



# **SUPPORTING THE INTEGRATION OF UKRAINIAN REFUGEE CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS IN POLAND**

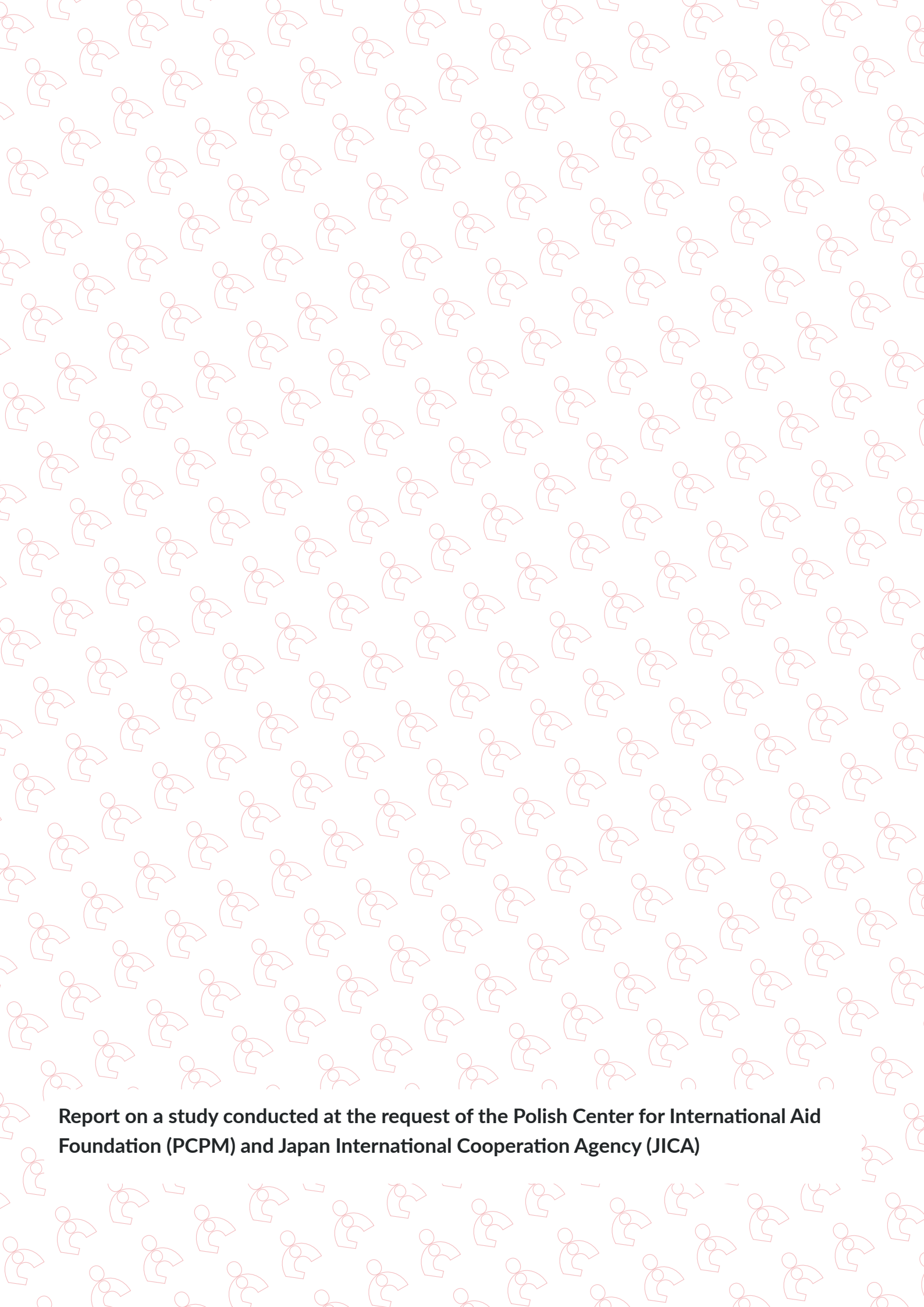
## **FACILITATING NOSTRIFICATION AND DIPLOMA RECOGNITION FOR UKRAINIAN EDUCATORS TO ALLEVIATE LOCAL SCHOOL BURDENS**

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**Report on a study conducted at the request of the Polish Center for International Aid Foundation (PCPM) and Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA)**

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## 1. SUMMARY

This report presents the results of a study commissioned by the Polish Center for International Aid (PCPM) Foundation and the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA). The study aimed to develop strategies to support the integration of refugee children and leverage the potential of Ukrainian teachers in the Polish education system to reduce the burden on schools.

The educational institutions surveyed, which are interested in employing Ukrainian staff, primarily need intercultural assistants and teacher aides, as well as staff for pedagogical roles, school pedagogues and psychologists, support teachers, and subject teachers. Facilitating the employment of these individuals includes: access to financial support (for diploma recognition, qualification courses, and postgraduate studies, as well as ensuring continuity of intercultural assistants' employment), Polish language courses, information about job vacancies and career paths, internships in educational institutions, and auxiliary roles until full qualifications are obtained. Schools can further support the employment of Ukrainians by clearly defining job responsibilities, maintaining an open and supportive attitude among school leadership and staff, and fostering a positive approach toward multiculturalism. Soft skills and the presence of a large number of Ukrainian students also facilitate employment.

The benefits of hiring Ukrainian staff for schools are multifaceted—psychological, social, educational, and organizational. These include supporting the mental well-being of students, promoting integration within the school community (including Ukrainian parents/guardians), and reducing the workload of teaching staff. The school also benefits from the exchange of experiences and good practices, which strengthens employees' competencies and changes the work

culture. Other benefits include filling vacancies and easier organization of additional classes or replacements. In addition, the possibility of using the potential of Ukrainian education staff and introducing changes in the education system of Polish language teachers in Ukraine is essential.

Ukrainian teachers face numerous obstacles in gaining employment in Polish schools, including a lack of systemic support, formal barriers, language difficulties, and low salaries due to unrecognized prior work experience. Other difficulties stem from cultural differences, unsupportive attitudes from school communities, lack of self-confidence, and emotional strain. Some logistical challenges include the need to relocate, a lack of proper working conditions for intercultural assistants (e.g., dedicated meeting rooms), and the short duration of NGO projects supporting Ukrainians' employment.

One significant barrier is the diploma recognition's substantive and administrative complexity, which lengthens and complicates the process. Substantive barriers include: legal regulations for professions such as teacher, speech therapist, and psychologist, differences between higher education systems, discrepancies in curricula leading to a recognized lower qualification level, and the non-recognition of professional experience. Diploma recognition is inconsistently coordinated and varies between universities, ranging from general diploma compatibility assessments to detailed curriculum comparisons, which may yield different outcomes. Administrative barriers include translation errors, applicants' unfamiliarity with procedures, incomplete documentation, the high cost and laborious nature of the nostrification, and an increasing number of applications.



Local governments, as the bodies overseeing educational institutions, can play a key role in supporting the integration of Ukrainian students and the employment of Ukrainian staff by financing salaries and language courses, disseminating job vacancy information, organizing integration workshops, and offering cultural awareness training. Examples of good practices include: establishing foreign student education teams and integration coordinators, welcome packages, hiring Ukrainian teachers and intercultural assistants, providing certified Polish language courses, supporting Psychological and Pedagogical Counseling Centers in students' diagnosis, and cooperating with NGOs that support refugee children.

Ukrainian staff can play a vital role in integrating refugee children. Ukrainian students face specific challenges, including language barriers, social and emotional problems often linked to war trauma, and difficulty adjusting to the Polish education system. The main challenges include: differences between the Polish and Ukrainian education systems, increased school enrollment due to linking the "800+" benefit to compulsory schooling, feelings of coercion among students and parents, and late entry into the Polish education system. Additional challenges stem from the complex emotional, material, and social situations of refugee children and the barriers to diagnosing and supporting students with special needs, which require good cooperation with parents. The rise in anti-Ukrainian sentiment in Poland, the lack of systemic solutions, and the absence of long-term integration policies have led to segregation between Polish and Ukrainian student groups.

Most surveyed schools support Ukrainian students through psychological and peer support, Polish language classes, integration activities, and curriculum adjustments. Schools can better address these children's difficulties through intercultural assistants' support and collaboration with parents/guardians, preparatory classes, subject tutoring, and teacher training. The integration process is also aided by systemic involvement from the Ministry of Education (via the "School for All" program and establishing an educational integration team), teacher professional development, and schools' openness to multiculturalism. Helpful elements include standards for working with refugee/migrant students, continuous integration efforts, smaller classes and group work, access to preschools and early education, clear rules for preparatory class placement, and using these classes not just for language instruction but also for integration and inclusion in the Polish education system.

Students from Ukraine during a lesson at the Education Centre in Warsaw





## 2. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the research results, several recommendations can be made to support the various actors in the Polish education system.

### SUPPORT FOR THE PROCESS OF DIPLOMA NOSTRIFICATION IN THE EDUCATION SECTOR

#### Recommendations addressed to the National Agency for Academic Exchange (NAWA):

- Developing a unified translation guide for the proper names of fields of study, majors, and disciplines. In the case of regulated professions, cooperation with the ministries responsible for the profession (e.g., teacher, speech therapist, psychologist) will be necessary in this process.
- Elaborating on a guide for applicants informing them where to apply for nostrification, the course of the procedures, their cost and duration, and the possibility of obtaining funding from the labor office or a fee waiver from the university. The information on this topic found on NAWA's website is worth elaborating on, as the guidelines for the nostrification process (provided step by step).
- Placing information on nostrification and regulated professions (in the case of education: teacher, psychologist, speech therapist) translated into Ukrainian on the NAWA main page with a link to more detailed content.
- Continuing training on nostrification for universities and applicants, and assessing their further training needs.

#### Recommendations addressed to the Ministry of Science and Higher Education (MNiSW):

- Establishing a nostrification team to support universities, promote good practices, and cooperate with various ministries. Organization of networking meetings to exchange experiences between universities, e.g., on different approaches to diplomas compliance assessment (general vs. specific analysis of program differences). Developing guidelines, especially for humanities subjects, which are more susceptible to various interpretations.
- Funding to strengthen the NAWA team's staffing and hire people to provide information on the nostrification process. These may be European Union funds.

#### Recommendations addressed to the universities conducting the nostrification process:

- Introduce a preliminary evaluation stage of submitted applications to identify potential difficulties in nostrification as early as possible. Dedicated employees who are not commission members can carry out these activities, e.g., by creating a checklist for applicants.
- Establishing permanent university commissions for nostrification to improve the efficiency and speed of the work. Committee members should be paid for their work, which does not contribute to career advancement.
- Developing clauses that consider GDPR concerning storing birth and marriage certificates. Various universities treat this issue differently (some do not store such documents, while others do so under internal regulations, so systemic regulations are needed).

<sup>1</sup> <https://nawa.gov.pl/uznawalnosc/podjecie-pracy-w-polsce/zawody-regulowane>



- Introducing an electronic version of contact forms, so that confusion associated with illegible handwriting, which makes contact difficult when handwritten e-mail addresses and telephone numbers are used, can be avoided.
- Directing applicants who wish to obtain more information about the teaching profession to education boards.

#### **Recommendations addressed to NGOs supporting the employment of people from Ukraine in Polish educational institutions**

- Implementing projects to support people from Ukraine in the nostrification process (e.g., in submitting complete and legible documentation to universities).

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## **SUPPORT FOR THE EMPLOYMENT OF INTERCULTURAL ASSISTANTS AND TEACHERS FROM UKRAINE**

#### **Recommendations addressed to the Ministry of National Education (MEN):**

- Establishing supplementary/ bridging education pathways and obliging Ukrainians to complete their qualifications within an agreed timeframe, during their employment. This training should be hybrid to reconcile education with professional responsibilities.
- Enacting legislation to recognize the length of service and professional experience of Ukrainian teachers in the nostrification process. Numerous staff shortages and a growing number of teachers of retirement age are prompting greater hiring of qualified employees from Ukraine (teachers, school psychologists, speech therapists), for whom the path to employment should be made more explicit.
- Elaborating on guidelines for education boards regarding the teaching profession by the Department of General Education.

#### **Recommendations addressed to the entities running educational institutions:**

- Greater dissemination of information about vacancies in educational institutions. This information should be made as widely available as possible, in addition to the boards of education. People from Ukraine should learn that they can also be proactive by sending their resumes to schools where they want to be employed.
- Stigmatize discriminatory practices in recruiting school employees by requiring Polish citizenship, which is unlawful.
- Developing databases of qualified intercultural assistants and Ukrainian teachers by leading authorities and labor offices. There is a particular shortage of teachers of foreign languages and science subjects (mathematics, physics, computer science), as well as teachers of vocational subjects. There are also vacancies for teachers who organize education, school psychologists, and speech therapists.
- Elaborating online materials on the procedures for hiring people from Ukraine, e.g., applying for funding for the position of intercultural assistants, verifying criminal record, etc.
- School principals should be made aware that hiring an intercultural assistant should not be delayed until a larger group of Ukrainian students has gathered, as even the presence of a few children may require such support.
- Hiring intercultural assistants in boarding and dormitories.
- Limiting the work of intercultural assistants to 6 hours a day. These individuals work 40 hours a week and do not have vacation privileges like educators, although their work is mentally demanding.
- Ensuring the sustainability of employment for intercultural assistants and teachers from Ukraine through stable employment contracts.
- Employing specialists from Ukraine who teach Polish as a foreign language and can simultaneously work as intercultural assistants.



These can be people who start their career path by teaching Polish, or have different specializations and are just learning it (if, for example, they are at the intermediate level, they can teach beginners).

- Providing free lessons in Polish as a foreign language through profiled improvement courses in the subject taught and communication with students and parents. After proper preparation, intercultural assistants and teachers can teach Polish as a foreign language and, in the meantime, gain qualifications in the subject they previously taught in Ukraine.
- Providing methodological support and vocational language courses to future vocational school teachers. Vocational teachers from Ukraine are badly needed in these institutions due to the large number of Ukrainian students and available vacancies, especially for logistics, IT, mechatronics, and construction professionals.
- Delineating professional development paths for intercultural assistants and teachers from Ukraine.
- Encouraging the Psychological and Pedagogical Counseling Center to hire psychologists from Ukraine. It is imperative to ensure equal access to psychological assistance for Polish and Ukrainian children so that they can benefit from such support without fear of stigmatization.
- Recommending participation in training on diversity management and working in an intercultural environment to the management of educational institutions.

**Recommendations addressed to the directors of educational institutions (e.g., school principals):**

- Ensuring Ukrainian employees are well prepared for work by organizing a welcome package with information on the Polish educational system, formalities, requirements, etc.
- Preparing the entire school community, including staff, students, and parents, to welcome Ukrainian teachers and

intercultural assistants. Various anti-discrimination trainings and workshops, as well as conducting active integration activities, will be helpful. Equipping all employees with competencies that facilitate working in a multicultural environment is necessary.

- Introducing an organizational culture conducive to the inclusion of Ukrainian employees by, for example, providing a favorable atmosphere in the school, nurturing good relations devoid of prejudice, mitigating conflicts, and helping with paperwork.
- Providing various forms of support for intercultural assistants and Ukrainian teachers, e.g., peer-to-peer, supervision, mentoring. Ensuring their well-being should also include strictly defining responsibilities.
- Providing a separate workspace for the intercultural assistants to use for individual meetings with parents and students. Intercultural assistants should also have access to a teachers' room and an electronic diary (such as Librus) and be treated as part of the whole staff.
- Providing intercultural assistants with opportunities for free further education, e.g., training and courses provided by Teacher Training Centers and pedagogical libraries.

**Recommendations addressed to organizations of intercultural assistants:**

- Dissemination by intercultural assistants' associations of developed materials and good practices (e.g., Work Standards, Code of Ethics) to standardize their approach to work in various facilities and networking of organizations dealing with intercultural education.
- Networking of Ukrainian employees and close cooperation with NGOs supporting multiculturalism in the workplace.



### 3. INTRODUCTION

This report presents the findings of a study commissioned by the Polish Center for International Aid Foundation (PCPM) and the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA). The research was conducted between February and March 2025. The study's overall

objective was to develop effective strategies to support the integration of Ukrainian students and leverage the potential of Ukrainian teachers within the Polish education system to alleviate the burden on Polish schools.

*The table below outlines the study's objectives and research questions*

Detailed Research Objectives	Research Questions
Examining the experiences and recommendations of educational experts on the process of nostrification and recognition of diplomas of teachers from Ukraine  Support efforts to facilitate the nostrification and recognition of diplomas for this professional group	1. How is the process of nostrification and recognition of diplomas of Ukrainian teachers who want to work in Polish schools currently proceeding? 1.1. Are there any difficulties in this process? 1.2. Should these processes be facilitated, and in what ways? What resources can support this process?
Identifying various challenges that can be addressed by increasing the employment of Ukrainian teachers in Polish schools	2. What are the needs of Polish schools in terms of employing teachers from Ukraine? 2.1. How can the potential of Ukrainian teachers be unleashed in the Polish education system? 2.2. Can increasing the employment of Ukrainian teachers in Polish schools address the challenges faced by these institutions? What conditions are required to make it feasible? 2.3. To what extent are schools ready to employ these people? What factors can hinder vs facilitate their employment?
Collecting information on the educational needs, adaptation process, integration, and challenges faced by refugee children from Ukraine in Polish schools	3. What are the specific educational needs of the refugee children from Ukraine? 3.1. How do these children's adaptation and integration processes proceed in Polish schools? What factors have an impact on these processes? 3.2. What challenges do children from Ukraine face in Polish schools? 3.3. How can the integration of refugee children from Ukraine be supported, and how can the burden on local schools be reduced?



## RESEARCH METHODS

The study employed a triangulated research approach. In addition to reviewing existing reports on the integration of Ukrainian refugee children into Polish schools, individual (KIIs) and group interviews (FGDs), as well as an online survey (CAWI), were utilized.

A total of 10 remote interviews were conducted with 36 participants representing the following institutions:

- The Ministry of Science and Higher Education, the National Agency for Academic Exchange, the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology of the Polish Academy of Sciences, and the Educational Research Institute;
- Higher education institutions involved in the nostrification of Ukrainian diplomas (Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznan, University of Gdansk, University of Lower Silesia, and the University of Silesia in Katowice);
- The Polish Teachers' Union and Teacher Training Centre;
- The Education Office of the City of Warsaw and the Department of Education of the City of Lublin;
- Non-governmental organizations (Center for Citizenship Education, Foundation for Social Diversity, EMIC, and PCPM);
- Primary and secondary schools with a high share of refugee children or those implementing refugee-friendly programs (including school leadership and Ukrainian nationals with experience working in Polish schools).

The teachers working at the Education Center are refugees who fled from Russian aggression



## SURVEYED SAMPLE OF SCHOOLS

The online survey was completed by 150 respondents (116 Polish-speaking and 34 Ukrainian-speaking) employed at 72 Polish schools that had previously collaborated with PCPM. Although the sample had national coverage, it was not representative; therefore, the results cannot be generalized and pertain only to the institutions that participated in the study.<sup>2</sup> Nonetheless, the conclusions drawn indicate issues that may also be identified in other educational institutions.

Most Polish respondents (60%) hold the school principal or deputy principal position,<sup>3</sup> and more than half of those from Ukraine work as an intercultural assistant/ teacher's aide (53%). Moreover, 26% of Ukrainian and 11% of Polish respondents hold a teaching position, while 18% and 10% have the function of subject teachers, respectively.

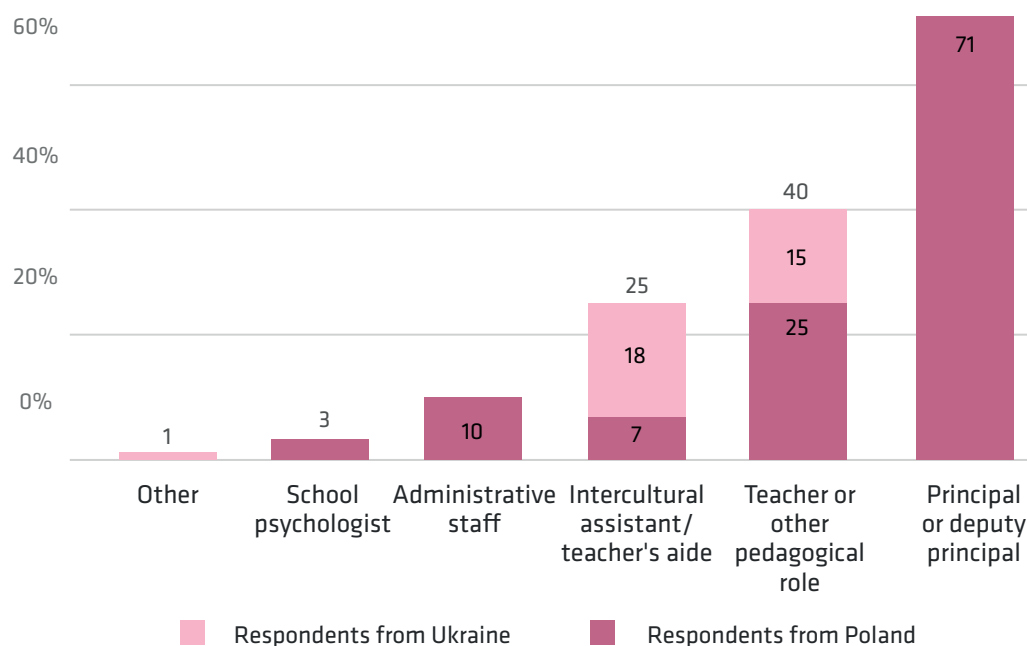


<sup>2</sup> None of the differences analyzed between respondents' country of origin, type and size of schools, location, or number of Ukrainian students were statistically significant.

<sup>3</sup> School counselor, after-school educator, pedagogical therapist, special education teacher, co-teacher for special education, sensory integration therapist, etc.

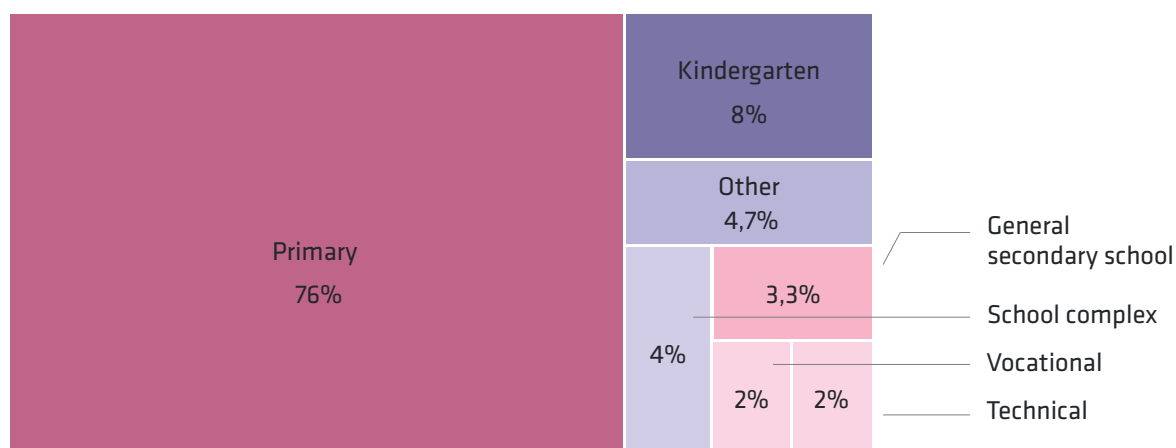


### Professional role at the school or institution



Most of those who completed the survey work in elementary schools (76%), and almost all are from Ukraine (97%).

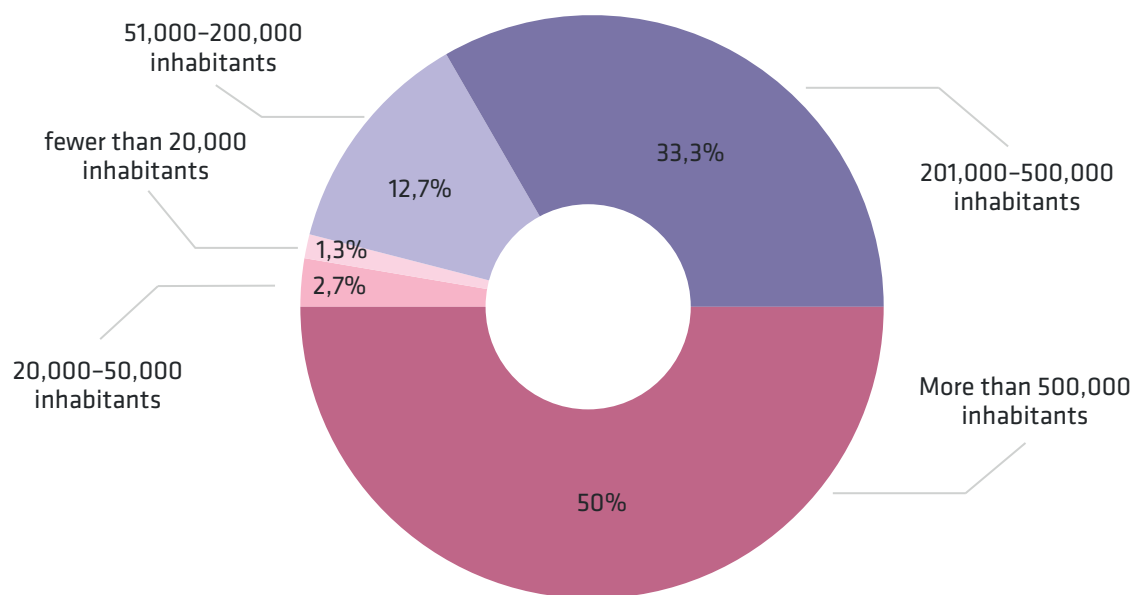
### Type of school or institution



Half of the schools are located in major metropolitan areas with a population of more than 500,000, and one in three are in large cities with a population of 201,000 to 500,000.

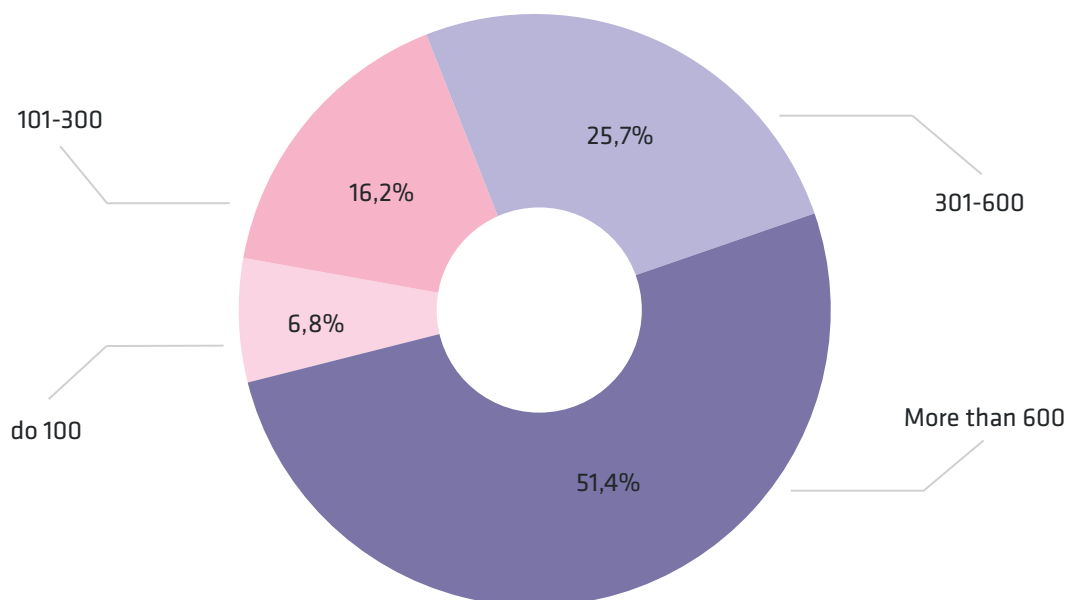


### Size of locality



Half of the schools have more than 600 students (51%), and one in four has between 301 and 600 children.

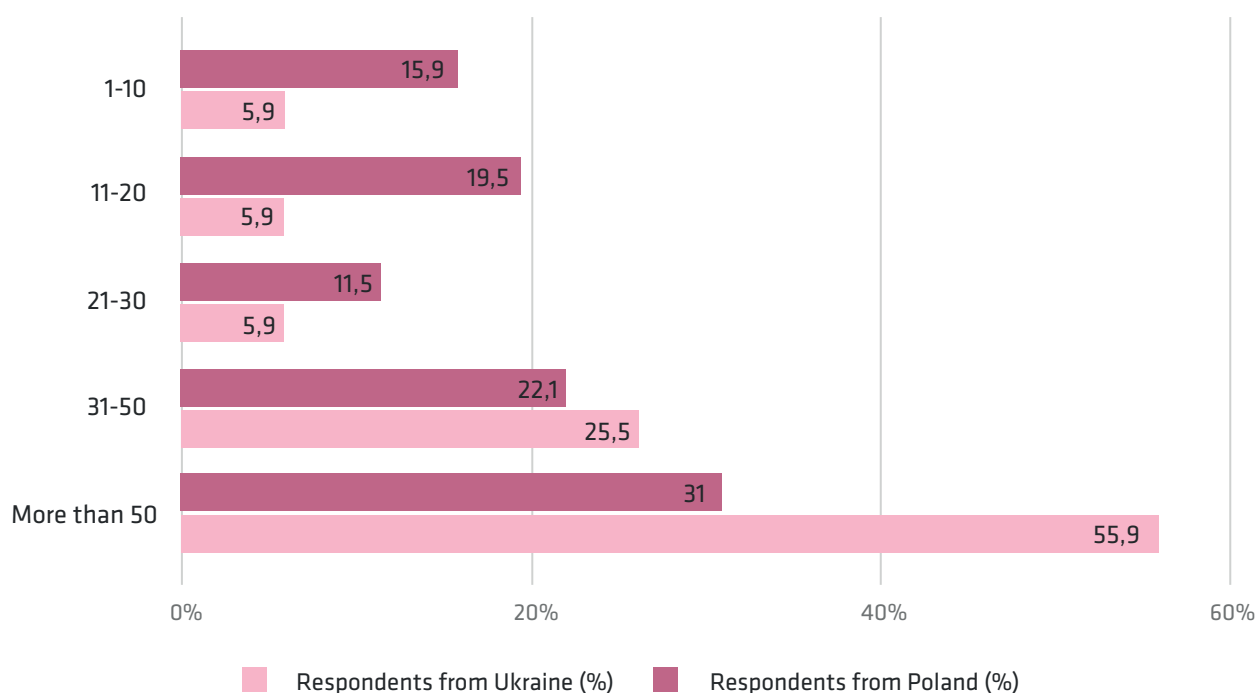
### Total number of students



The vast majority of schools where people from Ukraine work are attended by more than 31 Ukrainian students (82%), including more than half of the schools with over 50 children (56%). Respondents from Poland work in

schools where the number of these students is less diverse - almost one in three has more than 50 Ukrainian children, and more than one in five between 31 and 50 (30% and 22%, respectively).

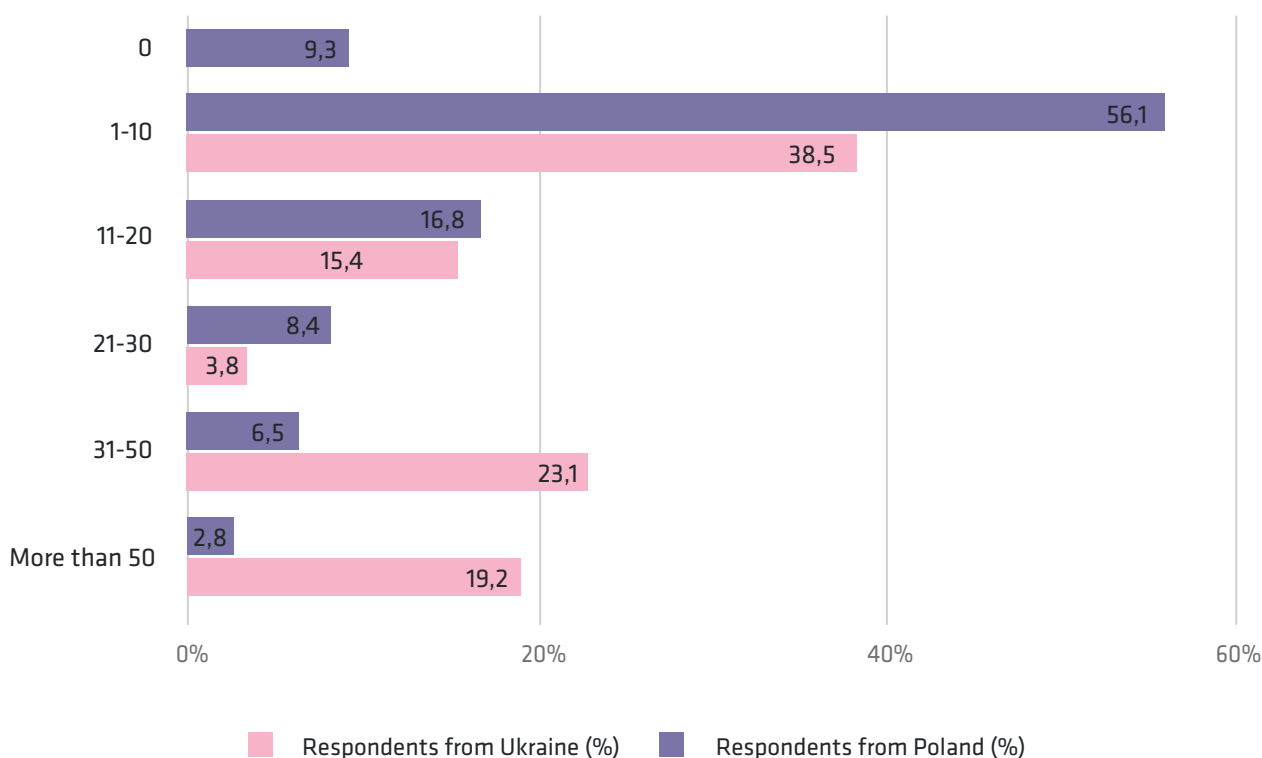
### Number of children from Ukraine



In the 2024/2025 school year, the most common schools that joined the survey were those with 1-10 students from Ukraine. The largest number of respondents from Poland (73%) indicated 1-20 newly admitted Ukra-

inian students. The responses from Ukrainian employees were more scattered, with over 42% indicating over 31 new children from Ukraine.

### Number of new children from Ukraine (September 2024)





## 4. THE POSSIBILITY OF HIRING EMPLOYEES FROM UKRAINE IN EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

The key to employing Ukrainian teachers in Polish schools, who could answer many of the education system's problems related to the integration of Ukrainian students and the growing number of vacancies, is the recognition of professional qualifications. Before 1989, in the bloc of socialist countries, recognition of diplomas was automatic under agreements between individual countries. In the case of Ukraine, these ceased to apply on 19 June 2006, so this date represents a caesura in the confirmation of qualifications. Depending on the date of issuance of a higher education diploma, the procedure is either recognition or nostrification:

- Diplomas issued before 20 June 2006 are recognized automatically by the National Agency for Academic Exchange (NAWA), as long as they have equivalents in the Polish higher education system. The procedure is free of charge and takes a maximum of 60 days.<sup>4</sup>
- Diplomas issued after 19 June 2006 are subject to nostrification by commissions appointed at universities with the appropriate authorizations. This procedure is chargeable and takes up to 90 days. The commissions assess the compatibility of the curriculum for the course in question in both countries. The education is considered equivalent if there is sufficient overlap between the programs.

The scope of the commission's work does not include checking knowledge of the Polish language. However, such a requirement is included in the regulation of the Minister of Science and Higher Education (MNiS) on the standard of education. Verifying the applicant's language competency is possible only if it is necessary to pass examinations in the relevant subjects.

### 4.1 FACTORS HINDERING THE NOSTRIFICATION OF UKRAINIAN DIPLOMAS

During interviews with university representatives, some substantive and administrative barriers were identified that can prolong and complicate the nostrification process.

#### SUBSTANTIVE BARRIERS

##### Differences between higher education systems and the regulation of professions

Some diplomas are impossible to nostrify due to excessive curricular differences. In addition, professions of teacher, psychologist, and speech therapist are regulated in Poland. Employment as a teacher requires preparation in both subjects (e.g., philology) and pedagogy, while in Ukraine, the latter is not necessary. Completing pedagogical studies entitles one to be a foreign language teacher and a school pedagogue in Ukraine, while Polish pedagogical commissions do not recognize combined qualifications and refer these diplomas to philological departments. In Poland, a psychologist and a special educator must complete a 5-year unified degree, while in the Ukrainian system, it is a two-stage degree, so a bachelor's degree or a master's degree alone entitles one to practice these professions. In addition, in Ukraine, a one-year or 1.5-year re-qualification course in related majors and engineering is sufficient to obtain a degree in so-called applied psychology.

<sup>4</sup> [https://nawa.gov.pl/images/Uznawalnosc/SYRENA/Syrena\\_User-Manual\\_Application\\_3.pdf](https://nawa.gov.pl/images/Uznawalnosc/SYRENA/Syrena_User-Manual_Application_3.pdf)



A degree in preschool and early childhood pedagogy (grades I-III) entitles one to work in both these professions in Poland and in Ukraine are separated, so it is required to pass the missing exams. The diploma of a speech therapist is not nostrified, because this field of study is connected with Polish studies. A Ukrainian teacher may be qualified to teach several subjects, and be a psychologist and pedagogue simultaneously, making the nostrification process much more difficult.

### **Curricular differences resulting in recognition of a lower level of education**

Many Ukrainian teachers have secondary education, or completed a 2-year degree that does not confirm a bachelor's degree, which is the minimum requirement for school employment in Poland. Education programs in the sciences and natural sciences generally overlap, and cases of negative nostrification most often involve humanities subjects. The level of education recognized by Polish universities may be underestimated to a bachelor's degree compared to the master's degree obtained in Ukraine, due to the few hours of classes.

### **Recognition of work experience**

People from Ukraine with many years of schoolwork experience start their careers from scratch in the Polish educational system, as their work experience is not recognized, and they receive the salary of a beginning teacher. At the same time, a much longer professional practice is required in Ukraine, which is counted in weeks, not hours, as in Poland. Some universities require work experience for nostrification, despite it being indicated on a Ukrainian diploma.

### **Inconsistent approach of universities to nostrification**

The nostrification process has not been strongly coordinated to date, so universities use different approaches, e.g., some assess the overall compatibility of diplomas, while others analyze program differences in detail. Therefore, a diploma rejected by one university may be nostrified by another, especially when they have different curricula.

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## **ADMINISTRATIVE BARRIERS**

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### **Inaccuracies in diploma translations**

Applicants for nostrification can translate the contents of their diplomas into Polish themselves. According to current regulations, universities can require translations certified by a sworn translator, so they would not have to verify the submitted documents thoroughly.<sup>5</sup> In practice, diplomas are most often translated using automatic translators or by employees of labor offices who are not certified as sworn translators. Sometimes, even certified translations of diplomas are riddled with errors, such as the names of universities or completed majors. Diplomas in Ukrainian, Belarusian, or Russian philology, which are most often nostrified, are analyzed by committees familiar with those languages. Diplomas in English, German, or Romance studies, on the other hand, are handed over to faculties whose staff are often unable to verify the accuracy of the translations. An additional source of inaccuracy is the translation of the title "bakalavr's degree" as "bachelor's degree" (although in Poland it lasts 3 years, while in Ukraine 4 years), as well as the distinction between "specialist" and "master's" degrees, which have no clear equivalents in the Polish higher education system.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Universities may only request this in justified cases.

<sup>6</sup> A practical guide to recognizing education-Ukraine (2022): [https://nawa.gov.pl/images/users/623/Ukraina\\_3.pdf](https://nawa.gov.pl/images/users/623/Ukraina_3.pdf)



### **Lack of knowledge of procedures by applicants**

Ukrainian teachers often do not know where to apply to confirm their qualifications or the procedures (recognition vs. nostrification of diplomas). The PCPM, Unbreakable Ukraine, and CARE Poland projects, which supported the employment of Ukrainians, were a great help to universities, so that the documentation they submitted was most often complete and well prepared.

### **High cost of nostrification**

The cost of diploma nostrification varies and ranges from PLN 3,200 to PLN 4,685, depending on the given university. The regulations indicate the maximum fees, which are 50% of the professor's salary, but in exceptional cases, the applicant can apply for a reduction. Nostrification can be financed through NGOs' projects, funds from labor offices, or the support of schools interested in hiring a particular employee.

### **A growing number of applications submitted**

This year, more than 100 applications for nostrification have been submitted to two universities, while before the outbreak of the war in Ukraine, there were several per year. The number began to grow exponentially last year, partly due to NGO projects that make it possible to subsidize nostrification. The growing trend of recognizing diplomas is also evident at NAWA, which sees a year-on-year increase of 50-60% in the number of applications submitted by people who want to work or continue their education in Poland.

### **Labor-intensive procedures**

Universities nostrifying diplomas are heavily burdened, with substantive work and administrative procedures. The universities receive a lot of inquiries from potential applicants, with whom multiple contacts on various formalities are necessary at the next stage (e.g.,

many people are unaware of the differences between the Polish and Ukrainian higher education systems).

### **Deficiencies and errors in documents**

Wartime activities in Ukraine contribute to the destruction or loss of documentation, although incompleteness can result from transferring archives to another city. Another formal impediment is discrepancies regarding place of birth or surname, such as the names of larger towns and cities, or maiden names. In such cases, universities require a statement signed by the applicant, which does not exclude the risk of abuse. Although universities require the presentation of a marriage certificate, some do not keep this document due to GDPR, while others do so under internal regulations.

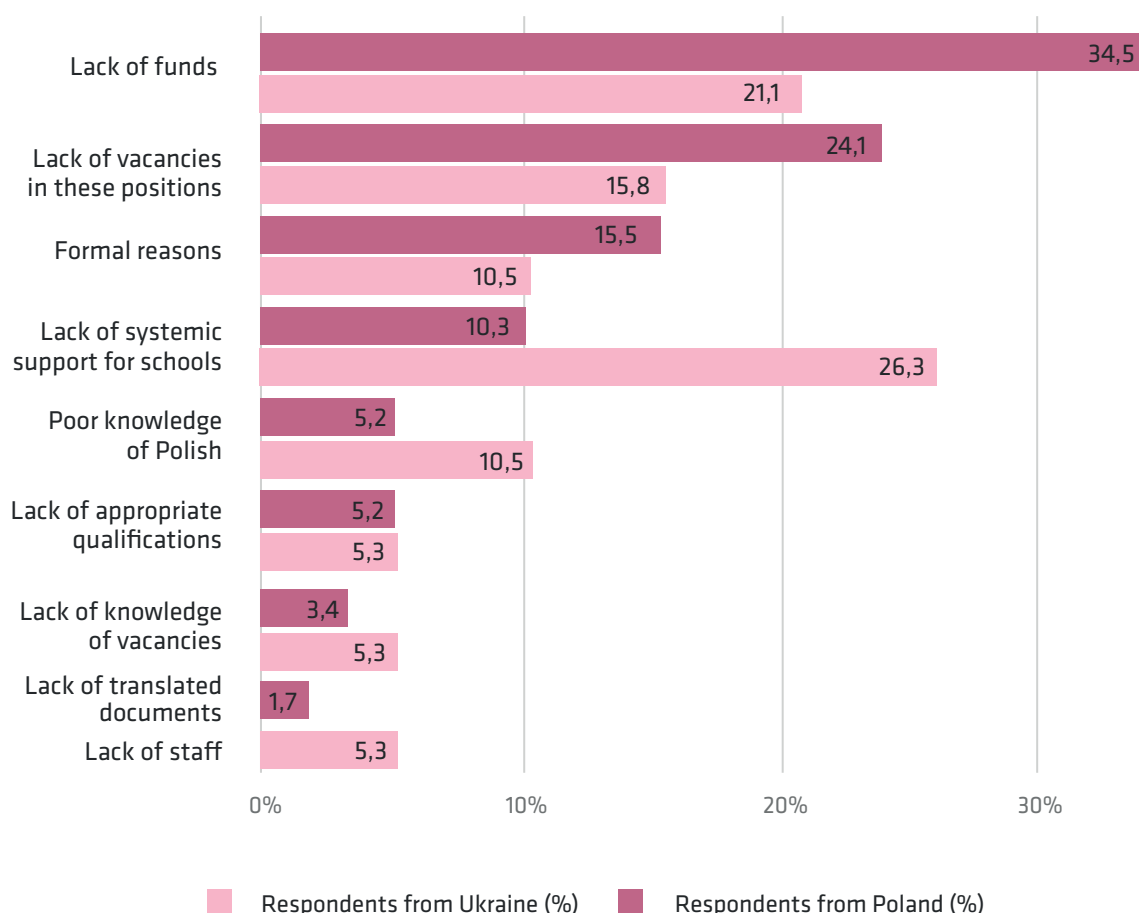
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## **4.2. DIFFICULTIES AND BARRIERS TO EMPLOYING PEOPLE FROM UKRAINE IN SCHOOLS**

Among the reasons that hinder the employment of Ukrainians, respondents included lack of funds and vacancies (32% indications of Polish employees and 23% of Ukrainian ones) and systemic support (25% indications of Ukrainians). Formal reasons, such as difficulties in the nostrification or recognition of diplomas, followed this. Poor knowledge of the Polish language (10% indications of respondents from Ukraine and 5% from Poland), as well as a lack of appropriate qualifications (5%) and knowledge of vacancies (10% and 3%, respectively).



## Employment barriers for people from Ukraine



Those interviewed mentioned some of the barriers mentioned above, but also pointed out other obstacles to employing people from Ukraine:

### Formal difficulties

Not all schools have sufficient information on the possibilities and conditions for hiring people from Ukraine, including how to verify their non-criminal record and recognize their diplomas, and differences in higher education systems. Sometimes, it is easier for principals to distribute the lacking full-time positions among already employed teachers rather than looking for employees from Ukraine.

### Language barrier

Polish is a rare language and challenging to learn quickly. Few specialists teach Polish as a

foreign language. Moreover, a subject teacher or psychologist must have considerable language proficiency.

### Low salaries

Salaries in the education field are not encouraging. Moreover, Ukrainian teachers have to spend much more time preparing to teach lessons without being financially compensated for it. The low salaries of Ukrainian employees are influenced by the recognition of a lower level of education than that acquired in Ukraine (due to differences in education systems) and the need to start from scratch, despite having previously worked in schools for many years.



### **Prejudices/unfriendly attitudes**

Some Polish parents fear that their children will acquire the wrong accent if foreign languages (mainly English) are taught to them by Ukrainian teachers. Some principals, anticipating the unfriendly reactions of Polish students and parents, are afraid to hire Ukrainian teachers so as not to expose them to psychological discomfort. Another barrier may be the reluctant attitude of the principals or those on the teaching staff. An example of such prejudice is the information on the education job portal, indicating that only people with Polish citizenship are eligible for recruitment (not only for teaching positions, but also for technical positions).<sup>7</sup>

### **Lack of self-confidence**

Some Ukrainian female teachers, including those with a good command of Polish, may choose employment below their qualifications due to a lack of self-confidence and fear of unfavorable treatment (e.g., accusations that they are taking someone's job, speaking Polish with an accent). People from Ukraine who want to get hired at a Polish school have to overcome many obstacles and be able to make various sacrifices.

### **Emotional costs**

Ukrainian employees hired in Polish institutions may need more time to acclimate, as working in education is mentally exhausting. Intercultural assistants may not be adequately integrated into the school community; for example, they are not involved in decision-making regarding Ukrainian students despite their excellent knowledge of their needs and life situations.

### **The need to move**

In some areas of Poland, more education vacancies are available in large cities, which may require moving and relocating one's own children to new facilities.

### **Lack of suitable conditions**

The institution may be unable to provide the intercultural assistant with a suitable workspace, such as a separate room, to conduct individual meetings with students and parents.

### **Too short duration of projects supporting the employment of people from Ukraine**

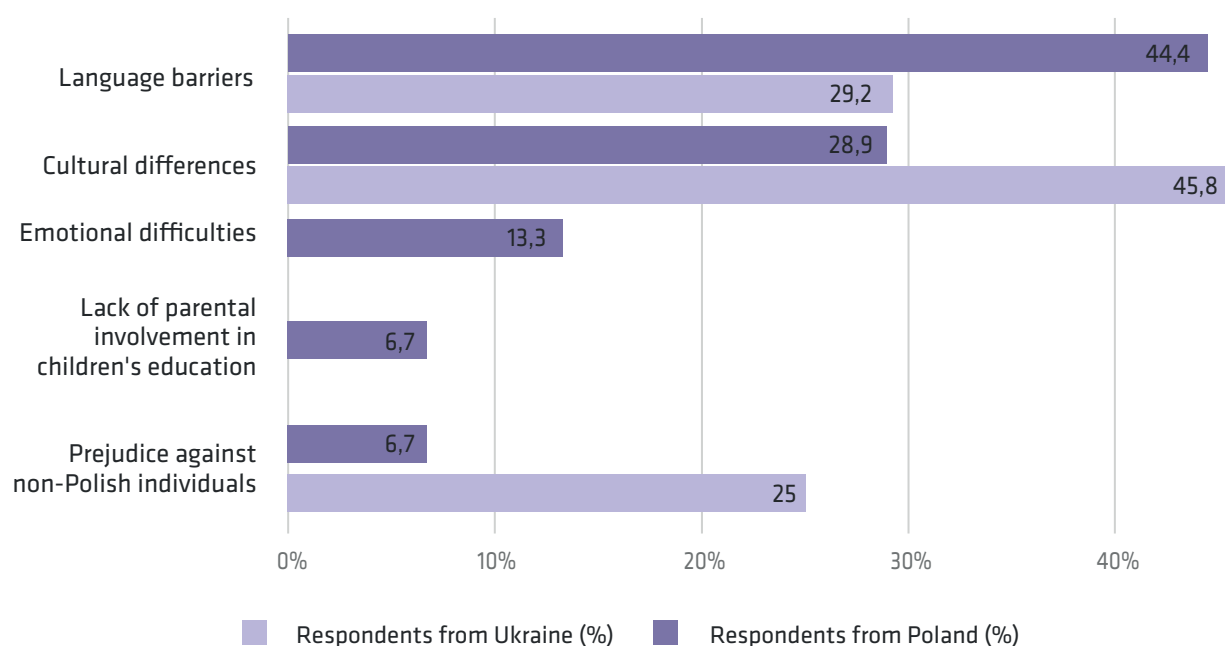
Getting a job in a school as a Ukrainian special educator requires completing two postgraduate courses in the Polish system, which last 18 months. At the same time, the projects that can fund further training are generally one year long.

Most respondents do not perceive barriers to cooperation between Polish teaching staff and people from Ukraine (66%), and only one in five confirmed the presence of such obstacles (21%). The main barriers include language difficulties (44% indications of respondents from Poland and 29% from Ukraine) and cultural differences (29% and 46%, respectively). The biggest divergence in responses concerns prejudice against people of non-Polish origin—25% indications of respondents from Ukraine compared to 6% from Poland.

<sup>7</sup> The website <https://ofertypracy.edu.pl/> contains many job offers with such a stipulation, e.g., 12 in the Silesian Voivodeship, 10 each in the West Pomeranian Voivodeship and Kuyavian-Pomeranian Voivodeship, 3 in the Wielkopolskie Voivodeship, and 2 each in the Malopolskie Voivodeship and Mazowieckie Voivodeship (as of April 18, 2025).



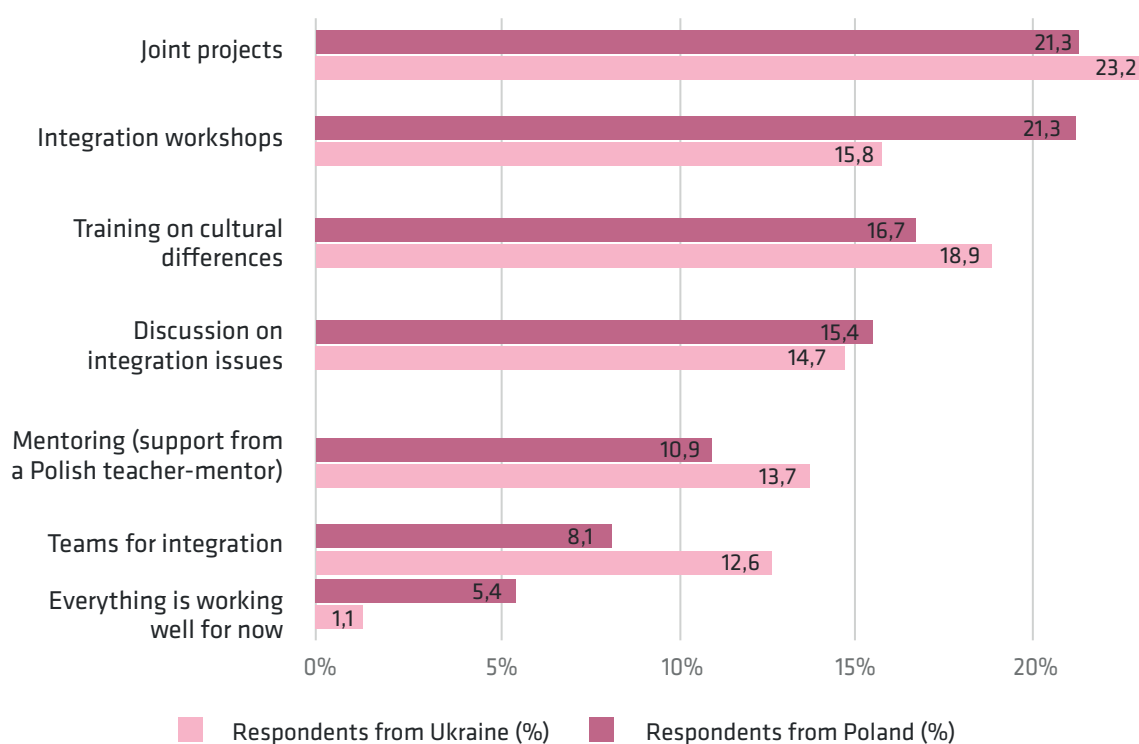
### Barriers to cooperation between Polish staff and individuals from Ukraine



Joint projects, indicated by both groups of respondents (21–23% indications), may help foster greater openness among Polish teaching staff toward cooperation with indivi-

duals from Ukraine. Integration workshops and training focused on integration were similarly well received.

### How to make teaching staff more open to working with people from Ukraine?

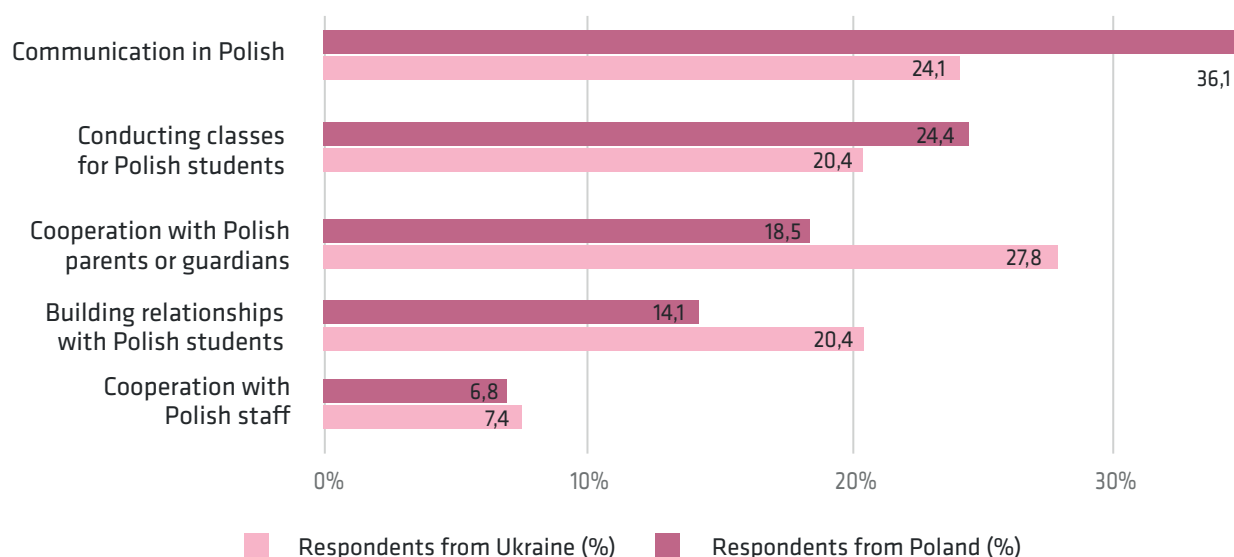




Among the difficulties that may arise from employing Ukrainian staff, problems with communication were mentioned (36% indications of respondents from Poland and 24% from Ukraine) and conducting classes for

Polish students (24% and 20%, respectively). For people from Ukraine, the biggest challenge is cooperation with Polish parents and guardians (28%).

### Challenges associated with employing staff from Ukraine

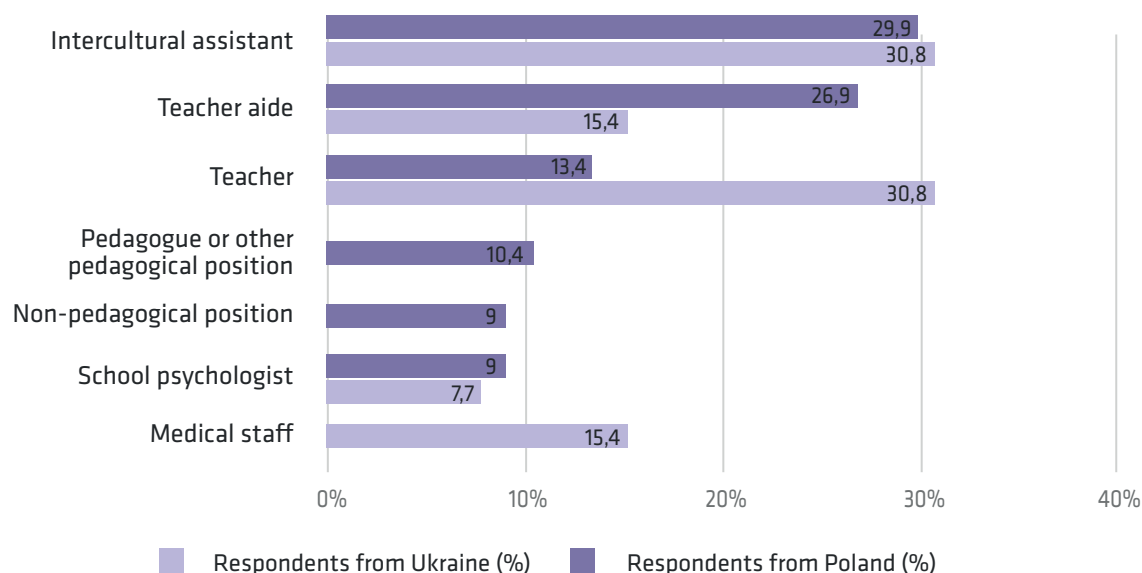


## 4.3. FACTORS THAT FACILITATE THE EMPLOYMENT OF UKRAINIAN PEOPLE IN EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

Institutions that would like to employ additional people from Ukraine need primarily intercultural assistants (about 30% indications in both surveyed groups) and teacher aides

(27% indications of people from Poland and 15% from Ukraine). Respondents from Ukraine perceive the need to employ Ukrainian teachers to a greater extent (31%).

### Staffing needs for employing people from Ukraine

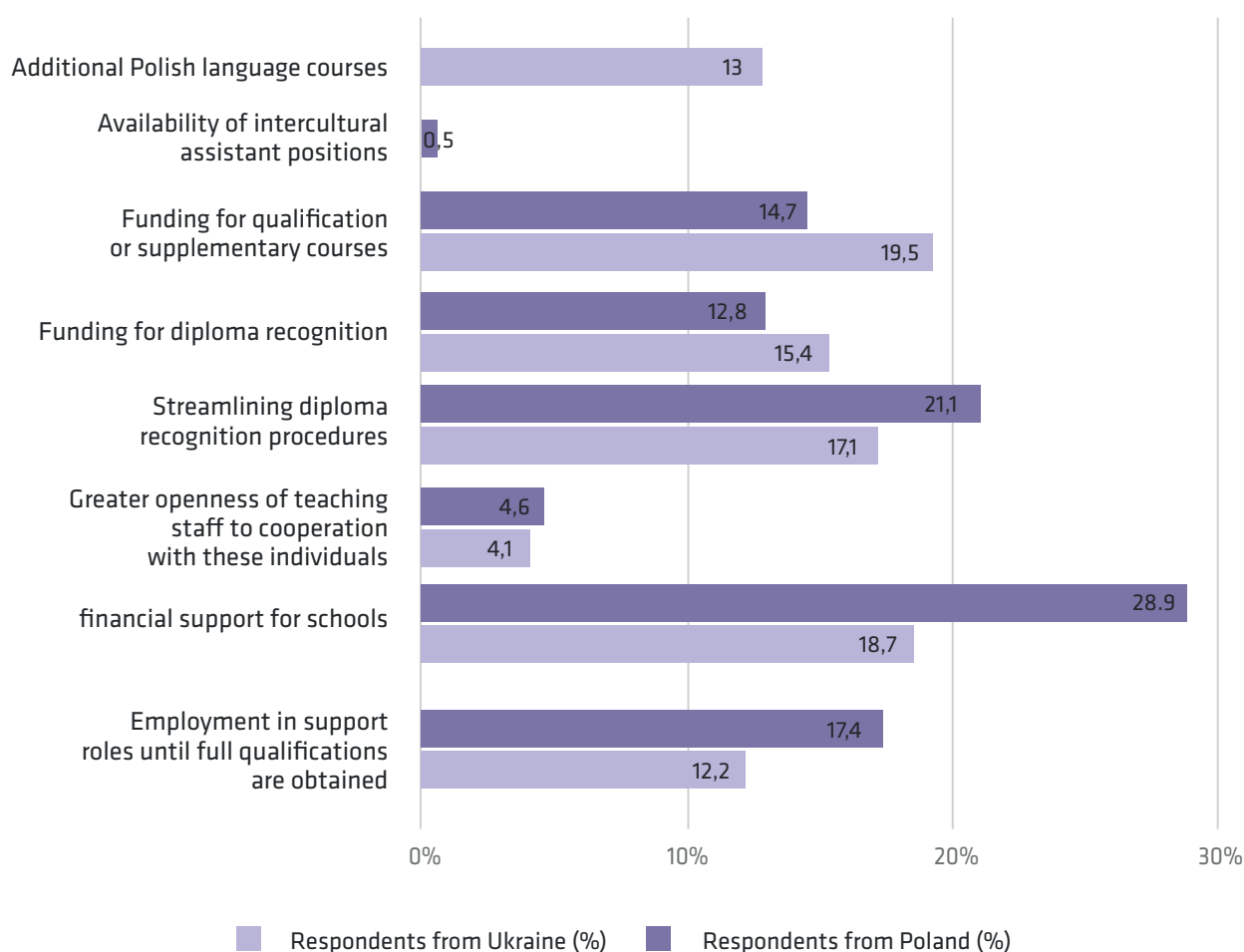




For people from Ukraine, the most significant help is financial support for additional qualification courses or studies to supplement competences (20% indications). In turn, for Poles, it is additional financing of schools

(29%), which may result from different functions performed by respondents—people managing institutions and those not performing management functions.

### *Suggested measures to support the employment of people from Ukraine*



Those who took part in the interviews also indicated the above elements, but also other factors that facilitate the employment of Ukrainians:

#### **Alignment of qualifications with the needs of the educational labor market**

Increasing the alignment of existing competencies with school needs requires Ukrainian subject teachers, including philologists, to acquire pedagogical qualifications. In addition to these individuals, qualification adjustment is needed for vocational teachers, for whom many vacancies are offered.

#### **Free Polish language courses and their popularity in Ukraine**

Polish language courses are most useful when profiled according to the needs of Ukrainian teachers, including vocational teachers and intercultural assistants. Polish is second (after English) in the number of people learning it in Ukraine, where most teachers are trained to find employment in Polish education.



### **Funding and continuity of employment of intercultural assistants**

Once NGOs' projects are completed, the employment of intercultural assistants is financed by the entities that run the educational institutions (e.g., local governments). Providing these people with work and pay during summer and winter breaks provides stability.

### **Knowledge of the nostrification procedures and access to information on vacancies**

Detailed knowledge of the nostrification process and the possibility of financing it makes it much easier for people from Ukraine to decide to be employed in a Polish school. Information on vacancies in educational institutions is most accessible to these people if found not only on the websites of the education boards, but also on dedicated portals used by Ukrainian employees.

### **Internships in educational institutions**

The opportunity to gain work experience through an internship in a school or kindergarten increases competence and confidence in one's skills among Ukrainians who want to work as teachers or intercultural assistants.

### **Career path information**

People from Ukraine find it easier to decide to work in a Polish school if they know the career path and have professional development opportunities. The Polish and Ukrainian systems of promotion in education differ considerably, because in Ukraine, a teacher receives a higher professional category after 3 years of work.

Nauczycielka, która uciekła z Ukrainy przed rosyjską agresją uczy matematyki



### **Strictly defined scope of responsibilities and soft competencies**

A precisely delineated scope of professional tasks and its alignment with one's competencies provide emotional comfort and facilitate an assertive response when intercultural assistants are commissioned to do things beyond their agreed-upon duties. The social competencies of intercultural assistants and Ukrainian teachers are very helpful in relations with the school community.

### **Favorable attitude of management and teaching staff**

The situation of the schools that first received refugee children, or had previous contact with migrant students, is easier due to the acquired ability to deal with tensions. Schools vary widely in their attitudes toward Ukrainians, although one might expect them to be more positive among the Polish intelligentsia than other professional groups.

Positive school attitudes toward multiculturalism and large numbers of Ukrainian students. The realization by educational institutions that multiculturalism can also be an opportunity, not just a threat, leads to acceptance of the phenomenon and better management of integration in education.

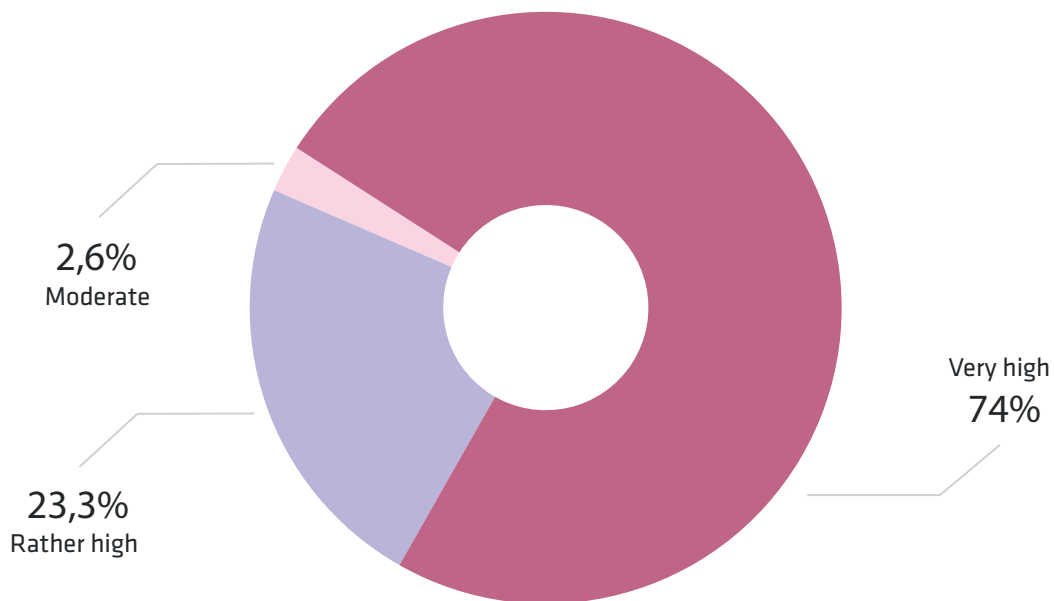




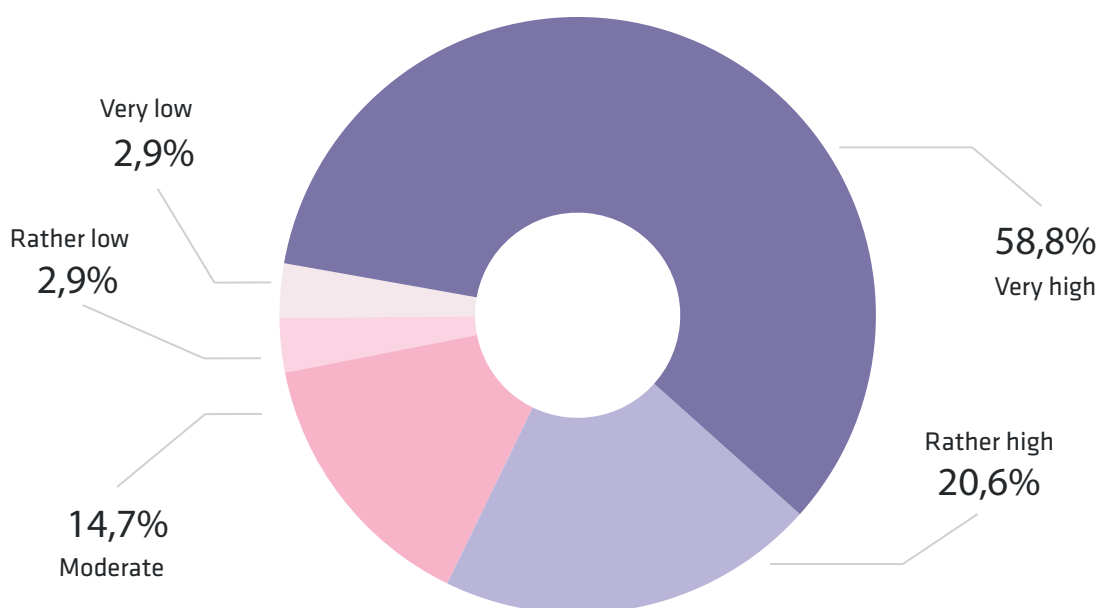
According to the vast majority of respondents, school staff are open to cooperation with Ukrainian employees—most consider them to be very open (74% of respondents

from Poland and 59% from Ukraine), while 23% of respondents from Poland and 21% from Ukraine assess the openness as rather high.

### *Perceived openness toward Ukrainian staff - respondents from Poland*



### *Perceived openness toward Ukrainian staff - respondents from Ukraine*





#### **4.4. BENEFITS OF EMPLOYING PEOPLE FROM UKRAINE IN EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS**

The benefits that the school and society can derive from hiring Ukrainian teachers and intercultural assistants are multiple:

##### **Ensuring the psychological well-being of students**

Ukrainian employees increase refugee children's sense of security, making them more willing to attend school and establish peer relationships. Intercultural assistants advise on how to help a child with trauma who has emotional problems. They also support Russian-speaking students of other nationalities and help them realize their potential. Some children have not studied at all for several years or have been in several education systems, falling out of them from time to time, and thanks to Intercultural assistants, they can be embedded in a Polish school.

##### **Supporting Ukrainian parents/guardians**

With intercultural assistants acting as liaisons in the school community, communication between Ukrainian parents and guardians and school staff improves. The Ukrainian staff also helps organize integration meetings with their participation. International assistants' work on temporariness among Ukrainian families is very important, as it affects attitudes toward children's attendance at Polish schools and the need for integration. The lack of a language and cultural barrier between Ukrainian staff, students, and parents makes it easier to obtain information, for example, about the situation of a particular child.

##### **Supporting the integration of the school community**

Ukrainian teachers and intercultural assistants support Ukrainian, Russian-speaking, and Polish children so that they can clear up many misunderstandings arising from cultural differences. The Ukrainian staff counteracts the formation of ethnically separate

groups and conducts integration activities that facilitate cross-cultural understanding and respond to crises.

##### **Unburdening the teaching staff**

Polish teachers often lack the strength and time for additional activities to support Ukrainian students. Intercultural assistants and Ukrainian teachers assist Polish staff in various aspects of their work, even when only one or a few refugee children are in the classroom.

##### **Sharing experiences and strengthening competencies**

Employees from Ukraine can bring their working methods to schools, exchange good practices with Polish educators, and learn from their experiences. Mutual learning enriches the entire teaching staff of the institution.

##### **Shifting the culture of schoolwork**

Different outlooks and ways of doing didactics are mixed in schools. Ukrainian employees help open the school community to other cultures and contribute to the democratization of relations.

##### **Filling vacancies in schools and making it easier to organize substitutes and extra-curricular activities**

Staff shortages are a systemic problem in Polish education. Many Polish teachers are retired or in pre-retirement age,<sup>8</sup> and should be gradually replaced by new cadres. Within a few years, school staffing deficits will become even more acute. Ukrainian employees also facilitate the organization of additional classes and replacements for teachers absent due to illness.

<sup>8</sup> In 2024, 10,000 young teachers resigned, while 7,500 people of retirement age continued their work. There were over 20,000 school vacancies in 2024.



### Utilizing the potential of Ukrainian staff

Employment in an educational institution gives Ukrainian employees a sense of agency and professional fulfillment. By helping refugee families, they are shaping the future of their children, which can also benefit Poland's development by closing the demographic gap. Schoolwork aligns with the qualifications and aspirations of intercultural assistants, Ukrainian teachers, and psychologists.

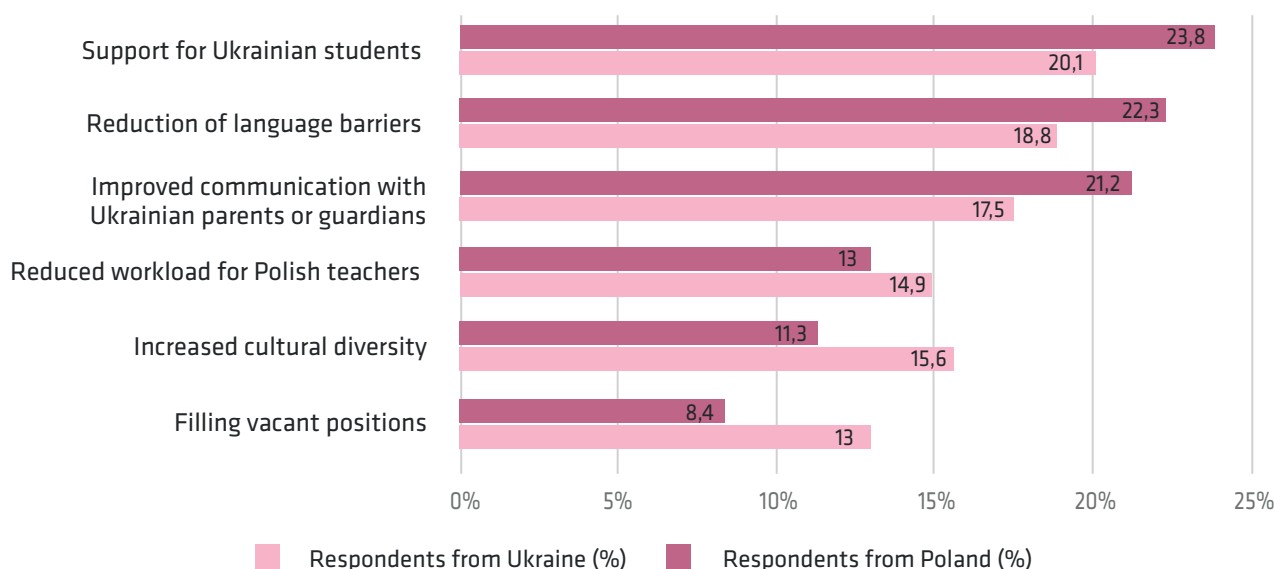
### Impact on the education system for Ukrainian teachers

Some centers in Ukraine have linked the training of Polish and English language

teachers, who may soon be very useful in Polish and Ukrainian educational institutions.

Among the benefits that a school can gain from hiring Ukrainian staff, the most indications were related to support for Ukrainian students - emotional, educational, social (24% indications of Poles and 20% of Ukrainians), reducing the language barrier (22% and 19%, respectively) and improving communication between the school and Ukrainian parents/guardians (21% and 18%).

### Benefits that a school can gain from hiring Ukrainian staff



## 4.5. THE ROLE OF LOCAL GOVERNMENTS IN SUPPORTING THE EMPLOYMENT OF UKRAINIANS IN EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

Local governments, especially those that are the governing bodies of educational institutions, can play an essential role in supporting the integration of Ukrainian students and the employment of persons from Ukraine. Thanks to the financial possibilities and the large scale of needs in public schools run by the City Office of the Capital City of Warsaw, the Warsaw Center for Educational and Social Innovation and Training (WCIES), which was

established in 2008, has undertaken many activities that serve to provide Ukrainian students with the best possible learning conditions. Activities for foreign children were implemented before the outbreak of war in Ukraine, but have been intensified since 2022.



Among the examples of good practices developed by the Education Office of the Warsaw City Hall and WCIES are:

### **Team for teaching foreign children**

The team offers comprehensive assistance to teachers and school principals, including psychological and pedagogical support, teaching Polish as a foreign language, inclusive education for students with refugee and migration experience, individual and group consultations, and workshops and training for pedagogical councils.

### **Integrated Educational Platform**

The Educational Platform's online version includes various materials, such as a good practice guide, publications on refugee classes, and other materials for teachers. It also includes welcome packets for students and parents, which have been developed in several languages.

### **Designation of coordinators in district Education Departments**

District coordinators provide information on the offer and enrollment process for educational institutions. Previously, this applied only to Ukrainian children, but now it also applies to other foreign students.

### **Employment of female teachers, psychologists, and intercultural assistants**

Actions supporting the employment of Ukrainian staff in schools were undertaken as part of projects implemented by NGOs, such as PCPM, Unbreakable Ukraine, CARE Poland, and UNICEF. Intercultural assistants are now local government employees who are also paid during vacations.<sup>9</sup>

### **Intercultural integration**

Integration activities conducted at schools include excursions, sports activities, and classes on the country's culture (e.g., "Days of Ukraine").

### **Polish language courses with the possibility of certification**

The website of the City of Warsaw has an information subpage in Ukrainian for those who wish to take part in a certified language course.

### **Support from Psychological and Pedagogical Counseling Centers**

These Centers deal with diagnosing students and elaborating judgments and opinions. This support is more comprehensive in Poland, so it is often necessary to convince Ukrainian parents to use the Centers' services. The City Council financed the purchase of materials in Ukrainian and the employment of Ukrainian people providing psychological support at the Centers.

### **Cooperation with various project entities**

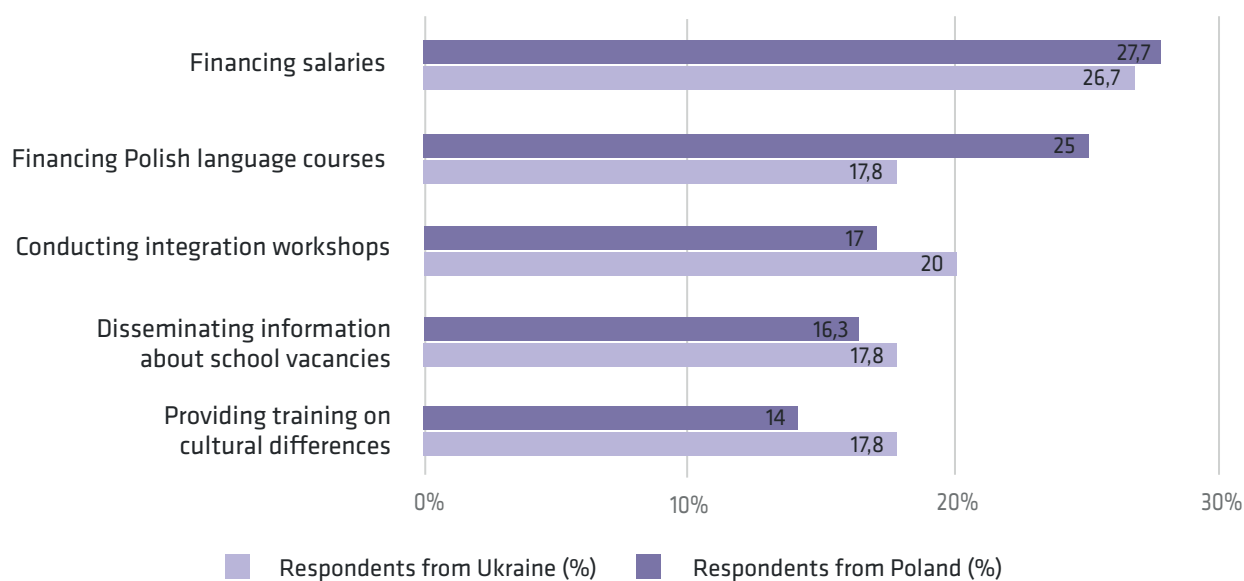
As part of the "Center for Education and Development" project implemented by UNICEF and Alior Bank, 120 remote learning points for Ukrainian students were organized in public facilities (e.g., libraries, the Palace of Culture and Science). In addition, more than 100,000 children have been supported through the information desk, psychological assistance in Ukrainian, food and daycare, support in preparing for school, and various classes (art, computer science, economics, science, and English).

According to the vast majority of respondents (80%), the local government can support the hiring of Ukrainian staff in educational institutions, with this opinion shared by almost all people from Poland (92%) and nearly four in ten from Ukraine (38%). The most indications regarding various ways of supporting schools by local government in employing Ukrainian staff referred to the financing of salaries (approximately 27% in both groups) and Polish language courses (25% in the Polish group and 18% in the Ukrainian one).

<sup>9</sup> These people worked as part of the "Summer/Winter in the City" campaign (rotating in various institutions) and recruited Ukrainian students to secondary schools.



### How can local government support the employment of Ukrainian staff?



An English lesson. The teacher is a Ukrainian woman who fled from occupied Kherson





## 5. FACTORS INFLUENCING THE INTEGRATION OF UKRAINIAN STUDENTS

As of September 1, 2024, school attendance became mandatory for Ukrainian children and youth holding a PESEL UKR <sup>10</sup> number and receiving the 800+ and “Good Start” benefits. As a result, new students joined Polish schools, many of whom had previously participated in online learning of the Ukrainian education system or had not been engaged in any form of schooling.<sup>11</sup> Following the introduction of this requirement, approximately 18,000 to 20,000 Ukrainian children enrolled in Polish schools<sup>12</sup> (an increase of 13.5%), although projections had estimated between 60,000 and 80,000. Currently, around 203,000 Ukrainian students attend Polish schools, including approximately 152,300 refugees and 51,000 migrant children who resided in Poland before the outbreak of the full-scale war in Ukraine. Refugee children and youth constitute about 3% of the student population in Polish schools and are enrolled in 58% of educational institutions—most frequently in the Mazowieckie, Slaskie, Dolnoslaskie, and Wielkopolskie voivodeships.<sup>13</sup>

The number of Ukrainian students in Polish schools has fluctuated dynamically throughout the full-scale war. Initially, their numbers skyrocketed weekly but declined as families relocated to other countries or returned to Ukraine.

The Polish education system was not prepared to accommodate such a large influx of students with refugee backgrounds. The mass arrival of Ukrainian pupils exposed numerous challenges and difficulties related to intercultural integration. Schools faced these new demands without systemic support:

*“It’s a false expectation that integration comes down to learning the language, and everything will somehow work out. A lot depends on the child’s individual resources, how the school*

*principal and teaching staff understand integration, and what they do to facilitate the process. Many people are unfamiliar with the stages of adaptation and integration, and they’re taken aback. They assumed that simply welcoming Ukrainian children ‘with an open heart’ would be enough for everything to go smoothly.”*

### Person representing an NGO

The first year of the war in Ukraine was the most difficult for Polish schools. However, in the following three years, based on the experience gained and with the support of local and international non-governmental organizations, numerous solutions and tools were developed to improve intercultural integration. The Ministry of National Education (MEN) is undertaking various initiatives, including establishing the Team for Educational Integration of Children Being Citizens of Ukraine<sup>14</sup> and launching the “School for All” program.

Most respondents (84%) believe Ukrainian students have specific needs and face various difficulties. The most frequently reported challenges faced by these students include: language barriers (approximately 33% indications), emotional and social problems (about 22%), and challenges with adapting to the Polish education system (19%).

<sup>10</sup> This obligation does not apply to migrant children who do not have a PESEL UKR number assigned to refugees from Ukraine who arrived in Poland after February 24, 2022.

<sup>11</sup> The Ministries of Education in Poland and Ukraine have determined that some children are not in any education system and are not socialized because they constantly live with their parents.

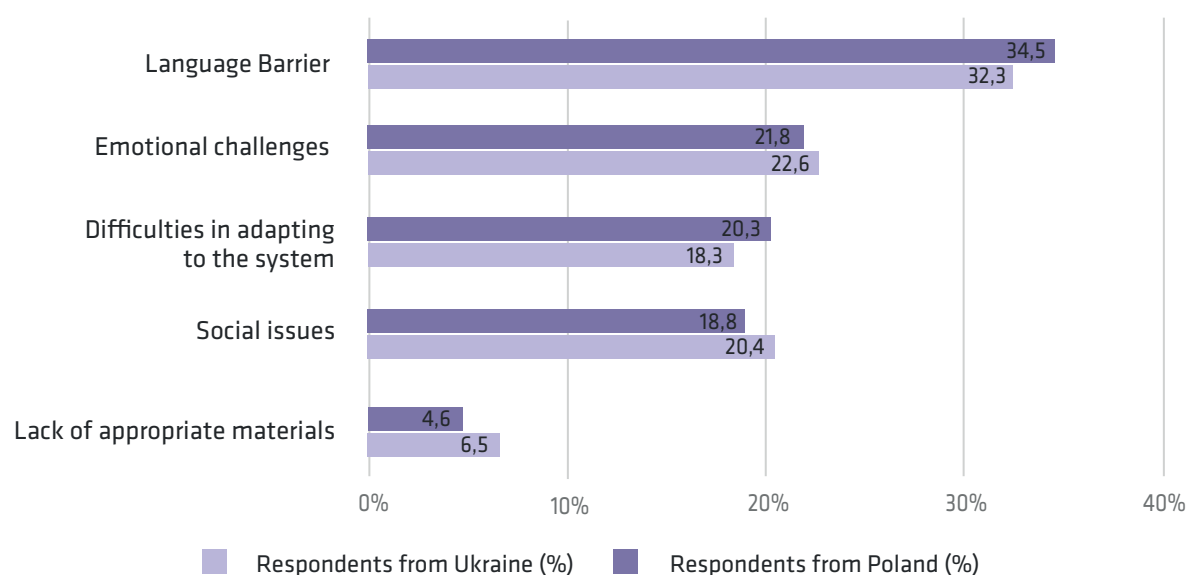
<sup>12</sup> These estimates vary depending on the source of information. For example, in October 2024, 195.3 thousand preschoolers and refugee students were registered in the Education Information System (151 thousand were registered in the Social Insurance Institution), the highest number since the outbreak of the war in Ukraine (78% were in Polish schools).

<sup>13</sup> Source of information: E. Swidrowska, K. Stano. Students from Ukraine with refugee experience in Polish schools. What has changed in the school year 2024/2025? CEO/U-NICEF report (2024).

<sup>14</sup> Ordinance of the Minister of Education of September 4, 2024 on the establishment of the Team for the Educational Integration of Children who are Citizens of Ukraine.



## Challenges experienced by Ukrainian students in Polish schools



### 5.1. FACTORS HINDERING THE INTEGRATION OF UKRAINIAN STUDENTS

Interview participants identified several key factors that hinder the integration of Ukrainian students in Polish schools:

#### Differences between the Polish and Ukrainian education systems

In the current school year, new students have entered the Polish education system—those who have been in Poland for several years but continued remote learning in the Ukrainian system, and those who arrived recently and do not speak Polish. Initially, many assumed that the refugee situation would be temporary and the war would soon end, so numerous students continued studying online within the Ukrainian system (particularly those in the final grades of their respective schools). Many Ukrainian families had not anticipated a prolonged stay outside of Ukraine, and only after the introduction of compulsory schooling did they begin enrolling their children in the Polish education system. Due to differences in both curricula,<sup>15</sup> Ukrainian students may have knowledge gaps relative to the Polish core curriculum. Although many schools offer remedial classes, these constitute an additional burden for Ukrainian students

and present scheduling challenges, mainly when these students are spread across different grades. In addition, Polish teachers are often unfamiliar with the Ukrainian curriculum at various stages of education, which complicates the teaching process.

#### Language barrier

The provision of additional Polish language classes for Ukrainian students is extended yearly. However, the weekly number of hours has been reduced from 6 to 4. Students from other countries receive even less support (2 hours), which may lead to unnecessary divisions. Presently, fewer children attend these classes<sup>16</sup> due to the overload of mandatory lessons and general fatigue. Language challenges become more visible at higher levels of education, where fluency and knowledge of subject-specific vocabulary are essential, for example, in science and vocational subjects, as well as when reading assigned literary texts.

<sup>15</sup> Students from both countries who are of the same age may be at different stages of their educational pathways.

<sup>16</sup> In 2024, there were 42% (47% in primary and 29% in secondary schools). Source of information: Swidrowska, E., Stano, K. (2024). Students from Ukraine with refugee experience in Polish schools. Report of the CEO and UNICEF.



### Attitudes of Ukrainian families toward the Polish education system

Some Ukrainian parents and students feel compelled to participate in the Polish school system due to the link between compulsory schooling and access to the 800+ benefit. As a result, school attendance may be taken less seriously, with some families tolerating absences for minor reasons. The introduction of compulsory education was not accompanied by adequate outreach or preparation for Ukrainian families. They were not informed of the non-financial benefits of attending Polish schools. Some parents fear that their children may lose their native language and Ukrainian identity:

*“These children were taken from their environment against their will, so they should stay connected to their culture to maintain their own identity.”*

(Intercultural Assistant)

A lack of intercultural assistants in schools leads to misunderstandings, as many Ukrainian parents are unfamiliar with the Polish education system<sup>17</sup> and assume it operates similarly to the Ukrainian one. Many children continue to combine attendance at Polish schools with remote learning through the Ukrainian education system, which burdens them considerably but is vital for preserving their cultural identity.<sup>18</sup> Parents' preference for Ukrainian online education may also stem from a perception of their stay in Poland as temporary, and from concerns about poor learning outcomes in Polish schools due to limited language proficiency. This situation tends to change at higher levels of education, as parents become more focused on ensuring their children obtain a good profession. However, they often do not realize that children cannot function successfully in upper secondary schools without prior integration into the Polish education system.

### Late integration into the education system

Older students who have previously studied exclusively online may lack sufficient proficiency in Polish, which impairs their learning, particularly at the upper-secondary level. Young people compelled by war to attend Polish schools may resist this obligation, further compounding their educational difficulties. For some, Polish schooling is perceived merely as a supplement to online Ukrainian education. Some students also struggle to accept school rules,<sup>19</sup> which can be a form of protest against being required to study in Poland. As mentioned above, many Ukrainian families view their stay in Poland as temporary and therefore may not prioritize full integration. If school leadership and teaching staff are not actively engaged in inclusive efforts, such as inviting Ukrainian parents to informational meetings or preparing both Polish and Ukrainian students for joint learning. In that case, integration processes are significantly more difficult. In secondary schools, parents are generally less involved in the school community, which may further hinder integration. The higher the level of education, the more profound the linguistic and cultural differences. Older students often carry more emotional trauma and have a weaker command of the language, making it harder for them to express their needs or feelings. As a result, they may show greater resistance to integration. At higher levels, the natural curiosity and openness typical of preschool and early primary children diminish, while the risk of classroom divisions increases. Older students also experience greater stress related to grading and exams. Their limited language skills may lead to underperformance relative to their actual abilities. Performing worse than they did in Ukrainian schools can cause frustration, affecting their overall functioning, including peer relationships.

<sup>17</sup> In both systems, the terms lyceum and gymnasium may refer to different age groups of students. In Ukraine, compulsory education ends at the age of 16-17.

<sup>18</sup> Younger children who do not use distance learning do not learn to write and read in Ukrainian, which raises parents' fears of Polonization.

<sup>19</sup> This includes punctuality, changing shoes, a ban on wearing make-up, and leaving school without informing teachers.



## The emotional and social situation of refugee children

Children and adolescent refugees arrived in Poland against their will and often long for their home country, house, family, and friends. Older students, in particular, struggle to adapt to new conditions. Many are withdrawn, traumatized, and in need of substantial support from both adults and peers. Additional difficulties arise for students who have already acclimated to life in Poland but whose parents plan to relocate to another country. Educational challenges may also stem from changes in family and life circumstances, such as when children are required to care for younger siblings due to the absence of a working mother. This may negatively impact their academic performance or prevent them from participating in school activities like field trips. Although the financial situation of these families, typically consisting of mothers and children,<sup>20</sup> has improved thanks to the 800+ benefit, Ukrainian students are sometimes treated unfairly by their peers due to their material conditions. Ukrainian children tend to integrate more easily with peers from Belarus than with Polish students, mainly due to fewer language barriers and cultural differences. Quantitative research conducted by the Educational Research Institute<sup>21</sup> with a sample of approximately 1,200 respondents indicates that Ukrainian children rate their peer relationships lower than their Polish counterparts. They also report lower academic self-esteem, weaker interpersonal skills, a reduced sense of popularity at school, and a more substantial experience of loneliness.<sup>22</sup> Furthermore, they receive lower grades in mathematics, despite the broader Ukrainian curriculum in this area. This may suggest that the academic potential of Ukrainian children and youth is not fully used in Polish schools.

## Challenges related to diagnosing and supporting children with special educational needs

Some Ukrainian students suffer a range of learning difficulties,<sup>23</sup> behavioral issues, or emotional challenges. However, these children are often undiagnosed. Communication with parents can be especially difficult if the school does not employ an intercultural assistant. Some parents, fearing stigma, are reluctant to have their children diagnosed at Psychological and Pedagogical Counseling Centers or to seek help from psychiatrists or psychotherapists. The most difficult situations involve children displaying problematic behaviors (e.g., related to ADHD, autism spectrum disorders, or self-harm), as the waiting time for free psychotherapy can extend up to 18 months. Some children are placed in mainstream schools when they would benefit more from attending special education institutions, often due to parents' lack of awareness of the relevant regulations.<sup>24</sup> Additionally, issuing a certificate of special education needs used to require the signature of one parent and the written consent of the other, which posed a significant barrier, particularly given that many Ukrainian mothers are raising children alone in Poland. In September 2024, a new regulation was introduced allowing children who are in the process of being diagnosed to be enrolled in special schools based on a parent's declaration, even without a formal certificate. However, not all Centers know this regulation, and there is a shortage of available placements in special education and integration classrooms.

<sup>20</sup> According to UNHCR data, women and children constitute about 80% of refugees from Ukraine in Poland <https://data.unhcr.org/en/situations/ukraine/location/10781>

<sup>21</sup> These are preliminary research results, the report of which will be published in September 2025.

<sup>22</sup> It should be noted that they do not have higher levels of school anxiety or a stronger feeling that they are victims of peer violence.

<sup>23</sup> They do not write, read, or speak their native language poorly.

<sup>24</sup> Ukrainian parents may be convinced that a diagnosis will mean that their child will be taken away from them and placed in a closed facility.



### **Enrollment of students at various points during the school year**

This situation initially arose due to military activities. Some Ukrainian families did not anticipate a multi-year stay outside of Ukraine and only began integrating their children into the Polish education system after introducing compulsory schooling. This issue may reoccur, albeit on a much smaller scale, in June of the current year, as applications for the new 800+ benefit period must be submitted between February 1 and May 31.

### **Lack of integration policy in schools leading to growing tensions between Polish and Ukrainian students**

The collective enthusiasm for helping, visible after the outbreak of war in 2022, has gradually faded. Initially, schools made significant efforts to foster integration—organizing events such as festivals, sports competitions, or “Ukrainian Culture Days”—but these initiatives were temporary and did not lead to lasting changes in attitudes toward multiculturalism.

*“A display case with embroidery, folk crafts, dances, and a map of Ukraine won’t solve everything. It highlights differences rather than similarities”; “It turned out that the good intentions of schools, management and teachers are not enough for integration”; “True inclusion is an everyday occurrence, not an action, which is easier and more visible, but does not lead to lasting changes.”*

(Persons representing NGOs)

Earlier enthusiasm and motivation for action are gradually waning, as there is a lack of systemic solutions, tools, and resources to enable schools to continue the integration process. Gradually, there is a return to “normality,” which is understood as monoculturalism, and a restoration of the school routine from before the outbreak of the war in Ukraine. The restoration of institutional equilibrium occurs at all levels and may also be due to the heavy burden of many daily tasks.

However, today’s schools face challenges beyond implementing the core curriculum and preparing for exams. Mental well-being plays a vital role in the educational process, so the emotional and social aspects of students’ functioning cannot be suppressed, especially since they also build their knowledge of the world based on peer relationships. Although the education system has done a good job of formally including children and teenagers from Ukraine, students from both countries are beginning to function as separate communities living more “side by side than with each other,” especially during breaks and after school. Schools are aware of this, but most often do not go beyond ad hoc measures due to a lack of competencies, finances, good practices, and an integration strategy that could prevent students from being locked into their groups. In addition, many schools do not see integration as their task, and teachers have not been systemically prepared to work with students with refugee experience.

*“Requirements are constantly being placed on schools, without thinking about how teachers will cope with them, without well-established role models. Teachers are lost, uncertain, judged by parents; they don’t know if they are doing the right thing, they need to make sure of it”; “On the issue of integration, the problems of the Polish school are concentrated like a lens.”*

(Persons representing educational institutions).

Integration was initially understood as a focus on Ukrainian children and youth. At the same time, too little attention was paid to the reaction of Polish students to the presence of refugees at school and the resulting changes. Schools may be afraid of changes toward multiculturalism and may not be ready for them. Referring to the autonomy of schools is also not helpful in the integration process, as systemic solutions and mobilizing the resources of the Ministry of Education are necessary at this stage.



Meanwhile, the issue of integration in education is not taking its rightful place. Many schools narrow it down to Polish language teaching, which is only one aspect of successful integration. As a result, misunderstandings and disputes arise in schools, intercultural divisions and conflicts grow. Not knowing how to integrate students effectively, schools reach for assimilationist measures.<sup>25</sup> Most schools lack the skills to manage multiculturalism and the culture to work in such an environment. Schools often treat Ukrainian students as just another group with special needs. However, this does not entail many adjustments, such as not considering the trauma of war or the specifics of learning in a culturally diverse environment. These difficulties arise from a lack of skills in working with foreign students and the condition of the Polish school and teaching environment, such as overwork, emotional strain, lack of time, training fatigue, and low salaries.

### **Concentration of Ukrainian students**

In some schools, particularly vocational ones, groups of Ukrainian youth tend to cluster together, often enrolling in schools where their peers are already present. Some institutions resist multicultural enrollment out of fear of being labeled as “Ukrainian schools.” On the other hand, fewer children are entering the Polish educational system each year due to the demographic decline, so schools benefit from accepting foreign students. Integrating older Ukrainian students requires greater school leadership and teaching staff effort. Integration is also hindered by expectations that students avoid speaking Ukrainian at school or by separate classes for Ukrainian students, both of which risk ghettoization and the escalation of conflicts.

### **Negative attitudes among Polish families**

Some Polish students and their parents do not fully understand the situation of refugee children, whom they perceive as enjoying special privileges that may arouse envy (such as being graded differently, receiving more

attention from teachers, being exempt from Polish language exams, or receiving subsidies for extracurricular activities). Domestic narratives may fuel conflicts, including anti-Ukrainian rhetoric used in political campaigns. Unpleasant or biting remarks can be the aftermath of what children hear in their environment (e.g., “If you don’t like it here, go back to Ukraine”).

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## **5.2. FACTORS FACILITATING THE INTEGRATION OF UKRAINIAN STUDENTS**

The vast majority of respondents (84%) confirmed that Ukrainian students receive support in the surveyed institutions, and this support is sufficient, according to most respondents. A significant number of people assessed it as rather sufficient (64% of Polish employees and 39% of Ukrainian ones), and more than every fourth respondent from Poland and every third from Ukraine consider it entirely sufficient (26% and 33%). This assistance consists of psychological support and learning the Polish language (28% indications each), integration classes (21%), adjusting curricula (12%), and peer support (7%). Other forms of assistance included mainly hiring an intercultural assistant.

### **Intercultural Assistants (IAs)**

The profession of intercultural assistant was introduced into the educational system on 1.09.2024, and was included in the administrative positions in local government units. The Assistance Fund finances the employment of IAs, i.e., the budget of Poland and the European Union. The assistants facilitate teachers and school administration contact with Ukrainian children and their parents, considering the language barrier<sup>26</sup> and cultural differences. They explain to parents the differences in teaching systems and the rules of Polish school operation.

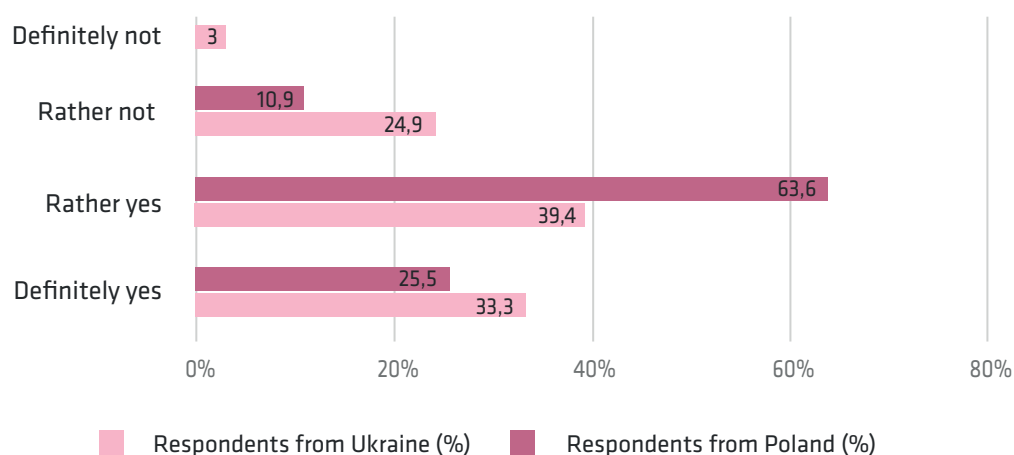
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<sup>25</sup> Swidrowska, E., Walczak B. (2024). Cultural Diversity of the Polish Schools—teachers’ perspective. The CEO and UNICEF quantitative report.

<sup>26</sup> Some parents do not speak Polish and do not learn this language, especially if they work in places where Ukrainian is spoken.



### Is the support provided to Ukrainian pupils by the school adequate?



They are a massive relief to schools because they understand the refugee/migration experience and can provide a sense of security for children. Ukrainian students readily advise IAs and report problems because they trust them. The assistants help when a student doesn't want to learn the language or go to school, and refer them to the Psychological and Pedagogical Counseling Center and a psychiatrist or psychologist, if necessary. Intercultural assistants organize meetings and trainings for parents and visit Ukrainian families, which is very helpful when the school has no contact with them. The assistants also help students preserve their identity and cultivate Ukrainian culture. The presence of IAs in schools also benefits children and parents of other nationalities who speak Russian, such as Belarusians, Russians, Georgians, and Chechens.

*"The children come to talk to the assistants at every break, so they also have better relations with Polish teachers and peers. The assistants help integrate the Ukrainian children and support the educator in this. They help children cope with trauma and adaptation stress, and ask parents about the reasons for their children's difficult behavior at school"; "The assistants' help to schools is invaluable, because they are often teachers of Ukrainian literature. They talk to the children in the quiet room or in the library, which has become the school's cultural center";*

*"In our school, there was always a teacher who needed the support of an intercultural assistant. The teachers are grateful to them. Even when there are 1-3 Ukrainian children in the class, the presence of the assistant helps the teachers a lot."*

(Persons representing educational institutions).

### Addressing the issue of integration by the MEN

In 2024, the MEN launched the government program "School for All," funded by the European Union and implemented from 2024 to 2027. The program provides IAs with better working conditions (job stability, professional development opportunities, supervision) and also includes improving the education system's staff and activities for the well-being of the school community.

### Professional development of teachers

Participation in courses and trainings, as well as anti-discrimination workshops, supports teachers who are concerned that they might miss something important, or "inadvertently touch the tender spots of traumatized children." These trainings also help deal with peer violence, not just against Ukrainian students. Leading schools provide education in this area for their entire staff.



### **School's openness to multiculturalism**

Internalized need for integration in school managers and taking purposeful action positively influence the attitudes of teachers, students, and their parents. Flexibility and preparation of the teaching staff are also necessary, as is attaching importance to students' social and intercultural competence. The team of teachers for students with refugee/ migration experience is very helpful in these activities, primarily when supported by the management and intercultural assistants. Developed standards for working with a student with refugee/migration experience Thanks to cooperation with various NGOs, standards have been developed for the assessment and classification of refugee/ migrant students, as well as individualized approaches to the process of their learning, psychological, pedagogical, and social support. Another standard regarding IAs and the teacher of Polish as a foreign language, as well as situations requiring the educator's and parents' intervention. These changes require adjustment of the provisions of the school statute and modification of other school documents.

### **Continuous integration activities in schools**

Integration activities, such as support groups, meetings with the school pedagogue and psychologist, excursions, competitions, and school fairs, are most effective if continuous. Continuing activities such as "Let's Get to Know Each Other" and "Hear Us" help improve the relationship between Ukrainian and Polish students by making the latter aware of the situation of refugee and migrant children.

### **Preschool education and early childhood education**

The attendance of Ukrainian children in kindergartens and grades I-III in elementary schools greatly facilitates their introduction to the Polish educational system, including coping with the communication barrier. Younger children learn a foreign language faster, and their basic knowledge of it is sufficient at the initial stages of education.

### **Integrative function of the preparatory classes**

Clear rules for attending a preparatory class and entering school encourage the Polish educational system. These classes are gradually declining, and currently, 2.4% of refugee students attend them. Preparatory classes fulfill their role well, as long as they are not just a place to learn the Polish language, but serve to integrate and fully prepare the child for further education.

### **Fewer classes and courses in small groups**

Integration-friendly courses must not be too large. Elementary schools are bound by districting, which means that some classes can have more than 30 students, while the optimal number of students in a class attended by refugee children should not exceed 24. In the integration process, classes conducted in smaller groups work well, so students of different nationalities learn to cooperate.



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## USEFUL MATERIALS AVAILABLE ON THE INTERNET

**Centre for Citizenship Education (CEO)** – materials on supporting students with migrant experiences:

<https://ceo.org.pl/uczen-i-uczennica-z-doswiadczeniem-migracyjnym-w-szkole-jak-i-ch-wspierac/>

A model for educational integration in schools receiving migrant students, developed by the CEO in cooperation with the Norwegian Refugee Council (2024) <https://biblioteka.ceo.org.pl/model-integracji-edukacyjnej/>

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**Education for Democracy (FED)** – comparison of the education systems in Poland and Ukraine: <https://fed.org.pl/pomoc-dla-ukrainy-edukacja/>



**EMIC**, Educational innovation project including, for example, a welcome package (in different languages) for Ukrainian children and parents who join a Polish school–A model for a school friendly to male and female students with migration experience:  
[https://emic.com.pl/assets/Model\\_szkoly\\_przyjaznej\\_2023-v2.pdf](https://emic.com.pl/assets/Model_szkoly_przyjaznej_2023-v2.pdf)

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Information on the nostrification of diplomas in the Ukrainian language:  
<https://nawa.gov.pl/images/users/623/-diplomiv-pro-visu-osvitu.pdf>

**Migrant Point Teacher Training Center in Poznan** – publication “Not only the first year” and other materials and trainings:  
<https://odnpoznan.pl/materialy/wsparcie-uczniow-z-doswiadczeniem-migracji>,  
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**Sieć Organizacji Społecznych Wspólna Szkoła** - <https://soswspolnaszkola.pl/>

**School with Class:** <https://soswspolnaszkola.pl/>

**Children's University in the Classroom**, a guide How to prepare your classroom to welcome students from Ukraine:  
<https://wklasie.uniwersytetdzieci.pl/aktualnosci/jak-przygotowac-klase-na-przyjecie-ukrainskich-uczniow-materialy-dla-nauczycieli>

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