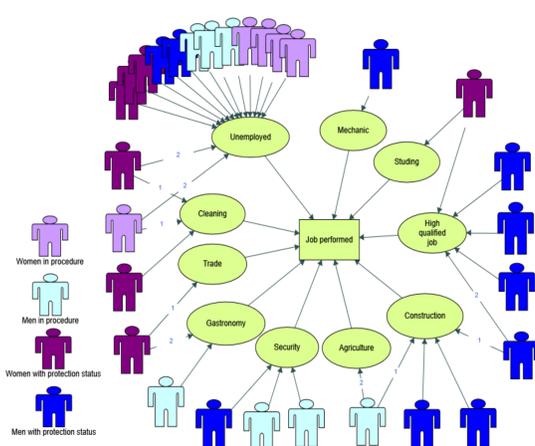


Refugee integration in Poland

Can it be improved?

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Distribution of interviewed asylum seekers and beneficiaries of international protection between different sectors

Abstract

Poland is characterised by the lack of an official integration strategy. Several legal acts deal with different aspects of integration policy (limited to those concerning beneficiaries of international protection) yet to a varying degree and not specifically devoted to it. In general, beneficiaries of international protection are granted equal rights with Polish citizens in the areas of access to labour market, education, healthcare, and housing. In practice, their integration is associated with various challenges.

References

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Introduction

Although Poland has only recently begun to transform from an emigration to immigration country, asylum seekers have been arriving to the country from the early 1990s. Their number was continuously growing from slightly over 500 in 1992, to over 15 thousand in 2013. Over 70 thousand persons applied for international protection between 2011 and beginning of 2018. The vast majority of them came from Russia (mostly Chechens - almost 48 thousand) while smaller groups were from Georgia (7,528) and Ukraine (6,785).

Main Results

Since the socio-economic and political transformation at the turn of the 1980s and 1990s, Poland has not implemented a coherent and comprehensive national integration policy, nor has it had a strategic document in this regard. The only integration activities offered by the state are addressed to forced migrants who benefit from international protection in Poland - refugees.

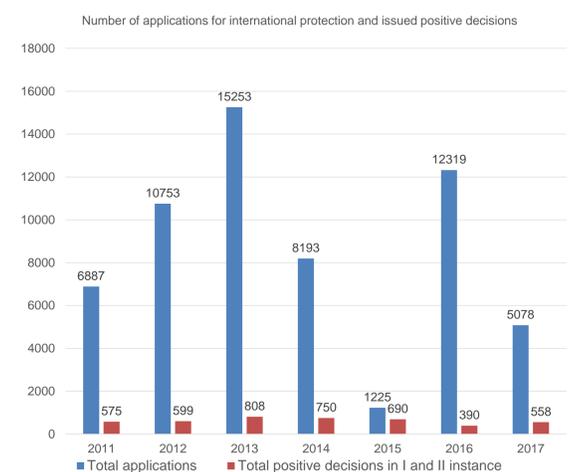
Education of refugee children is supported by instruments designed for foreign children in mind, yet these measures are often inadequate. The biggest challenges in education of refugee adults appeared to be learning the Polish language and recognition of previous education or degrees obtained in the countries of origin.

Regarding access to the labour market recognised refugees in Poland have similar rights as Polish citizens including unemployment support. Some of the key problems, however, are insufficient knowledge of Polish by beneficiaries of international protection, modest language skills of the labour market services and low social capital of refugees, which often act as barriers for them to find a job.

Finding adequate and affordable housing is a challenge faced not only by refugees but also Poles. The shortage of affordable housing makes the situation of refugees particularly difficult. Consequently, inadequate quality of housing results in slowing down the process of their adaptation to the new socio-cultural conditions, and may have a negative impact on their physical and mental health.

Methods and Material

- Analysis of the literature, legal and policy documents and statistical data.
- Semi-structured interviews with 30 forced migrants of different legal statuses and 17 experts from public administration at the central and local levels, NGOs, and other practitioners.
- Two roundtable seminars and focus groups with experts in Poland.



Lessons Learned

Poland's integration policy is fragmented and created by different public and non-state institutions. It is crucial to create a common national integration strategy, especially for refugees.

In the field of education appropriate trainings for teachers working with refugee children should be provided. All adult refugees should have access to free Polish language courses adjusted to their language level and needs.

On the labour market there is a need for programmes specifically tailored for refugees and asylum seekers. The process of integration of refugees should be systematically monitored.

In order to facilitate refugees' transition from the refugee centres to private housing arrangements, their access to cheaper and more adequate housing should be improved. This can be achieved for example by providing more support to the NGOs facilitating spatial integration of refugees.