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# The Birth and Development of the Polish Integration Policy

## Abstract

*The article describes the origin and current state of Polish integration policy as a part of the state migration policy. The authors provide a list of state bodies and nongovernmental organizations involved in the inclusion of immigrants into Polish society, evaluate their activities, and also declare the need to create a coherent state policy for the integration of foreigners.*

**Key words:** Polish integration policy, Polish migration policy, integration of immigrants, the Polish Migration Forum, Caritas Polska.

**JEL Classification:** J18, F22, L33.

## Introduction

Integration policy is one of the most important elements of a country's migration policy. However, not all European countries share this opinion. Poland is one of those countries. There are a number of possible causes for this situation. One of the main reasons is the lack of past experiences in absorbing a large number of immigrants. The current migration situation in Poland (a significant and constantly increasing influx of foreigners from Eastern Europe and Asia) makes the issue of migration policy a very pressing one.

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The purpose of this article is to analyse Polish integration policy, as well as to characterize the factors that influenced its development. The following methods were used in the article: content analysis techniques, comparative analysis and secondary data analysis. At the beginning of the article, the reasons for the current status of Polish migration (and in particular integration) policies were analysed. Next, the process of forming an integration policy based on the main regulatory documents was examined, and the characteristics of the activities of state and non-state organizations in implementing the integration policy were given. At the end of the article, it is concluded that there is no holistic integration policy in Poland and it is necessary to implement and coordinate it at the state level.

## **Reasons for the Lack of a Holistic Migration and Integration Policy in Poland**

In Polish migration policy, the issue of migrant integration has never been a priority or even an important topic. First of all, this is due to the fact that a scenario of Poland's transformation from a country of emigration into a country of immigration seemed unlikely for a long time (Okólski 2010: 131–157). The number of arriving citizens has never been large enough for their integration to become a problem. Secondly, migration was often only seasonal: immigrants came mainly to take up short-term work and did not plan to remain in the country, and therefore did not have to be integrated into the host society.

The third reason for the lack of a holistic integration policy is that the majority of immigrants came and still come from the neighbouring countries (Belarus, Ukraine and Russia), which are historically, culturally and linguistically very close to Poland. And indeed, as practice shows, newcomers from the neighbouring countries very quickly learn the language, the sociocultural norms and, in principle, do not have any major issues with integration. At the same time, immigrants from distant countries (such as the Socialist Republic of Vietnam) are not very interested in integration programs.

The fourth, and perhaps main reason behind the lack of a uniform integration policy is the attitude of Polish state institutions and Polish citizens to the phenomenon of migration. Migrants are most often seen as an economic factor, a workforce that should help the economy solve certain problems and then return to their countries.

For these reasons, for a long time, it was considered that there was simply no need for integration policies.

## The Origin of Current Polish Integration Policy

It should be noted that until recently, integration activities and programs undertaken in Poland were directed exclusively at two groups of immigrants: the first are refugees and people under subsidiary protection (since 1990, when Poland signed the Geneva Convention), the second are repatriates and their families (when the process of returning ethnic Poles to Poland began after the collapse of the USSR). However, as said above, a uniform integration policy has not even been a part of any official documents for a long time.

This state of affairs lasted until 2005, when the Ministry of Social Policy published the first official document related to the topic, entitled 'Proposals of actions aimed at creating a comprehensive foreigner integration policy in Poland' (*authors' translation*) (Propozycje Działań w Kierunku Stworzenia Kompleksowej Polityki Integracji Cudzoziemców w Polsce, 2015). This act is the first to define the concept of integration, as well as four aspects of building an appropriate policy:

- political (asylum policy, non-discrimination issues, employment, education and the place of an integration policy within a comprehensive migration policy);
- legal (creating regulations regarding the implementation of the integration policy);
- institutional (the appointment of institutions responsible for implementing the integration policy, cooperation with NGOs, organization of relevant training);
- substantive (knowledge about integration, its problems and process, types of immigrant groups and ways of supporting them) (Ibidem: 5–6).

As Kazimierz Laskus writes (Laskus 2016), 'Proposals (...)', as the first programming document, was very general in its scope, and did not describe any specific actions. Nevertheless, the act expressed the idea that an integration policy must be shaped in response to the real changes that are taking place in Polish society and must be connected with economic and political development. It is necessary to develop a uniform action plan, create appropriate institutions, issue regulatory acts, and formulate goals that the state wants to achieve with this policy. But it must also be very mobile and flexible, must answer hot questions that the changing reality creates (Propozycje Działań... 2015: 2).

This act, regardless of its general content, has become the legal basis for developing a debate on integration policy. It contained the following thesis: 'in Poland, the number of immigrants increases every year, and their integration with Polish society is becoming more and more important. Actions in the area of foreigners' integration policy should be adequate to the immigration policy of the Republic of Poland, which is being developed' (*authors' translation*) (Ibidem).

Events that took place after Poland's accession to the EU (the massive outflow of labour force to the West, economic development, social changes) substantially changed the image of migration and societal attitudes towards migration, and became a signal that integration policy is, after all, what the Polish state needs.

Understanding this need resulted in the fact that since 2009, Poland began the implementation of first projects co-financed by the European Fund for the Integration of Third-Country Nationals (we will talk about this in detail later in this article). In addition, in 2011, a strategic document 'The Polish Migration Policy: current state of play and further actions' (Polityka Migracyjna Polski – Stan Obecny i Postulowane Działania, 2011) was developed by the Inter-ministerial Committee on Migration and adopted by the Council of Ministers. A part of this document was devoted to Poland's integration policy, which emphasized the need for carefully planned actions:

'The gradual increase in the number of immigrants in Poland makes it necessary to define a policy of integration of foreigners and their role in Polish society. An integration policy can help build coherent, compact and tolerant societies in which the immigrant population coexists harmoniously with the local population' (*authors' translation*) (Ibidem, 17).

One very important achievement of this document was the fact that it expressed an understanding of the need to spread the integration policy to all immigrant groups (not just refugees). The document emphasizes the key role of Polish people in the integration process, as well as the fact that the process of integration requires efforts from both government agencies and immigrants themselves:

'Participation in integration programs should be voluntary, but a system of incentives should be introduced to encourage participation in such programs' (*authors' translation*) (Ibidem, 17).

The 2011 document was criticized by experts from the Republican Foundation (Fundacja Republikańska) (Andrzejewski, Gełzak, Gniadek, Groszek, Kmiec, Mazur, Sieniow, Sulkowski, Wójcik 2018) for not precisely defining the goals and tasks of the migration policy and for omitting some important issues. However, it should be noted that it was the first attempt at a structured approach to the issue of a migration policy, and it may form the basis for creating a single strategic document in the future.

However, this act ceased to apply in 2016, and a new official state strategy in this area is yet to be created. (Ibidem, 28)

An important attempt to create a comprehensive approach towards an integration policy was the publication of the report entitled 'Polish Hospitality Model. Framework for a new migration policy based on common good' (*authors' translation*) (Andrzejewski, Gełzak, Gniadek, Groszek, Kmiec, Mazur, Sieniow, Sulkowski, Wójcik 2018) developed by the Republican Foundation and analysed above. Nevertheless, this document is only an unofficial report, a sketch presenting a certain vector of shaping the migration policy.

## **Institutions Responsible for Implementing the Integration Policy in Poland**

According to a MIPEX (Migrant Integration Policy Index) 2015 report, where the level of conditions for immigrant integration is measured, Poland's success in the field of integration policy is modest at best. Out of 38 countries in Europe and North America, Poland took the 32<sup>th</sup> place, however the overall score is 43 that means "halfway favourable" in terms of MIPEX. Poland is ahead of Malta (overall score – 39), Lithuania (38), Slovakia (38), Cyprus (36) and Latvia (34), Turkey (24) (Poland: MIPEX 2015).

Today, there is no official document that would indicate the position of the Polish government on the integration of immigrants, and there is no separate institution that would be authorized to develop this policy and be responsible for its implementation. However, there are a number of institutions dealing with various aspects of integration policy.

### **Governmental institutions**

Pursuant to the decision of the European Committee of the Council of Ministers, from September 7, 2004, the Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Policy (MRPiPS) became the leading institution in the field of implementing integration policies. On January 11, 2005, it published the 'Proposals for actions aimed at creating a comprehensive policy of integration of foreigners in Poland' document mentioned above.

At present any activities related to the integration of foreigners carried out by the Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Policy, concern mainly a small group of

immigrants, which consists of people with refugee status, those granted “tolerated stay” permits or granted subsidiary protection. Compared to other EU countries, this group of people is rather small. For example, in 2018, 4,683 applications were received, of which only 185 were accepted (in addition, 219 people received subsidiary protection and 30 were granted tolerated stay permits). In the record-breaking 2013, 19,239 applications were received, of which only 213 were accepted.

The Polish integration policy towards the above-mentioned groups of migrants is implemented as individual and family integration programs. Rules for providing social assistance to foreigners are described in Chapter 5 of the Law of 12 March 2004 on Social Assistance (uniform text Journal of Laws of 2016 item 930 with further amendments).

Annual reports on the implementation of individual and family integration programs are available on the official website of the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy (Wybrane Informacje Dotyczące Pomocy Udzielanej Cudzoziemcom, 2020). In 2016, 278 refugees received social assistance benefits based on individual integration programs (including 115 from Syria, 24 from Iraq, 18 from Russia, 16 from Ukraine, 15 from Turkmenistan and 13 from Egypt). Also in 2016, 237 people were granted subsidiary protection based on integration programs (115 Russians, 61 Ukrainians and 26 Iraqis) (Świadczenia z Pomocy Społecznej Udzielane Cudzoziemcom w Roku 2016, 2016).

It is worth noting that the conditions offered to immigrants in Poland (in particular monetary social benefits – PLN 2,500.01 per person) are not particularly attractive (Ibidem: 5). It can be assumed that even if the state did not implement such a restrictive refugee policy (strict rules on the implementation of integration programs, a large number of applications for the recognition of refugee status being declined), it would be difficult to expect a strong wave of migration like in other, more developed EU countries, such as Sweden or Germany.

Recently in Poland the issue of integrating a much larger group of foreigners, economic migrants, has been brought to public attention. Lack of experience in this area makes Polish officials seek help in neighbouring countries. To this end, in 2017, the Department of Social Assistance and Integration at the Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Policy developed and launched implementation of the project ‘Building structures for integration for foreigners in Poland’ (*authors’ translation*) co-financed by the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund. The project implementation period is planned for the period from April 11, 2017 to April 10, 2020. PLN 771,250.00 will be allocated to the project (including PLN 578,437.50 from the FAMI Fund) (FAMI, 2018).

Another institution authorized to deal with the issues of integration policy is the Ministry of the Interior and Administration (MSWiA), and in particular, the Committee for Migration coordinated by the Ministry, created pursuant to Regulation No. 12 of the Prime Minister of February 14, 2007 (*authors' translation*). The Migration Team members in rank of State secretaries are appointed by the ministers responsible for economy, public finance, culture and protection of national heritage, science and higher education, labour, regional development, social security, foreign affairs, etc. (Zarządzenie nr 35 Prezesa Rady Ministrów z dnia 19 marca 2018 r.). This diversity among the members of the institution indicates a large number of public policy areas related to migration, as well as the strategic role of issues that need to be addressed in the work of the aforementioned body. It should be noted, however, that 10 years after the establishment of this institution in Poland, there is still no complete official document that would define the migration and integration policy of the state and enable its consistent implementation. As a part of the Migration Team, a consultative and advisory body was created in the form of Working Group for the Integration of Foreigners. Achievements of this body included preparation of the document 'Polish Integration Policies in Relation to Foreigners: Principles and Guidelines' (*authors' translation*) (Polska polityka integracji cudzoziemców – założenia i wytyczne, 2013).

Another body of the Ministry of Interior and Administration, the Department of Analysis and Migration Policy, is responsible for cooperation in creating and implementing a migration and integration policy towards immigrants, initiating, analysing and providing opinions on draft normative acts and other documents related to the state's migration policy, gathering information on the migration situation in the country and abroad, as well as cooperation with domestic and foreign scientific and research institutions and others.

## NGOs

According to international and EU law, Member States are obliged to take care of immigrants, especially in the area of satisfying their basic needs. In reality, however, it turns out that the activities of official bodies are insufficient to provide people with proper support, because they are not aware of the people's actual needs. This gap can be filled by NGOs that understand the needs of immigrants well and can act much more effectively.

Today over 100,000 NGOs are registered in the Polish REGON database. Among them, several dozen deal with the affairs of foreigners, both refugees and other migrant groups. These NGOs derive funds mainly from the EU funds: the European Social

Fund (ESF), the European Fund for the Integration of Third-Country Nationals, and the European Refugee Fund (ERF).

NGOs operate in their offices and centres, providing free services for foreigners. The general goal that NGOs are aiming at is to eliminate or at least lower social barriers on the path of integrating migrants into their new society. First – they provide consultancy and information assistance. Secondly – they provide psychological support, which is extremely important, especially at the beginning of the immigrant's journey into their new reality. In addition, the scope of NGO activities includes conducting free language courses and vocational training. They also help in finding a job and a place to live.

Because integration is a two-way process, NGOs both prepare migrants to enter a new society and prepare the society to accept new members. In the latter effort, the main tools are the dissemination of knowledge about culture, history and customs, encouraging recognition of the benefits and real threats that come from meeting different cultures and fighting against stereotypes and misinformation. In order to foster better integration and create a good social climate, NGOs organize various cultural events (culture days, film festivals, photo projects, exhibitions, meetings) and implement anti-discrimination measures.

The most active Polish NGOs which work in the field of migration are:

1. *The Polish Migration Forum* (<http://www.forummigracyjne.org>), which implements such projects as:
  - 'The Whole World in Our Classroom' (targeted at children of 5–7 years of age, their parents and teaching staff) (The Whole World in Our Classroom 2019/2020);
  - 'My Career in Poland' (training to help foreigners obtain legal employment or start their own business) (My Career in Poland);
  - 'I Am a Mom in Poland' (intercultural school of childbirth and childcare for migrant women, as well as for Polish midwives who will work with foreign patients) (I Am a Mom in Poland);
  - 'From tolerance to integration' (*authors' translation*) (applies to foreigners applying for refugee status) (Od tolerancji do integracji).

Although the organization implements many projects for foreigners, the number of participants given in reports can hardly be called impressive. For instance, only 10 women took part in the first edition of the program 'I Am a Mom in Poland' in 2014. In the second edition of this program in 2016 the number of participants increased, but not by much: 11 women and 26 migrant couples were given psychological help while 28 women participated parental competence workshops

(Sprawozdania z działalności). This may be due to a lack of active informational outreach about ongoing programs, or a lack of interest in the target group. However, the Forum is undoubtedly a very important organization that helps in the integration of foreigners, as it provides them with free legal advice and necessary information on many issues. Such assistance is certainly a primary element of integration, especially at the initial stage.

2. *Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights* (<http://www.hfhr.pl/en/>)

Established in 1989 on the initiative of the Helsinki Committee, the Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights is one of the best-known nongovernmental organizations working on behalf of foreigners. The Foundation's activities consist of numerous projects such as:- Human rights education programs for students, journalists and bloggers (Edukacja);

- Strategic Litigation Programme, which covers the scope of legal advice and assistance in conducting court cases regarding, among others, foreigners (Strategic Litigation Programme);
- Human Rights Film Festival 'WATCH DOCS. Human Rights in Film International Film Festival' (catalogues and tickets for the shows are free) (WATCH DOCS. Human Rights in Film International Film Festival);
- Human Rights Quarterly (*authors' translation*), a magazine featuring various articles on human rights (Kwartalnik o prawach człowieka).

In 2016, the Helsinki Foundation, with the support of the Heinrich Böll Foundation Warsaw, put out an important publication 'Foreigners in Poland. Handbook for public officials' (*authors' translation*) (Cudzoziemcy w Polsce. Podręcznik dla funkcjonariuszy publicznych, 2016), which lays out guidelines on working with refugees in Poland.

3. *Caritas Polska* (<https://www.caritas.eu/caritas-poland/>)

Caritas Polska is a charitable organization of the Polish Bishops' Conference. Caritas Polska cooperates internationally with Caritas Internationalis and Caritas Europe. It provides ad-hoc and long-term assistance to people in difficult life situations (the unemployed, homeless, sick, elderly and children from poor families), as well as immigrants and refugees, and deals with humanitarian aid for victims of wars and natural disasters. It acquires funds from philanthropists, charity institutions and organizations.

Caritas Polska projects, implemented in four voivodeships under The Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (The Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund), are directly addressed to immigrants. Each of the projects is implemented in cooperation with the appropriate voivode. In addition to practical activities, the organization's plan is to create a strategy for the integration of third-country nationals living in different

voivodeships (Migranci i Uchodźcy). This is a very important step, which highlights the local governments' understanding of the need for a uniform and coherent process of the integration of foreigners.

Particular emphasis in all voivodeships will be placed on the integration of Polish and foreign children through integration programs in schools (Witaj w naszej klasie). An international dance band has already been created to achieve this goal in Mazovian Voivodeship (Wsparcie integracji cudzoziemców na Mazowszu).

#### 4. *Centre of Migration Research* (<http://www.migracje.uw.edu.pl/en/>)

A specialized unit at the University of Warsaw that deals with interdisciplinary research on migration in Poland and the entire European Union. The academic staff of the centre consists of 9 professors and habilitated doctors, 31 PhDs and 18 members with master's degrees (data as of March 18, 2020) (CMR Staff, 2020).

The list of NGOs that contribute to improving the situation of migrants goes on and on. The most known initiatives are the Polish Red Cross, the Legal Clinics Foundation at faculties of law of Polish universities, the Perspektywa Civic Foundation (*authors' translation*) (activities for tolerance and dialogue of cultures) and many others.

## Conclusions

As discussed, the vast majority of foreigners in Poland come from countries with a similar culture and common history. Accordingly, it may seem that apprehension towards issues of integration is baseless in this case. However, Poland has recently opened its borders to an increasing number of immigrants from countries with very different cultures (India, Nepal, Bangladesh, China, etc) (Statystyki 2016/2019) and should approach the development of its integration policy carefully, learning from the experiences of other Western countries and not repeating their mistakes. Furthermore, a lack of integration of even culturally close foreigners can lead to negative social effects, such as creation of a 'deep state', emergence of grey economy and various national conflicts.

In June 2016 the Information Office of the European Parliament in Poland and the Polish Institute of Public Affairs organized a conference entitled 'Migration/Reasons/Reactions' (*authors' translation*). During the conference experts repeatedly stated that Poland had no integration policy at the moment (Eksperci: Polska Nie Ma Polityki Integracyjnej, Problemem Traktowanie Uchodźców Jako Zagrożenia, 2016).

This categorical statement seemed to completely contradict the conclusion we made before when analysed the authors analysed the activities of state bodies, NGOs, and organizations created by immigrants. There are indeed many NGOs and information points in Poland. Refugees and economic migrants take part in integration programs, attend Polish-language courses, receive free legal advice, obtain social assistance (in special cases), etc. But at the same time 'there is no integration policy in Poland' (Eksperci: Polska Nie Ma Polityki Integracyjnej i Traktuje Uchodźców Jak Zagrożenie, 2016).

Strangely enough, it can be argued that there is no contradiction. Indeed, all of the aforementioned projects and programs are implemented in Poland in the absence of a holistic, strategic approach to an integration policy. The attitude of the Polish government is constantly changing: from acceptance of the concept of labour migration to a populist manipulation of this topic. The authorities and the media regularly introduce contradictory information regarding the number of migrants in the country and their role in its economy. However, administrative changes and numerous legal amendments do not lead to an improvement of the foreigners' status in departments for foreigners and labour offices.

As M. Lesińska writes, 'there is a lack of political will to increase the efforts to integrate immigrants due to the decision-makers' position indicated earlier that settlement migration is not a desirable phenomenon from the state's point of view. At the same time, they [decision-makers] refer to the experience of other European countries that could not cope with the call to integrate immigrants and paid for it with unrest and social divisions' (Górny, Grabowska-Lusińska, Lesińska, Okólski 2010, 106).

Another problem is that the activities of nongovernmental organizations do not really affect the status of immigrants. As M. Lesińska writes, 'such organizations are small and the scope of their activities is very limited, therefore they cannot become an effective pressure group, capable of initiating changes that are beneficial to them' (Ibidem, 107).

Poland, unlike many European countries, has not signed the Council of Europe's Convention on the Participation of Foreigners in Public Life at Local Level (CETS No 144, entered into force in May 1997). The result is that public authorities are not interested in immigrants because they are not potential voters. In addition, foreigners are not entitled to participate in any trade unions in Poland.

Finally – probably the most important reason for all the problems described is the fact that Poland lacks a single body that would coordinate various areas of migration policy (political, economic, legal, administrative and substantive). This situation is

the reason for the lack of a uniform migration strategy in Poland. Time will tell how the situation develops once such a strategy appears.

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