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*Children and Youth with Multicultural
Backgrounds in the Polish System of Education*

Introduction

The text addresses the issue of the legal situation of foreign children in the Polish education system. It aims to present the theoretical (legal) and practical (school environment) aspects of the Polish system of education in which foreign students function. The first part outlines the history of immigration to Poland as a country which, compared to Western European countries, has a low level of cultural diversity across the population. The second part presents selected aspects of the system of education in Poland as well as selected regulations of both international and domestic Polish law pertaining to the education of foreign children. The last part refers to the state of research on the presence and functioning of foreign children in Polish educational institutions with a particular focus on school. The cited statistical data illustrate the insignificant presence of foreign children in Polish schools.

The text is based on the analysis of academic literature, reports from non-governmental organizations and government institutions as well as various legal regulations referring to the functioning of migrant children in Poland. It also draws on fragments of the Authors' own research conducted within the project 'A culturally different child in Poland. A pedagogical study of "rooting"' conducted between 2011–2014 in the Mazovian voivodeship and the capital city of Warsaw'.

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The history of immigration to Poland: a brief characterisation

Throughout the centuries the Polish people have comprised an emigrant nation and Poland a country which ‘has sent out’ rather than ‘accepted’ migrants. After both World War I and II as well as periods of communism, Polish people were made refugees of both war and politics. As such, many Poles were forced to seek refuge and protection in Western European countries as well as North America.

Due to the socialist system under which the Polish state operated between 1945 and 1989, few and sporadic foreigners arrived in our country. They arrived mainly from the states of the Eastern Bloc and came within scientific scholarship programs or through use of trade opportunities between the countries under the protectorate of the Soviet Union. It was only in a specific number of cases, primarily due to political, not humanitarian reasons, that Poland (at that time: The Polish People’s Republic – Polish: Polska Rzeczpospolita Ludowa – PRL) provided shelter to refugees in search of asylum due to the difficult situation in their countries of origin. In the 1950s, over ten thousand refugees from Europe: the Greeks and Macedonians (in total over fifteen thousand people) (Pudło, 1997: 149) as well as approximately two thousand children from North Korea (Krzyżanowska and Ukleja, 1993: 81–82) found refuge in Poland. In 1973, Poland also hosted several dozen Chileans who came in search of aid and protection (Wierzbicki, 1993: 172). In the period of the Polish People’s Republic, following the Iran- Iraq conflict in 1987, The Polish Red Cross, whose activity for refugees resulted from the tasks of *the International Red Cross Movement and Red Crescent* as well as the regulation of art.3 par.2 of *the Polish Red Cross Act* (Law Journal of 1964, No. 41, pos. 276 with later amendments), provided aid to the citizens of Iran who found themselves on the territory of Poland. In the 1980s, an average of twenty individuals, mainly from African and Asian countries¹, came to Poland annually in search of an asylum. As Norbert Rafalik (2012: 5) writes: ‘From the end of World War II until early 1990s Poland did

¹ The Polish law varies from the European law in the terms: refugee (Polish: *azylant*), asylum seeker (Polish: *osoba wnioskująca o status uchodźcy*) and recognized refugee (Polish: *uznany uchodźca*). An asylum (Polish: *azyl*) is an independent decision of the Polish state and does not result from any international obligations, unlike the status of a recognized refugee.

not participate in the international refugee protection system as the country was not a party to the Geneva Convention on the status of refugees. At the same time, under the influence of the Soviet Union Polish borders were closed to immigrants [...]’.

It was only after the collapse of communism in 1989 and after Poland had signed the 1951 Geneva Convention on the status of refugees and subsequently the 1967 New York Protocol in 1991, that our country began to attract more foreigners applying for refugee status. The first wave appeared as early as 1990 when the Swedish authorities deported a group of several hundred individuals from Ethiopia, Somalia, Lebanon, Iraq and Syria to Poland. These people had attempted to reach Sweden by ferry from the Polish coast of the Baltic Sea (Ząbek and Łodziński, 2008: 77–78.). Since then, the number of foreigners wishing to receive refugee status has constantly increased. However, the majority of refugees treat Poland as a transit country, which implies a short period of stay and the intention to emigrate to the West. This tendency is connected with better socioeconomic conditions of Western European countries. In the years 1990–1991 the citizens of African countries (mainly the Horn of Africa: Ethiopia and Somalia) as well as of Arab countries predominated in this group. In the years 1992–1994, the citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina, former Yugoslavia and Armenia, were the most populous group of asylum seekers. In 1995 the greatest number of individuals applying for refugee status came from India, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Afghanistan and Pakistan (Szonert, 1999: 227). In the years 1992–2000 most such applications came from citizens of Asian countries (Florczak, 2003: 110). In these years individuals from ninety two countries around the world applied for refugee status in Poland, in the years 2005–2007 – from 121 countries, while ‘in 2010 the applications came from fifty nine countries’ (Rafalik, 2012: 13). Since the year 2000, Russian citizens of Chechen nationality have been the most robustly numbered group of individuals to apply for refugee status². In 2014, 6,621 individuals submitted applications for refugee status, the majority of whom came from the territory of the Russian Federation (Chechnya), Ukraine and Georgia.

² This was connected with two Chechen wars: the first one in the years 1994–1996 and the second one in the years 1999–2002.

Among foreigners who migrate to Poland there is a large group of children- minors who submit applications for refugee status with their parents. The second group comprises children- minors who are not accompanied by a legal representative in Poland (most frequently parents/ guardians) and who can apply for such a status themselves. In such cases an official requests to appoint a curator for a foreign child to represent he or she during legal proceedings. An unaccompanied minor submitting a request for international protection in Poland is also appointed a *de facto* custodian, an employee of the Office for Foreigners, whose task is to exercise custody over the child. According to the act on granting protection to foreigners in the territory of the Republic of Poland, the term ‘a minor without custody’ refers to ‘a minor foreigner who arrives on the territory of the Republic of Poland without adult guardians responsible for him or her’ (*Act of 13 June 2003 on granting protection to foreigners on the territory of the Republic of Poland*, Law Journal 2003, No 128, pos. 1176).

According to existing Polish legislation, it is forbidden to place unaccompanied, asylum-seeking minors (below the age of fifteen) in detention (in closed centres). However, upon request of Border Guards the court can refer a minor to such a centre. The applicable act on foreigners obliges the court which decides to place an unaccompanied minor in a guarded centre for foreigners to consider the best interest of the minor, in other words, to be guided by a child’s well-being. Nevertheless, the theoretical assumptions and the applicable regulations do not always translate to best practice which would guarantee a child the best conditions for development and adaptation to the new socio-cultural environment of the host country.

As the authors of the report ‘In search of protection. Selected problems referring to the realisation of the rights of asylum-seekers remaining under international protection in the years 2012–2014. Observations of the Legal Assistance For Refugees and Migrants Program of the Helsinki Human Rights Foundation’ indicate: ‘There are no analogous regulations concerning families with children applying for international protection in Poland. A large number of families with children still remain in guarded centres’ (Białas et al., 2014: 72). The report stresses that foreign minors applying for refugee status should not be placed in guarded centres. This refers both to foreign minors who are unaccompanied as well as foreign children remaining in Poland accompanied by parents/ guardians.

Table 1. Refugee Minors remaining in Poland with parents/ guardians applying for refugee status in the period between 1 January 2015 and 30 May 2015

Age/ month	January	February	March	April	May
0–13	215	202	226	292	294
14–17	22	22	13	34	22
Total	237	224	239	326	316

Authors' compilation based on <<http://udsc.gov.pl/statystyki/raporty-okresowe/zestawienia-miesieczne/status-uchodzcy/2015-2/>>, Access date: June 24, 2015.

The system of education in Poland

The key element of everyday life which enables foreign children to adapt to the new conditions of the host country, as well as to integrate with the majority society, is formal education which takes place in the space of school. School is a place of encounters, communication situations as well as teachers' educational-nurture work with Polish and foreign students. Additionally, it is a space in which relations between students of various cultural backgrounds are formed. It is also a place of socialisation and acculturation which, in the case of foreign children, is frequently connected with the experience of alienation, culture shock as well as difficult situations and conflicts. These conflicts and situations are related to the differences in cultural experiences, unfamiliarity with the language, cultural script, and a distinct system of cultural norms and social behaviours. At times, the very system of education and the operating procedures at schools are foreign and incomprehensible to the students and their parents. Not all foreign children arrive in the new country and the new school of their own volition. Following the decision of parents, who choose to emigrate due to unexpected circumstances (war, conflict, difficult living conditions), leaving their country is often sudden, without earlier psychological and mental preparation of the child. 'The decision might, or might not have been consulted with the child, its opinion might, or might not have been considered' (Chisi et al., 2015: 6).

Their childhood biographies and school experiences are varied. After the hardships of their journey, they arrive in a new country and according to Polish law they are subject to compulsory education. They are included in a monocultural

system of education which is presently undergoing a process of adjustment in attempts to accommodate students with varied educational needs. Clearly, foreign students belong to such a group.

There are two basic models of integration policy concerning access to education which operate in Poland and are frequently cited in domestic academic publications: an integration model and a separation model (Todorovska-Sokolovska, 2009). The integration model, which functions also, among other countries, in Ireland, Scotland and Italy, assumes an integral education of children with multicultural backgrounds as well as children from the host country. Additional lessons of the language of the host country and at times also (depending on the realised projects and financial support) classes teaching the traditions and culture are organised in an individual mode. The separation model, which is also found in Germany, prescribes the early education of immigrant children in separate classes. As soon as the children learn the language of the host country at a level which allows for active participation in lessons, they are transferred to integrated classes. Certain schools apply a mixed model, which is oriented towards the integration of Polish and foreign students and the creation of educational space in which they will be able to acquire competencies within the language of the host country.

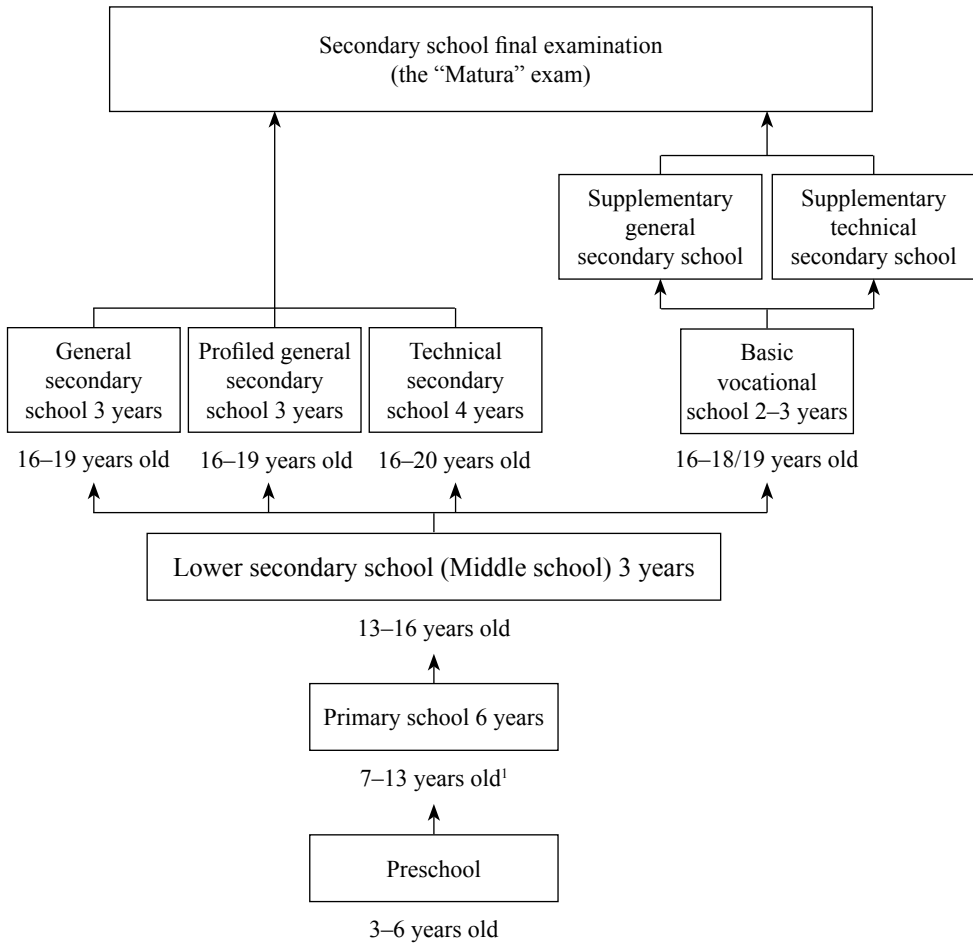
The system of education ensures the realisation of children's and adolescents' rights to learn through education, nurture and care. The basic legal act in this scope is *Education Act of 7 September 1991* (Law Journal of 2004, No. 256, pos. 2572 with later amendments).

Article 2 of this Act states that its structure includes:

1. Preschools, including: integrated classrooms; special preschools;
2. Schools:
 - a) Primary schools, including: special and integrated schools; schools with integrated and sports classrooms; sports schools;
 - b) Lower secondary schools, including: special, integrated and bilingual schools; schools with integrated, bilingual and sports classrooms; sports schools;
 - c) Upper secondary schools, including: special, integrated and bilingual schools; schools with integrated, bilingual and sports classrooms; sports, agriculture and forestry schools;
 - d) Arts schools.

Special preschools/schools are designed for students with a statement of special educational needs. In integrated schools, all classrooms are integrated in which students with a statement of special educational needs learn and develop together with other students. In bilingual schools, all classrooms are bilingual, and teaching is realized in two languages: Polish and a modern foreign language which is the second language of instruction. An agricultural school educates

Chart 1. The education system in Poland: Authors' compilation



¹ The 2015 amendment to Education Act introduces compulsory education from the age of 7 and the right to commence education at the age of 6. The new regulations apply from the school year 2016/2017.

exclusively within professions of agriculture, while a forestry school educates exclusively within professions of forestry. There are also international schools and classrooms where education is realised based on the curriculum designed by a foreign educational institution. Schools in Poland are divided into public or non-public (*civic, church, private*). Education is obligatory for children from the age of 7 to 18 years old (The 2015 amendment to Education Act introduces compulsory education from the age of 7 and the right to commence education at the age of 6. The new regulations apply from the school year 2016/2017).

The right to education and compulsory education in selected acts of international and domestic law

The right to education is expressed in various legislature, both Polish and international. Article 2 of the *First Protocol to the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms*, 20 March 1952 (Law Journal of 1995, No. 36, pos. 175) states that: ‘No person shall be denied the right to education. In the exercise of any functions which it assumes in relation to education and to teaching, the State shall respect the right of parents to ensure such education and teaching in conformity with their own religious and philosophical convictions’.

Another document pertaining to the right to education is the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights of 19 December 1966 (Law Journal of 1977, No 38, pos. 169). Article 13 states that every person has a right to education which aims at developing the individual, his or her sense of dignity as well as pursuing respect for human rights. Education should aim at an individual’s participation in a free and democratic society and ought to seek peaceful relations between people of different races, nationalities and religions. In order to achieve the assumed aims, basic education should be compulsory, free and equally accessible to everyone.

The question of educating the children of migrant workers within the policy of migrants’ integration in Europe was addressed in the Directive of the Council of the European Communities (*Council Directive of 25 July 1977 on the education of the children of migrant workers (77/486/EWG)*, the Council of the European Communities). The directive, which is devoted to policy and

educational solutions in its general provisions, obliges particular countries to guarantee free education to the children of migrants, particularly within language education of the host country as well as within activities designed to support children's native language education and the promotion of the knowledge of the culture of their country of origin. The regulations above were preserved in the Treaty of Amsterdam and confirmed in later treaty documents which drew attention to the social integration of migrants as one of the basic spheres of activity of the European Community. They were supplemented with the Directive 2000/43/WE of 29 June 2000, which introduced the rule of equal treatment of individuals regardless of their race or ethnic origin, as well as Council Directive 2003/109/EC of 25 November 2003, which refers to the status of citizens of third countries.

Another document including regulations referring to, among other things, the right to education is *the Convention on the Rights of the Child*, 20 November 1989 (Law Journal of 1991, No. 120, pos. 526). Article 28 states that education at a basic level should be compulsory and free for every child and that there should be school and vocational counselling enabling the child's comprehensive psycho-physical development. Moreover, the signatories of the Convention should pursue the aim of reducing illiteracy rates around the world and take all possible steps to facilitate an exchange of scientific and technical knowledge as well as modern teaching methods between countries. Article 29 of the same Convention refers to an assumption that education should aim at the comprehensive development of a child's personality, abilities and intellectual as well as physical potential. Additionally, it should contribute to respect for a child's cultural identity, language as well as the values and religious beliefs of both the child and its parents. Another important task of education should consist in preparing a child for life in a democratic society based on respect for peace and cooperation between people of different races, cultures, religions, beliefs and worldviews. What is more, education should transmit the significance and validity of environmental care.

The right to education is also articulated in *the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union*, 13 December 2007 (Official Journal of the EU, 2010/C 83/02). Article 14 states as follows:

- “1. Everyone has the right to education and to have access to vocational and continuing training.
2. This right includes the possibility to receive free compulsory education.

3. The freedom to found educational establishments with due respect for democratic principles and the right of parents to ensure the education and teaching of their children in conformity with their religious, philosophical and pedagogical convictions shall be respected, in accordance with the national laws governing the exercise of such freedom and right.”

The document: *Conclusions on the education of children with a migrant background* of 26 November 2009 draws attention to the essential role of education in the integration of foreigners in Europe. It has been indicated that: ‘education has a key role to play not only in providing children from migrant environments with opportunities thanks to which they can fully use their potential to become successful citizens who are integrated with the society, but also in creating a just society which favours integration and respects diversity. (...) The integration of migrants is a common task which requires effort of migrants themselves and is realised by a number of varied social sectors, not only the sector of education’ (*Conclusions of the Council of 26 November 2009 on the education of children with a migrant background* (2009/C 301/07)).

On the grounds of Polish law, the right to education is articulated in *the Constitution of the Republic of Poland*, 2 April 1997 (Law Journal of 1997, No. 78, pos. 483). Article 70 (1–4) states that every individual has a right to education which is free until the age of eighteen. Universal and equal access to education are provisioned for, and in state schools learning is tuition-free. The article also states that parents have a right to choose a school for their child other than a state school.

The Polish legal system provides two basic documents regulating the right to education of foreigners who remain in the territory of the Republic of Poland. These are: *Education Act of 7 September 1991* (Law Journal of 2004, No. 256, pos. 2572 with later amendments and *Order of The Minister of National Education of 2 January 2015 on the conditions and procedures of accepting to Polish schools non-citizens and Polish citizens who attended schools functioning in schooling systems of other countries, as well as the organisation of additional Polish language lessons, additional compensatory education and lessons of the language and culture of the country of origin* (Law Journal of 2015, pos. 31). Article 94a of this Act states that foreigners have a right to free education and care in public preschools. They also have a right to free education in primary, lower secondary and public arts schools as well as in public upper secondary

schools until the age of 18 or until the completion of upper secondary school. Public schools for adults, public post-secondary non-tertiary schools, public arts schools, public centres, public teacher training centres and public social service colleges as well as lifelong learning in the form of vocational qualification courses can be accessed for free by, among others: 1. citizens of European Union countries, member countries of the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) – parties to the agreement on The European Economic Area or the Swiss Confederation as well as their family members with residency rights or permanent residency rights; 2. persons of Polish origin; 3. persons who were granted permanent residency rights in the territory of the Republic of Poland; 4. persons with a valid Polish Card (Karta Polaka); 5. persons whose right of this type is guaranteed in international agreements; 6. persons who have been granted refugee status which may include their family members; 7. persons with permission for a tolerated stay; 8. persons and their family members who have been granted temporary stay on humanitarian grounds; 9. persons and their family members who have been granted complementary protection; 10. persons under temporary protection in the territory of the Republic of Poland; 11. persons who have been granted permission to remain in the territory of the Republic of Poland as long term residents of the European Union; 12. family members of persons applying for refugee status.

There are also three paths of support for foreign children who do not know the Polish language or who know it at a level which is insufficient to participate in state education. These include:

1. Additional, free Polish language education in the form of supplementary lessons.
2. Additional compensatory lessons of a particular subject for the period of twelve months. The total number of additional Polish lessons and compensatory lessons cannot exceed 5 hours a week.
3. Assistance of a person speaking the language of the student's country of origin, employed as a teacher's assistant (for instance as a cultural assistant) by the principal of the school for a period not longer than twelve months. Such a person, as school praxis reveals, can also be employed at the school thanks to financing received from a non-governmental organization within social, educational or integrational projects. In such a case, the speaker of the child's native language is called a cultural or intercultural assistant, but

in fact the tasks of such an employee are the same as a one who assists or supports the teacher, that is, provides support through translation and homework assistance, mediation in contacting the pedagogical staff and the students' parents, and helps with solving culture-based conflicts. A cultural/intercultural assistant's job is still a rather innovative form of support for culturally different students, their parents and school as well as the local environment. In Polish schools attended by students with a migrant background, assistants are seen as necessary. They are individuals who possess mastery of the Polish language and Polish cultural paradigms. They are also communicative persons who are respected among the members of a particular group of foreigners. Belonging to the students' culture (for instance, in the case of Poland: Vietnamese, Chinese, Chechen) they not only translate educational documents and announcements or explain misunderstandings in the sequence: students – school – parents as well as parents – school – students. They also serve to explain the nurture, educational, cultural and social reality which surrounds the migrant child. Thus, they become intercultural guides for students, parents and teachers. They mediate in matters concerning school, education, school achievements (or lack thereof), provide emotional support to students, and strengthen their sense of security in their new surroundings. From the students' point of view, these are exceptionally important tasks as students with a migrant background, who do not know the Polish language or Polish cultural script, are not always able to understand the educational realities, demands of particular teachers and the tasks assigned to them. From the perspectives of foreign parents, a cultural assistant is an invaluable source of knowledge connected with the Polish system of education, the rules, customs and traditions which they encounter in their children's school experience. From the teachers' perspective, an assistant helps facilitate Polish language education as well as the process of integration.

Many refugee centres in Poland as well as schools and centres run by NGOs which cooperate with migrants, offer adults and children both formal and outside-formal Polish language lessons. Their aim is possibly the earliest familiarization with the language and culture of the host country, integration with other children and adults (volunteers, teachers, psychologists) and through the above – facilitation of a better start at school. The organisation of classes, work

methods and teaching content of the classes realised within wider projects and programs differs in particular cities, towns and centres.

Moreover, in the case of foreigners subject to obligatory education, a diplomatic or consular post of the country of their origin operating in Poland or a cultural-educational association of a given nationality can organize language and cultural education of the child's country of origin. Such activities are organised following an agreement with the head of a particular school.

The presence of a foreign child in a Polish school poses new challenges for school authorities and teaching staff connected with understanding the needs and specific character of culturally diverse children's functioning in new conditions of the host country. Hence, it predisposes school employees to expand their intercultural competences, adjust the working conditions at school to foreign students' needs and finally develop competences as well as the acquisition of new skills in the sphere of communication and knowledge transmission. The Athens Declaration (A declaration of European ministers of education on the subject of intercultural education in the new European context of 10–12 November 2003) draws attention to teachers' training in the area of intercultural competences and encourages particular countries to consider the intercultural dimension in developed strategies and realised programs connected with the education of migrant children. It includes detailed recommendations concerning the involvement of particular European countries in the development of intercultural education with respect for human rights and diversity, promotion of best practices and preparation of teachers to fill this role.

In Warsaw, where the greatest number of foreign children in the country reside, "Education Department of the Municipal Office", Capital City of Warsaw implements 'The concept of systemic support for the education of foreigners'. This involves, among other things, systemic activities to raise the qualifications of Warsaw's teachers in the area of intercultural competencies as well as to expand the educational offer for children with migrant experience (also re-emigrants) at different stages of school education.

Within the support outlined for the didactic work of school, principals and teaching staff as well as the communication between students, parents and schools, information, guidebooks and publications connected with accepting and teaching foreign children in Polish schools are prepared by non-governmental organisations and educational institutions.

The publications include ‘Welcome pack for foreign pupils and their parents’ created and published by Education Department of the Capital City of Warsaw in cooperation with the following schools: Primary School No. 211 in Warsaw, Lower Secondary School No. 14 in Warsaw. The materials were published in paper and electronic version in Polish, Russian, Ukrainian, Chechen, English as well as Vietnamese. Among other publications are, to name a few: ‘A migrant child in our classroom. Recommendations from teachers for teachers’; ‘Towards a multicultural school in Poland’ – educational pack with a curriculum for teaching Polish as a second language for the first, second and third stage of education (in schools of the Capital City of Warsaw); an e-textbook ‘Turn Poland On!’; handbooks and packs of best practices developed within the program ‘Education in the face of migration challenges’: ‘Materials for education in the face of migration challenges, ‘An autobiography of intercultural encounters’ as well as handbooks: ‘An Other in Polish school – guidebook for teachers working with migrant pupils’ and ‘Working with foreign children- a guidebook of good practices’.

Educational materials for schools and teachers are available not only in paper versions but during training sessions, seminars and workshops organised on the subject of intercultural education or global education. They can also be found in their electronic version on the Internet sites of institutions and non-governmental organisations which enact projects for the support of teachers working with students with a multicultural context. Teachers can find a range of lesson plans, texts and presentations and adapt them to the needs of didactic work in a multicultural school classroom.

Foreign children in Polish educational institutions: the state of research

In the last decade, after Poland entered the European Union, a number of articles and various reports and studies on the situation of foreign students, including refugee students in Polish schools, have appeared in the Polish literature. However, the majority of the reports are based on “local” studies conducted on limited samples, in particular cities and/or voivodeships. There are also rare international studies in which Poland is most frequently only one of the researched countries. Below is a list of the four most important reports and

documents referring to international (European) studies in which Poland is one of the participating countries:

1. 'Xenophobe. The European Dilemma: Institutional Patterns and Politics of "Racial" Discrimination', apart from Poland seven other European countries participated in the project: Sweden, Austria, France, Great Britain, Germany, Italy and Cyprus. The research concerned institutional mechanisms of discrimination against foreigners in the job market and the system of education. It was conducted after the accession of Poland to the European Union in 2004 (More on the subject: Pawlak, 2005).
2. 'Access to Quality Education by Asylum-Seeking and Refugee Children. Poland Country Report, Situational Analysis', is a report commissioned by UNHCR which is a part of an analysis concerning the education of children awaiting refugee status, recognized as refugees and displaced children in forty two European countries. Apart from Poland the study was conducted, among others, in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Finland, Norway, France, Germany and Hungary. It was realized in 2006/2007 and focused on the access to education of children awaiting refugee status, unaccompanied minors, children recognized as refugees and children with a tolerated stay in Poland (More on the subject: Kosowicz, 2007).
3. 'Educational Challenges Posed by Migration to Poland', a report developed within the EMILIE project: 'A European approach to multicultural citizenship: legal, political and educational challenges', (CIT5-028205), 2009. The study was conducted by the Centre for International Relations within the 6th Framework Programme of the European Commission. The project lasted from July 2006 to September 2009 and encompassed nine countries: Belgium, Great Britain, Denmark, France, Germany, Spain, Greece, Poland, and Latvia. The aim of the project was to examine legal, political and educational challenges resulting from the religious, cultural and ethnic diversity in European societies (More on the subject: Gmaj, 2009).
4. 'Multicultural Diversity and Special Needs Education', a report summarizing a review of literature and research encompassing the years 1994–2009 developed by The European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education and covering twenty five countries: Austria, Belgium, Cyprus, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Greece, Spain, Holland, Iceland, Lithuania, Luxemburg, Latvia, Malta, Germany, Norway, Poland,

Portugal, the Czech Republic, Sweden, Switzerland, Hungary, Great Britain (England) and Italy. The research aimed at analysing the education of students with special educational needs (SEN) originating from immigrant backgrounds (Grünberger et al., 2009).

As far as local research is concerned, only two comprehensive publications regarding foreign children in Polish schools have appeared in recent years:

1. 'Foreign children in Polish educational institutions – a school perspective. Research report', the study was conducted in 2009 by the National In-Service Teacher Training Centre within the project: 'Education in the face of migration challenges'. Its aim was to diagnose the situation of foreign children in the Polish school system via the perception of school principals, teachers and school pedagogues (More on the subject: Bleszyńska, 2010).
2. 'The realisation of foreign minors' right to education', a report commissioned by the Polish Ombudsman. The study was conducted in the years 2011/2012 and 2012/2013 focused on the right to education of asylum-seeking minors remaining in centres for foreigners as well as minors placed in closed centres for foreigners and awaiting the decision or execution of the decision with a statement concerning deportation from the territory of Poland (More on the subject: The realisation of foreign minors' right to education, a report of the Polish Ombudsman, 2013: 12, 5–56).

Both international studies encompassing Poland and local reports provide a fragmentary view of the situation of foreign children in Polish schools. Further research is necessary which would take into consideration the changing social, legal, economic and geopolitical situation of Poland on the map of Europe and the world.

Foreign children in Polish schools: statistical data

Until 2001, accompanied, asylum-seeking children who did not have in their possession a certificate or a document confirming attendance at school abroad were not accepted to Polish schools. Children remaining in refugee centres were restricted to attending Polish language lessons. In 2001 the Ministry of National

Education began the process of collecting data on the number of foreigners learning in Polish educational institutions. In the school year 2004/2005 a significant number of children awaiting refugee status appeared in Polish schools – over 6,000 (More on the subject: Gmaj, 2009: 5). In the school year 2010/2011 there were over 5,000 foreign children in the education system (Children in Poland. Data, 2013: 58–60), while in the years 2013/2014 approximately 7,500 foreign children attended Polish preschools, primary and secondary schools (Fihel, 2014: 8). The group of foreign children attending Polish schools includes children of refugees, persons awaiting refugee status as well as persons granted permission for permanent residency in the territory of the Republic of Poland, persons granted complementary protection, permission for tolerated stay, permission for leave to remain on humanitarian grounds as well as temporary protection. Moreover, Polish schools provide education for the children of seasonal workers, migrant workers from the European Union, children from national minorities, children of repatriates and from mixed marriages. The number of foreign children in Polish schools in 2005 constituted 0.06 per cent of the total school population, which, in comparison to Western European countries, is a marginal number (data from the schools year 2006/2007).

As certain data show, approximately one thousand foreign children attend Warsaw public and private schools. There are no official data/statistics on the websites of the Ministry of National Education and the departments of education – in particular voivodeships – concerning the number of foreign students or their countries of origin. The data are mainly available in publications which were developed within various academic projects as well as social, integrational, educational projects run by non-governmental organisations and the Education Department of the Capital City of Warsaw. Thus, they can vary. Valentina Todorovska-Sokolovska reports that in the school year 2006/2007 there were 1,506 foreign children in the schools of the Mazovian voivodeship (Todorovska-Sokolovska, 2010: 3). In June 2008 there were 753 foreign children in Warsaw schools, 702 of whom were children from third countries (Chrzanowska, 2009: 2). A study conducted by the National In-Service Teacher Training Centre within the project ‘Education in the face of migration challenges’ showed that in the school year 2009/2010 234 foreign students (including 109 girls and 125 boys) attended Warsaw primary and secondary schools. The majority, i.e. approximately ninety per cent were single students (up to five individuals from one country). They represented fifty four

countries: Western Europe (Belgium, Denmark, France, Spain, Germany, Portugal, Sweden, Great Britain and Italy); Southern Europe (Albania, Bulgaria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Greece, Moldavia, Romania and Slovenia); Central and Eastern Europe (Belarus, Czech Republic, Lithuania, Latvia, Russia and Ukraine); the South Caucasus (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia); Asia Minor and the Middle East (Iraq, Iran, Yemen, Lebanon, Syria, Turkey, United Arab Emirates); Central Asia (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Mongolia); East and South Asia (China, India, Japan, Korea, Pakistan, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Vietnam); Africa (Angola, Ghana, Congo, Libya, Madagascar, Nigeria, Somalia and Sudan); North America (USA, Mexico) and three republics: Chechnya, Dagestan, Ingushetia which are territorially parts of the Russian Federation. In Warsaw's public schools, refugees of Chechen origin constitute the largest percentage of foreign children. Among the remaining refugees the majority are students from Georgia with single students from Iraq, Sri Lanka, Congo, Nigeria, Somalia and Sudan. The research was conducted between September and November 2009, its aim was to diagnose the school situation of foreign children, while the subject was the identification of the school situation of these children in the perception of educational institutions' employees. The report does not provide the list of schools in which the study was conducted (More on the subject: Błeszyńska, 2010: 23–24). Anna Bernacka-Langier reports that in the 2009/2010 school year, 134 refugee students attended Warsaw schools (in four primary and two lower secondary schools), the majority of whom were Chechen pupils. Vietnamese (341) and Ukrainian (263) students dominated among migrants (mainly economic migrants). There were 330 children of migrant workers in Warsaw schools – mainly non-public ones (Bernacka-Langier, 2010: 9–10).

Foreign children still remain a modest group in terms of percentage, however, an internally diverse group, both in terms of nationality and culture. Distinctions can be made based on: parents'/ guardians' country of origin, the child's and his or her parents'/guardians' legal and social status: refugee students, foreign students (economic migration), students from bicultural/bi-national families, as well as on the distribution in schools on the educational and geographic map of Poland. As revealed by the study of the authors of the present article as well as other research, cultural differences and other qualities of individuals and cultural groups: religion, nationality, age, language, social class, status, gender, etc. can constitute an additional value in the didactic and nurture work of the school.

Conclusions

Compared to the countries of Western Europe, Poland still has limited experience working with children with a multicultural context, which is not insignificant in the conditions of dynamization of migrant movements and their considerable structural diversity as well as multilevel cultural diversity. However, in both the dimension of legal regulations and school practice there is a continuous need for the adjustment of educational activities directed at foreign students with varied legal and social status. Additionally, there is a need for the development of tools designed to realise the accepted assumptions connected with the improvement of educational policy in the sphere of teaching foreign children with the consideration of Poland's cultural specificity. What seems equally crucial are the activities connected with teachers' education and training in the sphere of intercultural education. Poland belongs to the group of countries which apply integration policy and undertake educational activities for the newly arrived individuals. Needless to say, in the face of the transforming background of immigration to Europe: 'a number of questions connected with migrant children's education needs to be solved. Diversity ought to be reflected in the curriculum, cooperation between teachers, immigrants' communities and schools ought to be pursued and all specific problems ought to be solved, e.g.: when a large number of immigrant children learn in one school' (Communication from the Commission to the Council, European Parliament, European Economic and Social Committee as well as Committee of the Regions on the subject of immigration, integration and employment of 3 June 2003).

Despite the fact that Poland does not have a long tradition of accepting immigrants, it has an obligation, resulting not only from international agreements, but also from the sense of community with those who seek refuge and safety, to help those who have been deprived of their homeland and the right to respectable living conditions in peace. Thus, educational activities should concentrate on intercultural preparation of teachers, Polish students and students with a multicultural context as well as on the elimination of all forms of exclusion and discrimination in education. The following words remain valid: 'Today we know from experience that an arbitrary partition of countries, forced displacement of the population, unlimited armament, uncontrolled application of modern weapon, violation of basic rights of people and nations, violation of

international coexistence, as well as forced imposition of totalitarian ideologies – can only lead to the downfall of humanity’ (John Paul II, 2008: 32).

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TABLE AND FIGURE LEGENDS

Chart 1. The system of education in Poland.

Table: 1. Minor refugees remaining in Poland with parents/ guardians applying for refugee status in the period 01 January 2015 – 31 May 2015.