

EWSI Analysis on Voluntary and Citizens' Initiative: Poland

1 INTRODUCTION

Are considered as citizens' initiatives all activities mobilising large numbers of volunteers (e.g. in workplaces, schools, local communities, etc.) to support immigrants' long-term integration and/or open up the public to integration matters and diversity. **These initiatives most notably involve people-to-people or mutual learning activities** matching migrants with mentors, peers or people volunteering their time or space. These initiatives may concern housing, mentoring, child or university-level education, extracurricular activities for children, lifelong learning, language learning, information provision, assistance with public services, translation, job preparation, awareness-raising/advocacy, etc.

Given EWSI's thematic focus, the emphasis is placed on citizens' initiatives focusing on long-term reception (e.g. during the asylum procedure) and integration (of beneficiaries of international protection and/or other categories of migrants), and not on the **initial front-line humanitarian reception for asylum-seekers** (e.g. food, clothing, shelter before entering the reception phase).

2 LONG-ESTABLISHED VOLUNTEERS/CITIZENS' INITIATIVES

Description of initiatives that have been running for several years.

Informal volunteering (out of formal non-governmental organisations) in the area of foreigners integration and diversity awareness raising is very poorly developed in Poland. One of the reasons for the almost non-existence of citizens' initiatives in these fields is a relative novelty of immigration to Poland and the fact that integration of immigrants and diversity are not recognised as serious social problems in such an ethnically and culturally homogenous country as contemporary Poland. However, the perception of the significance of these issues has started to change slightly as a result of the refugee crisis in Europe and some increase in anti-immigrant sentiments amongst Poles.

The vast majority of activities for the benefit of refugees and migrants – often co-financed by the EU funds – are implemented by NGOs. Volunteers engage in unpaid activities targeting immigrants and the host society almost exclusively within the projects conducted by formal third sector organisations playing a key role in facilitating integration of foreigners in Poland. The only citizens' initiatives created before 2015 are very recent and related the 'refugee crisis'. They are listed in the see next section.

3 NEW VOLUNTEERS/CITIZENS' INITIATIVES

Description of major initiatives started only recently, particularly since the large numbers of refugee arrivals in 2015.

1. **'Bread and Salt. Poles for Refugees'**

Chlebem i Solą. Polacy dla Uchodźców is an informal grassroots initiative set up in July 2014 as a response to the refugee crisis, even before this issue appeared and became popular in media. The core aim of the initiative is to gather people (not necessarily professionals usually dealing with foreigners) who are willing to volunteer their time, energy and work for the benefit of refugees and migrants. The goal of the initiative is to support and initiate activities for the improvement of their life quality in Poland, Europe and in the conflict regions.

The focus is on raising awareness and informing the public on refugees and immigrants, particularly via [Facebook](#) and the website [refugees.info](#) [uchodzcy.info], as well as involving people from different backgrounds in aid and media campaigns. The main motivation is to fight against xenophobia, stereotypes and ignorance. Participants also support concrete aid campaigns, both small and grassroots initiatives and wider actions organised by NGOs, as well as initiate their own actions and [events](#). One of the largest events organised by 'Bread and Salt' was a 'Refugees Welcome' [*Uchodźcy mile widziani*] demonstration which took place in several Polish cities (Białystok, Gdańsk, Kraków, Płock, Szczecin, Warsaw, Wrocław) in September 2015.

Within the framework of the initiative operates a Working Group consisting of activists, members of non-profit organisations and other institutions, as well as individual volunteers. Their main task is to collect and post selected information on events, needs, campaigns, private requests, goods collection and fundraising, as well as reliable articles, statistics and infographics on refugees in Poland and worldwide. All this information is further disseminated by members on their private Facebook profiles. The aim is to reach and mobilise as many potential volunteers as possible.

The inspiration to organise the 'Bread and Salt' initiative has not come from activities undertaken in other countries nor on a national level. Volunteers however cooperate closely with almost all NGOs dealing with immigrant integration and diversity in Poland (exchange of information, joint organisation of events, etc.). They do not apply for public funding, as all their work is unremunerated.

4 PROFILE OF VOLUNTEERS

Description and comparison of the profile of volunteers active in old versus new initiatives.

People engaging in the initiative are of different ages and come from different parts of Poland. However, most of permanent volunteers are aged between 30 and 40 years and come from capital Warsaw or its surroundings. A high number of volunteers are new to the migrant integration field.

5 INNOVATION ASPECT

Description and comparison of innovative or entrepreneurial aspects of the old versus new initiatives.

In the Polish context, its grassroots character innovative, given that no other such initiative has been identified in the field of migrant integration.

6 ADDED VALUE

Description of the added value of such initiatives (both long-established and new), including the uniqueness of their activities compared to the existing practices of the (1) state and (2) NGOs.

The main strength of Bread and Slat. is its ability to attract ordinary people who do not professionally deal with migration issues to volunteer their time and become amplifiers of tolerance messages on social media and/or help refugees.

7 IMPACT

Description and comparison of the impact of old versus new initiatives.

At the current stage, it mostly participates in shaping public opinion on refugees and creating a more tolerance environment in Poland.