

## Waiting for Immigration to Come. The Case of Lodz

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The paper discusses the development and implementation of local policy measures towards stabilisation and facilitation of migrant settlement in Lodz at the time of a dynamic increase of immigration into Poland that has taken place in recent years. The narrative, institutional and practical dimensions of urban policy in this domain are under further analysis. The immigration, mainly from Ukraine, is presented by local authorities as a chance to mitigate the advanced depopulation processes affecting the city of Lodz, and they undertake various institutional initiatives to encourage Ukrainian immigrants to settle for good. However, in reality the inflow of immigrant is not considered to be a burning issue. It is seen as a one of many social challenges the city has to cope with and therefore no separate integration instruments have been offered to immigrants. Newcomers are seen as a (temporary) addition to labour force shortages rather than one of the pillars for long-term developments of the city of Lodz.

**Key words:** migration, migration policy, integration policy, urban policy, depopulation, Lodz, Lodz voivodeship

### Introduction

The city of Lodz (pol. *Łódź*) has been experiencing unfavourable demographic trends for over three decades. It is the fastest depopulating large city in Poland (Szukalski 2012; Kałuża-Kopias 2015). A bad economic situation after the collapse of the dominant textile industry in the early 1990s did not help to overcome these tendencies. The same problems, albeit less intensified, could be observed in the whole Lodz voivodeship (pol. *województwo łódzkie*). This contributed to the overall image of the

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city and the region as ones in decline. In recent years, however, the Lodz voivodeship, and its capital city in particular, have been transforming fast into an area of international immigration, particularly short-term and circular inflow of labour migrants from Ukraine. In 2019 the Lodz voivodeship has been among the top Polish regions with the largest number of immigrants who were granted residence permits and different types of work permits (GUS 2020; MRiPS 2020a, 2020b). The rapidly growing number of foreigners on the local labour market has therefore raised the local officials' hopes for mitigating negative demographic tendencies. In the official statements, the Lodz authorities refer on immigration from Ukraine as if it could restore the multicultural heritage of the city dating back to its heyday in the early 20th century, when the ethnic landscape was shaped by Poles, Jews, Germans and Russians. They expect that catching up with other major immigrant destinations in Poland (such as Krakow or Wroclaw) will contribute to the economic revival of this post-industrial city and raise its current low attractiveness. What the local authorities seem not to notice is how to make these new inhabitants settle down for good.

This paper is an outline of the author's pilot study, which aims to analyse the development and implementation of policy measures towards immigration in Lodz (and the whole Lodz voivodeship) at a time of dynamic increase of immigration into Poland in recent years<sup>2</sup>. Despite the fact that the study also seeks to identify the Ukrainian immigrants' perspective on integration and settlement amenities in the entire region, in the below paper the attention is given only to the Lodz policy-makers' response to immigration. It is analysed in three overlying dimensions: narrative (authorities' statements about immigration), institutional (legal and institutional framework dedicated to newcomers) and practical (policy instruments addressed to immigrants).

## Research aim and methodology

There is a lack of comprehensive studies on local authorities' reaction to immigration into Lodz (Horolets et al. 2018). In order to fill in the knowledge gap in this domain, the first aim of the paper is to describe the scale, dynamics and characteristics of immigration after Poland's accession to the EU in 2004 which was the moment that accelerated and made migration movements massive in that country (cf. Jakóbczyk-Gryszkiewicz 2016, 2018; Kałuża-Kopias 2015, 2020). The particular attention is given to Ukrainian immigrants who constitute, as in the whole of Poland, the ma-

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<sup>2</sup> The pilot study entitled *Immigration and integration policy of the authorities of Lodz and the Lodz voivodeship for long-term immigration and migrant settlement* was financed within a grant for young scientists at the Faculty of Economics and Sociology of the University of Lodz for 2020. Further studies are carried out in the project *Policies of self-government authorities of the Łódź and Silesian voivodeships towards immigration* that is financed by the Polish National Science Centre (NCN), agreement no UMO-2020/39/D/HS5/03186.

jority of foreigners undertaking jobs in the Lodz region. Apart from the absorptive labour market, other factors also attract foreigners, for instance educational opportunities, family reunification, transit to Western countries etc. The study focuses, however, mostly on the largest fraction of immigration in the region – the economic one. The second aim is to have an insight into the regional policy-making process towards immigration and integration of immigrants<sup>3</sup>. The paper presents the local authorities' response to the growing immigration, both those declared in official announcements and those actually undertaken. Beside the reconstruction of (in)coherence of commenced actions and reasons behind their implementation it also identifies crucial milestones of policy development (legal provisions, institutions involved, implemented solutions) and key actors involved (both of public and non-public character) (cf. Matusz-Protasiewicz, Kwiecieński 2020; Rajca 2020). In other words, it attempts to answer what the local authorities offer to make Lodz an attractive place to work and live for immigrants. Are there any policy instruments being implemented – on the one hand – to stimulate immigration into the city and – on the other hand – to turn the current temporary and circular migration into a migrant settlement? If so, what integration measures are being addressed to newcomers?

For this purpose the desktop research of statistical registers, official documents and strategies of local authorities as well as media releases regarding immigration into Lodz in recent years has been carried out. These secondary materials are then confronted with primary data: two focus group interviews (FGIs) conducted in 2019 and 2020 with immigrant community members and the representatives of their institutional surrounding (local administration, social security institutions, employers, NGOs) on local policy responses to immigration. Twelve FGI participants were purposefully recruited taking into account their engagement in the process of migrant integration.

The scholars' interest in dynamics and specificities of international immigration to the local labour markets in Poland is growing year by year. Several analyses have been carried out on the immigration to the regional capital cities, including the largest ones, such as Warsaw (e.g. Dudkiewicz 2016), Krakow (e.g. Pędziwiatr et al. 2021) or Wrocław (e.g. Górny et al. 2019), as well as middle-sized cities, for instance Lublin (Duda-Jastrzębska, Nazaruk-Napora 2019) or Bydgoszcz (Górny et al. 2019). Immigration flows to particular voivodeships have been analyzed, among others, by Górny et al. 2020 (Mazovian), Adamczyk et. al 2019 (West Pomeranian), Madej 2018 (Kujavian-Pomeranian) or Pindel 2014 (Lesser Poland). Local administration responses to immigration have been also studied, just to mention recent papers by Duszczyk

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<sup>3</sup> Immigration policy is seen here as the state's activities aimed at controlling the rules of entry and stay on its territory of non-citizens in order to obtain the optimum scale and structure of the inflow of foreigners (Duszczyk et al. 2020). Integration policy is understood as the state's actions oriented at achieving a dynamic and two-way process of mutual adjustment of newcomers and the receiving society, so that the potential of immigrants could be utilised optimally for both parties (Penninx, Garcés-Mascareñas 2016).

et al 2018 (on Warsaw) or Matusz-Protasiewicz, Kwieciński 2020 (on Wrocław and Gdańsk). What gathers probably the most attention of Polish researchers recently is immigration from Ukraine. This topic is being thoroughly analysed from a sociological (e.g. Kindler 2011), economic (e.g. Kaczmarczyk 2015) or demographic (e.g. Brunarska 2014) perspective. Many studies refer to the process of integration of labour migrants in Poland, taking into account entities such as cultural institutions (e.g. Mucha 2020), churches and religious organisations (Bartłomiejski, Kowalewska 2020) or media (Galanciak, Huriy 2020).

The below paper contributes then to the advancement of the state of art in migration studies as it attempts to fill the knowledge gap on immigration into Lodz, which is one of the few remaining Polish large cities that has not been adequately analysed so far. The exceptions in this regard are the works of Jolanta Jakóbczyk-Gryszkiewicz (2016, 2018) and Dorota Kałuża-Kopias (2015, 2020), who provided a general description of (internal and international) migration processes in Lodz and the entire Lodz region. The analysis of the regional authorities' reaction to immigration into the Lodz voivodeship (as well as the Opole and West Pomeranian voivodeships) was also carried out by Magdalena Lesińska and Kamil Matuszczyk (2018), although nowadays their findings seem partially outdated due to very dynamic changes of the migration situation in the region.

Despite the fact that this paper focuses predominantly on the city of Lodz, selected aspects of the analysis will also refer to the whole Lodz voivodeship as some statistical data on labour immigration (work permits and declaration on entrusting work to a foreigner) at the bottom-level of self-government (communes, pol. *gmina*) are not publicly available as they are aggregated only for a higher level of administration, i.e. counties (pol. *powiat*).

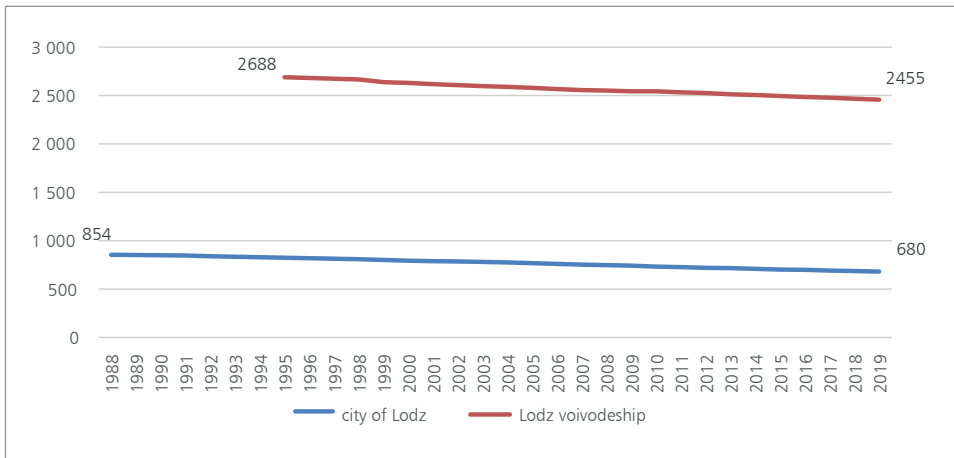
## Demographic situation of the Lodz region

Poland is currently experiencing progressive depopulation which, apart from a few exceptions of large cities such as Warsaw or Krakow, is observed throughout the entire country. The Lodz voivodeship, and especially its major city, are among the areas of the greatest population losses (Szukalski 2012, 2014; Jakóbczyk-Gryszkiewicz 2018). A steady population decline has been recorded in Lodz since the late 1980s. The number of its inhabitants has shrunk by over 20% from 854 000 in 1988, when it reached its peak, to about 680 000 in 2019 (see chart 1). In the meantime Lodz lost its second position after Warsaw among the most populous Polish cities to Krakow, and it is assumed it will also be overtaken by Wrocław in the coming years. The Lodz voivodeship is also depopulating, although not so fast. Since the mid-1990s its population has decreased by 9% from 2,69 million in 1995 to 2,45 million in 2019 (GUS 2019a: 36). These unfavourable processes will only show more negative tendencies.

According to demographic forecasts, during the next three decades the Lodz region will shrink by about 19% (to 1,99 million in 2050) and its capital city by 29% (to 485 000 in 2050) (US w Łodzi 2015: 2).

Chart 1

Changes in the number of people in the city of Lodz (1988–2019) and the Lodz voivodeship (1995–2019), in thousand



Source: own elaboration based on GUS 2021<sup>4</sup>

There are two main reasons behind this unfavorable situation: the negative migration balance and long-term negative population growth (Szukalski 2012). The net internal and international migration for permanent residence per 1000 population was  $-1.1$  in the Lodz region in 2019. This negative migration balance is not entirely determined by the outflow abroad, as in contrast to other (mostly Eastern) parts of the country, it is not large. It rather results from internal emigration to other, perceived as more attractive large urban centers (e.g. Warsaw) and advanced suburbanisation. However, what has even greater impact on population shrinking is the natural decrease, i.e. the negative relationship between the numbers of births and deaths. In 2019 both the Lodz voivodeship and the city of Lodz have recorded the highest rates of negative population growth among all Polish regions and large cities ( $-3,6$  and  $-5,6$  per 1000 people, respectively) (GUS 2021).

That demographic decline has significantly affected Lodz's socio-economic condition in recent decades. If it continues, which is very likely, it may contribute to a further deepening of development disproportions in relation to other larger cities.

<sup>4</sup> The Lodz voivodeship within its current administrative boundaries was established in 1999, but some demographic data from previous years were recalculated by the Central Statistical Office of Poland for this region (Jaeschke 2017: 16) and therefore this chart covers the years 1995–2019.

Piotr Szukalski (2015) in his study on the depopulation determinants of the socio-economic development of the Lodz region, underlines that Lodz is the fastest aging large Polish city. It has negative impact on the reproductive potential of population (smaller number of people in reproductive age) as well as the level of consumption. The number of consumers (especially in younger cohorts that are the most valuable for suppliers of goods and services) is decreasing and the total income they have at their disposal is relatively lower in Lodz than in other large cities. In such a situation there are also symptoms of deflationary pressure, which is, among others, visible in the local real estate market, where the demand for new housings and transactional prices are lower than in other major cities. The observed depopulation also directly affects the local labour market. The demographic dependency ratios, calculated as the number of people of non-working age per 100 people of working age, accounted to 70,2 for the Lodz voivodeship and 77,4 for its capital city in 2019, and these were the highest rates in Poland (GUS 2021). The decreasing number of (working-age) inhabitants, together with relatively low income of those who remain on the labour market contribute to lower taxes being paid to the local administration and, in the end, lower expenses on infrastructure or public services. The latter are also to a greater extent targeted at care services of overnumbered senior generations (Szukalski 2015; Kałuża-Kopias 2017).

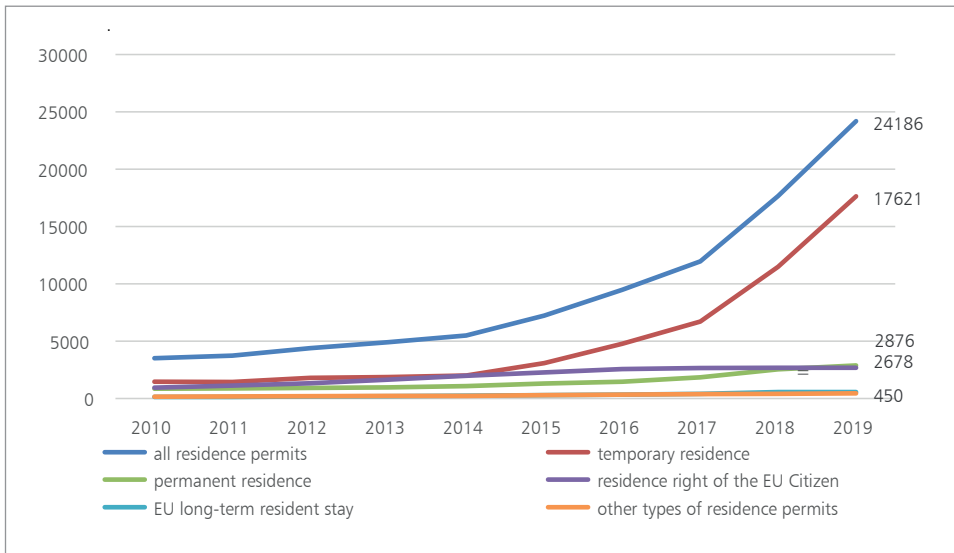
## Immigration into the Lodz region

Along with significant losses of the native population, there has also been a parallelly large inflow of foreign workers into the Lodz voivodeship in the last few years. While the immigration growth has been observed from the early 2010s to regional labour markets perceived as more attractive (i.e. Mazovia, Lesser Poland or Lower Silesia), the current scale, characteristics and ethnic structure (mainly Ukrainian citizens) of inflow into the Lodz region does not differ much from these observed in the leading Polish migrant destinations (Kałuża-Kopias 2020: 3). It is mostly of temporary and circular nature with some symptoms of foreigners' permanent residence (Jakóbczyk-Gryszkiewicz 2016: 143). In recent years there has been a continuous dynamic increase in the number of third-country nationals with the temporary residence permits (EU citizens are subject to separate regulations). As indicated in chart 2, since 2010 the number of foreigners entitled to temporary residence has risen almost 13 times in the Lodz region (from 1 400 to 17 600 in 2019), which gives it the 4th place in Poland after the Mazovian region (58,6), Lesser Poland (27,6) and Greater Poland (23,8). The number of foreigners with a permanent residence permit has also been growing steadily, which proves a slow but progressive settlement of immigrants. About 2 900 non-EU nationals with permanent residence permits in the Lodz region were noted in 2019 (7th place in Poland). In total, various residence permits,

including those issued for asylum seekers, were granted to 24 300 foreign nationals in the Lodz region (6th place), with the Ukrainian citizens clearly dominating among them (13 500) (GUS 2020).

**Chart 2**

**Foreign nationals with valid residence permits in the Lodz voivodeship in 2010–2019**



Source: own elaboration based on GUS 2019a

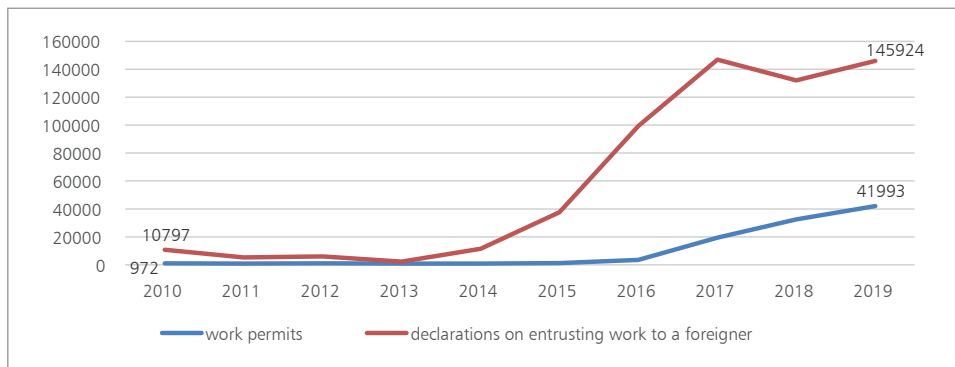
Since immigrants come mainly for work purposes, more comprehensive information on immigration can be found in the labour market registers. A systematic increase in the number of foreign workers has been observed in Poland since the accession to the EU, when in a situation of fast economic development and the outflow of Polish workers to other European markets, labour shortages (mainly in agriculture, seasonal and construction sectors) had to be supplemented with immigrants. This concerned mainly Warsaw and other large cities such as Krakow, Wroclaw or Gdansk (Jakóbczyk-Gryszkiewicz 2016: 143). However, a lot has changed since then. The dynamics of immigration, calculated as an average annual increase in number of issued work permits in 2015–2019, was the highest in the Lodz region and accounted for over 238% (Kałuża-Kopias 2020: 3). All in all, a record of 444 700 work permits were issued in Poland in 2019, including almost 42 000 in the Lodz region (9,4% of all permits in Poland), which ranked it 3rd place in the whole country, after Mazovian region (86 000) and Greater Poland (49 000) (GUS 2020). It means that their number increased 43 times in the Lodz region between the years 2010 and 2019 (see chart 3). About 76,5% of work permits (32 000) were issued to Ukrainian citizens.

The newcomers from Nepal and Belarus (4% each) were also frequently employed (MRiPS 2020a)<sup>5</sup>.

Similarly to the whole of Poland, non-EU immigrants (mainly from the post-Soviet countries) are mostly employed in sectors that do not require high qualifications. In the Lodz region in 2019 they worked in administrative services and supporting activities, which comprise various, mostly lower-skilled jobs provided by temporary employment agencies (43,3%), manufacturing (20,4%), construction (16,7%) and transport (11,9%) (ibid.). In the last years the largest increase in employment of foreigners has been recorded in manufacturing and construction sectors. The number of foreign workers in the hotel and catering services as well as in home care services has also been growing. One can expect that their presence in the latter sector will further grow in the fast aging Lodz region (Kałuża-Kopias, Śmigielski 2019: 23–27). On the other hand, there is a rising demand for immigrants in IT or business services, i.e. sectors that are dynamically developing in Lodz. Companies of this kind tend to employ EU citizens more often though (Dziennik Łódzki 2019b).

Chart 3

Work permits and declarations on entrusting work to a foreigner issued for foreigners in the Lodz voivodeship in 2010–2019



Source: own elaboration based on MRiPS 2020a, 2020b

The number of work permits issued under a simplified procedure (declaration on entrusting work to a foreigner for up to six months for citizens of Armenia, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, Russia and Ukraine) is also dynamically growing (see chart 3).

<sup>5</sup> The number of labour immigrants is actually higher, given that a work permit is not required from citizens of the European Economic Area and Switzerland, foreigners with the permanent residence permit, EU long-term resident stay, refugee status and a tolerated stay permit or graduates of upper secondary schools. The number of foreigners on the black market is also unknown. However, it is estimated that there are another several thousand foreign workers from the EU and those undertaking unregistered work (cf. Kałuża-Kopias, Śmigielski 2019).



Although the number of actually employed foreigners on the basis of these declarations is not collected and the problem of their multiplication is common, the number of declarations issued enables some approximation of immigration scale (Górny et al. 2018: 28). About 146 000 declarations have been registered in local labour offices in the Lodz voivodeship in 2019, i.e. 8,6% of all 1,64 million documents issued in Poland. It was the 5th largest number after the Mazovian region (321 000), Lower Silesia (186 000), Silesia (169 000) and Greater Poland (154 000). As in the whole of Poland, these declarations were also mostly granted for the purpose of work of Ukrainian citizens (136 000, i.e. around 93%) (MRiPS 2020b). And despite there are no exact data on the employment sectors these documents were issued for, the places where these declarations have been registered give some hints in this regard. Half of them (72 000) were registered just in Lodz, which confirms the other researchers' findings (Jakóbczyk-Gryszkiewicz 2016: 143–144; Kałuża-Kopias 2020: 8) as per attractiveness of the major city and surrounding counties (Zgierz and Pabianice) for foreigners. Apart from the Lodz metropolitan area, quite a lot of declarations were also noted in middle-sized towns such as Skierniewice, Piotrków Trybunalski and Belchatów. Taking into account their economic specificities, it can be assumed that those short-term migrants – just as in the case of those employed basing on regular work permits – were not only to work in administrative services and supporting activities, but also in agriculture or horticulture (MRiPS 2020b).

There are also other symptoms proving immigrants are eager to settle in the Lodz region. Not only do labour immigrants and more foreigners come to work in Lodz every year, but also more and more foreigners study there as it is one of the largest academic centers in Poland. In the academic year 2019/2020 there were over 3,400 foreigners studying full-time at public universities in the Lodz region, including over 1,800 of them at the University of Lodz, which is the 3rd most often chosen university by foreigners in Poland. Another 2,800 foreigners studied in the Lodz region within part-time or exchange programs (GUS 2019b; UŁ 2019a, UŁ 2019b). The number of foreign children who attend extra Polish language classes in primary schools in Lodz also grows every year. There were 398 children enrolled for such courses in 2018, i.e. twice as many as the year before (192). The vast majority of them were young Ukrainians (Dziennik Łódzki 2019a). The growing number of foreign children enrolled in local schools as a chance for migrant settlement has not gone unnoticed by the local authorities. As expressed by the President (Mayor) of the City of Lodz Hanna Zdanowska in one of press interviews (Dziennik Łódzki 2019a):

*I am delighted that more and more Ukrainian children attend our schools, because if the whole family moves, there is a chance that they will settle for good. This is very important in the context of stopping negative demographic trends. Attracting people from Ukraine who are very close to us in terms of culture and language is very important for Lodz.*

Yet another indicator of the slow, albeit steady settlement of foreigners is the growing number of binational marriages, especially involving Polish and Ukrainian nationals. In the last decade, their number has increased over 7 times from 19 in 2010 up to 135 in 2019 in the Lodz voivodeship (Szukalski 2020).

## Local turn in migration policies

Scholars pay attention to a specific *local turn* in the governance of migration processes (cf. Solga 2013; Ahouga 2017). They underline, however, that local governments have limited capabilities to determine the state's migration policy instruments as the national authorities are about to decide on the directions and scale of immigration to a given country. On the other hand, they have a greater impact on the migration decisions of the local residents (by creating conditions discouraging emigration or encouraging returns) and on the integration of newcomers (also by creating incentives to come and settle) (Lesińska, Matuszczyk 2018: 73). In Europe one can note the tendency towards *multi-level governance* of immigration and migrant integration (cf. Scholten, Penninx 2016; Caponio, Jones-Correa 2017). It refers to the high engagement of public and non-public actors representing various administrative levels (transnational, national, regional, local) in negotiations aimed at developing solutions to the existing socio-economic challenges, including the integration of migrants (Piattoni 2009). The involvement of public and non-public entities (employers, NGOs, migrant organisations etc.) in this process is growing at the regional and local levels (Collet, Petrovic 2014). It is assumed that, following the principle of subsidiarity, lower level authorities have an advantage over their national counterparts in mobilising immigrants and local civil society organisations, implementing cultural diversity management programs, defining priorities of actions, using particular policy instruments and monitoring the results of implemented policies addressed to immigrants. Thus, they can develop and implement integration measures different from those at the national level (Rajca 2020).

This involvement of local authorities in the integration of migrants is growing across Europe and is especially visible in large, superdiverse European cities such as Barcelona, London or Berlin (Scholten, Penninx 2016). On the other hand, a trend to move away from specific immigrant-oriented policies towards adopting *mainstream policies* targeted at their entire populations (or local communities) is also observed in several European countries, even if there is lack of guidelines for immigrant integration at the national level. At the same time, since there are many doubts if regional and local authorities can sufficiently address more structural-based problems alone, such as inequalities based on race or ethnic discrimination, one can also note a reverse tendency towards (re)centralisation of integration policies (state-run integration programs) and, thus, reducing cities' role in this respect (Gebhardt 2016;

Rajca 2020). Still, relations between policies created and implemented on national and regional/local levels are closely interdependent (cf. Duszczyk et al. 2020). Policy responses at the bottom level are influenced not only by the local context but also by specific state-imposed mechanisms. And *vice versa*, since local authorities are at the frontline of facing the demands of (new) residents and have to deal with several problems such as employment, social care or housing, they may impact national policies in order to meet the emerging challenges. Integration policy results then from those two-way and multi-level dynamic interactions (Rajca 2020; cf. Penninx, Garcés Mascareñas 2016).

Poland is being criticised for the lack of strategy and clear policy framework concerning both immigration and integration (Pawlak 2015; Łodziński, Szonert 2016). Although between 2012 and 2016 there was a strategic document “Migration policy of Poland – current state and recommendations” (*Polityka migracyjna Polski – stan obecny i postulowane działania*) that was about to set a frame for implementation of legal changes in the field of migration and integration (MSWiA, 2012), it was then withdrawn with a change of government from liberal-conservative Civic Platform to conservative and Eurosceptic Law and Justice. The withdrawal took place at the time of European refugee crisis that became a good opportunity for the Polish government to redefine the policy towards immigration and to introduce more restrictive migration measures (mainly in border control, visas and return procedures). These changes were accompanied by an anti-immigration campaign, based on the claim that Poland was facing a large inflow of immigrants threatening public order and security (Matusz-Protasiewicz, Kwieciński 2020: 24). Interestingly, in late 2020 a new document “Migration policy of Poland – diagnosis of the initial situation” (*Polityka migracyjna Polski – diagnoza stanu wyjściowego*) was published that provided an analysis of current migration dynamics and characteristics in Poland. It was prepared by representatives of ministries and central offices dealing with migration and supported by academic experts. This diagnostic report is supposed to be followed by a document with a set of general principles of Poland’s migration policy and a plan for implementation of particular migration-related measures for the next years (MSWiA 2020). It seems then that the Polish officials have recently come back to the idea of developing strategy towards growing immigration. Their general attitude towards this phenomenon could be, however, described following the notion of Okólski and Wach (2020), as *policy-tinkering* rather than *policy-making*.

Despite these shortcomings, still one can observe a certain involvement of the national authorities in shaping the immigration (border) policy, even if it seems to be *ad-hoc*, responsive, short-term and highly selective, namely giving preference to temporary labour immigrants from the post-Soviet countries and, at the same time, a restrictive asylum policy and opposing EU plans to relocate asylum seekers after the 2015 refugee crisis (Łodziński, Szonert 2016; Gońda, Klaus 2018). In turn, activities in the field of immigrant integration are assigned to the regional (voivodship) and

local (city) administration (Wach 2018). Large Polish cities, such as Warsaw, Krakow, Wroclaw, Gdansk or Lublin attempt to follow good practices of their Western European counterparts and define their policies of immigrant integration. For instance, Gdansk and Wroclaw have developed integration strategies that focus on different aspects. Gdansk's document refers to integration in several domains, including cultural, socio-economic as well as legal and political. Particular attention is given to the integration with the labour market and social assistance for immigrants. Wroclaw's strategy focuses more on the cultural sphere and refers to a multicultural dialogue and building relations among different groups as a basis for integration. In both cases the representatives of immigrant groups and NGOs were actively involved in the delivery of documents (Matusz-Protasiewicz, Kweiciński 2020). Other large Polish cities also implement first integration instruments, and Warsaw, being the largest migrant destination, is especially advanced in this matter (Duszczuk et al. 2018). Their involvement in this field (predominantly within the IPI-Individual Integration Programs for refugees) is, however, conditioned by the availability of European funds for migrant integration, e.g. AMIF (Pawlak 2015). As a result, a "vacuum" emerges in migration governance between the transnational level (EU providing funds for migrant integration) and the regional/local level (where self-governments implement their own integration solutions with the support of the NGOs) (Gońda, Klaus 2018)

Despite the fact that immigration should not be perceived as a simple countermeasure to the shrinking population, it may, however, provisionally alleviate its consequences, giving some time for structural and institutional reforms aimed at increasing the fertility rate or professional activity of a population (Okólski 2010: 37). And indeed, as noted before, the dynamically growing number of foreign workers raises hopes among the Lodz officials that the unfavourable effects of depopulation will be diminished. What are then their responses to the intensification of immigration in recent years? What are the narratives on immigration as well as institutional amenities and policy instruments addressed at immigrants in Lodz?

## Policy responses to immigration in Lodz

In order to answer the above questions, I followed the analytical model of migration policy analysis proposed by Lesińska and Popyk (2021) so that three overlapping dimensions of local policy responses have been studied: (1) *narrative*, covering local authorities' statements on immigration; (2) *institutional*, consisting of strategies, legal regulations and institutional framework dedicated to immigrants; (3) *practical*, including policy instruments and support programs addressed to new residents. The content, dynamics and coherence between these policy aspects are the core issues here to investigate. Bearing in mind that the contemporary immigration policy is multi-dimensional, multi-target and does not only concern (short-term) fulfilling

shortages of labour force but also subsequent challenges related to the growing diversity of the hosting society (cf. Gońda et al. 2020), the aim is to identify the policy instruments implemented by local authorities to, first, stabilise the inflow of immigrants (increase their interest in coming into the city) and second, create conditions for their integration and settlement. Particular aspects are reconstructed below.

## Narrative aspect

When it comes to the *narrative* aspect of policy responses to immigration, one needs to underline that Lodz authorities have undertaken the first steps aimed at diagnosing the scale and socio-professional characteristics of immigrants. Their estimations of the number of recent immigration seem, however, to be overoptimistic. For instance, in mid-2019 two contradictory announcements were given as to the number and healing effect of immigration on the development of that city. First, on the Lodz official website it was announced on the 19<sup>th</sup> of June 2019 that “*almost 1/5 of Lodz inhabitants are foreigners!*” (UMŁ 2019b). It would mean they accounted for about 130 000–140 000 people. A few days later, on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of June 2019 in one of the local newspapers it was noted that 70 000–80 000 Ukrainian citizens lived in the city on the basis of various residence permits, which would correspond to about 9–10% of the city’s actual population. It was also expected that the total number of Ukrainian inhabitants along with those who do not live in the city but commute there to work from the surrounding areas might have been as high as 150 000 (Dziennik Łódzki 2019b). Considering that the number of immigrants coming from other directions, mainly from other post-Soviet countries, the Middle East and East Asia may have reached another several thousand, both announced numbers seem to be far higher than those provided by official registers.

The above calculations were presented at the time of most intense immigration into the city in 2019. Inflow of immigrants has probably eased in the next year (2020) due to the COVID-19 pandemic, although no detailed information in this respect has been available as of yet. It has also reflected in the city’s announcements as to the number of foreign residents. In the draft version of a strategic document entitled *Development Strategy for Lodz 2030+ (Strategia Rozwoju Miasta Łodzi 2030+)* (2020) it was noted that “*50 thousand people from Ukraine and Belarus permanently reside in Lodz*”. Despite the latter estimations are more cautious, it is still worth emphasising that the city authorities do not refer to any reliable sources of their calculations, which does not allow them to verify their validity.

No matter what the real number of immigrants is, the Lodz authorities refer in their statements on immigration from Ukraine as a phenomenon that could help to restore the city’s importance dating back to the 20<sup>th</sup> century or at least help to catch up with other large cities that attract many immigrants. A symptomatic stance in this respect was taken by one of the local officials who participated in FGI:

*I can imagine that more and more Ukrainians and then Belarusians, Kazachs or Chinese come to Lodz and work here, then they set up their companies, cooperate with their countries of origin, give birth to children and settle for good. If other cities, such as Wroclaw, Krakow or so can do it, we can do it too. And maybe we can do it even better as we have big multicultural legacy. Lodz was built on immigrants. It can be rebuilt this way again.*

Yet another FGI participant (employer) underlined that failure to make use of growing immigration may lead to deepening the existing development disproportions in relation to other larger Polish cities:

*Immigration might be an accelerator of Lodz's future development. It seems to be one of the last remaining assets in competition with other cities. We should use this opportunity wisely.*

The argumentation that refers to migrants as “assets” necessary to take part in the “competition” (or the “race” as it was also referred to by this interviewee) with other cities was, however, criticised by another FGI participant who, being a practitioner working in NGO, noted that:

*Lodz is constantly looking for its identity. During last thirty years or so we had some big projects that were to reshape the character of the city. We wanted to be the city of film industry or city of creative industries, we attempted to be the 2016 European Capital of Culture and organise the Expo fairs. All of these ideas failed. Now what I hear is that we shall become the city of many cultures on and off. But migrants are not “assets”, they are human beings we need to attract somehow. And I am not sure if we can offer them much...*

## **Institutional aspect**

Such critical opinions are not common. The dominant voice in this respect belongs to employers who argue about labour force shortages. As explained by one of the local officials who took part in FGI:

*The city is trying to prepare for immigration. All these activities are above all a response to employers' complaints on the lack of labour force and difficulties of their new employees with prolonging residence or work permits in offices.*

The policy-makers have then undertaken some efforts to create an institutional framework dedicated to newcomers. In order to reconstruct its development, it is worth studying the city's latest strategies and other official documents that define long-term challenges and problems Lodz is about to encounter as well as activities to conduct in the next years. It should make it possible to comprehend the expectant role of immigrants in the future development of Lodz.

The close look into these documents shows, however, that Lodz's self-government bodies have not developed any separate documents or programs that would deal with that issue until now. Furthermore, the issue of immigration has not been mentioned at all in the strategic documents concerning the future plans. It was not present in the general strategy entitled *Integrated Development Strategy for Lodz 2020+ (Strategia Zintegrowanego Rozwoju Łodzi 2020+)* (2012) that is currently in force. In turn, in the detailed strategy *Social Policy 2020+ for the City of Lodz – Strategy for Solving Social Problems (Polityka Społeczna 2020+ dla Miasta Łodzi – Strategia Rozwiązywania Problemów Społecznych)* (2016) inhabitants' outflow to other regions and countries were presented only as one of the causes of the city's current poor demographic situation. Other references to these phenomena are noted in various detailed reports on the city's condition, for instance *Human capital in Lodz (Kapitał ludzki w Łodzi)* (UMŁ 2019c), but they are rather a presentation of the current migration situation, including the increasing number of foreigners, rather than proposals for solutions to attract migrants to come and settle in Lodz.

The lack of immigration-related issues in strategic documents seems, however, to end with the announcement of the *Development Strategy for Lodz 2030+ (Strategia Rozwoju Miasta Łodzi 2030+)* in late 2020. This document is still a draft of strategy for the incoming decade (and is supposed to be accepted by late 2021), however few references to immigration prove this phenomenon is finally recognised as important. Moreover, the final version of the document was publicly consulted in early 2021 not only with permanent (Polish) residents but also with the newcomers (in English and Ukrainian language). First, it identifies immigration as one of main indicators of the city's attractiveness. Second, in contrast to earlier documents it does not only refer to migration as a cause of Lodz's demographic decline (outflow to suburbs and other large cities) but also as a chance to mitigate its consequences. Third, maintaining the inflow of immigrants and their subsequent settlement is seen as one of the expected conditions of becoming "*strong and resistant to internal and external shocks*" (induced by increasingly severe and frequent global crises) by Lodz. These statements correspond then with the growing presence of immigration-related topics in recent press and web releases of the Lodz officials. Despite this appreciation of migration as an important factor for the city's development, there are still no precise incentives which have been proposed to attract foreigners to arrive and stay for longer. Possible challenges as to the presence and integration of migrants are not discussed either<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>6</sup> Interestingly, the overview of analogical strategic documents approved by the Lodz voivodeship's authorities shows that immigration to the region is perceived as a rather distant phenomenon that the voivodeship needs to prepare for, which is not a key issue for its development, though. It means that so far no regional policy instruments have been prepared that would encourage the arrival and settlement of migrants there. Activities in this area are limited to analyses and vague plans expressed – to a small extent – in the regional development strategies. Solutions to the increasing depopulation are rather sought in measures to stop the outflow of local inhabitants to other provinces and abroad rather than to attract immigrants (cf. Lesińska, Matuszczyk 2018).

The Lodz officials openly express their hopes and interests in attracting immigrants to come and settle in this city in media and strategic documents. But what actions have they recently taken to achieve these goals? In the last decade one can observe various efforts to institutionalise support for immigrants, including launching a dedicated body that would represent migrants in local administration. These attempts date back to 2012 when the President of the City of Lodz established the Civic Dialogue Committee for Diversity and Counteracting Discrimination (CDC – *Komisja Dialogu Obywatelskiego ds. Różnorodności i Przeciwdziałania Dyskryminacji*), being an independent body affiliated to the City Council and comprising of several NGO representatives. During the monthly meetings members of the CDC deal with, among others, reviewing and co-creating program documents and legal acts regarding public tasks for diversity and counteracting discrimination, cooperating with the City Council to improve the effectiveness of activities in this area or consulting the scope of activities commissioned to specific NGOs with the Council. The CDC's reports indicate that while in the initial period of its operation the meetings were focused mainly on counteracting discrimination against various groups at risk of exclusion (e.g. the disabled, women or the elderly), in recent years the issue of supporting foreigners in Lodz is being discussed more frequently (UMŁ 2012).

And so, in response to the increasing hate speech, intolerance and xenophobia towards foreigners, in June 2017 the President of the City of Lodz, Hanna Zdanowska, together with 11 other mayors of the largest Polish cities, signed the *Declaration of Presidents on the cooperation of cities of the Union of Polish Metropolises in the field of migration (Deklaracja prezydentów o współdziałaniu miast Unii Metropolii Polskich w dziedzinie migracji)*. This document, initiated by Gdansk authorities, called for an openness to immigration, facilitating the integration of foreigners, as well as cooperation and exchange of experiences between cities in this area. Also in June 2017, the need to establish the Plenipotentiary of the President of the City of Lodz for Foreigners was announced by local officials. The catalog of competences and duties of the Plenipotentiary was to be developed in July 2017 (UMŁ 2017). However, this unit has not been created to this date.

At the same time, due to repeating verbal and physical attacks on foreigners, the President was obliged by the resolution of the City Council of the 29<sup>th</sup> of March 2019 to take a number of actions aimed at the implementation of the anti-discrimination program. First, it was to develop tools to prevent discrimination and verbal and physical attacks based on sex, age, psychosexual orientation, skin color, nationality or religion, and to support the victims of such attacks. Second, the President was about to oversee the introduction of additional anti-discrimination classes in schools. Third, a social campaign was supposed to be carried out to strengthen the attitudes of tolerance and integration of people exposed to discrimination “*as an element of removing barriers that make it difficult for foreigners to use public services on a daily basis and to integrate with the city community's life*” (UMŁ 2018a). The City Council



also called for signing the Diversity Charter<sup>7</sup>, launching a more specific advisory body dealing with immigrants' problems (Council for Foreigners and Xenophobia Prevention), and strengthening the cooperation with the existing CDC. These activities were to be developed and implemented in consultation with local NGOs, experts, churches, employers, public institutions addressed at foreigners and, above all, migrant organisations in Lodz (ibid.). As noted by one NGO activist who took part in FGI, indeed more intensified cooperation with practitioners is necessary. It should not be limited only to consulting local initiatives (for instance within the CDC) but also to:

*outsourcing some integration-related tasks of the city to practitioners so that people who really know their job could facilitate migrants' adaptation in Lodz.*

That FGI participant also underlined such cooperation could contribute to development of better support services directed to newcomers:

*NGOs in Lodz are not so much oriented towards immigrants as during the last years there were other persistent social problems to focus on. Since immigration is a new challenge, close cooperation of NGOs with the City Council and local social care institutions could help to train qualified staff working with migrants.*

While the Diversity Charter was signed by the President Hanna Zdanowska a month later (in April 2019), the remaining obligations set by the City Council have not been implemented so far. As early as April 2019, the CDC discussed the idea of establishing the Council for Foreigners and Xenophobia Prevention, pointing out that due to the statutory competences imposing legal obligations related to immigration not on local (city) governments but on the voivodeship administration "[this] is an unnecessary and goes beyond the needs and possibilities of local government authorities" (UMŁ 2018a). The CDC argued that the existing initiatives should be merged and cooperation with NGOs in this domain should be strengthened. At the same time, however, an issue of appointing the Plenipotentiary for Foreigners was raised again (ibid.). To this date this body has not been created, though. Currently, the Plenipotentiary of the President of the City of Lodz for Equal Treatment (appointed in 2012) is responsible for initiating and supporting anti-discrimination activities. It is also a member of the CDC. The Plenipotentiary's tasks, however, have been defined more broadly than just the protection of foreigners' rights and include "undertaking activities aimed at ensuring equal treatment of women and men, as well as protection against discrimination" (UMŁ 2018b). Immigrants are then treated as one of potentially excluded group that needs support rather than separate addressees of local policy measures.

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<sup>7</sup> The Charter is an international initiative supported by the European Commission that obliges its signatories to prevent discrimination in the workplace and to take actions to promote diversity. In Poland it was signed, among others, by the authorities of Gdansk, Poznan and Wroclaw and other public and non-public entities.

## Practical aspect

The Lodz authorities have showed satisfaction many times with recent growing immigration. What is more, they consider themselves responsible for attracting foreign workers to come and live in Lodz with their families. As expressed by one of highly-ranked officials on the Lodz's website in mid-2019 (UMŁ 2019b):

*The Lodz City Council has been implementing a support strategy for foreigners for some time. It is gaining special importance right now, because the number of foreigners in Lodz has significantly increased. We are happy because the unfavorable trend of depopulating Lodz was stopped. We worked hard to increase the awareness of Lodz among foreigners, because a few years ago when they were considering coming to Poland to work, they thought about Warsaw, Gdansk, Wroclaw, Poznan and Krakow. Thanks to our support policy it was possible to change this. Now, with our actions, we are trying to make foreigners who came to Lodz quickly adapt to our city and make them feel at home.*

However, the overview of more practical solutions addressed to immigrants that have been implemented in recent years shows that the above declared "strategy of support for foreigners" seems to be an overstatement. In detail, the proposed amenities are addressed in particular to the citizens of Ukraine, who, as noted by one of FGI participants (employer):

*need to be looked after so that they do not think of escaping to Germany, where they obviously have better salaries and social protection.*

So far, however, these solutions are limited to the informative actions only, which are then relatively easy and at a low-cost to implement. The main one is the so-called *relocation package* that is a set of solutions introducing faster service of immigrants in local administration. And so Ukrainian and Russian speakers were employed as front desk clerks in one unit of local administration in 2019. The Lodz's official website and ticket machines in public transportation were made available in Ukrainian. The introduced amenities also included a brochure prepared in cooperation with local employment agencies and immigrants to encourage foreigners to choose Lodz as a place to settle and work (it is distributed in Ukraine and Belarus), and a guide with basic information on legal and administrative regulations concerning residence and work, education, health care or cultural and sports offer (Dziennik Łódzki 2019c). The City Council also cooperates with employment agencies and larger local enterprises (especially in the manufacturing sector) in hiring foreigners (UMŁ 2019b). Furthermore, an information and advisory point concerning official matters, social issues and labour market regulations was created for foreigners at the Department of Citizens' and Foreigners' Affairs (the unit of the Voivodeship Office responsible for the

legalisation and extending the stay of foreigners). In mid-2021 the Lodz Multicultural Centre was established where immigrants may receive basic legal and psychological assistance but also organise meetings or undertake various cultural activities promoting their heritage. The local authorities also declare that in the next years more extensive measures will be undertaken to keep immigrants in Lodz and stop them from further emigration. There are, among others, plans to launch a language training center for immigrants in cooperation with the School of Polish for Foreign Students at the University of Lodz (ibid.).

## Conclusions

At the time of increasing immigration to Lodz, the local authorities are taking the first steps to develop solutions that would stabilise immigration and facilitate migrants' settlement. Immigration, mainly from Ukraine, is seen as an opportunity to mitigate the advanced depopulation processes affecting the whole region. These policy responses seem, however, to be ambiguous and incoherent.

On the one hand, they are taking quite an active stance on immigration. This is associated with two factors. Firstly, as in other parts of the country, the largest urban center enjoys the greatest interest of migrants. It is Lodz and the neighboring communes that the majority of foreigners arrive at to work or study. Secondly, the problem of the aging population and the resulting shrinking domestic workforce take on a particularly unfavorable scale in Lodz, making immigration even more awaited. And although the city's strategic documents do not contain any specific provisions regarding the expected inflow of foreigners, some attempts have been made to create an institutional framework for it. Interestingly, however, immigrants are not addressed entirely as separate initiatives. The city authorities include them together with other groups potentially at risk of exclusion and discrimination (e.g. women, seniors or the disabled) in the strategic documents and law regulations. As a result, unlike in other large cities, such as Warsaw, Wroclaw or Gdansk, no official strategy of action towards immigration has been developed so far. No separate institutions have been established to integrate migrants and, as a result, to enhance their stay there either. Migration challenges are being incorporated into the mainstream urban policies (cf. Collet, Petrovic 2014). The city officials refer in their public statements to the migrant-related solutions introduced in other cities, but the undertaken activities addressed at immigrants have been so far of mostly symbolic in nature (declarations of openness to immigration and condemnation of acts of aggression against foreigners). At the same time, practical actions are limited only to the informative aspects (increasing access to city services in Ukrainian language). Non-public actors, especially third sector and migrant organisations have limited impact on the development and implementation of these amenities.

There seems to be one explanation for this incoherent and reactive approach (cf. Duszczuk et al. 2020). Despite the narratives of officials would suggest that the city is “awaiting immigration”, in reality it has not been identified as a problem that should be given excessive attention. In a city that struggles with a number of other social problems (depopulation, poor health condition of its inhabitants, persistence of poverty enclaves, etc.), immigration is considered an important, but not a key challenge. Even if immigration is to contribute to a partial slowing down of unfavourable demographic trends, this perspective is distant and does not guarantee success (assuming that immigrants from the post-Soviet countries may not stay in Poland and move elsewhere). Immigration is treated primarily through the prism of the labor market, as a (temporary) supplement to the shortage of labour. As such, it is a free-market phenomenon which should not be interfered too much by the introduction of additional facilities or support programs. Immigrants must “cope” on their own (Lesińska, Matuszczyk 2018: 75). Such an approach would, therefore, mean the lack of a long-term vision of immigration and treating it only in terms of current benefits (cf. Gońda, Klaus 2018). Finally, one should not ignore the generally disapproving political and social climate towards immigration in Poland, when the introduction of measures stimulating the inflow of foreigners may rather bring political losses than benefits to the authorities. It seems, however, that despite these threats, the local officials should take more courageous steps in this regard. Although immigration will not completely solve the problem of depopulation, it may slow down this process. Failure to take advantage of this opportunity may deepen the already existing development disproportions in relation to other large Polish cities (that already seem to have benefited from immigration).

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