

EDUCATION OF UKRAINIAN CHILDREN IN POLAND - BASIC INFORMATION

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ABSTRACT

Aim. The aim of the study was to attempt to familiarise the subject of the systemic and local solutions introduced in Poland in order to minimise problems related to the admission of Ukrainian children to educational institutions.

Concept. The study reviewed the legal acts and recommendations of the Ombudsman concerning the education of children, mainly Ukrainian, in Polish schools.

Results and conclusions. The inclusion of a large number of Ukrainian children in the Polish educational system required the cooperation of representatives of the Ministry of Education and Science, school boards, non-governmental organisations and local authorities, as well as teachers and educators themselves. In response to the difficulties, the Polish Ombudsman recommended simplifying the process of recruiting teachers and cultural assistants from Ukraine to Polish educational institutions. International classes were created and anti-discrimination and multicultural education was implemented to integrate refugees especially during distance learning. The Ministry of Education immediately responded to all recommendations with concrete actions, including planning multicultural classrooms. In addition, alternative options were suggested, such as the establishment of new educational institutions based on the Ukrainian system and the provision of remote education as an alternative to enrolling students directly in preparatory or mainstream classes. The importance of developing information in Ukrainian and Russian, such as enrolment details and electronic diary information (recommendations of the Polish Ombudsman), was also highlighted (RPO-rekomendacje (2022)).

Cognitive value. The work makes it possible to become familiar with the wide range of activities undertaken for the admission of children, mainly Ukrainian, to Polish educational institutions. It provides an opportunity to identify the problem of adjusting the Polish educational system to the reception of a large number of refugees in a short period of time.

Key words: recommendations, education, children from Ukraine

INTRODUCTION

From the onset of the Russian invasion of Ukraine on 24th February 2022 until May 2023, Poland has witnessed an influx of 11.9 million refugees crossing its borders. During the academic year 2022/2023, approximately 36 thousand refugees enrolled in Polish universities, while 191 thousand enrolled in schools within the country. Moreover, it is estimated that double that number continue their education through online classes in their home country, Ukraine (Paradowski et al., 2023). According to Polish law, everyone has the right to education, and up to the age of 18 education is compulsory (Prawo-do-nauki, 2022). It is up to the student to choose a public or non-public school. It often arouses great emotions, and is related to planning the future, choosing a future course of study or defining a profession. It often depends on the place of residence, the accessibility of the school, the possibility of care and commuting to school. Education provides the opportunity to acquire knowledge and skills on a regular basis allowing for a specific profession in the future. Due to the war situation in Ukraine, thousands of pupils were enrolled in Polish educational institutions. This included kindergartens as well as primary and secondary schools. Difficulties of various kinds arose both on the part of the schools (lack of preparation for the larger number of students, lack of teachers, language barrier) and on the part of the students themselves (adaptation and communication difficulties), (Nazaruk & Klim-Klimaszewska, 2017). Bearing in mind

that access to schooling and learning, together with with access to extra, compensatory classes must go hand in hand with the training of the teaching staff so that they are able to provide education for all culturally diverse students, extensive training and support measures have been undertaken. Tuition assistance for Ukrainian refugees is only a small percentage of the measures taken (Pasamonik, 2017; Szempruch, 2021). Poland was one of the first countries to get involved in assisting refugees from Ukraine and other countries, and at the beginning these were mainly social, volunteer-based activities and activities of non-governmental organisations. The protracted situation in Ukraine led to refugee families settling in Poland and, thanks to the possibility for children to start school or attend kindergarten, parents and guardians were able to take up gainful employment.

The arrival of foreign pupils in Polish educational institutions in numbers that far exceeded the capacity of the premises and staff made it necessary to adapt the conditions to the new situation. Some of the new pupils, apart from the language barrier that was apparent in the first place, also required the levelling of curriculum differences. No one knew how long the situation related to war and emigration would last, so some pupils made no attempt to adapt, believing that their time at a Polish school would be short, and therefore described the situation as temporary and did not engage in activities aimed at adaptation. The passive attitude hindered the adaptation process; some children did not want to learn the Polish language, some did not go to school despite being reported to educational institutions, and others attended lessons without commitment. Low attendance or lack of motivation to learn and participate in classes caused significant adaptation difficulties (Nazaruk & Klim-Klimaszewska, 2017). The beginning of the influx of children and young people into Polish schools was also a period of pandemonium and lessons were held remotely. Despite the advantages of remote teaching, there were also disadvantages and difficulties which, together with the difficulties of relocation, war, separation from family, fear and uncertainty, the language barrier, lack of access to computer equipment and the internet, did not facilitate Ukrainian children's access to education. Teachers are fully aware of the difficulties and challenges of educating children en masse in Polish schools due to the situation in in Ukraine (Ciupińska, 2022). Systemic, training and support measures have been taken in Poland and assistance to ensure equal opportunities in access to education. Children were placed in wards, preparatory classes or classes with Polish students.

The influx of refugees from Ukraine necessitated aid measures for the most urgent ones concerning shelter and nutrition, but also for longer-term ones related to education, health care and, enabling people to take up employment. To this end, a team for refugees from Ukraine was established in April 2022 at the Joint Commission of the Government and Local Self-Government (the Joint Commission of the Government and Local Self-Government set up a team for war refugees from Ukraine). The requirements and challenges that arose in the context of providing assistance to refugees required the coopera-

tion of the government with local self-governments and non-governmental organisations and social activists, which was hardly visible (Grabowska & Pięta-Szawara, 2023).

It is estimated that over 2 million people, mainly women and children, arrived in Poland during the war situation in Ukraine. There are nearly 188,000 children in educational institutions and young people, mostly in Warsaw, Wrocław and Krakow (samorząd.pap.pl, 2022).

Schools in large cities, but also establishments in small towns and villages, struggled with organisation, reception, scheduling, reception of staff, premises difficulties. The Government in the Act on Assistance to Citizens of Ukraine (Act of 12 March 2022 on Assistance to Citizens of Ukraine in Connection with the Armed Conflict on the Territory of Ukraine, Journal of Laws, 2022, item 583) included the most important forms of assistance, such as the following

- the right to an 18-month stay in Poland,
- possibility of assigning a PESEL number and a trusted profile,
- possibility of accommodation and free public transport to places of residence, accommodation and transport to places of accommodation,
- access to health care
- access to social benefits, i.e. parental benefit, so called 500+, good start, forms of subsidising a child's stay in a crèche and a one-off cash benefit of PLN 300 per person for living expenses)
- facilitating access to the labour market.

The Ministry of Education, on the other hand, together with representatives of the Board of Education and the Ombudsman (RPO), took decisions and actions concerning education in a multicultural system. Although the situation was not easy and there were daily signals of problems, it was impossible not to introduce uniform guidelines for the whole state. It was known that after the first needs provided, i.e. food, accommodation, it would be time to take on jobs and children's education

OBJECTIVE

The aim of this study was to attempt to present the various types of systemic and local solutions introduced to minimise problems related to the admission of Ukrainian children to educational institutions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In connection with the new situation in education related to the influx of a large number of children from Ukraine to Polish schools, meetings were held between representatives of the Ministry of Education and Science and school superintendencies, representatives of non-governmental organisations and local authorities who pointed out the enormity of the challenges, difficulties and problems associated with the admission of a large number of Ukrainian children to Polish schools in a short period of time.

The organisation that brings together education workers, the Union of Polish Teachers (ZNP), took action to provide broad support. It organised a number of activities to prepare education for refugees in the Polish educational system. The Union also participated in the preparation of legal solutions for the establishment of education for Ukrainian children and young people. Very soon after Russia's attack on Ukraine, because already on 8.03.2022, the Union submitted to the Minister of Education an application with proposed solutions related to the education of Ukrainian children in Polish educational establishments. The proposal concerned education, preparation of teachers of Polish as a foreign language, provision of sufficient textbooks for learning Polish, provision of school starter kits for children, employment of teacher assistants, translators, provision of pedagogical and psychological support and conducting of diagnoses. Inquiring refugee pupils' comfort level in speaking Polish with various groups of interlocutors at the end of school summer semester 2022, the study found that they were satisfied with their target language communication in the school among all possible options (Paradowski et al., 2023).

In the situational crisis of having to move schools as a result of the war, the child is forced into an increased adaptation effort, i.e. the need to adjust and change behaviour to the new situation. An additional obstacle may be the language barrier (Kluczyńska & Zabłocka-Żytka, 2020). Studies show that knowledge of English is not sufficient and that people deciding to stay longer outside their own country should learn the local language, which becomes the key to deeper intercultural communication and building lasting relationships. (Wąsikiewicz-Firlej i in., 2022).

Branches of the Polish Teachers' Union also organised Polish language courses for children and adults. ZNP saw the need for a meeting between the Ministry of Education and union representatives to discuss emerging educational problems. These resulted from the influx of more and more children into Polish schools and kindergartens. There have been requests to change the way children from Ukraine are assessed and classified from Ukraine, a demand for the recruitment of Ukrainian teachers and the ZNP published a handbook "How to talk about the war in Ukraine at school?" (Firlit-Fesnak et al., 2022). A few students, were identified as suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder. Consequently, the teachers had to exercise great care with these learners to ensure that they did not inadvertently trigger negative experiences (Paradowski et al., 2023). The Ombudsman also recommended facilitating the employment of teachers, therapists and also cultural assistants from Ukraine. Attempts were made to integrate refugees while distance learning was still in progress, international classes were created and anti-discrimination, multicultural education was provided. Equal access to educational materials and training for teaching staff were recommended in the recommendations. The Ministry of Education responded to all recommendations with actions taken and planned. A number of laws were enacted to provide for organisational issues, such as: the number of classes, the number of hours of the Polish language, not being subject to compulsory annual pre-school preparation or compulsory

schooling, not classifying students attending a preparatory division if the pedagogical board decides that they do not know or have insufficient knowledge of the Polish language (students then receive a certificate of attendance at the preparatory division instead of a certificate (Zbróg, 2022).

Legal acts such as the Regulation of the Minister of Education and Science on the education of persons who are not Polish citizens and persons who are Polish citizens and who received their education in schools operating in the educational systems of other countries (10.03.2022) or the Regulation of 21.03.2022 and of 8.04.2022 and 11.08. 2022 on the organisation of education, upbringing and care of children and young people who are citizens of Ukraine and the Letters of the Minister of Education and Science to the superintendents, local governments and principals of 23.03.2022 and 2.09.2022 were needed for ordering and coordination purposes but did not take into account important needs of children, parents and teachers such as a sense of security or ensuring relations with peers and good effective language communication. These needs had to be addressed directly by educators, pedagogues and teachers in individual educational institutions (Żmijewska, 2022). In the acquisition of a foreign language, direct relations, interactions with peers are important (Jarynowski et al., 2021) which had to be taken care of directly by the staff of the educational institutions.

The Ombudsman also drew attention to difficulties and possible solutions to them concerning, inter alia, a lack of experience in teaching multicultural classes or overcrowding in schools. The creation of new institutions operating in the Ukrainian system and the possibility of education in the Ukrainian system were indicated as alternatives to the enrolment of students in preparatory or mainstream classes in the Ukrainian system and the possibility of education in the Ukrainian education system through remote education. It was also important to develop information in Ukrainian and Russian on e.g. recruitment, information in the electronic diary. (recommendations of the ROP, MEiN 2022).

CONCLUSIONS

All these activities required time to prepare, introduce and modified as needed, and the appropriate qualifications and involvement of many people including contractors: principals, pedagogues, teachers and educators.

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