



**NIEM**  
ALL IN FOR INTEGRATION



# Local responses to the refugee crisis in Poland.

## Reception and integration

Anna Piłat  
Dominika Potkańska



INSTITUTE OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS  
Migration Policy Programme

The publication was prepared within the framework of the project ‘Local responses to refugee crisis – initial reception and integration. Dutch and Polish experiences’ run by the Institute of Public Affairs, the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in Poland and the European Commission Representation in Poland.



Preparation of the publication was co-financed by the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund in the frame of the project ‘National Integration Evaluation Mechanism. Measuring and improving integration of beneficiaries of international protection’.



ISBN: 978-83-7689-279-5

Copyright by the Institute of Public Affairs, Warsaw 2017

## TABLE OF CONTENTS:

Introduction - 4
1. Asylum seekers and refugees in Poland - 6
1.1. Statistics and current trends -6
1.2. Responses to the refugee crisis on a central and local level - 6
2. Asylum procedure - 7
3. Management of the integration process on a central, regional and local levels - 8
4. The refugee reception and pre-integration system - 9
4.1. Access to housing - 9
4.2. Access to healthcare - 10
4.3. Access to language courses - 11
4.4. Access to education - 12
4.5. Access to the labour market - 13
4.6. Access to legal assistance - 14
5. Integration measures for beneficiaries of international protection - 14
5.1. Social Assistance and the Individual Integration Programme - 14
5.2. Access to housing - 17
5.3. Access to the labour market - 19
5.4. Access to education and training - 21
5.5. Access to language courses - 21
5.6. Access to guidance and counselling - 22
5.7. Access to healthcare - 23
6. Cooperation of key local public institutions and organisations involved in refugee integration - 24
7. Perception of refugees and raising awareness at the local level - 28

## Introduction

The unprecedented flows of migrants approaching Europe is confronting the European Union and its Member States with a variety of challenges. It is raising fundamental questions about the social and cultural structure of European societies. A great deal of attention has been paid to European and national regulations pertaining to the distribution and integration of refugees. At the same time, the refugee crisis is equally important on a local level. Both local authorities and various organisations (community-based organisations, schools, NGOs, employers, etc.) are facing various challenges relating to the reception and integration of the newcomers. They must provide an immediate response, often within a context of limited funding and political tensions. At the same time, the refugee crisis is often misunderstood by the general public, especially in the local communities experiencing an increased influx of refugees. Local initiatives have an important role then to play in demystifying some of these misconceptions. Integration is a policy area where the approach locally is particularly important. While immigration policy is usually created at the national level, its impact on migrants/refugees and the community are strongly felt at the local level.

Taking the above into account, the aim of the research was to both identify and analyse current integration policies towards asylum seekers and refugees in Poland and the Netherlands from a local perspective and also describe reception, pre-integration and integration policies, programmes and activities being implemented in these countries both by the public and non-governmental sector. In our research we wanted to focus on various aspects relating to reception and integration, in particular: housing, the labour market, social assistance, access to health care, language training, education, access to legal aid and counselling. An important element of the research in both Poland and the Netherlands was also the evaluation of public perception and activities aimed at raising public awareness about the situation of refugees at the local level. The goal of the study research was also to identify and present examples of good practices, in particular refugee integration projects being implemented at the local level in Poland and the Netherlands.

The research project was conducted simultaneously by Polish and Dutch experts. In Poland the research process was divided into two stages: desk-research and the in-depth interviews at two localities: Warsaw's Targówek district and Lublin<sup>1</sup>. We decided

<sup>1</sup> 12 expert interviews were carried out with representatives of the public institutions responsible for shaping, implementing and evaluating integration policy, namely central administration and local government, the Labour

to focus on these two localities, i.e. Warsaw Targówek and Lublin, because both these places have experience hosting and integrating asylum seekers. Warsaw Targówek contains the only Centre for Foreigners for women, mostly single mothers with children, in the city. This centre was also chosen because of its favourable location in the capital city. All major stakeholders, including the local authorities and NGO's are located there, and there is also a high concentration of foreigners. Lublin is a city located in central-eastern Poland where, between 1995 and 2015, one of the Center for Foreigners was located. Despite the fact that the centre hosting asylum seekers was closed, there are still refugee families living in Lublin. Another reason why we wanted to focus our research on this city is that Lublin has very interesting experiences regarding the shaping of integration measures.

In case of the Netherlands, as there are already a great number of reports and analyses concerning the integration of refugees on the local level, all the research questions could be handled employing desk research alone.

Based on the gathered data and materials from both countries, an analysis was prepared presenting background information, key research findings and best practices from both countries, and this is what we will be presenting in the following sections of the report.

Research study was conducted by the Institute of Public Affairs (IPA) as a part of the project conducted in a partnership with the Dutch Embassy in Poland and The European Commission Representation Office in Poland. Project envisages the exchange of best practices and experience between Poland and the Netherlands in the field of integration of the beneficiaries of the international protection with a special emphasis on the intercultural dialogue and integration of the above mentioned group with the local host societies in both countries. Apart from conducting the research study, there were also international conference entitled "Local responses to refugee crisis - Initial reception and integration. Dutch and Polish experiences" organized in the premises of the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands on 7th of October 2016. The report from the conference could be find in the Appendix.

Office, social workers working with refugees on a daily basis; school authorities and teachers teaching intercultural groups of students and representatives of non-governmental organisations like community organisers and lawyers assisting refugees. In these interviews, a special emphasis was placed on selected aspects of the local dimension of refugee integration.

# PART ONE: POLISH EXPERIENCES IN RECEPTION AND INTEGRATION OF ASYLUM SEEKERS AND REFUGEES

## 1. Asylum seekers and refugees in Poland

### 1.1. Statistics and current trends

Over the last six years, there has been no significant change in international protection trends in Poland. However, there has been a considerable change in the number of asylum claims. In 2010 there were 6,000 asylum claims in Poland, mostly submitted by Chechen nationals with Russian citizenship. In 2013 this number doubled, reaching 15,000 claims (again mostly made by Chechen nationals). In 2014, after the war in the East of Ukraine started and the annexation of Crimea became a political fact, the number of Ukrainian asylum seekers peaked at 2,318. Due to the majority of decisions on these claims being negative, the number of Ukrainian asylum seekers dropped the following year to 1,042 claims. These negative decisions on Ukrainian claims were justified on the basis that Ukraine, despite the war in the Eastern part of the country, is considered to be safe, and Ukrainian migrants can therefore stay within the country and migrate internally.

All in all, since 2010, the top five foreign nationals/citizens claiming asylum in Poland have remained the same: citizens of the Russian Federation, Georgians, Ukrainians, Armenians and Syrians. If we, however, examine the decisions to grant refugee status, the proportion is set to change. In 2015, only 21 refugees from the Russian Federation, 203 from Syria, 14 from Belarus, 24 from Iraq and 8 from Afghanistan were granted refugee status in Poland. Since 2013, only four Ukrainian citizens have been granted refugee status in Poland. In total, 349 refugees received refugee status in Poland in 2015, and 163 refugees were granted subsidiary protection.

### 1.2. Responses to the refugee crisis on a central and local level

In September 2015 firm declarations were made by the previous Polish ruling coalition (PO-PSL) to accept 7 082 asylum seekers from Italy and Greece within the European Commission's Relocation and Resettlement Programme. Even after the change of government to the more right-wing Law and Justice Party (PiS), those declarations were upheld and the Office for Foreigners was preparing makeshift camps to receive newcomers. In response to the new challenges, a special interdepartmental working

group was created. It was led by the Migration Policy Unit at the Ministry of the Interior and Administration and was tasked with working on a scenario that adequately responded on two fronts: firstly, to the “Ukrainian crisis” and secondly, to the migration crisis that hit Europe in 2015. Additionally, while preparing for the relocation process in 2015, the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy conducted a study among Regional Labour Offices on their experiences working with people granted refugee status or subsidiary protection. This examined what challenges were being faced as a result of the higher influx of migrants and how the Labour Offices could be better prepared to support the integration of beneficiaries of international protection into the labour market

The declared number of admitted asylum seekers, subsequently dropped, however, to 400 in 2016, but the executive regulation to this decision was never adopted. The Brussels terrorist attack provided the final impetus (or even excuse) for the complete abandonment of those declarations and, as the Polish Prime Minister Beata Szydło stated: “as things stand, I don’t see any possibility of any migrants being accepted in Poland”. “As things stand” was not defined though, either by the Prime Minister, or the follow-up statements made by the Ministry of the Administration and the Interior. The question of refugee relocation could therefore be said to have fallen into political limbo.

## 2. Asylum procedure

In Poland there are a few forms of international protection that a person can be granted. After an asylum application has been successfully submitted and a positive decision given by the Office For Foreigners (Urząd do Spraw Cudzoziemców), the refugee can be granted refugee status or subsidiary protection. If the foreigner does not meet the criteria for refugee status, but fears a serious threat in the country of origin and returning there may put him or her at real risk, he or she may be granted subsidiary protection, which is the most common form of international protection in Poland. These two forms are granted by the head of the Office For Foreigners in Poland. The remaining two forms of protection: a tolerated stay permit and humanitarian stay are granted by the Border Guards. The distinction between these two is, however, sometimes unclear. A tolerated stay permit is usually granted when the foreigner cannot be deported to the country of origin (e.g. because of there being no travel documents or extradition agreement between countries). Humanitarian stay, on the other hand, is granted when the deportation of the foreigner would seriously violate their right to a family life or the human rights as a migrant.

### 3. Management of the integration process on a central, regional and local levels

In Poland there are two institutions responsible for the integration of asylum seekers and – later on – that of refugees. During the asylum procedure for a migrant's pre-integration, the responsible institution is the Office for Foreigners. If the foreigner is granted refugee status, the Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Policy is responsible for the integration process. The main obstacle in this system is that the two institutions operate on the basis of two different Acts and therefore do not cooperate extensively. There is clearly insufficient provision made for cooperation between the Office for Foreigners and local institutions.

The Department of Social Assistance and Integration (the Foreigners' Integration and Programmes Unit) at the Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Policy has been responsible since 2004 for the coordination of foreigners' integration in Poland and the shaping of integration policy. In accordance with the Social Assistance Act, Polish citizens, citizens of the European Union and foreigners who hold permanent residency (based on a residency permit or any form of international protection) are entitled to social assistance benefits. The provisions of the same Social Assistance Act, only vaguely touch on pre-integration and integration issues. However, as experts stress, the main target group of the integration policy are refugees (both those with refugee status and those with subsidiary protection), and other foreigners (beneficiaries of other forms of international protection and Third Country Nationals) are basically not covered by the integration assistance programme. It also worth mentioning that Poland does not at this stage have any Integration Policy or Integration Strategy. Therefore there is a lack of vision and legal provision at the central level. Even though an Integration Strategy is was in the process of being developed at the Ministry, the whole process dropped out of the political agenda with the change of government.

Even though the social assistance system is mainly coordinated by the central administration, the regional level administration also plays crucial role. The voivode (regional level) is responsible for the assessment of conditions for social assistance and supervision of services provided by the social assistance organisational units at powiat level,<sup>2</sup> the Family Assistance Centres. The majority of social assistance services for beneficiaries of international protection are provided by local social assistance centres

<sup>2</sup> A county or powiat is the second level of Polish administrative division, between the voivodeship (provinces) and the gmina (municipalities or communes; plural "gminy").

and powiat level Family Assistance Centres. Both are responsible for the payment of cash benefits as well as non-financial assistance. In the case of integration assistance for refugees and persons granted subsidiary protection (Individual Integration Programme), the responsible units are the Family Assistance Centres.

It should be underlined that in present system – the integration policy is not part of local government's general remits. There is currently no legal framework or funding coming from the state budget for integration services which could be provided by local government, the exception being the education of asylum seeking children in public schools (described in the section 4.4. of the paper). Therefore, the role and tasks of local governments and local communities with regard to refugee pre-integration and integration are still unspecified. Only some local governments, in cooperation with non-governmental organisations, play an active role in this area and take their own actions addressed at asylum seekers, refugees and other foreigners settling in their local communities. Some of these activities could only be implemented because the local NGO had been granted a project financed from the AMIF or EEA and Norway grants. Due to the lack of a favourable legal framework, these few actions taken by local governments with regard to integration measures are temporary in nature. They arise from the "good will" of local authorities and the rarely encountered stance that any difficulties integrating refugees are their own, local problem.

The significant role of the European Union as a provider of funding and non-governmental organisations as actors responsible for the implementation of various integration projects (usually co-financed from EU funds) should be emphasised.

## 4. The refugees reception and pre-integration system

### 4.1. Access to housing

After submitting an asylum claim, a migrant has two options: either to stay at the Centre for Foreigners, or to stay on his or her own. If the foreigner decides to stay in the Centre for Foreigners, he or she is entitled to social assistance such as:

- accommodation
- full board or the cash equivalent of full board (e.g. if their children go to school)
- pocket money for small personal expenses
- Polish language lessons
- medical treatment or vaccinations, or in other justified cases.

During their stay at the Centre for Foreigners, asylum seekers are also under the supervision of social workers hired by the Office for Foreigners. If foreigners decide to retain their independent status, they are entitled to financial assistance from the Office for Foreigners. According to a report produced by the Supreme Audit Office in 2015, the Centres provided adequate living conditions. All asylum seekers can benefit from primary health services, specialist consultations, hospitalisation and emergency medical services as well having access to mental health services. However access to healthcare is not flawless. This will be elaborated on in the next section of this chapter.

It is a general problem in Poland that the vast majority of Centres for Foreigners are located in remote areas away from the bigger cities. There is just two centre located in bigger cities - in Warsaw and Białystok. The rest are located at a distance ranging from ca. 30 to 150 km from the bigger cities. Lack of access to public transport is also an issue. Although the centres for foreigners are open, some foreigners are also detained in specialised detention centres. There are two types of detention centre in Poland, both of which are used to detain asylum seekers and other foreigners not part of the asylum procedure: guarded centres for foreigners and strict detention centres (for arrested foreigners). All detention centres are for migration-related purposes and the SG (Straż Graniczna – Border Guards) is in charge of their management.

#### 4.2. Access to healthcare

A foreigner in the asylum procedure has access to healthcare parallel to the public services (the National Health Service). For those who live in the Centres for Refugees, health care is outsourced by the Office for Foreigners to a private entity that provides basic nursing and advanced medical services. Since public health care in Poland is very underdeveloped, asylum seekers paradoxically have better access to healthcare when they are going through the procedure than later - after they have been granted refugee status and are faced with the same plight as Polish citizens. This does not mean, however, that the system during the procedure is flawless. The main problem with it is the accessibility of the specialised medical services, especially in the remote Centres for Foreigners. The Office for Foreigners does not provide transportation. It only reimburses travel costs for public transport. This situation is especially burdensome for pregnant women, disabled persons and those who are seriously ill. Other difficulties that are faced are the need to attend medical appointments without an interpreter and the small amount of medical staff qualified in intercultural competences. Moreover, NGO reports show that access to psychologists is limited and not available on a day-to-day basis. However it should be mentioned that more and

more medical services are being made available for asylum seekers at the Centre for Foreigners, including GPs and gynaecologists.

### 4.3. Access to language courses

Free Polish language classes are the only pre-integration services available to residents of the Centre for Foreigners. These facilitate the process of cultural adaptation while waiting to be granted a status. However it should be pointed out that participation in the language course is not obligatory. Despite significant changes in course organisation and teaching methodology being introduced in 2015 the language learning process at the Centre for Foreigners is, according to many studies, still not efficient and not tailored to the needs of asylum seekers. The Centre for Foreigners still faces two challenges in this area: low attendance at Polish language classes and low levels of efficiency in the offered classes. The major factor influencing the low attendance levels is a lack of motivation among asylum seekers, as the majority of them are planning to leave Poland before the asylum procedure is completed.

Particularly worthy of scrutiny is the very large percentage of Centres for Foreigners residents who have never attended Polish language lessons. According to an IPA quantitative study, around 34% of respondents had never studied the Polish language and 31% of them had been learning Polish less than a month.<sup>3</sup> A particularly high percentage of those people who have never attended Polish language classes can be observed among migrants who came to Poland between 2015 and 2016. Respondents indicated that one of the reasons for this situation is the fact that the majority of asylum seekers are not planning to stay in Poland after being granted protection or are even thinking about going to another EU country before the application process is finished. As the percentage of negative decisions on applications is quite high in Poland, many people do not feel motivated to put any effort into learning of Polish language. The low level of effectiveness of these classes is also a result of the inadequacy of the system of dividing students into language groups, the low number of classes, the failure to adjust the hours of classes to times when foreigners can participate and too little diversity in the language groups in terms of Polish language proficiency and country of their origin. Additionally, female respondents have indicated that creating a women-only group and providing childcare during the lessons would be extremely beneficial to them. Also, the latest Supreme Audit Office<sup>4</sup> report confirmed that the percentage of asylum seekers learning the language during

<sup>3</sup> Baczynski-Sielaczek, R., Polish language courses at the Center for Foreigners, Institute of Public Affairs, 2016, [www.isp.org.pl/uploads/filemanager/Program%20Migracji%20i%20Polityki%20Rozwojowej/as/RAPORTJzykiFinaIFinal.pdf](http://www.isp.org.pl/uploads/filemanager/Program%20Migracji%20i%20Polityki%20Rozwojowej/as/RAPORTJzykiFinaIFinal.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> The Supreme Audit Office's Report on Social and Integration Assistance for Refugees

the pre-integration process (both those living in the Centres for Foreigners and those living on their own) is very small, at around 14-17%, and that intensiveness of the courses is much lower than it should be.

#### 4.4. Access to education

The children of foreigners both living in the Centre for Foreigners and in rented apartments have access to education (and are required to attend school) from the first days of their stay in Poland. However, there is no special education programme aimed at these children. It is common practice, due to the fixed regulations of school districts, for the children to join the nearest school to the Centre for Foreigners (or their apartment), often during the middle of the school semester. During the school year, however, they can attend additional Polish language classes. From this year, after changes in the law were adopted, it has also been possible to organise preparatory classes composed of children with a foreign background and the children of Polish migrants returning to their country of origin.

One of the main problems stressed by teaching practitioners is, to some extent, connected with the fixed school district system. In practice, at least in the case of schools near to the Centre for Foreigners, this means that there is a significant percentage of foreign children in class. In the opinion of teachers, “significant” in many cases means “too many” to accurately address their needs. The optimal number of foreign students, in the opinion of practitioners, is around 3 or 4 pupils. In practice, the number of foreign students in one class is much larger and, with no additional support, it is impossible for teachers to take care of the foreign students, and keep up with the curriculum at the same time. Some education experts have stressed that the only solution for this situation would be relaxing the fixed school district rule for foreigners, so that they can be dispersed among other locations.

In some schools there is an “intercultural assistant” that supports the teacher on an everyday basis. The assistants are either funded from the school budget or by the NGO’s that cooperate with the schools. The assistant is usually one of the children’s parents living in the same Centre or a foreigner of the same ethnic origin. The key issue when it comes to implementing adequate integration measures for foreign school pupils is the need for proper cooperation between the receiving school and the nearest Centre for Foreigners. As practitioners state, this cooperation is usually informal, and to a large extent, depends on there being cordial relations between teachers and head

teachers and Centre staff. There are no formal channels for communication and cooperation between these two entities.

#### 4.5. Access to the labour market

The asylum seekers are not entitled to work for the first six months of the asylum procedure. After six months, however, a person can legally enter the labour market. During the pre-integration stage, special emphasis should be placed on activities aimed at improving the chances of asylum seekers on local labour markets. According to the aforementioned Supreme Audit Office report, in Poland's case, the potential of the pre-integration period is currently untapped, when it could actually be used to facilitate labour-market integration. The activities offered at the Centre for Foreigners do not adequately prepare asylum seekers for entering the Polish labour market. In particular, it would be useful if they could offer individual consultation with a career counsellor, meetings providing information on how to look for a job in Poland and how to prepare for a job interview or workshops empowering newcomers to participate in the labour market and social life.

Some workshops or vocational training sessions have been organised at the Centre for Foreigners, but they were initiated by an NGO within the framework of projects co-funded by the European Union. For the different reasons elaborated on in this section, the support package delivered by the Centre for Foreigners is not tailored to the needs of individuals. Given this fact, regularly conducted quantitative research analysing the qualifications and competences of the asylum seekers who have a high chance of receiving international protection would be of great value. The results of such surveys could serve as valuable input into the process of designing workshops for this group that aim to improve their knowledge and qualifications. It would be equally crucial to introduce elements related to managing the home budget as well as knowledge of Polish public institutions, the rights and duties of foreigners and knowledge of Polish culture, customs and traditions.

The first instance proceedings of the regular asylum application process should not exceed 6 months in length. If the decision is not issued within a 6-month period and asylum seeker is not responsible for the delay (e.g. by leaving the country) he/she can apply to the Head of the Office for Foreigners for a document which – together with the identity certificate – provides the basis for working legally in Poland for a defined period of time. In this case, no additional work permit is required. If asylum seekers are working, they are not entitled to unemployment benefits, but they are entitled to health care services. During the period of preparation for the Resettlement and

Relocation Programme, the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy was considering shortening the 6-month period during which the asylum seeker is not entitled to apply for a work permit to, for example, 3 months. The idea behind this proposal was that the sooner asylum seekers would be able to enter the labour market, the less chance they would have of falling into depression and inactivity during their stay at the Centre for Foreigners. However, this proposal raised huge concerns, as this decision would result in the larger inflow of economic migrants pretending to seek asylum in Poland. For the time being, there are no legislative plans on the table to shorten the 6-month period.

#### 4.6. Access to legal assistance

Asylum seekers have access to legal assistance, although in practice this is only rendered by non-governmental organizations sponsored by European Funds. Poland - like any other European country - is obliged to provide legal assistance to asylum seekers. This obligation, however, is not being realised in practice. Lawyers from NGOs help asylum seekers apply for refugee status, appeal against negative decisions, apply for social housing and offer assistance within other legal matter they encounter in Poland.

### 5. Integration measures for beneficiaries of international protection

In the following part of our paper, we would like to describe and evaluate the system of integration for foreigners who have been granted one of the two forms of international protection (refugee status and subsidiary protection).

#### 5.1. Social Assistance and the Individual Integration Programme

Once a refugee receives a positive decision, he or she is able to stay at a Centre for Foreigners and is entitled to healthcare or social assistance outside the centre for two months from the date of receipt of the positive decision. After two months, he or she has to take care of his own income and accommodation. However, if granted refugee status or subsidiary protection, he or she may apply to participate in a one-year Individual Integration Programme (Indywidualny Program Integracyjny - IPI), and receive assistance with organising his or her life after receiving a positive decision. Persons who have received a residence permit for humanitarian reasons and consent to tolerated stay status are not entitled to participate in the IPI. However, they can apply for social security (welfare benefits). Integration assistance within the IPI includes:

- monthly cash benefits (depending on the size of the household) for maintenance, in particular for food, clothes, shoes, personal care products, housing expenses and costs related to learning the Polish language;
- health insurance and the right to free health services at public facilities;
- the support of a social worker;
- specialist counselling, including legal, psychological and family counselling;
- the provision of support and information, such as contact details for institutions, in particular labour market institutions, the local community, local institutions and non-governmental organisations.<sup>5</sup>

The units responsible for managing the IPI programme and providing assistance are Family Assistance Centres (Powiatowe Centrum Pomocy Rodzinie or Miejski Ośrodek Pomocy Rodzinie). Language courses are only available for those who enter the Individual Integration Programme after being granted refugee status. At this stage, however, such courses are also partly co-funded by EU funds and run by NGOs.

The Individual Integration Programme, however, lasts only twelve months. This, as has been stressed by many non-governmental organizations and also our respondents, is way too short a period for achieving the required results. As many studies show, the IPI programme is not able to provide its beneficiaries with support services that will enable them to function independently in Polish society. At present, due to many factors, the IPI does not fulfil the purpose for which it was created. IPI programmes are not flexible and (in spite of the adjective “individual” in the name) they are not tailored to the needs, abilities and plans of its beneficiaries. The IPI lacks most of the tools needed for strengthening/regulating the activity of the beneficiaries, for example, by linking the payment of benefits with an active job search. Additionally, as our respondents indicated, there is lack of coordination between institutions involved in the integration of foreigners, broadly conceived.

One of the challenges mentioned by our respondents is that the refugees encounter difficulties communicating with public institutions, e.g. at the hospital, because of the language barrier and there usually being no access to an interpreter. Family Assistance Centers are trying to respond to this challenge and sometimes assistants working at these units help refugees, for example, to make doctor’s appointments.

<sup>5</sup> Art. 92 paragraph. 1 of the Act of 12 March 2004. On social assistance (Dz. U. of 2008. No. 115, pos. 728 with later. amendments.). Issues related to the integration of foreigners who have obtained refugee status or subsidiary protection in the Republic of Poland, are regulated in Chapter V (Art. 91-95) of that Act

For a couple of years, some of the most active Family Assistance Centres have been conducting additional activities to those stated in the Social Assistance Act, in order to provide beneficiaries of international protection with a more tailor-made support. Due to budget constraints, it would usually not be possible for Family Assistance Centres to undertake these additional activities without EU funding. An interesting example of such an initiative is a project addressed to refugees and people granted subsidiary protection entitled “Integration for self-reliance” (“Integracja dla samodzielności”), which is conducted by the Warsaw Family Assistance Centre (a detailed project description can be found in the “Best practices” section below.) Within the framework of this project, the Centre has organised free specialist consultations as well as assistance with searching for a job, a flat for rent and contact with education institutions, social welfare centres and healthcare institutions. Additionally, project participants could take part in free vocational training (e.g. for the posts of electrician, welder, tailor or office manager), workshops on Polish labour law and Polish language courses.

After the completion of the integration programme, refugees and beneficiaries of subsidiary protection are entitled to social assistance on the same conditions as Polish citizens. Social assistance consists of various categories of cash benefits as well as different forms of non-financial support, e.g. services in the form of social work, care services, specialist counselling (mainly legal and psychological) help with settling official matters or other key life issues. However, the capacity of the social assistance system to provide financial and counselling support tailored to the needs of refugees is limited.

It is also worth noting that, according to the regulations, persons with tolerated stay and stay for humanitarian reasons are not able to enrol on the IPI programme. The exclusion of these two groups of foreigners is resulting in serious problems after they leave the Centre for Foreigners. They have difficulties integrating within the local community and searching for a job in the open labour market. Despite the fact that these people have not been granted refugee status or subsidiary protection, they are still forced migrants. For these people, the decision to leave the centre for foreigners was forced on them. Hence, they should be treated differently to economic migrants.

Also monitoring the future situation of those participating in integration programmes could be of great importance, as it could enable the integration programmes to be redefined in such a manner as to ultimately make them effective.

As our research shows, it would be extremely beneficial if integration programmes could be prolonged and modified so they that they could be more tailored to the needs of beneficiaries of international protection. Additionally, linking the payment of benefits with an active job search would have a positive effect on the integration process.

## 5.2. Access to housing

According to Polish law, all beneficiaries of international protection have access to public housing, so can apply for city or social housing in the municipalities in which they live, on the same basis as Polish citizens. They can, of course, also purchase their premises and rent apartments on the open market. It should be pointed out that the housing situation of persons already granted refugee status or subsidiary protection is different to the situation of the beneficiaries of other forms of international protection (humanitarian stay permit) who do not qualify for social housing. Migrants with refugee status and subsidiary protection, on the other hand, can apply for municipal/district social housing, and, in the case of Warsaw, they can apply for one out of the five additional municipal apartments secured for refugees.

Crucially, the structure of the Polish housing market is extremely unfavourable for all residents of a lower socio-economic status, including refugees. Poland suffers from a permanent housing deficiency. The harsh situation of refugees with regard to their access to social and communal housing therefore reflects the hardship of the Polish population. The percentage of municipal and social housing in Polish cities is one of the lowest in Europe (in 2011, the rate of social housing was only 8.7% of the total housing market) and renting apartments on the private market is extremely expensive, thus purchasing an apartment is more of a luxury than a common civil right.

In Poland, there is basically no separate system of housing assistance for refugees. However, there are some policy measures ensuring access to decent housing for this group. As we have indicated earlier, after receiving a positive decision, persons with refugee status or subsidiary protection may apply for the Individual Integration Programme. Within the framework of the IPI programme, beneficiaries receive financial benefits which could also be spent on rent. However, as research shows, the amount of assistance is not sufficient to cover the whole rent. Taking into account the purpose of the IPI, which is to provide assistance to refugees during the initial stages of their settlement in Poland, it should be made clear that the financial benefits to which beneficiaries of international protection are entitled do not enable them to

secure housing and often push them into homelessness and housing exclusion. According to the experts, in spite of receiving IPI financial support, refugees with large families are not able to afford to rent larger flats as the rental rates in bigger cities such as Warsaw are high.

As we have mentioned earlier, according to Polish law, refugees have the right to apply for municipal housing in the city or municipality in which they live on the same basis as Polish citizens. In practice, however, this is a very complex and time-consuming process. Refugees are often not only able to meet application requirements, but they are also encountering discrimination during the procedure. As long as local governments are failing to provide refugees and beneficiaries of international protection with dedicated housing assistance, it is important that this group is treated at least as fairly as Polish citizens. According to the 2015 report of the Supreme audit Office, only 5% of refugee families were provided with municipal or district housing, not only because of the shortage in council-owned and social housing as such, which is obviously the main reason, but also because of the lack of specific regulations pertaining to refugees. They also face serious problems on the private housing market. As the Institute of Public Affairs' researchers argued after conducting discrimination tests, refugees are systematically discriminated against on the private housing market and have limited access to apartments and houses on the open market.<sup>6</sup> As a consequence, as research shows, as many as 5-10% of refugees face homelessness and around 30-40% are excluded from the housing market. Refugee access to the housing market has, however, been one of the main concerns of NGO's and researchers for many years now.

This policy recommendation is particularly important when it is taken into account that currently only three cities - Lublin, Warsaw and Gdansk - offer housing assistance specifically addressed at refugees. The Family Assistance Centres in Lublin, Warsaw and Gdansk are some of the most active and successful local government institutions in receipt of EU funds for the integration of foreigners who have been granted international protection. In Lublin, persons who have obtained refugee or subsidiary protection status and meet other criteria can rent 3 apartments within a sheltered housing city scheme run by the Municipal Family Support Centre in Lublin (the flats are owned by the City). Sheltered housing is a form of social assistance aimed at preparing foreigners in particularly difficult situations for independent life and integration within the local community. Sheltered housing tenants are supported by a family

<sup>6</sup> Wysieńska K. "Czyj jest ten kawałek podłogi? Wyniki badań dyskryminacji uchodźców w dostępie do mieszkań", Institute of Public Affairs, Warsaw 2013

assistant whose task is to provide support in the form of social work tailored to their individual needs. The total period of stay in the sheltered flat should not exceed 24 months. Each year, the City of Warsaw, through the Warsaw Family Support Centre, provides 5 sheltered flats on a rotation basis for foreigners who hold refugee or subsidiary protection status and reside in Warsaw.

Another city which is seeking to improve the housing situation of refugees is Gdansk. An important part of the recently adopted Immigrants Integration Model incorporates measures addressed to refugees and people with subsidiary protection living in Gdansk. Starting from 2016, the city will prepare 2 flats per year which will be available for refugees and people with subsidiary protection status participating in or completing the Integration (IPI) Programme run by the Family Assistance Centre. In addition to the requirements already defined in the regulations on renting public housing, such criteria will be taken into account as having many children or suffering from a stress syndrome.

### 5.3. Access to the labour market

Once an entitled asylum seeker or a refugee is registered as unemployed at the Powiat Labour Office, he/she has access to all manner of Active Labour Market Policies (ALMPs), (e.g.. career counselling, active job searches, a start-up grant, renting subsidies, vocational training,) on the same terms as Polish citizens. Generally Powiat Labour Offices do not provide specially developed programmes dedicated to refugees or beneficiaries of international protection. With some exceptions, there are no activity-stimulation tools among the measures available to Labour Offices addressed to refugees, because of a lack of relevant funds and guidelines. Beneficiaries of international protection are also entitled to unemployment benefits if they remain completely unemployed during 12 out of the previous 18 months.

As our research shows, the labour market integration of refugees (as well as asylum seekers) is currently not a top priority for the Polish authorities. One of the arguments being raised by the authorities is that refugees have access to the same range of labour market services as Polish citizens. However, as experts underline, a support package can only be both efficient and effective if it is tailored to the needs of beneficiaries. Also, the insufficient preparation of Labour Office staff for working with customers who are foreigners is also noticeable, in particular the low level of their multicultural competences and foreign language skills.

Additionally, there are no existing incentives offered to employers to hire refugees and/or asylum seekers such as temporary exemption to abide to the minimum wage, reduction of non-wage labour costs and wage subsidies.

However, during our research, we have identified examples of Labour Offices which are using the resources available to address challenges faced by the refugees, e.g. in Białystok, the Powiat Labour Office was organising meetings for beneficiaries of international protection offering information on how to gain or improve skills important on the labour market. Each Labour Office could also offer foreigners who are registered as unemployed a free of charge Polish language course. As our respondents stated, although refugees sometimes have problems meeting the requirements to enrol on this course (i.e. some Labour Offices require a written statement to be submitted by an employer that he/she will employ this person after completing a Polish language course, which is hard to obtain), this is a very important integration measure available to refugees.

It should be mentioned that there are good examples of labour market integration services, mostly organised by the non-governmental organisations. For example, the Polish Humanitarian Action, in the period 2012-2014, organised vocational training for 20 refugees enrolled on Individual Integration Programmes. The project was funded from EU structural funds. Therefore, the important role of non-governmental organisations in stimulating economic activity among refugees should be emphasised.

When developing effective integration measures, conducting an assessment of the current situation and profiling the beneficiaries of the policies and their needs are of great importance. In Poland's case, there is no systematic approach to the assessment of the needs of integration measure beneficiaries. According to a report on the human and social capital of asylum seekers conducted by the Institute of Public Affairs, the level of education of refugees measured in terms of number of completed school years is relatively high (on average at a level corresponding to Polish lower secondary education).<sup>7</sup> According to the asylum seekers and refugees themselves, they have the skills to take up employment in sectors where there is a shortage of workers, like childcare and elderly care services. In addition, they have competencies that can facilitate their employment in the construction, transport and agriculture industries. Only a small percentage of the respondents indicated that they have the skills needed for office and administrative jobs (despite the fact that up to 21% of the refugees use the computer and Internet, only 7% say they know how to use office appliances).

<sup>7</sup> Karpiński, Z., Wysieńska K., "Kapitał ludzki i społeczny uchodźców w Polsce", Institute of Public Affairs, Warsaw 2013, <http://www.isp.org.pl/uploads/pdf/1089754990.pdf>

Another significant factor hindering the process of labour market integration in Poland is lack of recognition of foreign certificates and diplomas (nostrification). As experts state, due to the existing regulations, the nostrification process is very complicated and time-consuming.

Given the aforementioned challenges, it is particularly important to prepare activity-stimulation tools for inclusion among the measures available to Labour Offices tailored to the needs of beneficiaries of international protection. This would not require the granting of much more money from the state budget to Labour Offices, but rather prioritising the use of all existing resources (i.e. available language courses) to address problems which refugees are facing when trying to enter the Polish labour market. However, as our research shows, there is a big need for central administration to provide Labour Office staff with training opportunities to improve their multicultural and language skills, which requires the establishment of a reasonable budget for these purposes. Additionally, when creating and implementing support measures relating to the labour market and stimulating economic activity, public institutions could more regularly use the great expertise as well as experience of NGOs by outsourcing the Active Labour Market Policies to them.

#### 5.4. Access to education and training

Crucially, in Poland's case, it is non-governmental organisations that are systematically involved in offering training opportunities for beneficiaries of international protection. NGO initiatives are usually co-funded from the European structural funds (like the European Refugee Fund or, currently, from the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund) or EEA and Norway Grants. One of the many non-governmental organisations involved in the provision of consultation and training opportunities is the Polish Migration Forum Foundation, which, in partnership with the Institute of Public Affairs, is running a job advice centre under the project entitled "My career in Poland II", which is financed from the AMIF. Free consultations with a career advisor, business startup advisor and finance and accounting specialist are available for economic migrants as well as for refugees and people granted subsidiary protection.

#### 5.5. Access to language courses

As previously mentioned, language courses are not obligatory for asylum seekers although they are compulsory for those who have received refugee status in Poland and participate in the Individual Integration Programme. Nobody doubts that learning the language is absolutely crucial, but at the same time there are practically no

financial resources allocated for this purpose (none from central government, and only limited resources from regional administrations). As a consequence, regardless of the seriousness of this aspect of refugee integration, the whole process is mainly managed by non-governmental organisations within the framework of European Funds. Obviously this is not an efficient system, as European Funds tend to be intermittent, and certainly not permanent. Ultimately, the Supreme Audit Office's report<sup>8</sup> shows that only one third of refugees are attending language courses of a relatively intensity, the average number of hours per week being from two to four. At the local level, the Powiat Labour Offices also run language courses, but they are also very limited. For example, many of them only last around one or two months. They focus more on improving proficiency than learning the language from the beginning and they are designed for clients seeking, for example, a specialist language course for a specific profession.

## 5.6. Access to guidance and counselling

Non-governmental organisations play a key role in helping asylum seekers as well as people who have been granted refugee status and beneficiaries of other forms of international protection. Apart from the support offered by different public institutions, there are numerous integration activities (e.g. guidance, counselling and civic education, and legal and psychological assistance) for these groups being organised by NGOs using extra-budgetary, mostly EU, funds. Thanks to obtaining a grant from the European Refugee Fund, the Fundacja Ocalenie was able to run a project addressed to beneficiaries of international protection, as well as persons applying for refugee status. The main goal was to improve their integration by offering free-of charge counselling addressed to this group of people. The project included specialist (psychological, legal and professional) counselling provided by specialists in different languages (including Arabic, Russian and Chechen) and workshops addressed both to refugees and persons and institutions in everyday contact with refugees (teachers, organisations and public institutions) on the cultural differences and psychological aspects of being a refugee. Moreover, there was also a mentoring programme available to beneficiaries ran by foreigners employed at the Foundation who also have migration and refugee backgrounds. During the whole project, which was entitled "Q-integracji", ca. 700 people were provided with help and consultation on 1600 occasions. It is also worth noting that NGOs are trying to address the specific needs of asylum seekers and female refugees by preparing special activities for them. The Polish Migration Forum Foundation runs, together with the Institute of Public Affairs, a project whose aim is to provide asylum seekers and female refugees with

<sup>8</sup> "Social assistance for refugees", Supreme Audit Office 2015

specialist help with regard to their psychological state, dealing with emotions but also giving advice about giving birth, nursing new-borns and raising children in Poland. Within the framework of this project, the Polish Migration Forum organises Childbirth Classes in which midwives, doctors and a psychologist provide group and individual consultations for migrants and refugee parents. What makes this project significant is that all classes are translated into the migrant's native language.

Projects implemented by Polish NGOs cover all different subjects and address very different needs. However, as they are very dependent on money received under EU structural funds and calls for grants are not released regularly, there is often a problem with a lack of continuity in these support activities.

## 5.7. Access to healthcare

After a person is granted refugee status as well as subsidiary protection, he or she has the same access to the healthcare system as Polish citizens. However, as was mentioned before, due to the fact that public health care in Poland is very underdeveloped, beneficiaries of international protection face the same problems as Polish citizens, like, for example, the very long waiting lists for a specialist doctor's appointment and the high medicine prices. As IPA research shows, the biggest challenge when it comes to refugees' and migrants' access to healthcare services is a lack of cultural competences and foreign language proficiency among medical personnel.<sup>9</sup> Awareness of the health situation of refugees and migrants is still very low. On the other hand, refugees as well as migrants in general show a significant lack of knowledge on how to access the health care system and the manner in which it operates in Poland. It would appear to be important to conduct education and dissemination activities addressed to migrant communities in Poland (e.g. in the form of social campaigns) to raise awareness of how the healthcare system is organised in Poland. There is also a large need to provide medical personnel, and even medical students, with training opportunities in the fields of cultural competences, working with people with traumas and the legal regulations pertaining to refugees in Poland.

According to the aforementioned IPA research, persons applying for international protection are often considered by medical personnel to be demanding patients, and providing them with healthcare is perceived as extremely difficult due to cultural differences. However, these negative sentiments towards forced migrants are mostly

<sup>9</sup> Jabłecka, B. "Strukturalne i kulturowe bariery w dostępie imigrantów do ochrony zdrowia w Polsce", Institute of Public Affairs, Warsaw 2012, <http://www.isp.org.pl/uploads/filemanager/B.JabeckaStrukturalneikulturowebarierywdostpieimigrantwdochronyzdrowia.p>

the consequence of bad experiences and frustration arising from cultural differences rather than malice (according to respondents, such hostile behaviour is a result of misunderstandings and not showing up for appointments as well as leaving Poland for another EU country before the treatment is finished).

Polish non-governmental organisations, apart from providing asylum seekers and beneficiaries of international protection with support and guidance on how to navigate the Polish healthcare system, also plug a gap by improving medical personnel's multicultural competence and knowledge on the situation of refugees. The Polish Migration Forum Foundation, within the framework of the first edition of the "Being a Mother in Poland" project financed under the European Fund For the Integration of Third Country Nationals has conducted a series of workshops dedicated to midwives and doctors who want to improve their competences when providing care for patients from different cultures, in particular foreign women giving birth in Poland. This workshop enabled participants to explore topics related to cultural diversity in perinatal care while deepening their knowledge about the most common misconceptions emerging from cultural differences.

Given the above, it is extremely important to improve the cultural competences of medical personnel, not only by conducting obligatory soft skills training sessions, but also by creating opportunities for this group to meet and get to know their patients better, for example by visiting the Centre for Foreigners.

## 6. Cooperation of key local public institutions and organisations involved in refugee integration

Maintaining cooperation and partnership during the shaping and implementation of integration policies presents a great challenge in Poland. However, this should be among the main fields of interest of decision-makers at every administrative level. According to experts and practitioners we have been talking to during the research, there is also a lack of systematic exchange of experiences and information among the institutions that play a key role in the integration of beneficiaries of international protection. The lack of information flow and activity coordination is sometimes noticeable between the following entities: the Office for Foreigners, schools, the Powiat Labour Offices, Family Assistance Centres, local NGOs and local authorities. To a large extent, this lack of coordination and knowledge exchange has a negative impact on the outcomes of the IPI and the quality of integration activities. According to the Supreme Audit Office report, one of the reasons for the low effectiveness of the

integration system is the insufficient coordination of activities between public institutions involved by law in the integration of refugees. As described above, the integration process is carried out in two stages. At the first stage, “preintegration” is carried out by the Office For Foreigners supervised by the Ministry of Interior and Administration and this is addressed to asylum seekers. The second stage, proper integration, is available to persons who have obtained refugee or subsidiary protection status. Integration assistance for this group is provided by the Powiat Family Assistance Centres supervised by the Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Policy. The regulations contained in the Granting Protection to Foreigners in the Territory of the Republic of Poland Act (preintegration) and the Social Assistance Act (Integration) do not contain provisions requiring the exchange of information between institutions involved at the two stages of integration and close cooperation between them. Therefore, the current regulations and everyday practice do not create the conditions for a smooth transition from pre-integration to integration. On the one hand, the Office For Foreigners has no legal obligation to monitor what is happening with the people who have been granted international protection after they leave a Centre and on the other hand, the Municipal Family Assistance Centres are not obliged to prepare integration programmes for people with refugee status on the basis of the results of the preintegration programme. According to the Supreme Audit Office, these integration programmes should be a continuation of the pre-integration actions and should be closely coordinated. As our respondents emphasised, as things stand, the communication between local institutions and organisations involved in refugee integration is often part of the particular project and here there is a big need to create a formal platform for local institutions and organisations in order to enable the exchange of information. However, our research shows that in some Centres for Foreigners, there are functioning cooperative teams gathering together representatives of the Office for Foreigners, police, medical personnel and local NGOs.

Although Family Assistance Centres are the main institutions involved in the integration of refugees as they are responsible for the implementation of integration measures on a county level, these institutions only play a limited role as local coordinators of integration activities. In general, Family Assistance Centres do not make any attempt to create local platforms for the cooperation and exchange of information between key institutions involved in the refugee integration process. The experiences of countries in the West indicate that such solutions can form the basis for local migration and integration policies.

However, it is noticeable that some local governments are shifting towards the “good governance” model and starting to create intersectoral consultative bodies engaged in shaping and consulting local policies. The aim of the good governance approach is to build and strengthen relationships between government and citizens, neighbourhoods and community councils. Crucially, some of these initiatives were established long before the migration crisis arose and before the former government’s declaration that Poland would join the Relocation and Resettlement Programme.

Warsaw provides a good example of how to establish social dialogue platforms. The Social Dialogue Committee for Foreigners was established in Warsaw in 2012 as an initiatory and advisory body to the Mayor of Warsaw. The Committee consists of 30 NGOs working for foreigners and foreigners' associations. One of the results of the meetings was the elaboration of the Committee’s opinion regarding the draft of the Foreigners Act. The Committee is one of 30 such social dialogue committees operating at Warsaw City Hall. These are initiatory and advisory bodies created by non-governmental organisations and the City Hall. They are essential partners supporting local administration with the elaboration of solutions in particular domains of the public tasks for which the City is responsible.

In 2015, when the former government of Ewa Kopacz announced that Poland would host refugees within the framework of the Relocation and Resettlement Programme, local authorities were left in no doubt that they would be primarily responsible for the integration of newcomers into Polish society. Regardless of the lack of any clear communication and decisions from the state regarding the legal repercussions and a funding scheme, it was local governments that took the lead/ initiative.

One of the most progressive cities is the municipality of Gdańsk. In 2015, the Mayor of Gdansk, Paweł Adamowicz, appointed an intersectoral and interdisciplinary committee whose aim was to develop a Model for the Integration of Immigrants living in Gdansk. This was Poland's first cross-sectoral and interdisciplinary team within the domain of integration policies addressed to beneficiaries of international protection as well as Third Country Nationals. The committee contained around 140 members representing more than 70 organisations and institutions. The task of the committee was to list available resources and opportunities that could be dedicated to the support of immigrants, identify their major needs and problems and elaborate concrete integration measures targeted at foreign residents of the city. The model covers 8 thematic areas (education, employment, culture, local communities, violence and discrimination, social assistance, health and housing) and its implementation will

be coordinated by a cross-sectoral and interdisciplinary committee consisting of a Steering Committee, Management Group, Integration and Migration Forum (formed by representatives of the institutions and organisations involved in the Model's development) and Immigrants Council. The Immigrants Council is the first advisory board to the Mayor established in Poland to consist of representatives of diverse immigrant communities. The overall aim of this ambitious and comprehensive action plan is to both strengthen coordination and cooperation between diverse stakeholders and improve the quality of services targeted at immigrants already living in Gdańsk. It should be emphasised that the document mainly relates groups of immigrants. Only a few selected tasks are addressed to groups of refugees, beneficiaries of other forms of international protection or persons who are involved in the procedure of applying for this status. Thanks to the large commitment of social partners and the clear vision of local authorities, Gdańsk has become the first Polish city with its own comprehensive model for immigrant integration.

Such a consultative committee was also established in the City of Warsaw. On 24 November 2015, the Mayor of Warsaw appointed a permanent Committee for the coordination of actions relating to foreigners granted refugee or subsidiary protection status. The Committee is composed of eight representatives from Warsaw City Hall as well as representatives from the following local institutions: the Labour Office of the Capital City of Warsaw, Centre for Educational and Social Innovation and Training, Family Assistance Centre, Council of the Assets of the Capital City, Mayor's Plenipotentiary for Equal Treatment, Social Dialogue Committee for Foreigners and the Social Dialogue Committee for Equal Treatment. The Committee is also obliged to cooperate with, inter alia, other public institutions, NGOs and experts.

The main task of the Committee is to elaborate and implement a Programme to support foreigners who have been granted refugee or subsidiary protection status. This includes:

- The development and the implementation of an action plan aimed at:
  - providing accommodation, employment and access to Polish language classes,
  - facilitating integration within the community of Warsaw,
  - providing support relating to the obligation to provide schooling for foreign children
- Making an effort to inform Warsaw residents of actions taken for the benefit of the newcomers;

- Initiating and supporting actions to counteract racism, xenophobia and the social exclusion of foreigners

Also there are grass roots committees which were set up in Polish cities after the refugee crisis started. One such committee was set up in Lublin by representatives of academia, the Church and local business sector. The main aim was to gather the resources voluntarily offered by the citizens of Lublin, so that Lublin would be prepared to provide the refugees with different kinds of support once they arrived. Following to suspension of the Relocation and Resettlement Programme, some of these committees and support teams suspended their activity.

When shaping integration policy at the municipal level, learning from positive and negative experiences is of great value. As our research shows, two very progressive cities, Gdańsk and Lublin, are taking part in the European exchange network in the area of immigrant integration policy within the framework of Eurocities. This is a consortium of major European cities with an active Forum of Social Affairs, which focuses, among others matters, on sharing the best practices of the cities most experienced in the area of integration policy for migrants. Through participating in study visits, the Polish delegates have obtained a very good overview of local migration and integration policy and gleaned inspiration from the experiences of cities in Europe with a longer migration history. However, according to our respondents, there is still a need to develop cooperation between cities in Poland in order to establish a similar network, here in Poland, aimed at exchanging experiences and organising joint projects. To sum up, there are some cities and politicians that have begun making meaningful efforts to improve the situation of refugees in Poland.

## 7. The perception of refugees and raising awareness at the local level

Recently, we have observed a very marked polarisation of Polish society over the issue of the reception of refugees and a rise in negative opinions on this issue, especially among young people. As shown in the last IOM study, only 28% of Poles have had any contact with foreigners over the last year.<sup>10</sup> The main reason for this negative perception is ignorance and the projection and shaping of an image based on stereotypes, information from the media and the Internet. Infrequent contact with immigrants fuels this negative image of migrants/refugees, who are identified as "aliens". This is extremely visible on the Internet: according to the available data, 81% of Internet users have negative opinions concerning Poland's admission of refugees.

<sup>10</sup> Raport p.t. "Badanie na temat postaw wobec cudzoziemców w Polsce", Międzynarodowa Organizacja ds Migracji, Warszawa 2016, "[http://poland.iom.int/sites/default/files/IOM\\_Cudzoziemcy\\_raport\\_IX\\_2016.pdf](http://poland.iom.int/sites/default/files/IOM_Cudzoziemcy_raport_IX_2016.pdf)

The polarisation of public opinion on the reception of refugees is very visible. The latest opinion poll entitled “Poles towards refugees” conducted by the Public Opinion Research Centre (CBOS) in September 2016 shows that more than half of Poles (52%) oppose Poland receiving refugees from war-torn countries. Around 40% of the respondents claimed that refugees should be granted temporary shelter until the situation returns to normality. The permanent settlement of refugees in Poland is supported by only 4% of the respondents. As CBOS polls have been conducted regularly from the beginning of the migration crisis and even before then, it is very interesting to analyse how public opinion reacted to this issue throughout this period. In comparison with the August surveys, the number of people accepting the temporary stay of refugees in Poland has increased by 6%. At the same time, the number of vehement opponents of accepting refugees has declined by 6%, returning to the level reported by the June and July survey.

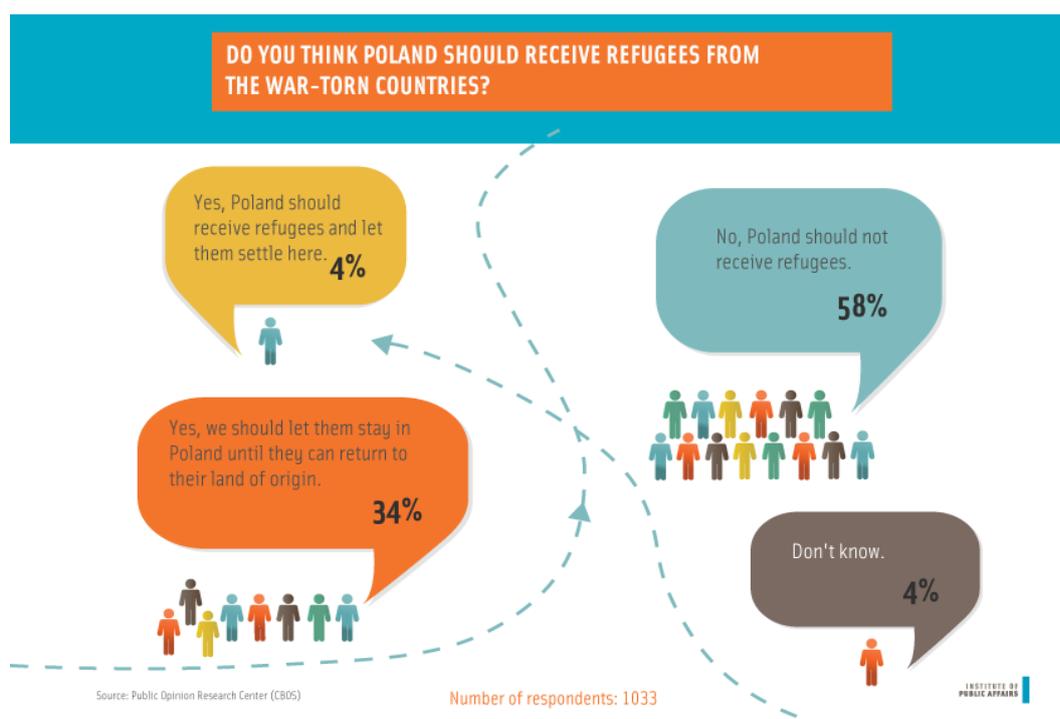
According to CBOS analysts, the latest events and subsequent terrorist attacks in Europe may have had a negative impact on public opinion sentiment. CBOS analysts point out that before the attacks in Paris in November 2015, the percentage of refugee reception supporters was greater than the number of opponents, but in addition, the prevailing view was that the best solution was to grant them temporary asylum. An increase in the number of opponents of refugee being received in Poland was also recorded after the attacks in Brussels (March 2015). The August drop in support for the reception of refugees may be associated with the terrorist acts in Nice and Munich.

There is also a significant difference in opinions on receiving refugees in Poland with regard to country of origin. The latest research shows, signalling a continuing trend, that the majority of respondents (67%) are against accepting refugees from the Middle East and Africa. On the other hand, there is broad acceptance of hosting refugees from Ukraine. Granting approval to asylum-seeking residents of Eastern Ukraine fleeing from areas of hostility is declared by 57% of respondents. Reluctance to grant such asylum is expressed by only 38% of respondents.

However, differences in opinion on this issue are particularly visible between age groups. One of the most concerning issues relating to public opinion views on refugee reception is the phenomenon of young people being extremely reluctant to grant shelter to people fleeing from war and persecution. Younger people, from 18 to 34 years of age, are more negatively inclined towards accepting refugees than older respondents. The majority of young people claim Poland should not receive any refugees from war-torn areas. By contrast, most older respondents (65 years old and more) think that Poland should help the refugees, at least temporarily.

Young people’s opinion on refugee reception was the focus of research conducted recently within the framework of a project overseen by the Association for Legal Intervention.<sup>11</sup> The report contains a summary of sociological research conducted between January and March 2016 among people aged 18-30 from Warsaw, Łódź and Pruszków. The report seeks to determine what the beliefs and fears are on which the opposition is founded, the strength of the aversion expressed by the research participants and whether this opposition is accompanied by acceptance of some forms of violence against people who, as a result of international commitments, would be coming to Poland. When justifying their reluctance towards receiving refugees in Poland, respondents put forward a number of arguments. They mentioned threats to the security of Polish citizens, threats to European culture, the possibility that newcomers only want to take advantage of social welfare, the frightening image of Muslims and Islam emerging from media reports and state institutions being insufficiently equipped to receive and integrate the newcomers. These concerns were raised both by respondents who have never had personal contact with a refugee or persons from different cultures and those who have direct contact with such people, even if they evaluated this positively.

Infographic 1. Polish attitudes toward refugees



Source: Public Opinion Research Center (CBOS)

<sup>11</sup> Hall, D., Mikulska-Jolles, A., „Uprzedzenia, strach czy niewiedza? Młodzi Polacy o powodach niechęci do przyjmowania uchodźców”, Association for Legal Intervention, Warsaw 2016, <http://interwencjaprawna.pl/docs/ARE-116-uprzedzenia-mlodych-polakow.pdf>

Unfortunately, from the beginning of the refugee crisis, negative sentiments towards asylum seekers and refugees have also been on the rise in local communities. According to the results of research on the reception of refugees<sup>12</sup> conducted by the Polish Migration Forum among inhabitants of the 4 selected towns and cities in which refugee centres are located (Biała Podlaska, Góra Kalwaria, Podkowa Leśna and Warsaw), refugees are often viewed - especially by those who are against accepting refugees – from a “clash of civilisations” perspective. Such clashes are frequently identified with Muslims while the influx of refugees is identified as an Islamic invasion. The fear of social tension seems to be one of the main reasons for opposing the admission of refugees. Another problem is the prevailing terminological chaos. People find it difficult to distinguish refugees from immigrants, Islamists from terrorists, integration from assimilation or Syrians from Arabs. Such views on refugees are shaped by the media. The politicisation of immigration makes the situation no easier. Political parties use the issue of immigration to mobilise the electorate, resulting in a deepening of the polarisation within society. Moreover, many respondents emphasise their lack of confidence in public institutions, including the police. However, the majority - regardless of their opinion on receiving refugees (for or against) - declared an openness towards and willingness to help refugees, which seems to create a strong opportunity for dialogue.

For the past year, we have been able to observe among local communities various forms of expressing hostility or disagreement towards the localisation of Centers for Foreigners within their communities. For example, in the case of Warszawa Targówek, somebody destroyed a painting in public space created by students from a local school portraying children of different skin colours holding hands. Apart from painting over the faces of dark-skinned children using white paint, a large inscription appeared saying "We do not want foreigners." Activists working at the Centre for Foreigners we were interviewing suggested that it was people outside the Targówek district who were responsible for this incident. Fortunately, there is a positive ending to this story. Parents of the children from the local school spontaneously offered to restore the painting to its original state.

During our research, we have identified numerous examples of interesting multicultural education projects taking place in Targówek organised by local schools and non-governmental organisations. One of them is especially interesting and

<sup>12</sup> Walczak, G., “Uchodźcy. Witajcie (stąd)”, Polish Migration Forum, Warsaw 2016  
<http://www.forummigracyjny.org/pl/aktualnosci.php?news=515&wid=22&wai=&year=>

valuable as it creates opportunities for refugee children and retired Warsaw inhabitants to meet, spend time together and learn about different cultures. The aim of the project run by the Legal Intervention Association is to build intergenerational dialogue and activate elderly citizens through actions aimed at acquainting them with other cultures, strengthening openness and tolerance among them, thus promoting intercultural and intergenerational dialogue. The activities include ethnic cuisine workshops and theatre workshops. Further information on this project can be found in the “Best practices” section.

Our analysis identified a couple of very interesting examples of local projects aimed at building multicultural dialogue and shaping positive attitudes towards people from different cultures as a response to the refugees crisis in Europe. One non-governmental organisation, the A. Gołąb Association for the Development of the Abilities of Children and Young People, which is based in Zgierz, prepared complex projects aimed at combating the wave of hate speech and promotion of discrimination which has occurred in recent times in Zgierz. Zgierz is one of the cities where local communities can make contact with asylum seekers, as the Center for Foreigners in Grotniki is located near the City of Zgierz. Organisers have conducted a wide-ranging educational campaign against discrimination in Zgierz. The project was mainly targeted at the local community, especially children and young people attending schools where refugees make up 800 of a total of about 15,000 people. One of the interesting activities included in the project was an antifascist football tournament. New tools were also developed for schools, for example, an animated film about refugees.

The wave of hate speech and racially-motivated violence and acceptance for such behaviour has become a large challenge causing great concern in today’s Poland. According to official statistics of the National Public Prosecutor's Office, during 2013-2015, the number of recorded hate crimes has doubled. Statistics for 2016 have not yet been made available, but according to non-governmental organisations dealing with this issue, the situation is continuing to deteriorate. What is most concerning is that the victims of the violence are not exclusively or primarily refugees. Any people with a different skin colour, way of dressing, or speaking in a foreign language are vulnerable to such attacks. This also includes people who have lived in Poland for years, or were even born here. In response to the process of the intensification of hate crime, in spring 2016, around 319 non-governmental organisations signed a petition to the Prime Minister Beata Szydło calling for a response to hate crimes and loud condemnation of the perpetrators. As they have emphasised, there has been no strong counter-reaction and the contempt characterising some public statements has created a climate in

which the perpetrators of such attacks equate the lack of response with silent approval.<sup>13</sup>

It should also be mentioned that, in response to the refugee crisis in Europe and radicalisation of the public debate in Poland, a large number of grass-roots civic pro-refugee initiatives have appeared. One of the largest initiatives, which is named “With Bread and Salt” (“Chlebem i solą”), is a totally grassroots, informal initiative created to support various actions favouring the improvement of refugees’ lives in Poland and in Europe and raise awareness about the experience of being an exile among public opinion in Poland. Their aim is to engage people from different backgrounds in helping refugees by means of concrete actions and media campaigns, promote multicultural dialogue and advocate changes in asylum and immigration policy. This group has organised pro-refugee rallies in Warsaw and other Polish cities and came up with the idea for the “Solidarity with Refugees Day” on 15th of October, when NGOs, public institutions like schools and libraries as well as private companies are invited to organise events aimed at raising awareness about the situation of refugees in Poland and Europe. These initiatives were extremely successful, as in the 2016 edition, there were 70 events organised in 25 cities throughout Poland. These events aimed to counter the prevalent view – present in much of the national media and public debate – that Poland is unwilling to play its part in helping solve Europe’s refugee crisis and send the message that there will be no acceptance for xenophobia, racism, discrimination and violence.

One of the main characteristics of the results of the public opinion polls is that, for many of our research respondents, the form taken by localised anti-immigration protests is very concerning, in that it is young people who are the most reluctant to see refugees living, working and integrating in Poland. How can their concerns be addressed and attitudes changed? There is a big need for education in order to improve young people's knowledge of the situation of refugees and the range of social support which would be offered to them after they arrive in Poland. However, the challenge still remains of how to get across new information to young people who are social networks users, since their opinions are most shaped on their peers’ profile pages. Moreover, the mainstream political discourse, represented, in particular, by the government, tends to arouse more negative sentiment towards refugees rather than promoting positive attitudes. Nevertheless, educating and creating opportunities for young people and people from different cultures to meet and forge relationships (e.g.

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.ngofund.org.pl/apel-do-premier-beaty-szydlo-o-podjecie-dzialan-w-sprawie-atakow-na-organizacje-pozarządowe/>

in the form of Live Libraries), are of great importance and should be one of the top priorities of public institutions, non-governmental organisations and local communities. According to the opinions of many of our respondents, the key element in changing reluctant young people's attitudes is to approach the arguments and concerns of people who are against hosting refugees in a very serious way, because only then is real social dialogue possible.