

S U M M A R Y

PoMOCna KAWA #42



LET'S GET TO KNOW EACH OTHER! ABOUT HELPING
UKRAINIAN STUDENTS IN THE NEW SCHOOL YEAR

16 ORGANISATIONS WERE PARTICIPATING IN OUR MEETING Nieobcy Foundation, BARKA Mutual Assistance Foundation, Avalon Foundation, Homo Faber Association, Polish Migration Forum, Wroclaw Centre for Social Development

On Tuesday, 5 September, another meeting of the 'PoMOCna Kawa' series was held. This time, among NGOs, we tried to identify the current challenges concerning children and young people from Ukraine in Polish schools. We also took into account the latest data collected by the UNHCR. They indicate that the situation of children who, for various reasons, do not make it into the Polish school system deserves special attention. Below you will find a written summary of the main conclusions of our discussion.

Message from UNHCR and UNICEF

"More than half of Ukrainian refugee children in Poland are not enrolled in the national education system".

- reports UNICEF and the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR).

Organisations appeal to refugee parents to enrol their children in Polish schools. Why? Because **learning in a traditional environment with peers and teachers is of great importance not only for their education, but also for their socialisation, mental health and overall well-being.** Schools are not only places of learning, but also a source of routine and security for children who have survived difficult experiences such as loss, displacement and violence. They provide opportunities to make friends, receive support from teachers and integrate into local communities. In addition, **schools provide access to services that support children's mental health and well-being.** According to available data, **only slightly less than half of Ukrainian refugee children (approximately 173,000) currently attend Polish schools, including primary and secondary schools.** It is worth noting that approximately one in five Ukrainian students of secondary school age attended Polish schools at the end of the previous school year

Refugee children who do not attend Polish schools are likely to try to **continue their education online, using the Ukrainian curriculum or other distance learning platforms**. Unfortunately, these methods do not provide full support for social development and do not necessarily yield positive results in the long term. In addition, many children in Ukraine have already missed a significant amount of on-site learning time due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Approximately 30% of Ukrainian children attending classes in the Polish education system are also likely to benefit from online learning, which can be extremely difficult and exhausting. Some children study informally, attending Ukrainian schools or dropping out of school altogether. Low enrolment rates can be attributed to factors such as the frequent movement of children between Ukraine and Poland, language barriers and the limited capacity of schools to accept new students.

School recruitment

The rules for recruitment to secondary schools in Poland are based on a system of scoring points for specific achievements during primary schooling (for participation in competitions, for a certificate, etc.), which then add up and form the basis for admission to specific institutions. **Pupils from Ukraine in such conditions are at a disadvantage - already at the start they do not have the time or opportunity to collect points for recruitment on the same basis as children from Poland, because they have spent much less time at school** (e.g. two semesters, not eight years). In addition, not knowing the Polish language, they cannot do activities for which points are assigned (e.g. take part in an Olympiad). **If they finish primary school, the number of points they have accumulated will allow them to get into less reputable schools or remain on the reserve list.** This is a systemic problem - recruitment based on the principles described above does not provide a fully fair solution for those in such a situation as Ukrainian children in Poland.

Disinformation

Some parents of Ukrainian students do not have full and up-to-date information related to their children's compulsory schooling. During the meeting, situations were cited in which schools were said to prohibit Ukrainian children from attending Ukrainian schools online. There were also cases of misrepresentation, with the message that non-attendance at a Polish school is grounds for withdrawal of social benefits, removal of the child or threat of deportation. In addition, there are cases where parents are not informed, for example in some establishments, of their right to appeal the school's decision to the school superintendent. This can result in their later resentment and a feeling of inferior treatment by schools. Such situations affect parents' final decision on their children's educational future.

System differences

There is no single system that would allow the management to recognise which class a Ukrainian pupil is suitable for in a Polish school. During our interviews, there was information that in some establishments the management analyses the translated curriculum of specific classes, while in others a more general solution is applied (e.g. completion of grade 9 in Ukrainian means that the child has completed Polish primary school). Parents of children are also confronted with a situation in which graduation from a Ukrainian school will occur faster than from a Polish school. Therefore, not wanting their child to spend unnecessary extra years in a Polish school, they opt for online learning in a Ukrainian school. The situation is further complicated by the level of knowledge of the Polish language. Even if a child has mastered the core curriculum, he or she must be able to demonstrate this in Polish at a Polish school. The result of this may be the basis for a decision to send them to a lower class.

Closure of preparatory wards

The Map Help team, while updating the base (including the map of preparatory wards, which you can find [here](#)), noticed an increased number of preparatory wards closing. This topic was also raised at our meeting. According to the education law, these are 'school divisions for non-Polish citizens and persons who are Polish citizens and who are subject to compulsory schooling or compulsory education, who have received education in schools operating in the education systems of other countries and who do not speak the Polish language or speak it at a level insufficient to benefit from education'. If the next wave of refugees arrives in the winter, this could have negative consequences.

Children's overload

The unclear situation for the education of Ukrainian children in Poland, triggered by the challenges described above, seems to lead to the conclusion that it is best to remain in two school systems - Polish and Ukrainian - "just in case". Such a solution places a heavy burden on children who are already exposed to the stress and trauma caused by the war.

Residents in collective accommodation

Some Ukrainian refugees have decided to live in places of collective accommodation and have adapted their daily life to the locality in which the place is located. If such facilities are located in small towns, there is a good chance that there will be no school places. This results in the phenomenon of transport exclusion, which means that a child has no opportunity to try to get to a school in, for example, a neighbouring town, because there will be no way to get there anyway.

Legislation unfavourable to cooperation between the NGO sector and schools

The current law amending the educational law, commonly referred to as **Lex Czarnek 3.0**, makes schools reluctant to cooperate with specialised NGOs willing to support them in the process of integrating Ukrainian children with their Polish peers. This takes away opportunities to work together for the good of these two groups. The school is left alone with all the challenges, despite the fact that representatives of the NGO sector are ready to help and relieve the organisation in many tasks.



Thank you for your participation in the last "PoMOCna Kawa". As you can see, the issue of education of children and young people from Ukraine in Polish schools is complex and requires further analysis and joint action. We have identified many challenges, both systemic and individual, that affect the integration and education of this special group.

We are aware that this is just the tip of the iceberg and we need further discussions and actions to find concrete solutions. Therefore, we will continue the theme of education at future meetings, trying to focus on specific aspects that need immediate intervention and support.

We encourage you to continue to get involved in our initiatives and share your experiences at our next coffee together.



If you need a contact for a specific organisation, please email us at mapujpomoc@culturelab.pl.