WELCOMING SPACES

Country report: Poland

Welcoming spaces in relation to social wellbeing, economic viability and political stability in shrinking regions

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WELCOMING SPACES

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List of abbreviations

AMIF	Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund
CSO/GUS	Polish Central Statistical Office/Główny Urząd Statystyczny
CSOs	Civil society organisations
EU	European Union
IDI	In-depth individual interviews
IIP	Individual Integration Program
MOF	Urban functional area
MOPS	Municipal Social Welfare Center
NGOs	Non-governmental organisations
OSI	Area of strategic intervention
PM	Prime Minister
RRRP	Regional Refugee Response Plan
SGH	SGH Warsaw School of Economics
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

Executive summary

This report aims to present findings of the research conducted in Poland within the Work Package 1 of the Welcoming Spaces project, namely "Welcoming spaces" in relation to economic viability, social wellbeing and political stability in shrinking regions. The main aim of the mentioned research was to examine how welcoming initiatives are organised and implemented in the selected shrinking localities in Poland. In particular, the creation of welcoming initiatives concerning social wellbeing, economic viability and political stability was assessed. To accomplish this objective, five localities were selected purposefully, namely Łomża (city with powiat status) and Zambrów (urban commune) in Podlaskie Voivodeship and Łuków (town), Wohyń (rural commune) and Zalesie (rural commune) in Lubelskie Voivodeship. Within these localities, 23 welcoming initiatives were identified, out of which 12 were chosen for in-depth research.

The field research was conducted in all five localities between March and December 2021. During this period, the SGH Warsaw School of Economics team conducted 43 interviews with institutional stakeholders (representatives of local governments, schools, non-governmental organisations – NGOs, religious organisations and private companies) and individuals (both migrant newcomers and native residents). In addition, local government representatives were surveyed to compare their policies, measures and stances toward migrant inhabitants and local development. The research was also complemented with the literature review, policy documents analysis, and local media outlets discourse analysis.

Until February 2022 and the outbreak of war in Ukraine, welcoming spaces in Poland were scarce and spatially limited to the big cities like Warsaw, Cracow, Wrocław, Gdańsk, Lublin or Białystok, governed by liberal mayors and city councils open to accept migrants and treat them as a valuable human asset of the city community. However, in smaller cities, towns and rural areas, especially in shrinking regions, welcoming spaces have been highly conditioned by welcoming initiatives carried out mainly by civil society organisations (CSOs).

It is very likely that the war in Ukraine will completely change the situation we write about in this country report. However, this crisis and its consequences were not the subjects of our desk research and fieldwork in Poland, which ended in December 2021. As of late July 2022, the number of border crossings from Ukraine to Poland is almost 5 million and the number of forced migrants registered for temporary protection or similar national protection scheme concern 1.3 million people (UNHCR 2022). However, the number of those who have decided to stay in Poland is estimated at around 1.5 million (Duszczyk and Kaczmarczyk 2022). Such a large influx of forced migrants from Ukraine within five months already affects the demographic situation in the country and access to public services, mainly in large and medium-size cities[1]. Depending on the development of events in Ukraine and the number of migrants who will decide to stay in Poland in the following months, the functioning of the domestic labour market, education, health service, and social assistance may significantly change. The following months may also bring new changes in the law relating to foreigners, aimed at their easier integration in the country. Access to housing in cities is already a considerable challenge, which may result in measures to encourage foreigners to settle in smaller towns and rural areas. Given these dynamic changes in the migration situation of the country, as well as in the area of admission and integration activities, Poland seems to be slowly becoming one great welcoming space. It is worth mentioning that the main institutional actors in this area have been NGOs and local governments since the beginning of the humanitarian crisis in Ukraine. An important supporting and coordinating role

[1] See more: Jaroszewicz et al. 2022; Łukasiewicz et al. 2022; Pachocka 2022; Wach, Pachocka 2022.

has also been played by international organisations such as the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), which launched its inter-agency Regional Refugee Response Plan (RRRP) in early spring to address the most urgent needs of the population of forced migrants and their host countries in this part of Europe (UNHCR 2022a; UNHCR 2022b; UNHCR 2022c).

Based on the number of newly emerged welcoming initiatives and the pace of this emergence, they will soon become an everyday reality for every municipality in Poland. Therefore, it is difficult to find more up-to-date circumstances for the "Welcoming Spaces" project objective, which is "to rethink ways forward in creating inclusive space in such a way that it will contribute firstly to the successful integration of migrants in demographically and economically shrinking areas and simultaneously to the revitalization of these places". Furthermore, the initiatives we selected as case studies for our research should be widely promoted and treated as a model of migrants' inclusion into the new communities. On the other hand, we need to emphasize here that the empirical material was collected between March and December 2021, before the outbreak of war in Ukraine. As such, it does not reflect the new reality in Poland.

1. Introduction

In recent years, from being a traditional emigration country, Poland has transformed into a new immigration country in terms of the migratory balance. Since 1989, there have been two migratory stages determined by the political, social and economic developments within the country: a stage of moderate emigration induced by economic transformation (1989–2004) and another one of post-accession migration to other EU countries after joining the European Union (EU) in 2004, the latter with rapid growth in the beginning and slowing down since 2012. In addition, starting in 2016 and continuing for consecutive years, the number of immigrants surpassed the number of emigrants. Since then, we have witnessed increasing labour migration (mainly from Ukraine) to Poland as a response to the economic growth and labour market needs. COVID-19 pandemic and the lockdown of sectors with a high rate of foreign employees (construction, gastronomy, tourism) have slowed down the trend for a while, but after 2020 the number started to increase again. Forced migration to Poland till very recently was not very significant.

The first stage of post-1989 migration started with the fall of communism and facilitation of exit procedures and ended in 2004, with Poland's accession to the EU. It is characterized by the economic migration of Poles to countries with established Polish migrant networks (i.e. Germany, the United Kingdom, United States, Canada, Australia), but also to other Western European countries, like Sweden, France, Austria or Italy. There were also various Poles emigration types in this stage: seasonal (often within a 3-month visa-free movement with Schengen countries[2]), short-term, long-term or aimed at permanent settlement. In this period, on average, the emigration of those who permanently changed their place of residence was 22.3 thousand people (GUS 2019a) annually. However, it is estimated that the number of actual emigrants who left Poland between 1989–2002 could be close to 600 thousand[3]. Concerning immigration to Poland, it comprised Poles who returned to the country after long-term emigration or through the repatriation procedure and foreigners who arrived in Poland mainly for work reasons and seeking asylum. Between 1989 and 2002, approx. 70 thousand return emigrants and 2.5 thousand repatriates (Hut 2014, p. 53) came to Poland. According to the National Census of 2002, there were approx. 64 thousand foreigners in Poland in 2002, out of whom 40 thousand had permanent residence permits, and the rest 24 thousand lived in Poland for more than two months. The foreigners with permanent residence permits came mainly from Germany, Ukraine, Russia, Belarus, Vietnam and the United States, whereas among temporary immigrants especially were Ukrainians, Russians, Belarussians, Germans, Armenians and Vietnamese (Andrejuk and Fihel 2018, pp. 200-201). In addition, from 1992 until 2003, more than 27 thousand people applied for refugee status in Poland (Hut 2014, p. 53).

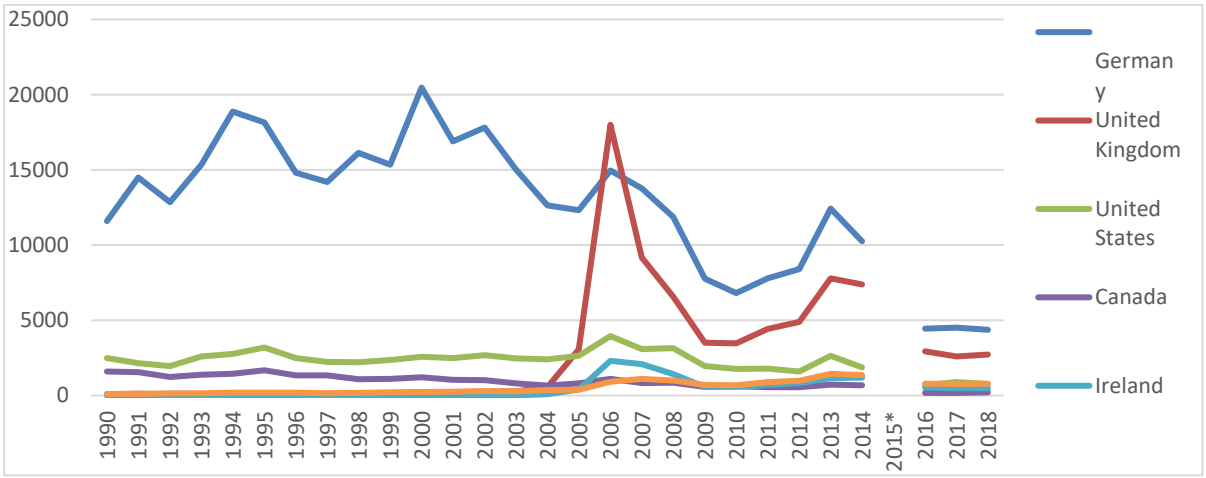
The second, current stage started in 2004 after Poland acceded to the EU on 1 May 2004. Since then, citizens of Poland could benefit from the freedom of movement within the EU and access the labour market of the EU Member States, although the latter was introduced gradually. The first countries which opened their labour markets to Poles were the United Kingdom, Ireland and Sweden (in 2004), then Finland, Spain, Portugal, Greece and Italy in 2006, the Netherlands and Luxembourg in 2007, France in 2008, Belgium and Denmark in 2009, and finally, Germany and Austria in 2011. According to the Polish Central Statistical Office (CSO – *Główny Urząd Statystyczny, GUS*), at the end of 2004, approximately one million Polish citizens

[2] Poland signed an agreement on 3 months visa-free movement with Schengen countries in 1991.

[3] The number 22.3 thousand people annually, however, shows only official statistic of those who deregistered from their permanent address in Poland. According to the National Census conducted in 2002, approx. 625 thousand people still registered in Poland resided outside of Poland for one year or longer. See more in: Andrejuk and Fihel 2018, pp. 200-201.

were abroad for more than two months. In contrast, at the end of 2016, there were 2.5 million such emigrants. Most migrants (88% in 2016) resided in other EU countries[4]. As depicted in Figure ***1***, since 2004, the main directions of emigration from Poland for permanent residence were the United Kingdom, Germany, the United States, Ireland, the Netherlands and Canada. Considering the ageing process of the society, which started even before the EU's access, the post-accession emigration, mainly of people under 35 years old, only deepened demographic losses. It also impacted the labour shortages, especially in services, tourism and construction. Consequently, Poland has started to need immigrant workers (Garapich, Grabowska, Jaźwińska 2018, pp. 208-220).

Figure 1 Main directions of emigration for permanent residence from Poland by countries in years 1990–2018



Source: own elaboration by the H2020 Welcoming Spaces team at SGH Warsaw School of Economics based on: GUS. (2019b). Main directions of emigration and immigration in the years 1966-2018. Migration for permanent residence. https://stat.gov.pl/en/topics/population/internationa-migration/main-directions-of-emigration-and-immigration-in-the-years-1966-2018-migration-for-permanent-residence,2,2.html.

Neither the accession to the EU nor joining the Schengen zone in 2008 triggered an immediate increase in immigration to Poland. According to the National Census in 2011, there were approx. 86 thousand foreigners residing in Poland then, out of whom 55 thousand have a permanent residence. These foreigners came predominantly from Ukraine, Belarus and Germany and lived mostly in Mazovian Voivodship (mainly in Warsaw) and border regions in the country's east. However, in 2016 there was a shift in the immigration trends as a consequence of the increasing need for labour workers in the Polish labour market and the breakout of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict in 2013 in eastern Ukraine. As a result, since 2016, Poland has started to indicate a positive migratory balance, which means more immigrants are coming to the country than emigrants leaving Poland (Table 1). In 2018, in Poland, there were 325 thousand foreigners with a valid residence permit, out of whom 50% were Ukrainians.

[4] Central Statistical Office (GUS), https://stat.gov.pl/en/topics/population/internationa-migration/main-directions-of-emigration-and-immigration-in-the-years-1966-2018-migration-for-permanent-residence,2,2.html.

Table 1 Migratory balance in Poland regarding migration for permanent residence

	2005	2010	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Difference between the number of immigrants and emigrants	-12,878	-2,114	-15,750	1,505	1,400	3,612	6,183	4,483

Source: own elaboration by the H2020 Welcoming Spaces team at SGH Warsaw School of Economics based on: GUS. (2007; 2011; 2016-2021). Demographic Yearbook of Poland.

However, the above statistics show only part of the picture since they pertain to immigrants with permanent residence permits. To see an actual situation of immigration to Poland, we should look at short-term (or temporary) immigrants who keep coming to Poland with visas for a couple of years before applying for long-term residence permits. In 2017, Polish consulates issued almost 800 thousand Schengen visas, which was a lower number than in 2016 (approx. 1 million). In 2016, the number of all visas (both Schengen and national) issued by Polish consulates amounted to approximately 1.8 million (Szulecka, Pachocka, Sobczak-Szelc 2018, p. 13). The latter number is similar to the number of declarations to entrust the job to a foreigner (Górny, Kindler 2018, pp. 221-222) (also 1.8 million) registered in 2017 (Szulecka, Pachocka, Sobczak-Szelc 2018, p. 15).

Until the end of 2021, the biggest group of immigrants in Poland were Ukrainians who came for work or study purposes. They were followed by Belarussians and citizens of other countries of the former Soviet Union (Russia, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan). In the population of immigrants from the Russian Federation, it is essential to mention that a significant number of Chechens, who hold Russian citizenship, were granted international protection status (mainly subsidiary protection) in Poland. Nonetheless, their share in the total number of immigrants from this country was relatively marginal. In addition, the traditional immigration of Vietnamese citizens to Poland, commencing in the 1960s, continues. There is also an increasing inflow of migrants from China, India and Nepal induced by the labour market demands (see Table 2).

Table 2 Non-EU citizens with valid residence cards in Poland by type of permit and main countries of origin (as of January 2018)

Country of origin	Permit for permanent stay	Long-term resident's EU residence permit	Tempo-rary residence permit	Refugee status	Subsidiary protection	Permit for tolerated stay	Permit for stay due to humani-tarian reasons	Total
Ukraine	29,969	3,712	110,626	88	277	8	380	**145,060**
Belarus	10,746	528	3,864	108	5	2	46	**15,299**
Vietnam	2,405	2,484	6,518	2	1	217	82	**11,709**
Russia	3,851	543	4,276	446	1,484	3	712	**11,315**
China	632	1,106	7,025	14	-	3	4	**8,784**
India	478	539	5,876	-	-	-	9	**6,902**
Turkey	622	574	2,653	4	2	1	10	**3,866**
Armenia	857	565	1,733	3	4	12	293	**3,467**
USA	797	132	1,434	-	-	-	3	**2,366**
South Korea	79	317	1,554	-	-	-	-	**1,950**
Uzbekistan	202	43	1,488	6	4	1	14	**1,758**
Georgia	147	52	1,190	-	7	2	151	**1,549**
Pakistan	132	38	1,110	12	2	6	10	**1,310**
Kazakhstan	651	44	563	17	22	-	10	**1,307**
Egypt	384	39	780	40	2	-	5	**1,250**
Moldova	242	83	849	-	-	-	6	**1,180**
Nepal	47	236	871	2	1	2	5	**1,164**
Iraq	108	13	820	55	61	-	4	**1,061**
Syria	162	54	501	286	40	-	4	**1,047**
Japan	213	34	772	-	-	-	1	**1,020**

Source: Szulecka M., Pachocka, M., Sobczak-Szelc K. (2018). Poland – Legal and Policy Framework of Migration Governance. RESPOND Multilevel Governance of Mass Migration in Europe and Beyond Project Report Series, https://zenodo.org/record/1418583#.X0ynI8gzZPZ.

It is estimated that in the first two months of the COVID-19 pandemic, i.e. March and April 2020, the number of foreigners staying in Poland decreased by 223,000, namely by 10.1%, compared to the numbers at the end of February. According to GUS, at the end of February 2020, there were 2,213,594 foreigners in Poland, out of which 1,390,978 (63%) were citizens of Ukraine. The latter also comprised the most significant group who left Poland after the pandemic breakout – more than 160 thousand people returned to Ukraine in March and April 2020 (GUS 2020). The main reasons behind this decision were job loss and uncertainty about the future. However, as indicated in the preliminary surveys, most returned Ukrainians are willing to come to Poland again (OTTO Work Force 2020).

Latest developments

The refugee crisis of 2015, caused by the increased forced migration to Europe and lack of efficient coordination among the EU Member States toward this issue, impacted Poland in a specific way. It induced a public debate on refugees' admission. However, the actual trigger of the fierce political and public debate on refugees in Poland were two mutually interlinked developments: the asylum seekers' relocation scheme discussed since April 2015 and approved in September 2015 and a welcoming policy of the German Chancellor Angela Merkel, who in early 2015 started advocating for supporting asylum seekers by the EU countries and, later on, in August 2015 declared that Germany would admit all Syrian asylum seekers coming to Europe (Łotocki 2019, pp. 143-151).

In September 2015, based on the proposal of the European Commission, the Justice and Home Affairs Council (comprised of the European Union Member States' interior ministers) decided to introduce the Emergency Relocation System (quota system for refugees' relocations). It aimed at supporting the frontline states of Italy and Greece in the admission of asylum seekers by relocating up to 160,000 refugees to other EU countries. However, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Romania and Slovakia voted against the relocation system. Poland, then ruled by Prime Minister (PM) Ewa Kopacz (Civic Platform), accepted it, issuing a promise to accommodate 7200 asylum seekers in the forthcoming years (Legut and Pędziwiatr 2018). However, Law and Justice party, which came to power after the October 2015 elections, disregarded Poland's commitments on this matter by, firstly, lowering the number of anticipated admission of refugees to 400 in January 2016 and then rescinding the plans of relocation to Poland of the first 100 refugees (65 from Greece and 35 from Italy) in May 2015 (Łotocki 2019, pp. 176-177).

A consequence of the fierce political debate was a protracted public debate which impacted the Polish society's attitudes towards foreigners, especially refugees. Between 2015 and 2017, Poles have changed from cautious supporters to decisive opponents of admitting refugees into the country. According to an IOM/IPSOS opinion poll (2016), nearly two-thirds of Poles are concerned about the inflow of foreigners to Poland, regardless of whether they have had any contact with foreigners in the last year. Surprisingly, far more respondents consider the impact of migrants on the economy and the labour market as negative (45%) than positive (25%). The prevailing negative attitudes towards foreigners or admitting refugees were reflected in the following surveys: CBOS (2018, 2017, 2016) and IPSOS (2015, 2016).

Surprisingly, the COVID-19 pandemic has not caused an increase in anti-immigration sentiments in Poland. Despite the initial chaos in the first weeks after the breakout of the pandemic, the foreigners in Poland could count on some administration and social support, although limited to emergency response (Cope et al. 2021).

The anti-refugee narratives came to daylight again in the second half of 2021, when Poland experienced a crisis at the Polish-Belarussian border, where Polish security forces were accused of illegal pushback practices. The crisis was caused by the actions of the Belarusian president Alexander Lukashenko who in May 2021 announced his intention to terminate the 2020 readmission agreement with the EU (which the Belarusian parliament confirmed in October 2021) and, in July the same year, threatened to "flood" the EU with migrants. Then, owing to encouraging arrivals in Belarus and advertising it as a gate to Europe by the state-controlled tourist enterprises together with visa facilitation and increasing the number of airline connections from the Middle East, Belarus attracted more and more migrants, primarily from Iraqi Kurdistan, with smaller groups form different parts of Asia and Africa, and made them cross the borders of Latvia, Lithuania and Poland with no possibility to return. Although the people who crossed the border or were trying to do so often tried to apply for asylum in Poland, the Polish Border Guard, in many cases, did not register these requests and pushed the people back to Belarus. Whereas the Polish government considered the situation a hybrid war with Belarus, civil society organisations named it a humanitarian crisis because the government did not offer any assistance to people at risk of death from hunger or cold in the forest (Grupa Granica 2021). However, due to the pressure of civil society organisations, some asylum applications were accepted, so the total number of these applications in 2021 increased by 181% (from 1529 in 2020 to 4298 in 2021) (Border Guard 2022). Citizens of Belarus were the biggest group of foreigners applying for asylum in Poland in 2021 – 29% of all foreigners, followed by citizens of Afghanistan – 23%, Iraq – 18%, and Russian Federation – 13%. The Border Guard prevented almost 40 thousand irregular border crossings in the same year.

The outbreak of war in Ukraine in the aftermath of Russia's invasion on 24 February 2022 showed a different approach towards forced migrants perceived as culturally close to Poles. The Polish government declared an open-door policy for all Ukrainians fleeing war, and the Polish society got involved in enormous emergency humanitarian assistance and reception support for newly arrived people. NGOs and local governments were the most engaged ones who tried to organise the most needed aid for the rapidly arriving forced migrants from Ukraine. As of late July 2022, the number of border crossings from Ukraine to Poland is almost 5 million and the number of forced migrants registered for temporary protection or similar national protection scheme concern 1.3 million people (UNHCR 2022a). However, the number of those who have decided to stay in Poland is estimated at around 1.5 million (Duszczyk and Kaczmarczyk 2022). Such a large influx of forced migrants from Ukraine within five months already affects the demographic situation in the country and access to public services, mainly in large and medium-size cities[5]. Depending on the development of events in Ukraine and the number of migrants who will decide to stay in Poland in the following months, the functioning of the domestic labour market, education, health service, and social assistance may significantly change. The following months may also bring new changes in the law relating to foreigners, aimed at their easier integration in the country. Access to housing in cities is already a considerable challenge, which may result in measures to encourage foreigners to settle in smaller towns and rural areas. Given these dynamic changes in the migration situation of the country, as well as in the area of admission and integration activities, Poland seems to be slowly becoming one great welcoming space. It is worth mentioning that the main institutional actors in this area have been NGOs and local governments since the beginning of the humanitarian crisis in Ukraine. An important supporting and coordinating role has also been played by international organisations such as UNHCR, which launched its inter-agency Regional Refugee Response Plan (RRRP) in early spring to address the most urgent needs of the population of forced migrants and their host countries in this part of Europe (UNHCR 2022a; UNHCR 2022b; UNHCR 2022c).

[5] See more: Jaroszewicz et al. 2022; Łukasiewicz et al. 2022; Pachocka 2022; Wach, Pachocka 2022.

2. Methodology

Data collection methods

Research activities conducted by the Polish team in the Work Package 1 of the Welcoming Spaces project were based on mix-methods, including both quantitative and qualitative ones:

- a critical review of the literature on the subject,
- analysis of statistical data,
- analysis of official documents (legal, political and policy documents),
- (participatory) observation (in case of field research),
- in-depth individual interviews,
- case study analysis.

The primary research methods were in-depth individual interviews (IDI). In total, the research team conducted 43 interviews, of which 33 were conducted in person, 8 online (using MS Teams and Zoom), one by phone and one by e-mail. The interviews were based on semi-structured interview scenarios adjusted to the category of the respondents (the questionnaires for each category of respondents were different, but all of them comprised the same thematic blocs, namely: Profile of the respondent, Welcoming initiatives, Social wellbeing, Geography & positionality and Economic viability, Political stability and governance, and integration and discourses).

To conduct the in-person interviews, four field trips were organised: to Łomża and Zambrów (from 28 June till 2 July 2021), to Zalesie (between 14-17 September 2021), to Wohyń (between 22-25 September 2021) and to Łuków (between 23-26 November 2021). During the fieldwork, the researchers also visited three centres for foreigners: in Czerwony Bór (Zambrów commune), in Kolonia Horbów (Zalesie commune) and in Bezwola (Wohyń commune). Unfortunately, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, it was impossible to visit the centre for foreigners in Łuków (the Head of the Office for Foreigners did not permit to visit the mentioned centre in November 2021 due to COVID-19 pandemic restrictions).

In order to recruit the interviewees, we used the snowball technique, supported by engaging gatekeepers who know the social relations in a given locality. The most helpful in this regard were NGOs, without the help of whom the fieldwork could hardly be possible. The interviews were conducted between March and December 2021 with the institutional (meso-level) and individual (micro-level) respondents (

Table ***3***), including:

- **19 Meso-level interviews** with:
  - Local government representatives – we intended to interview 1-2 persons from each locality. However, convincing the municipalities' representatives to give us an in-depth interview was hard. One municipality (Wohyń commune) did not agree to the interview; in another (Łuków), a representative gave us a written response to all the questions in the scenario. Therefore, we conducted one interview in each of the rest communes (Łomża, Zalesie and Zambrów).
  - Primary school representatives – we intended to conduct interviews in at least one school in each locality. Still, we ended up with two interviews with representatives of two primary schools known for a significant share of foreign pupils.

- Social organisations representatives – representatives of NGOs implementing welcoming initiatives in each locality – in total, six interviews were conducted with NGO representatives, at least one in each locality. It needs to be added that some NGOs are active in more than one research locality.
- Religious organisations representatives – we managed to convince one priest to give the interview.
- Local entrepreneurs – we intended to interview at least one entrepreneur in each locality, but most of the contacted entrepreneurs did not agree to talk to us. So we ended up with two interviews with entrepreneurs.

- **24 Micro-level interviews** with:
  - Migrants (including asylum seekers/refugees) – 20 interviews (17 with refugees/asylum seekers and 3 with other migrants).
  - Local residents – citizens – 4 interviews.

The interviews were recorded, transcribed (in Polish) or translated from Russian (if needed) and anonymised. The recordings and transcriptions are stored in a secure drive of the SGH Warsaw School of Economics. Access to recordings and transcriptions was granted only to the SGH researchers involved in the Welcoming Spaces project. The transcribed interviews were then coded in qualitative analysis software (NviVO software) according to the previous codes list.

Table 3 Interviews according to localities

Locality	Meso-level interviews	Micro-level interviews	Total
Łomża	5	5	10
Zambrów	4	6	10
Łuków	4	5	9
Wohyń	0	4	4
Zalesie	6	4	10
Total	19	24	43

Source: own elaboration by the H2020 Welcoming Spaces team at SGH Warsaw School of Economics.

Locality selection criteria

The research in Poland was conducted in five selected localities: two in Podlaskie Voivodship: Łomża (city with poviat status), Zambrów (rural municipality) and three in Lublin Voivodship: Łuków (urban municipality/town), Zalesie (rural municipality) and Wohyń (rural municipality). The localities were selected based on the two adopted criteria: being identified as a shrinking region (or a locality within the region) in Poland and the presence of welcoming initiatives addressed to non-EU migrants.

Administrative division of Poland – information in the context of research

Poland's three-tier administrative (territorial) division was introduced on 1 January 1999 and divided the territory of Poland into voivodships, then into powiats (including cities that at the same time have gmina and powiat status) and gmina. As of 1 January 2022, the administrative division of Poland included Figure 2 and Figure 3):

- 16 voivodships (regions, provinces),

- 314 powiats and 66 cities with powiat status,
- 2477 gminas (municipalities, communes) (including 302 urban gminas, 662 urban-rural gminas and 1513 rural gminas)

The following three types of gminas are distinguished:

- urban gminas whose boundaries coincide with the boundaries of the city or town forming the gmina (urban gminas may also be cities with powiat status);
- urban-rural gminas, which include both the city or town within its administrative boundaries and areas outside these boundaries;
- rural gminas which do not have a city or town within their area.

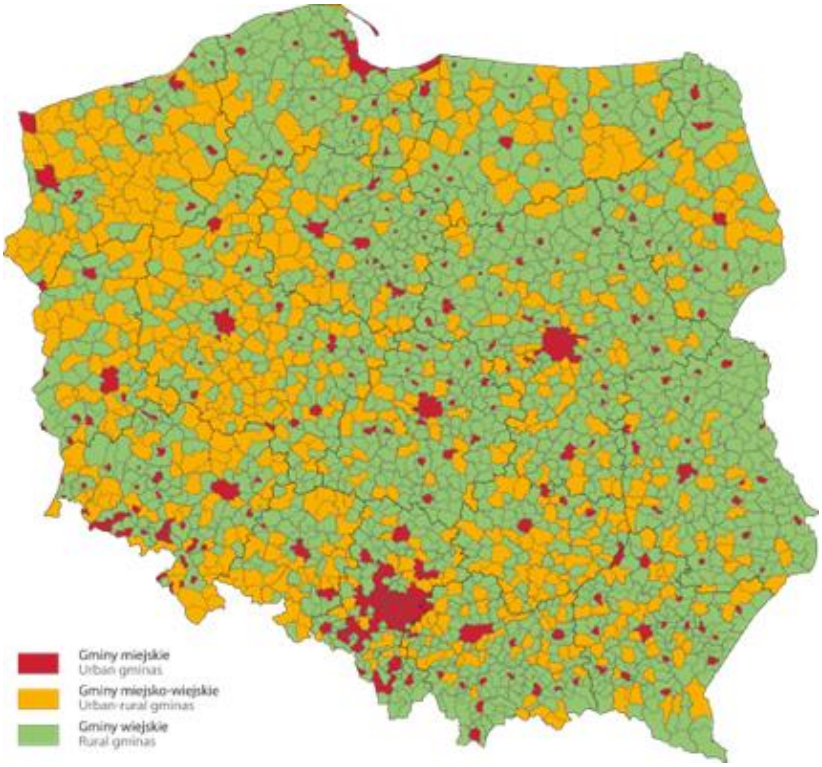
It is essential to explain the competencies for conducting development policy at the levels mentioned above of the administrative division in Poland:

- Voivodeship (region, province) – the voivodeship self-government determines the voivodeship development strategy and conducts the voivodeship development policy. In addition to the self-governing authorities, each voivodeship has an office appointed by the Prime Minister – the Voivode.
- Poviat – there are two types of poviats: a basic unit of territorial division, which covers the entire area of bordering communes – the rural district, or the whole area of a city – the city with powiat status. The powiat performs public tasks of a supra-municipal nature. It is responsible for public services in a fairly general sense, such as maintaining and running schools, libraries and community centres, supervising road construction and repairs, running social welfare and fighting unemployment.
- Gmina (municipality, commune) – the basic self-governing community is the municipality – the smallest administrative unit. The municipality's sphere of action includes all public matters of local importance not reserved by law for other entities. The municipality is primarily responsible for satisfying its inhabitants' basic, specific needs in terms of, among other things: public transport, water supply and water supply, sewerage and sewage disposal, social assistance, public education, spatial order, and environmental protection.

Figure 2 Administrative division of Poland into Voivodships and powiats as of 1 January 2022

Source: GUS. (2022a). Administrative division of Poland. https://stat.gov.pl/en/regional-statistics/classification-of-territorial-units/administrative-division-of-poland/.

Figure 3 Types of gminas in Poland as of 1 January 2022



Source: GUS. (2022b). Types of gminas and urban and rural areas.https://stat.gov.pl/en/regional-statistics/classification-of-territorial-units/administrative-division-of-poland/types-of-gminas-and-urban-and-rural-areas.

The five localities selected for the research have experienced, for the last 15 years (since 2005), a population decline, either continuously or in longer intervals, and at least one of the following negative developments has taken place:

- a decreasing number of jobs and reduced level of investment,
- reduced quality of public services and public space (especially visible in urban areas),
- shortages in land and civil engineering infrastructure (including linear infrastructure, e.g. water supply, sewage systems), limited housing resources and transport infrastructure attributable to the decline in population density.

The welcoming initiatives carried out in the above locations are linked with the presence of asylum seekers in these areas who either live in the centres for foreigners[6] or in private houses. The latter situation is less common since it depends on the availability of housing and job opportunities in the informal local labour market[7]. Sometimes, after being granted protection status, foreigners decide to continue living in the areas they learned during the asylum procedure.

[6] Accommodation centres for asylum seekers.

[7] If a decision has not been issued within the time limit of six months from the date of submission of an asylum application, and the proceedings extended for a reason beyond the applicant's control, the Head of the Office for Foreigners, upon an applicant's request, may issue a certificate (statement), which, accompanied by the temporary certificate of identity of a foreigner, entitles a given person to work within the territory of the Republic of Poland according to the Law on the promotion of employment and labour market institutions (Law on Protection, Article 35(1)). See more at: Pachocka et al. 2020, pp. 54-55.

In the case of forced migrants in Poland, their rights in the field of access to housing and the form of possible housing support depend on their legal status and legal regulations – a different situation concerns people who apply for refugee status who may (but do not have to) live in one of the centres for foreigners, and another one beneficiaries of international protection (persons with refugee status or subsidiary protection) who can benefit from the instruments (Law on Social Assistance 2004) like the Individual Integration Programs (IIPs). As these solutions are complex, it is worth exploring the details of Polish law in this regard and the practices, which are both discussed in two national reports[8] from another Horizon 2020 RESPOND project[9], in which some of the SGH team researchers from the Welcoming Spaces project participated.

Description of localities

Localities in Poland comprise a total of 5 territorial units, including two towns: Łomża (cities with poviat status and Łuków (urban commune) and three rural communes: Zambrów, Zalesie and Wohyń. Lublin Voivodship is a region composed of 213 communes (20 urban, 165 rural and 28 urban-rural communes). There are four cities with the status of a city-poviat in the region. In Poland, the status of a municipality depends on its administrative status (see Figure 3). Rural municipalities may be located both in the vicinity of large cities and surrounded by other rural municipalities on the periphery of the Voivodeship. The Voivodeship is ranked 3rd in the country in terms of area and 9th in population. Podlaskie Voivodeship comprises 118 communes (13 urban, 78 rural, and 27 urban-rural). There are three cities with the status of a city-poviat in the region. Podlaskie Voivodeship is ranked 6th in Poland in terms of area and 14th in terms of population. Localities represent two voivodeships: Podlaskie Voivodeship and Lubelskie Voivodeship) – regions considered to be shrinking areas and border regions in Poland. Lubelskie Voivodeship borders Ukraine and Belarus, and Podlaskie Voivodeship borders Belarus and Lithuania (see Figure 4).

[8] Details regarding housing support under the reception conditions for asylum seekers in Poland are discussed in: Pachocka et al. 2020, while access to housing to the beneficiaries of international protection is presented in: Sobczak-Szelc et al. 2020.

[9] See: https://respondmigration.com/wp-blog/tag/Poland.

Figure 4 Selected localities in Poland

Source: own elaboration by the H2020 Welcoming Spaces team at SGH Warsaw School of Economics.

According to the demographic forecast of the Central Statistical Office, both regions will be subject to depopulation by the year 2050. The ESPON study (2017) also identified both as shrinking rural regions in Poland. On a national scale, both voivodships are among the most depopulated voivodships in the long time horizon covering 1998-2018, including Opolskie (-9.5%), Lodzkie (-7.4%), Silesia (-7.1%), Świętokrzyskie (-6.4%), Lublin (-5.4%) and Podlaskie (-3.5%) (Szukalski 2019). Therefore, from the point of view of development processes, not only the population decline but also the progressive ageing of the population is essential.

A decline in the number of residents in these voivodships has been observed for many years. For example, in 1995, Lubelskie Voivodeship had 2 244.6 thousand inhabitants, while by 2020, the number of inhabitants was to decrease by 148 140. In 1995, Podlaskie Voivodeship had 1 221.9 thousand inhabitants, while by 2020 – 53 671 fewer. Further projected decrease in population is presented in Table 4.

Table 4 Forecast of population changes in the analysed voivodeships in Poland

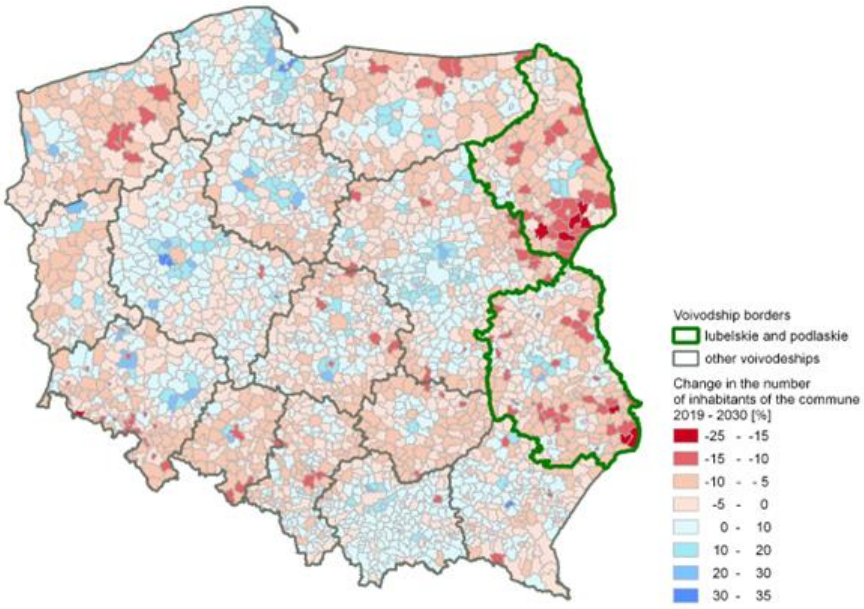
Voivode-ships	Population 2020	Population 2025	Population 2030	Population 2035	Population 2040	Population 2045	Population 2050
Lubelskie	2096460	2049781	1995751	1932870	1862458	1787592	1710590
Podlaskie	1168229	1146804	1121839	1092463	1058768	1021686	982320
TOTAL Poland	38137804	37741462	37185073	36476771	35668232	34817385	33950569

Source: own elaboration by the H2020 Welcoming Spaces team at SGH Warsaw School of Economics based on: GUS. (2014). Prognoza ludności dla Polski na lata 2014-2050. https://stat.gov.pl/obszary-tematyczne/ludnosc/prognoza-ludnosci/prognoza-ludnosci-na-lata-2014-2050-opracowana-2014-r-,1,5.html.

Population decline is not uniform across the area – local (commune) variation – see

Figure ***5***.

Figure 5 Population changes in Poland by communes 2019-2030



Source: own elaboration by the H2020 Welcoming Spaces team at SGH Warsaw School of Economics based on: GUS (2014). Prognoza ludności dla Polski na lata 2014-2050. https://stat.gov.pl/obszary-tematyczne/ludnosc/prognoza-ludnosci/prognoza-ludnosci-na-lata-2014-2050-opracowana-2014-r-,1,5.html.

Place of localities in regional policy

In Poland, the basis for conducting development policy at the regional level is the Strategy of Regional Development, which considers territorialization. In Lubelskie Voivodeship, it is "Development Strategy for Lubelskie Voivodeship until 2030" (2021). It identifies the following areas of strategic intervention (the so-called OSI): urban functional areas (MOFs), OSI Roztocze, OSI Powiśle, OSI Polesie, Podlaski OSI, and Food-zones OSI. Łuków belongs to the Local Centres (MOF). The Wohyń commune belongs to the Polesie OSI. Zalesie commune belongs to Podlaskie OSI.

In Podlaskie Voivodeship, "Podlaskie Voivodeship Development Strategy 2030" (2020) indicates the following areas of strategic intervention:

- medium-sized cities losing their socio-economic functions,
- areas at risk of permanent marginalization,
- subregion growth centres,
- Białostocki Obszar Funkcjonalny (Białystok and 9 neighbouring communes),
- county towns,
- rural areas, including valuable natural areas.

Łomża is classified as a medium-sized town losing socio-economic functions and a poviat town and subregional growth centre. On the other hand, Zambrów commune is classified as a rural area, including valuable natural areas.

3. Basic information about localities

Łomża is a town in Podlaskie Voivodship with a total number of inhabitants of 62,945 (as of 2019) and a slight downward trend in population for the last several years. From 2001 until 2019 population decreased by 3.5%, a negative result of definitive migration balances (for permanent residence). In 2001-2013, the number of people leaving Łomża was at the level of 700-1000 people. On the other hand, the number of people arriving in the city was lower (500-700 people), hence the balance of internal and international migrations has been negative since 2001. The demographic forecast until 2050 is also not favourable in this regard. The negative balance of internal and foreign migrations will continue in the coming years (GUS 2014, 2021a). Until 2010 Łomża was a town hosting a centre for asylum seekers. Approximately 200-300 people with international protection (refugee status or subsidiary protection) live now in the city. In addition, some asylum seekers decide to move to Łomża from the nearby Czerwony Bór, where another centre for foreigners is located and live in rented flats.

Zambrów is a rural commune with a population of 9 thousand. Surprisingly, in migration for permanent residence, the direction of registration to the Zambrów commune from cities prevails. Between 2007 and 2014, 1010 people registered their permanent residence there, of which 791 moved from a city and 204 from rural areas. At that time, 885 people emigrated from the Zambrów commune, including 670 to cities and 205 to rural areas. In 2007-2014 only 10 people moved abroad, whereas 15 foreigners resided in the commune, which also gave a positive migration balance (GUS 2014, 2021a). Zambrów is a commune hosting a centre for asylum seekers located in Czerwony Bór, as we mentioned above.

Łuków is a town and an urban municipality in Lublin Voivodship with 29,441 inhabitants. The negative migratory balance per 1000 people has increased from -5,7 in 2017 to -6,3 in 2019 (Lubelski Urząd Wojewódzki 2020). The city hosts a centre for asylum seekers.

Wohyń is a rural commune in Lublin Voivodship with a population of 7,200. The negative migration balance per 1000 people expanded from -1.46 in 2010 to -4.61 in 2018 (GUS 2021a). There is a centre for asylum seekers within the Wohyń commune (Bezwola).

Zalesie is the minor locality chosen for the analysis. The Zalesie commune has a population of 4,400 people and a negative migration balance of -4 per 1000 people (-4.11 in 2010, -4.05 in 2018). The commune hosts a centre for asylum seekers in Kolonia Horbów.

Communes selected for the analysis are diverse in administration, area and population. Basic information about localities is presented in Table 5.

Table 5 Basic information about localities in Poland – 2019 data

Name of Commune	Area (km²)	Population	Population density (people per km²)	Feminisation rate (women per 100 men)
Łuków	36	29728	832	108
Wohyń	178	6608	37	98
Zalesie	147	4405	30	98
Łomża	33	62945	1927	110
Zambrów	299	8875	30	96

Source: own elaboration by the H2020 Welcoming Spaces team at SGH Warsaw School of Economics based on: GUS. (not dated). Statystyczne Vademecum Samorządowca. https://svs.stat.gov.pl .

To further characterize the localities, our analysis was divided into several categories:

- demographics,
- infrastructure affecting the quality of life,
- access to social services,
- financial situation,
- job market,
- the natural environment and land use planning.

Demographics

From the point of view of demography, the population and the share of different age groups are crucial. The table presents the population in 2019. The demographic dependency ratio and the number of people of pre-working and post-working age are also given for this year. For 2030, the projected population is presented along with an indication of the number of people aged 65+ and 80+ (see Table 6).

Table 6 Summary of demographic data for localities

Name of Commune	Population in 2019	Non-working age population per 100 people of working age)	Population in pre-productive age	Pro-duction age population	Post-working age population	Population in 2030	Number of people 65+ (including 80+) in 2030
Łuków	29728	73,0	5662	17186	6880	27702	6 830 (1857)
Wohyń	6608	70,0	1231	3887	1490	6245	1438 (364)
Zalesie	4405	65,1	902	2668	835	4287	793 (183)
Łomża	62945	64,2	11204	38333	13408	57197	15346 (3491
Zambrów	8875	62,4	1711	5464	1700	9556	1998 (356)

Source: own elaboration by the H2020 Welcoming Spaces team at SGH Warsaw School of Economics based on: GUS. (not dated). Statystyczne Vademecum Samorządowca. https://svs.stat.gov.pl/.

Infrastructure affecting the quality of life

The basic infrastructure influencing the quality of life includes water supply, sewage, and gas. In addition, the quality of life is affected by access to health care services; hence data on health clinics appear here (see Table 7).

Table 7 Infrastructure affecting the quality of life in localities – 2019 data

Name of Commune	% of the population using the water supply system (county average)	% of the population using sewerage system (county average)	% of the population using a gas installation (average for the county)	Number of clinics (in the county)	Number of people per clinic (in the county)
Łuków	95,2 (91,6)	86,0 (47,1)	82,0 (39,0)	17 (41)	1749 (2605)
Wohyń	73,0 (86,3)	22,7 (38,7)	1,7 (7,8)	3 (25)	2203 (2354)
Zalesie	86,8 (80,0)	33,0 (39,4)	0 (3,3)	2 (46)	2203 (2408)
Łomża***	97,3 (90,8)	94,2 (64,8)	22,8 (29,2)	7	8992
Zambrów	95,0 (95,3)	14,5 (54,1)	0,8 (4,0)	0 (30)	0 (1450)

***** Łomża is a city with poviat status; therefore, the values of indicators were compared to the average of Podlaskie Voivodeship**

Source: own elaboration by the H2020 Welcoming Spaces team at SGH Warsaw School of Economics based on: GUS. (not dated). Statystyczne Vademecum Samorządowca. https://sys.stat.gov.pl/.

Analysed localities are diversified in terms of functions as centres of public services. For example, the rural commune of Zambrów is adjacent to the urban commune of Zambrów – the county seat (rural commune surrounds the town); therefore, the commune office is located in the town of Zambrów. Inhabitants of the rural commune use many public services in the town, e.g., related to health or culture. Therefore, indicators such as the number of clinics in the rural commune Zambrów is 0 – residents use these services in the town Zambrów. Such an approach is very common in Poland. Urban communes, especially cities that are county seats, are local service centres for surrounding rural communes. It is also worth mentioning that in rural areas with low population density, household water supply (wells) and sewage treatment (household sewage treatment plants) systems are sometimes developed. In the last five years, the analysed communes have taken intensive actions in water supply system development, sewage system development and the field of renewable energy sources.

Access to social services

It links significantly to the quality of life and relates to care, education, and leisure services in the broadest sense. The summary in the table below is for 2019 (and 2019/2020 for educational institutions) (see Table 8).

Table 8 Access to social services in localities (2019 or 2019/2020 data)

Name	Nurse-ries and clubs for children	Pre-school facilities	Elemen-tary school	Secon-dary schools	Libraries and file (in the county)	Cultural institu-tions (centres, cultural houses and centres, clubs and shared rooms) (in the county)	Art groups (in the county)	Sports clubs (in the county)
Łuków	4	15	7	0	5 (27)	2 (34)	10 (12)	13 (64)
Wohyń	0	12	6	0	2 (20)	1 (7)	8 (54)	0 (26)
Zalesie	0	6	5	0	1 (40)	1 (25)	2 (128)	3 (39)
Łomża	5	29	10	24	5	2	15	27
Zambrów	0	8	7	0	1 (6)	0 (3)	0 (20)	3 (14)

Source: own elaboration by the H2020 Welcoming Spaces team at SGH Warsaw School of Economics based on: GUS. (not dated). Statystyczne Vademecum Samorządowca. https://svs.stat.gov.pl .

Information on % of residents using community social assistance is an important indicator complementing social services. At the regional level, in 2019, it was used: in Lubelskie Voivodeship by 4% of residents and in Podlaskie Voivodeship by 6.1% of residents. In localities, it was respectively in 2019:

- in Łuków – 1.8% – a downward trend since 2015, less than the county and region,
- in Wohyń – 9.7% – a downward trend from 2015, but higher than the county and region,
- in Zalesie – 8.2% – a significant downward trend from 2015, but higher than the county and region,
- In Łomża – 3.5% – a downward trend since 2015, less than the region,
- In Zambrów – 3.4% – a downward trend since 2015, less than the county and region.

Financial situation

The financial situation is analysed in terms of the total revenue of the commune budget per capita and the total expenditure of the commune budget per capita. In addition, there is an indication of which budget sections dominate in municipal spending and which funds were allocated for financing and co-financing EU programs and projects (see Table 9).

Table 9 Localities finance data – the year 2019

Name of Commune	Total revenue of the municipal budget per 1 inhabitant in PLN (County)	Total expenditure of the municipal budget per 1 inhabitant in PLN (County)	Dominant expenditure sections in the municipal budget (%0	Financial means for financing and co-financing of EU programmes and projects in PLN million
Łuków	4341 (5040)	4205 (5005)	Education and upbringing 37.0% Family 30.8% Municipal economy and environmental protection 9.2%	0,8
Wohyń	4924 (4930)	4524 (4839)	Education and upbringing 35.3% Family 30.6% Social assistance 7.7%	0,9
Zalesie	5058 (5198)	4831 (5112)	Education and upbringing 37.5% Family 29.4% Social assistance 4.9%	0,4
Łomża	6738	6556	Education and upbringing 34.3% Family 18.6% Transport and communication 10.7%	22,6
Zambrów	5331 (4923)	4934 (4697)	Family 26.7% Education and upbringing 22.9% Transport and communications 16.1%	3,1

Source: own elaboration by the H2020 Welcoming Spaces team at SGH Warsaw School of Economics based on: GUS. (not dated). Statystyczne Vademecum Samorządowca. https://svs.stat.gov.pl/.

Labour market

The labour market analysis includes the number of business entities in the REGON register and the registered unemployed (see Table 10).

Table 10 Business entities and unemployed in localities (2019 data)

Name of Commune	Number of business entities in the REGON register (commune)	Number of business entities in the REGON register (poviat)	% of registered unemployed in the population of working age (commune)	% of registered unemployed in the population of working age (poviat)
Łuków	3570	906	3,2	3,1
Wohyń	346	4131	4,6	4,1
Zalesie	232	9396	7,3	6,2
Łomża	6467		4,7	-
Zambrów	705	3506	3,4	4,2

Source: own elaboration by the H2020 Welcoming Spaces team at SGH Warsaw School of Economics based on: GUS. (not dated). Statystyczne Vademecum Samorządowca. https://sws.stat.gov.pl/.

The natural environment and land use planning

The general living conditions also consist of environmental aspects – areas of protected land, forest cover, access to bicycle paths and spatial order. Indicators from this thematic area are presented in Table 11.

Table 11 Environmental and spatial aspects in localities (2019 data)

Name of Commune	Forest cover in %	% of commune area covered by forms of nature protection	Length of bicycle paths in km	% of area covered by current local spatial development plans
Łuków	12,3	7,2	44,9	96,8
Wohyń	20,5	0,04	0	99,7
Zalesie	36,7	10,7	2,7	11,4
Łomża	1,0	16,2	107,1 (per 100 km^2)	0,6
Zambrów	43,3	0,54	0	1

Source: own elaboration by the H2020 Welcoming Spaces team at SGH Warsaw School of Economics based on: GUS. (not dated). Statystyczne Vademecum Samorządowca. https://sws.stat.gov.pl/.

In terms of transport accessibility, it can be stated that:

- there is no airport on the territory of any of the analysed communes – there is only one airport near Lublin in the town of Świdnik in both analysed provinces;
- none of the analysed communes is located within the range of a motorway ;
- the distance from the capital city of the voivodeship is the smallest in Zambrów (60 km) and the largest in Zalesie (134 km).

The analysis of all presented indicators for localities indicates their differentiation resulting from the character of the commune (cities position themselves better than rural communes) and the administrative function performed.

A questionnaire (in a web form) was also sent to the municipalities to supplement the statistical analyses. Further data presented refer to the results of the online survey developed and implemented by the SGH team of the Welcoming Spaces project (survey April-October 2021). The overall assessment of the quality of life in the localities is good – 3.67 (on a scale of 1-5, where 1 means a very low quality of life and 5 means a very high quality of life). Such a rating is influenced, among others, by the quality of the environment, including air and water quality and natural and landscape values.

The description of localities should also be supplemented with barriers and factors of development indicated by communes. This part of the report was also prepared based on information obtained through an online survey addressed to communes already mentioned. Unfortunately, the rural commune of Zambrów did not respond to the survey. The analysis of local policy documents was conducted using an expert method based on available materials on the website. In other aspects, the commune of Zambrów is not included in the analysis. The number of non-EU foreigners residing in the commune was indicated in analysed localities. The highest number (250 people) was suggested for the Wohyń commune and the lowest (a single person) for the Zalesie commune.

The primary barriers to development (last five years period) identified by communes include:

- population loss,
- community ageing,
- the departure of young residents to larger cities and/or abroad.

This was indicated by all communes completing the questionnaire. For example, the answer "small (insufficient in relation to needs) number of jobs in the local market" was indicated by four communes. In addition, the following possible answers were also selected by the respondents from the localities: "low social integration" and "deficiencies in commune infrastructure (water supply system, sewage system)".

Despite the developmental barriers related to depopulation indicated by communes, not all communes perceive migration as a developmental opportunity. Only two communes recognize it as such an opportunity. Three communes revealed in the survey that "the phenomenon of migration and presence of migrants is an indifferent factor for the development processes in the commune/town". Moreover, two communes stated that "the phenomenon of migration and presence of migrants is a challenge for local governments, but it may bring many benefits to the Communes/City and local community". Only one commune indicated that "the phenomenon of migration and presence of migrants is a barrier to the development of the commune/city".

This approach is reflected in strategic documents. None of the analysed communes has diagnosed the problems of migrants in their development strategies and has not dedicated part of the planned objectives and/or activities to them. Four communes admitted that "in the strategy and/or other strategic documents, there is no reference to the issue of migrants at all". Two communes indicated that "the problems of migrants were noticed in our commune through *ad hoc* actions dedicated to them, not resulting from strategic documents". One commune pointed out that it links migrant issues with education.

For the last five years, the analysed communes (3 of those responding to the questionnaire) in their local development policy:

- were catching up in development (developing infrastructure, increasing access to public services, etc.),
- have taken actions geared toward job growth and economic development,
- have continued the path of development set out many years ago and have consistently followed it.

In addition, one commune (rural commune Zalesie) indicated that in recent years its activities had been focused on social cohesion and inclusion of excluded groups, including migrants, in development processes.

For the next 5-10 years, communes are planning the following activities:

- focused on job growth and economic development (5 communes – all analysed communes),
- related to the continuation of the local policy (after evaluation and analysis of changes in the commune/city and its further and closer environment) (3 communes),
- related to catching up in development (developing infrastructure, increasing access to public services, etc.) (1 urban commune – Łuków),
- activities for rapid socio-economic development (1 rural commune – Zalesie).

None of the communes indicated activities related to social cohesion. Also, the revitalization programs do not refer to the issue of migrants. The four analysed communes have prepared Municipal Revitalization Programs, but in none of the documents there are planned projects whose stakeholders would be migrants. This is a common situation in municipalities. Revitalisation programmes concern small fragments of the municipal area (following the law, a maximum of 20% of the area) and focus on the inhabitants without specifically identifying migrants. According to the questionnaire data, communes most often carry out activities for migrants in cooperation with schools. Communes also indicate those projects concerning cultural integration and multiculturalism as good practices. Individual communes also cooperate with entrepreneurs, NGOs and the Office for Foreigners.

According to the results of the survey, the following should be responsible for creating conditions and taking measures for the integration of migrants: International organizations (UN, UNHCR, OSCE, etc.); Government administration (Prime Minister, Ministry of Interior and Administration, Ministry of Family and Social Policy); Diplomatic and consular representations from migrants' countries of origin. Regional and local governments were indicated in the last place.

4. Welcoming initiatives selected for the research

In the five selected communes, initially, 23 welcoming initiatives were identified since 2001 (Table 12) and every existing programme or project addressed to migrants was taken into account10. This resulted from adopting the working understanding of "a welcoming initiative" at the beginning of the project. As such, a welcoming initiative was defined as "an action, either short-term or long-term, aimed at supporting non-EU migrant newcomers in their emplacement in a specific locality". As 'emplacement' we understand after Schiller and Çağlar (2011, p. 495) "a person's efforts to settle and build networks of connection within the constraints and opportunities of a specific locality". By formulating the above definition, we neither determined an actor leading an initiative nor adopted any other criterion, such as duration or persistence of an initiative.

Table 12 Number of welcoming initiatives identified in the selected localities in the stage of desk research

Locality	Number of identified initiatives
Łomża	6
Zambrów	4
Łuków	3
Wohyń	6
Zalesie	4
Total	23

Source: own elaboration by the H2020 Welcoming Spaces team at SGH Warsaw School of Economics.

Then, during the fieldwork, it turned out that not all of the initiatives mentioned above were ongoing since some were only one-time projects that lasted no longer than six months. Therefore, to determine which initiatives can be included in further analysis, we decided to focus on programmes, projects or other forms of support for migrants that last or lasted longer than six months. Such a criterion helped filter the initiatives and select the ones which are not only still ongoing but also, due to the longer duration, rooted in the local community. In this way, 11 initiatives were selected (Table 13).

[10] It is worth adding that in Poland there is no comprehensive national or regional register that collects information about initiatives / places that can be considered welcoming for foreigners / migrants. However, On the other hand, some projects, initiatives or activities that can be considered good practices in the area of integration are collected in the European Commission's good practice database on the European Web Site on Integration (EWSI). In this context" "'Good practices' can be defined in multiple ways. However, a thread common to most definitions implies strategies, approaches and/or activities that have been shown through research and evaluation to be effective, efficient, sustainable and/or transferable, and to reliably lead to a desired result. Good practices on the EWSI are collected through a template, which has been developed specifically to that effect and comprises all the information needed to judge whether the practice is adaptable to other contexts" (see more: European Web Site on Integration (EWSI) (not dated). What are 'good practices'?, https://ec.europa.eu/migrant-integration/index.cfm?action=furl.go&go=/what-are-good-practices [Accessed 30 July 2022]. To learn more about the list of good integration practices, see: European Web Site on Integration (not dated). Integration Practices, https://ec.europa.eu/migrant-integration/integration-practices_en [Accessed 30 July 2022]. More about the EWSI dataset: Pachocka, Sobczak-Szelc K. 2020, pp. 76-77.

Table 13 Initiatives selected to further analysis after accomplishing fieldwork

Locality	Name of the initiative	Run by	Target groups	Scope of activity
Łomża	Assistance Centre for Foreigners (Centrum Pomocy Cudzoziemcom)	NGO (Ocalenie Foundation)	Migrants (asylum seekers, refugees, economic migrants)	Legal support, Educational activities, Cultural activities, Support in accessing the labour market, Support in-house searching.
	Programmes of the Municipal Centre of the Social Assistance	Local government	Unemployed residents; Residents recovering from addictions; Seniors	Support in accessing the labour market; Socialising activities.
Zambrów	Kindergarten in Czerwony Bór	NGO (Dialogue Foundation)	Pre-school children residing in the centre for asylum seekers;	Child-care and educational activities
	Intercultural assistant in the school of Poryte-Jablon	Local government	Asylum seekers and refugees; parents of school children, school children, teachers	Educational activities; Empowerment of asylum seekers
	Integration projects of Obywatelska Perspektywa Foundation	NGO (Civic Perspective Foundation)	Asylum seekers and refugees (both children and adults)	Educational activities
Łuków	Women's Collective	NGO (Association for Earth)	Female asylum seekers; female refugees	Providing vocational courses for asylum-seeking women; facilitating access to the labour market
	Second Things	NGO (Association for Earth)	Female asylum seekers; female refugees	Providing job opportunities for asylum-seeking women
	Notebooks from Łuków	NGO (Dla Ziemi Association) and an Artist	Female asylum seekers; female refugees	Providing job opportunities for asylum-seeking women;
Zalesie	Primary school in Berezówka	NGO (Za rzeką Krzną Association)	School-age Children (asylum seekers and native residents)	Educational activities;
	Children club in the centre for asylum seekers in Kolonia Horbów	NGO (Homo Faber)	Asylum seeking children	Educational activities; Cultural activities;
Wohyń	Primary school in Bezwola11	Local government	School-age Children (asylum seekers and native residents)	Educational activities.

Source: own elaboration by the H2020 Welcoming Spaces team at SGH Warsaw School of Economics.

In the localities selected for the research, the vast majority of welcoming initiatives were led by NGOs (eight out of eleven). However, we also spotted some programmes run by local government (three out of eleven), directly or indirectly, through a school dependent on the funding from the municipal budget.
This proportion mirrors the general situation in Poland, where welcoming initiatives are mainly driven by

[11] Closed in September 2021.

non-governmental organizations (including NGOs established or run by migrants). However, some programmes and actions (including the flagship Individual Integration Programme[12], which targeted beneficiaries of international protection) are run by state institutions.

Initially, in the stage of the desk research, the main focus was put on programmes, projects, and other forms of support addressed towards migrants, either forced or voluntary ones, or both. Then, however, the fieldwork also revealed some indirect welcoming initiatives, namely the ones that did not target migrants initially, but gradually, the newcomers have also been their beneficiaries or active participants.

One of the main goals of welcoming initiatives is to eliminate barriers migrants encounter in integrating with Polish society. Some initiatives also take action to prepare the Polish society for receiving foreigners. Within the welcoming initiatives following types of support were provided:

1. Legal measures. This category involves mostly counselling for individuals, primarily concerning their regularisation, as well as in cases related to taking up employment, labour law and discrimination. Foreigners also receive the support of lawyers representing them in courts and conducting strategic litigation. The category also comprises monitoring migration law and providing consultation on draft legislation (e.g. Ocalenie Foundation).
2. Informal measures and those supporting integration. These are all kinds of publications – books, brochures, leaflets, films, videos, Internet apps – containing information on living in Poland or a given city. The category also comprises the support provided by so-called integration counsellors, i.e. people who help migrants solve everyday problems, such as helping them find a school for their children and going through a recruitment process (Ocalenie Foundation, Homo Faber Foundation).
3. Employment aid – helping to find employment or bringing undeclared workouts into the open and providing vocational and business counselling (Women's Collective, Second Things, Notebooks from Łuków, Ocalenie Foundation).
4. Linguistic training – organising formal language courses and private lessons for children (Ocalenie Foundation).
5. Integration measures targeted at specific migrant groups. This category hosts very different projects, for instance, childbirth classes for migrants, support groups, interest groups, and artistic activities (Women's Collective).
6. Assistance in finding accommodation and other forms of financial support (Ocalenie Foundation).
7. Advocacy. This category comprises advocacy efforts aimed at bringing about changes to legislation and practice, as well as actions taken for the sake of individual persons (for instance, to prevent deportation) using digital advocacy (Ocalenie Foundation, Homo Faber Foundation).
8. Actions targeting the host society. This category primarily concerns informal education: courses, workshops, seminars, conferences, cultural festivals, sports events, etc. (Ocalenie Foundation, Dla Ziemi Association).
9. Cooperation with local authorities to develop municipal integration action plans and policies

[12] Individual Integration Programme, IIP, is a 12-month programme of integration of foreigners who have received refugee status or subsidiary protection in Poland. A geographical/territorial criterion applies when granting aid within the IIP. The foreigner must live in a given voivodeship (region), submit an application only in one region and confirm in writing that he is ready to participate in the integration programme. The integration assistance includes: cash benefits for maintenance of living and covering expenses of Polish language learning, health insurance, social work, specialist counselling, including legal, psychological and family counselling, providing information and support in contacts with other institutions, in particular with labour market institutions, the local environment and non-governmental organisations, other activities supporting the foreigner's integration process. IIPs are under the authority of the poviat, which is part of the government administration implemented in a given administrative unit. That is why IIPs are approved and financed by the voivode (Law on Social Assistance 2004, Art. 93(2-3)).

(Ocalenie Foundation).

10. Actions supporting the education of migrant children and multicultural education. They involve cooperation with schools attended by children with a migration background, conducting multicultural workshops, support in developing the Codes of Conduct, monitoring newly implemented educational solutions, and organising private lessons for foreign children (primary schools in Poryte-Jabłoń, Berezówka and Bezwola; Dialogue Foundation, Obywatelska Perspektywa Foundation, Homo Faber Foundation).
11. Psychological support for migrants belonging to vulnerable groups (asylum seekers, refugees, women and children with migration experience) (Ocalenie Foundation) (Mikulska-Jolles, 2019, p. 22).

Here, the role of NGOs in launching and carrying out welcoming initiatives needs to be highlighted. Although NGOs should complement the state's activity in principle, they replaced the state in its duty to take care of migrants in the selected localities. It is evident regarding beneficiaries of international protection since together with asylum seekers and all other forced migrants constitute the category requiring the most significant scope of assistance. NGOs provide migrants with various types of support – from ad-hoc direct assistance to struggles to influence the system of reception and adaptation shaped in Poland. In some situations, direct assistance provides accommodation, school layettes or cleaning supplies, and other basic material needs. In addition, an important role is played by organizations providing free legal assistance, especially when dealing with complex administrative duties by those with limited knowledge of the Polish language.

Despite the help provided by the state – as part of Individual Integration Programs implemented by poviat family support centres – NGOs also support the integration of forced migrants in Poland by organizing Polish language courses or vocational training. In addition, NGOs are actively involved in activities to improve the reception and adaptation of forced migrants in Poland – both through consultation and monitoring of the implementation of legal acts, as well as through research on refugees (Pawlak and Matusz-Protasiewicz 2015, p. 14).

5. Welcoming initiatives and social wellbeing

For the purpose of the research in Poland, we understand social wellbeing as the quality of life in terms of the objective satisfaction of basic needs (material living conditions: housing, income, jobs) and the subjective, mental and spiritual dimension (community, education, environment, governance, health, life satisfaction, safety and work-life balance).

Firstly, social wellbeing pertains to people, both migrant newcomers and older residents (citizens and established migrants). Social wellbeing also refers to localities and regions concerning the quality of living offered by a specific locality/region to its inhabitants. As such, it can be a significant factor behind the decision to arrive and settle in the locality or, on the contrary, leave it. Due to its complexity, social wellbeing partially overlaps with political stability and economic viability dimensions. To avoid repetitions, in this part, we focus only on factors not analysed in the two other dimensions: protection and safety, housing, health, education and environment. In summary, we evaluated the life satisfaction in the studied localities based on the reflections given by our respondents, namely inhabitants (both newcomers and older residents) of particular localities.

5.1 Safety and protection

The need for safety is commonly acknowledged as a basic human need and, in the theory of psychology, is referred to as a need for security and protection. According to Maslov's pyramid of needs, the need for safety represents the second tier just after the physiological needs and, as such, includes personal security (absence of physical threat), financial security (absence of financial hardship), health and well-being (absence of illness or infirmity), and a safety net against accidents and illness and their adverse impacts (ability to receive appropriate medical care) (Sam 2013). In the reality of the Westphalian world, where the state has sovereignty not only over its territory but also jurisdiction over the people residing, either permanently or temporarily, in this territory, the need for safety is very much related to the legal status of an individual. The central axis of division is drawn by citizenship, understood as a legal bonding with a particular state (Sobczak-Szelc et al. 2020). Those who have it are citizens, and the others are non-citizens; the latter group is usually diverse concerning both status and the rights pertaining to the status. The same applies to this research group of interest – immigrants from non-EU countries. In the literature on migration research, the essential criterion of division within this group is the reason or motivation behind a person's decision to migrate, which determines whether the migration is forced or voluntary. In the common discourses and narratives, the dichotomy is wrongly narrowed to forced versus economic migration, although economic migration can also be forced/non-voluntary if we consider migration from the territories affected by climate change and unfitting for life (Pachocka and Sobczak-Szelc, 2018).

As mentioned in the Introduction, Poland is a country hosting both forced and voluntary immigrants. However, during the research, it turned out that the forced immigrants are much more vulnerable in terms of their safety and security since they cannot just return to their home country but are dependent from, firstly, decision on granting them a protection status and, secondly, on rights and obligations deriving from this status. Moreover, as acknowledged by one of our institutional respondents, the difference in rights directly depends on the difference in status:

> *"[forced migrants] have more problems, as if they report problems to us more often, because economic migration follows its path. These are two different phenomena. It works differently. A visa allows for more, and international aid, international protection limits this person to some extent, in action, so it is automatically a natural beneficiary for us" (PL_NGO_01).*

After they arrive in Poland, if forced migrants decide to apply for international protection, they are considered asylum seekers (or asylum applicants), and they have the following rights:

- social aid (accommodation in centres or elsewhere, financial allowance to satisfy basic needs) and medical assistance (the scope of medical services is the same as for Polish citizens, but spa treatment is excluded; medical services are provided by health care units contracted by the Office for Foreigners, which creates a parallel healthcare system for asylum seekers);
- free Polish language lessons;
- education for children;
- assistance in voluntary return to the country, if they can return there (e.g. the country will admit the foreigner);
- accessible communication with representatives of UNHCR, representatives of international organizations, and non-governmental organizations ensuring assistance to foreigners, including legal assistance,
- the possibility of giving consent to UNHCR to convey information on the course of proceedings, on granting international protection and for making notes or copies of the files;
- free of charge legal information given through the course of the proceedings in the 1st instance and about the granting of international protection by the employees of the Office for Foreigners;
- free of charge legal assistance available based on the Law on Protection (t.j. Dz.U. z 2019 r. poz. 1666 z późn. Zm.).

Concerning rights of beneficiaries of international (refugees, beneficiaries of subsidiary or temporary protection) and national protection (asylum holders, holders of a permit for stay due to humanitarian reasons, and holders of a permit for tolerated stay), the situation of foreigners depends on the type of protection granted to them. The most comprehensive rights catalogue is vested in persons granted refugee status or subsidiary protection. The persons with the mentioned types of protection have the following rights:

- the right to reside in Poland (they receive a residence card),
- the right to work and do business on the same terms as Polish citizens,
- the right to benefit from social assistance and family benefits,
- the right to health insurance,
- the right to integration assistance within Individual Integration Programme (IIP),
- the right to study in primary, lower secondary, upper secondary and higher education on the same terms as Polish citizens,
- the right to family reunification (Law on Protection 2003).

Concerning personal rights and freedoms in Poland, they are generally considered to pertain to all persons, regardless of nationality. As stipulated by the Constitution, all foreigners can enjoy constitutionally guaranteed "freedom to express opinions" (Art. 54), "freedom of peaceful assembly" (Art. 57) and "freedom of association" (Art. 58). There is only one provision in the Constitution related to the mentioned rights which applies only to Polish citizens – prohibition of expatriation (of expulsion and prohibition of a return

to the country) of a Polish citizen (Constitution, 1997, Article 52(4)).

Nevertheless, refugees and beneficiaries of subsidiary protection cannot be expelled from Poland and given a decision to leave the territory of Poland (Law on Protection 2003, Article 89g (1)) under any circumstances, except from the situation while posing a severe threat to national security or public order, as stipulated by the Geneva Convention related to the status of refugees (Geneva Convention, 1951, Article 32 (1) and 33 (2); Sobczak-Szelc et al. 2020, 117).

The right to grant international or national protection lies at the sole discretion of the central government, namely the Office for Foreigners (refugee status, subsidiary protection and asylum) or the Border Guard (concerning the permit for stay due to humanitarian reasons and a permit for tolerated stay). Still, due to the complexity of each case, the procedure can last from 6 months to even a few years (if there are negative decisions but the applicants apply for asylum again and again). Among our studied initiatives, one (Ocalenie Foundation) provided legal assistance to forced migrants both during the asylum procedure and after receiving the status: "we have 100 hours of legal counselling, this is legal counselling, a lawyer is based physically in Białystok, but it is available to people from all four centres [for foreigners]" (PL_NGO_01). It is vital for asylum seekers whose asylum procedure has been prolonged; they usually seek legal counselling themselves and can rarely find an engaged private lawyer: "I had a lawyer from Warsaw; we have been waiting for over five years [for the decision on asylum application], the case is still not resolved. I changed my lawyer. I have had a new one for a year; maybe he will do something. I do not know. We are waiting (PL_NCOM_14). In the shrinking localities, legal assistance offered to immigrants by NGOs seems to be especially important since the local governments hardly provide any information for foreigners in languages other than Polish. None of the five studied localities offered a permanent contact point for foreigners. Knowing NGO's activity in the locality, the commune's officials often rely on NGO employees as intermediaries in giving information to immigrants who deal with local administration.

5.2 Housing

In 2019, the housing deficit (the difference between the number of inhabited flats and the number of households) in Poland amounted to approx. 1.7 million flats. In 2005-2018, over 2 million flats were built in Poland, of which only 1.8% were municipal flats, and 1.9% were flats in the resources of the social housing association. It is pretty evident that the most challenging situation in terms of access to housing is in low- and middle-income households (Nowak 2021, p. 158). After 1989, the assumption was made that the fundamental way to get a flat is to buy it on the free market. Such an approach meant that no attention was paid to the fact that the unmet housing needs of people whose income does not allow them to buy a flat on the free market, and immigrants are, to a large extent, such a group.

Economic migrants coming to Poland usually have the resources to rent a home. During the procedure for granting a refugee status, asylum seekers/applicants for international protection "*can live in a refugee centre or apply for small financial resources for independent living outside the centre. After obtaining international protection, refugees need to leave the centre. However, due to the coronavirus pandemic and legal limitations for renting apartments introduced during the lockdown, the refugees were allowed to stay longer in the centres"* (PL_NGO_04).

The initiative in the "housing" dimension has been implemented by the Ocalenie Foundation, which acts as an intermediary between a tenant and a landlord: finds housing, talks to a landlord certifies the integrity

of a tenant. So, the initiative is an answer to the problem of difficult access to a rental due to prejudices of local inhabitants, which manifests when looking for a new apartment. One of the migrants described her experiences when looking for a flat:

> *"No, it wasn't easy. I had a problem with this, because immediately when (the landlords) hear me (on the phone) they already know that I am not a Polish citizen; when I speak they can hear the accent. I called several times, I wanted a bigger apartment, but I couldn't find another one, they always told me that there is no apartment, the ad is no longer valid, or there is a problem with the document and something like that; even if during the telephone conversation they gave the address of the apartment, later they did not even want to open the door."* (PL_NCOM_19)

When the landlord hears that NGO is looking for an apartment for a refugee – he says that the advertisement is out of date. It becomes easier when a landlord or landlady rented a home to the immigrants before; then, he or she will likely rent it later to another. The source for this prejudice may come from the mass media*: "Not everyone wants to rent an apartment for them because they have a bad opinion. Generally, people think what they hear on TV about some refugees, about this Islam, about the fact that they are terrorists."* (PL_NGO_06) But the personal experiences can change this:

> *"Everyone got used to it (immigrants living in the locality). They know that these are not the people who cause any problems, are bullies, or will destroy (the flat). (…) I have not heard people complaining that they cannot rent a flat because someone discriminates against them, because they are from Chechnya or something like that."* (PL_NGO_10).

If the immigrants lived in an apartment, then, after their leaving, it is likely that this flat will be rented to the immigrants because the landlord got to know the migrants or local NGO helping them and let his prejudices go.

One of the reasons for immigrants to leave the locality is when it is difficult to find a flat to rent, which is sometimes a case in the localities. The advantage of the surveyed localities is that rental costs are lower than in bigger cities. Also, when the immigrants are entitled to social benefits such as "Family 500 plus"[13], it helps cover rental costs. Another family-related problem faced by the respondents is finding a flat for a large family (with several children) or a family with small children (PL_NCOM_04, PL_NCOM_09, PL_NCOM_16). This may be partly due to Polish law (Law on the Protection of the Rights of Tenants 2001), according to which you cannot evict, among other things, pregnant women or minors (under 18 years old).

Another challenging area of "housing" is access to public housing. People who cannot afford to buy or rent a flat on the free market, and those who do not have a place to live, should be helped by the commune because, according to the Law on communes' autonomy (t.j. Dz.U. 1990 nr 16 poz. 95 z późn. Zm.), the communes are responsible for the shape of the local housing policy in Poland. Unfortunately, getting a council flat or a social flat is hard. Usually, communes have a very limited number of vacant premises, and the waiting line is long. Waiting for a public flat is a matter of many years. Analysing the situation in selected localities: rural localities have the least opportunities to meet the citizens' needs because they have a very limited stock of council housing (7 in Zalesie and 22 in Wohyń) as well as subsidized housing (5 in Zalesie, none in Wohyń). Urban localities have significantly more council housing and subsidized housing: in Łuków

[13] Rodzina 500 plus (*Family 500 plus*) - a social policy program implemented in Poland since April 1, 2016, under which parents or guardians receive a monthly allowance for each child in the amount of PLN 500.

accordingly: 304 and 26, in Zambrów: 833 and 32, in Łomża: 994 and 93 (GUS 2021a), but urban areas have more significant needs. The rules for granting housing from municipal resources are regulated by the resolutions of individual communes, which sometimes make it impossible to provide required documents and limit access to the accommodation.

Łomża is an interesting case: the city has 992 residential premises; another 95 flats are situated in private buildings. The waiting list for public housing is constantly growing: 985 applications were submitted for the council flat. There are 240 names on the list for the possible receipt of public flats, and 627 households are waiting to be added to this list. In addition, 71 people are waiting for social housing and 47 for temporary housing (4Łomża 2021). According to one of our respondents, city authorities plan to build one council building with 53 flats and renovate a historic tenement house with 17 flats, i.e., a total of 70 council flats (PL_LGOV_03). In Łomża there are many new buildings. In the respondents' opinion, the apartments are bought by the people who left the commune, live abroad, and treat the property purchase as a kind of investment. Often, but not always, they rent these flats. The second reason for so many new apartments and the increase in the prices is the rural area surrounding Łomża, and there is a visible trend of farmers at the retirements age who leave the farms to their children and decide to buy a flat in the city and live there (PL_LGOV_02). Another reason is that thanks to the EU subsidies, the farmers buy the apartments in Łomża as investments. This high demand for housing (among other factors) contributes to the increase in housing prices and their low availability even for people with permanent employment contracts and average remuneration and Polish citizenship, as the conditions for obtaining a loan are demanding. This type of apartment is out of range for people working illegally or legally but on fix-term contract, with low remuneration, and not having Polish citizenship. So the most common way of dealing with the housing issue for immigrants is renting an apartment or a house. Sometimes a family lives in one flat, sometimes a group of people rent a place together.

> *"Economic migrants often come alone, one person from the family. It rarely happens that they come to Poland with their whole families. (…) These are usually employee quarters, where everyone has a small room, one bed or several colleagues in one room. However, there are more men than women."* (PL_NGO_01).

But, because of the limited financial resources, sometimes immigrants rent flats which are cheaper than others, but have disadvantages like: are in poor condition, with fungus, in the "uninteresting neighbourhood". If more families or groups of migrants move to such an area, it is harder for them to integrate (PL_NGO_01).

5.3 Education

Education is one of the most significant factors comprising social wellbeing. It is even more crucial for foreigners, especially foreign children, since it is detrimental to their future; secondly, it is a significant integration domain (Ager and Strang 2008). Nevertheless, there are significant educational access differences between foreign children and adults. Whereas the first group has a constitutionally guaranteed right to education, foreign adults face many barriers to accessing education. However, the level of these barriers depends primarily on their legal status and opportunities offered in a particular locality.

Concerning foreign children who arrive and live in Poland, according to the Polish Constitution, everyone has a right to education, which is compulsory until 18 years (Article 70(1)). Therefore, the right to education

is guaranteed not only to Polish citizens but to all children in Poland, including asylum seekers and refugees, who have free and unlimited access to education in public schools until the age of 18 or the completion of higher school.

In September 2020, there were 358 foreign children in the selected localities in primary and secondary schools, although the numbers of pupils in each locality varied (see Table 14).

Table 14 Number of foreign pupils in schools in the selected communes in 2020

Commune	Foreign pupils	Asylum seeking children	Children with international protection (refugee status or subsidiary protection)
Zalesie	7	1	0
Łuków	138	2	9
Wohyń	47	41	2
Zambrów	16	13	0
Łomża	150	0	27
Total	**358**	**57**	**38**

Source: Liczba uczniów cudzoziemców według gmin – dane SIO według stanu na 30 września 2020 r. https://dane.gov.pl/pl/dataset/1426/resource/31180,liczba-uczniow-cudzoziemcow-wedug-gmin-dane-sio-wedug-stanu-na-30-wrzesnia-2020-r/table?page=1&per_page=20&q=&sort=.

The above-presented statistics are not entirely accurate, though, since they do not include foreign children in schools run by NGOs, like the one in Berezówka, which accommodated 21 foreign children in September 2021. The reason is that the Education Information System gathers data only from public schools.

Among the initiatives selected for the research were long-term and short-term programs aimed at including foreigners in education. These initiatives were mainly addressed to children since it is crucial to provide them with access to education from the beginning of their living in Poland.

One such initiative is a supporting teacher, colloquially called cross-cultural assistant, a solution introduced to the educational system in Poland in 2010. A director of the school employs a cross-cultural assistant. This assistance is limited to a maximum of 12 months for a student (Law on School Education, Art. 165 para 8). The tasks of the teacher's assistant usually include supporting foreign students in learning, facilitating adaptation to new surroundings and integration, supporting teachers in teaching foreigners, monitoring and supporting attendance in classes controlling attendance, and mediating, also as translators, in communication between school staff and parents of students (AIDA 2020). It is worth mentioning that this solution is not easy to implement since the final decision to hire a teacher's assistant rests with a local government responsible for administering a particular school (Sobczak-Szelc et al. 2020). Such a solution was also introduced in the selected localities by schools located in the vicinity of the centres for asylum seekers: in Poryte-Jabłoń (located close to Czerwony Bór), Berezówka (located close to Kolonia Horbów) and Wohyń (in the commune hosting asylum seekers' centre in Bezwola). Apart from being aimed at facilitating integration in the education of foreign children, especially with forced migration backgrounds, a cross-cultural assistant also plays a significant role in the inclusion of the children's parents in the local community since it acts as a channel of contact between teacher and parents and between parents of both migrant and Polish children.

It turned out that the schools in the selected localities appraised the role of a cross-cultural assistant and

insisted on hiring such a person from the local governments. However, there are some deficiencies in this solution. The help of a cross-cultural assistant is limited to a maximum of twelve months for a student, which is considered insufficient. Moreover, their remuneration is too low because such assistants are treated as administrative employees rather than teachers. Our empirical material confirms the latter, as one person employed as a cross-cultural assistant admitted she receives a minimal salary.

Kindergarten in Czerwony Bór

Although attending kindergarten is not compulsory for children in Poland, for many parents, it is the only way to be active in the labour market. The situation is not different for migrants who often cannot count on more extensive family assistance in this regard and seek other ways to safeguard daily care for their toddlers. The Dialogue organization saw the problem of lacking such a facility in the asylum seekers centre in Czerwony Bór and, using their resources, decided to open in 2010 and run a kindergarten there. Owing to this initiative, children are taught the basics of the Polish language, and their parents can leave the centre and work. Asylum seekers who lived in the centre at the time of the research appraised the role of the kindergarten and admitted that if there was no such place, they could not work.

Closing of schools in shrinking localities and NGOs assistance

One of the negative outcomes of depopulation is closing the schools due to decreasing number of children attending them. Although the local governments administer the public schools (both primary and secondary), the latter receives the educational subvention from the central administration. And since the subvention is counted per the number of pupils who attend the school, the smaller number of children in the schools means less money for the maintenance of the school. Therefore, if we look at the numbers of schools in the selected localities, they have decreased in the last decade (Table 15).

Table 15 Number of elementary schools in selected localities

Commune	2010	2019	2021
Łuków	4	7	5
Wohyń	6	6	4
Zalesie	5	5	5
Łomża	7	10	7
Zambrów	8	7	6

Source: GUS. (2021a). Bank danych lokalnych GUS, https://bdl.stat.gov.pl/bdl/dane/podgrup/tablica; UM Łuków. (2020). Szkoły podstawowe, http://www.lukow.pl/dla-mieszkancow/oswiata/szkoly-podstawowe; UM Łomża. (2004). Wykaz jednostek oświatowych prowadzonych przez miasto Łomża, http://www.lomza.pl/bip/index.php?wiad=873; UG Zambrów. (2016). Oświata, http://www.ugzambrow.pl/strona-54-oswiata.html.

Closing the schools is not free from local residents' protests, although, as revealed in the research, the opposing voices are rarely considered. A community of Bezwola experienced no different situation; a locality in the Wohyń commune unsuccessfully protested against the school closure. One respondent bitterly reflected on the situation:

> *"I14: You talked about this school which was closed in September this year. And why was it closed?*
> *R: Because there are not enough funds to maintain the school*

[14] In quotes from the interviews, the bold "R" is the "Respondent" and bold "I" the "Interviewer".

I: So the commune authorities made this decision?
R: So it is not just that there are not enough children, but just as if the funds were not enough to run a nonvoluntary school. Because there are schools in the neighbouring places with fewer students than in Bezwola.
I: Then why those other schools were not closed?
R: That's not a question to me.
I: But did the authorities explain it somehow?
R: No, no, the authorities did not explain. The authorities didn't know how to explain" (PL_OLRESI_05).

Another commune, Zalesie, announced the closure of two elementary schools in Berezówka and Kijowiec much earlier in 2012. However, the administration of the mentioned schools was taken over by the local NGOs15 with the active participation of the local community, whose protests led to self-association: "the parents said that they wanted this school to be here because it is a small school, a nice school—Polish parents. And so, the association really started its activity. The parents joined the association founded by a teacher" (PL_NGO_06). Since then, the school in Berezówka, run by Association "Za rzeką Krzną", has become an example of model integration of asylum-seeking children into education.

In addition to integrating children, the school in Berezówka also facilitated encounters with parents of Polish and foreign children. Our respondents recalled one of festivity with a sentiment:

"even on Christmas Eve, our Polish Christmas Eve, Chechen families came with their dishes. They were together. […] There was such a big Christmas Eve because there was little money for it ... and they made their dishes. In addition, there was a lot of such food, and then everyone came, there was a lot, and everyone tried. They ate our Polish cake much more, fish too .. that's right. I must tell you that on the first Christmas Eve when they brought these beautiful decorations; these dishes were so impressive that we took pictures of them. […] In this respect, the parents are really open. It is not that we are not together. We do this together" (PL_SCHOOL_07).

It turned out that the critical factor in migrant children's integration into education is the approach of teachers and their understanding of the specific needs of their foreign pupils:

"In the beginning, it is very hard. Always. We try to explain the topics in different ways. First, we support ourselves with students who have been around for a long time; for example, they help in translation. We ask them to translate or present the lesson visually by using films, animations, and pictures. We use the [google] translator ourselves; if necessary, we translate something. You have to flex a lot, and then, when they are longer [in the school], you know, they understand more and more, they catch more, and it gets easier" (PL_SCHOOL_07).

The assistance of NGOs during the COVID pandemic and online teaching

Another important aspect of social wellbeing was enabling access to education during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020-21, when schools all over the country for shorter or longer intervals were locked down as a measure to prevent an increase in infections. Luckily, online education was introduced quickly so children could attend classes through internet platforms. However, to ensure that every child has tools indispensable for attending the lessons, like a laptop or computer and an internet connection, the schools in the selected localities asked local governments and NGOs for help:

[15] Both in public and non-public schools with the rights of a public school, curricula are implemented that take into account the same core curriculum. Assessing pupils and conducting examinations also follow the same rules as described in the Law on School Education (2016).

> *"We have a cooperation with schools. In case of any problems, they call us. The teachers are calling us, and the director is calling. For example, when distance learning started, some refugees did not have access to a computer to attend such lessons. And our NGO asked everyone, wrote everywhere, and talked about it. People just sent laptops and tablets from different parts of Poland, and we pass this equipment on to these families. We sign a certificate that such and such a person got the equipment. It was also great support. They would not be able to deal with the refugees themselves" (PL_NGO_03).*

Another organization engaged university students as internees who taught asylum-seeking and refugee children the Polish language and helped them with school subjects. It turned out that this kind of assistance has enormously expanded owing to online learning during the pandemic:

> *"During the lockdown, our organization did really well online and strengthened foreign children at the Center for Foreigners in xxx [name of the locality] because people from the university had internships with us throughout the academic year. It was, together with our volunteers, 73 people who helped children with distance learning, mainly in the Polish language and math and English. We have organized a total of 60 computers for children in the pandemic. We have an IT specialist responsible for servicing these devices. Computers were obtained through public fundraising and donations from some companies. All post-leasing services are in good condition; we do not accept donations from individual people. We tried this option of donations, and it didn't make any sense because we got computers that had to be thrown away immediately, so our IT specialist just bought the equipment. We prefer to raise money and buy equipment which is of good quality" (PL_NGO_10).*

Language education for adult migrants

As described above, newly coming foreign children residing in the locality can count on many educational initiatives aiming at their inclusion into the local communities. However, the opportunities for adult migrants are much more limited, and they often need to show their determination to find and participate in an initiative. One of the crucial elements of their inclusion is knowledge of the Polish language. It allows for daily communication and establishing relations with Polish citizens and is often a prerequisite to finding a job. Unfortunately, the offer of shrinking localities in this respect is minimal. Firstly, because there is no Polish language education system offered for migrants (except for asylum seekers), they cannot count on any public language schools anywhere in Poland. Secondly, the offer of private language schools in the selected localities is also very limited (in Łomża and Łuków) or non-existent (in all rural communes: Zambrów, Zalesie and Wohyń). Thirdly local governments in the selected localities do not organize such lessons for migrants partially because they do not distinguish them as a separate group to whom any assistance should be addressed (Szałańska et al. 2022). Lastly, in general, migrants cannot count on free Polish lessons offered by NGOs in larger cities due to the limited presence of migrant organizations in shrinking localities.

Considering all the limitations, the empirical research revealed two initiatives which aim to face the mentioned challenges. The first one is free Polish language classes available to all asylum applicants who live in centres for foreigners. The Law on Protection guarantees access to Polish language classes for adults and basic language-learning materials (Article 71(1)). The Office for Foreigners organises Polish language courses in centres for asylum seekers as a pre-integration action. The language classes are conducted by private entities selected in public procurement to "provision of educational services for the needs of the Office for Foreigners". According to the conditions of the latest procurement announced in 2019, the entity responsible for the organisation of the courses has to provide Polish classes in every centre three times weekly (two hours each) for adults and five times weekly (one hour each) for children (Office for Foreigners,

2019c) (Sobczak-Szelc et al. 2020, p. 60). Even though the participation in the courses is not high (35%), those who attend them can learn the basics of Polish to the level enabling them to communicate or to work:

> *"R: I attended Polish lessons at the centre for foreigners. Even when I lived in a private house [outside the centre for foreigners], I always attended the course.*
> *I: And for how long did you take the course?*
> *R: I attended all the time until I went to work. When I go to work, I don't have time. And now there are new lessons, I was also in English for the first lesson, but I was not for the second. Because my schedule is not so stable, one week I go in the morning, the second in the afternoon, and the third week at night, and when I'm night, I am dead, and I feel very bad" (PL_NCOM_19).*

An additional disadvantage of the Polish language courses organized in the centres for foreigners emerged during the COVID-19 pandemic and lockdown. The courses were stopped due to bureaucratic reasons – the contract with the language school did not foresee the possibility of conducting online lessons:

> *"R: when this pandemic started, we were excluded from everything; even these Polish language courses did not take place.*
> *I: Even online?*
> *R: We didn't have online either because they are conducted in person. The office has signed a contract with such a company, and there were no such courses here. As soon as the green light was on, we could resume these courses; they were resumed." (PL_PUBINST_01).*

In this regard, NGOs were much more efficient since they organized online lessons as fast as they learned the communication and learning platforms: *"we run one of the best courses of Polish as a foreign language. We receive several thousand applications from people who want to learn Polish a year, several thousand at least, and more in the time of a pandemic, because people from outside the city thought they would be able to join it too" (PL_NGO_01).*

5.4 Environment

All the communities included in the study are situated in the eastern part of Poland, with a lower population density and more forest areas than the centre or the west of the country. In the public consciousness, the East of Poland is perceived as an area of beauty, untainted by human activity and nature, where high-quality food, in line with the "bio" trend, is produced.

Two of the localities: Łomża and Zambrów, are situated in Podlaskie Voivodship, in the Green Lungs of Poland[16], which favours the development of ecologically harmless industries. Zalesie and Wohyń are rural areas without large manufacturing plants. It is different in Łuków, mainly due to one of the leading production factories in the commune, i.e. Zakłady Mięsne Łuków (Meat Plant Łuków), whose activity not only increases air pollution as many manufacturing industries do but also causes an unpleasant smell in the area.

Low emission is a very common problem in small and medium-sized cities or the suburbs of large cities, no

[16] Green Lungs of Poland - The functional area is located in the north-eastern part of the country, and its area is 63,234 km², which is 20.2% of the territory of Poland. About 4 million people live in this area, which is about 10% of the country's population. The basis for delimiting the area was one of the most valuable ecological systems in the country and in Europe.

matter which region of Poland they are located. It occurs in the Polish climate for most of the year, from autumn to spring, in the months when it is necessary to heat houses. Because many single-family houses are heated by burning coal, many pollutants are emitted into the atmosphere.

Łomża's activities are aimed at limiting the low emission with the tools like replacing stoves, installing renewable energy installations, solar collectors, photovoltaic panels, developing public transport towards low-emission and emission-free vehicles, promoting non-motorized transport, public bicycle, bicycle paths, road reconstruction and information and education campaigns.

During the field research, we encountered a welcoming initiative called "Notesy z Łukowa" (Notebooks from Łuków). This initiative engages the women who live or used to live in the centre for asylum seekers in Łuków. On the physical level, this involves asylum seekers sewing notebooks from recycled paper and then selling the notebooks, not only as utility items but above all as art objects. The notebook inside is made of recycled paper; the cover is made of coffee bean packets, which come to Łuków from cafes all over Poland. At a deeper level, the initiative was to empower asylum seekers by involving them in deciding in what activity and for how long they want to be involved and providing them with legal funds from the sale of notebooks. The natural environment is not the primary factor in choosing a place to live or deciding to stay or leave in a given commune for economic migrants or asylum seekers. *"For me as a person who escaped from the war, it doesn't matter what the water or air is here. I just think that there is no war here"* (PL_NCOM_03). On the other hand, migrants and non-migrants appreciate the proximity of forests and rivers as walking and recreational areas (PL_NCOM_01, PL_NCOM_02, PL_NCOM_05, PL_NCOM_19, PL_ORLESI_04, PL_ORLESI_06) as one of the migrants described:

> *"I'm not used to drinking tap water, but I read that the water here is really good. We have a filter and that's how we always do (drink) water after filtering, but some of my friends, I saw myself, that they drank tap water and gave it to their children and had no problems. And the air is very good, but here is the Podlaskie Voivodeship nearby, a lot of forests, very clean air and it's very, very nice really here."* (PL_NCOM_01).

5.5 Life satisfaction

Many elements contribute to life satisfaction, but it is hard to identify the initiatives that influence this dimension. Therefore, in the conducted study, we diagnosed life satisfaction on the general level by asking whether the locality is a good living place and whether the people like to live in a given commune.

The work and labour market are critical aspects affecting the reception of the locality. It does not matter if a person is a migrant or non-migrant: *"If a person has a job and has a place to live, it is good to live here, but if a person does not have it, I do not know how to live. It makes no difference whether it is Łomża or Warsaw"* (PL_NCOM_04).

One of the key reasons for the localities to be shrinking is the high outflow rate of young inhabitants because the labour market does not offer the possibilities the people expect: one aspect is a sufficient number of workplaces; another aspect is the quality of the workplaces. The outflow of young people who decide to quit the commune to study or work in other areas of Poland, in bigger cities, or even abroad, is a phenomenon characteristic of this area and shapes many other aspects of everyday life in these communes. Migrant respondents who live in rural localities differ on which city they would move to – the nearby one, any big city in Poland or Warsaw. Still, the common opinion is that rural localities have fewer possibilities

for finding a well-paid and satisfying job. Also, the bigger the locality, the more excellent choice of schools at all stages of education, and types of schools (e.g., music schools) it has: *"I would like to move to a bigger city because there are more learning opportunities for children there. There is not so much choice here"* (PL_NCOM_05). But for some who have a job, a place to live and friends, moving to other parts of Poland is not a good idea. One of migrants stated:

> *"We have lived here for a long time, we have got used to this place. We know everything around, so I would not like to go further than 50 km from here. Why do I need Warsaw, Cracow or Białystok? Why start all over again? Make friends from the beginning?"* (PL_NCOM_14)

The other one had similar opinion:

> *"We live like people. The quality is so-so. I'm just nervous about the lack of response (on status). And generally, it's ok. If it wasn't good, I move to another country. But I've adapted here, I know everything here."* (PL_NCOM_10)

Another aspect of life satisfaction is the standard of living, or rather the opinions on the standard of living. A common observation for the respondents was that only a small part of the community has a high or average standard of living, and the majority have a low standard. Also, a high social stratification is an issue: *"There are groups that have a high quality of life, and there are groups that have a rather low quality of life. Missing (group) in the middle"* (PL_LGOV_03). The standard of living is usually a function of the type of work performed, remuneration, and education. Most of the surveyed localities do not have highly developed industries; in all the three rural localities, the main branch of the economy is agriculture; most of the workplaces are in agriculture, which means these are relatively simple and not well-paid jobs. One of the respondents claimed that their commune is not attractive enough to the economic migrants because it does not offer too many options for work. Still, it can be more accessible and attractive to refugees because it offers places to work and relatively low prices for flat rentals (PL_NGO_03).

For many years, it was believed that the most significant possible part of society should obtain an academic degree. The results of this narrative are expressed in numbers: in 2020, 28.9% of Poles had at least a bachelor's degree (women – 34.5%, men – 23.4%) (GUS 2021a). In the surveyed localities, most of the jobs for people with a degree are working as a teacher, working in the offices like commune offices, or working in a hospital. Still, these places create a very limited number of workplaces, so people with degrees need to find jobs in bigger cities. Another result of these higher aspirations is that working in agriculture is not an attractive job for most young people, so it is an area where immigrants work. Besides agriculture the immigrants work in the building industry or production companies e.g., Zakłady Mięsne Łuków (Meat Plant Łuków), Łukpol (work and household footwear), Okręgowa Spółdzielnia Mleczarska w Piątnicy (District Dairy Cooperative in Piątnica).

The cities have the advantage of having universities (Łomża - one public and three non-public, Łuków – one non-public). However, in rural localities, there are no universities. What is an interesting paradox: the universities of Łomża are famous amongst people from the surrounding rural areas, coming from families which are not wealthy enough to send their children to universities in large cities such as Warsaw, Cracow, Gdańsk or abroad. So, teens from more advantageous families often leave Łomża to study. But, because the costs of studies in eastern Poland are the lowest in the country, there is a migration of international students to study there. This is also connected to the "housing" dimension because the "educational immigrants" are people who rent flats, which are either properties bought as investments or properties of Poles who left Łomża.

When it comes to the priorities of the authorities (the case of Łomża), the respondents did not notice that the youth and their needs were a priority; the most critical group are seniors and sports-related activities (PL_LGOV_02). One of the respondents shared their opinion that local authorities are more willing to invest in the municipal building and the expansion of river boulevards than in activities that could, in the long run, make Łomża a more attractive place to live for young, ambitious people and encourage them to return after their studies (PL_NGO_01).

Access to education can also be seen from different perspectives – in the localities where there are elementary schools, immigrants' children can attend and have good relations with their peers – it may be one of the factors in favour of staying in this commune. But it is a less important factor than the labour market (availability of jobs and remuneration).

When analysing life satisfaction, the feeling of being welcomed by the local inhabitants is also worth mentioning. The activists, who are Polish, but were not born in the commune they live in, even though they have been highly involved in the life of communities, have lived there for teens years, have had their children and grandchildren born and raised there, but did not feel as accepted by the native inhabitants. They feel they are not treated as people with equal rights to speak about local problems. They feel they are strangers because they were not born in the commune. This aspect of life satisfaction may not be as striking in everyday life, but on a deeper level, it can be an essential aspect of living in a given locality. The migrant respondents living in the centre for foreigners spoke positively about being welcomed by the employees and residents of the centre. As for the contacts with the local communities, the overwhelming majority were positive or neutral. The only incident described in the interviews was aggressive behaviour towards one of the respondent's children at school. The teacher was involved in solving the situation, and after that, it did not reoccur (PL_NCOM_03). The migrants who have a satisfactory job, accommodation, and the education needs of their children are met say: *"Yes, I have friends here. I know the city. I feel at home"* (PL_NCOM_17).

6. Welcoming initiatives and economic viability

For the purpose of the research conducted in Poland, economic viability was understood as the ability of a community to meet its basic core needs (Brook 1998). In Poland, it is often narrowed to the economic dimension and related to the availability of jobs, decent salaries and technical infrastructure (Zegar 2012, p. 133). However, we use the term economic viability in a broad sense which involves the following (as indicated in the Welcoming Spaces project proposal):

- availability and use of local resources,
- infrastructure,
- economic sectors,
- availability and quality (in terms of salaries and working conditions) of jobs and services,
- local entrepreneurship,
- place marketing.

Regarding the subjects of economic viability, they comprise migrant newcomers, older residents and the locality/region itself.

To begin the analysis of the empirical material, it is helpful to recall the key themes from the previous subsection describing the socio-economic situation in the selected locations. These areas have relatively low unemployment, a declining number of elderly residents, as well as a slowly increasing but still small number of migrants. Apart from some migrants who came to Poland in the 1970s, often as students from communist countries, these are primarily refugees or economic migrants who are relatively new to the area. They usually work in low-wage, low-skilled jobs, and many have no plans to stay in the area permanently. Consequently, the migrants themselves and the initiatives for their support are somewhat overshadowed by discussions on the economic situation or development opportunities of municipalities, and the migration itself is ambiguously evaluated. However, this ambiguity concerns the extent to which migrants are a real opportunity for development of the municipality than a real need to employ migrants at the local labour market, where most interviewees assume such a necessity and take it for granted. In the following, we will take a closer look at this topic using the statements of interviewees from the meso (authorities and local institutions) and micro (migrants and, to a lesser extent, residents) levels.

Two situations, differing to some extent, are worth mentioning here. In doing so, it is worth noting that this division is a certain simplification of a complex situation. One concerns asylum seekers, representing a minority of foreigners, often families with children, who start their stay in Poland and, in many cases, are still living in a centre for asylum seekers. These facilities are usually located in remote areas, and people living there lack a network of contacts with family and friends who came to Poland earlier (migration networks); also, the language barrier is a big problem. The peripheral location of the centres also creates an additional transport barrier due to the lack of public transport[17].

Economic migrants, who came to Poland to work, are in a slightly different situation. They often come to Poland without other family members but with a job arranged by friends or an employment agency. Economic stability and source of income help them to accommodate and learn, step by step, about the situation in the community, save some money, prepare a place to live, and then bring other family members.

[17] Details regarding housing support under the reception conditions for asylum seekers in Poland are discussed in: Pachocka M. et al. 2020.

This division partly corresponds to the distinction made by many interviewees between migrants from Ukraine and foreigners from other countries, mainly Muslim countries. They treat Ukrainian migration as being more "natural" and more manageable. This has been confirmed by the recent dramatic events related to the war in Ukraine, where Poland (as of 12.07.2022) became a temporary home for around 1.5 mln Ukrainians, when a year earlier, in the summer of 2021, it was decided to close the border with Belarus entirely and not to let in people from Afghanistan, Iraq or Syria:

> *"It's a bit different story with Ukrainians, because they organise themselves, inform each other about the company they work for and enlist slowly one by one. They are reluctant to engage people from a culturally different group, i.e. Muslims"* (PL_NGO_01).

At the same time, in both these cases, the employment obtained is, as mentioned above, relatively low-paid and does not require specialized qualifications. These are often physical jobs for men, especially in construction, while women work in the service sector. Both genders also find jobs in agriculture. However, it also happens that there is a search for employees with specific qualifications that the Polish market lacks, and foreigners are offered competitive rates, such as truck/lorry drivers.

> *"I: And what kind of job has your husband found? What type of work?*
> *R: He cobbled streets (...) Where do our girls work? They clean homes. I haven't done that yet; I worked in the mushroom-growing cellar.*
> *I: So physical work is accessible, where do people from the centre work?*
> *R: In various places, in factories, they cobble streets, pick fruits, but it's hard work, and it hurts the back afterwards."* (PL_NCOM_19)

> *"There are companies that bring people with specific skills here; they know the demand. But, on the other hand, some of these people come here simply because they want to stay in Poland and look for jobs here, on the spot."* (PL_OLRESI_06).

> *"We have production plants here that employ a vast number of people from Ukraine (...) we have (...) many farmers, large scale farmers who raise cattle and cultivate huge areas of land; they also hire Ukrainians (...) a production company that manufactures windows. Companies that repair roads and make cobblestones. They all rely on migrants."* (PL_LGOV_02).

As for those who come to Poland without their families, for work purposes, they often work 12 or more hours to save up more and to be able to transfer their savings to their families back home. Institutional respondents emphasize foreigners' hard work and motivation compared to typical Polish jobseeker. Then there are those job offers with board and lodging, which on the one hand, allows them to save more money, but on the other hand, prevents them from "breaking away" from work and becoming more rooted in the local community:

> *"From Moldova also came a lot, they work over 16, 14 hours too, from Ukraine as well. They come to earn money and work. They don't have children, and that's why they do it."* (PL_NCOM_19).

> *"Those women are so hard-working that one will do more than three when compared with Łomża women."* (PL_LGOV_02).

> *"In the village (...) there is a farmer who currently has (...) cows (...), and they milk them three times a day. He hires those refugees, Ukrainians. As for the work on a farm in our area, it's a lot, because they get 3.5 thousand zlotys per hand, they have free accommodation and food, so they can keep 1500 zlotys for themselves, to have money for cigarettes and fuel, so finally, they can easily send 2000 zlotys to their families"* (PL_LGOV_02).

> *"We also have a big factory here where shifts used to be 12 hours long (...) When pay conditions improved in Poland, there was a shortage of Polish workers, and foreign workers appeared. Those were mainly, and still are, Ukrainians, but now they work more in construction or renovation, not in production, where the work is harder but less paid. At the same time, some exotic nations have appeared, for example, the Filipinos".* (PL_LGOV_06).

> *"Those who come here alone will sleep in the provided accommodation (included in their wages), and they get meals and so on. They are just sending money home, not earning them. They don't really function here; for example, they don't need to drive children to school, and such life doesn't generate costs. People not from Ukraine have problems with employment because they don't want to work for 12 zlotys per hour; they're out of their homes all the time and don't have sufficient means. That is the problem."* (PL_NGO_01)

People who have been in Poland for a longer time aspire both to improve their qualifications, as well as to advance professionally and return to work in their profession acquired in the country of origin (nurse, accountant, etc.), which is also associated with increased knowledge of the Polish language. This can be considered a typical career path of a migrant, as well as investing and taking care of children's education so that they have a better start in the labour market in the future. At the same time, the language barrier is also one of the main obstacles to finding employment, and public institutions' support is often inadequate.

> *"Personally, I really want to work, go to a factory somewhere so they can teach me something useful. The only thing I can't do is to speak Polish; it bothers me a lot. Obviously, I want to learn Polish a lot. Once a week, we have Polish classes here. The teacher is very good but once a week is not enough"* (PL_NCOM_12).

While there are instances of people starting their businesses, these are relatively rare and involve much sacrifice. Nor do they – for the time being – have a significant impact on the local economy and labour market.

> "*The idea to open her own bar/restaurant came 2.5 years ago (in 2018). It took 1.5 years from the idea to the realisation – that's how much time Mrs X. needed to do catering training, find premises, and deal with paperwork (...) Mrs X. is not only the owner; she works in the bar as a cook, waitress, deals with deliveries, and does everything herself. She only outsources the bookkeeping (...) In the beginning, Ms X. received funding for the start-up of the business – from EU funds, funding was granted by the Marshal's Office (...) Now she is looking for further funding (...) She works 16-17 hours a day (including weekends) every day*" (PL_OLRESI_05).

It is also worth noting that the difficulties in finding a job and, more broadly, better-paid jobs at senior positions are not a problem specific to migrants but concerns the entire population of the analysed regions. Furthermore, though access to infrastructure and services is better in urban areas, the labour market is still relatively shallow, so foreigners consider moving to major cities. It is also one of the reasons why young Poles, especially with higher education, migrate to major cities as well.

> *"R: And here, where we live (...) finding work is tough. It is difficult to settle here; I perceive this region as weak. So I may have to go to Warsaw if there is no way to find a job here.*

I: Do you think that this could be the reason why people prefer to live in Łomża or Zambrów, because it is closer to the hospital, easier to get somewhere, etc.?
R: No, I think that the job's availability matters. There is more work in big cities like Warsaw, Gdańsk, and Białystok. There's no work in small towns" (PL_NCOM_09).

Summarizing the above discussion and applying it to the key research questions:

- How is the emergence of welcoming spaces conditioned by economic viability in the locality?
- How welcoming spaces may contribute to this factor?

The two points can be interrelated. The comparatively low unemployment throughout the country and the growing demand for unskilled and relatively cheap labour have created employment opportunities for the refugees residing in the centres for foreigners and economic migrants, primarily from neighbouring Ukraine and Belarus.

The perception of these migrations as short-term and mainly economic led to the situation in which the creation of "welcoming spaces" and initiatives related to the integration of foreigners have only a limited and more temporary character and not a longer-term and more strategic perspective. Often the most integrated, but at the same time not seeing the chance for full professional development, foreigners leave or plan to depart the area of the surveyed municipality. Therefore, there is a lack of people who, on the one hand, could engage and, on the other hand, be the beneficiaries of the more developed and long-term projects. Moreover, short-term economic migration does not encourage migrants to undertake activities other than work, nor does it encourage entrepreneurs to invest in their employees in the long term. Thus, there is a shortage of local leaders – foreigners who could, to a large extent, organize their activities for the benefit of their minority. Although there is a growing group of activists and entrepreneurs among migrants, they are still not a sufficiently strong and organized minority to significantly impact the socio-economic development of their region and the creation of welcoming spaces.

"*Let's make it clear. When someone is unhappy here and cannot cope, they leave (...) Some families move to another city, to a bigger one, because there is a better chance for employment. But there are also people who have just arrived (...), and then there are new families who need to be helped, and we need to get to know them (...) I know probably about ten families who have been here for years, whose members (...) say – Łomża is my home (...) these are the families who have been here for the longest time, who have always been here".* (PL_NGO_01)

NGOs working for foreigners are among the few entities interested in a more systematic and complex approach. It is challenging to include here employers who aim to find new employees or even facilitate the accommodation process but not to integrate the foreigners into the local community. As for the representatives of local governments, the issue is less clear-cut, i.e. they recognize the economic dimension of migration and foster social activities, but it seems that – at least until now – they do not handle this topic in a well-organized and planned manner, i.e. they do not regard creating "welcoming spaces" as crucial.

However, it is noteworthy that one of the infrastructural fields where the presence of migrants is perceived both as a challenge and an opportunity – are educational institutions. The responsibility for maintaining schools in the Polish educational system falls on local government units. Still, this task is co-financed from the state budget as a part of the subsidy paid for each student. In the case of an ageing population and thus a decreasing number of school-age children, migrant children are an essential argument for maintaining a given educational institution. It is essential for smaller municipalities, where educational expenses exceed

1/3 of the budget and the school building is often the only place in a given village/community that enables organizing meetings of residents (it might be an argument for young parents to stay in this particular municipality). It has already increased daily contact, starting from kindergarten and school where migrants' children attend. More and more foreigners have also started to work in the service sector, including public institutions, like "A Handyman for Seniors" project in Łomża, which offers support in small repairs to lonely elderly people. This also strengthens the frequency of social interaction and builds a positive image of migrants as a permanent local community element.

The importance of migrants described above, although growing, is still marginal and will change soon. Even without the war in Ukraine, the last 2-3 years have seen a regular increase in the number of foreigners in Poland. Over the past few months (since February 2022), the number of foreigners residing in Poland has increased by nearly 1.5 million. Currently, the share of foreigners in the Polish labour market exceeds 6% and should reach 10% in the next few years. Thus, issues related to the economic integration of foreigners will move into the policy mainstream at the level of the country as a whole and at the level of the localities surveyed. This should also increase the number of foreigners residing in the surveyed municipalities.

7. Welcoming initiatives and political stability

Political stability can be understood as a situation of a predictable political environment that comprises predictable (and based on law) central and local government decisions, the rule of law, strong institutions, a responsive and efficient bureaucracy, low corruption and a legal climate for sustainable development (Davies 1969; Radu 2015). In this meaning, political stability may refer to a country, a region, a municipality or a particular locality. Individuals (migrant newcomers, established migrants, citizens) rely on political stability or suffer from political instability. Political stability can correspond to:

- local/regional/national policies,
- governance and its actors,
- leadership and power relations,
- civic participation,
- citizenship and legal status,
- membership/social cohesion/belonging,
- placemaking/emplacement.

In this section of the report, we discuss three selected issues from the above mentioned that have been well reflected in empirical research, namely:

- national and local policies,
- governance and its actors,
- civic participation.

7.1 National and local policies toward migrant integration and socio-economic development

National policy for migration and migrant integration

Poland had lacked a migration strategy on the national level since 2016, when the new government of Law and Justice annulled the strategic document 'Polish Migration Policy—Current State of Play and Proposed Actions' (Strzelecki, Pachocka 2020, p. 254-255; Sobczak-Szelc et al. 2020, p. 21-22; Molęda-Zdziech et al., 2021; Okólski and Wach, 2020). Consequently, Poland's migration and integration policy is dispersed among different legal acts, governance levels and institutions. In this situation, local actors such as local governments, NGOs, migrant networks and religious institutions became crucial when providing migrants with assistance (Szałańska et al. 2022; also check: Sobczak-Szelc et al. 2020; Molęda-Zdziech et al. 2021; Okólski and Wach 2020). The extent of access of foreigners in Poland to the labour market, education, healthcare and welfare systems depends on their legal status. Municipalities play an important role in welcoming and including migrants into the local tissue in such patchwork governance.

It is also important to highlight that no national strategy or other documents suggest attracting migrants to settle in depopulating regions. On the contrary, most migrants come to the largest metropolises, and only a few settle down in shrinking regions. This phenomenon can be explained as follows: "Such a situation applies to the eastern border regions, namely Podlaskie, Lubelskie, and Podkarpackie Voivodeships, which attract immigrants from nearby Ukraine and Belarus. In addition, geographical dispersion of accommodation centres for asylum seekers (six out of ten centres are located in Lubelskie and Podlaskie

Voivodeships) makes forced migrants stay in these regions, either temporarily for the duration of the asylum procedure or permanently, if they decide to settle down there. Although big cities like Bialystok or Lublin are the preferable destinations in the mentioned voivodeships, some immigrants live in middle-sized urban areas, like Lomza, Zambrow, Suwalki (Podlaskie), Lukow, or Biala Podlaska (Lubelskie)" (Szałańska et al. 2022, p. 2-3).

A policy of location of the centres for foreigners

In Poland, the Office for Foreigners, supervised by the Ministry of Interior and Administration, is responsible for processing the applications for international protection and delivering social assistance to asylum seekers. It also runs centres for foreigners who have submitted asylum claims (Szulecka et al. 2018; Pachocka, Sobczak-Szelc 2020). "In 2019, the Office had 11 centres for foreigners, including four of its own centres in Podkowa Leśna-Dębak, Biała Podlaska, Czerwony Bór near Łomża, and Linin near Góra Kalwaria, and seven centres contracted with external entities through agreements concluded as part of public procurement procedures. The centres in Podkowa Leśna-Dębak, near the capital city of Warsaw, and in Biała Podlaska, 30 kilometres from the Polish-Belarusian border, and the BCP in Terespol are reception centres from which asylum seekers are often transferred to other centres, called residence or stay centres, in which they can decide to live during the asylum procedure (Office for Foreigners 2019, p. 4)" (Pachocka, Sobczak-Szelc 2020, p. 17).

It is also essential how the procedure of locating the centre for asylum seekers looks like: "The centres for asylum seekers are located in without consulting this decision with the local communities and without preparing them through an educational campaign concerning the culture and customs of the future residents of the centre. Although not including the opinions of the interested ones has been common practice in choosing the location of asylum seekers' centres (Chrzanowska, Klaus and Kosowicz, 2011), be it a secluded military base in a forest, town, or a city, this decision appeared to be especially misguided for a city dealing with social and economic problems. The location of centres in cities that are losing their functions creates a challenge for the inclusion of immigrants –lack of work is a problem not only for migrants but also for residents" (Szałańska et al. 2022). It has to be highlighted that middle-sized, shrinking cities face many problems and a relatively small group of migrants, who need integration activities, is not listed usually among crucial challenges. Moreover, middle-sized Polish cities usually have a homogeneous social structure and very little experience with hosting migrants, especially those from culturally distant countries.

Local policies

The local governments in analysed localities in Poland faced many problems such as the loss of the number of inhabitants, ageing of the local community, migration of young, well-educated residents to larger cities and/or abroad, and an insufficient number of jobs on the local market (based on our survey and analysis of official documents). However, the community of migrants in the studied towns was small; it was not perceived as an opportunity or threat to the development of the municipality; foreigners were also not treated as a chance to reverse the negative demographic trends taking place in the surveyed localities (which was also due to their small number). Instead, they were perceived as a factor indifferent to the municipality's development (survey). Furthermore, the survey showed that local governments did not perceive themselves as ones who should create conditions and take action to integrate migrants. According to the survey, the actors that are responsible for such actions are international organizations (UN, UNHCR, OSCE, etc.), diplomatic and consular representations from the countries of origin of migrants, regional authorities

(government and local government), government administration (Prime Minister, Ministry of Interior and Administration, Ministry of Family and Social Policy), non-governmental organizations. In the city itself, schools were identified as the most crucial actor helping to integrate migrants into localities.

Also, analysis of strategic documents of the selected localities has shown that the authorities paid little attention to the presence of foreigners. Immigrants were not treated as a separate group by the local public policy; in a sense, no specific instruments were addressed to them nor adopted unique solutions facilitating their integration. Although in the analyzed development strategies and revitalization plans, there were at most single mentions of the presence of migrants, in some documents, nothing was written about foreigners (Table 16).

Table 16 Problem of immigrants in strategic development documents

Locality	Urban development strategy	Migrant content	Revitalisation plan	Migrant content
Łomża (town)	"Strategia Zrównoważonego Rozwoju Miasta Łomża do 2020 roku"	Lack of housing for beneficiaries of international protection and foreigners with a permit for tolerated stay staying in the city	„Lokalny program rewitalizacji miasta Łomża na lata 2017-2023"	No references to foreigners/refugees/ immigrants
Zambrów (urban commune)	"Strategia Rozwoju Miasta Zambrów na lata 2012-2022"	Individual Integration Program as a task of Poviat Family Support Centre (but this is not related to the individual situation of Zambrów)	„Lokalny Program Rewitalizacji Gminy Miasto Zambrów na lata 2017-2022"	Individual Integration Program as responsibility of Poviat Family Support Centre
Łuków (town)	„Strategia Rozwoju Lokalnego Miasta Łuków na lata 2015-2020"	reasons for granting assistance to clients of the municipal social welfare center in Łuków in 2011: difficulties in integrating people who have received refugee status or subsidiary protection (20 families, 100 people)	„Lokalny Program Rewitalizacji Miasta Łuków na lata 2017-2022"	No references to foreigners/refugees/ immigrants
Wohyń (rural commune)	"Program Rozwoju Gminy Wohyń na lata 2015-2023"	No references to foreigners/refugees/ immigrants	-	-
Zalesie (rural commune)	„Strategia Rozwoju Gminy Zalesie na lata 2008-2020"	No references to foreigners/refugees/ immigrants	-	-

Source: own elaboration by the H2020 Welcoming Spaces team at SGH Warsaw School of Economics based on different sources.[18]

[18] UM Łomża. (2007). Strategia Zrównoważonego Rozwoju Miasta Łomża do 2020 roku. http://biznes.um.lomza.pl/archiwa/3480; UM Zambrów. (2012). Strategia Rozwoju Miasta Zambrów na lata 2012-2022. https://zambrow.pl/publikacje-urzedu-miasta/strategia-rozwoju-miasta-zambrow-na-lata-2012-2022/; UM Łuków. (2015). Strategia Rozwoju Lokalnego Miasta Łuków na

Meso-level interviewees in the analysed biggest localities explained why little attention was paid to migrants in official documents. One of the respondents, a city hall representative, claimed that the group of foreigners is so tiny that there is no need to take them under special consideration when planning strategies for urban development (PL_LGOV_03). Another respondent highlighted that the foreigners who experience problems are treated equally as other persons socially and economically excluded (PL_LGOV_02). Those who need social assistance can benefit from the Regional and Municipal Social Assistance Centre and the Municipal Integration Centre (case of Łomża). A representative of the local authorities underlined that the activities dedicated exclusively to migrants are led by NGOs (PL_LGOV_03). Also, schools were mentioned as essential entities taking action against foreigners (survey). Another respondent claimed that the presence of foreigners is politically "sensitive", which is why the subject does not exist in the city's strategic documents (PL_LGOV_01) (Szałańska et al. 2022).

However, not including foreigners in official documents may have a different reason than indicated above. This may result from treating foreigners as an integral part of the city's population, meaning they constitute an equal group. Therefore, it is advisable to treat them like Poles, assuming equal access to public services in the city. For example, the Warsaw 2030 Strategy consciously does not mention foreigners separately, considering the inclusive nature of the city.

7.2 Governance and actors involved

Various actors – both local government and NGOs – were involved in the governance of selected localities at the local level. On the side of self-government entities, it is necessary to indicate local government authorities and organisations such as the vocational integration centre, municipal and communal social welfare centres and schools. As the examined towns were small, these institutions cooperated without appointing a formal coordinator for foreigners, as evidenced by the statement of the representative of local authorities:

> *"Here, the city authorities are open to migrants, cooperation and assistance, and generally to ensure conditions. Municipal Social Welfare Center [MOPS], even my centre. So, when it comes to coordinating all of these activities concerning our migrants, X is too small a centre to designate any specific institution. We, on our own, are these three institutions – the Center, MOPS and the city. We manage without a specific coordinator. We only exchange actions and share these actions. We all act, so to speak, to one goal"* (PL_LGOV_02).

The second group of entities co-managing the examined city were NGOs, and two types of them can be indicated. Usually, there were organisations with their headquarters in large cities but implementing projects in individual localities, or organisations based in a large city and having their branches in the surveyed localities. NGOs were run by local residents, including foreigners, and people from larger urban centres to

lata 2015-2020. https://umlukow.bip.lubelskie.pl/index.php?id=227&id_dokumentu=946361&akcja=szczegoly&p2=946361; UG Wohyń. (2015). Program Rozwoju Gminy Wohyń na lata 2015-2023. https://gminawohyn.pl/program-rozwoju-gminy-wohyn/; UG Zalesie. (2008). Strategia Rozwoju Gminy Zalesie na lata 2008-2020. http://www.zalesie.pl/asp/pl_start.asp?typ=14&menu=56&strona=1&sub=111&subsub=43; UM Łomża. (2017). Lokalny program rewitalizacji miasta Łomża na lata 2017-2023. http://www.lomza.pl/index.php?wiad=9193; UM Zambrów. (2017). Lokalny Program Rewitalizacji Gminy Miasto Zambrów na lata 2017-2022. https://zambrow.pl/rewitalizacja/obwieszczenie-lokalny-program-rewitalizacji-2/; UM Łuków. (2017). Lokalny Program Rewitalizacji Miasta Łuków na lata 2017-2022. https://umlukow.bip.lubelskie.pl/index.php?id=228&akcja=szczegoly&p2=1191648.

implement the project. It is well illustrated by these statements of meso-level respondents from NGOs:

> *"The coach was a Chechen. The mentors were Chechens. The psychologist was Russian speaking, because she was Ukrainian by origin, and the rest were Poles"* (PL_NGO_01).

> *"We have a Polish refugee collective in the centre in X. We employ women, refugees, from this collective. Therefore, they also play the role of people who distribute humanitarian aid in the centre"* (PL_NGO_10).

Very rarely were there bottom-up organisations in a given locality (PL_SCHOOL_07). NGOs active in selected localities usually came there from bigger cities. Activists came to implement the project or donate money (e.g. to the local school's headmaster) and returned to their cities. Sometimes, those were NGOs acting locally, but with their headquarters in a big city, e.g. Warsaw.

The formal aspect of the activists' cooperation with the NGOs differed. NGO representatives were sometimes employed in the organisation, but usually, it was a volunteering activity. This depended heavily on the organisation's access to funding. Until 2016, when these organisations received funds from the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF), many activities were carried out, and NGOs experts received remuneration for their work. After 2016, when the distribution of funds from AMIF was suspended, cooperation changed, usually from employment to volunteering (PL_NGO_10). Also, the scope of activities was limited due to limited budgets[19]. As noted by one of the representatives of NGOs:

> *"When I was the coordinator of X, nine people worked, and nine people were employed. A powerful team. For some time, since AMIF was taken from us, contests were not resolved, we had to limit a lot, I, we had to allow everyone. Those who wanted to stay with us as volunteers, those who, it is unknown, had to look for a way to earn money, simply left. I stayed as a volunteer, and X was with the team; there were three cultural mentors because that's what is needed in these cultural differences"* (PL_NGO_01).

Limited financial funds forced NGOs to compete with each other, but sometimes it happened that organisations from large cities received funding for the implementation of projects, but the implementation of these projects was commissioned by local, smaller NGOs, which is explained by the statement:

> *"Of course, we work with other organisations because AMIF, our main funding source, was suspended for a few years, and then it turned out that voivodes were given this role of allocating funds from the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund. It resulted from a few things, for example, that they are given to organisations that often cannot operate in the area physically... so we cooperate on the basis that, for example, an organisation.... received a grant. We carry out these tasks for them related to helping refugees"* (PL_NGO_01).

The role of NGOs should be supplementary for the authorities in developing public policies towards foreigners. However, they often play a crucial role in assistance and integration activities for this group of residents (Dragan 2017, p. 28; Pawlak, 2018, p. 297; Sobczak-Szelc et al. 2020, p. 31-32). This statement evidences the importance of NGOs in the integration of foreigners; however, sometimes, the role of institutions is unjustifiably undermined and downsized:

> *"The Polish government is obliged to create integration programs, which it does not do because it cannot cope with it, because there are no institutions because they are only on paper. These MOPS [municipal social welfare centres]*

[19] The issue of the AMIF calls is discussed in detail in 'Section 2.1. Key Actors, Cooperation among Governance-levels and Experiences' in Pachocka and Sobczak-Szelc 2020, pp. 34-38.

integration programs were only money granted to people; no one thought about how to explain to them where they came from, what awaited them here, and their rights. As if it fell on non-governmental organisations and we did not always have the time and opportunities to reach these people to explain it like this" (PL_NGO_01).

Schools are a significant actor in the integration process (surveys, PL_PUBINST_01; PL_NGO_02). In Poland, children have the right and obligation to attend school, regardless of their parents' legal status. Schools have daily contact with children, often with their parents; they are a bridge between Poles and foreigners. One of migranst desribe the situation in a following way:

R: What is the relationship with teachers?
M: Very good.
R: What language do you speak to teachers?
M: I speak Polish poorly, but I understand well. I speak to them in Russian, they speak to me in Polish
(PL_NCOM_14)

The other one stated:

R: How do you like the school?
M: It's okay. I know the director, the deputy director.
R: Where did you meet them?
M: At school at meetings. We went to picnics together.
R: What is the relationship with teachers?
M: Also good.
R: Children do not complain?
*M: No, absolutely. If there are any problems, the teachers call me (*PL_NCOM_15)

Schools that cooperate closely with centres for asylum seekers are also essential partners of programs run by NGOs and are said to be excellent partners for cooperation (PL_NGO_02). The programs aim to support children in learning, organizing additional classes and workshops (PL_NGO_01). Additional lessons are organized in schools, managed by school principals, and local teachers conduct lessons. Sometimes the support of NGOs consists of subsidizing educational institutions by purchasing the necessary educational equipment, e.g., books (PL_NGO_02). The following statements illustrate the scope of this cooperation:

"Cooperation with schools looks great. And what we buy as part of the help, we buy, for example, for schools. And textbooks for learning Polish as a foreign language. ... as part of all our projects, they spent several tens of thousands on books, for example [books] to [learn] Polish as a foreign language because we are trying to subsidise the school" (PL_NGO_02).

"Of course, we work with the school all the time, with the school attended by refugee children, which is one elementary school that all the children attend. I guess the two of them only go elsewhere. We also cooperate with the school, even next week we have a performance in ... We are going because we are preparing another performance with children from the centre [for foreigners] and we are going to ... to the community [cultural] centre. The supervisor of the trip, the manager of the trip is the school principal, so our cooperation is always, and as much as we can, we try to do some integration activities" (PL_NGO_10).

One interlocutor emphasized that such cooperation has many benefits; children learn in a familiar environment. Moreover, for teachers, they cease to be just difficult pupils and become a source of additional income (PL_NGO_02).

Schools also provided activities targeted at Polish children, aimed at sensitizing them to the presence of culturally different peers. These were shows of national dances and refreshments with traditional dishes (activities organized by children and parents). NGOs also organized workshops on the culture of foreigners in schools (PL_NGO_01). Some schools where pupils with migrant backgrounds attended, such as the school in X run by a foundation created by parents, had their external sponsors, who sometimes came from the local community (councillors, village leaders), and sometimes came from large cities:

> *"Sometimes we have sponsors of such local ones; I don't know some municipal councillors, sometimes our village administrators/leaders also pay some sums there. Well, such trips are co-financed for children, so the child does not pay 100 zlotys, only 50 zlotys. Or we even have a lot of free trips or for symbolic amounts. We had a donor, even an anonymous gentleman, who gave us 10,000 [zlotys]. He bought toys and teaching aids for our school. And we also got 5,000 [zlotys] for a trip from some law firm in Warsaw"* (PL_NGO_06).

NGOs implement many integration programs in cooperation with centres for asylum seekers (PL_NGO_02). Representatives of NGOs positively assess the cooperation with those entities: *"I mean, [the administration of the centres for foreigners] are open, supportive, meet us as much as they can and are very willing to work with us, that is, they are very willing to be involved in projects"* (PL_NGO_02). These programs were often addressed to children and took place in cooperation between NGOs, centres for asylum seekers and schools, as evidenced by the statement:

> *"We are at the centre [for foreigners]; (...) as part of EU projects, as long as we had money, i.e. until 2016, we did a lot of integration activities, i.e. activities between the school and the centre; between school children and children [from the centre]; we employed intercultural assistants, which was also very important at school; in general, we were the only organisation to employ intercultural assistants in the X region, as long as we had EU funds, and that was all until 2016"* (PL_NGO_10).

The cooperation of centres for asylum seekers with the schools was also essential, as illustrated by this example: *"In general, we have good cooperation with the centre. If something happens, the manager of the centre calls. If we have a case, we also call. I think this cooperation is good, with the centre's employees, first of all with the director; there was greater cooperation. Now, because of a cultural assistant who is seven hours in school, they also know a lot about children's behaviour"* (PL_SCHOOL_05).

Many integration programs implemented in centres for foreigners by NGOs are aimed at women, providing them with entertainment, and sometimes are supposed to empower them. For instance, one NGO activist, an artist encouraging migrant women to make notebooks by hand, used her contacts and her reputation in the art world to organise a distribution network for manufactured products. As a result, notebooks were sold in art galleries and socially responsible cafes (PL_NGO_06). In addition, some NGOs cooperated with lecturers and university students; for example, students came to teach children the Polish language, which was treated as an obligatory professional practice (Stowarzyszenie Dla Ziemi).

The growing social awareness of the problems and challenges resulting from the cultural diversity of society is also observed among uniformed services (such as police and border guards). They asked one of the NGOs

for training courses concerning the culture of migrants (PL_NGO_03). The offer of training for uniformed services was small, and the motivation of this professional group to learn about the cultural customs of migrants was not great.

Also, large companies are interested in cooperating with NGOs and helping migrants. This is usually material support; supermarkets donate vouchers for food and household chemicals, and other companies donate clothes or furniture. These can be big, international entities such as Biedronka (a popular discount in Poland) or Ikea, as well as small local entities (PL_NGO_10, PL_NGO_01). One of the respondents explained the meaning of this kind of cooperation:

> *"We have wonderful allies in the form of [name of the company] whom we love and value greatly, and this is absolutely one of the greatest organisations we know. Thanks to them, we were recommended to IKEA, because it turned out that IKEA is looking for someone in the X region to cooperate (...) ... at this point, we start cooperation with IKEA, i.e., with a company that will support us materially, will support people in the [asylum] procedure, with whom we want to organise various items, such things are for a better life"* (PL_NGO_10).

Material support from companies of different sizes for forced migrants became incredibly intensive after the beginning of the war in Ukraine. But this was not the subject of our study.

There were also conflicts in communities with a visible immigrant minority, and one of the most publicised conflicts in recent years was a series of events in Łomża. The conflict situations concerned Chechens. Their different culture and religion, including the characteristic clothing of women, clearly distinguished this national group from Poles. Some behaviours of Chechens, such as evening meetings of large groups of men in public space, loud conversations, participation in gambling, and sometimes problems with drugs, aroused aversion in the inhabitants of Łomża, brought about associations with the Chechen mafia, and, as a result, a sense of threat and antipathy (PL_NGO_01, PL_NGO_03).

As a result, conflict situations, acts of aggression from the Polish side, such as beatings, attempts to break the hijab of Chechen women, stabs with a knife, and vulgar leaflets distributed in public transport occurred in Łomża. In such situations, the NGO became a critical mediator and took measures to prevent the escalation of the conflict, mutual hostility and long-term disturbance of the stabilisation of everyday life. The organisation's activities would not be effective without close long-term cooperation with foreigners and mutual trust. Furthermore, the indicated conflicts concerned mainly Chechens, and the Chechen elders played a significant role in solving them, alleviating tensions and stigmatising community members if they committed criminal acts (PL_NGO_01).

The attitude of the police was also important, as according to one of the interviewees, at first, they "closed their eyes" and never found the perpetrators. However, over time, and also thanks to training on the culture of Chechens and their presence in Poland, the police treated the Chechens' reports of acts of aggression more seriously and searched for the perpetrators more and more conscientiously (PL_NGO_03).

7.3 Civic participation

The level of civic participation assessed by specific measures, such as organisation of public consultations or bottom-up activity, was generally low in the examined localities. On the one hand, the local government

did not involve the inhabitants in governing the city; the inhabitants were not encouraged to get involved, and social consultations and other forms of activating the inhabitants were rarely organised. On the other hand, the residents' interest in governance was minimal (PL_LGOV_03, PL_LGOV_06). One of the reasons for the residents' lack of interest in co-governance was the lack of education in this area, which, according to one of the meso-level interlocutors, should start at school:

> *"Social involvement is very low, but it results from the fact that we do not educate young people in any way how to influence the reality around us, we do not show them what the civic budget is, what NGOs are or what they are, what forms of association they also have, that they can act, that they can submit their ideas, that we cannot tell them that…"*(PL_NGO_01).

City authorities often treated social participation instrumentally. The leading example is the perception of the participatory budget by city officials, as commented by the representative of the NGO:

> *"We treat the civic budget in the city so instrumentally to do things for which there is no money. So normally, i.e. we will constantly renovate parking lots, pavements and all the rest"* (PL_NGO_01).

On the other hand, some typical civic participation activities for towns and rural areas were undertaken. Those were rural housewives' clubs (sometimes men were also participants) where women gathered, sometimes organised cultural events for the village community, or just spent time together. Also, associations of regional products were active. Such organisations aimed to promote, produce and sell traditional regional food. Men were active in volunteer fire brigades. This was reflected in the following statement of one of the meso-level respondents from the local government:

> *"Among associations, these are associations of voluntary fire brigades. They work, I am the commune president myself. In addition, I am the president of the '... local products' association, where residents and farmers also have their products registered from their grandfather's grandfather, passed on by their grandmothers, are registered. Apart from that, there were also rural housewives' clubs, of which there was such a large number. …. I have friends who are also members of the rural housewives' club ... the ladies there have engaged their husbands or boys, who sometimes go to exhibitions or fairs somewhere to present their products or support some social or cultural events, where the commune also organises, and they present themselves at the same time, they can also earn on it. And so this cooperation even looks nice (...). Anyway, as I said, as we do not have our cultural centre, most of the events are in cooperation, we give money, and all these associations help us organizationally; various institutions of this type operate in culture but are not financed by the commune"* (PL_LGOV_06).

An interesting example of the social involvement of residents was an association consisting of parents and teachers founded to support children's education. When the local government decided to close the local school, the association and the parents took up the fight to maintain the school and then undertook to run this institution. The association was responsible for the formal aspects of running the school – e.g., employing teachers, and accounting, while parents were involved in the organization of socio-cultural events (PL_SCHOOL_07).

In five selected localities, some NGOs were active; the activities undertaken by them concerned support for migrants, women empowerment, equalizing educational opportunities for children, and some activities for sustainable development were undertaken as well.

8. Notes for further research in WP 2-5

8.1 History, geography and positionality

The analyzed localities in Poland are located in two regions (voivodships): Lublin and Podlaskie. Lublin Voivodship occupies 8% of the country's area. Over 94% of the area of the voivodship is farmland, wooded land and bushes, and 3.9% is built-up and urbanised land. In addition, 22.7% of the area of the voivodship is covered by various forms of nature conservation (5.6% of the country's protected areas). In Lublin Voivodship there are two national parks: Roztoczański and Poleski. Podlaskie Voivodeship covers 6.5% of the country's total area. Agricultural land and wooded and semi-timbered forests make up 92% of the voivodship's area, and built-up and urbanised areas – 3.8%. Protected natural areas account for 31.6% of the total area of this voivodship. On the territory of Podlaskie Voivodeship there are Białowieski, Wigierski and Narwiański National Parks (GUS 2021b). The Białowieża Primeval Forest is listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Podlaskie and Lubelskie Voivodeships are two out of five voivodeships (Podlaskie, Warmińsko-Mazurskie, Lubelskie, Podkarpackie and Świętokrzyskie) classified as eastern Poland's regions. These are regions with poor socio-economic development, for which a special fund was created in 2007 as one of the EU's regional policy instruments. The funds were and are still spent on infrastructure development and reducing the social gap compared to other regions in Poland. Podlaskie Voivodeship in 2019 had a GDP per capita of PLN 42976. The voivodeship was thus ranked 12th in the country. Lubelskie Voivodeship indicated PLN 40741, which gave it the last – 16th – position in the country. For comparison, the highest position in this respect was occupied by the Mazovian Voivodeship, where this indicator was PLN 96370 (calculations based on Central Statistical Office data).

Both voivodships Lublin and Podlaskie are characterised by a rich history dating back to the Middle Ages, evidenced by numerous cultural monuments, e.g. the Old Town in Zamość (Lubelskie Voivodeship) inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List. Podlaskie Voivodeship is a meeting point for four cultures and religions: Catholicism, Orthodoxy, Judaism and Islam. Multicultural history is evidenced by: the mosque in Kruszyniany, the Great Synagogue in Tykocin, the Orthodox Church in Odrynki, the Holy Mountain of Garbarka and the wooden Church of the Holy Cross in Sokoły. In Podlaskie Voivodeship, Belarusians, Lithuanians, Ukrainians, Tatars, Roma and Russians live together.

Lubelskie Voivodeship wants to be perceived as a multicultural area. The regional capital, Lublin, participates in the intercultural cities programme (an initiative of the Council of Europe and the European Commission). In Włodawa, a festival of three cultures takes place yearly (it nurtures the historical co-existence of Catholic, Orthodox and Judaic religions). Representatives of nine national minorities currently inhabit Lubelskie Voivodeship: Belarusians, Czechs, Lithuanians, Germans, Armenians, Russians, Slovaks, Ukrainians, Jews and four ethnic minorities: Karaites, Lemkos, Roma, and Tatars (Lubelski Urząd Wojewódzki 2020).

Poland's multiculturalism changed significantly due to the Second World War, and right after it, Poland became virtually monocultural. During communism (until 1989), migrants who came to Poland were mainly from other socialist countries. However, the geopolitical situation changed after the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics collapsed. As a result, Ukrainians, Belarussians and Moldovans began to come to Poland, often to study, and university towns such as Lublin and Bialystok had an increasing number of foreign

students. Also, for seasonal work in agriculture, more and more workers from behind Poland's eastern border came to both regions.

Podlaskie and Lubelskie Voivodeships are border regions. Until 1991 they bordered the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. After the collapse of the USSR, Lubelskie Voivodeship borders Ukraine and Belarus, and Podlaskie Voivodeship borders Belarus and Lithuania. Poland's eastern border is the external border of the EU, the border of the Schengen Area and the border of influence of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). This location since 24 February 2022 (since the beginning of Russia's aggression against Ukraine) has translated into the number of migrants reaching Poland.

8.2 Policy, rules and governance

After 1989, Poland underwent an evolution of its migration policy, which is framed by researchers in four phases: institutionalization (1989-2001), Europeanisation (2001-2004), stabilization (2004-2015) and in late 2015/early 2016, it has entered the fourth one – a revision phase (Lesińska, Stefańska, Szulecka 2010, pp. 262-264; Szulecka, Pachocka, Sobczak-Szelc 2018, p. 23).

During the institutionalization phase, a new legal and institutional system aiming to adapt to the international order was established (an example was signing and ratifying the Geneva Convention on refugees in 1991). The Europeanization phase aimed at adjusting the legal framework in the field of border control, visa and admission policy to the EU conditions. Hence, in 2003 the Polish parliament adopted a Law on granting protection to foreigners within the territory of the Republic of Poland, which included provisions of EU directives on minimum standards for the reception of asylum seekers and granting temporary protection in the event of a mass influx of asylum seekers (UdSC 2009). During the stabilization phase, which started right after the accession to the EU in 2004, the institutional and legal system concerning migration had been developed, and crucial legal acts concerning the situation of foreigners were adopted: Polish Citizenship Law (2009) and Law on Foreigners (2013).

In addition, in 2012, the key strategic policy document "Migration policy of Poland – the current state and recommended actions" was adopted by the government after being developed in collaboration with partners from academia and civil society. The migration strategy document presented diagnosis and recommendations in the following sections: legal immigration, counteracting illegal migration, protection of foreigners in Poland, integration of foreigners, citizenship and repatriation, economic emigration and return migrations, efficient functioning of the legal and institutional system, international conditions of the migration policy, relations between Poland's migration policy and other policies and monitoring of migration processes. Furthermore, since it assumed that Poland would not become an immigration country shortly, it prioritised immigration, meeting the needs of the labour market (Łodziński and Szonert 2016, pp. 25-26).

The revision phase started as a consequence of conservative Law and Justice coming to power after the parliamentary elections in October 2015. In 2016, the PiS government rescinded the document mentioned above on the "Migration policy of Poland", announcing that a new migration policy would be developed. In 2018, the Ministry of Investment and Development presented 'Socio-economic priorities of migration policy'. According to the statement, the new migration policy of Poland must be adapted to the priorities of the labour market; focus on supplementing labour resources with foreigners in sectors/occupations

characterized by competency gaps (including protection of the national labour market); respond to the needs of foreigners and Polish citizens living abroad, including repatriates, to encourage them to return to the country and establish in or transfer to Poland their business activities; prevent further emigration and ensure an increase in return migration (PAP 2018).

Concerning actors involved in migration governance in Poland, there are different actors involved in various activities and policies by law, financing, or practice, which can be divided into four main groups:

- intergovernmental organisations: e.g. EU, IOM, UNHCR;
- national and regional levels of the central public administration: Ministry of the Interior and Administration, Office for Foreigners, Ministry of the Family, Labour and Social Policy, Ministry of National Education, Ministry of Science and Higher Education, voivodship offices;
- local level public administration: poviats (mainly the largest cities with poviat status) and communes, poviat family support centres, social support centres (social welfare centres), poviat labour offices, primary and secondary schools run by municipalities;
- NGOs (mainly in large cities), language schools, local communities, religious organisations, etc. (Sobczak-Szelc et al. 2020, p. 31).

At the central public administration level, the most powerful institution responsible for designing and implementing migration policy is the Ministry of Interior and Administration. The Ministry supervises the work of the Office for Foreigners and the Border Guard. In addition, the Ministry of Family and Social Policy plays an important role, competent in the labour market and social assistance areas. The other ministries that need to be mentioned here are the Ministry of Foreign Affairs with a diplomatic missions' network (issuing visas) and the Ministry of Education and Science (recognition of qualifications and diplomas and inclusion of foreign children into the Polish education system).

At the central public administration's regional level (voivodships), there are Voivodes and Voivodship offices responsible for implementing immigration policy with respect to the legalization of residence, repatriation and granting of citizenship.

At the local level (communes [in Polish *gminy*] and poviats), there are poviat family support centres responsible for Individual Integration Programmes addressed to beneficiaries of international protection (refugees and beneficiaries of subsidiary protection with their family members), social welfare centres, and communal offices responsible for administering the local schools, running public services and maintaining the overall social cohesion in communes Labour offices should also be listed here due to their role in vocational training and facilitation in entering the labour market for foreigners.

Apart from those mentioned above, indispensable actors of migration governance are NGOs since they not only supplement but often substitute key actions of the state. Last but not least, among actors are also individuals, both foreigners and Polish citizens, since the success of migration policy also relies on their attitudes.

Essential factors for the creation and implementation, and then the success of welcoming initiatives/spaces (in general, not only for the analysed ones in this report) are:

- The general political situation in the country, which is conditioned by the political program of the ruling party and its approach/attitude to migration and foreigners (Poland is a unitary state, which results in the crucial role of central politics, and this one was considered more favourable to Ukrainian

labour and educational migration than to forced migration from the Middle East since 2015).

- State of play in the area of the national migration policy:
  - the strategy of migration policy and strategic documents or the lack of them (e.g., since 2016, Poland has had no strategic document and no officially formulated strategy of migration policy, in the years 2019-2021, several working documents were prepared on the diagnosis of Poland's migration situation and policy goals for 2021- 2022, but none of them was adopted),
  - understanding of the migration policy and its scope – the main areas of this policy (e.g., immigration, emigration, asylum, diaspora, integration) and their mutual relations (e.g., is the integration policy separated from the immigration policy and treated as equivalent or understood as an element of the immigration policy?) and the priority of specific migration-related policies resulting from the government's politics (e.g., in Poland, the emphasis on the policy towards short-term economic immigration aimed at satisfying the needs of the labour market over settlement immigration, secondary treatment of asylum policy, no integration policy, except for measures addressed to beneficiaries of international protection under Individual Integration Programs implemented by actors locally – local governments),
  - the legal framework (basic legal acts and their content – e.g., the degree of policy restrictiveness, the degree of formalization and bureaucracy of entry, stay and work procedures) and the application of the law in practice,
  - the structure and relations of the main actors (state and non-state ones) and their actual role (e.g., in Poland, NGOs come to the fore in integration activities for newcomers, including forced migrants).

In the case of the localities and initiatives analysed in Poland (Table 12), it is of key importance that our localities are in the vicinity of centres for foreigners (in other words, for asylum seekers), and the primarily targeted groups of initiatives (Table 13) are forced migrants – people in the asylum procedure or those who have already received a positive decision (including refugees and persons with subsidiary protection). This means that the state's asylum policy is crucial – its legal framework and the resulting legal status of foreigners, their rights and obligations, and the state's integration policy reduced to integration support for beneficiaries of international protection under the national social policy.

The main actors involved at the local level in reception activities for asylum seekers and integration activities for beneficiaries of international protection are centres for foreigners, non-governmental organizations and local authorities (municipal/communal welfare support centres, family support centres). NGOs should be considered the most active actors, often replacing public institutions in their responsibilities. Schools also play an essential role, especially concerning children with migration backgrounds, including refugee children, because they are a natural place of socialization with the host society.

8.3 Discourses and representations

National and local discourses and narratives on migrants are crucial for emerging and maintaining welcoming initiatives in the selected localities. Interestingly, there were some differences between the localities in their reception and reproduction of a particular discourse. In this section, the preliminary findings of the research are presented concerning three topics of discourses: migrants and migration, shrinking regions (or localities) and welcoming spaces (and initiatives).

Discourses about migrants and migration

The nationwide discourse of migration in Poland began in 2015, and it was an effect of the refugee and migration crisis in Europe coinciding with the electoral campaigns before the presidential and parliamentary elections held the same year. The discourse was triggered not so much by the arrival of asylum seekers in Poland, which was minimal in numbers, but by the European debate on relocation quotas of asylum seekers among the EU Member States. Although there had been political debates on migration, refugee admission and the principle of solidarity before 2015, their publicity was of minor significance. Since 2015, rival political parties in Poland have been shaping their approaches towards migration, especially forced migration, although not all of them distinguished asylum seekers as a different category of immigrants (Szałańska 2020). In general, until February 2022, when Russia invaded Ukraine, the two topics in the migration discourses prevailed. The first one was the division of migrants between refugees (the right ones who have justified reasons to apply for asylum) and economic migrants (who were portrayed more as "fake asylum seekers", namely those who should not apply for asylum because their goal is to improve their economic situation). The second one was the approach to the reception of asylum seekers, mirrored by a dichotomy between solidarity and security. Solidarity refers to two dimensions: firstly, to the principle of solidarity between the EU member states in sharing their burden in receiving refugees and, secondly, to the principle of protecting and its basis to provide help to people fleeing wars and conflicts (Szałańska 2020). Security refers to treating national security (even if the threat was imagined) as superior to international obligations and using it as an excuse to not comply with the relocation mechanism or using the pushbacks against migrants trying to cross the border and apply for asylum (Sobczak-Szelc et al. 2022). These conflicting discourses pertain more to asylum seekers and refugees than to migrants themselves, although, as the various surveys show, there is a correlation between the negative attitudes towards these two groups and the negative attitudes towards immigrants in general (CBOS surveys of 2016, 2017, 2018 and IPSOS surveys of 2015, 2016). With regard to national migration discourses, one issue needs to be added here: although the Law and Justice politicians were in the front row of those who produced the anti-refugee discourses, the PiS government's stance on economic migration, mainly from Eastern Europe, was silently positive. The latter means that even though the government has not created a narrative of Poland as an open country and failed to adopt a migration policy even, in fact, owing to legislative changes they adopted, it was easier to come to Poland to work or study (Szulecka, Pachocka and Sobczak-Szelc 2018).

The national discourses were also reproduced locally, although not word for word. In one locality, Łomża, the anti-refugee discourse appeared even before its nationwide equivalent. In 2009, Lech Kołakowski, a Member of the Parliament from the Law and Justice, started a campaign aimed at closing the centre for foreigners located in the city. He argued that he received complaints from residents who felt threatened, even if police statistics did not confirm this. However, the action of the right-wing politician found a response. On the forums, he was supported by Internet users; later on, the city was covered with Russian leaflets and stickers with slogans: "We don't want you here" and "Get out from our city". Anonymous letters against "strangers" began to flood the offices of the president, city council, parliamentarians, and the local newspaper offices. In February, the Director General of the Office for Foreigners20 received a petition signed by 772 people who called for the closure of the centre in Łomża (Klimowicz 2010). Eventually, the centre was closed in October 2010 (Gazeta Wyborcza 2010; Polskie Radio Białystok 2010).

Even if the campaign of Kołakowski was aimed at attracting new potential electoral supporters, it badly affected relations between foreign, mainly Chechen, and native communities in Łomża. However, owing to the activities of the Ocalenie Foundation operating in Łomża, these animosities could be mitigated. One

[20] The Office for Foreigners is responsible for administering the centers for foreigners.

such activity was the education of the host community, which was important in the face of the lack of such activity on the part of public authorities. The Foundation has organized training sessions, culinary workshops and talks in primary and secondary schools, as well as training for public institutions. Owing to these trainings, officers could learn the basics of intercultural communication and learn how to deal with people of different religious and cultural backgrounds. Another activity of the Foundation was organizing (or co-organizing) the so-called integration days aimed at familiarizing the host community with the culture of foreigners. These events usually took place in the city's public space, and admission was free for everyone. The events were accompanied by refreshments with national dishes. A new form of mutual getting to know each other was organizing the so-called "Living library", which consisted in selecting a migrant to whom each participant of the event could ask any question about everyday life, culture and customs. Recently, the Foundation has co-organized events such as the Refugee Days and the Multicultural Week (Popławska and Gać 2021).

Although the minor incidents against migrants in Łomża still occur, their severity cannot be compared to the past events, when attacks against foreigners, mainly Chechens, were more severe and happened in the city more often (4Łomża 2009; TVN24 2016). Inhabitants of all selected communes were to some extent aware of anti-refugee discourses in Poland, although the newcomers, or the migrants, seemed to belittle their gravity. When asked about the native residents' stance towards them, our migrant respondents assessed it as good or friendly. Only when they were asked about some incidents against them came up with examples of hostility they experienced.

Discourses about shrinking regions/localities

The discourse about shrinking regions and localities in Poland is somehow limited to the media discourse, which is not widespread. Every year, when the Polish Central Statistical Office publishes demographic data for the country, there are numerous articles about the imminent demographic disaster in Poland. The following example headlines mirror this:

- "Demographic scissors wide open. Poland is depopulating" (Fidziński 2022),
- "Poland is dramatically depopulating" (Kot 2021),
- "The dramatic depopulation of Poland is ongoing. Two regions are disappearing!" (Grórecki 2021),
- "Poland is depopulating and ageing. Are we doomed to disaster?" (Bendyk 2020).

The shrinkage of the two regions selected for the research, Podlaskie and Lubelskie Voivodeships, is also an issue of media discourse, even to a greater extent than on the national level. In the local media outlets, there are many articles about the disappearing villages (Strefa Argo 2022), depopulating towns (Podlasie24 2012) and even the regions' main cities, Bialystok (Krzewska 2018) and Lublin (Smaga 2022) , which also lose their population. The leading cause of depopulation of these regions and localities is the emigration of people to bigger cities or abroad to find better work or education opportunities. However, the COVID-19 pandemic could partially slow down this trend, as it was noticed by one of the local TV in the Podlaskie region:

> *"There is a saying – each stick has two ends. Therefore, what may be a disadvantage for some – an advantage for others. In this case, we are talking about a process that will take place in the next decade. Depopulation of communes. For it has been counted – where, how many people will be left. This is quite interesting information for all those who, for example, are looking for peace and quiet. The example of Sejny and the vicinity of this town showed that the pandemic arrived there very late. In general, if experts are to be believed, there will be more and more pandemics due to*

> *climate change. Even the Minister of Health was tempted to say that "return to normal" will never happen again – in this context. Therefore, if you do not intend to spend your whole life wearing a mask, consider moving out of big cities. More and more people are doing this" (Podlaskie.tv).*

Our empirical research revealed that the inhabitants are aware of the depopulation process triggered by the emigration from the selected localities. Surprisingly, the most worried group were not local governments' representatives but the entrepreneurs who experienced difficulties in finding a labour force. It must be highlighted here that the migrants who lived in the studied localities also considered moving to a bigger city to find a better job or schools for their children.

Discourses about welcoming spaces (or initiatives)

Discourses about welcoming spaces or initiatives were almost non-existent in the selected localities. Local newspapers have rather not presented the initiatives addressed towards migrants with one exception: activities carried out by the local governments (or entities dependent on the local government). A good example is the representation of an initiative of the Centre for Social Integration (CIS) in Łomża (financed and dependent on the City Hall), namely "A Handyman for Seniors". When CIS started the program, it was advertised even by a right-wing news platform, Niezależna.pl (2020), despite the latter outlet being highly against migrants. However, the initiative was not addressed directly to migrants but to local seniors and people with disabilities, and the migrants engaged in it as the title "handymen"; therefore, right-wing media could not oppose it openly.

Three different perspectives were revealed regarding the representation of selected localities as welcoming spaces in our empirical research. Firstly, the native residents felt at home and considered their localities rather welcoming. The second group, asylum seekers who lived in the centres for foreigners, generally planned to leave the localities and move to a bigger city if they get a positive decision about their asylum application. The last group, migrants with national or international protection granted and economic migrants, who lived in private (rented) flats or houses, were somewhat emplaced in a locality but considered leaving the place to find better working or education opportunities.

8.4 Local citizen-migrant engagements

The welcoming initiatives in Poland assumed a different scope of foreigners' involvement – from beneficiaries of aid programs to employees and co-creators (Table 17). Three initiatives deserve special attention: Assistance Centre for Foreigners in Łomża, Notebooks from Łuków, Women's Collective, Second Things in Łuków and artistic and educational projects led by Civic Perspective Foundation in Zambrów and Wohyń. The other initiatives were targeted mainly at children; they were of an educational or caring nature, and children acted as beneficiaries. Undoubtedly, these projects improved the quality of children's lives and gave them opportunities for better lives in the future.

Table 17 Foreigners' role in Welcoming Initiatives

Locality	Name of the initiative	Foreigner's role in initiative
Łomża	Assistance Centre for Foreigners	Foreigners (adults and children) as beneficiaries Foreigners employed in an initiative as intercultural assistants, foreigners co-organising cultural events (The Days of refugees) Foreigners helping to solve problems, the friendship between Poles and foreigners within NGO
	Programmes of the Municipal Centre of the Social Assistance	Foreigners as beneficiaries
Zambrów	Kindergarten in Czerwony Bór	Children as beneficiaries
	Intercultural assistant in the school of Poryte-Jablon	Children as beneficiaries
	Artistic and educational projects of Civic Perspective Foundation	Foreigners (adult women and children) as beneficiaries
Łuków	Women's Collective	Foreigners (adult women) co-creating initiative, Foreigners employed in an initiative
	Second Things	Foreigners (adult women) co-creating initiative, Foreigners employed in an initiative
	Notebooks from Łuków	Foreigners (adult women) co-creating initiative, Foreigners employed in an initiative
Zalesie	Primary school in Berezówka	Foreigner children as beneficiaries, their parents sometimes participating in organisation of cultural events
	Children club in the centre for asylum seekers in Kolonia Horbów	Children as beneficiaries
Wohyń	Primary school in Bezwola	Children as beneficiaries

Source: own elaboration by the H2020 Welcoming Spaces team at SGH Warsaw School of Economics.

Assistance Centre for Foreigners led by Ocalenie Foundation

The Assistance Center for Foreigners, led by Ocalenie Foundation, was co-organised by migrants; they were employed as cultural assistants, conducted training in schools and for uniformed services, and co-organized cultural events, such as the Refugee Days. On the other hand, the management of the Foundation were Poles, so it was Poles who decided on the directions of its activities. Despite the lack of power balance, the foundation was undoubtedly a good place to work (especially in the face of problems with finding a job in Łomża). One of the migrants, employed as a cultural assistant, when asked if they would not prefer to open their own NGO, replied that they did not because, in Ocalenie Foundation, everyone knows each other, they like and cooperate, and they are just like a family. The help provided by the foundation was a crucial element in solving long- and short-term problems of foreigners.

Notebooks from Łuków, Women's Collective, Second Things *led by Association for Earth in cooperation with Artists*

Those projects provided a high level of agency for foreigners. In each of them, migrant women were provided with job opportunities; they were co-creating the projects, often becoming experts leading them. The activities of the Association were aimed mainly at women and children as "*the most excluded, with the smallest job opportunity, with the most difficult start in life"* groups (PL_NGO_04). Women's Collective aimed to strengthen, educate and lead women towards economic independence through learning the craft, and cooperation with artists, designers and art institutions. This initiative was related to the Notebooks from Łuków project, which resulted from the cooperation of an artist from a large city and women living in a centre for asylum seekers. The artist, however, only gave the first impulse for the project and took care of developing the sales network. She left the creative process and its evolution to the migrant women.

> *"I did not come with any assumptions, I did not come up with a project prepared in a city, and I did not come to the centre to implement it. Maybe during this meeting, we started talking about the fact that these notebooks are very nice in general, and that maybe we will just sell them somewhere and that we can make a fund for something ...I suggested that my role might be to find places where these notebooks could be bought. ... And then I asked if they, do the girls agree to it, is it, is it somehow attractive to them and would they like to continue doing it together? And after they said yes, we decided to come up with a name. And the most straightforward name was "Notebooks from Łuków". After returning to my city, I asked my partner, who was a graphic designer, to design a logo for us. But I also didn't want only one logo that someone would create for us that I would agree. He designed eight or ten different proposals that I sent to the ladies in Łuków, and they made a decision which logo would be ours"* (PL_NGO_04).

> *"And the girls just became experts in this notebook-making process ...There were the first workshops that the ladies led, and it was then… you could sign up, and you could come to make your own notebook. And it just started to work. The ladies actually conducted these workshops in different localities"* (PL_NGO_04).

Artistic and educational projects led by Civic Perspective Foundation

The projects led by the Civic Perspective Foundation aimed to provide children with better chances in education and women with a little bit of entertainment" "*We conduct various activities; you might say artistic. Their point is to give a little break, rest, get women away from children, get away from everyday life"* (PL_NGO_02). In those initiatives, foreigners' agency was limited to being beneficiaries, with little influence on the shape and course of the project. However, it should be emphasized that the projects were created by NGOs, taking into account the needs reported by schools and centres for asylum seekers:

> *"I construct these projects…. These projects were constructed in such a way that I firstly talked to the schools about what they needed. I spoke to the management of the centres. What would they like us to do and on this basis I created my projects* (PL_NGO_02).

An important assumption of the projects is to involve people known to the beneficiaries, i.e., teachers from local schools and employees of refugee centres:

> *"we also employed cultural assistants at school, it is also a very important thing, which often helps, when there is a person who knows the child's language, and whether he or she comes from the country of the refugees' origin, and also speaks Polish, is fairly integrated"* (PL_NGO_02).

> *"We operate in such a way that we employ local people for projects, that is, for example, we employ teachers in schools to teach their pupils. So, in fact, the teacher gets additional salary for it and it really changes the attitude towards migrants, at this point, they do not only see it as a burden, but also see a kind of development opportunity for the region"* (PL_NGO_02).

The NGO also had an interesting project aimed at giving women financial independence and teaching them to sell their artistic products online, but this project did not receive funding, so it was not implemented (PL_NGO_02).

9. Conclusion: Country-specific policy- and practice related reflections

The analysis of the collected empirical material shows that the presence of non-state actors (mainly non-governmental organizations) and their activities at the local level play a vital role in the examined localities. They favour the creation and implementation of welcoming initiatives, which mainly concern forced migrants living in centres for foreigners or nearby towns. As the research on the case studies revealed, especially the more prolonged presence of an NGO in a given locality can enhance the integration of different groups and strengthen the overall social cohesion.

The functioning of NGOs – the scope and scale of their activities – is very much dependent on access to funds, including the state budget and EU funds, but distributed by public institutions. As shown by the example of Poland, in 2016-2019, the limitation in access to AMIF funds resulted in a decrease in the activity of these organizations. In a situation of limited financial resources, the activities of NGOs were based mainly on the involvement of their leaders and their social capital. The interlocutors indicated that building trust and acceptance between the inhabitants and culturally different foreigners is a slow process, but the direction of social change is relatively positive.

The key and partly interrelated factors for improving the life situation of newcomers (especially migrants) in all five selected localities are finding employment and having a place to live. In Poland, which has a very limited market for non-commercial rented housing, having a job is, in principle, necessary to be able to live, for example, outside the centre for foreigners. Therefore, legal regulation that would allow legal employment without restrictions and in the shortest possible time after crossing the Polish border is crucial. In recent years, there has been a significant simplification of procedures in this respect in Poland – although mainly concerning foreign workers and not asylum seekers. However, new, more advanced changes in the law on foreigners may result from the already adopted and future legal modifications dedicated to forced migrants from Ukraine (see, e.g., Law of 12 March 2022 on assistance to Ukrainian citizens in connection with the armed conflict on the territory of the country (consolidated text, Journal of Laws 2022, item 583 with amendments)). However, these changes are addressed to Ukrainian citizens and their family members who fled the country starting on 24 February 2022, when Russia invaded Ukraine. The new law makes their access to the Polish labour market almost equal to that of the Polish citizens. Moreover, the special temporary protection status is valid for 18 months with the possibility of its extension. Regardless of further legal changes, it is worth emphasizing the importance of the option to access the Polish labour market as a critical factor for foreign newcomers' emplacement in any locality.

To overcome challenges identified during the course of the research, we propose to implement by the central and local governments the following policy recommendations:

1. aimed at enhancement of social wellbeing:

- Provide basic information for foreigners (in the form of a brochure, leaflet or a tab on official web pages of communes) in the most common languages they can understand (at least English, Ukrainian and Russian).
- Provide legal counselling (for free) for all vulnerable migrants (asylum seekers, beneficiaries of national and international protection). This can be partially done by delegating tasks to local

governments and NGOs, which could hire a lawyer if they have permanent funding.

- Change the neo-liberal paradigm in housing: the decision-makers need to acknowledge that the free market cannot meet the needs of middle- and low-income groups and take responsibility for at least partially meeting these needs through the development of community and social housing.
- Provide appropriate training for teachers working with migrants and especially refugee children, so they have skills to educate pupils who are not native-Polish speakers, and secondly, have special educational and psychological needs.
- Promote hiring cross-cultural assistants in schools with children with a migrant background, including refugee children, and increase their salary to the level of the junior teacher.
- Introduce good quality multicultural and anti-discriminatory education into the regular curricula of primary and secondary schools.
- Establish a system of teaching Polish as a foreign language at the central level, with the possibility of delegating tasks to local governments and NGOs to create opportunities for learning Polish by migrants who live outside the big cities.

2. **aimed at enhancement of economic viability:**
   - Enable faster access to the labour market for asylum seekers (similar to the currently introduced measures of automatic access to the labour market for people from Ukraine under temporary protection).
   - Improve career counselling for foreigners in local labour offices so they can better use the skills of foreigners and provide them with job offers according to their skills and education.

3. **aimed at enhancement of political stability:**
   - Provide a clear framework for national integration policy and define apolitical sources of financial support for NGOs so they can carry out their activities regularly, especially outside big cities.
   - Enable NGOs and local governments to directly apply for EU funds in European agencies without the intermediation of central-level institutions.
   - Create, at the level of local governments, also in communes, a platform for social dialogue between the local community and newcomers (similar to, for example, the Branch Social Dialogue Commission for Foreigners in Warsaw, which is an advisory body composed of the City Hall officers and NGOs experts).
   - Introduce into elementary and secondary education programmes curricula about civic participation, its significance, and possibilities to act and introduce changes into the socio-economic development of cities, towns and rural areas.

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