

Katarzyna Gmaj, Krystyna Iglicka

## Educational Challenges Posed by Migration to Poland- Recommendations for Policy Makers

“EMILIE: A European approach to multicultural citizenship: legal, political and educational challenges (CIT5-028205)”

*The intercultural education aims in reduction of fear towards “others”. Thus to achieve it school should enable pupils to experience different cultures, including language and direct contact with representatives of diverse cultures. It should also support immigrants’ children in social advancement. Teachers should be trained to acquire intercultural abilities and knowledge of foreign pupils’ origin country and culture. Racist lining should be excluded from school textbooks. Simultaneously respect for cultural diversity should be introduced. An important element of state policy is enabling minorities to learn their mother tongue.*<sup>1</sup>

### Introduction

On the basis of the data provided by the Ministry of National Education, it could be stated that the number of immigrants’ children in Polish Schools during the last years oscillates between 4 000 -6 000. This numbers are extremely low in comparison to the number of pupils in general. E.g., in the school year 2005/2006 there was 6.6 million pupils (aged 7-21<sup>2</sup>) covered by national system of education (primary, lower-secondary, secondary schools)<sup>3</sup>. However, in the nineties foreign pupils were almost not present in Polish schools, their numbers were negligible.

In the Polish case, in general, there are no obstacles in providing education to refugees’ and immigrants’ children. However, it seems that the issue of immigrants’ children presence in mainstream schools is still considered as a future challenge. It is important to note at this point that cultural and ethnic diversity is still treated rather in terms of old ethnic/national and religious minorities in Poland. It is related to the fact that majority of immigrants in our country do not treat Poland as a place of settlement.

Children who are not Polish citizens and who are subject to compulsory schooling (7-16 years) can benefit from the education and care in public primary schools, gymnasia (lower secondary schools) on the same terms as Polish citizens despite their parents’ or guardians’ legal status of stay in Poland. Those. Legal basis of admission of persons with non-Polish citizenship to public and non-public schools are as follows:

article 93 and article 94a of the Act on the Education System of 7 September 1991

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<sup>1</sup> Lalak D., „Swoi” I „obcy” w perspektywie antropologiczno-społecznej, in Lalak D. (ed.) „Migracja, Uchodźstwo, wielokulturowość. Zderzenie kultur we współczesnym świecie” (Migration, exile, multiculturalism. Clash of cultures in contemporary world), Warszawa, 2007, pp.89-122

<sup>2</sup> Statistics contain pupils attending primary schools, lower-secondary schools, secondary schools: vocational schools, technical colleges, profiled lyceums, comprehensive lyceums, post-lyceum schools. For that reason they refer to the category 7-21.

<sup>3</sup> *Oswiata i wychowanie w roku szkolnym 2005/2006* (Education in the School Year 2005/2006), p 32 [http://www.stat.gov.pl/cps/rde/xbcr/gus/PUBL\\_analiza\\_osw2006.pdf](http://www.stat.gov.pl/cps/rde/xbcr/gus/PUBL_analiza_osw2006.pdf)

the Regulation by the Minister of National Education and Sport of 4 October 2001 on the admission of persons with no Polish citizenship in public pre-schools, schools, teacher trainings institutions and units  
the Regulation of the Minister of National Education and Sport of 20 February 2004 on conditions and procedures of admission of pupils to public schools and on the transfer of pupils from one type of school to the other  
The Regulation of the Minister of Education and Science of 6 April 2006 on the Nostrification of School Certificates and Maturity Certificates Obtained Abroad  
The Regulation by the Minister of National Education of 1 February 2007 on the Framework Programme of the Polish Language Courses for Refugees

## **Asylum Seekers' Children and "the Rest" – Suggested Recommendations**

On the basis of the collected materials one can distinguish two categories of foreign pupils.<sup>4</sup> The first category pertains to refugees' and asylum seekers' children. They, usually, cause enormous educational and pedagogical challenges - an effort for which Polish teachers are often not prepared.

It is also possible to find positive cases of progress of both Chechen pupils and Polish teachers in Polish schools however, in general, this category can be compared with Roma minority, which due to its tradition and life style is reluctant to attend school and to learn. **In the case, of Chechen children due to cultural context and cultural distance between Poland and Chechnya, assistant for a foreign pupil seems to be a reasonable solution.**

There is also another category where motivations of children and parents are visible. It refers to children of immigrants, who usually, thanks to small cultural distance (**Ukrainians, Russians**), or high position of education in the system of values (**Vietnamese**) adapt easily to Polish school's realities. Vietnamese are even presented to Polish pupils as an example to follow since they are work hard and, in many cases, are gifted especially in mathematics and natural sciences. They also take very good position in spelling competitions organized by schools. **In that case, assistant for a foreign pupil does not seem to be justified since both parents and children seem to be sufficiently motivated.**

For both categories, especially in case of older children, **some kind of preparatory "zero class program" should be considered.** It is expected that this kind of tool

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<sup>4</sup> In our research we conducted interviews in the following institutions: The Ministry of National Education (Ministerstwo Edukacji Narodowej); The National In-Service Teacher Training Center – Department of Civic and European Education (Centralny Ośrodek Doskonalenia Nauczycieli); The Foundation for the Development of the Education System (Fundacja Rozwoju Edukacji); The Mazovian School-Board (Mazowieckie Kuratorium Oświaty); The Warsaw Office for Education (Biuro Edukacji Urzędu Miasta Warszawy); The Mazovian Local Governmental Center for Upgrading Teaching Skills (Wojewodzki Ośrodek Doskonalenia Nauczycieli); The Polish Teachers' Union ZNP (Związek Nauczycielstwa Polskiego); The Educational Branch of the Independent and Self-Governing Trade Union Solidarnosc (Sekcja Oświatowa NSZZ Solidarnosc); The refugees' and asylum seekers' centers in Warsaw; NGO – Vox Humana; NGO –Polskie Forum Migracyjne (Polish Migration Forum). We overviewed also two publications: "Głos Nauczycielski"(Teacher's Voice) issued weekly by the Polish Teachers' Union ZNP (Związek Nauczycielstwa Polskiego) and "Przegląd Oświatowy" (Educational Review) issued each twice weeks by the Educational Branch of the Independent and Self-Governing Trade Union Solidarnosc (Sekcja Oświatowa NSZZ Solidarnosc). We overviewed editions starting on January 2004 and ending on May 2007

could help immigrants' children to join their Polish peers at school with a proper level of language skills. It is supposed to facilitate them to learn other subjects.

Chechen children often start their attendance at school unexpectedly during ongoing school year. According to the information provided by the Warsaw Office of Education, **an average period of Chechen child presence in Warsaw school oscillates between 4-6 months. These sudden appearance and disappearance of pupil, who is not deeply motivated to learn, disorganize work done with the whole class. It results in far less teachers' attention devoted to Polish pupils. Thus one of the headmasters suggested considering the idea of separated classes for Chechen children only.**

An interviewed employee of the Warsaw Office of Education emphasized that it is definitely not manifestation of discriminatory practices. **Chechen children promising in terms of continuity of education, whose parents are interested in prolonging their stay in Poland, would join normal classes. Therefore, it is supposed to be beneficiary for those Chechens who wish to stay in Poland and are motivated to learn, and Polish pupils and, teachers as well.**

Almost all of the interviewed persons claimed that we should undertake proper steps to prepare Polish schools, including teachers, pupils and their parents for much bigger number of immigrants in the future. We should benefit from a present situation, characterized by insignificant number of foreign pupils in Polish schools, which gives us time for preparation in advance.

**It is recommended to study situation in other EU countries and to consider implementation of certain tools in Poland in order to avoid social tensions and conflicts already being faced in that countries. It is also recommended to collect and distribute good practices elaborated by Polish teachers. Thus, a website devoted to cultural diversity brought about by foreign pupils in Polish schools is desirable.**

Interviewed respondents also agreed that **all solutions and undertaken activities should be flexible and individually elaborated - depending on the school and immigrants' child's needs and abilities.**

**It is advisable to create a financial framework that would allow distant and poor communities (gmina, powiat) to have immigrant children and to deal with challenges they bring as well.** So far only rich communities as Warsaw can afford it.

In Polish system each level of education is finalized with the exam that entitles to start another level. **The procedure of exam does not provide any special terms for foreigners. Such provisions, including longer time or teacher's assistance are recommended.**

Our respondents stressed that education in schools should focus more on challenges of culturally diverse society. **Polish children and youths should be thought tolerance and openness since family environment not always can provide values of tolerance and equality.** Sometimes family is a source of pathologies of different kinds.