

## **THE IMPACT OF ETHNIC CARDS AS AN INSTRUMENT OF STATE POLICY ON THE INTERACTION BETWEEN THE COUNTRY OF ORIGIN, THE COUNTRY OF RESIDENCE, AND THE DIASPORA: THE EXAMPLE OF KARTA POLAKA**

Karta Polaka is a legal instrument instituted by the Polish state for individuals of Polish descent living abroad. Its primary objective is to reinforce cultural and national ties with Poland while affirming inclusion in the broader Polish national community. Although it provides concrete benefits, such as facilitated settlement, access to education, and a pathway to citizenship, Karta Polaka also functions as a socio-political tool. It actively shapes identity, influences emotional attachments, informs life choices, and fosters transnational engagement.

This research project aims to conduct an in-depth analysis of Karta Polaka as a state policy instrument toward the diaspora. The study focuses on its impact in three selected countries: Ukraine, Belarus, and the Czech Republic — states that differ in their approaches to national minorities, their relations with Poland, and their models of social integration. This selection enables a comparative analysis of the influence of Karta Polaka in both post-Soviet and EU contexts, and allows for the inclusion of various types of diasporic communities: migrants, descendants of historical settlers, and autochthonous populations.

The project is interdisciplinary in nature and is based on qualitative research methods, including interviews with holders of Karta Polaka, representatives of institutions (e.g., the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, consulates, and Polish diaspora organizations), as well as analysis of legal documents, state strategies, and media discourse in both Poland and the countries of residence. Particular attention will be devoted to the motivations of individuals who chose to obtain Karta Polaka, as well as to those who, despite being formally eligible, consciously decided not to apply for the document. This approach aims to uncover not only the outcomes but also the limitations of state policy influence. The project addresses key questions such as:

- *What are the main motivations and barriers influencing the decision to apply for (or refrain from applying for) Karta Polaka in Ukraine, Belarus, and the Czech Republic, and how do these differ across the specific socio-political contexts of each country?*
- *What are the experiences of Karta Polaka holders in both symbolic (identity-related) and practical (legal, social) terms, and how do these experiences shape their everyday lives and decisions related to migration, education, and employment?*
- *How are Karta Polaka and Poland's broader diaspora policy perceived by institutions and societies in the countries of residence, what factors shape these perceptions, and what tensions or challenges arise in the relationship between Poland, host states, and diaspora communities?*

The outcome of the research will be the first empirical and comparative analysis of Karta Polaka in Poland conducted from the perspective of its users, both holders and potential holders of the document, rather than solely from the standpoint of the state institutions that created it. The project introduces an innovative bottom-up perspective into a debate thus far been dominated by legal and political approaches. This will make it possible to capture the lived experiences, emotions, motivations, and barriers that remain invisible in official documents.

The uniqueness of the project also lies in its comparative character, specifically, in the juxtaposition of how Karta Polaka operates in three countries with distinct political systems, legal cultures, and approaches to national minorities. For the first time, the post-Soviet realities of Belarus and Ukraine will be examined alongside the EU's minority policy framework as exemplified by the Czech Republic. This approach will allow for the identification of not only the universal mechanisms underlying the functioning of Karta Polaka, but also the context-specific differences shaped by diverse socio-political environments.

The research findings will be published in peer-reviewed academic journals both in Poland and internationally, and will also be made accessible in a clear and practical form to those directly concerned, the communities of Polish descent. The project will contribute to strengthening both public and academic debates on diaspora policies, integration strategies, and the challenges of transnational identity in contemporary Central and Eastern Europe. Its findings may also contribute to improving migration policies implemented by state institutions.