

CITY REPORT

Warsaw

Promoting hospitality in a difficult environment.

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1. Abstract & Takeaway

Key Takeaway:



Despite a hostile national political climate and no local migration strategy, individual municipal offices are able to address migrant resident needs.

What is unique about the city?

Many offers for migrants despite inconsistent policies: Warsaw has one of the most generous offers in Poland for migrants, although it has not developed a consistent local policy covering inflowing migrants and refugees. As the capital and largest city in Poland, Warsaw was the first to experience the diversity connected with migration movements. The presence of a large number of migrants helped spark a number of inclusive actions in municipal public institutions and social organisations, including those established by migrants themselves.

What is the focus of local migration policies?

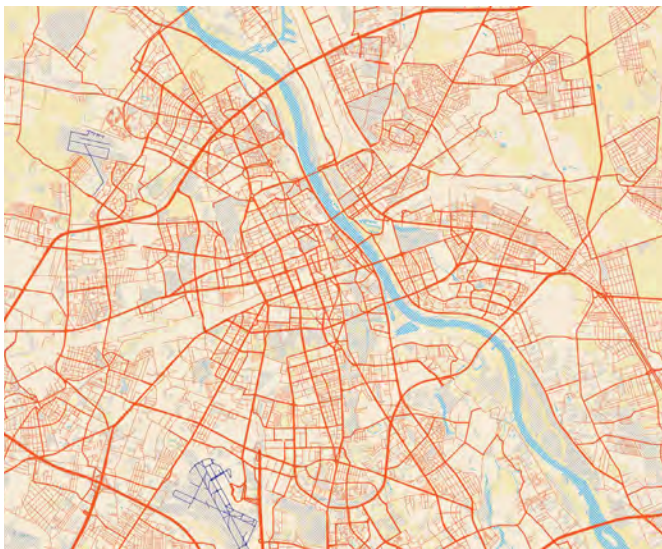
Centres jointly run by the city and civil society: In Warsaw, migrants can use their own organisations as platforms to propose and implement their own projects. Warsaw's Multicultural Centre and the Branch Social Dialogue Committee for Foreigners stand out as particularly effective and appreciated examples of cooperation between the city and civil society. Some of these organisations have been active for years, and have become a permanent element of Warsaw social activities.

What are the key factors in the city's migration policy?

Civic engagement and the local administration: Together with civil society, individual municipal offices and several coordinating institutions are the most important actors in migration policy. The city also funds several NGO projects working on migration.

Political activities and advocacy beyond the city level?

The mayor of Warsaw has signed declarations emphasising the positive contributions of migrants and refugees and promoted openness. In June 2018, Warsaw signed the UNHCR Cities #WithRefugees declaration and a Union of Polish Metropolises statement on cooperation with respect to migration. In September 2020, Warsaw issued a statement expressing its willingness to offer shelter to children and families who were victims of the fire at Lesbos refugee camp.



Population

1,800,000

Location/ region

Warsaw, the capital of Poland and the Mazowieckie Voivodship, is located in Central-Eastern Poland.

Mayor (party)

Rafał Trzaskowski (Koalicja Obywatelska)

2. Local background and context

Although Warsaw does not have a migrant integration policy written down in a single strategic document, individual municipal offices take migrant residents' needs into account when performing their statutory duties, as they have long-term experience in this field. Apart from tasks performed by municipal institutions, Warsaw finances NGO projects to support migrants. The city also grants non-financial support, by making municipal premises and spaces available for events or meetings free of charge, and by supporting in the city's organisational and technical capacity.

The main municipal institutions involved in migrant inclusion include the Warsaw Centre for Family Support (Warszawskie Centrum Pomocy Rodzinie), the Centre for Social Communication of Warsaw (Centrum

Komunikacji Społecznej Miasta Warszawy), and municipal educational facilities like the Warsaw Centre for Educational and Social Innovation and Trainings (Warszawskie Centrum Innowacji Edukacyjno-Społecznych i Szkoleń). In 2020, a new governmental office was established, the International Cooperation Office (Biuro Współpracy Międzynarodowej) that includes the Team for the Coordination of Activities to Support Foreigners (Zespół Koordynacji Działań na Rzecz Cudzoziemców).

The Warsaw Centre for Family Support: providing welfare services

The Warsaw Centre for Family Support is an organisation that provides welfare services. Its tasks include helping people who have been granted international protection. The Centre conducts one-year Individual Integration Programmes that include Polish language classes, help in finding jobs and material support. Foreigners who are covered by international protection may apply to rent a flat from the municipal resource pool, which also includes protected housing. “Warsaw has five flats annually for refugees,” said Daniel Witko, a lawyer from the Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights. “This is more than in other cities, but the number is still insufficient, considering the number of people in need. Currently, housing is granted to people who have completed the Individual Integration Programme in Warsaw, which limits access to flats for some refugees, e.g. those who have not left the refugee shelters near Warsaw early enough. The municipal policy could be improved in this respect.”

Warsaw’s educational institutions are actively involved in supporting foreign students, but also in preparing their teaching staff for work in a multicultural environment. The Warsaw Centre for Educational and Social Innovation and Training has a contact point and team for teaching foreign children and Polish diaspora children who return to Poland from abroad in Warsaw schools. The Centre has published several materials supporting the education of foreign children, including a ‘Welcome pack for pupils and their parents’.¹ Since 2020, the offer of psychological and pedagogical clinics has been extended to include specialist consultations for students and parents who do not speak Polish.

The Social Communication Centre: supporting civil society

Another important agency in migrant integration is the Social Communication Centre of the City of Warsaw (SCC) that deals, broadly speaking, with supporting civil society development in the city. The duties of the SCC include supervising the Multicultural Centre. The latter is managed by NGOs chosen in a competition. It is widely recognised in Warsaw as the main achievement of the cooperation between the city and NGOs and is explored in greater detail below.

The SCC also coordinates municipal diversity policy. This policy is created by municipal institutions, NGOs, and academic circles. It includes migrant and refugee integration. Since 2012, the Branch Social Dialogue Committee for Foreigners (BSDCF) has operated at the SCC. The BSDCF

¹ <http://www.swianiewicz.pl/pub/pakiety/druk/PAKIET-ENG-druk.pdf>

is the main platform for cooperation between the city and social organisations that support migrants, including organisations established by migrants.

The BSDCF currently has 28 associated organisations. Its role is to identify the areas the city should financially support, issue opinions on legal acts, and consult documents referring to immigration policy. Since December 1, 2020, the BSDCF has moved to the Office for International Cooperation (OIC).

The OIC is a new organisation in the Municipal Office, responsible for coordinating and consulting municipal actions affecting foreigners. In 2020, team activities included providing foreigners with information about the pandemic's development and ensuing restrictions. It also supported Belarussian citizens who left their country and arrived in Warsaw. The information booklet *Life in Warsaw* was published especially for them. In cases related to Belarussian citizens, the OIC cooperates with organisations founded by Belarussians, such as the House of Belarus.

The City of Warsaw finances various inclusion and anti-discrimination projects, mainly through competitions. These projects include legal and integration consulting, discrimination prevention trainings for officials, and the *Warsaw Days of Diversity* since 2016. The most comprehensive — and most costly — project is the Multicultural Centre.

3. Selected local approaches to migration and inclusion policy

3.1 The Multicultural Centre

The Multicultural Centre (MC) is currently the main municipal space in Warsaw conducting intercultural activities. These activities range from cultural and educational projects, through language learning, to legal and psychological counselling. The MC is often described by academics² as the best instance of inter-sector cooperation between the city and social organizations. The city finances Centre activities, while social organizations manage activities after being competitively selected.

The idea of establishing the Multicultural Centre dates to 2008, and discussions between the city and social activists. The Municipal Office and 30 NGOs jointly developed the concept and main tasks. As a result, the Municipal Office and 30 NGOs created a plan of priority activities. From 2009-2010, the Other Space Foundation (Fundacja Inna Przestrzeń) conducted a pilot programme of the Warsaw Multicultural Centre. Later, a group of NGOs established the Foundation for the Multicultural Centre (życia Fundację na rzecz Centrum Wielokulturowego). This Foundation

² E.g. Sobczak-Szelc, K., Pachoc-ka, M., Pędziwiatr, K., Szałańska, J. (2020). 'Integration Policies, Practices and Responses. Poland – Country Report', Multilevel Governance of Mass Migration in Europe and Beyond Project (#770564, Horizon2020) Report Series, p.122.

managed the MC from 2014-2017, conducting activities in four main areas: activation, information, culture, and education.

Today, the Multicultural Centre is a place for local activity, such as meetings, projects, debates, conferences, and seminars. The Centre also conducts anti-discrimination workshops and diversity lessons for children, young people, and teachers. It also offers support addressed specifically to migrants, in the form of free legal assistance on residency and finding a job, career counselling, psychological support, and courses in Polish as a foreign language. Due to the large inflow of people from Belarus as a result of political tensions, in September the MC opened a Support Point for Belarusians.

As a place of local activity, the Multicultural Centre makes its premises available to NGOs, individuals, informal initiatives, neighbourhood community groups, etc. Every year, the Centre also offers small grants to projects conducted on its premises. In 2020, subsidies were granted to the singing workshops Music of the World (a project in the field of global and artistic education), educational art workshops for children on the cultures of Poland and Uzbekistan, and more.

The concept of a Multicultural Centre whose space and technical facilities are used both by the hosts and by external entities has great integration potential and results in a significant number of activities. The minimum planned number of activities conducted in the Centre is 150 per year.

Currently, four organisations manage the MC: Pro Humanum Association, Foundation for Somali, the Armenian Foundation, and the Polish-Ukrainian Chamber of Commerce. “We decided for a relatively wide partnership between the organisations managing the Centre for several reasons. First, it allows us to see issues related to staying in Poland from the point of view of various groups and we learn more about their needs. Second, a larger number of people involved means more know-how, and the ability to better assign tasks, which translates to a wider offer for visitors of the Centre. Finally, partnership requires cooperation and transparency, which also improves the quality of our activities,” says Małgorzata Sójka, an educator and animator at the Warsaw Multicultural Centre.

3.2 Intercultural Warsaw

Intercultural Warsaw is a project created by the Association for Legal Intervention (ALI) (*Stowarzyszenie Interwencji Prawnej*) – a Warsaw social organisation that supports human rights and combats unequal treatment. The Association is a team from various backgrounds and professions (attorneys, cultural scientists, scientists) allowing a comprehensive approach to inclusion issues. SIP projects are designed to connect people from various social groups – refugees, migrants, the elderly, children, and volunteers. Its legal activities focus on revealing discrimination situations.

The Intercultural Warsaw project (fourth edition: December 2018–November 2021) is addressed to refugees and voluntary migrants. It includes providing free legal and integration consulting and managing a Centre of Voluntary Work (Centrum Volontariatu).

Legal consultation for foreigners

Legal consulting covers a whole range of legal problems foreigners in Poland may face. In practice, it means assistance in cases such as requests for international protection or residency permits, appeals to a court against deportation decisions, labour law and social security or family law cases (marriage and divorce), housing law, etc. Lawyers, who are sensitive to issues of equal treatment, analyse these problems to spot any evidence of discrimination. They help solve problems related to employee exploitation and monitor hate crime cases.

This legal counselling is complemented by integration advisors, who also support migrants in finding their way in Poland. They perform the function of translators, cultural guides, and even social workers of a kind. Counsellors also offer guidance on how to behave in various social situations, e.g. in an office, during conversations with landlords, employers, teachers. If necessary, they accompany migrants in such situations, to reduce the risk of cultural or linguistic misunderstandings.

The Centre for Voluntary Work: assistance in day-to-day tasks

The Centre for Voluntary Work is also offers migrants complementary legal and cultural counselling. Volunteer duties include assisting migrants in doing everyday errands, such as visits to the office, doctor, or school. In this way, volunteers not only help refugees and migrants, but also spread the word about displacement and migration in other institutions, educating their employees and making them more sensitive to these problems. About 50 people engage in voluntary work in the organisation every year. “The motivations of our volunteers are different,” says Aleksandra Chrzanowska, member of the board of SIP. “Some of them are simply interested in other people and finding out more about different cultures and working with migrants helps them satisfy this interest. Others treat it as the beginning of their professional careers, for example as translators or employees of humanitarian organisations. Finally, there are those who just feel that they need to help others. Sometimes this kind of attitude may be a form of expressing gratitude for help that they once received. For example, some members of this group are our former clients, who have already gone through the whole process of adapting to life in a new country and now they want to help others.”

The Centre for Voluntary Work is only one project involving ordinary Warsaw residents in the migrant integration process. The Association for Legal Intervention has conducted several projects connecting children of refugees with elderly Poles, by organising joint activities, such as cooking, filmmaking or sewing workshops. The aim of these activities is to initiate intercultural dialogue between generations, to motivate the

elderly to meet people from other cultures, and to foster open-minded, tolerant attitudes.

Projects from the **Intercultural Warsaw** series, Senior Citizens in Multicultural Warsaw, the Many Generations of Warsaw, and Children in Intergenerational Warsaw are co-financed by the City of Warsaw.

4. Advocacy and network activities

The main values Warsaw champions in its communication strategies and municipal policies are diversity, tolerance, and non-discrimination. Some mayors also signed declarations of solidarity with refugees.

This approach was introduced from 2009-2011, when the city started to respond to the growing diversity of its inhabitants. In December 2009, the mayor appointed the first Plenipotentiary for Equal Treatment,³ a major signal of potential municipal policy shifts in this area. Later, other large cities like Poznan and Lodz followed in Warsaw's footsteps. In 2010, the Municipal Office drafted a pilot programme called Diverse Warsaw (Warszawa Różnorodna), with implementation to start in 2012. With Poland hosting the EURO 2012 football championship, many foreigners were expected to visit the country. As a result, there was an urgent need to conduct anti-discrimination and anti-racist actions such as training and legal consulting. Ultimately the Diverse Warsaw programme was not implemented, but many of its recommendations were implemented anyway, with some continuing today.

Diversity policies

Diversity was defined as a key trait and advantage in the Warsaw 2030 Strategy adopted in 2018. The strategy lays down a vision of Warsaw as an open city that focuses on cooperation. However, migration issues were not widely discussed.⁴ In 2020, the city returned to creating a municipal Diversity Policy, which covers migrant integration issues. Public participation informs policy creation, in cooperation with city officials, scientists, and social organisations in Warsaw. Warsaw has also invited practitioners with experience creating similar documents for other cities to cooperate. The policy is expected to be finished in mid-2021.

Combating discrimination and affirming diversity are emphasised in the city's policy. These goals usually refer to a particular minority group. The most visible example occurred in February 2018, when the city of Warsaw launched a campaign to support refugees, with the slogan 'People from Warsaw are not afraid'.⁵ This slogan was expanded in various ways, e.g. 'People from Warsaw are not afraid to make friends with refugees,'

³ Appointed by Ordinance No. 3994/2009 of December 22 2009

⁴ <http://2030.um.warszawa.pl/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/Strategia-Warszawa2030-final.pdf>

⁵ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p_-R5CN5tVQ

or ‘People from Warsaw are not afraid to defend a refugee.’ The campaign was a direct response to a wave of aggressive behaviour towards migrants. The campaign was one of the major dissenting voices in the nationwide debate on accepting refugees, which, starting in 2015, was dominated by a narrative about the apparent threats connected with accepting asylum seekers. The wording of ‘People from Warsaw are not afraid’ positively evokes one of the most important events in the city’s history – the Warsaw Uprising. What’s more, one of the Uprising’s participants took part in the campaign.

Apart from this campaign, the mayor of Warsaw has signed declarations with positive references to migrants and refugees. In June 2018, Warsaw signed the UNHCR Cities #WithRefugees declaration and a Union of Polish Metropolises statement on cooperation with respect to migration.⁶ In September 2020, Warsaw issued a statement expressing its willingness to offer shelter to children and families who were victims of the fire in the Lesbos refugee camp.⁷

Warsaw’s Municipal Office has also been recognised for supporting migrant inclusion and awarded the *Złote Wachlarze* (Golden Fans) prize by the IOM’s Polish branch in 2013.

⁶ <https://www.metropolie.pl/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Tekst-deklaracji-UMP-z-30-czerwca-2017.pdf>

⁷ <https://www.metropolie.pl/8003.stanowisko-prezydentow-miast-unii-metropolii-polskich-im-pawla-adamowicza-w-sprawie-pomocy-mieszkancom-spalonego-obozu-moria-z-dnia-25-wrzesnia-2020-r/>

The **Moving Cities** project provides an in-depth research of 28 progressive, solidarity-based cities and their strategies in Europe, exploring their most inspiring and successful local approaches to their migration policies.

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