

Children participate!

Exploratory research on
the participation of
migrant children in
Warsaw's cultural life

SUMMARY

June – December 2025

WVOK Warszawskie
Obserwatorium
Kultury

Malgorzata Bakalarz-Duverger
Łucja Krzyżanowska
Sara Majcher-Wojciechowska
Anzhela Popyk



wok.art.pl

Table of contents

Introduction → 3

Parents → 9

Children → 16

Cultural entities → 23

Educational and cultural environments → 34

Round table → 41

Conclusions → 43

Context

School year 2024/2025¹

237 thousand

foreign children were enrolled in Polish primary and secondary schools

4.8%

of pupils in Polish primary and secondary schools were foreign

10%

of pupils in all of Warsaw's educational establishments (including kindergartens and schools for adults) were foreign

85%

of foreign pupils in Polish primary and secondary schools were of Ukrainian origin

13%

of foreign pupils in Polish primary and secondary schools were of Belarusian origin

Research goals

- ① **Identifying** styles of participation, needs and barriers to access among children (aged 7-15) with experience of being a refugee or migrant from Belarus or Ukraine
- ② **Mapping** cultural events and activities for this age group offered by Polish and diasporic cultural entities in Warsaw
- ③ Developing a better **understanding** of Belarusian and Ukrainian culture in Warsaw
- ④ **Emphasising** the role of culture in countering the second-generation radicalisation effect

Assumptions, methods, research perspectives

- **This exploratory research was carried out between June and December 2025.**
- We examined the cultural participation of **children aged 7–15**, assuming that the parents and the reality of school would be significant points of reference for this group. We chose Belarusian and Ukrainian groups due to the scale of their migration to Poland in recent years.
- We have undertaken to explore this area from the **perspectives of many actors**: the children themselves and their families, Polish and diasporic entities creating offerings available to non-Polish youth, and school teachers.
- We understand cultural participation broadly: both as experiencing various artistic and cultural productions, and as benefiting from cultural education.² In our ethnographic study among children, we used the term ‘free time’, which we then clarified in the context of participation in culture.
- **Migration experience**: in our research we refer to the experience of migration, although this also includes the experience of being a refugee.
- After the first round of interviews, we decided that the study required **not only language skills from the interviewers, but also cultural and positional understanding**. Therefore, most of the research was conducted by people with migration experience.

How are quotations from research material coded?

Quotes are described using three-part codes, where the first part refers to the type of interviewee or interviewees (e.g. **RO** – parent), the second to the interviewee’s country of origin or, in the case of interviews with representatives of cultural entities, to the national community to which the majority of cultural activities are addressed (e.g. **BY** – Belarus), and the third refers to the method of collecting the material (e.g. **IDI** – individual interview).

Acronyms appearing in the codes:

in the first part: **RO** – parent,
DZ – children or child, **PK** – cultural entity,
NA – teacher or teachers

in the second part: **BY** – Belarus, **UA** –
Ukraine, **PL** – Poland

in the third part: **IDI** – individual interview,
F – group interview

Example:

DZ/BY/F – quote by a child from Belarus
taken from a group interview

Research material

1

Inventory of cultural offerings (PL, BY, UA) available to Belarusian and Ukrainian children in Warsaw, archived online

13

individual interviews with the representatives of cultural entities (PL, BY, UA)

1

group interview with instructors from cultural and youth community centres

An **ethnographic study** of eight children from Belarus and Ukraine and

8

individual interviews with the children who took part in the project

10

individual interviews with parents

2

group interviews with teachers

10

experts met at a **Round Table** meeting at WOK Lab on 5 December 2025

2

individual interviews with teachers from Polish primary schools

2

group interviews with children (BY, UA)

Research material

We present the conclusions drawn from the analysis of the material collected in the exploratory research on the following slides.

The material is organised according to the perspectives of various types of social actors studied: **parents, children, cultural entities** and the **school environment** – with clear awareness that many of the topics discussed overlap in the experiences of these groups and are difficult to assign unambiguously.

Parents

The study outlined two vectors of conditions that influence parents' decisions regarding their children's participation in culture.

The first concerns the broadly defined and changing living conditions of families, which are influenced by a number of factors, including the experience of migration.

The second is related to the personal preferences and aspirations of parents and families.

The living situation of families may be linked to elements characteristic of the migration experience, as indicated by the interviewees. These include financial opportunities in the new place of residence, an excess or lack of free time due to work or job hunting, a sense of temporariness and limbo, the quality of contacts with Poles, attitudes towards identity issues, the number of children and their age – it is important at what stage of childhood they experienced migration – whether they are the 1.5 generation or the second generation.³

Styles of participation in culture are determined by **parents' personal preferences**, their expectations and aspirations for their children and family life in general, and their attentiveness to the needs and interests of their children (both new and pre-emigration).

Children's participation in culture also has the potential to integrate parents. However, this is a major challenge for both Polish and diasporic cultural entities.

The interviewees emphasise that their needs change over time. They improve their language skills and cultural competencies. They do not want to be stigmatised by drawing attention to their migrant status, which is why they sometimes deliberately choose not to take advantage of offerings addressed to their community. They want to participate in the activities offered by both Polish and diasporic cultural entities.

Parents. Access to cultural activities

Factors affecting the accessibility of cultural activities

- ➔ **Financial accessibility** – particularly important for people who have only recently moved to Poland. However, it should be remembered that the situation on the labour market is generally more difficult for non-Polish workers.
- ➔ **Infantilisation of activities for children with migration experience** – some parents feel that Polish initiatives aimed at their children treat them less seriously.
- ➔ **Information about Warsaw's cultural offerings** is primarily available in **Polish**, making it difficult to find activities and events in more local cultural venues.
- ➔ **The possibility of adjusting extracurricular activities or family outings to the rhythm of the day** – work and daily responsibilities. That is why some people, despite their willingness, make less frequent use of the offerings of diasporic cultural entities.
- ➔ **Feeling invited to a cultural venue** – openness in terms of procedures, language and cultural frames of reference.
- ➔ **Entry threshold** – events in public spaces are highly accessible, but cultural centres with Polish-language activities are much less so.

Parents

“

Migrants have it even harder, because the parents of Ukrainian children have to work very hard just to feed their children and pay for their accommodation. I see these mothers working two or three jobs, while their children are looked after by neighbours from the next room, because, for example, they share a flat. I have a boy who hangs out with older kids in the park until nightfall because no one is looking after him, he is on his own. It's difficult. I understand the mother because she has to earn money to provide for him, but he doesn't have a mother at the moment. He doesn't have a parent. He is alone.

NA/PL/IDI1

Parents. Choosing from cultural offerings

Factors that influence parents' decisions when choosing cultural activities

- ➔ **Approach to issues related to identity** and cultural belonging – the need to maintain or build a child's relationship with the culture of their country of origin.
- ➔ **The possibility of easily joining and leaving** a cultural activity to see if it is something for them. For this reason, events in public spaces seem to be popular.
- ➔ **The need to move beyond the role of migrant** and settle into local relationships.
- ➔ In cultural education, some people **prefer to focus on results** – performances, improving skills – rather than on the process and the benefits it brings.
- ➔ **Free activities are received with mixed feelings.** On the one hand, they offer an opportunity to gain new experiences, which many people take advantage of. On the other hand, at the level of aspirations, they are rejected by some people – what is free may turn out to be of lower quality.

Parents

“

I don't think that events exclusively for Ukrainians are a good solution. I don't want to talk about 'ghetto', but that comparison comes to mind. It's wonderful that [Ukrainian cultural entities] maintain a connection with Ukrainian culture for Ukrainians. However, it would be good if Poles had a little more opportunity to learn about Ukrainian culture.

RO/UA/IDI5

Parents

“

At the beginning, when we first arrived, we spent a lot of time with our child. We visited many museums and attended all sorts of cultural events that took place here in Warsaw. I had more free time, and we basically followed the events, trying to go to everything we could. We really enjoyed it because it allowed us to take our minds off the situation a little and settle in here.

RO/UA/IDI4

Parents

“

My daughter collects instances when someone says ‘wow’ to her: “Wow, children in Ukraine play the recorder? Wow, children in Ukraine speak English? Wow, there are music schools in Ukraine? Wow!” She already has a whole collection of such gems. She just loves to repeat them, savour them...

RO/UA/IDI5

Children

Participation in culture takes place in the shadow of the experience of migration and generational challenges: the digital world, the mental health crisis, fatigue. The coexistence of these factors makes it difficult to interpret their distinctiveness unequivocally.

Children experience **loneliness and isolation** within their families and peer groups, as well as **a longing** for the environment they have left behind and their favourite activities. Participation in culture is often a way to overcome these emotions.

They seek **acceptance and secure relationships**: all forms of cultural participation with friends are highly valued. Culture is a space of relief and respite from internalised discrimination in other contexts.

The **digital world** plays a major role in socialisation and participation in culture: often out of necessity rather than choice.

An overloaded school curriculum and the difficulties of everyday life cause **fatigue**, which prevents participation in cultural activities.

Children take on the role of guides for adults and/or younger siblings. Their childhood becomes **contested** — a situation in which the child becomes the subject of disputes between various actors (family, state, majority society). Regardless of the child's wishes, there are conflicting visions of who they are, what rights they have and what their future should be like. Participation in culture can be a space for building young people's agency.

Children. Participation in culture - characteristics

Migration context

The impact of the migration experience on contact with culture.

- psychological impact of migration or refugee experience
- longing
- the need to move beyond the role of a migrant

Emotion regulation and time management

Culture serves as a tool for coping with boredom, tension, loneliness and the need for stimulation.

- contact with culture as a way to counteract boredom and spend time 'effectively'
- contact with culture as an accompanying activity (background to everyday life)
- the need to be 'entertained', less effort in providing oneself with emotional stimuli
- isolation, loneliness

Relational dimension of culture

Culture acts as a 'relationship infrastructure': a pretext for meeting, shared practices, increased activity when a social element appears.

- a pleasant time spent with parents or friends
- participation in cultural activities as a factor strengthening and building peer relationships
- visits from guests (family members/friends) increase participation in cultural activities

Participation space: offline and online

- Escaping into the virtual world
- Easy access to culture (and in a more attractive form) on the Internet
- Culture is primarily associated with time spent outside the home

Children. Barriers and enablers to participation in culture

Time constraints and the burdens of everyday life

Barriers resulting from the rhythm of daily life and excessive responsibilities, which reduce the time and energy available for participation in culture.

- Intensive school hours – no free time
- Imposing participation – it is important for children to be able to choose their activities and level of involvement themselves

Access and conditions of participation

Barriers related to whether participation is realistically possible in organisational, financial and ‘usage’ terms (easy to undertake, flexible, accessible).

- Price (in)accessibility
- (Lack of) strict participation rules

Relationships and social support

Barriers and enablers depend on whether the child has someone to participate with and whether adults and peers genuinely support participation in cultural activities.

- Adult figure (parent, teacher, coach)
- Opportunity to spend time with family members
- Opportunity to participate with friends

Knowledge of context and rules

- Cultural differences and preferences
- Learning new rules for participating in social and cultural life

Being active in the virtual and digital world

- Maintaining and building social relationships in the virtual world

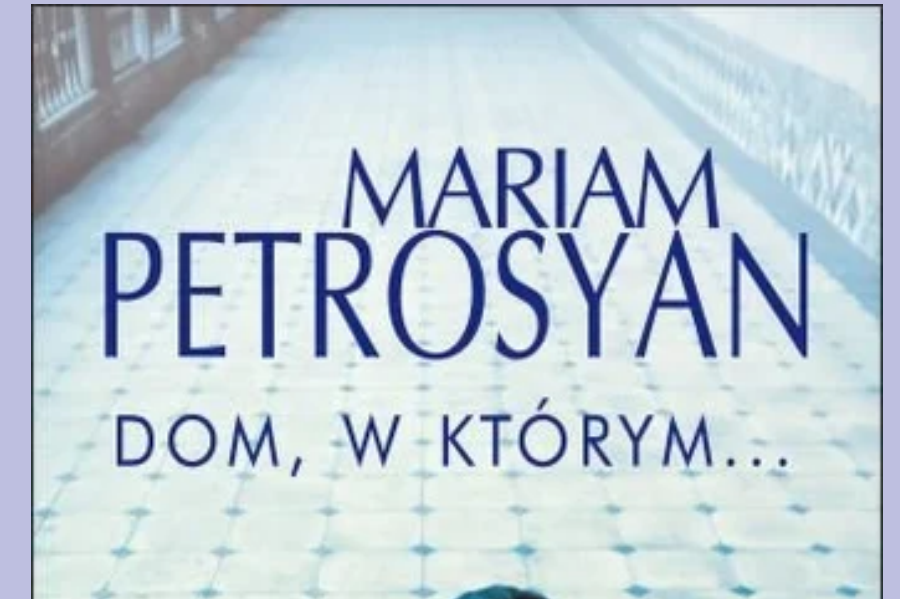
Children

The community around the book “The Gray House”

The communities which form around the book “The Gray House” are analogue-digital in nature: young people who know the book meet online and offline to discuss it – and do various things together at the same time.

The language of conversation is Russian; a participant in the study pointed out that her group is multinational (members from Poland, Belarus, Kazakhstan and Ukraine).

The reading community around the book “The Gray House” may be an example of the intertwining of generational and subcultural preferences and those specifically resulting from the experience of migration.



Children



My friend and I decided that we didn't want this summer to be just another summer, that we didn't want it to go to waste. That's why we decided to go for a walk every day, to go somewhere, because constantly going to the shopping centre or the park is getting boring, and we also usually go to therapy. We decided that we would go to museums when admission is free. There is a museum like that every day, there are free days, for example, on Thursday this museum is free, on Friday that one, and so on.

DZ/UA/ID11

Children

“

I would like to have some Ukrainian friends. Just Ukrainians who lived there with me [in Ukraine], so that we could be friends. And when it comes to places to go, Warsaw has everything.

DZ/UA/IDI2

“

I like spending time with my parents, especially when we're not at home. At home, somehow we don't manage to spend time together, because when everyone's at home, someone's on their phone, someone's watching a film, and then we don't get to spend time together. To just sit together. There's nothing to do at home. But if we go somewhere or go to the water park, then spending time with my parents is interesting.

DZ/UA/IDI1

Children

“

I don't know. I think my cat helps me relax a little. My phone does too, but it's a bit of a burden. But basically, you could call it relaxation when I'm really relaxed, watching something on YouTube and nothing is bothering me.

DZ/UA/IDI4

“

Our [dance] group consists only of Ukrainians and Belarusians, and almost all of them are Ukrainians. I have also seen groups consisting only of Poles, and Ukrainians did not want to join them. I wanted to join the Ukrainian group because it is easier for me when they explain in Ukrainian what movements to do.

DZ/UA/IDI4

Cultural entities

In response to the migration of people from Belarus since 2020 and from Ukraine since 2022, the cultural landscape has changed irrevocably.

Diasporic cultural entities have become increasingly active. Belarusian and Ukrainian cultures have become an inseparable part of life in Polish cities.

Polish cultural entities have also expanded their offerings to new audiences.

In the case of Polish entities, many activities for Belarusian or Ukrainian children have been scaled back over time due to declining interest, the end of funding, and a lack of ideas for adapting the offering to the changing needs of minority communities.

However, there are entities that have permanently introduced multiculturalism into their activities, and the presence of Belarusians and Ukrainians has helped them develop effective and responsive programming strategies.

The activities of cultural entities aimed at children with migration experience are driven by various motivations and pursued through different approaches. These are not mutually exclusive forms, but rather ones that, in an ideal model, could work synergistically, responding to a range of needs and aspirations of new young residents of Warsaw.

In our study, we identified four such approaches: **cultural venues as counter-spaces, locality, integration through culture, and family in the foreground.** We discuss them in the following slides.

Cultural entities

While reviewing Warsaw's online-archived cultural offerings for school-age children from Belarus and Ukraine (January 2024–May 2025), we came across:

49

activities offered by **Polish** entities

Thirteen in-depth individual interviews were conducted with representatives of **11 entities** contributing to Warsaw's multicultural offering. These included **theatres, cultural centres, foundations and museums.**

23

activities offered by **Belarusian** entities

20

activities offered by **Ukrainian** entities

Cultural entities. Recognition

Preliminary conclusions on the recognition of various types of cultural entities by children and parents

- ① Warsaw's cultural centres were poorly recognised. One barrier may be the **Polish-centric nature of these entities** – communications and registration systems in Polish, a lack of instructors from Belarus or Ukraine, and (after 2023) few activities aimed at non-Polish children.
- ② **Libraries** were mentioned more often, also as places to spend leisure time.
- ③ Parents are looking for **private tutors** for their children. This choice is influenced, on the one hand, by the opportunity to develop interests in their native language and, on the other hand, by the fact that Polish-language options, though often cheaper, are harder to find.
- ④ When visiting the city or museums, some people prefer to choose guides who are fluent in their language and who understand **cultural references** specific to their groups.


Cultural entities. Distinctive approaches

1.

Cultural venues as counter-spaces

Diasporic entities often serve as counter-spaces for their communities – places where children can develop their identity in a safe environment, make friends, build self-confidence and learn to cope in a host country society that is not always favourable.⁵

After 2020 and 2022, Belarusian and Ukrainian cultural entities significantly increased the scope and scale of their activities in Warsaw, mainly directing them at minority communities.



Let's be honest, very often the only and most important problem these children have is that they don't have a space where they can integrate and play together with other Ukrainians. This is their first and foremost need: to be able to spend time with other children in their own language.

PK/UA/IDI1

Cultural entities. Distinctive approaches

2.

Locality

The activities of some local cultural entities, such as Cultural Centres or Local Activity Centres, show how important a role they can play in everyday integration, based on shared neighbourhoods, small gestures of kindness, and familiarising oneself with cultural venues close to home.

Children have the opportunity to strike up friendships which they can continue to develop outside the cultural venue – in communal spaces or in their neighbours' homes. Children also build positive relationships within their neighbourhood, district and city, which are important for their everyday life and future.



Next to us there is a small square, a play area and residents' windows. When our kids want to play football or skip rope, they go out to this square. This space comes alive. Sometimes someone walks by and kicks the ball, someone joins in the fun, neighbours watch the children playing. It's nice that the children have taken over this space around them and the residents respect their presence.

PK/PL/IDI9

Cultural entities. Distinctive approaches

3.

Integration through culture

The activities with the greatest potential for integration are those offered by the theatres we surveyed. Regardless of whether theatre classes are held in a mixed or monocultural group, they give children the space and tools to open up, build their identity, strengthen their self-confidence, communication skills and assertiveness. These are qualities that are extremely useful for children with migration experience and have a positive impact on the integration process in their new environment.



I remember perfectly well the first meetings of the project, when the children divided themselves into Polish and non-Polish groups because they did not understand each other. At the beginning, the classes were conducted in three languages: Polish, Russian and Ukrainian. Somewhere around the third class, this was no longer necessary. The children mixed together and no longer minded that they were from different countries. It's amazing how it works.

NA/PL/IDI1

Cultural entities. Distinctive approaches

4.

Family in the foreground

Both Polish and diasporic institutions face the challenge of how to involve parents in integration when organising activities for children. Children often have more opportunities than their parents to make new friends — through school, extracurricular activities, after-school clubs, and so on. Therefore, some entities focus on family life – on the one hand, quality time spent with the child while doing activities together, and on the other, an opportunity for the parents themselves to enter a new environment.



Some Ukrainian families will stay here, and this will require integration into the majority society, i.e. Polish society. It is also important for the parents themselves to have opportunities to meet and exchange experiences. We are definitely considering creating this opportunity, and we are doing so through family activities.

PK/PL/IDI7

Cultural entities. Can we come in?

It is not enough for cultural venues to be open. New audiences, new participants, new recipients need to be invited.

Parents point to the need for Polish institutions (especially libraries and cultural centres) to communicate their openness to non-Polish children, e.g. by informing them about the availability of books in different languages or the presence of foreign-language instructors. They are also attentive to how invitations to events or classes are worded.

”

In competitions for children playing instruments, it says: students of Polish music schools. For me, this means that it is clearly stated who it is for. That’s why you don’t even go there.

RO-UA/IDI5

Cultural entities. An inviting cultural offering

Factors contributing to creating an offering that is culturally accessible and inviting

- ➔ **Networking with diaspora entities** – entering into regular and one-off collaborations, consultations or support in reaching out to cultural minority groups.
- ➔ **Introducing people from cultural minorities to teams** – greater ease in creating culturally accessible offerings, direct contact with the community, easier identification of needs.
- ➔ **Inclusive communication** – this may mean translating some of the materials on the website and social media (even for events held in Polish), but also using non-exclusive Polish language – in online communications and on a daily basis.

Cultural entities

”

During museum lessons, they feel safer because they know that it is a simulation, that it is supposed to be real, but not entirely. It also greatly improves the competence of the employees. Before each lesson, if I know that they will have to go somewhere, find some information, take a photo, I run through the exhibition, to the ticket office, to the bookshop and say: listen, we're expecting a group which isn't great at speaking Polish, but don't speak to them in English, use simple sentences, subject, verb. When someone tells you something like that 50 times a year in the morning, it sticks in your head. Even at this level, this shapes the museum: its communications and its patience with people who have difficulty communicating.

PK/PL/IDI3

Cultural entities



Culture has a big impact through activities that sometimes do not require language skills, such as attending pottery classes, painting classes or even singing classes. They allow you to integrate more quickly. This allows children to find a group of people with similar interests and pick up the language really quickly, especially younger children.

PK/PL/ID12

Educational and cultural environments

Polish educational institutions are not monocultural environments, although they very often function as such.

In many interviews, Polish schools appear as **places where children** from Belarus and Ukraine **find it difficult to fit in, feel safe, and develop their own identity and sense of belonging.**

They experience discrimination and misunderstanding from their peers. During classes, they often have to make an extra effort to participate actively.

Some parents, fearing bullying in Polish schools, send their children to diasporic schools.

Teachers feel isolated and unsure how to handle multicultural classes.

Educational and cultural environments. The teachers' situation

The situation of teachers in Polish schools

The teachers who participated in the study indicated that they feel overburdened and isolated, acting intuitively and on their own initiative, lacking systemic support in working with multicultural classes. The challenge of integrating pupils and resolving any tensions between different groups of pupils often rests entirely on their shoulders.

The role of intercultural assistants is important and appreciated by teachers, although they feel that it is systemically underdeveloped.

Several years after the rise in the number of children with migration and refugee experience from Belarus and Ukraine, multicultural classes have become an everyday reality for some teachers. Dilemmas arise as to how to treat migrant children on an equal footing with Polish children, while remaining sensitive to their additional needs.

Educational and cultural environments. Integration in the classrooms

Factors that hinder integration in schools

- ➔ **Some children participate in two education systems simultaneously** – the Polish system locally and, for example, the Ukrainian system remotely.
- ➔ **Teachers lack the skills and schools lack the resources** to work with a multicultural group.
- ➔ **Uncertainty about the future** and a sense of temporariness – this makes it difficult to build relationships with the current place of residence and the host society.
- ➔ Separation from the previous social group – **longing** for the familiar and rejection of the new situation.
- ➔ **Lack of understanding** among Polish peers and teachers of the situation of a child with migration experience.
- ➔ **Perceiving the child through the prism of their foreignness** – multiculturalism treated as pointing out differences instead of building everyday multicultural competence.

Educational and cultural environments. School trips

School trips have great potential to open children up to culture and give them a break from their everyday school experience, as some parents point out.

At the same time, interviewees often mentioned the reluctance of children from Belarus and Ukraine to participate in school trips. The children say that trips can be boring. Teachers note that the relationships between children and the atmosphere present in the classroom do not disappear during outings, and can even be more acute. If young people do not feel safe, discrimination follows them, and the cultural experience takes a back seat.

“

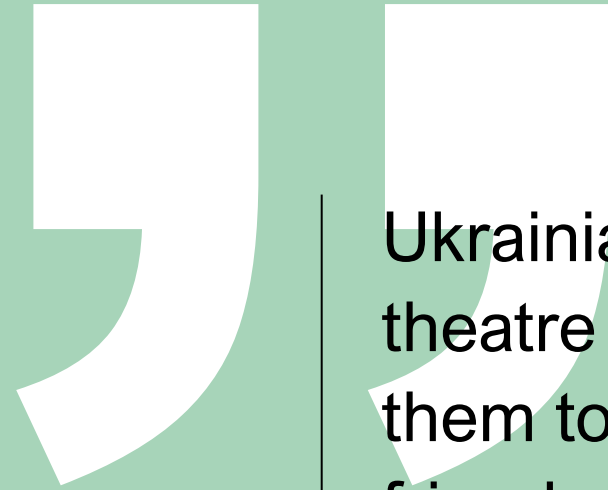
I don't want to say that it's something against immigrants. Perhaps the school staff doesn't involve my daughter in extracurricular activities because she doesn't want to go on trips with the children. She doesn't want to go anywhere with her class. It's important to me that she has places where she can meet children outside of school, but the teachers don't encourage this. I can't force her to do it either. Unfortunately.

RO/BY/IDI2

Educational and cultural environments. When culture enters school

The example of the school theatre in one of Warsaw's primary schools shows the great potential of in-school cultural activities for including minority groups.

Working in a group with shared interests helps children form more lasting relationships based on shared experiences, which promotes a sense of belonging and builds self-confidence in the school environment.



Ukrainian children adapt much more quickly through theatre classes at our school. Somehow, it is easier for them to join the team because they already have friends, not only their own, but also older and younger Polish friends from other classes. This makes it easier for them to find their place in the school corridor.

NA/PL/IDI1

Educational and cultural environments

”

There has been a lot of this recently, it happens often. Before coming here, I worked at a Polish school as an intercultural assistant. I observed this bullying, that you are from Ukraine and so on. Because of this, many parents still want their children to go to school among their own kind. To learn in their own culture, to be among children from Ukraine.

PK/UA/ID12

Educational and cultural environments

“

This school is such that... you could say they force you to go there. Here, you come of your own free will, because you want to, you want to paint, make things out of clay. Here, there are people who like the same things you do.

PK/PL/IDI6

Round Table at WOK Lab

5 December 2025

The intention of the Round Table was to initiate an expert discussion on the topics and questions outlined in the study and to open a public, multi-voiced discussion that will help identify further stages of the study.

The Round Table participants included experts from the City of Warsaw's Culture Bureau and the Education Bureau; representatives of Polish, Belarusian, and Ukrainian cultural organisations working with children with migration experience; as well as experts from the Friendly School programme and the Polish Migration Forum. The discussion was moderated by Aleksandra Winiarska, PhD, from the Centre of Migration Research at the University of Warsaw.

The meeting focused on the main themes of the research in three areas:

- ➔ **Perspectives and needs within the cultural ecosystem.** Diverse forms and motivations for working with children with migration experience, based on examples of practices from Warsaw's Polish and diasporic cultural organisations
- ➔ **Perspectives and voices of children and their families.** On the accessibility and function of cultural offerings for Ukrainian and Belarusian children in Warsaw.
- ➔ Views on the existing and desired **relationship between the school and cultural environments**, in the context of the experiences of the interviewees. How to support synergy between these environments?

Questions discussed:

- ➔ **It is not enough to be open, you have to be inviting:** what are the invisible barriers to entry and the unspoken needs of children with migration experience and their families?
- ➔ **What do cultural entities need** in order to effectively develop the participation of young people in multi-ethnic Warsaw?
- ➔ **Where can the ecosystems of education and culture meet** in supporting multicultural coexistence? What and who is needed for this?

During the meeting, many perspectives were expressed, and the democratic formula of the Round Table invited those active in the field of culture (Polish and diaspora), the NGO sector and local government to join the discussion.

Among the numerous voices, we quote those that are of particular importance for the planned continuation of the study:

- **“A child remains a child,”** regardless of their history or family situation. This is a key principle for all institutions working with young migrants – to allow them to be children.
- **“All pupils must be treated equally, but it should be taken into account that some groups have different needs that must be met”** – nationality must neither be invalidated nor stigmatised in the programming of cultural or educational experiences.
- **“Without parents, nothing can be done”** – family circumstances and the motivations and attitudes of parents (including Polish parents) are important factors in understanding the needs of children’s participation in culture and an important element to consider when planning programmes.
- **“It’s as if we were piercing concrete with soap bubbles”** – the new role that theatre and other cultural entities have to play requires openness and the development of competences in teams and entire institutions.
- **“Creating and strengthening bonds between children in the cultural space supports the school”** – which, as a space where integration is more difficult, can use this resource and strengthen it.
- **“Supporting a multicultural school is actually supporting a good Polish school as a whole”** – subjectivity, participation and openness are the foundations of better education for all children.

Conclusions

The study of migrant children's participation in culture illustrates an aspect of the rapidly emerging multi-ethnic society that Poland has become in general, and Warsaw in particular.

We recognise that this 'rapid multi-ethnicity' allows us to take a broader view of issues that have been with us for over a decade: the lack of a common frame of reference, stratification, the need for counter-space, i.e. safe spaces for minority groups. This offers great potential for discussion about intersectionality in Warsaw.

The research allowed us to outline topics for further exploration:

- ➔ We identify the need to examine the participation of all children and young people in culture in Warsaw in order to better understand the distinctions caused by various factors (e.g. migration vs. generation).
- ➔ Non-Polish cultural circuits, including institutional and infrastructural relations between the Polish and non-Polish ecosystems, remain on our radar.
- ➔ We want to examine the resources and competencies needed to develop appropriate programming strategies in cultural institutions, replacing short-term, reactive offerings with long-term programming strategies for all residents.

An important question that emerges in the background of the study concerns the role of cultural entities in the future of Warsaw, their significance, and the directions of their development and transformation.

References

- 1 Elżbieta Świdrowska, Klaudia Stano, *Uczniowie cudzoziemcy w polskich szkołach w roku szkolnym 2024/2025. Raport z analizy danych*, Centrum Edukacji Obywatelskiej, 2025
- 2 Mikołaj Lewicki, Mirosław Filiciak, *Wynalezienie poszerzonego pola kultury* [in:] „Kultura i Rozwój” no. 1 (2/2017)
- 3 Weronika Kloc-Nowak, *Drugie pokolenie czy pokolenie dwóch kultur?* [in:] „Repozytorium Warszawskiego Obserwatorium Kultury”, 2026, <https://wok.art.pl/dzialania/on-the-wok-radar/artykul-drugie-pokolenie-czy-pokolenie-dwoch-kultur-repozytorium-wok/>

- 4 Elżbieta M. Goździak, Marie Louise Seeberg, *Contested Childhoods: Growing in Migrancy* [in:] *Contested Childhoods: Growing in Migrancy. Migration, Governance, Identities*, ed. Marie Louise Seeberg, Elżbieta M. Goździak, published by Springer Nature, Cham 2016
- 5 Roozbeh Shirazi, “Somewhere We Can Breathe”: Diasporic Counterspaces of Education as Sites of Epistemological Possibility [in:] “Comparative Education Review” no. 63 (4/2019)

Children participate!

Exploratory research on
the participation of
migrant children in
Warsaw's cultural life

SUMMARY

June – December 2025

WOK Warszawskie
Obserwatorium
Kultury

Małgorzata Bakalarz-Duverger
Łucja Krzyżanowska
Sara Majcher-Wojciechowska
Anzhela Popyk



graphic design: mariannawybieralska.pl
cover illustration: Zofia Wróblewska
cover photo: Małgorzata Bakalarz-Duverger

wok.art.pl