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# EDUCATIONAL POLICY IN TIMES OF WAR 2022: A CASE STUDY OF THE TWITTER OF THE MINISTRY OF EDUCATION AND SCIENCE IN POLAND<sup>1</sup>

## Abstract

The aim of the conducted research was to analyze the activity of the Polish Ministry of Education and Science on Twitter<sup>2</sup> and to diagnose and then describe the perspective (experiences, reflections, postulates) of Twitter users, thus enabling the analysis and evaluation of activities undertaken in the field of shaping education policy in times of Russian aggression to Ukraine.

The subject of the research were entries and comments posted on the Twitter platform on the account of the Polish Ministry of Education and Science in Poland placed in the time period from February 24, 2022 (the first day of Russia's invasion of Ukraine) to June 1, 2022 (celebration related to Children's Day). The collected data were analyzed in the MAXQDA program in accordance with the prepared – described in detail in the article – code key.

As part of the research, a total of 259 posts and 2,339 comments were analyzed. It turned out that Twitter users are reluctant to create recommendations (3% of all entries), while the vast majority of comments contain negative opinions and experiences related to education policy. The analysis also showed a worrying trend towards an increasing number of hate speech comments. Users often

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<sup>1</sup> The article was based on funding obtained as part of the RESEARCH SUPPORT MODULE support for doctoral students and participants of doctoral studies as part of the strategic program Initiative of Excellence at the Jagiellonian University.

<sup>2</sup> The authors prepared the article when the platform was called Twitter. Today it operates under the name "X".

used the Twitter platform to mock politicians, but also made statements directed against the Ukrainian people.

Based on the conducted research, it is extremely difficult to describe the activities undertaken in the field of education policy by the Polish Ministry of Education and Science. It should be noted that the analyzed entries in most cases are only very short messages, often referring only to visits or speeches by politicians. At the same time, it is worth emphasizing that comments posted by users rarely enter into substantive polemics, because they are usually only a vent for very negative emotions.

**Keywords:** education, educational policy, Twitter, war

**JEL:** D83, F51, L86, M31

## Introduction – the role of social media in contemporary world

The social media have been an integral part of reality for several years now. Andreas M. Kaplan and Michael Haenlein perceive them as “a group of Web applications that are based on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that support the production and exchange of user-generated content” (Haenlein et al., 2010). Uğur Gündüz, on the other hand, focuses in his definition on their functions, stating that social media provide a platform for the exchange of views, the expression of opinions and sharing of content, and furthermore that these communication and interaction processes occur without temporal and spatial limitations (Gündüz, 2017). Monika Czaplicka enriches these considerations with the notion of social portals, special cases of social media whose main objective is “to develop communities that can interact with one another at different levels” (Czaplicka, 2014). During considerations of new media, there is no shortage of references to the theory of mass communication proposed by Denis McQuail (1983). Magdalena Iwanowska cites the views of the British-American scholar and writes about four categories of benefits enjoyed by the social media users (Iwanowska, 2016):

1. Entertainment, escape from boredom, problems, defusings, search for positive incentives, etc.;
2. Information seeking, learning about the world, arriving at arguments facilitating decision-making process, satisfying one’s curiosity, etc.;
3. Social interaction, companionship with others, social usefulness, sense of belonging to a group, etc.;
4. Personal identity, search for one’s own identity, affirmation of self-respect, enhancement of self-esteem.

The aforementioned functions put social media in a positive light, showing opportunities associated with their use. There is, however, another, completely different side to a coin. This is because social media fuels the presence of the Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) syndrome. The FOMO complex is the fear that others may have rewarding experiences in which one is absent (Przybylski et al., 2013). FOMO

is not a new phenomenon, but one that has significantly been amplified by social media (FOMO 2022 Report). Wanting to be informed and avoid missing out on an event, FOMO forces a constant online presence and monitoring of profiles under observation. Browsing of accounts of friends who report on their lives by means of photos and videos triggers the user's desire for constant comparison and undermines his self-esteem. As a result of FOMO the feelings of jealousy, anger and frustration may emerge. Another negative perspective of social media is indicated by Stanisław Stasiewicz, who perceives social media as a space conducive to the spread of hatred, or online hate speech (Stasiewicz, 2017). According to Stasiewicz, social media "have made available a powerful tool for hatred distribution". Social media are proving to create favourable conditions for the spread of hate. Firstly, by offering a range of opportunities to express one's opinion (in a comment or post, through sharing), and secondly, by the anonymity and scarce control that prevails. Users feel anonymous and believe they can get away unpunished, which is driving force of the propagation and spreading of hate speech.

In February 2022 DataReportal published a report on statistics concerning Web and social media users in Poland (Kemp, 2022). It shows that 72% of the Polish population are social media users. The average time spent daily on various websites is 1 hour 49 minutes. The three major reasons for using social media are as follows: to keep in touch with friends and relatives, to read news and to fill one's spare time. The most frequently used applications in Poland include Facebook (88.1% of total users) and Facebook Messenger (79.8%). They are followed by Instagram (59.6%), WhatsApp (49.8%), TikTok (34.1%) and Twitter (26.2%). This article focuses on the latter social medium i.e. Twitter.

## 1. Twitter – basic assumptions

Twitter was established in 2006 with the major objective of developing a global space for conversation (Twitter, 2022). The portal performs the function of a microblog, allowing very short text messages to be sent and read (Oliński, Szamrowski, 2018). Public messages sent and received via Twitter, or 'tweets', are limited to maximum 140 characters (MacLean et al., 2013). The portal is also characterised by hashtags, short messages preceded by the # symbol, whose primary function is to tag, or mark, one's posts (Adamska, 2015). As with other social networks, there is interaction between Twitter users – mainly through an option of adding comments. The most frequently followed accounts are the profiles of: Barack Obama (131.67 million), Justin Bieber (114.67 million) and Katy Perry (108.9 million) (Ahlgren, 2022). However, it is not only the posts of world-famous politicians or artists that can become popular and widely commented on. Contributions by anonymous users also stand a chance of achieving high popularity. In his talk on Twitter, British-American writer Jon Ronson highlighted a significant feature of the portal. As he

noted, thanks to the portal, ‘people without a voice have discovered that they have a voice’, and furthermore their voice is powerful and influential (Ronson, 2015).

It is worth noting that bots are quite a common phenomenon on the Twitter platform. Bots are applications that automate activities assigned to them by their authors (Baron-Polańczyk, 2019). They can quickly disseminate information, interact with other users or create the appearance of excessive interest in a given topic or person (e.g. public). As Adrian Grycuk (2021) writes: “The number and activity of bots vary on individual websites”. There are indeed tools that allow you to identify bots (especially on Twitter). However, there is no 100% certainty that all user accounts are real (Grycuk, 2021). The authors are aware of this threat, which is why during the study they paid special attention to verifying the accounts of people who added comments. In this way, an attempt was made to avoid potentially quoting or taking into account the bot’s opinions.

### 1.1. Twitter – the “politicians’ platform”

Twitter, like other social media, enables image creation. This function is readily used by politicians active on the platform. Annusewicz concludes that in contemporary politics – which he calls ‘post-politics’ – creating one’s own image is becoming more important than realising political plans (Annusewicz, 2011). Despite the fact that Twitter is only the sixth most frequently used social medium in Poland, it is the one most frequently used by politicians. One of the reasons for this may be the fact that Twitter is not a visual medium, so users do not focus on graphics, but on text messages. Additionally, compared to Facebook or Instagram, Twitter is not a popular space for influencers, brands or companies to attract users’ attention with advertisements and sponsored posts. Another reason, which seems to be the most important one, why politicians choose Twitter is its characteristic responsiveness, i.e. reaching the public instantly with important information (Lakomy, 2014). The choice of the service by politicians is also confirmed by statistics. The President of the Republic of Poland, Andrzej Duda, has 1.7 million followers on Twitter, 808,000 followers on Facebook and 116,000 on Instagram. The trend of politicians’ popularity on Twitter is also present abroad. US President Joe Biden’s Twitter profile is followed by 26.8 million users, compared to 11 million on Facebook. The US is a special case of Twitter being used by politicians. In 2016, the service was one of the main venues for the presidential campaigns of Donald Trump and his opponent Hillary Clinton.

At the same time, it should be noted that it is not only politicians who use the Twitter platform to campaign or create their own image. Various ministries, both in Poland and abroad, have their own profiles on which they share information on their activities, policies or important events with users. Among others, the Ministry of Education and Science (hereinafter: MES) has its own Twitter profile. The

measures taken by the MES to help the war in Ukraine and, above all, the way they are narrated through the Twitter account, will be the subject of this article.

The @MEIN\_GOV\_EN profile, observed by 128,900 users, has been present on the portal since August 2011. In its bio (the space provided for the profile description), MES invites “subject-matter and cultural discussion”, thus emphasising that the Twitter profile is a place for the exchange of comments and interaction between users (Twitter, 2022). Statistics show that in February 2022, the month of the war outbreak, the MES account’s followers grew by 12,679 users, the largest rise in the number of followers on an annual basis (Social Blade, 2022). In the period studied by the authors (24 February – 1 June), there were 259 posts related to educational policy in the context of the war in Ukraine, with a total of 2,339 comments posted below. The challenges posed by the need to suddenly implement educational policy tools became a hot topic of conversation and a willingness to share one’s own views, experiences and insights.

## 2. Serving the general public: educational policy

Education policy is one of the key tools of public policies, being of great importance for the development of society (Noworól, 2012). Attention to the quality of education is not only fundamental for contemporary life but is also an expression of concern for ensuring a secure future for future generations. Today’s world is facing many challenges: demographic problems, environmental pollution, an ageing population, increasing poverty or ever-widening social inequalities. Education in the broadest sense of the term is an important cornerstone of measures taken to minimise the effects of existing crises and prevent the emergence of new ones. Education is perceived as a profusion of different processes that can have a positive impact on children, young people, adults and seniors by raising awareness, deepening and developing knowledge, motivating independent activity and reinforcing social patterns and norms (Field, 2001). Triggering in individuals the need to understand changing realities is of considerable importance in supporting harmonious and sustainable progress (Little, Green, 2009). It is therefore pertinent to ask how decision-makers in authority should go about ensuring the quality of education and setting the direction education should take? There are also questions about how to finance science effectively and ensure the widest possible access to it?

In Poland, a strategic role in shaping educational processes is played by educational policy, defined by Gabriela Wronowska as “the practical activity of levelling educational differences among the population living in different and environments” (Wronowska, 2017, p. 194). As the author emphasises, it is important to make such decisions which will consequently lead to real and effective results (Wronowska, 2017). At the same time, it is worth emphasising that the emphasis should be on levelling out the emerging differences, which are not only the result

of the predisposition of individuals, their talents or the amount of knowledge they possess, but are also the result of the existence of diversified environments or other factors that are important for people's development. Moreover, as Aleksander Noworól points out in his article "Local educational policy instruments". "Instruments of local educational policy": educational policy is related to the activity of the "state in the field of education and upbringing" (Noworól, 2012, p. 140), taking care of the determination and realisation of the directions of education, providing material and technical facilities and managing institutions operating in this field (Noworól, 2012). *Ergo*, it is important to make a holistic analysis of all aspects that can affect educational processes, whether in terms of human capital, financial or material resources.

The wide range of instruments available to educational policy should, first and foremost, serve to ensure equal access to education while "respecting the civil rights of a democratic state" (Noworól, 2012, p. 140). The educational programmes prepared should be adapted to the needs of a changing world and support the processes of increasing self-awareness in individuals. It is necessary to ensure inclusive conditions and circumstances (Fischer, Mazurkiewicz, 2008). Moreover, as Gabriela Wronowska (2017) notes, a well-considered educational policy correlates with the current requirements of the labour market in such a way that graduates are able to cope with working life after completing their education. Especially since, as some author emphasise, education has a unique rank, being a kind of investment in human capital and raising the general level of well-being. *Ergo*, caring about the quality of education is reflected in many dimensions of social life.

## 2.1. Educational policy and Twitter as a space to respond to current global events

Russia's invasion of Ukraine has led to cracks appearing in the hitherto familiar image of the world. The education system became one of the areas requiring a rapid response and implementation of changes. It was necessary to take effective and realistically supportive measures in order to maintain the continuity of education for the Ukrainian population. The implementation of the idea of social inclusion also appeared to be a priority. In the face of emerging threats, the Ministry of Education and Science in Poland took a number of measures to support the citizens and nationals of the Ukrainian state in times of war, which it informed about, among others, through the Twitter platform. The tweets posted included information about the establishment of cooperation with the Ministry of Education and Science in Ukraine, regulations issued or rules for the admission of foreigners to Polish schools. The Ministry's posts, however, were met with criticism and some users started to discuss the validity of the activities undertaken. Questions were raised about the future of education and the forms it should take in times of war. Twitter became a space for the exchange of personal reflections and experiences. Users of

the platform became not only close observers of tragic events in the world, but also active commentators interested in the challenges faced not only by politicians, but also by students, parents, teachers, principals, and everyone whose life is connected to education. In order to understand the current situation related to the tragic events in the world and to try to provide answers to the extremely difficult questions related to the need to provide assistance to people fleeing war, the aim of this article is to capture the activity of the Polish MES on Twitter. By diagnosing and then describing the perspective (experiences, reflections, demands) of Twitter users, i.e. the audience of the MES profile, an analysis and evaluation of the activities undertaken in the field of educational policy-making by the Polish Ministry will be carried out. An attempt will be made to answer the following research questions:

1. What activities have been undertaken by the MES concerning the educational policy?
2. What are the Twitter users' opinions on the activities undertaken by the MES?
3. How is the educational policy perceived from the perspective of the war in Ukraine?
4. What recommendations regarding educational policy are postulated by the Twitter users?

Making an attempt to answer the research questions, the authors will try not only to take a critical look at the activities of the Polish ministry, but also to reflect on recommendations that could support refugee assistance in the future in the field of education.

### 3. Methodology

The methodological strategy was conducted along the lines of virtual ethnography (netnography), based on an exploratory case study (Jemielniak, 2013). The Twitter account of the Polish Ministry of Education and Science was selected for the study. A frequency-topic analysis of the content of the Ministry of Education and Science's profile and a content analysis of posts from 24.02.2022 (the first day of Russia's invasion of Ukraine) to 1.06.2022 (celebrations related to Children's Day) was conducted. The authors analysed the Ministry's profile and then selected 259 posts directly or indirectly related to educational policy in the face of the war in Ukraine. There were a total of 2,339 comments under the collected posts. The research material was analysed using MAXQDA software.

The code tree prepared included separate analytical categories for entries and comments. The documents were divided by month: from February to the beginning of June. In this way, the authors attempted to discern any changes that occurred during the selected time period. The individual analytical categories


identified in the code tree will be briefly described in the analysis of the collected research material.

## 4. Analysis of the collected research material

### 4.1. Educational policy measures taken by the MES in the context of war

In order to analyse in depth the activities of the Polish Ministry, the authors took into account the following analytical categories relating to: 1. the group of recipients covered by the entry (refugees, local government officials, students, pupils, rectors, teachers, principals, rectors, and parents); 2. the level of education (from kindergartens to universities); 3. the medium used by the ministry to inform about its activities (from activities taking place in the real world, to media appearances, to Internet entries); 4. the type of activities reported by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (celebrations, in the field of providing assistance to refugees, in the field of information policy, concerning speeches, participation in the media or on national and foreign visits). In addition, the entries were categorised according to their function: PR, sympathising, information or opinion-oriented.

The majority, over 81%, were informational entries, representing a record of the activities undertaken by the MES. Only one entry directly had an enquiry directed at users of the platform:

-  Do you know East Slavic languages? Are you a student, teacher or lecturer? Do you want to support educationally young people coming from Ukraine? We encourage you to fill in the form available on the MES website.”<sup>3</sup>

The sympathising entries contained content aimed at supporting those fleeing the war and reassuring them of the openness of the Polish nation and its readiness to help:

- “Polish children are very involved in welcoming Ukrainian peers. This is a historic moment when our children participate in the creation of a new history of Polish-Ukrainian relations,’ said Minister @CzarnekP in #Kalisz.”<sup>4</sup>
- “‘Today we can slightly modify the order of L. Okulicki and convey a message to our #Ukrainian neighbours: never agree to live any other way but in a fully sovereign, independent and just Ukrainian state,’ said Minister @CzarnekP in Radechnica.”<sup>5</sup>
- “‘In the centre run by @CaritasPoland in #Piechowice you can see a great heart, but also a sense of organisation. The women who are here will be

<sup>3</sup> [https://x.com/MEN\\_GOVPL/status/1499727213624795140?s=20](https://x.com/MEN_GOVPL/status/1499727213624795140?s=20)

<sup>4</sup> [https://x.com/MEN\\_GOVPL/status/1507403640906133505?s=20](https://x.com/MEN_GOVPL/status/1507403640906133505?s=20)

<sup>5</sup> [https://x.com/MEN\\_GOVPL/status/1500557642107957250?s=20](https://x.com/MEN_GOVPL/status/1500557642107957250?s=20)



able to work at Caritas. It is very important that refugees are given the opportunity to live in dignity,' said Deputy Minister @MarzenaMachalek."<sup>6</sup>

- "'These young people are the subjects of new Polish-Ukrainian relations. Without forgetting the past, they are building an excellent future,' said Minister @CzarnekP during a visit at Primary School No. 57 in #Gdansk."<sup>7</sup>

During their speeches and visits, the politicians emphasised the need for cooperation between Poland and Ukraine and mentioned the new history being written, which should be built on the concepts of freedom, independence and justice. It is worth emphasising that the sympathising entries were linked to the creation of a positive image of the Ministry, thus performing a PR function. The pathetic and lofty statements were intended to convince of the deep commitment of the Minister and other politicians.

The entries referred to different social groups, however, the group of pupils (about 43% of all entries), including the group of primary school pupils (59% of the total community of learners), can be considered dominant. The information provided referred to both Polish and Ukrainian pupils:

- "🗨️ I want to express my pride in how Polish children behave towards children from #Ukraine and my joy that Ukrainian children are finding peace in Poland and safety – said Minister @CzarnekP in #Lublin."<sup>8</sup>
- "🗨️ There is an abundance of school infrastructure that can be used to create conditions for education for Ukrainian children and young people. An example is the ORE in #Sulejówek and the hotel base in this centre, which will receive 70 refugees tomorrow, including children – Minister @CzarnekP"<sup>9</sup>
- "🗨️ I have spoken to Mr Serhiy Shkarlet @MON\_UKRAINE. I assured about the openness of schools to children and young people from #Ukraine. I assured that we are doing everything to ensure that the Polish education system serves to provide educational and educational care for the duration of their stay in Poland – Minister @CzarnekP"<sup>10</sup>

Readiness was declared, both in terms of preparing the entire infrastructure to accommodate Ukrainian pupils and the favourable attitude of Polish pupils. Mention was also made of the preparation of preparatory school branches, which can be used by pupils in grades IV to VIII who do not know the language or who know it in such a way that it is not possible for them to participate freely in classes together with Polish young people.

A small group of recipients were parents, to whom the Ministry directed information entries on where to find help in transferring a child to a Polish school, the

<sup>6</sup> [https://x.com/MEN\\_GOVPL/status/1510968018758688773?s=20](https://x.com/MEN_GOVPL/status/1510968018758688773?s=20)

<sup>7</sup> [https://x.com/MEN\\_GOVPL/status/1522524028220674049?s=20](https://x.com/MEN_GOVPL/status/1522524028220674049?s=20)

<sup>8</sup> [https://x.com/MEN\\_GOVPL/status/1505879641256517634?s=20](https://x.com/MEN_GOVPL/status/1505879641256517634?s=20)

<sup>9</sup> [https://x.com/MEN\\_GOVPL/status/1498687364193005571?s=20](https://x.com/MEN_GOVPL/status/1498687364193005571?s=20)

<sup>10</sup> [https://x.com/MEN\\_GOVPL/status/1499353150611935235?s=20](https://x.com/MEN_GOVPL/status/1499353150611935235?s=20)

changes implemented and the current legal situation. A similar group of entries were those addressed to teachers and principals. Above all, an effort was made to keep people informed about what to expect in the near future, what the Ministry is planning and what has already been decided.

Within the framework of the analysis carried out, it was most important to describe the activities undertaken by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Among them, the two most important types, which appeared most frequently in the collected material, were activities in the field of educational policy (42%) and providing assistance to refugees (27%). Frequently (22%), there was information on information held by politicians. However, such entries are more of a chronicle than a reflection of actual activities and will therefore not be detailed in the article.

In March, when an immediate reaction was necessary, there were entries informing about proposed forms of teaching:

- “Organisation of education for students from #Ukraine: ◊ continuation of education in the Ukrainian system – remote mode; ◊ continuation of education in the Polish system: at a preparatory school branch or in a class division #SzkołaDlaWas.”<sup>11</sup>
- Information on the current number of refugees was provided:
- “☝ There are already 150 thousand children of Ukrainian refugees in Polish schools. Most are enrolled in primary schools, 20 thousand are children in kindergartens and the rest in secondary schools, Minister @CzarnekP informed.”<sup>12</sup>

However, it would be difficult to point out any subject matter entries that more accurately informed users about specific and real-life activities. Most of them were only a brief message about the fact that the MES is functioning in this area at all:

- “In the context of Russia’s aggression against Ukraine and the influx of refugees into Poland, the Ministry of Education and Science has taken a number of measures to facilitate Ukrainian children in Polish schools and the employment of Ukrainian citizens.”<sup>13</sup>
- “Members of @RadaMlodziezy (The Youth Council) have drafted a position paper on the current situation in #Ukraine and have called for full support for those arriving in Poland as a result of the military operations taking place in Ukraine. @MON\_UKRAINE ► Details: <https://gov.pl/web/edukacja-i-nauka/posiedzenie-rady-dzieci-i-mlodziezy-vi-kadencji>.”<sup>14</sup>

In addition to scarce reports, there were most often references to other sites where more information could be obtained about, for example, psychological and pedagogical recommendations prepared, extracurricular infrastructure created or debates held. Occasionally, there were brief messages about the assistance sent to

<sup>11</sup> [https://x.com/MEN\\_GOVPL/status/1506557288261246976?s=20](https://x.com/MEN_GOVPL/status/1506557288261246976?s=20)

<sup>12</sup> [https://x.com/MEN\\_GOVPL/status/1509171114857091084?s=20](https://x.com/MEN_GOVPL/status/1509171114857091084?s=20)

<sup>13</sup> [https://x.com/MEN\\_GOVPL/status/1509057343153184770?s=20](https://x.com/MEN_GOVPL/status/1509057343153184770?s=20)

<sup>14</sup> [https://x.com/MEN\\_GOVPL/status/1498955444286595076?s=20](https://x.com/MEN_GOVPL/status/1498955444286595076?s=20)

the Ukrainian state. It is difficult to consider the perfunctory content of the entries as the basis for a substantive discussion, which was also reflected in the comments of users, who reacted to short announcements, very often without getting acquainted with links to recommended websites or guides.

It would also be extremely difficult for the authors to clearly identify educational policy activities on the basis of enigmatic entries. This is because the profile of the MES, if only because of the restrictions on the number of characters imposed by the Twitter platform, limits the dosage of information to a minimum. It should be noted that in this case Twitter is becoming a tool for building a positive image of politicians, posting information about visits they have made, rather than being a platform for sharing substantive and extensive messages. The entries should be considered as a metaphorical chronicle, with the help of which it is only an aide-memoire to broaden the knowledge of educational policy.

## 4.2. Feedback from Twitter users on the activities undertaken by the MES

The comments tab has become a space to express one's opinion, taking on different nature and emotional colouring. 75% of users' comments under the posts were negative, 21% neutral and only 4% positive. On the basis of the collected material, the authors have divided and distinguished the main types of emerging opinions:

### 1. Critical opinions

Criticism is the largest group of opinions. At this point, it is important to emphasise an important difference between criticism and hatred. The task of the hater is to create a sense of discouragement among the audience, while criticism, on the other hand, involves a positive intention to do good, broaden thinking horizons and force people to reflect (Naruszewicz-Duchlińska, 2021). Among the comments assigned to this category, the authors distinguished the entries according to their subject matter:

#### a) Medicine

Users referred to medical issues. Some comments referred to the pandemic-specific phenomena (wearing masks or keeping a distance). However, a predominant group concerned the issue of vaccination and the mixing of Polish and Ukrainian pupils in classes. Internet users referred to the optional vaccination of children in Ukraine:

- “Polish children with rags on their faces and Ukrainian children don't? You are pathetic. It's a pity for words, this falls under the abuse of Polish children.”
- “@Czarnek @MEIN\_GOV\_EN @MarzenaMachalek @GIS\_gov torturers #Norymberg2 Compulsory wearing of masks can cause permanent brain damage to children.”

- “Ukrainian kids tested, will you also implement all this syphilis from tuberculosis starting with TB, which is in epidemic form in Ukraine, to Polish kids?”
- “Ukrainians are admitted to state kindergartens who do not have compulsory vaccinations against measles, etc. you were afraid of Covid, but you are not afraid of the measles epidemic!”

## b) Economic issues

Economic issues, both in terms of finances and economy understood more broadly, were also criticised. The announced pay rises for teachers were considered negligible by the users. Internet users criticised politicians for failing to act realistically and shifting responsibility to school principals, rectors and teachers. The merging of the Ukrainian and the Polish students and thus filling classes to the absolute maximum was also viewed negatively.

- “Is really this 4.4% pay rise of ‘average’ teachers’ salaries all you can afford?”
- “So much for the practice of pushing Ukrainian children who don’t know the Polish language into Polish schools 😏”
- “And the talking stops there. Minister @CzarnekP has no idea what to do at school with so many refugees.”
- “You also have zero idea what to do next and as usual the responsibility is shifted to headmasters and teachers.”
- “Who allowed you to lower the level of education PL children by mixing our children with the Ukrainians who do not know the language or the Latin alphabet.”

## c) Education

The curriculum or the lack of consideration for the adaptation problems of Ukrainian students were also criticised. Internet users reproached the long period of remote teaching, which in their opinion had a negative impact on Polish students.

- “Polish children have been out of school for almost two years and you were not appalled by this? After all, these deficiencies in education will never be made up for.”
- “It was the biggest mistake bringing kids from Ukraine after fleeing the war into the cogs of school, education, when they don’t know the language, where most of the subjects and content don’t match the curriculum, in addition even forcing them to take Grade 8 exams and A levels?! Insane ideas!”

## d) Politics

Critical opinions did not spare the political issues either. Twitter users criticised the behaviour and decisions of politicians, often pointing to their hypocrisy and incoherence. Examples of such comments include those that appeared under the post of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs assuring that Poland is safe, which is guaranteed by international alliances. In their criticism, internet users also referred to the lack of tolerance and widespread exclusion of certain minority groups applied by the ruling party:

- “Let’s hope it’s not LGBT students, because these are the ones the Polish state has as agents of the rotten West and a plague. Like who? Oh, wait...”
- “And not so long ago we wanted to leave the European Union because... It’s bleh.” Now what a beautiful and strong ... But always according to the maxim: “when in doubt, consult the...”
- “Aaaa this ‘imaginary community’ is it offering real or imaginary security? Because as a non-electoral of a not-mine president, I don’t know anymore...”

## 2. Subject-matter opinions

Twitter users also took up an opportunity to express their own opinions and gave an opinion forming and factual assessment of the way the MES conducts policy. This group of comments consists of substantive statements, referring to specific solutions and cases.

- “A school does not need electronics or the internet ... but well-paid educators with a vocation. Strange that the eagles from the Ministry of Education need to point out such obvious issues ... Children from Ukraine are supposed to follow their curriculum anyway – all the more reason not to wreck our system ...”
- “Mr Minister We have expanded the school, we did not get anything from the State, everything was done with local government funds. We need for computers for the computer lab, maybe the Ministry can prove itself now. Regards.”
- “Don’t forget the Polish students who studied at Ukrainian universities. May Polish citizens not receive inferior treatment than the Ukrainian citizens. Already in the Draft Law, Art. 1, para. 2, subsection 8) you have forgotten about the Polish students.”

## 3. Questioning/expressing doubt opinions

Another distinguished group consists of questions and doubts in the comments. The question marks suggest not only a real expectation of an answer, but also a kind of defiance. The doubting comments are at the same time an expression of concern

about the validity of the decisions taken. The comments falling into this category included teachers' pay rises or setting up preparatory school branches.

- “Minister, is my wage going to increase like interest rates did recently?”
- “Why doesn't the Minister visit, for example, Zabrze, which doesn't want to develop preparatory school branches, but crowds children into 'regular' classes... However, it just zero normality here.”
- “Just why do you as a government remain in conflict with the EU? Why was the tender for helicopters cancelled? Why did Macierewicz people led by Misiewicz enter the NATO headquarters? Is this how alliances are upheld? Those helicopters from France would come useful now.”

#### 4. Ironic/mocking opinions

Quite a few of the comments took on a humorous tone. Giving a humorous tone to political and social issues does not necessarily imply an insult to the commentator or a lack of awareness of a difficult situation. Researchers describe this procedure as humour serving one's ego, i.e. an attempt to make oneself feel better by seeing comedy in one's surroundings (Tomaszek, 2018). Another reason for setting a humorous tone to serious events may be to experience a sense of embarrassment or nonsense:

- “Czarnek and Sasin at a joint press conference? the level of nonsense and low I.Q. must have been going through the roof.”
- “If the mere sight of Czarnek in me as a parent is a cause of vomiting, diarrhoea and convulsions let alone in the kids 😞 ”
- “We are in the most powerful alliance with the Vatican.”

#### 5. Supportive opinions

The least numerous group among the comments are supportive opinions. Among these entries, one could see patriotic attitudes, appreciation of the measures taken by the politicians towards the situation in Ukraine and a sense of pride in them.

- “Poland helps :) Well done :)”
- “Once again Minister Czarnek has proven his value with the right decisions. And criticism of his activities is an anti-Polish and anti-state and inhuman attitude. Nobody knows how long Putin will be at war in Ukraine. Well done Minister. Bravo.”
- “Minister of Education and Science Prof. Przemysław Czarnek 👍 PLEUUS 🌸”
- “He is great. He has knowledge and competence. The right man in the right place. He is an authority, and he gives a guarantee that the educational affairs in our country are moving in the right direction.”

### 4.3. Users' recommendations

The observers of the MES profile were also tempted to leave their tips and suggestions for solutions to selected problems. Among the comments collected, 3% of the Internet users' entries are recommendations. The authors divided them up and distinguished the following categories: recommendations concerning education, economics, political and social issues.

#### 1. Education

The main demand related to the issue of language learning. Twitter users suggested the introduction of classes where Polish language teachers would teach Ukrainian students the Polish language. The opposite solution, i.e. introducing Polish students to the Ukrainian language, was also recommended. Both of these measures would aim at faster acclimatisation of the two nationalities in one school and class. Reference was also made to teachers fleeing the war who could find employment in Polish schools. There were also repeated requests to limit the number of students per class, suggesting that classes were overcrowded. Twitter users were not unanimous on this point, however. They divided into two camps: those in favour of combining Polish and Ukrainian pupils in one class and those who opted for separate special classes for Ukrainian children, in which they would be able to follow the Ukrainian core curriculum, with which they are already familiar. Another solution for Ukrainian students could be online learning, which they would continue from their existing school. One user was even tempted to call this a 'big virtual school'. Another aspect raised was the recommendation to reduce the amount of material that is currently compulsory. There were also calls for the cancellation of the eighth-grade exam, due to the extremely difficult time that prevented students in the final year of primary schools from focusing on their studies.

#### 2. Economic issues

The most frequent recommendation in the economic category was about pay rises for teachers. Users argued that due to the war in Ukraine and the addition of hundreds of thousands of students to Polish schools, it is the educators who have the greatest responsibility. The larger number of pupils and the additional diversity of pupils, force additional commitment and workload on the part of teachers. It was also recommended to start building new schools so that existing facilities are not overcrowded and allow students to be comfortable in their studies and teachers to be comfortable in their work. The MES's incentives for the development of preparatory school branches were also viewed critically – the users suggested that the government should use EU funds for this purpose, rather than delegating the responsibility on the shoulders of local authorities. An emerging demand was also the introduction of a cap on the welfare benefits that refugees have started to receive.

### 3. Politics and social issues

Twitter users drew attention to the psychological state of students fleeing Ukraine, suggesting that they should receive special, pedagogical care. In this context, reference was also made to questionable educational solutions, asking whether learning the Polish language, dealing with a different curriculum and acclimatising to a completely new environment is not too much of a challenge and a mental burden for such young people. Attention was also drawn to the pervasive chaos and lack of specifics, which are being replaced by ‘utopian visions of the Minister.’ Suggestions were also made for the introduction of special courses and general awareness-raising, and skills in self-defence, among other things. Reference was also made to unclear messages from politicians. It was advocated that specifics should be given, thus preventing the spread of fake news and unnecessary panic.

#### 4.4. Education policy perception from the perspective of the war in Ukraine

The measures taken by the Ministry are presented by users in a very negative light, noting that educational policy is criticised not only in relation to the current situation in Ukraine. Users believe that the MES has neglected education issues for many years and the sudden crisis could change little in this aspect, but only exacerbate the already existing weaknesses in the system. The authors would like to point out that the opinions and reflections of the contributors quoted in the analysis, direct attention to a number of diverse ills, which the educational policy in its current form is unable to cope with. According to the users, the Ministry should first address the underlying problems, such as overcrowded schools, poorly paid teaching staff or education programmes that are not adapted to the modern world – before embarking on more decisive and radical steps. However, all these demands lead to a paradox. On the one hand, the MES is expected to act immediately to provide favourable conditions for refugees. On the other hand, however, it is pointed out that the Polish education system does not have sufficient facilities for the needs of Polish students, so any additional burden could lead to its total collapse. It would therefore be advisable to refer to the recommendations proposed by users and, starting with taking care of the smallest things, to begin a slow reform of education in small steps. Another issue remains that Polish educational policy is perceived as “hardened”, ossified, corrupt and treated by politicians as a tool for sowing propaganda. The future of education is seen in black colours. According to users, only a change of government or a sudden shift in the political scene could bring desirable and viable solutions.

When analysing perceptions of the measures taken by the MES, the authors paid particular attention to an additional thread that emerged during the coding of the comments. Unfortunately, many users used hate speech directed towards not only politicians, but also people who are fleeing the war in Ukraine. There was an abundance of vulgar, obscene and aggressive messages (11% of all comments were



those manifesting hate speech). Users did not hold back their language and gave vent to very negative emotions. On the basis of the collected material, the authors would distinguish emerging hate speech into two categories:

1. hate speech targeted at the politicians;
2. hate speech of a nationalist and fascist nature.

In the first case, there were comments insulting politicians: their behaviour, appearance or characteristics. Users also used vulgar words designed to undermine the image of an elected person. Hate speech of a nationalistic nature, on the other hand, most often took the form of criticism of educational policies, in which the MES sought to provide assistance to people from Ukraine. Users emphasised that they did not wish the Ukrainian language to appear in Polish schools.

- “Absolutely no Ukrainian schools! Absolutely no exams in Ukrainian! Come to your senses, this is Poland.”
- “Provided that Ukrainian teachers know Polish and will teach in Polish!!!”
- “GO AWAY! For two years you closed schools for POLISH children. Now you don’t stop debating the education of refugees.”
- “Well, what’s it like with these headmasters? Is it still Poland? Or is it already Ukropoland?”

Negative emoticons appeared next to the entries with Ukrainian flag: angry, sad or showing a vomiting figure. Users were not happy that MES wants to help refugees to any extent, instead of focusing solely on the Polish community.

The educational policy in Poland stirs a lot of emotions. Before closing this article, the authors would like to emphasise that more often than not, users refer to the profiles of politicians who arouse their dislike, rather than directly to the real activities that are carried out. The comments analysed barely contain information that could be considered factual, i.e. not containing offensive content, relating to the subject matter addressed and with solidly grounded arguments. The author is aware that users may often feel helpless facing what they perceive as wrong or inappropriate. However, on the grounds of the collected material, it seems impossible or it is hard to a large extent to draw clear conclusions about the perception of educational policy in Poland. However, the authors consider it necessary to control hate speech and to implement such tools that would make it more difficult to disseminate content of a nationalistic or fascist nature. Since, regardless of one’s opinion on the political aspects, it is unacceptable to produce content that incites aggression, violence or hostility towards a selected national group.

## 5. Conclusions

Nowadays, the social media represent the primary communication platform. Applications, services and instant messengers, which were originally used to keep in touch with friends, are today a space that spans all sectors and areas of life. An

example of a political presence on social networks is the Ministry of Education and Science's Twitter profile. In the context of the war in Ukraine, this account has become not an additional, but a primary source of information about the activities undertaken by the Ministry. Twitter as a representative of social media, compared to traditional (newspaper, radio) and new media (television), enables two-way communication. This fact is also pointed out by the American businesswoman A.J. Martin, according to whom people still do not understand that social media is not a kind of monologue, but a dialogue, and are more like a telephone rather than television (McFarland, 2022). The underlying reasons for writing comments and leaving an online footprint vary, as showed by our analysis. 14% of the studied comments are entries of haters, which are full of vulgarities, exclamations and contain exclusively negative messages. The objective of such entries is not only an attempt to attack a specific person or phenomenon, but they are also driven by a need to let go suppressed emotions. The significant number of hateful comments confirms the belief that hate speech is a common phenomenon in social media. The main motivation for posting hate-filled comments seems to be anonymity. A user with an imaginary name or a created nickname is driven by different mechanisms than a person who signs his own name and surname. Additional distance is caused by the very essence of social media, which is solely behind a phone or computer screen. Indirect contact deprives one of empathy, sympathy or understanding, and inconsistency adds to the courage to publish any content. Much less frequently (3% of comments), users decide to indicate a recommendation that could provide a solution to a given problem. Perhaps MES should consider how to change the way the narrative is conducted in social media to give as little reason for hate speech as possible and instead create a space for substantive conversation. The reason for this, in turn, may be that users do not perceive the comments section as a space for substantive discussion. A review of the comments collected did not reveal any activity on the MES profile in responding to the comments of others. Thus, users may be convinced that there is no purpose in posting relevant and informative posts, not feeling that their voice has any real impact. This may also be due to a certain generality of the MES profile, which does not function as the education minister's personal blog, but rather as an information platform.

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