

Executive Summary & Recommendations from the Survey “Cultural Diversity in Polish Schools – Teachers’ Perspectives”



This report is based on quantitative research conducted among teachers on a nationwide sample of schools between May and June 2024. The study involved 3,081 school staff members, including 2,869 teachers from 325 schools. The resulting findings provide a basis for drawing conclusions about the population of teachers in half of Polish schools who have contact with foreign students, primarily from Ukraine.

Teachers’ attitudes towards cultural diversity

According to the results, the vast majority of teachers expressed openness towards cultural diversity and hosting refugees. Their attitudes were influenced by factors such as the length of professional experience, the intensity of contact with foreign students, and the type of school they work at. While teachers supported hosting refugees in Poland (79%), the majority of them (55%) believed this should be a temporary measure until the refugees can return to their home countries. Only 24% of teachers were open to allowing refugees to settle permanently in Poland, and 6% opposed hosting them altogether.

A significant majority of teachers expressed openness to integrating students from Ukraine into the Polish education system. Three out of four teachers (75%) supported the enrolment of refugee children from Ukraine into Polish schools. Teachers from vocational schools are the least likely to express a positive opinion on this matter (their response rate drops to 72%).

The teachers’ attitudes changed significantly when the question concerned integration of all foreign children into Polish schools. In this case, the support dropped to 56%, with teachers in general and technical secondary schools being more sceptical about this issue (50–52%) than those from primary and vocational schools (58%).

Positive attitudes to hosting refugees by Poland and admitting refugee students into Polish schools were strongly linked to teachers’ professional experience. Younger teachers with less experience (fewer than 10 years) were more sceptical about Poland as a host country and refugees in Polish schools. Differences in opinions between teacher groups ranged from 5 to 10 percentage points.

Most teachers saw cultural diversity in the classroom as an added value. As many as 83% agreed that it fostered the development of civic awareness, and 69% recognized its positive impact on students’ empathy. They generally agreed that the presence of foreign students

provided an opportunity to broaden perspectives on the world and one's own culture (84%) as well as to reduce stereotypes and prejudices among student community (69%).

At the same time, teachers identified challenges associated with teaching in multicultural classrooms and assessed the impact of cultural differences on the teaching process relatively negatively. For instance, 74% indicated that cultural diversity made lessons more difficult to conduct, and 36% noted that it hampered the discussions on controversial topics during the lessons. Nearly two-thirds believed that the presence of foreign students slowed down the pace of lessons (63%) and created difficulties in preparing all students for exams (60%). This trend was particularly strong among teachers in general secondary schools and primary schools, who most frequently highlighted these challenges (65% and 60% regarding the pace of work, and 50% and 60% regarding exam preparation). **Less experienced teachers and those teaching a high number of foreign students (over 50) were more negative about effects of cultural differences.**

It is worth noting that, in the ICCS international research, carried out in March and April 2022, teachers from other countries more frequently highlighted the benefits of cultural diversity and were less likely to report its negative effects.

The language barrier was by far the most frequently identified challenge in working with foreign students (74%). Other significant issues included assessing and grading students (48%). Less than 40% of teachers highlighted the need to adapt teaching methods to the needs of new students, address their psycho-emotional needs, or manage issues related to low attendance and high turnover among students of different nationalities.

Teachers' competencies for working with multicultural classrooms

When asked about different competences required for teaching in a culturally diverse classroom, teachers overwhelmingly recognized all of them as important, with 79% to 93% (depending on the specific competency) providing positive responses. The most frequently highlighted competencies were class integration (93%), identifying students' psycho-emotional needs (92%), and adapting teaching methods (90%). Teachers with more intensive contact with foreign students were more likely to emphasize the importance of adapting teaching and assessment methods to accommodate a multicultural classroom. Teachers working with over 50 foreign students most often describe these competencies as important – 93% with regard to teaching methods and 90% to assessment methods.

Although 86% of teachers reported having worked with foreign students, 60% described their experience as limited or almost negligible. Only one in 17 stated they know how to work with a foreign student. Greater contact with this group tends to correlate with a more positive self-assessment of teachers' experience. However, this trend changes among those teaching over 50 foreign students – only 20% declare that they know how to work with this group of students.

When we asked teachers to assess their own competencies required for working in a multicultural classroom. The vast majority rated all of them positively - depending on the competency, 66% to 79% positive assessments. The competency ranked lowest in importance – knowledge of how migration experiences can affect learning – was also the area where teachers felt least competent. In this category, 22% gave negative responses, and 12% answered 'hard to say'.

Primary school teachers rated their preparedness higher than their colleagues in general secondary schools and technical schools, likely due to more frequent contact with foreign students at the primary level. While greater contact with foreign students generally correlated with a more positive competency self-assessment, one exception was observed. Teachers working with the largest number of such students (more than 20) were more likely to rate their competencies negatively.

Teachers' Professional Development for Teaching in a Multicultural Classroom

The majority of teachers reported that they developed their competencies related to work in multicultural classrooms primarily through their own resources and efforts (87% reported self-study). The second most popular form of professional development was participation in webinars (58%), followed by workshops or courses (40%). Longer forms of support, such as postgraduate studies, were not interesting for teachers (95% had not participated in them, and 81% indicated they would not want to do so in the future). However, nearly one in five teachers (19%) stated they were not willing to participate even in shorter forms of training, such as webinars (this figure rose to 29% for in-person workshops and courses).

Teachers in primary schools were those who most frequently engaged in professional development, followed by vocational schools' teachers, while teachers in general secondary schools and technical schools participated the least. Primary school teachers not only attended in-person workshops and courses more often but also expressed a greater willingness to participate in such forms of professional development in the future.

Most teachers were satisfied with the support they had received in recent years – 69% stated that professional development support was entirely or fairly sufficient. At the same time, many of them (71%) expressed a desire for further professional development.

Teachers, when asked what could help them in working in multicultural classrooms, still most often pointed to teaching materials such as lesson plans, textbooks, and worksheets (45%). They also highlighted the need for support from specialists (34%) and intercultural assistants (27%). This suggests that teachers were more inclined towards forms of professional support that are less demanding of their time and effort, preferring ready-to-use resources that alleviate their workload. Training and workshops were ranked in the middle of the list of preferred support forms (18% of responses), with many other forms of support being more highly valued by teachers. The demand for workshops, training, and consultations with specialists was more commonly expressed by secondary education teachers, particularly those in vocational and technical schools (28% and 30%, respectively).

Recommendations

- 1. Educational authorities, including the Ministry of Education and regional boards of education, should actively communicate the critical importance of welcoming and integrating foreign students into Polish schools.** This should be accompanied by clear explanations of the long-term educational, social, and cultural benefits such integration offers, not only to the students themselves but also to the broader school community. This approach fulfils the Polish state's obligations to all children residing in Poland, while also fostering social cohesion and enriching the educational experience for all students.
- 2. Educational authorities, including the Ministry of Education and regional boards of education) should continuously encourage teachers to actively participate in professional development initiatives** with a specific focus on equipping them to work in culturally diverse classrooms. This should be integrated as a key priority in national educational policy for the 2025/2026 school year.
- 3. Teachers must receive tailored, flexible support to build their competencies in culturally diverse classrooms, addressing their unique needs and openness.** This support should include blended approaches, including practical resources, online sessions, expert consultations, and continuous, process-driven school support.
- 4. Teachers should be provided with integrated support to improve their competencies in working with culturally diverse classrooms,** combined with general methodological guidance. For example, support could focus on assessing all students with diverse knowledge and skills, rather than focusing only on those with migration backgrounds. This broader approach would likely boost teachers' interest and engagement in the support offered which would ultimately benefitting the entire school community.
- 5. Teachers in secondary schools, particularly those preparing students for the school leaving exam (so-called 'matura exam'), must receive targeted methodological support.** As fewer foreign students attend up to this level of education, integration becomes more challenging in secondary schools, as training opportunities have largely focused on primary school teachers.
- 6. Support for teachers working in culturally diverse classrooms should encompass not only training but also clear guidelines, recommendations, interpretations of regulations** (e.g., on assessment), ready-to-use materials for working with students, and examples of best practices.
- 7. Teachers should receive special focus on language instruction as part of their training for working in culturally diverse classrooms.** Teachers need to be made aware of the role all educators play in teaching the language of education and simplifying instructions and develop their skills in this area.