

**Intercultural assistants as an instrument of integration policy:
the case of the Polish educational system
(abstract for the general public)**

The research project's aim is to capture the role of intercultural assistants in the integration of children, youth, and families with migration experience. An "intercultural assistant" denotes someone who supports the education and integration of children and youth with a migration experience at school. A key skill of an assistant is the knowledge of the language of the pupil's country of origin. In Poland the legal basis to employ a teacher's assistant has existed since the 1st of October 2010, This institution (position) is based on the position of "Roma education assistant", which functions already since 2004. The intercultural assistants are employed on the basis of resources for administrative and help staff, not based on the Teacher's Charter (Karta Nauczyciela). In the school year 2019/2020, 72 persons were employed [by schools] as teachers' assistants, speaking the language of the [pupils] country of origin". In addition to this group, there are people employed as part of projects led by non-governmental organizations (overall there are approximately 20 persons employed in Poland on that basis). In sum, no more than 100 persons work as intercultural assistants in the Polish educational system.

The number of foreigners in Poland systematically increases. For over two decades the inflow of foreigners to Poland was relatively small, with temporary migration of circular character from Ukraine prevailing. By 2019 the number of Ukrainian nationals who had resident cards in Poland increased by 570%, as compared to 2013. According to the data by the Office of Foreigners on the 1st of January 2020, there were 422,438 foreigners with a residence permit in Poland. In the school year 2019/2020 there were 39,858 foreign children in Polish schools. There was a migrant child in every third school in Poland. The need for the policy response to this situation is growing.

The main research question of the research project is: What is the role of intercultural assistants in the integration of children, youth, and families with migration experience? The work and role of an assistant were until now rarely the topic of systematic scientific research. The majority of information comes from the expertise and experience of the intercultural assistants and non-governmental organizations co-operating with schools, in which children with migration experience study. The proposed project will fill this research gap and contribute to the social policy studies and migration studies by: Contributing to the debate on the role of local communities and their institutions (ie. schools) in the process of integration. Contributing to the debate on the multi-level governance of integration policy by focusing on the relations between national policy, local governments policies, the involvement of civic organizations, and the use of the European funds. Creating a preliminary qualitative and explorative study as the starting point for future in-depth quantitative policy research concerning the foreign students in Poland's educational system.

In the project, the mixed methods will be used. The desk research (analysis of existing data produced by state agencies) will be combined with qualitative field research (participant observation, in-depth interviews, and focus group interviews). On the basis of two purposively selected schools, a case studies analysis will be conducted. The interviews will be conducted with intercultural assistants from various schools in Poland in order to learn about the conditions of their work and their experiences at implementing the integration policy at its frontline.