant is a liaison, a person who builds bridges between students and teachers, parents, and teachers, but also between teachers and school management. This person understands the Ukrainian context and can guide teachers based on the local situation. For example, we had a boy who was unresponsive in class. It turned out he was from Mariupol. I explained to the teachers that, in his case, education could wait, and the most important need was for safety because he was constantly thinking about Ukraine. [Panel discussion]*

*What we need the most is probably psychological support. Some workshops for us so that we can work more with the children on this aspect. [Assistants, FGI]*

## 5. Multi-cultural learning spaces

Creating spaces for integration within schools is crucial. This involves adopting teaching methods that facilitate interaction despite language barriers. Such methods can include project work in mixed groups, integrating elements of art and craftsmanship and promoting integration through sports activities. Equally important are shared extracurricular experiences, such as trips, outings, or spending time together in spaces designed for leisure. With a focus on integration, teachers highlight the necessity of expanding the network of venues (e.g., afternoon clubs, not necessarily school-affiliated) where students of all nationalities can gather, complete homework, and participate in extracurricular activities. Integration is vital not just for fostering social connections but also for educational benefits – stronger peer relationships help safeguard against absenteeism.



*We have a café, and the children integrate wonderfully into it. They have their own equipped space with dishes, cups, a kettle, everything. They just need to clean up after themselves. And it's tidy there, cleaner than in the teachers' room. So, we can create this for them, but we need someone to introduce Ukrainian students to it. [Teachers, World Café]*

<sup>7</sup> <https://serwisy.gazetaprawna.pl/edukacja/artykuly/9293382,polska-szkola-staje-sie-wielokulturowa-brakuje-asystentow-miedzykultu.html>

## 6. Multi-cultural teaching techniques

Participants of the research session pointed out several methods that are worth utilising in the teaching of mixed classes:

- Project-based learning is friendlier to students with a different native language than the language of instruction, and additionally, promotes integration. However, more flexible curriculums might be necessary to employ it on a wider scale.
- Working in smaller groups, which does not require contributions in a whole class setting.
- Methodologies used in foreign language teaching, such as group work, conversations, idea exchange and basing teaching on conversation and communication, are integration-friendly and stimulate the activity of non-Polish students.

## 7. Employ Ukrainian teachers

Teachers and educational experts call for the more effective integration of Ukrainian teachers and psychologists into the Polish education system. Session participants believe this approach could address numerous challenges, including language barriers and the scarcity of specialists fluent in Ukrainian. At present, the considerable talents of Ukrainian educators and psychologists are underutilised, which not only squanders their potential but also restricts the professional and personal growth opportunities available to these Ukrainian specialists. The inability to employ Ukrainian English teachers in Polish schools, in particular, has been met with bewilderment by both teachers and experts.

## 8. Multi-cultural School Leadership

Ukrainian students and parents should be integrated as integral members of the school community, rather than being viewed as separate entities or “guests”. Treating them as partners entails a greater sense of responsibility within the community for both incoming students and parents and helps prevent the formation of mental barriers between Poles and Ukrainians. It’s crucial to actively involve students and their parents in the planning and implementation of school projects designed for them, as well as in assessing student needs. Such involvement not only reinforces their status as key members of the school community but also grants them a vital sense of agency over their environment.



*In the whole class, my daughter is afraid to speak because someone might say something, or comment on it. But in a small group, she starts talking, and getting along with the children. [Assistants, FGI]*

*Language teachers are often much more open to this. Language teaching is more humanistic than a lot of other forms of teaching. It’s natural to get students to work together in groups to share ideas. Speaking is collaborative. It must be. But maths, science, everything else is not so much. Again, I think it’s very frustrating for language teachers because you want to do this, but your colleagues are not embracing it. [Educational expert, FGI]*



*I believe that we’ve got a huge number of psychologists, teachers, etc. I know that it may be difficult to allow a subject teacher who doesn’t speak Polish to work with kids, but for me, I can’t understand the situation that an English teacher cannot work in a Polish school. We invite native speakers [to deliver classes] and [in the case of Ukrainians] suddenly there is a problem. And also there surely are people who can help us with major problems, like psychologists, for example, specialists. I believe that we should use the potential. [Teachers, FGI]*



*We talk about problems as the problems of the entire school – not through the lens of Poles versus Ukrainians. When we deal with conflicts among students, we view it as a conflict among students – regardless of their nationality. [...] In lessons as well – we try to treat students of both nationalities equally. They are not just learning about the geography of Poland, but teachers choose examples to talk about soil or population structure using examples from Ukraine, so there is mutual learning. [Headteacher, Panel Discussion]*

## 9. School-community-family: joined up approaches

The well-being of students is significantly influenced by the condition of their entire families, making it essential to address their needs for students to thrive in educational settings. Beyond the psychological support for parents previously discussed, conference participants recommended organising sessions for parents. These sessions would explain the workings of the Polish education system, set realistic expectations about what schools can offer and clarify any limitations. Additionally, there was a noted need for support in parenting skills, a resource that should be made available to both Ukrainian and Polish parents. The challenging situation of students often results from difficult living conditions – schools should more effectively identify families and students in need, providing, for example, lunches to those who require them. Schools should also have easy access to information on where parents can find assistance (e.g., legal, housing), to enable them to be able to signpost parents accordingly. Participants of the research session stated that they would gladly welcome a simple and accessible database of available support and aid organisations.

## 10. Communicating the benefits of multicultural classes

It is important to overcome concerns and resistance towards integration on the part of Polish parents. Panel discussion participants pointed out that multiculturalism brings significant value, which should be emphasised in communication with parents:

- Linguistic aspects: Children often have contact with English, as they use it to communicate with peers from another country outside language classes.
- Learning Ukrainian: a language that will become increasingly common in Poland, and proficiency in it can be an important asset in later life.
- Preparation for life in an inevitably multicultural society of the future.

## 11. Sharing best practices among schools and teachers

Many teachers working with children from Ukraine feel compelled to independently seek out solutions that have already been tested, either in another school within Poland or in countries with more experience in accommodating foreign students. The methods employed by the participating schools in the study varied significantly. It was only during the conference that their representatives had the opportunity to exchange these strategies. Compiling best practices into a handbook, brochure, or dedicated website would be beneficial. Organising workshops and meetings for this purpose is also encouraged, particularly for teachers of non-foreign language subjects who may have less experience with innovative teaching methods.



*This conference is already the third or fourth opportunity for me to talk about these issues [related to the presence of Ukrainian students in Polish schools] – but again only among English teachers and other foreign language teachers. Maybe it's because we are more interested? But it also seems to me that teachers of other subjects do not have such opportunities, or they do not seek them. Inviting teachers of other subjects to such events would be a good idea. So that they can listen, better understand what is happening, and get suggestions on what they could do differently in their lessons. [Teachers, FGI]*



## 12. Teachers' continuing professional development

Teachers identified the need for support in the following areas:

- Professional training on working with migrant students, including addressing trauma, educational difficulties, and language gaps.
- Preparation for conducting psychological interventions and working with students with trauma; they would welcome courses and materials on topics for which they were not prepared by their studies and previous work.
- Basic Ukrainian language courses for teachers – as a gesture of openness towards students, demonstrating efforts to meet the needs of students from outside Poland.
- Knowledge sources for subject teachers, such as guides and materials that advise on facilitating the participation of linguistically excluded students with refugee experience in subject lessons.
- Providing access to specialists (psychologists, educators) who could support teachers in interventions beyond their area of expertise – in psychological matters, and trauma-related issues, as well as in integration, conflict resolution, and preparation of Polish students to welcome classmates from another country and culture.

# Conclusions

The report underscores the urgent need for systemic changes, emphasizing their crucial role in the integration of students with refugee experiences. It highlights a significant correlation between these changes and the overall well-being and educational success of all students in the Polish education system.

The report *Empowering Education: Understanding Teachers' Needs in Multicultural Classrooms* outlines the path to creating a flexible support system that ensures equal access to quality education and serves as a foundation for building cohesive school communities.

It is worth noting that all data and insights in this report were collected from individuals involved in education. The experts participating in the research strongly advocate for a holistic school approach, considering it pivotal. The English language assumes a crucial role, not only as a tool but also as a facilitator of positive changes. Meanwhile, efforts to build resilience aim to have a positive impact on multicultural classrooms, leaving an indelible mark on the Polish education system and shaping a more resilient and inclusive future.

## Next steps

One of the immediate next steps should be to provide support for teachers working in multicultural classrooms, considering the identified needs and priorities within the school community. The continuation of actions supporting the student-refugee population from Ukraine in Poland will require decisive involvement from both the Ministry of National Education and institutions working on behalf of the government and local authorities.

Collaboration at various levels, identification of supporting individuals and potential partners, exploration of a whole-school approach, as well as conducting a needs analysis for students and implementing tailored solutions are essential steps for further development. It is crucial to emphasize the particular interest in supporting resilience and key skills, especially conflict resolution. We hope that all these efforts will make Ukrainian parents and students feel like partners in Polish schools, not guests.



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They develop and disseminate good practices, create tools to simplify the facilitation of social activities, conduct social research, they also train and develop educational materials.

The effects of the activities are used by e.g.: seniors, students and teachers, citizens, activists, and local government officials from all over Poland.



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