

# THE RIGHT TO EDUCATION OF UKRAINIAN REFUGEE CHILDREN IN POLISH SCHOOLS AFTER FEBRUARY 24, 2022\*

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**Abstract.** It should be emphasized that the method of preparing the Polish education system to accept children of Ukrainian refugees, developed in cooperation with education superintendents, school principals and the governing bodies (local governments) has proven to be almost foolproof. Nowhere in Poland have there been any problems related to this over the past 2 years. Moreover, the presence of Ukrainian students in Polish schools does not generate any conflicts on the grounds of nationality, nor does it negatively impact the quality of education. It is hoped that the recently proposed solutions, including the exemption of Ukrainian students from the mandatory Polish language exam and the introduction of Ukrainian elements into the core curriculum in Polish schools, will not have a detrimental effect on this positive outcome.

**Keywords:** right to education; children of Ukrainian refugees; compulsory schooling; preparatory classes; exam; hiring teachers.

## INTRODUCTION

During the night hours of February 24, 2022, Russia launched a full-scale war against Ukraine. Especially the first weeks of this brutal war were characterized by constant rocket attacks throughout Ukraine, including on cities near the Polish-Ukrainian border. These are also brutal acts of genocide and brutality by Russian troops who were already approaching Kiev. All this intensified the migration movement. The number of refugees, mainly women and children, who came to Poland at that time reached up to 2.5 million. It was estimated that up to 1 million school-age children came to Poland.<sup>1</sup> This generated the need to organize educational care for them. Pursuant to Article

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<sup>1</sup> See <https://atlas2022.uw.edu.pl/mapa-tygodnia-uchodzcy-z-ukrainy-od-poczatku-wojny-do-konca-marca/> [accessed: 30.09.2024].

70 of the Constitution of the Republic of Poland,<sup>2</sup> everyone, including refugee children located on the territory of the Republic of Poland, has the right to education. Moreover, this education is compulsory until the age of 18.

## 1. EDUCATION IN THE ACT ON ASSISTANCE TO CITIZENS OF UKRAINE

On March 12, 2022, the Sejm of the Republic of Poland adopted the Act on assistance to citizens of Ukraine in connection with the armed conflict on the territory of this country.<sup>3</sup> Pursuant to the provisions of Article 50 et seq. of this Act in 2022 in order to support local government units in the implementation of additional educational tasks related to education, upbringing and care of children and students who are citizens of Ukraine, whose stay in the territory of the Republic of Poland is considered legal pursuant to Article 2(1) of the Act, full financing of the costs incurred by local governments in connection with admitting Ukrainian refugee children to schools was ensured. Funds were also guaranteed for the purchase of textbooks, educational materials and exercise materials for students of public and non-public primary schools for children and youth and art schools providing general education in the field of primary school, who are citizens of Ukraine, whose stay in the territory of the Republic of Poland is considered legal, or who reside legally on the territory of the Republic of Poland, if they arrived on the territory of the Republic of Poland from the territory of Ukraine from February 24, 2022.

The entire costs incurred by the managing bodies in connection with the education of refugee children from Ukraine are paid from the funds launched pursuant to Article 14(1) of the aid act: “An Assistance Fund, hereinafter referred to as the Fund, is established at the *Bank Gospodarstwa Krajowego* in order to finance or co-finance the implementation of tasks to assist Ukraine, in particular to Ukrainian citizens affected by the armed conflict on the territory of Ukraine, including tasks carried out both within and outside the territory of the Republic of Poland.”

There were many opinions immediately, also from teaching circles, especially from the Polish Teacher’s Union, expressing fear, that there will be not enough space in Polish schools for all the students who came from Ukraine. These fears were not only exaggerated, but also did not take into account the fact that over the last 20 years the Polish education system has lost approximately 2.2 million children and young people, while the school infrastructure has significantly improved. However, in order to calm down

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<sup>2</sup> Constitution of the Republic of Poland of 2 April 1997, Journal of Laws No. 78, item 483 as amended.

<sup>3</sup> Journal of Laws of 2022, item 583.

these negative emotions, which also had an impact on the atmosphere in Polish schools and among parents, on the initiative of the Minister of Education and Science, the provision of Article 51 of the Act, according to which, in order to ensure education, upbringing and care for the children of Ukrainian refugees, “other locations for conducting teaching, educational and care activities may be created, subordinated organizationally to schools or kindergartens,” and the provision of Article 39(5a), Article 89 of the Act of December 14, 2016 – Education Law,<sup>4</sup> and Article 71 of the Act of July 7, 1994 – Construction Law,<sup>5</sup> providing a complicated and lengthy procedure on this occasion and specific requirements, are excluded. It was also indicated that the creation of another location for classes subordinated to a school run by a local government unit or a kindergarten run by a local government unit takes place by way of a resolution of the decision-making body of this local government unit, after obtaining a positive opinion from the education superintendent. The opinion is issued within 7 days from the date of receipt of the request for its issuance, and the resolution is not subject to publication in the provincial official journal.

Subsequent regulations also provide for the possibility of organizing free transport for Ukrainian refugee children and students to a place where they are provided with education, upbringing and care. If such transport is organized, the local government unit is obliged to provide care during transport to children receiving pre-school education and to students who are provided with education, upbringing and care at a primary school for children and youth.

The problem indicated by school authorities, teachers and parents, was the knowledge of the Polish language among refugee children. This is an extremely important issue, because having Ukrainian children participating in Polish classes without knowing our language would not only be very ineffective for them, but would also disorganize the lessons for Polish children. For this reason, the then Minister of Education and Science and the management of the ministry focused on the creation and promotion of Ukrainian classes preparing, primarily linguistically, for full participation in the Polish education system. Therefore, in accordance with Article 55 of the Act, teaching in a preparatory class may be conducted in an inter-school group, and in cases justified by demographic conditions, the executive body of the local government unit that is the body managing the school in which the preparatory class is organized may direct students of other schools of the same type, run by the same school, to this class local government unit. Moreover, local government units running schools may conclude agreements for the executive body of the local government unit to transfer students of the school it runs

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<sup>4</sup> Journal of Laws of 2024, item 737, 854.

<sup>5</sup> Journal of Laws of 2024, item 725, 834, 1222.

to a preparatory unit organized in a school of the same type run by another local government unit. Curriculum issues were also regulated, indicating that teaching in the preparatory class is based on general education curricula implemented at school, adapted in terms of the scope of teaching content and the methods and forms of its implementation to the developmental and educational needs and psychophysical capabilities of students.

The provisions of the Act also addressed concerns regarding the potential shortage of teachers and the impossibility of employing them for more than 1.5 full-time positions. Pursuant to Article 56 of the Act, in a school where an additional department has been established to provide education, upbringing and care for refugee children and students, a teacher may be assigned, with his or her consent, overtime hours exceeding those specified in Article 35(1) of the Act of January 26, 1982 – Teacher’s Card (27 teaching hours).<sup>6</sup> The same solution is also provided for Polish language teachers, with their consent, also in schools where no additional department has been established to provide education, upbringing and care to children and students of Ukrainian refugees.

The requirements for employing Ukrainian teachers in Polish educational institutions have also been significantly reduced. Pursuant to Article 57 of the Act in the position of teacher’s assistant referred to in Article 165(8) of the Act of December 14, 2016 – Education Law, a person without Polish citizenship may be employed if he or she has knowledge of the Polish language in speech and writing to the extent enabling assistance to a student who does not know the Polish language or knows it at a level insufficient to use science. The requirement of knowledge of the Polish language confirmed by a document has been waived. It is clear that such documents could have been destroyed during the war.

Responding to allegations about a potential lack of teachers due to the wave of refugee children in Polish schools, the Ministry of Education and Science also proposed the solution adopted in Article 58, according to which the prohibition provided for in Article 9(2) of the Act of May 22, 2009 on teachers’ compensation benefits<sup>7</sup> when employing the recipient of such a benefit as a teacher’s assistant, a Polish language teacher or a teacher conducting additional Polish language classes.

## 2. REGULATION OF THE MINISTER OF EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

In order to implement all these solutions, in Article 59 of the Act, the Minister of Education and Science was authorized to issue an appropriate

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<sup>6</sup> Journal of Laws of 2023, item 984.

<sup>7</sup> Journal of Laws of 2022, item 301.

implementing regulation. Such a regulation was issued immediately after the entry into force of the discussed Act on assistance to citizens of Ukraine, i.e. on March 21, 2022.<sup>8</sup> In this regulation, the minister in particular defined the rules for Ukrainian students in eighth grades and secondary school leaving examinations to take the eighth-grade exam, the material exam, and vocational exams. However, the Minister of Education and Science did not succumb to pressure and did not exempt these students from the obligation to take the Polish language exam. It only allowed to extend the time for solving tasks in the Polish language exam (§ 1-3).

A change in this respect occurred only this year. On the initiative of the new Minister of Education, Ukrainian refugee students were exempted from the compulsory Polish language exam. According to many parents and experts, this change is unfavorable because it demotivates Ukrainian students to learn Polish literature and poetry, but it will also privilege these students when it comes to applying to the best secondary schools and may increase misunderstandings and reluctance towards the Ukrainian minority in Poland. Such voices are very common, despite the fact that the same amendment adopted a revised system for converting the lack of a Polish language exam into appropriate points for recruitment to secondary schools.<sup>9</sup>

In the subsequent provisions of the regulation, the minister decided that in the school years 2021/2022-2024/2025, a student who is a citizen of Ukraine and attends a preparatory department is not subject to annual classification if the pedagogical council decides that: 1) the student does not know the Polish language or the student's knowledge of the Polish language is insufficient to benefit from the education or 2) the scope of educational activities carried out in the preparatory department makes it impossible to carry out the student's annual classification. In such cases, the student receives a certificate of attendance at the preparatory department.

Clear rules for completing primary school by children of Ukrainian refugees have also been established. Such a student completes primary school if: 1) he or she received positive annual classification grades for all compulsory educational activities carried out in the 8th grade, referred to in the regulations issued pursuant to Article 44zb of the Act of September 7, 1991 on the education system; 2) he also took the eighth-grade exam. However, in the grade sheet and on the student's primary school leaving certificate, a horizontal line is inserted in the space intended for entering grades for compulsory educational activities: music, art, nature and technology.

Due to the limits on the maximum number of children and students in kindergartens and schools, which block the possibility of accepting Ukrainian

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<sup>8</sup> Journal of Laws of 2022, item 645.

<sup>9</sup> Journal of Laws of 2024, item 854. See also Fidler 2024.

refugee children, these limits have been increased. Thus, in accordance with § 7 of the regulation in question, the number of children in a kindergarten class may be increased by no more than 3 children who are citizens of Ukraine. In turn, based on § 8, the number of students in a class of grades I-III of primary school may be increased by no more than 4 refugee students, and in subsequent years the number of students in a class of grades I, II or III of primary school operating with an increased number of students cannot exceed 29. In subsequent regulations, the limits of students in integrated schools and special schools, as well as in special educational and educational centers and in special educational centers were also increased by 2 (§ 9-10).

The addition of a large group of children from Ukraine to schools made it necessary to increase the allowed group size for after-school activities. As a rule, no more than 25 students may attend club classes in a public primary school under the supervision of one teacher. However, in the case of admitting students who are victims of the conflict in Ukraine, this number may be increased by a maximum of 4 students. Importantly, one teacher in a mainstream and integrated school may have not 5, but as many as 7 students with disabilities (§ 11).<sup>10</sup>

Since the beginning of the full-scale war, it has become clear that in many cases it will be impossible for Ukrainian refugees to present documents confirming both their rights of all kinds and their degrees of disability. Therefore, a solution was adopted in § 12, according to which the director of a special kindergarten, a special school, a special educational center or a special educational center may accept a disabled child or a disabled student who is a Ukrainian refugee on the basis of a declaration by the parent or person caring for the child or student about submitting an application to a public psychological and pedagogical counseling center, including a public specialist counseling center, for a decision on the need for special education.

For a similar reason, it was also assumed that in justified cases, in a public educational institution and a public institution providing care and upbringing for students during the period of receiving education outside their place of permanent residence, in order to conduct classes for children and youth who are refugees from Ukraine, it may be possible, with the consent of education superintendent, an employed person who is not a teacher and has preparation recognized by the director of the institution as appropriate to carry out the tasks specified by the director of the institution in this respect.

Due to the expected housing problems, which ultimately occurred only in the centers of several largest cities, the Minister of Education and Science also flexibly established detailed conditions for accepting another location for teaching, educational and care activities in kindergartens and schools.

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<sup>10</sup> See also Wysocka 2022.

### 3. AMENDMENT OF REGULATIONS AFTER THE CHANGE OF MANAGEMENT OF THE MINISTRY OF NATIONAL EDUCATION – COMPULSORY SCHOOLING

The problem that was widely discussed from the beginning in the ministry and in teaching circles, but also among parents of refugee children, was compulsory schooling for these children. Due to the initial very large fluctuation in migration – especially in the first months, millions of Ukrainians came to Poland and then went to other countries or, no less often, simply returned to Ukraine – it was decided not to make school compulsory for these children, provided that they continue to study. distance learning in Ukrainian schools. Although this teaching was often fiction, especially in schools in areas bombed and destroyed by Russia, there was no other, better solution at that time. Therefore, it was finally decided that students from Ukraine who are under 18 years of age are obliged, according to the constitution, to fulfill the obligations of one-year pre-school preparation, compulsory schooling and compulsory education, but it is not necessary to attend a Polish unit of the education system. Ukrainian students could still complete the above-mentioned activities. obligations by receiving education in a kindergarten or school operating in the Ukrainian education system using distance learning methods and techniques. Importantly, however, the parent (or person providing care) submitted a declaration of continuing education in the Ukrainian education system [Wysocka 2022].

Due to a number of irregularities and the possibility of abuse (arguments raised mainly by the local government), it was not decided that the obligation to educate and learn could be fulfilled by refugee children from Ukraine in the form of the so-called home education.

After a few years, when refugee immigration from Ukraine stabilized, it was time for changes in this area. Thus, in accordance with the amendment to the Act on Assistance to Citizens of Ukraine, from September 1, 2024, refugee children have been covered by compulsory one-year pre-school preparation, compulsory schooling and compulsory education (secondary schools) in the Polish education system – similarly to Polish students. Only students who, in the 2024/2025 school year, study in the highest class in a school operating in the Ukrainian education system will be able to study online.

In order to fully enforce compulsory schooling, it was combined with the 800+ and Good Start family benefits, which are paid to refugees from Ukraine provided that their child attends the so-called kindergarten, primary school or secondary school.

As the authors of the amendment rightly point out, “education is the right of every child. Good education is a chance for a good future. The Polish school is properly prepared to accept children coming from Ukraine



and provide them with appropriate support, care and safety. Lack of education is not only a lack of knowledge, it also means difficulties with integration, with finding one's place in the country of residence, as well as, in the future, problems with finding a job and functioning properly in society. We cannot allow children to be deprived of their chance for a good life, we must take care of their education, safety and well-being. These children can build both Ukraine and Poland in the future.”<sup>11</sup>

While the above change is completely justified, the exemption of Ukrainian students from the Polish language exam in the eighth-grade exam is a breach in our education system. This solution is not only harmful to Ukrainian students – it allows them to graduate from Polish schools without sufficient knowledge of both the Polish language and Polish literature and poetry, but it also raises suspicions of discrimination against Polish students who, having obtained different results in the Polish language exam, may be in worse situation when recruiting to the best secondary schools.

#### 4. ACTIVITY OF THE MINISTER OF EDUCATION AND SCIENCE ON THE THRESHOLD OF A FULL-SCALE WAR

Since the beginning of the war and the refugee crisis, the Minister of Education and Science has been extremely active in relations both with the local government, representing the overwhelming majority of bodies running kindergartens and schools in Poland, and also in relations with the Ukrainian side. This activity was also accompanied by information activities.

On February 28, 2022, the Ministry of Education and Science has prepared information for students and scientists coming from Ukraine. The material presents the most important issues related to continuing studies and a scientific career in Poland. The information has been prepared in Polish and Ukrainian.<sup>12</sup> The day before, the Ministry of Education and Science prepared information for teachers and educators regarding psychological and pedagogical assistance. The material includes recommendations and tips on supporting Polish students, as well as children from Ukraine currently studying in Poland, as well as those who will reach our country as a result of military operations carried out beyond the eastern border.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> See <https://www.gov.pl/web/edukacja/uczniowie-z-ukrainy-w-polskich-szkolach-wazne-informacje-dla-rodzicow> [accessed: 30.09.2024].

<sup>12</sup> See <https://www.gov.pl/web/edukacja/informacja-dla-studentow-i-naukowcow-przybywajacych-z-ukrainy> [accessed: 30.09.2024].

<sup>13</sup> See <https://www.gov.pl/web/edukacja/jak-rozmawiac-z-dziecmi-i-uczniami-na-temat-sytuacji-w-ukrainie--rekomendacje-dla-nauczycieli-i-pedagogow-szkolnych> [accessed: 30.09.2024].



On February 25, 2022, a day after Russia's attack on Ukraine, due to bombs falling also near the border with Poland and clearly audible by Poles living along the border with Ukraine, the Minister of Education and Science introduced regulations according to which in the area Bieszczady, Chełm, Hrubieszów, Jarosław, Lubaczów, Przemyśl, Tomaszów and Włodawa counties and cities with county rights: Chełm and Przemyśl, directors could, if necessary, suspend stationary classes in schools and educational institutions.<sup>14</sup>

On March 1, 2022, five days after the outbreak of full-scale war, the Minister of Education and Science of the Republic of Poland had a long conversation with the Minister of Education and Science of Ukraine, Serhiy Shkarlet. The online meeting covered, among others: preparing the education and science system in Poland to accept refugees from Ukraine. As he pointed out, "for 380 thousand people who crossed the Polish-Ukrainian border, half of them are school-age children." The head of the Ministry of Education and Science informed that during the meeting he discussed with the Minister of Education of Ukraine the issue of preparing the Polish education system to accept refugees. He emphasized that he is open to accepting students who are fleeing areas affected by armed conflict. – I told the minister how this system is prepared. We are open, this friendship will be shown to Ukrainian children and youth fleeing the war, said the Minister of Education and Science. He added that the education system should provide support to students from Ukraine so that they can take a break from the dramatic experiences.<sup>15</sup>

A few days later, Secretary of State in the Ministry of Education and Science, Dariusz Piontkowski, announced at a press conference that in recent days the ministry's management had been meeting with education superintendents and representatives of local governments. As a result of these meetings, it was agreed that "it will be possible to increase the number of children in the preparatory department to a maximum of 25 students. Now the number of students is 15. In addition, school governing bodies will be able to create inter-school classes." The Secretary of State at the Ministry of National Education and Science added that in rural communes there will be funding for transporting children to schools. The deputy minister also announced that the Ministry of Education and Science is preparing regulations that will allow the school principal to employ a teacher's assistant – a person who knows Ukrainian and Russian. There will also be changes to the Teacher's Card Act, so that teachers who want to work more will have the opportunity to receive overtime hours beyond half-time. However, teachers receiving

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<sup>14</sup> See <https://www.gov.pl/web/edukacja/mozliwosc-zawieszenia-zajec-stacjonarnych-w-szkolach-i-placowkach-oswiatowych-na-terenie-8-powiatow-przygranicznych-z-ukraina-rozporzadzenie-mein> [accessed: 30.09.2024].

<sup>15</sup> See *Rozmowa szefa MEiN z ukraińskim Ministrem Oświaty i Nauki*, Ministerstwo Edukacji Narodowej – Portal Gov.pl ([www.gov.pl](http://www.gov.pl)).

compensatory benefits will be able to work at school with Ukrainian students as teachers or teacher's aides. He also informed that schools have recently received PLN 180 million of additional funds for specialist assistance for additional classes as part of psychological and pedagogical assistance.<sup>16</sup>

Two days later, the ministry provided comprehensive information on the legal provisions adopted on those days and the solutions resulting from them: 1) possibility of transferring an additional subsidy from the state budget to local government units; 2) possibility of creating other locations for teaching, educational and care activities, organizationally subordinated not only to schools, but also to kindergartens; 3) possibility for the school principal to assign overtime hours to a teacher (with his/her consent) exceeding 1/2 of the weekly mandatory teaching hours; 4) facilitating employment as a teacher's assistant for citizens of Ukraine who know the Polish language in speech and writing to a degree that allows them to help a student who does not speak Polish; 5) enabling you to start work without suspending your right to compensation benefits; 6) exemption from fees for people from Ukraine, injured as a result of hostilities, for submitting an application to the education superintendent for recognition of the level of education in Poland and for having the right to continue education at university.<sup>17</sup>

The day before, on March 8, 2022, the Ministry of Education and Science prepared a list of available educational materials that can be used when working with students admitted to Polish schools in connection with the armed conflict in Ukraine.<sup>18</sup>

In the face of incomprehensible and harmful disinformation activities, the Ministry of Education and Science has undertaken an action to promote preparatory classes in schools for students from Ukraine who do not know the Polish language or who know it insufficiently to participate in lessons conducted in Polish. The Ministry explained that a much more beneficial form of education for such children and young people is a preparatory class, where students are in their Ukrainian group and learn primarily Polish, which will allow them to join classes in classes with Ukrainian students after a few months without excessive stress. Polish students and conducted in Polish. In addition to organizational improvements consisting in the possibility of creating inter-school and even inter-municipal preparatory units, the ministry has also prepared increased financing for the operation of such units.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> See <https://www.gov.pl/web/edukacja/konferencja-wiceministra-dariusza-piontkowskiego-o-pomocy-dla-uchodzcow-z-ukrainy>

<sup>17</sup> See <https://www.gov.pl/web/edukacja/pomoc-ukrainie-rozwiazania-dotyczace-oswiaty-i-szkolnictwa-wyzszego-w-projekcie-tzw-specustawy> [accessed: 30.09.2024].

<sup>18</sup> See <https://www.gov.pl/web/edukacja/materialy-edukacyjne-do-wykorzystania-w-pracy-z-uczniami-z-ukrainy> [accessed: 30.09.2024].

<sup>19</sup> See <https://www.gov.pl/web/edukacja/zasady-organizacji-oddzialow-przygotowawczych>

For this reason, special emphasis was placed on learning Polish. Therefore, not only students from Ukraine, but all students subject to compulsory schooling and compulsory education, who do not know the Polish language or know it at a level insufficient to benefit from education, have the right to additional, free Polish language learning for a period of up to 24 months (Article 165(7) Education Law). From the 2022/2023 school year, additional Polish language classes should be conducted for no less than 6 hours per week. These classes may be conducted individually or in groups, but the group cannot consist of more than 15 students. A very important solution that is valid in the 2022/2023 school year is the possibility of organizing Polish language learning in inter-school groups. In cases justified by demographic conditions, the commune head (mayor/president of the city) may refer students attending other schools run by the same authority to a school providing additional Polish language instruction in order to receive additional Polish language instruction (Article 55b of the Act on assistance to citizens of Ukraine). The Act on the Education System also states that students who are entitled to additional free Polish language learning are also entitled to assistance provided by a person who speaks the language of their country of origin (for a period of 12 months). Such a person is employed as a teacher's assistant by the school principal (Article 165(8) Education Law).

Due to the need to employ Ukrainian teachers arriving as part of the refugee movement in Polish schools, on March 23, the Ministry of Education and Science launched accelerated Polish language courses for these teachers. In a statement from that day, the ministry encouraged people to sign up for an intensive Polish language course at the primary level (A1) intended for teachers and educational workers from Ukraine. The aim of the project was to facilitate the start of work in a Polish school as a teacher/teacher's assistant for all people who applied who had previously worked as a teacher or were associated with education in Ukraine.<sup>20</sup>

A week later, on March 30, 2022, a press conference was held in the MEiN building with the participation of the Minister of Education and Science, the president of Poczta Polska, Tomasz Zdzikot, and the president of the Digital Poland Association, Michał Kanownik. During the event, details about the #SchoolForYou campaign were presented and information was given about the involvement of Poczta Polska and the Digital Poland Association in this initiative. The "School for You" campaign was addressed to Ukrainian students who did not decide to study in Polish schools and remained in the distance learning system in Ukrainian schools: "The head of the Ministry of Education and Science pointed out that the vast majority of Ukrainian

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[accessed: 30.09.2024].

<sup>20</sup> See <https://www.gov.pl/web/edukacja/nauka-jezyka-polskiego-dla-nauczycieli-oraz-pracownikow-oswiatowych-z-ukrainy--intensywny-kurs-osrodka-rozwoju-edukacji> [accessed: 30.09.2024].

children are still outside the Polish education system. Some of them use remote learning and connect with their classes. These students – in accordance with applicable regulations – are exempt from compulsory schooling. To enable distance learning for these students, the Ministry of Education and Science is implementing the #SchoolForYou initiative: as part of this campaign, we have already collected several thousand pieces of used computer equipment – said the Minister of Education and Science, presenting the assumptions of the project. – This equipment will be distributed to all children who need this equipment to connect with Ukrainian classes – he emphasized.” In turn, Michał Kanownik, president of the Digital Poland Association, added: “We actively collect used computer equipment. The equipment is cleaned, properly prepared for reuse and secured to be a reliable tool for distance learning in the Ukrainian education system. Our networks have dedicated their service lines to prepare this equipment for reuse.”<sup>21</sup>

As already mentioned above, in connection with Russia’s aggression against Ukraine and the inflow to Poland of refugees from the territory of the Ukrainian state, the Ministry of Education and Science has undertaken a number of actions aimed at facilitating the functioning of Ukrainian children in Polish schools and the employment of Ukrainian citizens. The ministry posted a detailed and comprehensive message summarizing these activities and informing Ukrainian refugees on March 29, 2022.<sup>22</sup>

On May 4, 2022, the Minister of Education and Science once again spoke with the Ukrainian Minister of Education and Science Serhiy Shkarlet. The next online meeting concerned, among others: organization of the secondary school leaving examination for Ukrainian students staying in Poland. The education ministers of Poland and Ukraine also talked about the “Solidarity with Ukraine” conference, organized by the National Agency for Academic Exchange in cooperation with the University of Gdańsk.<sup>23</sup> A similar conversation took place on August 26, 2022 and concerned preparations for the new school year.

## CONCLUSIONS

The number of Ukrainian students – children of Ukrainian refugees in Polish schools initially reached 200000. In the previous school year 2023/2024, 183.9 thousand students attended Polish educational institutions.

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<sup>21</sup> See <https://www.gov.pl/web/edukacja/szkola-dla-was--wsparcie-ukrainskich-uczniow> [accessed: 30.09.2024].

<sup>22</sup> See <https://www.gov.pl/web/edukacja/zatrudnianie-kadry-pedagogicznej-i-pomocy-nauczycielaw-szkolach--informacja-dla-obywateli-ukrainy> [accessed: 30.09.2024].

<sup>23</sup> See <https://www.gov.pl/web/edukacja/kolejna-rozmowa-ministra-przemyslawa-czarnka-z-ukrainskim-ministrem-oswiaty-i-nauki> [accessed: 30.09.2024].

children and youth from Ukraine who arrived after the outbreak of the war in 2022, including 154.3 thousand in schools, and 29.6 thousand in kindergartens and kindergarten points (approx. 4% of all students). It is estimated that as a result of the introduction of compulsory schooling for all Ukrainian students residing in the Republic of Poland, approximately 40-70 thousand additional students will attend schools. children of Ukrainian refugees.<sup>24</sup>

It should be emphasized that the method of preparing the Polish education system for the reception of Ukrainian refugee children, developed in cooperation with education superintendents, school principals and the governing bodies (local government), turned out to be almost foolproof. No major problems related to this have been reported anywhere in Poland over the past 2 years. This is due to the high flexibility of the regulations, which provide a large slack of competence in this area to the governing bodies and school principals. This is also the result of the full and systematic transfer of financial resources from the Assistance Fund to the managing bodies, covering one hundred percent of the costs. These are internal, national funds, estimated at several billion zlotych

Moreover, the presence of Ukrainian students in Polish schools does not generate any ethnic conflicts, nor does it reduce the level of teaching in schools. Let's hope that new solutions – exempting Ukrainian students from the compulsory Polish language exam, as well as new, absurd ideas of the new management of the Ministry of National Education – introducing Ukrainian elements into the core curriculum in Polish schools, do not spoil this effect. Especially in the latter case, it is worth emphasizing that while fully respecting the rights of national minorities, exactly as in the entire civilized world, in accordance with Article 165(15) of the Education Law, for students who are not Polish citizens and are subject to compulsory school attendance, a diplomatic or consular mission of their country of origin operating in Poland or a cultural and educational association of a given nationality may organize at school, in consultation with the school principal and with the consent of the governing body, language learning and culture of the country of origin. The school provides rooms and teaching aids free of charge. However, the school principal is not obliged to organize Ukrainian language learning for students from Ukraine. It may only be obliged to provide rooms and teaching aids necessary to organize such learning. This in no way means changes to the curriculum in Polish schools, taking into account the Ukrainian curriculum. And it should stay that way.

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<sup>24</sup> See <https://wszystkoconajwazniejsze.pl/pepites/ile-dzieci-i-mlodziezy-z-ukrainy-uczy-sie-w-polskich-szkolach/> [accessed: 30.09.2024].

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