

INCLUSION AND INTEGRATION OF UKRAINIAN STUDENTS IN POLISH HIGHER EDUCATION: THE CASE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF RZESZÓW

Anna Barwińska-Małajowicz, Miroslava Knapková, Radosław Pyrek



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Preface

The aim of this publication is to explore the integration of students from Ukraine into the Polish academic environment, with particular focus on the experiences and practices developed at the University of Rzeszów. The choice of this topic reflects both the unprecedented scale of educational migration triggered by the war in Ukraine and the need for a deeper understanding of the social, cultural, and institutional processes shaping the experiences of refugee students as they adapt to new living and learning conditions.

The war and the resulting forced displacement have created a number of challenges for the Polish education system. Universities – despite the absence of dedicated external funding – undertook rapid measures to integrate students from Ukraine into academic structures. These efforts included organizational adjustments and expanded forms of linguistic, psychological, and informational support.

This publication is intended for researchers, university instructors, administrative staff, and stakeholders involved in education policy. The monograph seeks not only to present the current state of knowledge and the integration initiatives already underway, but also to outline practical implications and recommendations that may help strengthen inclusion and foster an academic environment grounded in dialogue, collaboration, and mutual respect. The authors hope that the analyses presented here will inspire further research and reflection on the role of the university amid the dynamic social changes unfolding today.

Introduction

The outbreak of the war in Ukraine in 2022 triggered large-scale migration, which rapidly posed significant social, humanitarian, and educational challenges for Poland. From the earliest days of the conflict, the country opened its borders, providing refuge to those seeking safety. Educational institutions, including schools, universities, and academic centres, played a crucial role, having to quickly adapt their structures to ensure that children, adolescents, and students from Ukraine could continue their education.

The response of Polish universities, particularly the University of Rzeszów, demonstrated a high degree of institutional flexibility in addressing unforeseen crisis challenges. Organizational and programmatic adjustments were implemented promptly, and support mechanisms were rapidly expanded. Concurrently, initiatives were launched to create spaces that facilitate both social and academic integration, enabling Ukrainian students to participate fully in university life.

This monograph provides a comprehensive analysis of the processes of inclusion and integration of Ukrainian students within the Polish academic environment, with particular attention to the University of Rzeszów. It combines theoretical and empirical perspectives, highlighting effective practices implemented by the university, as well as the lived experiences of Ukrainian students and the involvement of their Polish peers. The findings presented here offer a foundation for reflection on the development of academic environments in increasingly diverse cultural contexts and contribute to understanding the challenges of educational migration. They also inform strategies aimed at fostering an open, inclusive, and intercultural academic community.

The primary aim of this monograph is to examine the multidimensional processes through which Ukrainian students are integrated into Polish higher education, identifying both the factors that facilitate successful inclusion and the barriers that impede it. This examination proceeds through several interconnected levels of analysis.

The monograph is organized into five chapters that progressively build from theoretical foundations to empirical findings and practical recommendations. The first chapter provides a comprehensive theoretical framework for understanding inclusion and integration in higher education. It examines contemporary conceptualizations of inclusion, the role of universities in building open-academic environments, the barriers faced by international students, and the importance of intercultural communication and psychological support. This chapter draws on cross-cultural psychology, intercultural communication theories, transition theories, and ecological models to establish the conceptual foundations for the empirical analysis that follows. Next chapter

outlines methodology and the research approach employed in this study. The third chapter presents the macro-level context of the phenomenon. It documents the scale and dynamics of educational migration at both secondary and higher education levels, analyses the motivations of Ukrainian students for choosing Poland as their study destination, describes the socio-demographic structure of this population, identifies the main barriers and challenges they face, and reviews the social and institutional responses to the influx of Ukrainian students. This chapter establishes the broader context within which the University of Rzeszów operates. The fourth chapter forms the empirical core of the monograph. It begins by introducing the University of Rzeszów as both an institutional context and research field, then examines the institutional support structures (particularly the role of the Polish Community Centre), the involvement of Polish students in inclusion processes, and the experiences and assessments of Ukrainian students regarding their academic and social integration. The last chapter synthesizes the key findings and presents recommendations for four main stakeholder groups: public policymakers, higher education institutions, economic actors, and social and local institutions.

This monograph contributes to the growing body of scholarship on forced migration and higher education in several important ways. First, it provides detailed empirical evidence on a rapidly evolving phenomenon that has transformed Polish higher education since 2022. Second, it employs a multi-stakeholder approach that captures the complexity of integration as a relational process involving institutions, host students, and migrant students. Third, it bridges theoretical frameworks from inclusion studies, intercultural education, and forced migration research to generate insights applicable beyond the Polish context. Finally, it offers practical recommendations grounded in the lived experiences of those directly involved in integration processes.

From a theoretical perspective, this monograph advances understanding of integration as a multidimensional, reciprocal process that extends beyond individual adaptation to encompass institutional transformation and community-building. It demonstrates the utility of ecological frameworks that situate student experiences within nested systems of influence – from immediate peer interactions to institutional policies and broader socio-political contexts. The comparative analysis of stakeholder perspectives reveals how integration is simultaneously understood as a systemic task (by institutions), a relational process (by peers), and a condition for rebuilding safety and continuing academic life (by Ukrainian students themselves).

From a practical standpoint, the monograph provides actionable insights for university administrators, policymakers, faculty, and students. It identifies specific areas where interventions can be most effective, such as language support, psychological services, peer mentoring, and intercultural education, while also highlighting the importance of coordination across these domains. The detailed documentation

of the University of Rzeszów's response, including the role of the Polish Community Centre and the "Solidarity with Ukraine" programme, offers a model that other institutions can adapt to their own contexts.

The research reported in the monograph was conducted as part of the Erasmus+ project "European Inclusion of Ukrainian Students" (project number 2023-1-SK01-KA220-HED-000157553), involving partnership between institutions in Slovakia, Poland, and Romania.

1. Inclusion in the academic environment

The contemporary landscape of higher education is increasingly defined by unprecedented levels of international student mobility, cultural diversity, and institutional complexity. As universities around the world seek to establish themselves as global institutions, creating genuinely inclusive academic environments has become both a moral obligation and a strategic priority.

This chapter offers a comprehensive theoretical analysis of inclusion in academic settings. It explores the multidimensional processes of student integration, institutional responsibility, and systemic barriers, while also highlighting the pivotal role of intercultural communication and psychological support frameworks in fostering inclusive educational communities.

The conceptualization of inclusion in higher education has evolved significantly – from early assimilationist models to more sophisticated theoretical frameworks that recognize the reciprocal relationship between institutional transformation and student adaptation. Contemporary scholarship increasingly acknowledges that authentic inclusion requires more than accommodating diverse students within existing structures; it demands a fundamental reimagining of academic environments to embrace epistemological diversity, cultural reciprocity, and systemic equity (Fitzpatrick, 2023).

This paradigmatic shift calls for a critical examination of the theoretical foundations of inclusive practice, the institutional mechanisms that either facilitate or hinder inclusion, and the complex interplay of factors shaping international students' academic and social experiences.

1.1. The Conceptualization of Inclusion and Integration of Students

The contemporary inclusion theory in higher education is deeply shaped by insights from cross-cultural psychology and intercultural communication studies, which together illuminate how culture influences learning, interaction, and adaptation. One of the most cited frameworks remains Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory, which, despite substantial critique for its static, nation-based orientation, offers a useful starting point for understanding how cultural values shape communication norms, authority relations, and classroom behaviour (Wang et al., 2023). Dimensions such as power distance, individualism versus collectivism, uncertainty avoidance, and long-term orientation help explain why students from different cultural backgrounds may interpret instructions, feedback, and participation roles differently. For example, in high

power-distance contexts, students may hesitate to question professors, whereas those from low power-distance cultures may view open debate as a sign of engagement.

However, the explanatory power of Hofstede's model is limited by its assumption of stable, national cultures. To address this, more dynamic frameworks, particularly those inspired by Edward Hall's theory of high- and low-context communication, offer a finer-grained understanding of interpersonal dynamics in diverse classrooms (Dunworth et al., 2021). Hall's model highlights how implicit (high-context) or explicit (low-context) communication patterns influence academic discourse and feedback interpretation. In academic settings, these differences often manifest in group work, classroom participation, and teacher–student relations. Students from high-context cultures may rely on shared understanding and nonverbal cues, while low-context environments such as Anglo-American universities privilege directness and explicit argumentation. The resulting mismatches can create unintentional barriers to full participation.

Together, Hofstede's macro-level analysis and Hall's micro-level framework form a complementary foundation for inclusion research, showing that intercultural barriers in education stem not only from language proficiency but from deeper mismatches in communication norms and expectations. Building on these insights, inclusion scholars have increasingly emphasized interculturality as a central pedagogical paradigm.

Unlike earlier multicultural approaches, which often focused on tolerance and cultural celebration, intercultural pedagogy treats diversity as an epistemic and pedagogical resource, a source of new perspectives, not merely a challenge to be managed (Hassan, 2025). This orientation shifts inclusion from being a matter of “fitting in” to one of mutual transformation: students learn to navigate and value difference, while institutions adapt curricula, teaching methods, and assessment practices to reflect multiple worldviews. As Lazarević (2023) notes, this paradigm challenges Western-centric epistemologies by legitimizing alternative ways of knowing, learning, and expressing understanding. Intercultural pedagogy thus calls for a profound rethinking of what counts as valid knowledge in the academy. Instead of adding “international content” to existing courses, universities are urged to cultivate dialogic spaces where students' cultural repertoires become part of the learning process. Such an approach reframes inclusion not as accommodation of diversity but as co-creation of knowledge through diversity.

In sum, these interrelated frameworks (Hofstede's macro-cultural lens, Hall's interactional focus, and the emergent paradigm of intercultural pedagogy) together provide a multi-layered theoretical foundation for understanding inclusion in higher education. They reveal that authentic inclusion requires both structural transformation of institutions and reciprocal intercultural engagement within classrooms. While cultural and intercultural frameworks explain how students and institutions navigate difference, theories of transition and adaptation add a temporal and developmental dimension to inclusion. They explore how individuals adjust to new academic, social, and cultural environments

over time, highlighting the dynamic interplay between personal resources and institutional support. A central contribution in this area is Schlossberg's transition theory, particularly her 4S model – Situation, Self, Support, and Strategies – which provides a comprehensive framework for understanding how individuals experience and manage significant life changes (Krsmanovic, 2022). Applied to international higher education, this model clarifies how students' adaptation depends on both personal characteristics (e.g., resilience, motivation, prior experience) and contextual factors such as institutional structures, peer networks, and available support mechanisms.

Empirical studies demonstrate that international students often face multiple, overlapping transitions. They must simultaneously adapt to new academic expectations, acquire language proficiency, establish social networks, and negotiate emerging identities – all while managing the psychological stress of cultural displacement (Dembitskyi et al., 2025). Consequently, successful adaptation is not a linear process but an ongoing negotiation between continuity and change. Institutions that recognize this complexity tend to design layered support systems, addressing both immediate practical needs and long-term developmental growth.

Recent scoping reviews and meta-analyses confirm that three factors consistently underpin successful inclusion: language competence, pedagogical alignment, and social integration (Hussain, Shen, 2019; Zhu et al., 2022). Yet, as these reviews emphasize, many existing studies remain descriptive. The field increasingly calls for multi-method and longitudinal research linking theoretical constructs to measurable institutional outcomes – such as retention, academic performance, and student wellbeing. Only through such evidence-based inquiry can inclusion strategies evolve beyond rhetorical commitments into effective, replicable practice.

Integrating intercultural and transition theories produces a more comprehensive framework for institutional action. Intercultural theories explain the communication and cultural processes that shape students' experiences, while transition models provide insight into the timing and sequencing of necessary interventions (Semigina, Stoliaryk, 2025). This synthesis underscores that inclusion requires both cultural competence and developmental sensitivity, that is, awareness not only of difference but also of the evolving nature of adaptation over time. Building on this integrative foundation, recent scholarship emphasizes the relational and ecological dimensions of student experience. Strayhorn's (2018) influential work on belonging conceptualizes inclusion as the satisfaction of a basic human need – the need to feel accepted, valued, and supported within an academic community. Belonging is therefore not an individual trait but a relational condition shaped by institutional culture, peer relationships, and opportunities for meaningful engagement. Institutions that promote belonging through mentoring, collaborative learning, and inclusive governance structures report higher student satisfaction, retention, and academic success.

Complementing this relational focus, ecological theories of inclusion draw from Bronfenbrenner's bioecological model, which situates human development within nested systems of influence – from immediate interpersonal interactions (microsystems) to institutional structures (mesosystems) and broader sociocultural and political environments (macrosystems) (Bronfenbrenner, Morris, 2007). Within this framework, student inclusion emerges as a multi-level phenomenon: academic success depends not only on individual effort but also on the alignment between institutional policies, community attitudes, and societal values.

From an ecological standpoint, inclusion cannot be achieved through isolated interventions, such as language courses or orientation programs, but through coordinated, systemic action across the entire educational ecosystem. Universities, therefore, bear responsibility not only for supporting individual adaptation but also for shaping environments that nurture diversity, belonging, and mutual transformation.

1.2. The role of universities in building an open academic environment

Universities occupy a unique position in the global landscape of inclusion, serving simultaneously as educational institutions, cultural mediators, and social change agents. Over the past decades, their responsibilities have evolved from basic compliance with anti-discrimination legislation toward comprehensive duty-of-care frameworks encompassing academic, social, and psychological dimensions of student wellbeing (Muhwezi, Turyasingura, 2025). This transformation reflects a broader understanding of higher education as not only a space for knowledge transmission but also as an environment where social equity, wellbeing, and belonging are actively constructed.

Contemporary research identifies recurring institutional responsibilities that span multiple domains of student experience. Together, these create an interconnected architecture of support that includes orientation and onboarding programs, academic and language support, peer mentoring and social integration initiatives, curriculum internationalization, staff development, and mental health and pastoral care services (Kholodniak, 2025). When coordinated systematically, such initiatives can significantly alleviate the challenges international students face during academic and social transitions, as evidenced by numerous mixed-method and case studies (Onwelumadu, 2019). Yet the literature consistently points to persistent implementation gaps – support services often operate in isolation, lacking coordination and strategic coherence. True inclusion thus requires institutions to view these initiatives not as discrete projects but as mutually reinforcing components of a single, coherent support system.

Orientation and onboarding processes have been identified as particularly crucial in shaping early experiences of international students. Effective orientation programs serve as critical entry points, providing guidance on academic expectations, campus resources, and cultural norms while also facilitating initial social connections (God, Zhang, 2019). The most effective models, however, move beyond conventional information sessions to include experiential learning, cultural immersion, and continuous mentoring across the first academic year. The design and philosophy of such programs reflect the institution's deeper stance toward diversity: universities that conceptualize international students as cultural assets and contributors to knowledge production rather than as individuals needing remediation tend to achieve stronger academic and social outcomes (Olagunju et al., 2024). This asset-based approach reframes inclusion as a process of mutual enrichment, one that values students' prior experiences, linguistic repertoires, and cultural perspectives as resources for collective learning.

Language support represents another core dimension of institutional inclusion but one that has grown increasingly complex in contemporary scholarship. While English as a Second Language (ESL) programs remain a cornerstone of linguistic support, their traditional focus on general language proficiency is increasingly seen as insufficient for addressing the deeper cognitive and disciplinary demands of academic communication (AlTaher, 2020). Drawing on Cummins' (2017) distinction between basic interpersonal communication skills (BICS) and cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP), scholars argue that true academic language competence develops not prior to academic engagement but through active participation in disciplinary communities. Accordingly, effective institutional strategies integrate language development within content-area instruction, positioning language learning as a continuous, context-embedded process. Such integration requires close collaboration between language specialists and disciplinary faculty, breaking down departmental silos and promoting interdisciplinary cooperation. This shift reflects a broader movement from remedial models toward inclusive epistemic participation, where linguistic diversity is seen as an opportunity to rethink how knowledge is communicated, constructed, and assessed.

Closely related to language inclusion is the internationalization of the curriculum, which represents one of the most visible and transformative dimensions of institutional responsibility. This process extends beyond the addition of international content or examples to courses. It involves a systematic re-examination of learning outcomes, assessment practices, and pedagogical assumptions to ensure accessibility and relevance for a globally diverse student body (Zolfaghari, Sabran, Zolfaghari, 2009; De Wit, Deca, 2020). Research on inclusive pedagogy emphasizes multiple interconnected dimensions: the diversification of assessment methods to respect different cultural modes of demonstrating understanding, flexible participation formats that accommodate varied communication styles, and the design of collaborative learning

environments where cultural diversity becomes a source of collective knowledge-building (Gay, 2018). Importantly, inclusion at the curricular level requires not only technical adjustments but also a transformation of academic culture itself – a shift toward epistemological openness, where diverse ways of knowing and reasoning are legitimized within institutional discourse.

Such curricular transformation, however, depends heavily on faculty readiness. Numerous studies highlight that many educators lack the pedagogical and intercultural competencies needed to teach effectively in diverse classrooms, which underlines the importance of systematic professional development (Deardorff, 2006). Faculty who participates in intercultural training consistently report increased confidence, higher teaching satisfaction, and improved student engagement. In this sense, inclusion-oriented staff development benefits both students and the academic community at large, fostering reflexive teaching practices and reinforcing institutional cohesion.

Another vital component of inclusive academic policy is the recognition of prior learning (RPL), which acknowledges the heterogeneous educational and experiential backgrounds that international students bring to their studies. This mechanism aligns with European policy directions emphasizing equitable access to education for displaced and mobile learners (Commission Recommendation (EU) 2022/554; Worster, 2022; Storey, 2023). RPL frameworks promote transparency and flexibility by validating knowledge acquired through informal, non-formal, or experiential means, thereby counteracting exclusion caused by rigid credentialing systems. Contemporary RPL approaches increasingly rely on portfolio-based assessment, competency mapping, and structured documentation of experiential learning (Andersson, Harris, 2006). These tools allow institutions to balance academic integrity with inclusivity, recognizing that valuable knowledge and skills often emerge outside traditional educational trajectories.

Yet institutional inclusion extends beyond policy mechanisms and programmatic interventions, it is equally dependent on the broader culture and climate of the university. As Hurtado et al. (2012) argue, inclusion is embedded in the everyday interactions, expectations, and values that define institutional life. Inclusive climates are characterized by visible leadership commitment, transparent diversity policies, and genuine efforts to address bias and discrimination. Leadership thus plays a pivotal role: sustained inclusion requires not symbolic gestures but tangible resource allocation, targeted policy development, and the establishment of accountability structures (Williams, Berger, McClendon, 2005). Universities that achieve meaningful inclusion outcomes typically demonstrate strong, consistent leadership that articulates a clear diversity vision, invests resources strategically, and monitors progress through measurable indicators.

Finally, institutional governance is an essential yet often overlooked dimension of inclusive practice. Studies show that sustainable inclusion depends on participatory decision-making structures that involve students, faculty, and administrative

staff in shaping the policies that affect them (Tight, 2019). Meaningful participation ensures that inclusion is not merely a top-down initiative but a co-created process reflecting the lived experiences of diverse stakeholders. Such collaborative governance reinforces transparency, trust, and a sense of shared ownership, conditions necessary for inclusion to become a defining feature of the institutional identity rather than a peripheral agenda.

In sum, universities' role in fostering inclusion extends far beyond the provision of support services. It encompasses the reconfiguration of institutional structures, pedagogical practices, and leadership cultures toward a holistic model of education that recognizes diversity as a driver of innovation and excellence. When orientation programs, language support, curriculum design, recognition mechanisms, and governance processes operate as parts of an integrated system, inclusion ceases to be a policy aspiration and becomes an everyday reality within the academic community.

1.3. Barriers and difficulties in the process of including foreign students

Language barriers represent perhaps the most visible and well-documented challenges confronting international students in academic environments, yet contemporary scholarship demonstrates that these challenges extend far beyond simple deficits in language proficiency. They encompass intricate dimensions of academic discourse, disciplinary conventions, and culturally embedded communication patterns that together shape students' ability to participate fully in university life (Arkoudis, Tran, 2007). The distinction between conversational fluency and academic language competence is particularly significant. While many students quickly acquire everyday communicative skills, the mastery of academic language – characterized by discipline-specific vocabulary, rhetorical patterns, and epistemological assumptions – often takes years to develop (Cummins, 2000). This complexity is magnified by the fact that much of academic literacy involves implicit conventions rarely taught explicitly but nonetheless critical for success, including citation practices, argumentation structures, and culturally contingent notions of critique and originality (Lea, Street, 1998). When institutions assume that students will absorb these conventions informally through exposure, they risk creating invisible yet powerful barriers to achievement and belonging.

Recent research on multilingualism further complicates traditional understandings of linguistic ability, challenging monolingual norms that dominate many educational systems (Mateus, 2014). Studies of code-switching and translanguaging reveal that multilingual students draw creatively on their entire linguistic repertoire to construct meaning and engage in complex cognitive processes, yet institutional policies frequently

restrict these practices in favor of standardized linguistic norms. Recognizing multilingualism as a resource rather than a deficit represents a necessary paradigm shift. When universities value and leverage students' multilingual capabilities – by encouraging translanguaging in classroom discussions or permitting bilingual assessment, for instance – both academic outcomes and social integration improve (Hornberger, Link, 2012). Such an asset-based approach, however, requires institutional awareness of power dynamics that privilege dominant languages and marginalize others, reinforcing inequities even within ostensibly inclusive spaces.

Beyond linguistic factors, a substantial body of research points to mismatches between international students' prior educational experiences and the pedagogical expectations of host institutions (Jin, Cortazzi, 2006). These divergences span learning and teaching styles, classroom participation norms, assessment formats, and notions of authority. For instance, Hofstede's (2001) work on cultural dimensions illustrates how values such as collectivism, power distance, and uncertainty avoidance influence students' approaches to learning. While Western higher education often valorises independence, critical thinking, and argumentation, students from more hierarchical or collectivist systems may initially struggle to interpret these expectations. Yet, as Tweed and Lehman (2002) argue, these students also bring alternative strengths – collaborative learning habits, holistic reasoning, and respect for intellectual dialogue – that can enrich classroom dynamics if educators recognize and integrate them. The challenge, therefore, is not merely to “adapt” students to dominant pedagogies but to develop teaching practices flexible enough to accommodate and value diverse epistemological traditions.

Assessment practices constitute another area where cultural assumptions frequently translate into structural disadvantage. Traditional forms of evaluation in higher education often emphasize individual achievement, competitive performance, and highly textual modes of demonstrating knowledge – criteria that may not align with the educational backgrounds or communication styles of many international students (Kirby, Cullinane, 2016; Bates, 2024). Research suggests that diversified assessment strategies – such as portfolios, group projects, oral examinations, or multimodal presentations – provide fairer and more valid measures of learning for heterogeneous student cohorts. Furthermore, temporal factors play a significant role: operating in a second language often imposes additional cognitive load and slows information processing. Flexible assessment timing, opportunities for revision, and explicit instruction in assessment conventions can mitigate these inequities without compromising academic rigor (Brown, 2008).

While academic factors shape one dimension of inclusion, social integration represents an equally vital yet persistently challenging area. Studies repeatedly show that international and domestic students frequently coexist in physical proximity but social

isolation persists, limiting opportunities for intercultural learning (Engberg et al., 2016; Yu, Moskal, 2019). Research into campus dynamics has uncovered enduring patterns of cultural segregation arising from both voluntary clustering for comfort and inadvertent exclusion by majority groups (Summers, Volet, 2008; Volet, Ang, 2012; Liang, Schartner, 2022). These divisions are often reinforced by structural features of university life: housing policies that concentrate international students, program timetables that limit shared coursework, and extracurricular activities designed primarily around local cultural norms (Glass, Wongtrirat, Buus, 2015; Aw et al., 2023). The presence of diversity alone, therefore, does not guarantee interaction or understanding. Genuine inclusion demands intentional institutional design that promotes sustained intercultural engagement, such as mixed housing models, structured cross-cultural projects, and mentoring schemes linking local and international students.

Compounding these social barriers are experiences of discrimination and bias, which research identifies as major determinants of international students' wellbeing and academic persistence (Lee, Rice, 2007; Tavares, 2024a; 2024b). Discrimination may manifest overtly through racial or religious prejudice or subtly through microaggressions and social exclusion. Such encounters often undermine students' confidence, reduce participation, and erode their sense of belonging. The consequences extend beyond emotional distress to affect academic performance, help-seeking behaviours, and long-term aspirations (Ramos et al., 2016; Hussain, Jones, 2021). Students who internalize discriminatory experiences may disengage from both academic and social opportunities, perpetuating cycles of marginalization. Addressing this issue requires not only anti-discrimination policies but also the cultivation of critical awareness among faculty and students about everyday exclusionary practices that often go unnoticed yet deeply affect those subjected to them.

In addition to interpersonal and pedagogical obstacles, international students frequently confront institutional and administrative barriers that constrain their educational trajectories (Forbes-Mewett, Sawyer, 2016; Cao et al., 2021). Complex bureaucratic structures, opaque communication channels, and inconsistent administrative responsiveness can leave students feeling unsupported or invisible (Sherry, Thomas, Chui, 2010; Tavares, 2024a; 2024b). Navigating visa regulations, financial documentation, or residence permits adds another layer of stress, particularly when immigration policies are unpredictable or restrictive (Sato, Hodge, 2009; Lewis, 2021). These administrative burdens are not peripheral inconveniences but central determinants of academic engagement and psychological wellbeing. Institutions that provide accessible, coordinated immigration support and transparent administrative processes report stronger retention and satisfaction among international cohorts.

Despite the proliferation of specialized services aimed at supporting international students, research continues to identify persistent gaps in accessibility and cultural

responsiveness (Hanassab, 2006; Buckner et al., 2021). Many services remain invisible to those who most need them due to insufficient outreach, language barriers, or assumptions that all students share similar needs. Moreover, services often reflect the perspectives of domestic or majority populations rather than the lived realities of international students. Evaluations conducted from student perspectives frequently reveal a misalignment between institutional intentions and student experiences (Poyrazli, Grahame, 2007; Can, Poyrazli, Pillay, 2021). To bridge this gap, scholars advocate participatory approaches in which international students are actively involved in designing, implementing, and evaluating support systems. Such collaboration not only improves service effectiveness but also empowers students as co-creators of inclusive academic environments.

Taken together, the literature demonstrates that the barriers to inclusion for international students are multidimensional – spanning linguistic, pedagogical, social, administrative, and psychological domains. Overcoming these barriers requires universities to move beyond isolated interventions toward comprehensive, systemic strategies that integrate academic support with social inclusion, equity policies, and intercultural learning. Inclusion, in this sense, is not a static condition but a continuous institutional process of recognizing, addressing, and transforming the structures that produce exclusion in the first place.

1.4. The importance of intercultural communication and psychological support

Intercultural communication theory provides essential frameworks for understanding the complex dynamics that arise when individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds interact within educational settings (Ting-Toomey, Chung, 2005). These theoretical perspectives have evolved from classical models that emphasized cultural contrasts toward contemporary approaches focusing on dynamic meaning negotiation, identity construction, and relational adaptation. Within this spectrum, Hall's influential distinction between high-context and low-context communication continues to provide valuable insights into how students interpret classroom discourse, feedback, and social interactions (Kittler, Rygl, Mackinnon, 2011; Chastagner, 2022). In high-context cultures, where communication relies heavily on implicit meaning, shared background knowledge, and nonverbal cues, students may perceive direct confrontation or explicit critique as disrespectful. Conversely, in low-context academic environments that privilege clarity, precision, and self-expression, such indirectness may be misread as lack of engagement. Understanding these cultural communication norms is therefore crucial for educators seeking to design inclusive classroom environments that accommodate

different participation styles without compromising academic rigor (Zhuk, 2022; Co-maniciu, 2024; Sharipova, 2025). Faculty who intentionally cultivate awareness of intercultural communication differences and adapt their teaching strategies accordingly tend to foster greater student engagement, higher satisfaction, and improved learning outcomes across culturally diverse cohorts.

Contemporary intercultural communication theory has increasingly moved away from fixed typologies of national culture toward a focus on interactional processes that highlight the fluid, negotiated nature of meaning-making in intercultural encounters (Spencer-Oatey, Franklin, 2012). From this perspective, culture is not a static variable but a dynamic resource mobilized by individuals as they construct shared understanding in specific contexts. This process-oriented view aligns closely with constructivist theories of learning, which regard dialogue, reflection, and collaboration as essential to the development of intercultural competence – the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately across cultural boundaries (Deardorff, 2011; 2023). Research indicates that intercultural competence does not emerge spontaneously through exposure to diversity but develops through structured, intentional opportunities for cross-cultural interaction, guided reflection on cultural assumptions, and explicit instruction in communication strategies. Universities that embed such developmental experiences across curricula, mentoring programs, and co-curricular activities report stronger outcomes in student empathy, perspective-taking, and global citizenship.

The intersection between intercultural communication and psychological wellbeing has become a major focus of recent scholarship, reflecting a growing understanding that academic success and social adjustment are inseparable from mental health and emotional resilience (Sümer, Poyrazli, Grahame, 2008). International students often navigate profound transitions involving not only academic adjustment but also cultural adaptation, identity reconstruction, and emotional reorientation. Within this context, Schlossberg's transition theory offers a valuable framework for conceptualizing the psychological dimensions of adaptation, emphasizing situational factors, personal resources, social supports, and coping strategies as critical determinants of successful adjustment (Schlossberg, 2011; Zhu, Ross, Battern, 2023). Applying this model to international education underscores the importance of tailoring psychological interventions to students' developmental stages and transition phases (Anderson et al., 2011). Support needs vary over time: pre-arrival guidance, early adjustment counselling, and pre-graduation career transition support each require distinct strategies. Institutions that adopt such temporally sensitive approaches to psychological support demonstrate greater effectiveness in sustaining wellbeing across the full student lifecycle.

A substantial body of research also documents cultural variations in mental health experiences and help-seeking behaviour, highlighting that emotional expression, treatment preferences, and recovery pathways are profoundly shaped by cultural values

and norms (Constantine, Okazaki, Utsey, 2004; Ma, 2021). Traditional Western models of counselling and psychotherapy, rooted in individualistic assumptions about self-disclosure and autonomy, may not resonate with students from collectivist or interdependent cultural backgrounds (Sue, Sue, 2008). Alternative models – incorporating community-based supports, indigenous healing practices, and holistic wellness frameworks – can often offer more culturally congruent and effective avenues for support. The development of culturally responsive mental health services thus requires both institutional flexibility and collaboration with diverse cultural communities, as well as sustained professional development in cross-cultural psychology and trauma-informed care.

Integrating intercultural communication theory with psychological support frameworks represents a promising and increasingly necessary direction in both research and practice (Bennett, 2013; 2023; 2025). This integration recognizes that communication competence and psychological wellbeing are mutually reinforcing: difficulties in communication can exacerbate feelings of isolation and anxiety, while strong intercultural communication skills promote belonging, confidence, and resilience. For many international students, the ability to negotiate meaning, express emotions across languages, and navigate culturally embedded expectations becomes both a communicative and psychological challenge. Programs that address these dual dimensions holistically, such as communication workshops linked to counselling services or peer mentoring networks that blend language practice with emotional support, illustrate the potential for synergy between linguistic and psychological development.

In recent years, researchers have also emphasized the necessity of trauma-informed approaches in international student support, acknowledging that a significant proportion of globally mobile students may have experienced trauma related to war, persecution, displacement, or systemic discrimination (UNHCR, 2024). Trauma affects cognition, memory, and social engagement, influencing how students learn, relate to others, and seek help. As Kira et al. (2008) demonstrate, integrating trauma-informed practice with cultural responsiveness produces sophisticated frameworks that acknowledge both the universal effects of trauma and the cultural variability of its expression and healing. Effective trauma-informed systems require institutional commitment to safety, trustworthiness, empowerment, and collaboration, as well as specialized training for faculty and staff to recognize trauma indicators and respond appropriately.

Empirical evidence further supports the strong relationship between intercultural communication competence and psychological resilience among international students (Kim, 2000; Oloruntobi, 2023). Students who acquire intercultural communication skills – such as empathy, adaptability, and tolerance for ambiguity – report higher levels of social support, academic satisfaction, and general wellbeing. Conversely, communication breakdowns or cultural misunderstandings can amplify stress, foster social withdrawal, and undermine confidence. As a result, contemporary support

models increasingly seek to integrate interventions that enhance both communicative and psychological capacities. Integrated programs that combine communication training with counselling or peer-support initiatives reflect this dual focus, recognizing that meaningful adaptation depends on the interplay between cognitive understanding, emotional regulation, and social connectedness (Berry, 2005; Karim, 2021).

Ultimately, the synthesis of intercultural communication theory and psychological support represents a transformative framework for understanding inclusion in higher education. It positions communication not merely as a linguistic skill but as a relational and emotional process that underpins adaptation, resilience, and belonging. By embedding intercultural competence, cultural sensitivity, and trauma awareness across institutional structures, universities can create environments that foster both academic and psychological flourishing. Such environments enable international students not only to succeed academically but also to thrive as whole persons – learning, living, and growing within communities that recognize the profound interdependence of communication, culture, and wellbeing.

1.5. Conclusion

The theoretical frameworks explored throughout this chapter collectively illuminate the multidimensional nature of inclusion in higher education. Across diverse conceptual traditions, spanning cultural theory, adaptation and transition models, ecological systems, and intercultural communication, the literature converges on a central insight: inclusion is neither a singular event nor a static institutional attribute, but an ongoing process of transformation that engages individuals, structures, and cultures simultaneously. The synthesis of these perspectives reveals that inclusive higher education requires sustained interaction between structural reform, pedagogical innovation, and psychological support, underpinned by a deep respect for epistemic and cultural diversity.

The progression from assimilationist models toward holistic inclusion paradigms signifies a paradigmatic shift in the philosophy of higher education. Inclusion now entails not only integrating diverse students into pre-existing systems but reconceptualizing these systems themselves, curricula, assessment, governance, and campus culture, to reflect pluralistic understandings of knowledge and community. Theoretical traditions examined here converge on several key propositions: that inclusion is relational and ecological; that it depends on reciprocal adaptation between students and institutions; that it must engage both cognitive and affective dimensions of learning; and that it is sustained through participatory governance and leadership accountability.

In operational terms, inclusion becomes tangible through a series of interrelated practices, orientation programs that signal belonging from the outset, language

and curriculum design that enable epistemic participation, and professional development that equips educators to engage across cultural boundaries. Equally, it relies on systemic coordination of psychological, social, and academic supports that address the full complexity of international student experiences. The interdependence of these elements underscores that isolated interventions are insufficient: true inclusion emerges only when institutional culture, pedagogy, and policy are aligned around shared principles of equity, respect, and mutual transformation.

From a conceptual standpoint, intercultural communication and psychological support frameworks deepen this understanding by highlighting the human dimension of inclusion. Communication competence and emotional resilience appear not as secondary skills but as foundational capabilities that mediate adaptation, identity formation, and wellbeing. Trauma-informed and culturally responsive approaches extend this logic further, recognizing that inclusion cannot occur without safety, recognition, and care. Thus, inclusion operates simultaneously as a structural, pedagogical, and relational process, each domain reinforcing the other in creating environments where diversity is both valued and generative.

To consolidate these insights, the table 1 summarizes the major theoretical frameworks discussed in the chapter, outlining their conceptual contributions, analytical focus, and implications for institutional practice.

This integrative synthesis positions inclusion not simply as an ethical imperative but as a strategic, epistemic, and developmental necessity for contemporary universities. The theoretical frameworks converge in emphasizing reciprocity, between institutional structures and student agency, between culture and cognition, between wellbeing and academic achievement. Through this lens, inclusion emerges as the defining quality of a global university capable of transforming diversity into collective growth and innovation.

Table 1. Comprehensive Overview of Theoretical Frameworks on Inclusion in Higher Education

Theoretical Framework	Core Concepts	Authors/sources	Implications for Institutional Practice
Cultural and Intercultural Theories	Cultural dimensions, high/low context, interculturality	Hofstede (2001), Hall (in Dunworth et al., 2021), Lazarević (2023), Wang et al. (2023), Hassan (2025)	Foster culturally responsive pedagogy; integrate intercultural training into faculty development
Transition and Adaptation Models	4S model, temporal adaptation, coping resources	Schlossberg (2011), Krsmanovic (2022), Dembitskyi et al. (2025)	Provide staged support across academic journey; design layered orientation and mentoring systems

Theoretical Framework	Core Concepts	Authors/sources	Implications for Institutional Practice
Ecological and Relational Perspectives	Belonging, nested systems, institutional climate	Bronfenbrenner and Morris (2007), Strayhorn (2018)	Build multi-level inclusion strategies; strengthen peer and community networks
Inclusive Pedagogy and Curriculum Internationalization	Flexible assessment, collaborative learning, epistemological plurality	Deardorff (2006), Gay (2018), De Wit and Deca (2020)	Embed diversity in curriculum design; train faculty in inclusive pedagogy
Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)	Validation of informal/non-formal learning, competency mapping	Andersson and Harris (2006), Commission Recommendation (EU) 2022/554, Worster (2022), Storey (2023)	Implement transparent, flexible RPL systems; reduce credentialing bias
Intercultural Communication and Psychological Support	Intercultural competence, trauma-informed practice, wellbeing	Kira et al. (2008), Deardorff (2011; 2023), Bennett (2013; 2023; 2025), UNHCR (2024)	Integrate counselling with intercultural training; develop culturally responsive mental health services

Source: own elaboration.

These theoretical insights provide the conceptual foundation for the following chapters of the monograph, which shift from analysis to application. The subsequent sections – focusing on institutional strategies for inclusive academic environments, empirical examination of international student experiences, and evaluation of support mechanisms – translate the theoretical principles outlined here into concrete practices and research findings. In this way, the theoretical synthesis not only clarifies what inclusion is but also establishes how it can be realized, measured, and sustained within evolving academic ecosystems.

2. Methodology

This chapter outlines the research approach employed to examine the integration of Ukrainian students into the academic community of the University of Rzeszów. The study was conducted as part of the Erasmus+ project “European Inclusion of Ukrainian Students” (project number 2023-1-SK01-KA220-HED-000157553), which aims to develop evidence-based strategies for supporting student refugees across European higher education institutions.

The research was designed to respond to the urgent need for systematic understanding of the integration experiences and support needs of Ukrainian students who arrived in Poland following the escalation of the war in February 2022. The University of Rzeszów was selected as the primary research site due to its significant engagement with Ukrainian student integration, the substantial increase in Ukrainian student enrolment, and its development of institutional support structures such as the Polish Community Centre. As a medium-sized regional university with approximately 15,000 students, the University of Rzeszów represents a typical institutional context for understanding integration processes in Polish higher education.

2.1. Research aims and research approach

The monograph aimed to:

- 1) document the scale, dynamics, and socio-demographic characteristics of Ukrainian student migration to Poland and specifically to the University of Rzeszów;
- 2) identify the main barriers and facilitating factors affecting Ukrainian students’ academic and social integration;
- 3) examine the institutional policies, programs, and support structures implemented to facilitate integration;
- 4) explore the lived experiences and perspectives of Ukrainian students regarding their adaptation processes;
- 5) understand the perspectives and experiences of Polish students and academic staff who interact with Ukrainian students.

The monograph applies a multi-level descriptive and analytical approach that integrates macro-level statistical analysis, meso-level institutional analysis, and micro-level empirical data on student experiences.

2.1.1. Macro-level analysis: educational migration context

At the macro level, the study is based on the analysis of secondary quantitative data describing the scale, dynamics, and structural characteristics of educational migration from Ukraine to Poland. These data originate exclusively from official and publicly available sources, including national statistical institutions, ministerial databases, and analytical reports that are explicitly cited in the respective chapters of the monograph.

The macro-level analysis focuses on:

- 1) the development of educational migration flows over time;
- 2) changes in student numbers before and after key geopolitical events, particularly after 2014 and 2022;
- 3) the distribution of Ukrainian students across educational levels, regions, and fields of study.

The purpose of this analysis is contextual rather than explanatory. The statistical data are used to establish the structural background within which institutional responses and individual student experiences are situated. No original data collection, modelling, or inferential statistical techniques are applied at this level, all interpretations remain within the descriptive limits of the available data.

2.1.2. Meso-level analysis: institutional context of the University of Rzeszów

The meso-level component of the methodology focuses on the University of Rzeszów as a concrete institutional research field. This analysis is grounded in institutional documentation, publicly available university data, and descriptive materials related to the organisational structure and support mechanisms implemented after the arrival of students from Ukraine.

The institutional analysis serves three main purposes. First, it reconstructs the organisational and legal context of the University of Rzeszów, including its size, structure, and international orientation. Second, it documents the forms of institutional support developed in response to the increased presence of Ukrainian students, with particular attention to the role of the Polish Community Centre. Third, it provides the contextual framework necessary for interpreting student-level empirical findings presented later in the monograph.

2.1.3. Micro-level analysis: empirical study among students from Ukraine

The core empirical component of the monograph consists of a survey-based study conducted among students arriving from Ukraine and studying at the University of Rzeszów. The study involved a total of 266 respondents, whose socio-demographic structure, study characteristics, and educational experiences are described in detail in Chapter 5.

The survey data provide information on:

- 1) nationality structure and basic socio-demographic characteristics;
- 2) form and level of study;
- 3) perceived barriers related to language, cultural adaptation, financial situation, and social integration;
- 4) experiences of academic functioning and everyday life at the university;
- 5) perceptions of and experiences with institutional support measures.

The survey is used as a descriptive empirical tool that captures students' perspectives at a specific point in time. The data are analysed using basic descriptive procedures and thematic structuring of responses. The analysis does not aim at statistical generalisation beyond the surveyed population, nor does it attempt causal inference.

The sampling logic reflects the institution-specific and context-bound character of the study. Participation in the survey was voluntary and limited to students studying at the University of Rzeszów during the period covered by the Erasmus+ project European Inclusion of Ukrainian Students.

As a result, the empirical findings:

- 1) are not representative of all Ukrainian students in Poland;
- 2) reflect the specific institutional, regional, and temporal context of one university;
- 3) are interpreted as illustrative evidence of integration processes rather than as universally generalisable results.

These limitations are inherent to the design of the study and are consistent with the monograph's focus on institutional practices and lived experiences within a defined academic environment.

2.1.4. Research design and analytical architecture: summary

The research design of the monograph is structured as a multi-level analytical framework integrating macro-, meso-, and micro-level perspectives. This architecture reflects the assumption that the integration of students with a forced migration background constitutes a complex, systemically embedded phenomenon that unfolds simultaneously within structural, institutional, and individual dimensions. Conceptually, the study

draws on a contextual and ecological understanding of integration processes, according to which outcomes cannot be adequately explained by isolated variables but must be interpreted within interacting social, organisational, and policy environments.

At the macro level, the analysis relies exclusively on secondary quantitative data obtained from official statistical institutions, ministerial databases, and publicly available analytical reports. The macro-level component serves to reconstruct the structural conditions of educational migration from Ukraine to Poland, with particular attention to temporal dynamics and geopolitical turning points (notably 2014 and 2022). The analytical objective at this level is contextualisation rather than causal explanation. No original data collection, inferential modelling, or hypothesis testing is conducted; instead, the analysis provides a descriptive structural background within which institutional responses and individual experiences are situated. The macro-level thus establishes the external systemic environment framing institutional adaptation processes.

At the meso level, the focus shifts to the institutional context of the University of Rzeszów as a bounded organisational field. The data sources include institutional documentation, publicly available university statistics, and descriptive materials concerning organisational structures and support mechanisms developed in response to the increased presence of Ukrainian students. This level operates within an institutional-analytical perspective, examining how organisational arrangements, governance practices, and support infrastructures mediate structural pressures identified at the macro level. The meso-level analysis is interpretative and descriptive; it aims to identify patterns of institutional adaptation rather than to evaluate policy effectiveness through experimental or quasi-experimental methods.

At the micro level, the study incorporates original empirical data derived from a survey conducted among Ukrainian students enrolled at the University of Rzeszów ($N = 266$). The survey captures socio-demographic characteristics, perceived barriers and facilitating factors, experiences of academic and social integration, and assessments of institutional support measures. The empirical strategy is descriptive and exploratory. Data are analysed using basic descriptive statistical procedures and thematic structuring of responses. The study does not aim at statistical generalisation beyond the surveyed population, nor does it pursue causal inference. Instead, it provides context-specific, empirically grounded insights into lived experiences within a defined institutional setting.

Epistemologically, the study adopts a context-bound, descriptive analytical orientation. It does not seek universal generalisations or predictive modelling; rather, it aims to produce analytically structured knowledge about integration processes in a specific higher education environment. The three analytical levels are conceptually interlinked: macro-level structural conditions frame institutional strategies at the meso level, while micro-level student experiences both reflect and illuminate the effectiveness

and limitations of institutional responses. This layered design enhances analytical coherence while maintaining methodological transparency regarding the scope and limits of inference.

The resulting conclusions are therefore descriptive and context-sensitive. They contribute to evidence-based reflection on integration practices without claiming causal generalisability across institutions or national systems. Such positioning is consistent with the monograph's objective of providing empirically informed, institutionally grounded insights into the integration of Ukrainian students in Polish higher education.

3. Educational migration of students from Ukraine to Poland – context and dynamics of the phenomenon

This chapter presents the main empirical findings on Ukrainian students in Poland, examining migration trends, their motivations for choosing Polish universities, socio-demographic characteristics, and the challenges and barriers they face in fully participating in academic life.

3.1. Scale and dynamics of educational migration from Ukraine to Poland

In recent years, educational migration from Ukraine to Poland has emerged as a phenomenon of considerable demographic, social, and cultural significance. Poland, as a neighboring country with relatively easy access to its educational system, has become a natural destination for thousands of young Ukrainians seeking education. Over the past decade, the inflow of pupils and students has shown a clear upward trend, particularly following the major political events of 2014 and 2022.

This subchapter examines the scale and dynamics of educational migration from Ukraine to Poland at the secondary, post-secondary, and higher education levels. It discusses quantitative and structural trends, considering the impact of geopolitical factors, based on statistical data from official public sources.

3.1.1. Educational Migration at the Secondary and Post-Secondary Levels

According to official data from the Ministry of Education (MEN), in the 2023/24 school year, a total of 5.2 million individuals were enrolled across all types of educational institutions, both public and non-public, ranging from children in kindergartens to adults in post-secondary schools. Nearly 7% of these students were foreign nationals from various countries (Chrostowska, 2024). The vast majority of foreign students in Poland were Ukrainians, followed by Belarusians, Russians, Vietnamese, Indians, Georgians, and Moldovans (Figure 1).

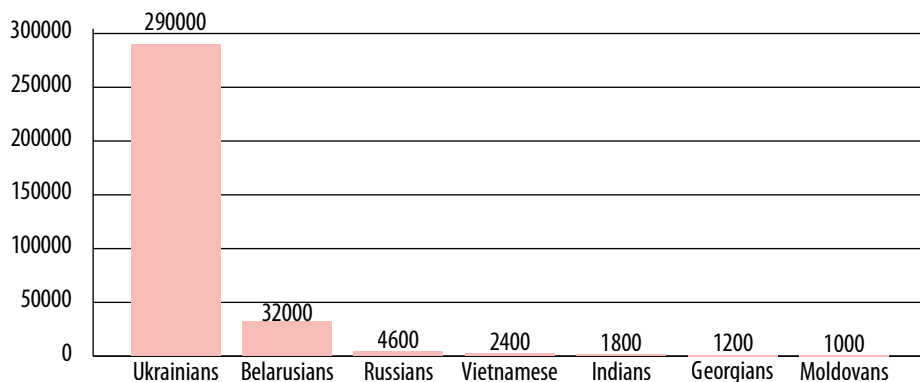


Figure 1. Largest groups of foreign students in Polish schools, 2023/24 school year (thousands)

Source: own elaboration based on Chrostowska, 2024.

In the previous three years, the situation was very similar. Among all foreign students attending Polish schools in the 2020/2021–2022/2023 school years, the largest group consisted of students from Ukraine: 74.8% of all foreign students in 2020, 73.5% in 2021, and 88.3% in 2022. The next largest groups of foreign students were from Belarus (5% in 2020, 8% in 2021, and 5% in 2022), Russia (3% in 2020, 3% in 2021, and 1% in 2022), Vietnam (2% in 2020, 1% in 2021, and 0.4% in 2022), and Bulgaria (1% in 2020, 0.3% in 2021, and 0.3% in 2022) (Figure 2).

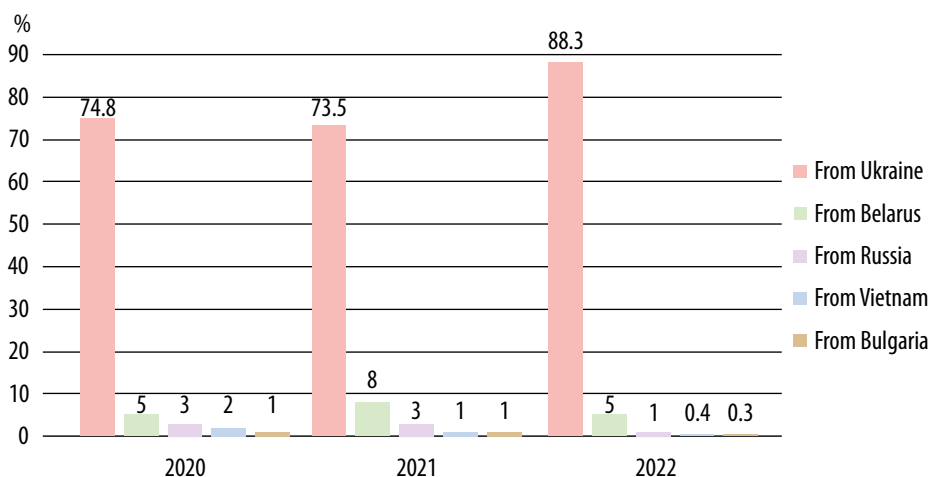


Figure 2. Share of students of different nationalities attending Polish schools in the 2020/2021–2022/2023 school years as a percentage of all foreign students (%)

Source: own elaboration based on Najwyższa Izba Kontroli, 2023.

3.1.2. Higher Education Migration

At the beginning of the second decade of the 21st century, Ukrainian students made up about one-third of all foreign students in Poland, and their numbers were rising rapidly. This trend was further reinforced after 2014, when the occupation and annexation of Crimea by Russia, along with the outbreak of armed conflict in eastern Ukraine, prompted many young Ukrainians to seek more stable educational opportunities abroad. By 2019, more than 39,000 Ukrainian students were studying in Poland, representing half of all foreign students in Polish higher education institutions.

Between 2019 and 2021, however, both the number and the share of Ukrainian students among all foreign students gradually declined. This trend was reversed only by the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, which again led to a sharp increase in interest in Polish universities. According to the analysis of the Report by the Center for Information Processing – National Research Institute (OPI PIB) (Maziarczyk et al., 2023), in 2022 the number of Ukrainian students rose to over 48,000, accounting for approximately 47% of all international students.

In 2023, the total number of foreign students in Poland reached 107,000, with Ukrainians remaining the largest group at 46,200, representing slightly more than 43% of all international students (Figures 3, 4). This trend confirms the growing role of Polish universities not only as educational institutions but also as crucial stabilizing spaces for young people affected by the war.

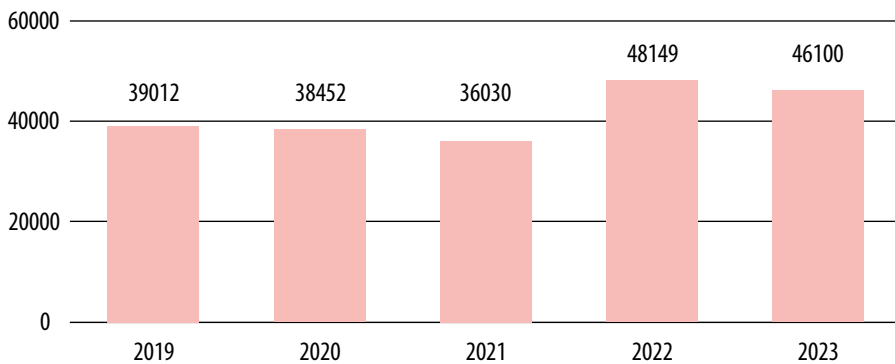


Figure 3. Number of Ukrainian students among all foreign students, 2019–2023

Source: own elaboration based on Maziarczyk et al., 2023; Ośrodek Przetwarzania Informacji – Państwowy Instytut Badawczy, 2023; Piwowarski, 2025.

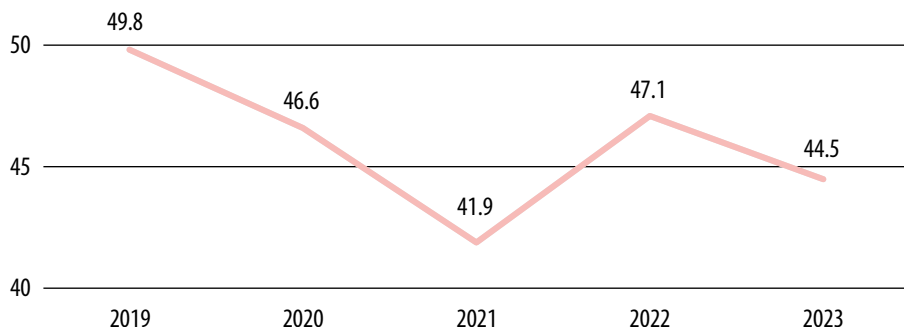


Figure 4. Share of Ukrainian students among all foreign students, 2019–2023 (%)

Source: own elaboration based on Maziarczyk et al., 2023; Ośrodek Przetwarzania Informacji – Państwowy Instytut Badawczy, 2023; Piwowarski, 2025.

The observed increase in the number of students from Ukraine was also reflected in the distribution across higher education levels. The largest group consisted of students enrolled in first-cycle (bachelor's) programs, while a considerably smaller proportion continued their studies in second-cycle (master's) programs or in long-cycle master's programs. In 2022, 75% of Ukrainian students were enrolled in first-cycle programs, 20% in second-cycle programs, and 5% in long-cycle master's programs (Figure 5).

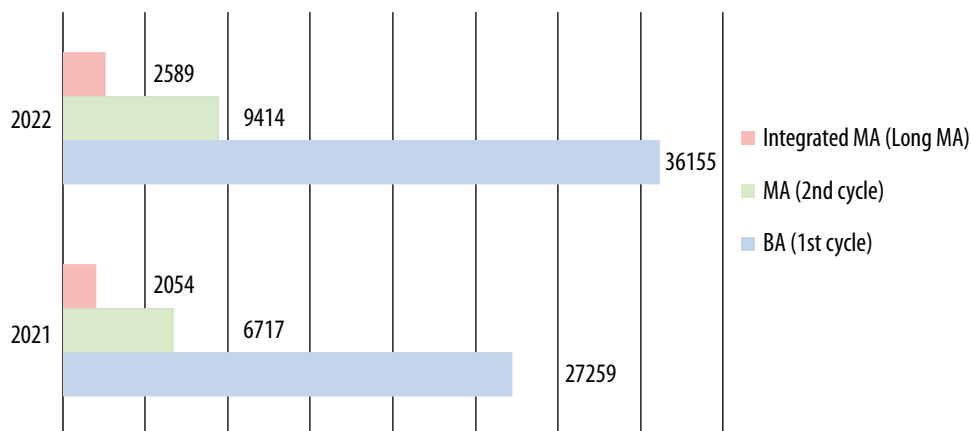


Figure 5. Ukrainian students by level of study, 2021–2022

Source: own elaboration based on Maziarczyk et al., 2023.

The increase in the total number of Ukrainian students at Polish universities in 2022 was also reflected in a higher number of students from this group beginning their studies in Poland (first-year students in first-cycle, second-cycle, and long-cycle master's programs).

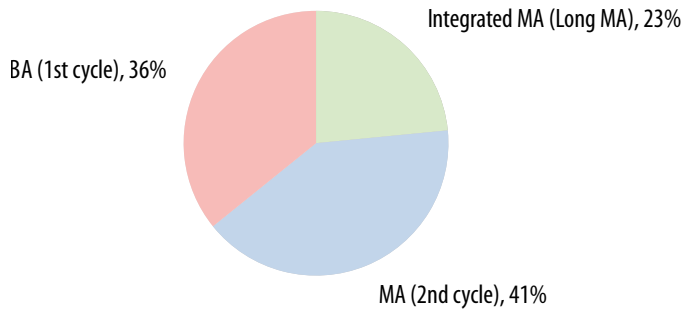


Figure 6. Share of first-year Ukrainian students among all Ukrainian students in Poland by level of study, 2022

Source: own elaboration based on Maziarczyk et al., 2023.

The analysis of the data presented in Figure 6 reveals a varied share of first-year Ukrainian students depending on the level of study. The highest proportion of first-year students was observed at the second-cycle (master's) level, where they accounted for as much as 66% of all Ukrainian students at this level. This may indicate a strong influx of graduates from Ukrainian higher education institutions continuing their studies in Poland or reflect interrupted studies due to the war, necessitating their resumption abroad.

At the first-cycle (bachelor's) level, first-year students made up 58% of all Ukrainian students. This may suggest a trend of young Ukrainians undertaking the full higher education cycle in Poland, often without starting their studies in their home country.

By contrast, in long-cycle master's programs, the proportion of first-year students was noticeably lower, at 38%, which could indicate that such programs (e.g., law, medicine) are less frequently chosen by Ukrainian students, possibly due to the longer duration of study or language-related challenges.

The variation in the share of first-year students across different levels of study reflects the multi-dimensional nature of educational migration among Ukrainian citizens and highlights the need for in-depth research, as well as for adapting institutional policies at universities to the diverse needs and profiles of international students.

It is also worth examining the geographical distribution of Ukrainian students across Polish universities. The majority of Ukrainian students began their studies in major academic centers such as Warsaw, Kraków, and Wrocław. In the Mazowieckie voivodeship, Ukrainian students accounted for 24% of all foreign students in 2022 (11,500 individuals). In Małopolskie voivodeship, just over 5,000 Ukrainians commenced their studies. More than 4,000 Ukrainian students began studies in the Dolnośląskie, Lubelskie, Wielkopolskie, and Łódzkie voivodeships. The lowest numbers, not exceeding 1,000 students, were recorded in Świętokrzyskie (853), Lubuskie (254), Podlaskie (190), and Warmińsko-Mazurskie (186).

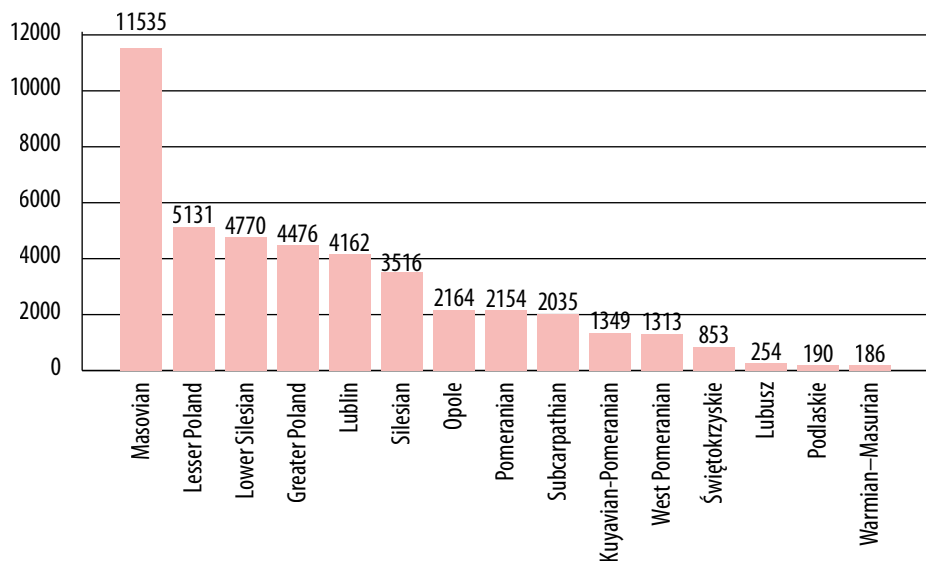


Figure 7. Number of Ukrainian students by voivodeship, 2022

Source: own elaboration based on Maziarczyk et al., 2023.

An important aspect of analyzing the educational migration of Ukrainian students is identifying the fields of study that are most popular among them. In the 2022/2023 academic year, the most frequently chosen field was management. Computer science also held a prominent position among students' educational choices. Fields such as logistics, tourism and recreation, economics, and international relations attracted somewhat less interest from Ukrainian students (Maziarczyk et al., 2023).

This subchapter presents the scale and structure of educational migration of Ukrainian citizens to Poland at secondary, post-secondary, and higher education levels. The analysis includes statistical data illustrating the dynamics of student inflows in recent years, with particular attention to changes after 2022 resulting from geopolitical circumstances. It also considers Ukrainian students' field-of-study preferences, analyzed in the context of different levels of education. The presented characterization thus provides an important background for discussions on the motivations of Ukrainian citizens in choosing to study in Poland, which are the focus of the following subchapter.

3.2. Motivations for Ukrainian citizens to study in Poland

In many research projects on migration, including educational migration, Everett S. Lee's model, known as the push-pull theory, is widely applied. In analyzing the migration of students from Ukraine to Poland, push and pull factors are particularly significant, encompassing both the conditions that push individuals out of their home country and those that attract them to the destination country. If push factors in a given country are strong, young people are more likely to leave. Conversely, the choice of a destination country for educational migration is influenced by pull factors (Długosz, 2018).

The decision to pursue education abroad is a complex process shaped by multiple individual, social, economic, and geopolitical factors. Young people are guided both by factors that push them out of their home country and by elements that attract them to foreign educational systems. In recent years, the educational mobility of Ukrainian youth has undergone a clear transformation, with the boundaries between different forms of migration – educational, economic, or refugee – becoming increasingly blurred.

In this context, educational migration of Ukrainian students to Poland constitutes a particularly dynamic phenomenon, driven by numerous determinants. These factors can be grouped into four main categories:

- 1) political and geographical factors;
- 2) economic factors;
- 3) educational factors;
- 4) socio-cultural factors.

For Ukrainian citizens choosing Poland as a destination for higher education, each of these categories plays a significant role.

Political and Geographical Factors

Political instability, corruption, the relatively low quality of certain aspects of Ukrainian higher education, and limited career prospects are push factors motivating young Ukrainians to seek better educational conditions abroad. Poland, as a neighboring country and a member of the European Union, appears as an attractive alternative, particularly due to its geographical proximity, linguistic similarity, ease of communication and transportation, as well as social and cultural ties (Gierko, 2015; Gergało-Dąbek, 2024).

Even before the outbreak of war, political instability and corruption acted as strong push factors driving students abroad. The armed conflict and humanitarian crisis that began in 2022 further intensified this trend. In the 2022/2023 academic year, the number of Ukrainian students in Poland increased by approximately one-third compared to the previous year, driven both by wartime displacement and by the decisions of many

families to settle in Poland for longer periods, as well as by young Ukrainians beginning or continuing their studies at Polish universities (Boichuk, 2024).

As a result, educational migration of young Ukrainians to Poland often becomes the first step toward permanent settlement. Political instability, war threats, and the desire to obtain an education in a safe environment serve as strong motivating factors for leaving the home country, while geographical proximity, shared history, and linguistic similarity make Poland a natural choice for Ukrainian students (Gierko, 2015; Gergało-Dąbek, 2024).

Economic factors

Economic factors play a key role in decisions to study abroad, especially for young people from countries with low per capita income, such as Ukraine. Before the Russian invasion in 2022, the main motivation was the relatively low cost of living and studying in Poland, combined with the opportunity to obtain high-quality education at limited expense (Kuśnierz, Rogowska, Pavlova, 2020).

An important element was also the possibility of working while studying. Research conducted on a sample of 1,055 Ukrainian students indicates that 66% combined studies with part-time work (Perspektywy.pl, 2022), while Kapera's (2017) study found that 60% of respondents identified the possibility of working as the main reason for choosing Poland. Additionally, the presence of a Ukrainian diaspora and an extensive social network facilitated adaptation and the accumulation of both educational and professional capital (Długosz, 2018).

Poland thus appeared as a compromise between the quality of education and living costs, also offering opportunities to gain professional experience that could support future employment within the EU.

After the outbreak of war in February 2022, the significance of purely economic factors partially gave way to concerns about safety and material stability. Poland, as a neighboring country offering relatively low living costs, became the main educational destination for academic refugees. Many students had to combine studying with work or rely on scholarship support provided by government programs, universities, and international organizations (NAWA, 2022; Tędziągolska, Walczak, Wielecki, 2024).

Economic determinants remained important – they enabled students to continue their education at manageable costs and gain professional experience – but now they function in conjunction with motivations related to safety, social integration, and adaptation to a new academic environment. The Polish education system became for Ukrainian students not only a place to obtain a diploma but also a means to ensure safety and a foundation for further life stabilization.

Educational factors

Poland offers diplomas recognized throughout the European Union, which for Ukrainian students provides a guarantee of international mobility and attractiveness on the labor market. Despite various challenges, the Polish education system is perceived as solid and in line with European standards.

Polish universities actively participate in international exchange programs, such as Erasmus+, opening additional opportunities for students to develop and gain experience abroad. For young Ukrainians, this is not only a chance for education but also an investment in their future and human capital, particularly career capital.

Polish universities offer a wide range of study programs, both in Polish and English, as well as simplified admission procedures (Gierko, 2015; Kuśnierz, Rogowska, Pavlova, 2020). The high quality of education, broad program offerings, and modern teaching methods are important factors attracting students from beyond Poland's eastern border. After the outbreak of the war in Ukraine in February 2022, Poland's role as a study destination for young Ukrainians was further reinforced. In addition to the standard educational motivations, such as access to high-quality education and international mobility, considerations of safety and life stability also gained increased importance.

Socio-cultural factors

Another important aspect concerns the socio-cultural factors influencing Ukrainian students' decisions to choose Poland as a study destination. There exists a strong cultural and linguistic affinity between Poland and Ukraine, which facilitates self-identification and eases the process of acclimatization. Research indicates that these similarities, along with geographical, cultural, and linguistic proximity, act as powerful pull factors for Ukrainian youth (Długosz, 2018). The cultural closeness between Ukraine and Poland enhances young Ukrainians' sense of safety and familiarity. Izdebska-Długosz notes that "the similarity of language and cultures reinforces the effect of being 'at home'" (Izdebska-Długosz, 2017).

Additionally, the presence of a substantial Ukrainian diaspora in Poland, as well as extensive personal networks among migrants, supports students' decision-making process – they often choose Poland because of the presence of friends and family, which provides a sense of security and belonging (Długosz, 2018). These support networks function as significant pull factors. Social conditions, such as having relatives or acquaintances in Poland, are also important (Rebisz, Sikora, 2015). At the same time, studies conducted by the Institute for Public Affairs indicate that a growing number of students primarily interact within Ukrainian peer circles, which can limit their proficiency in Polish, although the general trend shows that a large portion of Ukrainian students possess good command of the Polish language.

Moreover, the UNESCO report highlights that, thanks to their temporary protection status, Ukrainians have simplified access to education and social benefits, which further strengthens their social integration and stability (UNESCO, 2025).

Table 2. Key determinants influencing Ukrainian students' choice of Poland

Determinant	Description
Political-geographical	Geographical proximity, personal safety, fleeing armed conflict
Economic	Lower cost of living, better employment opportunities, recognition of qualifications
Educational	Wide range of study programs, courses in Polish or English, simplified admission procedures
Socio-cultural	Recommendations from family and friends, shared cultural values, social integration

Source: own elaboration.

Table 2 summarizes and organizes the key determinants influencing Ukrainian students' choice of Poland, as discussed above.

3.3. Socio-demographic structure of Ukrainian students in Poland

The socio-demographic profile of Ukrainian students in Poland is diverse. The largest cohort consists of individuals aged 17–21, who enter higher education directly after completing secondary school (Gergało-Dąbek, 2024). This group shows a predominance of women, although the gender balance varies across different fields of study (own elaboration based on the EIUS 2024 project; Kuśnierz, Rogowska, Pavlova, 2020).

Consistent with trends observed in the 2022/2023 academic year (see Section 2.1), management remained the most popular field of study among Ukrainian students in the subsequent year. In 2023, more than 16% of Ukrainian students in Poland were enrolled in management programs, representing 41% of all international students pursuing management studies during the same period (Ośrodek Przetwarzania Informacji – Państwowy Instytut Badawczy, 2023). Computer science was also highly sought after, with 13% of Ukrainian students enrolled in this field. Other fields, including logistics, tourism and recreation, nursing, economics, and international relations, attracted comparatively fewer students (Figure 8).

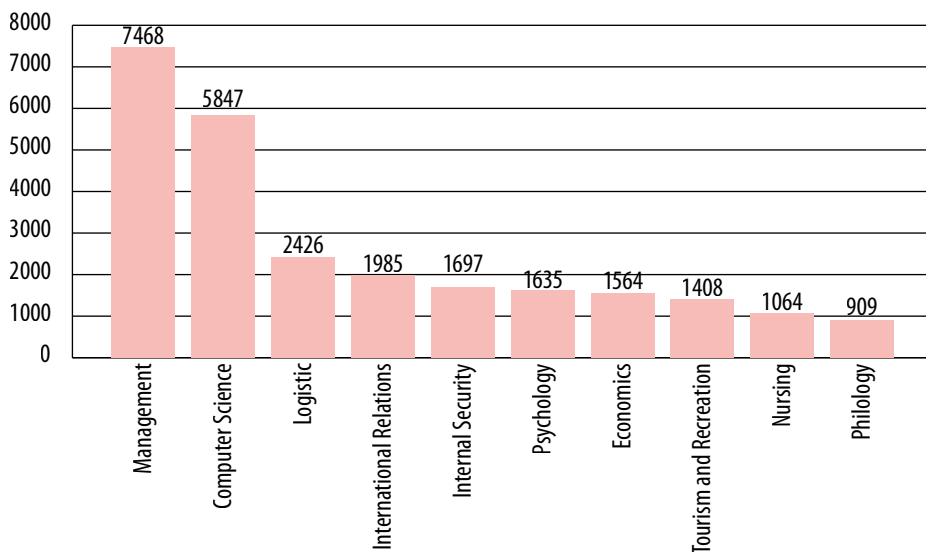


Figure 8. Most popular fields of study among Ukrainian students in Poland (2023)

Source: Ośrodek Przetwarzania Informacji – Państwowy Instytut Badawczy, 2023.

Research indicates that the choice of fields of study among Ukrainian students only partially aligns with labor market needs in Poland and the European Union. For instance, there is limited interest in engineering programs or studies related to elderly care, areas where demand is growing.

Additional socio-demographic information on Ukrainian students in Poland is presented in Section 2.1, providing further context for understanding their educational choices and integration patterns.

3.4. Barriers and challenges related to the functioning of Ukrainian students in Poland

In recent years, the migration of Ukrainian students to Poland has had a profound impact on the Polish academic environment, introducing new cultural and educational dynamics. Living and studying in a foreign country entails a range of barriers and challenges that affect both students' everyday life and their academic success, as well as their process of social integration. These challenges are multifaceted, encompassing formal, linguistic, financial, psychological, and cultural dimensions. Addressing them effectively requires coordinated efforts by academic institutions, non-governmental organizations, and the student community itself.

This subsection outlines the main difficulties encountered by Ukrainian students, as well as strategies and initiatives designed to support their adaptation within the Polish education system. An analysis of the available literature and practical observations indicates that the key challenges are concentrated in the following areas:

- 1) language challenges;
- 2) cultural adaptation;
- 3) financial situation;
- 4) integration processes.

Language challenges

One of the primary challenges faced by Ukrainian students in Poland is language, which affects both everyday communication and full participation in academic courses. Ukrainian students frequently encounter difficulties in understanding specialized academic texts and engaging meaningfully in class discussions, which can have a detrimental impact on their academic performance and self-esteem (Reddick, Dryden-Peterson, 2021; Pentón Herrera, Byndas, 2023). These challenges pertain not only to Polish but also to English, which is increasingly required in many Polish universities.

Limited language proficiency can impede effective knowledge acquisition, contribute to social isolation, and restrict opportunities for meaningful integration with Polish peers. As a result, students may experience feelings of alienation, decreased motivation, and challenges in adapting to the new academic environment. Although universities provide various forms of support that help students feel accepted and secure, linguistic barriers in both academic and non-academic contexts often lead students to feel partially excluded (Pentón Herrera, Byndas, 2023).

Furthermore, insufficient proficiency can hinder the development of professional competencies, as it may restrict full participation in internships, seminars, and other practical activities offered by universities. Overall, language challenges constitute a significant factor shaping both the educational and social experiences of Ukrainian students in Poland.

Cultural adaptation

Adapting to a new cultural environment represents a significant challenge for Ukrainian students in Poland, shaping their experiences both academically and socially. The acculturation process – understood as the adjustment to life within two cultures – encompasses emotional, cognitive, and behavioral aspects, and its success depends on a range of individual and contextual factors (Berry, 2005). Although Poland and Ukraine are relatively close culturally, research indicates that differences in social norms, value

systems, communication styles, customs, and educational practices can lead to stress, feelings of alienation, and difficulties in establishing meaningful relationships with the surrounding community. Findings from current studies emphasize the need to intensify educational initiatives that promote mutual understanding between citizens of neighboring countries (Świdzińska, 2019).

The literature describes a phenomenon wherein migrants arrive in a country that appears culturally similar but encounter substantial differences in daily interactions, academic expectations, and communication styles. This may reduce psychological well-being, foster distance toward the host group, and discourage participation in social activities (Ward, Bochner, Furnham, 2001). Ukrainian students frequently need to balance the adoption of new cultural values with the maintenance of their own national identity, which requires targeted support from universities and the academic environment (Rataj, Berezovska, 2023). Additionally, war-related experiences and forced migration exacerbate adaptation challenges, contributing to emotional instability and uncertainty.

In summary, cultural adaptation for Ukrainian students in Poland is a complex process that demands both individual flexibility and systematic support from higher education institutions. The literature consistently highlights that successful integration occurs only when universities recognize and address the specific emotional, social, and educational needs of Ukrainian students arising from both forced migration and cultural differences.

Financial situation

The financial situation of Ukrainian students who began their studies in Poland after 2022 is often challenging, largely determined by the consequences of forced migration, the loss of income sources, and the need to adapt to the legal regulations and social norms of the new country. Most Ukrainian refugees arrived in EU countries without stable financial resources and without the immediate ability to engage in professional employment, a situation that also affects young adults continuing their education. Many face limited financial means, which impacts their ability to cover living expenses, secure accommodation, and participate fully in academic and social life. Financial support from the Polish government and universities is available, but it is not always sufficient, and the procedures to access such aid can be complex (Kowalski, 2023).

Material insecurity directly undermines adaptation processes, while interrupted education, traumatic (war-related) experiences, and lack of economic resources exacerbate stress and create a sense of overload. This, in turn, increases the risk of withdrawing from studies or experiencing a decline in academic performance (Pentón Herrera, Byndas, 2023).

It should be noted that financial difficulties may also limit opportunities for full social and academic integration.

Integration Processes

Integration is a multi-level process that spans social, educational, and professional spheres. The literature highlights four key areas of integration: access to and opportunities in employment, housing, education, and healthcare; the principles and practices surrounding citizenship and rights; the development of social bonds within and between groups; and structural barriers related to language, culture, and the local context (Ager, Strang, 2008).

The integration of Ukrainian students into the academic and local environment is also complex, involving structural dimensions (access to employment, housing, and services), socio-cultural aspects (peer relationships, campus participation, support networks), as well as the personal dimension of a sense of belonging and security. Students frequently experience isolation, a lack of acceptance, or indifference from Polish peers, and their interpersonal relationships may remain superficial (Kamionka, 2025). Psychological support, integration initiatives, and the presence of intercultural assistants can significantly facilitate adaptation and the formation of meaningful relationships (Dubinina, 2025).

In summary, reviews of the literature and analyses of empirical reports indicate four main areas of challenges for Ukrainian students in Poland after 2022:

- 1) language, which affects learning effectiveness and peer interactions;
- 2) cultural adaptation, encompassing stress related to differences in norms, values, and teaching styles, as well as the maintenance of national identity;
- 3) financial situation, associated with limited economic resources and the need to balance work and study;
- 4) integration into the environment, including difficulties in establishing lasting relationships, isolation within national groups, and limited institutional support.

These areas and associated barriers are summarized in Table 3, offering a concise overview of the main challenges and highlighting where university initiatives and public policies may have the most significant impact.

In response to these challenges, many Polish universities, as well as governmental and non-governmental organizations, have implemented a range of strategies and initiatives aimed at supporting the adaptation and integration of Ukrainian students.

Table 3. Main Barriers and Challenges for Ukrainian Students in Poland

Area	Example Barriers/Challenges
Language	Difficulties in comprehension and communication, isolation
Cultural Adaptation	Stress, alienation, value conflicts
Material Circumstances	Limited resources, financial difficulties
Integration	Social isolation, superficial relationships, lack of support

Source: own elaboration.

Table 4. Selected Strategies and Initiatives Supporting the Adaptation and Integration of Ukrainian Students in Poland

Initiative/Strategy	Essence	Type of Support
“Solidarni z Ukrainą” (NAWA Program)	Exemption of refugee students and doctoral candidates from tuition fees, admission to Polish universities, provision of scholarships, often including psychological and legal support	Ensures continuity of education, reduces financial and legal barriers, enhances feelings of safety and stability for refugees
Scholarship and Grant Programs (e.g., National Science Centre – NCN)	Funding for research, master’s or doctoral theses, or annual scholarships for students/researchers from Ukraine	Enables continuation of academic paths even if studies or research in Ukraine were interrupted; supports academic mobility and integration into the Polish scientific environment
Polish Language Courses, Bridging Courses, Adaptation Support	Courses offered by Polish universities and organizations (often with state or NGO involvement) for new Ukrainian students	Helps overcome language barriers – crucial for effective learning, communication, and integration; reduces social isolation
Psychosocial Support – Psychological Counseling, Legal Assistance	Programs for academic refugees and their families, often within initiatives such as “Solidarni z Ukrainą”	Assists in coping with war trauma and migration-related stress, supports mental health – contributing to better adaptation and learning conditions
Integration Initiatives, Regional Projects, Inter-University/Inter-Institutional Partnerships (e.g., EU projects)	Polish universities implement cooperation programs, provide support for refugee students, engage them in research, offer dormitory places, share resources	Promotes a sense of belonging, social and academic integration, and creates real opportunities for continuing education and career development
Information, Counseling, and Recruitment/ Adaptation Support – Educational Hubs, Refugee Information Centers	Projects such as EduHub Warsaw (and others) provide information, counseling, adaptation, psychological, and social support for refugee students	Improves orientation in the Polish education system, helps overcome bureaucratic and adaptation barriers, and increases chances for successful integration

Source: own elaboration based on Ministerstwo Nauki i Szkolnictwa Wyższego, 2022; NAWA, 2022; Degtyarova, Kraśniewska, 2024; Ministerstwo Nauki i Szkolnictwa Wyższego, 2025; Uniwersytet Rzeszowski (n.d.).

Table 4 presents selected structural, institutional, and socio-educational initiatives. There is a clear alignment between the challenges faced by Ukrainian students and the measures implemented to support them. Language courses, mentoring programs, scholarships, and integration activities are designed to address communication

difficulties, financial constraints, and social isolation, thereby facilitating academic adaptation and promoting a sense of belonging within the university community.

In conclusion, this chapter underscores the significant scale and evolving dynamics of educational migration from Ukraine to Poland, largely driven by the armed conflict, as well as the diverse motivations behind students' decisions to study abroad. It also outlines the socio-demographic characteristics of Ukrainian students studying in Poland and the multifaceted challenges they encounter, encompassing linguistic, cultural, financial, and social barriers. A thorough understanding of these factors is essential for designing effective policies and support mechanisms to facilitate integration, improve academic outcomes, and support the well-being of Ukrainian students who have been forced by the war to continue their education in a new and unfamiliar environment.

4. Integration of Ukrainian students into the academic community of the University of Rzeszów – good practices and perspectives of participants

The purpose of this chapter is to present the process of integrating students from Ukraine into the academic community of the University of Rzeszów and to discuss the actions, experiences, and perspectives of the three key groups involved in this process: institutional representatives, Polish students, and students arriving from Ukraine. The chapter aims to systematise knowledge concerning the challenges, barriers, and needs associated with the functioning of Ukrainian students in a new academic environment, while also highlighting good practices developed within the project. The analysis begins with an outline of the institutional context, a description of the forms of support offered by the University of Rzeszów, and initial observations regarding the social changes resulting from the influx of Ukrainian students after 2022. This introduction provides a basis for a comprehensive assessment of the effectiveness of integration measures and for comparing the perspectives of the three groups participating in the study.

4.1. The University of Rzeszów as an institutional context and field of research

The University of Rzeszów began its operations on 1 September 2001, following the enactment of the law adopted by the Parliament of the Republic of Poland on 7 June 2001 and subsequently signed on 4 July of the same year by the then President of Poland, Aleksander Kwaśniewski. This legal act formally established a new public university, which from the outset became a key higher education institution in the Podkarpackie region. Although the University is among the youngest Polish universities, its structure is rooted in long-standing academic traditions, with origins reaching back several decades through the activities of earlier educational institutions in the region.

The foundation of the University's establishment was the merger of three previously functioning institutions: the Higher School of Education in Rzeszów, operating since 1963; the Rzeszów branch of Maria Curie-Skłodowska University in Lublin, present in the city since 1969; and the Faculty of Economics of the Hugo Kołłątaj Agricultural Academy in Kraków, active since 1973. The consolidation of these units enabled the creation of a modern university that continues to uphold academic values such as the pursuit of truth, openness to diverse concepts, respect for the freedom

of scientific research, and care for human dignity and cultural heritage. The University also emphasises its political neutrality, promoting cooperation beyond ideological and religious divisions.

Since its establishment, the University has continuously expanded its educational offer. In 2001, students could choose from 20 fields of study, whereas by 2023 this number had grown to 68, with the student population reaching approximately 15,000. Nearly 100,000 graduates have completed their studies at the institution since its inception. A high standard of education is ensured through the implementation of modern teaching methods and a broad academic programme, which includes full-time and part-time studies, first- and second-cycle studies, as well as long-cycle master's programmes. Full-time studies account for around 78% of the total number of students (11,912 individuals), while part-time studies (3,436 students) meet the needs of those who work or have other commitments (Figure 9).

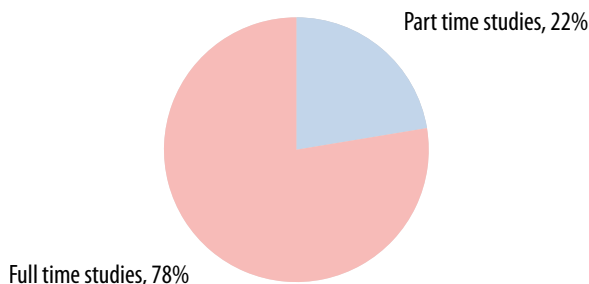


Figure 9. Number of students at the University of Rzeszów

Source: own elaboration based on Uniwersytet Rzeszowski (n.d.).

An important milestone in the history of the University was the granting of the right to offer long-cycle master's studies in medicine to the Faculty of Medicine on 10 July 2014. This significantly enhanced the University's prestige and contributed to its academic and educational development.

The University implements the idea of lifelong learning by offering courses, workshops, and training programmes for people of different ages and with diverse needs – from children and young people to working adults and seniors. These programmes are conducted both in traditional and online formats, allowing the University to adapt its educational offer to the demands of contemporary society.

The University's infrastructure has expanded systematically. At the beginning of its activity, the institution used buildings inherited from its predecessor institutions. According to the 2018 asset report, it possessed 46 facilities with a usable area of 167,532.69 m² and a total cubic capacity of 1,235,422.99 m³, providing appropriate conditions for education and scientific research.

The University holds the authority to confer doctoral degrees in nineteen disciplines across the humanities, social sciences, natural sciences, law, medicine, the arts, and technical sciences. Its academic staff includes PhDs (695), habilitated doctors (331), full professors (104), and master's degree holders (296), ensuring both a high level of teaching and a strong research base (Figure 10). Academic staff members serve as mentors, shaping students' knowledge, practical competencies, and ethical and civic attitudes.

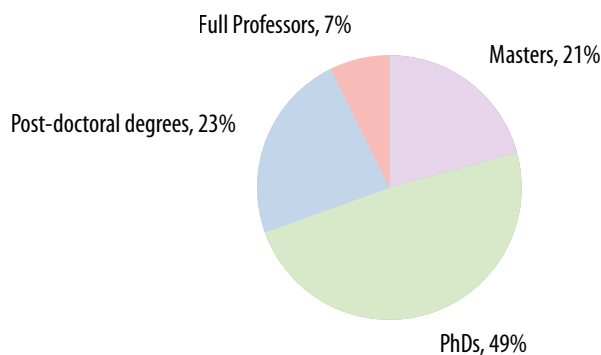


Figure 10. Academic staff of the University of Rzeszów

Source: own elaboration based on Uniwersytet Rzeszowski (n.d.).

The University of Rzeszów cooperates with approximately 280 foreign universities under the Erasmus+ programme, which enables the exchange of experiences, participation in research projects, and the development of competences among both students and staff. This cooperation contributes to the creation of innovative fields of study and strengthens the University's position within the international academic community.

The Senate of the University adopted a new Statute (16 December 2024) and approved the Organizational Regulations, introducing significant changes to the institution's structure. The previous colleges were replaced by fifteen faculties, including the Faculty of Biology and Environmental Protection, the Faculty of Economics and Finance, the Faculty of Humanities, the Faculty of Exact and Technical Sciences, the Faculty of Pedagogy and Philosophy, and the Faculty of Law and Administration. Within the Collegium Medicum, four specialised faculties operate: Biotechnology, Medicine, Physical Culture Sciences, and Health and Psychology Sciences. Rector Professor Adam Reich emphasises that the new structure increases management efficiency and allows for better alignment with the needs of individual academic areas.

Since the arrival of students from Ukraine at the University of Rzeszów, numerous initiatives have been launched to help them continue their studies and to provide comprehensive support within their new academic environment. Both the University

administration and the student community have been actively involved in creating a safe and welcoming space that fosters integration and mitigates the challenges resulting from migration and the consequences of war. In this context, the aim of the research conducted within the project is to identify the key challenges, barriers, and needs related to building such an environment, as well as to analyse how partner universities – including the University of Rzeszów – can effectively support the adaptation of students from Ukraine by drawing on the experiences of institutions that have developed stable and effective solutions in this area.

The study of Ukrainian students at the University of Rzeszów aims to explore their educational, social, and adaptation-related experiences within this specific academic setting. The significant increase in the number of Ukrainian students after 2022 reshaped the social structure of the UR academic community and highlighted the need for a deeper understanding of their situation. The analysis of the collected data makes it possible to identify factors that facilitate integration, as well as barriers that hinder full participation in academic life. The findings also allow for an assessment of the effectiveness of the support measures implemented by the University of Rzeszów for international students. This introduction serves as a starting point for an in-depth reflection on the needs, expectations, and challenges faced by Ukrainian students studying at the University. In 2024, 198 Ukrainian students were enrolled, while in 2025 the number increased to 255.

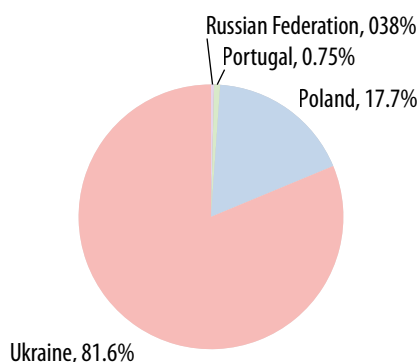


Figure 11. Structure of respondents by nationality ($N = 266$)

Source: own elaboration

The study involved 266 students studying at the University of Rzeszów who come from Ukraine but represent different nationalities. The largest group consists of individuals of Ukrainian nationality – 217 persons (81.6%), which confirms the dominant character of this community among students arriving from Ukraine. The second-largest group comprises individuals of Polish nationality residing in Ukraine – 47 persons

(17.7%), reflecting the presence of the Polish minority within Ukraine's demographic structure and its participation in educational mobility. Significantly smaller groups include students of Portuguese nationality (2 persons, 0.75%) and Russian nationality (1 person, 0.38%). Although marginal in number, they indicate a degree of ethnic diversity within the community of students coming from Ukraine (Figure 11). This structure highlights that the analysis of integration experiences does not concern a single ethnic group but encompasses students with diverse national identities studying in Poland.

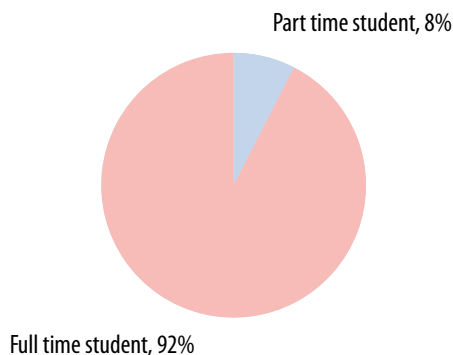


Figure 12. Structure of respondents by type of study ($N = 266$)

Source: own elaboration.

The vast majority of Ukrainian students study in a full-time mode – over 90% of the total. This indicates that:

- 1) the primary form of education for international students at the University of Rzeszów is full-time study;
- 2) these students generally live in Poland permanently or stay in the country for most of the academic year;
- 3) they require support in everyday functioning on campus, access to classes, social assistance, and administrative services.

The proportion of part-time students is small. This group may experience different needs, such as combining studies with employment, issues related to mobility, or reduced access to integration activities (Figure 12).

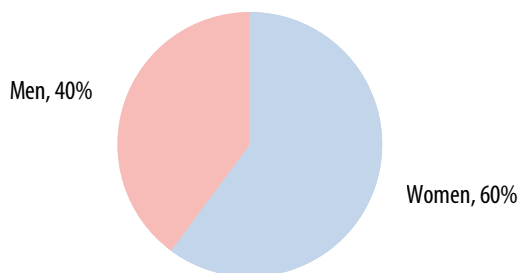


Figure 13. Structure of respondents by gender ($N = 266$)

Source: own elaboration

Among the surveyed students, women clearly predominate – they constitute approximately 60% of the entire sample, while men account for just under 40%. This predominance of women corresponds with national trends in educational migration from Ukraine, where women more frequently decide to begin or continue their studies abroad (Figure 13).

The gender structure may have the following consequences:

- 1) increased demand for psychological support targeted at young women undergoing adaptation;
- 2) higher participation of women in integration activities and student initiatives;
- 3) opportunities to better tailor the University's actions in areas such as safety, soft skills development, mentoring, and educational guidance.

The aim of the study is also to collect and organise knowledge about the social, economic, legal, and cultural factors relevant to the functioning of Ukrainian students in new academic realities. This is intended to support the development of a comprehensive database and integration tools that will allow universities to respond more effectively to students' needs, minimise adaptation difficulties, and strengthen their sense of safety and belonging within the academic community.

The presented results are context-specific and relate to a research sample situated within the institutional setting of the University of Rzeszów. Therefore, any generalization of the findings should be approached with caution and take into account the characteristics of the analyzed population as well as the adopted methodological framework.

The comparative analysis of the three groups indicates that integration is influenced by formal institutional measures, everyday social practices, and the reciprocal perceptions of students and teachers concerning both groups. Discrepancies between the support provided and participants' actual experiences highlight areas requiring reinforcement, while simultaneously identifying good practices worthy of further development. Consequently, the recommendations presented in this monograph are grounded in empirical findings and respond to the actual needs of all groups involved, integrating scientific insight with practical relevance.

5. Institutional Support for Students from Ukraine

The institutional response to the arrival of students from Ukraine after February 2022 must be understood within a broader framework of higher education governance in times of crisis. Universities operate not only as educational institutions but also as social organisations embedded in national and international policy environments. In situations of forced migration, their role extends beyond the provision of academic instruction and encompasses humanitarian, integrative, and psychosocial dimensions. Institutional support therefore requires coordinated action at multiple levels, combining regulatory adjustments, financial instruments, administrative facilitation, and socio-cultural integration measures. Such responses are shaped both by national policy frameworks – such as the programmes implemented by the Polish National Agency for Academic Exchange (NAWA) – and by institution-specific capacities and organisational cultures.

At the University of Rzeszów, the support architecture developed in response to the war in Ukraine reflects a comprehensive approach that integrates formal, educational, social, and psychological dimensions. Rather than treating integration as a purely administrative task, the University adopted a model that combines structural facilitation (tuition waivers, scholarships, simplified procedures) with relational and community-building practices. Within this institutional ecosystem, a central coordinating and operational role is played by the Polish Community Centre, which functions as a key organisational hub for language instruction, counselling, integration initiatives, and international cooperation. The following section analyses the structure and activities of this unit as a pivotal component of the University's inclusion strategy.

5.1. The Role of the Polish Community Centre

The University of Rzeszów, responding to the humanitarian crisis in Ukraine and the influx of academic refugees, has undertaken numerous measures aimed at supporting foreign students in continuing their higher education. A key role in this process is played by the Polish Community Centre, a unit operating within the Faculty of Philology, with many years of experience in working with the Polish diaspora and foreigners. The Polish Community Centre was established in 2020 on the basis of the Polish Language Study Centre for the Polish Diaspora and Foreigners “Polonus” and continues the tradition of educational and integration activities addressed to international students, offering both formal and socio-cultural support. The unit specialises in Polish

language instruction, academic and legal counselling, as well as the organisation of cultural, integration, and educational projects.

In response to the arrival of students from Ukraine after 24 February 2022, the University of Rzeszów provided Ukrainians with the opportunity to continue their studies through a simplified procedure, offering tuition fee waivers and scholarship support. The Polish Community Centre conducts Polish language courses at various proficiency levels, enabling students to quickly adapt to the requirements of the Polish academic system and social life. Language classes are held both in-person and online, and students additionally receive support with University administrative procedures, including registration, document verification, and access to social benefits. The Centre also provides psychological counselling, helping students cope with adaptation difficulties and stress related to war and migration.

The integration activities of the Polish Community Centre aim not only to teach the language but also to familiarise students with Polish culture and facilitate integration into the academic community. One of the main components is the organisation of integration workshops attended by both Polish and Ukrainian students. Thanks to such initiatives, young people can build intercultural relationships, exchange experiences, and better understand different social and cultural perspectives. The Centre also organises cultural and holiday events, such as concerts, exhibitions, fairs, and joint celebrations of national and religious holidays, allowing students to actively participate in University and local community life.

Alongside educational and integration activities, the University of Rzeszów provides social and material support. Students from Ukraine may benefit from monthly scholarships, financial aid, and accommodation in University dormitories with partial or complete exemption from fees. This support allows them to focus on their studies and reduces the impact of difficult financial circumstances on the educational process.

The Polish Community Centre plays a key role in coordinating this support, ensuring that all activities are coherent and effective, and that students are provided with a comfortable adaptation process in their new environment.

An important aspect of the Centre's work is its international cooperation. The unit participates in scientific and educational projects, including the Erasmus+ programme, maintaining partnerships with more than 280 foreign institutions. As a result, students from Ukraine have the opportunity to take part in academic exchanges, engage in research projects, and benefit from modern teaching methods and global scientific achievements. Participation in international projects also fosters the development of intercultural competences and the building of global academic relationships.

The activities of the Polish Community Centre are complementary and encompass various dimensions of support: formal, educational, social, psychological, cultural, and integrative. Students from Ukraine not only acquire knowledge and practical

skills but also have the opportunity to fully participate in the life of the University and the local community. These initiatives help build a sense of security, intercultural integration, and positive relationships between Polish and Ukrainian students. This model demonstrates that academic institutions can play not only an educational role but also a humanitarian and integrative one, creating an inclusive environment that supports adaptation and development for young people in times of crisis.

The Polish Community Centre at the University of Rzeszów is an example of effective institutional support that combines educational, social, cultural, and integrative activities. By offering language courses, administrative and legal support, scholarship programmes, integration workshops, and international projects, the unit significantly enhances the comfort and adaptation of students from Ukraine. At the same time, it promotes the values of solidarity, intercultural cooperation, and openness, strengthening the social and cultural role of the University of Rzeszów as an academic institution.

In response to the humanitarian crisis caused by the war in Ukraine, the University of Rzeszów actively joined the implementation of the “Solidarity with Ukraine” programme, prepared by the Polish National Agency for Academic Exchange (NAWA) on behalf of the Polish government. The programme aimed to support students and doctoral candidates from Ukraine who arrived in Poland after 24 February 2022, enabling them to continue their studies and academic work in safe conditions. The University’s involvement encompassed both formal measures and a wide range of integration, educational, and support initiatives designed to ensure that academic refugees were provided with a sense of security, stability, and the opportunity to fully participate in university life.

Within the “Solidarity with Ukraine” programme, refugee students and doctoral candidates from Ukraine were granted the possibility to continue their studies through a simplified procedure. The University of Rzeszów waived tuition fees and provided scholarships that covered basic educational and social needs. These financial solutions were crucial in the context of the sudden departure from their home country and the need to adapt to new academic realities. The University also ensured administrative and legal assistance, facilitating the registration process, document verification, and access to available social benefits.

One of the essential components of the programme was access to Polish language courses at levels A1, A2, and B1, delivered by the University of Rzeszów. Intensive and tailored language learning enabled academic refugees to adapt more rapidly to academic demands and daily life in Poland. The courses were offered both on-site and online, allowing participants to choose the most convenient form and reducing barriers related to diverse life circumstances. Proficiency in the Polish language not only facilitated studying but also formed the basis for social integration and building relationships with the local academic community.

The programme also included psychological and social support, crucial for students and doctoral candidates facing emotional and material difficulties. The University offered psychological assistance and accommodation in dormitories with partial or full fee exemption. Such comprehensive support extended beyond financial aid and addressed the overall well-being of participants, allowing them to focus on their studies and integration in the new environment.

The significance of the University of Rzeszów's involvement in the "Solidarity with Ukraine" programme extends beyond the provision of educational conditions alone. The programme had a comprehensive character, encompassing educational, integrative, social, and psychological activities, which enabled academic refugees from Ukraine to effectively join the university and local community. Through these measures, students could not only continue their studies but also establish intercultural relationships, participate in social events, and develop the competences necessary for functioning in the Polish academic environment.

The University's participation in the "Solidarity with Ukraine" programme also shows that academic institutions in Poland can play not only an educational role but also a humanitarian and integrative one. The example of the University of Rzeszów demonstrates that comprehensive support for refugee students requires a combination of financial, educational, psychological, and integrative efforts. Thanks to these measures, young people who were forced to leave their homeland suddenly can continue their education in safe conditions and fully benefit from university resources, while also developing intercultural and social competences.

The engagement of the University of Rzeszów in the "Solidarity with Ukraine" programme is an example of an effective academic response to a humanitarian and educational crisis. By providing financial, linguistic, psychological, and integrative support, the University enabled students and doctoral candidates from Ukraine to continue their academic and social development in Poland, thereby contributing to the creation of an inclusive academic environment and promoting the values of solidarity and intercultural cooperation.

Thanks to this comprehensive approach, the integration of students from Ukraine into the Polish academic environment becomes more effective, and the actions undertaken by the University of Rzeszów and the Polish Community Centre may serve as a model for other universities in Poland and across Europe. Such institutional support not only enables students to continue their education but also strengthens their sense of belonging to the academic community, develops intercultural competences, and prepares them for active participation in professional and social life in the host country.

5.2. Engagement of Polish Students in the Inclusion of Students from Ukraine

The engagement of Polish students in the inclusion of students from Ukraine constitutes one of the key foundations of contemporary academic communities, especially in the context of intensified educational migration triggered by the armed conflict. Universities in Poland, including the University of Rzeszów, serve as institutions responding to humanitarian crises; however, genuine integration does not occur solely at the level of regulations or formal procedures. The most important element of this process remains the cooperation among students, their readiness to co-create intercultural relations, and their everyday practices of coexistence within the academic environment. In the face of the war in Ukraine, Polish universities became places of refuge, and for many young people – a source of hope for continuing their interrupted education. Yet it is the activity of Polish students, their social sensitivity, empathy, and openness to diversity that makes the process of inclusion effective and multidimensional.

Polish students do not only participate in formally planned activities but also engage in bottom-up initiatives, forming support networks based on peer relationships. Particularly important are their interactions with newly arrived Ukrainian students, as these interactions help break cultural, linguistic, and psychological barriers. Polish students are often the ones who accompany their peers during their first days at the University, helping them complete administrative procedures, navigate the campus, understand academic rules, or find their place within the local community. This constitutes a form of informal mentoring in which peer guidance plays a crucial role in fostering a sense of safety among students experiencing forced migration. Thanks to such support, Ukrainian students can gradually adapt to the new environment, overcome initial distance, and build social bonds.

At the University of Rzeszów, integration workshops devoted to internationalisation and inclusion – addressed to Polish students – played a particularly significant role. These meetings not only helped identify barriers and difficulties but also created a space for critical reflection on existing integration practices. Through group work, students had the opportunity to analyse their experiences, formulate opinions, and propose systemic solutions. Importantly, this initiative had a bottom-up character, as it involved Polish students as co-creators of the diagnosis and recommendations rather than merely recipients of institutional actions.

During the workshops, students could express diverse opinions regarding coexistence with peers from Ukraine, which made it possible to capture a broad spectrum of experiences – from clear goodwill and openness to scepticism resulting from misunderstanding or perceived inequalities in the support system. This form of dialogue

provides insight into real social attitudes and supports the creation of mechanisms that respond to emerging tensions.

In everyday academic life, Polish students play an important role in shaping an atmosphere conducive to intercultural cooperation. Through shared participation in classes, student associations, research projects, and cultural initiatives, students of both nationalities can build lasting relationships. Such interactions reduce feelings of alienation, foster social bonding, and teach mutual tolerance and empathy. Polish students demonstrate readiness to explain cultural differences, introduce their Ukrainian peers to Polish customs and everyday realities, and support them in learning the Polish language, particularly during the first months of their stay. These attitudes are especially important in the context of forced migration, where emotional factors – fear, uncertainty, trauma – require a sensitive and supportive environment.

The educational and social dimension of inclusion is also extremely important. Polish students offer assistance in understanding academic content, consulting assignments, sharing notes and materials, and explaining differences in terminology and teaching methods. Their engagement helps create conditions that equalise educational opportunities and prevent the marginalisation of students arriving from a war-affected country. Working together on projects and academic tasks also supports the development of cooperation skills in a multicultural environment, which in turn contributes to building competences useful in future professional life.

Importantly, this contact is beneficial for both sides. For Ukrainian students, it provides support, integration, and the rebuilding of a sense of stability. From the perspective of Polish students, it is an opportunity to develop soft skills, cultivate social sensitivity, learn about another culture, and shape attitudes of civic responsibility. Moreover, intercultural cooperation enables both groups to recognise the importance of solidarity, mutual respect, and collaboration in times of global crises.

However, the challenges arising from linguistic differences, social norms, and migration experiences cannot be overlooked. Polish students note that communication can be difficult, especially when language differences lead to misunderstandings or reluctance to engage in conversation. They also point to differences in educational systems, communication styles, or expectations regarding academic staff. Another issue is the excessive burden placed on Polish students, who often become the first source of support and information, which in the long term may lead to burnout or a sense of overload. Such difficulties highlight the need to strengthen formal support structures and coordinate initiatives so that they do not rely solely on individual students but form part of a stable institutional strategy.

At the same time, some Polish students express critical opinions stemming from a perceived imbalance in access to resources or a belief that Ukrainian students are privileged. Although many of these views are secondary in nature and not based

on personal experience, their presence indicates the need for dialogue and educational efforts that explain the principles of support and demonstrate the shared benefits of inclusive policies. It is essential for the University not only to react to challenges but also to conduct active information campaigns that build a sense of fairness and balance among all members of the academic community.

In the context of the workshops organised at the University of Rzeszów, Polish students were able to formulate recommendations for future actions supporting integration. They pointed to the need for systematic development of language courses, the organisation of more integration events, and the introduction of mentoring programmes in which more experienced students could support newcomers. Such actions not only facilitate adaptation but also prevent social isolation while strengthening the sense of belonging and building intercultural bridges.

From an academic perspective, the engagement of Polish students can be interpreted as a process that enhances social capital based on cooperation, mutual trust, and a sense of community. This is an approach that extends beyond one-time initiatives and leads to a long-term cultural transformation within the University. The integration of Ukrainian students thus becomes not only a response to current migratory challenges but also a foundation for an academic environment built on inclusivity, empathy, and openness. The participation of Polish students in this process is therefore not only a form of assistance but also part of shaping a conscious and responsible civic society.

It is worth emphasising that inclusion carried out with the active involvement of Polish students strengthens the University as an institution resilient to future crises and prepared to operate in an international environment. The experiences gained in the context of Ukrainian migration will have long-term significance, as they contribute to the development of models of intercultural cooperation that may be used in other situations as well. The role of Polish students is particularly important here: they shape the day-to-day atmosphere at the University, introduce newcomers to the community, and demonstrate that openness is not merely a declaration but a lived social practice.

In conclusion, the engagement of Polish students in the integration of students from Ukraine has multidimensional importance. It combines educational, social, cultural, and emotional actions. It strengthens peer relations, builds the University's social capital, and simultaneously responds to contemporary challenges. Through their activity and openness, Polish students become co-creators of an academic culture based on dialogue and intercultural sensitivity. Thanks to them, integration takes on a real dimension, and the University becomes a place where every student – regardless of their country of origin – can find a space for learning, development, and coexistence.

5.3. Experiences and Assessments of Ukrainian Students Regarding Academic and Social Integration

The academic and social integration of Ukrainian students at Polish universities has in recent years become a subject of particular attention due to the mass educational migration caused by Russia's aggression against Ukraine. Moving one's studies to a new country, into a different cultural, linguistic, and institutional environment, places young people in the face of complex adaptation challenges. Their experiences make it possible to capture both the opportunities opened by studying in Poland and the barriers that may hinder full integration. The statements and observations of Ukrainian students gathered during workshops organised at the University of Rzeszów provide valuable data on the actual course of inclusion processes, their reception, and expectations regarding the actions of the University and the student community.

In the initial phase of encountering the university environment, students' experiences are strongly shaped by the emotional state associated with forced migration, uncertainty, and a sense of foreignness. During the workshops, it was observed that some Ukrainian students initially displayed considerable reserve and visible stress, which affected their activity and openness to communication. Only the gradual establishment of a sense of safety, support from the facilitators, and interaction with other participants led to greater ease and spontaneity in sharing experiences. The process of linguistic adaptation was also noticeable, as some participants asked for clarification of academic terms, indicating that the language barrier remains one of the fundamental factors determining the pace and quality of integration of students from Ukraine within the Polish academic environment.

Among the factors facilitating adaptation, Ukrainian students particularly emphasised the accessibility of shared activities with students of various nationalities and the possibility of participating in everyday academic life. They mentioned shared classes, student events, collaboration on educational projects, and integration through informal meetings, such as outings with friends. These experiences created a space for overcoming distance and building relationships that facilitated entry into the university environment. For many students, support from Polish peers proved crucial, as they offered help in both academic and everyday matters. Examples of empathetic behaviour included assistance in the recruitment process, explaining formal procedures, giving tips on navigating the city, and naturally including Ukrainian students in social circles. Participants repeatedly emphasised that both the student and teaching communities were welcoming and open, which strengthened their sense of safety and encouraged the development of close interpersonal relations.

An important aspect of integration was also the opportunity to develop language competences. Students clearly stated that living in Poland enables them to learn Polish

– and often English – more quickly and effectively, especially through daily interactions and participation in classes. The Polish language courses offered by the University played an essential role in overcoming communication barriers and increasing confidence in interactions with Polish students, lecturers, and administrative institutions. According to the students, language proficiency not only facilitated academic and social integration but was also seen as an investment in their future careers and an opportunity to function in the labour market across European countries.

Access to diverse cultural resources was another significant element of positive adaptation experiences. Students emphasised that studying in Poland allows them to participate in a rich cultural life, academic events, concerts, conferences, and university celebrations. The ability to explore Polish and European culture, as well as contact with peers from other countries – such as Spain, Turkey, or Italy – opened new perspectives and strengthened intercultural competences. These experiences were regarded as particularly valuable because, in their home country, students would not have the same opportunities to build international networks, which may benefit future professional development. Participants also noted that interactions with foreign students reduced initial stress and enabled more comfortable functioning in a multicultural environment. They recognised that having friends abroad who could support them in future travels or professional projects was an additional advantage of their presence in an international academic community.

At the same time, the experiences of Ukrainian students indicate important adaptation barriers that affect the pace and quality of integration. The most frequently highlighted problem was the language barrier, which led to communication difficulties, feelings of loneliness, and the need for greater effort in learning. According to some participants, the lack of information available in Ukrainian and insufficient preparation of some lecturers to work with international students were significant obstacles to full participation in the educational process. Differences in communication norms and the absence of clear support mechanisms also made it difficult for some students to understand university rules, regulations, or exam requirements.

Students pointed out that during the first months of their stay, there was a lack of a person or institution that could serve as a guide to academic culture and assist in adapting to new conditions. Their statements revealed the need for a dedicated contact point and an increase in integration initiatives aimed specifically at Ukrainian students or the broader international group. Some participants also expressed concern about the insufficient involvement of student organisations, which could play a more significant role in integration by organising meetings, events, or bridging activities. In students' accounts, it was also evident that many of them felt they had to organise integration initiatives themselves and sought support only when facing problems. Such experiences led to the belief that the university should be more actively

involved in facilitating assimilation and helping students overcome everyday adaptation challenges.

Attention should also be paid to students' concerns about the risk of social isolation. Many of them emphasised the fear of rejection due to their accent, origin, or worries about the quality of interactions with Polish peers. There were also statements mentioning feelings of discrimination or unequal treatment, particularly regarding tuition fees. Students pointed to difficulties collaborating with others during classes, sometimes due to language differences or a lack of shared cultural background. These experiences were further intensified by the fact that students from Ukraine are often required to put greater effort into daily responsibilities, limiting their time for informal meetings and building social relationships. Many also declared that withdrawal resulting from language insecurity or fear of judgement negatively affected their willingness to engage in integration activities.

Participants' accounts also included references to stereotypes and discriminatory attitudes. Some students recalled comments questioning their Polish language proficiency or implicitly suggesting lower academic competence compared to students from other countries. In one account, a student reported being compared to other foreign students in terms of language skills, which caused a sense of injustice and lowered her self-confidence. Although such experiences were not dominant, they are crucial for analysing integration processes, as any instance of rejection or negative assessment can significantly influence students' social integration and educational success.

Despite the difficulties, Ukrainian students perceive studying in Poland as an important opportunity for personal and professional development. The possibility of obtaining a degree recognised throughout Europe, access to mobility programmes, prospects of employment in various EU countries, and opportunities for internships serve as motivating factors that encourage them to overcome integration challenges. Participants also emphasised that studying in Poland opens doors to a better future and increases their competitiveness on the labour market. Interaction with Polish and international students helps them understand diverse cooperation models, which may facilitate functioning in multinational professional environments in the future.

Overall, the experiences of Ukrainian students are complex and multidimensional. Academic and social integration involves processes of linguistic, cultural, educational, and emotional adaptation. On the one hand, students highly appreciate the availability of development opportunities, the openness of parts of the academic community, and the benefits associated with an international environment. On the other hand, they encounter significant barriers, including communication difficulties, the absence of dedicated institutional support, the risk of isolation, and insecurity related to being judged by others. Their statements indicate that full integration requires not

only individual effort but also coordinated actions by the university, student organisations, and the wider academic community.

These experiences provide rich material for analysis and highlight the importance of creating spaces for dialogue, strengthening informational support, expanding language courses, and designing integration initiatives that engage both Ukrainian and Polish students. Academic integration thus ceases to be a one-sided process and becomes a dynamic social exchange in which each side contributes its own values, needs, and perspectives.

6. Synthesis of Research Findings and Conclusions from the Comparison of Perspectives

The integration of students from Ukraine into the Polish academic environment has become one of the key challenges for universities since the beginning of the war and the influx of a large group of young people seeking to continue their education in safe conditions. The academic staff meeting conducted at the University of Rzeszów enabled a multifaceted diagnosis of the experiences, observations, and evaluations of lecturers regarding the functioning of Ukrainian students within the Polish educational space. The statements of the participants reveal a picture of a complex process in which developmental potential and opportunities intersect with linguistic, psychological, and didactic challenges that influence both the course of education and interpersonal relations within the academic environment.

Academic teachers particularly highlighted that students from Ukraine bring unique experiences to classes, deriving from their direct contact with war. These perspectives enrich discussions, provoke deeper reflection on political, social, and ethical issues, and facilitate understanding of phenomena that Polish students often analyse only in theoretical terms. Lecturers noted that the contrast between real personal stories and textbook narratives intensifies critical thinking, fosters empathy among students, and motivates staff to reflect more deeply on their own educational practices.

Among the most frequently mentioned observations is admiration for the determination of Ukrainian students who, despite traumatic experiences, demonstrate high levels of motivation to study. Lecturers point out that their engagement, diligence, flexibility, and willingness to adapt to Polish academic realities serve as inspiration both for peer groups and for teachers. Many lecturers emphasise that these students display a strong “thirst for knowledge,” treating education as a tool for rebuilding life stability and as an investment in their future. At the same time, it is noticeable that a significant number of them prefer to work in groups with other Ukrainian-speaking students – a natural reaction in stressful situations and in the context of rapid adaptation.

Alongside these strengths, teachers also identify significant barriers that hinder the integration process. One of the most frequently highlighted is the language barrier, which affects both students’ activity during classes and their academic performance. Lecturers observe that language difficulties sometimes result in incomplete understanding of course content, problems interpreting exam tasks, and limited participation in discussions. This leads to the necessity of adapting teaching methods and assessment approaches, which requires greater flexibility from teachers and often adds to their workload. Nevertheless, the academic staff emphasises that the level of Polish

language proficiency is gradually increasing, indicating the effectiveness of language courses and the natural adaptation process.

A significant area of difficulty relates to the psychological consequences of traumatic experiences. Teachers reported that some students display withdrawn behaviour, reduced engagement, difficulties with concentration, or signs of anxiety. These factors influence learning pace, knowledge acquisition, and social functioning. Lecturers note that access to professional psychological support is insufficient and that the lack of dedicated solutions places an additional burden on teaching staff, who often face issues beyond their professional competencies. At the same time, teachers express the need for training in recognising symptoms of post-traumatic stress and adapting communication styles to students with forced-migration backgrounds.

Another important area of reflection is the risk of tensions and misunderstandings between Ukrainian and Polish students. The teaching staff observe that although conflicts occur only sporadically, potential sources of difficulty arise from cultural differences, communication styles, and divergent life experiences. Teachers emphasise the importance of preventive measures such as promoting a culture of dialogue, anti-discrimination education, intercultural workshops, and creating spaces for the exchange of experiences between students of both nationalities.

In the opinions of lecturers, there is also a strong need for developing tools and support programmes for teachers working with students who have migration experience. They point out that integration requires not only openness and interpersonal competence but also institutional support – simplified teaching materials, linguistic assistance, access to intercultural consultations, and additional administrative resources. From the teachers' perspective, the absence of such solutions risks lowering the quality of the educational process and overburdening the staff with adaptation-related duties. At the same time, they recognise that well-developed support systems could significantly increase the effectiveness of integration and facilitate the building of a coherent academic community.

The statements of teachers clearly indicate that the presence of students from Ukraine also presents valuable developmental opportunities for the academic staff themselves. Intercultural interactions broaden knowledge about Ukraine, enhance cultural sensitivity, and foster reflection in teaching practice. Many lecturers view working with Ukrainian students as a chance to develop competences related to intercultural education, building relationships based on empathy and cooperation, and conducting classes in culturally diverse environments. They also point out that these experiences align with the broader mission of the university as a socially responsible institution responding to global challenges and supporting individuals affected by armed conflicts.

The reflections of academic teachers present the integration of Ukrainian students as a multifaceted process that combines educational, social, and humanitarian values.

The staff recognise both the significant potential of Ukrainian students and the obstacles hindering full adaptation – from language barriers to war-related trauma and structural gaps in support. At the same time, strong emphasis is placed on the need for systemic development of intercultural education tools, increasing access to psychological support, and organising regular experience-sharing meetings. These insights show that the success of integration depends largely on cooperation between students, teachers, and the university, and that experiences arising from working with Ukrainian students hold not only educational but also social and ethical value.

The process of integrating students from Ukraine into the Polish academic environment reveals a complex network of interdependencies between institutional actions, the activity of the student community, and the individual experiences of people migrating under forced conditions. The analysis of the three groups participating in the project – institutional representatives responsible for integration policies, Polish students, and Ukrainian students – allows for capturing complementary, though at times divergent, assessments of the functioning support mechanisms and the barriers hindering full inclusion in academic life. The diversity of perspectives creates a multi-dimensional picture of integration, which on the one hand confirms the effectiveness of certain measures undertaken by the university, and on the other – highlights areas requiring intensification, improvement, or redefinition.

Table 5. Comparison of the three perspectives on the integration of Ukrainian students

Area of Analysis	Perspective of Institutional Representatives/Academic Staff	Perspective of Polish Students	Perspective of Ukrainian Students
Understanding the purpose of integration	Integration as a systemic task: formal support, equal access to education, response to the migration crisis	Integration as building cooperation and relationships within the group	Integration as a condition for rebuilding safety and continuing academic life
Assessment of university actions	The university operates efficiently but needs stronger resources (psychologist, information, language support)	Actions are dispersed; lack of a support system; too much responsibility placed on students	Actions helpful but incomplete; difficulties accessing information; no dedicated contact person
Access to information and communication	Need to simplify language, create clear communication and repeatable procedures	Information not always clear; Polish students often translate it for Ukrainian peers	Information difficult and unclear; language barrier significantly slows adaptation
Peer relationships	Key to successful integration; the university should support them	Willingness to help but sometimes burdensome; language differences hinder cooperation	Relationships with Polish students as the main source of support; initial sense of uncertainty
Relationships with academic staff	Staff need tools and training to work with multicultural groups	Seen as supportive but sometimes unprepared to work with international students	Friendly atmosphere, but difficulties in understanding requirements and instructions

Area of Analysis	Perspective of Institutional Representatives/Academic Staff	Perspective of Polish Students	Perspective of Ukrainian Students
Language and communication skills	The biggest barrier to integration; requires additional courses and materials	Hinders group communication; requires more effort	Source of stress, withdrawal, isolation; key element of adaptation
Psychological and emotional support	Insufficient; increased resources needed	Students see the need to support Ukrainians but do not always know how to respond	Feel stress, anxiety, trauma; lack of accessible psychological help
Sense of safety	Important for the integration process; the university strives to provide it	Polish students notice that Ukrainians need increased sensitivity	Low at the beginning; grows through relationships, support, and language
Cultural and social differences	Can be addressed through intercultural training; not a major barrier	Sometimes cause misunderstandings and distance	Cause uncertainty and withdrawal; strong need for acceptance
Differences in education systems and working methods	Visible, require didactic adaptation	Hinder joint projects; need to explain rules	Difficulties adapting to Polish assessment methods, projects, independent work
Working style and engagement	Ukrainian students perceived as motivated, hardworking, determined	Engagement noticeable, but group work sometimes challenging	Declare high motivation, but language limits activity
Social and extracurricular life	The university should support integration activities and student organisations	Willingly integrate through outings and shared activities, but limited by time and workload	Strong need for social participation; also fear of rejection
Perception of conflicts and tensions	Conflicts rare but possible; preventive actions needed	Sometimes distance arises from misconceptions or the burden of being the “translator”	Fears of stereotypes and discrimination; incidents reduce self-esteem
Assessment of integration effectiveness	Moderately positive; many actions exist but require improvement	Rather critical; actions inconsistent; too much responsibility on students	Positive with reservations; integration depends more on people than systems
Expectations towards the university	Strengthen institutional support, develop integration structures, provide training	Mentoring programmes, clear rules, greater involvement of student organisations	Cultural assistants, better information, language courses, psychological support
Greatest needs	Coordination, resources, professionalisation of tools	Support structure and even distribution of responsibilities	Emotional, linguistic, and informational support
Main barriers	Language, stress, limited social exchange	Language, lack of support system, uneven academic preparation	Language, trauma, lack of clarity in academic and administrative expectations
Key conclusions	Integration requires systemic reinforcement and coordination	Integration cannot rely on informal help from students	Integration succeeds when stable support and a sense of social safety exist

Source: own elaboration based on EIUS project documents.

The statements of institutional representatives responsible for implementing project activities indicate that the integration of Ukrainian students is treated as a systemic task requiring the simultaneous strengthening of administrative tools, psychosocial support, and educational measures. From the institutional perspective, it has been

crucial to provide formal pathways enabling students to access recruitment procedures, counselling, scholarships, and information on university functioning swiftly. Representatives also emphasise the need to adapt communication processes to the needs of Ukrainian students, particularly through simplifying language, preparing informational materials, and ensuring support for those who are only beginning to use Polish in an academic context.

At the same time, from the institutional perspective there is clear awareness that formal support instruments are only the foundation of integration – a process that in practice depends primarily on daily peer interactions and the intercultural competences of the entire academic community. During meetings with academic staff, it was strongly emphasised that direct relationships – among students working together in seminar groups, project teams, or student organisations – determine the real sense of belonging and safety. Attention was drawn to the need for greater activation of Polish students, who often play the role of natural “guides” through university structures and represent the most important source of informal support.

The perspective of Polish students reveals a willingness to offer peer assistance while also highlighting specific difficulties that hinder everyday cooperation with Ukrainian colleagues. Polish students point out that intercultural contact is for them a space for acquiring new competences – linguistic, communicative, and social. Many recognise the value of exchanging knowledge and experiences, as well as the opportunity to develop pro-social attitudes aligned with the principles of global and European education. In their opinion, the arrival of Ukrainian students has enriched the academic environment, making it more diverse and open.

At the same time, Polish students note several barriers that hinder full inclusion. They identify language differences, uneven academic preparation, and varying learning styles and working methods as the greatest challenges. A recurring theme in their statements is the existence of “parallel student environments,” which operate alongside one another but do not fully collaborate. Polish students also point to the reluctance of some Ukrainian students to engage in mixed groups, often interpreting this as cultural distance or insecurity stemming from traumatic war-related experiences. They also observe that integration frequently requires additional effort from them – explaining rules, helping interpret instructions, or supporting navigation through academic processes – which creates a sense of burden, particularly where the university does not provide sufficient structural support.

The perspective of Ukrainian students, in turn, presents integration primarily as an adaptive experience shaped by psychosocial factors. Their statements repeatedly emphasise stress associated with forced migration, the language barrier, and the need to navigate a new educational and socio-cultural system. Ukrainian students stress that the openness of Polish peers is one of the most important factors supporting their

sense of safety and enabling the gradual building of relationships. The presence of kind individuals – both students and staff – helps break initial isolation and insecurity.

At the same time, Ukrainian students articulate several structural problems that hinder their adaptation. They point to an insufficient number of Polish language support classes, difficulties accessing administrative information, and a lack of dedicated integration programmes. A recurring theme is the absence of a person or unit responsible for ongoing adaptation support – a role that in many European universities is fulfilled through tutor systems, intercultural assistants, or student mentors. Ukrainian students also note that many integration activities require their own initiative, which is challenging when they are simultaneously struggling with emotional, linguistic, and organisational barriers.

Comparing the perspectives of the three groups reveals several areas of convergence as well as fields of tension resulting from differing experiences and expectations. All groups agree that peer relationships and an atmosphere of openness are the most important elements of integration. Institutions emphasise the need to create formal conditions for integration; Polish students highlight the need for greater support and clearer structures; Ukrainian students stress the importance of empathy and access to information. There is a shared belief that integration cannot rely solely on administrative activities – it must be embedded in everyday interactions, mutuality, and the strengthening of social capital.

Differences also emerge in the assessment of the effectiveness of integration measures. Institutional representatives consider existing solutions appropriate but in need of expansion. Polish students view them as insufficiently coordinated and placing too much responsibility on informal peer relationships. Ukrainian students most often regard them as helpful but incomplete – supportive of academic development but not always addressing psychosocial needs. Their statements indicate that the feeling of integration increases along with improvements in language competences but also with the quality of peer relationships and the possibility of participating in student life without fear or excessive burden.

The comparison of perspectives leads to several key conclusions. First, the integration of Ukrainian students is a multi-stage process in which institutional, peer, and individual actions overlap, and only their synergistic interaction leads to real inclusion. Second, the most frequently identified barrier is language – both academically and socially – which requires expanding linguistic support systems and increasing the availability of courses at different proficiency levels. Third, socio-cultural integration requires activating Polish students and developing mentoring or tutoring programmes that relieve both students and teachers. Fourth, both institutional representatives and students recognise the need to strengthen psychological support and develop

measures facilitating cultural adaptation, especially for those who arrived in Poland through forced migration.

Overall, the integration of Ukrainian students into the Polish higher education system is a dynamic process in which formal mechanisms gradually give way to the building of lasting social relationships. The effectiveness of integration efforts thus depends on balance between institutional structures and bottom-up initiatives that create spaces for coexistence, solidarity, and intercultural exchange. The synergy of these elements makes it possible not only to minimise adaptation barriers but also to create new opportunities for development for Ukrainian students and the entire academic community, expanding its competences, cultural sensitivity, and capacity to function in a diverse, multicultural environment.

6.1. Conclusions and proposals for actions

The analyses conducted confirm that the integration of Ukrainian students in Polish universities is a complex, multidimensional process, and its success depends on both institutional measures and the quality of social interactions within the academic community. The collected theoretical and empirical evidence shows that, although Polish universities have demonstrated significant adaptability and openness in response to the sudden increase in the number of Ukrainian students, considerable barriers remain that hinder their full participation in academic life.

The findings and reflections presented in this monograph provide an important and multidimensional contribution to the analysis of contemporary processes of educational migration and the integration of students with experiences of forced migration within the higher education system. The collected empirical material and the conducted theoretical analyses make it possible to capture both the macro-social context of the migration of students from Ukraine to Poland and the micro-social dimension of their functioning within specific academic communities. The monograph presents educational migration not as a homogeneous phenomenon, but as a dynamic process embedded in broader political, economic, cultural, and institutional conditions. The research results provide a foundation for further comparative studies, while at the same time offering important guidance for policymakers, university authorities, and practitioners responsible for designing integration policies. The monograph confirms that effective integration requires a holistic approach based on a long-term strategy, intercultural dialogue, and the conscious integration of educational goals with the social responsibility of universities.

Educational migration of Ukrainian students to Poland exhibits a sustained and growing trend, with notable intensification after 2014 and particularly following

2022, which has established this group as the largest population of international students in the Polish higher education system. This phenomenon should be understood in the context of a complex interplay of political, economic, cultural, and geographical factors, which make Poland an attractive and relatively safe destination for study, offering degrees recognized in Europe. An analysis of the socio-demographic structure of Ukrainian students reveals considerable diversity, with notable trends including the feminization of migration, concentration in major academic centres, and strong interest in fields such as economics, computer science, and medicine. Despite the growing significance of this group for the Polish educational and economic system, students continue to face multiple barriers, including language difficulties, financial constraints, and adaptation challenges. Consequently, the sustained influx of Ukrainian students can be seen both as a potential source of strengthening human capital and internationalization of Polish universities, and as a challenge requiring co-ordinated measures to support integration and adaptation. These trends further suggest that Ukrainian students may contribute to the development of local labour markets and the internationalization of higher education institutions, highlighting the need for targeted initiatives to make full use of this resource.

In light of these findings, particular attention should be given to recommendations addressing four key groups of stakeholders: public policymakers, higher education institutions, economic actors, and social and local institutions. For public policymakers, it would be beneficial to develop a coherent, long-term strategy for educational migration, which could help reduce the institutional barriers faced by students. For higher education institutions, it would be advantageous to further strengthen support systems, including the expansion of intensive Polish language courses, the creation of integrated student service centres, and the provision of professional psychological and intercultural support, addressing adaptation challenges identified in the analysis. For employers and economic actors, extending internship and practical training programs could facilitate students' acquisition of professional experience and enhance their prospects for long-term engagement with the Polish labour market. Meanwhile, social organizations and local institutions could play an important role in developing integration initiatives, informational support, and intercultural programs, potentially reinforcing social capital and facilitating student adaptation in local communities. Coordinated implementation of these measures across all stakeholder groups could contribute both to reducing barriers faced by Ukrainian students and to maximizing the benefits of their presence for Polish higher education, local communities, and the broader economy.

The analyses presented clearly indicate that the process of integrating students from Ukraine into the academic community of the University of Rzeszów is complex, multi-dimensional, and long-term in nature. It is not the result of isolated support measures, but rather the outcome of the interaction of institutional, social, and individual factors

which may mutually reinforce one another or – if incoherent – lead to the persistence of adaptation barriers. Integration should therefore be understood as a dynamic process that requires continuous adjustment of tools, procedures, and academic practices to the changing needs of students functioning under conditions of forced migration.

The University of Rzeszów, analysed as an institutional context, has demonstrated a significant capacity to respond to the educational crisis triggered by the war in Ukraine. Its extensive organizational structure, experience in internationalisation, and the active role of the Polish Language and Culture Centre have created a foundation for providing Ukrainian students with formal conditions for continuing their education, as well as linguistic, social, and administrative support. These measures played a key role in the initial phase of adaptation, enabling students to find their place in the new academic environment relatively quickly and to rebuild a sense of stability. At the same time, the research shows that even well-developed institutional instruments do not guarantee full integration if they are not accompanied by a coherent system of communication, coordination, and ongoing diagnosis of the needs of international students.

An important element of the integration process is the involvement of Polish students, which in practice fills the gap between formal solutions and the everyday functioning of the academic community. Peer relationships, informal mentoring, and support in linguistic and organisational matters significantly reduce adaptation barriers faced by Ukrainian students. At the same time, the analysis indicates that excessive reliance on bottom-up initiatives leads to a shift of responsibility from the institutional level to individuals. Such a situation entails the risk of overburdening Polish students, reinforcing role imbalances, and generating tensions resulting from a sense of injustice or a lack of systemic support.

The perspective of Ukrainian students highlights that academic and social integration is strongly conditioned by psychosocial factors, including experiences of war-related trauma, migration stress, and the level of language competence. Students perceive studying in Poland as an important opportunity for personal and professional development; however, this process is accompanied by uncertainty, fear of assessment, and the risk of isolation. While the openness of parts of the academic community and the opportunity to function in an international environment are highly valued, significant deficits are identified, including insufficient access to psychological support, a limited number of language courses, and the absence of a clearly designated person or unit responsible for ongoing adaptation support.

Comparing the three perspectives – institutional, Polish students, and Ukrainian students – leads to the conclusion that effective integration requires maintaining a balance between systemic solutions and interpersonal relationships. Empathy, openness, and solidarity are essential, but they cannot replace durable organisational structures. Integration should not rely solely on the goodwill of individuals, but rather on a clearly defined

university policy encompassing coordinated informational, linguistic, psychological, and educational measures. The absence of such an approach fosters the fragmentation of support and increases the risk of marginalisation of students with lower language competencies or those burdened by experiences of forced migration.

At the same time, the presence of Ukrainian students constitutes a significant added value for the academic community. They bring new cognitive perspectives, enrich teaching-related discussions, and contribute to the development of intercultural competencies among both students and academic staff. Integration thus ceases to be a one-sided process and becomes a form of mutual learning and adaptation, embedded in the social mission of the university as a responsible institution open to the challenges of the contemporary world.

From a scholarly perspective, the integration of international students should be understood as a multi-level process encompassing organisational, didactic, social, and psychological dimensions simultaneously. A lack of coordination between these levels leads to the dispersion of efforts and a reduction in their effectiveness. The research findings clearly indicate the need for systematic evaluation of integration activities and for incorporating students' voices into the design and modification of institutional solutions. Integration should have a participatory character, based on shared responsibility among all actors of academic life, which supports the development of sustainable social capital within the university.

The experiences of the University of Rzeszów also demonstrate that the integration of students with experiences of forced migration cannot be treated as an incidental action activated solely in crisis situations. Instead, it should constitute an element of the university's long-term development strategy, taking into account increasing educational mobility and the volatility of geopolitical conditions. In this sense, the analysed case may serve as a reference point for other universities, indicating that effective integration requires combining solidarity and empathy with the professionalisation of actions, clearly defined institutional roles, and a coherent vision for the development of an inclusive academic community.

The starting point for formulating the recommendations is the recognition that the educational migration of students from Ukraine to Poland currently has a structural rather than incidental character. Its scale, dynamics, and complex political, social, and economic determinants mean that higher education institutions today function not only as teaching institutions, but also as spaces of adaptation, stabilization, and the reconstruction of human capital for individuals affected by forced migration. Combining a macro-social perspective, referring to general trends in educational migration and public policies, with a micro-institutional perspective rooted in the everyday functioning of academic communities, makes it possible to develop comprehensive

recommendations that take into account both systemic conditions and the real needs of students and academic staff.

First and foremost, it is recommended to further strengthen the strategic and long-term approach of universities to the integration of students from Ukraine. This integration should be clearly embedded in university development strategies, internationalization documents, and equality and inclusion policies, rather than functioning merely as a set of ad hoc measures. It is necessary to clearly define integration goals, specify the responsibilities of individual organizational units, and ensure coordination of activities at the level of the entire institution. Such an approach promotes coherence of actions, limits their fragmentation, and increases the predictability of support offered to international students.

An important area requiring further development is institutional communication. The experiences of students from Ukraine indicate that the lack of clear, coherent, and easily accessible information constitutes one of the key adaptation barriers. It is therefore recommended to simplify the language of administrative communications, prepare comprehensive multilingual information packages, and establish central information points dedicated to international students. Access to reliable and up-to-date information reduces the sense of disorientation, limits dependence on informal support channels, and strengthens students' autonomy in navigating the academic system.

Particular importance should be attached to language support, which remains one of the key determinants of academic success and social integration. It is recommended not only to increase the number of Polish language courses, but also to better tailor them to the specific fields of study and students' levels of proficiency. Expanding the offer of academic and specialist language courses, as well as bridging courses, can significantly reduce the risk of educational exclusion. In the long term, such measures contribute to equalizing opportunities, improving academic performance, and encouraging more active participation of Ukrainian students in academic life.

At the same time, it is recommended to strengthen activities in the area of cultural adaptation and the development of intercultural competences. Despite the cultural proximity of Poland and Ukraine, research indicates the existence of differences in communication norms, learning styles, and student–teacher relationships. Universities should systematically develop intercultural education programs addressed both to students and to academic staff. Such initiatives foster mutual understanding, reduce the risk of stereotyping, and strengthen a climate of openness and trust within the academic environment.

An indispensable element of an effective integration policy is also psychological and psychosocial support. Experiences of war, forced migration, and economic uncertainty significantly affect the well-being of Ukrainian students and their ability to learn effectively. It is recommended to increase the availability of professional psychological

assistance, develop forms of group support, and enhance the competences of academic staff in recognizing adaptation-related difficulties. These measures are important not only for individual well-being, but also for the quality of the teaching process and academic relationships.

In the context of the difficult material situation of many Ukrainian students, it is justified to further develop financial support instruments. This includes both scholarships and emergency grants, as well as the simplification of administrative procedures and greater transparency of the support system. It is also recommended to promote flexible forms of combining studies with work, while at the same time monitoring the risk of excessive workload, which could negatively affect academic performance and the integration process.

The process of social integration should be supported through the development of formalized mentoring programs, peer tutoring, and systems of intercultural assistants. These solutions allow for a more balanced distribution of responsibility for integration and reduce its dependence on informal relationships. At the same time, it is advisable to actively support student initiatives of an intercultural nature, which foster the building of lasting relationships and a sense of belonging to the academic community.

Finally, it should be emphasized that systematic evaluation of integration activities and the involvement of students in their design are of key importance. Regular opinion surveys, consultations, and participatory actions make it possible to better adapt the university's offer to the changing needs of the academic community. Integration should be perceived as a dynamic process based on dialogue and institutional learning, which in the long term strengthens universities' resilience to future migratory, social, and educational challenges.

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"The study offers a coherent and methodologically mature analysis of the processes of inclusion and integration of Ukrainian students within the Polish higher education system, situated within a case study of the University of Rzeszów. The authors clearly articulate the aim of the publication: to capture the multidimensional nature of integration mechanisms, to identify both facilitating factors and existing barriers, and to present not only institutional responses but also the lived experiences of the students themselves.

Particularly noteworthy is the multi-layered structure of the argument. The narrative is developed in a logically consistent manner, moving from the macro level (the broader context of educational migration and institutional-policy frameworks), through the meso level (institutional solutions and practices implemented at the university), to the micro level (the perspectives and experiences of students from Ukraine, considered in relation to the role of Polish students and the wider academic community). This analytical architecture accurately reflects the complexity of the phenomenon under investigation: integration within higher education unfolds simultaneously across organizational, pedagogical, social, and psychological dimensions, all of which the monograph successfully systematizes and interconnects".

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"The monograph represents a methodologically robust and thoroughly documented study of the inclusion of Ukrainian students within the Polish higher education system. The authors address a highly topical and socially significant issue, situating their analysis both within the context of dynamic migration processes following 2014 and 2022, and within broader theoretical frameworks related to inclusion, intercultural adaptation, and the role of the university as a socially responsible institution.

The work is distinguished by its methodological coherence and a clearly conceptualized structure, which enables a systematic progression from a macro-level, systemic perspective to an in-depth exploration of individual student experiences".

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