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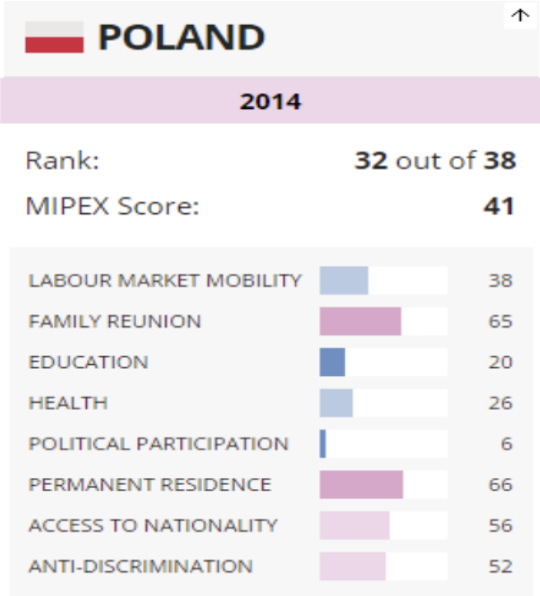
MODEL OF MIGRANTS' INTEGRATION IN POLAND

I. CONTEXTUAL SUMMARY: POLAND AND MIPEX

Poland's most recent MIPEX score (2020) stands at 41/100, that is below the MIPEX average of 49. This marki s indicating a slightly unfavorable integration environment. However, these data predate the significant geopolitical shifts and the large-scale arrival of Ukrainians in refugee-like conditions post-2022, rendering it partially outdated. Between 2014 and 2019, Poland's score declined marginally by one point, though incremental improvements were noted, including the introduction of intercultural teacher training, free language instruction for migrant pupils, and the launch of health education platforms.

Graph 1: MIPEX 2020



Since the 2018 regulatory amendments, migrants in Poland have faced increasing barriers to receive permanent residency, including mandatory certification of Polish language proficiency (at the B1 level) and proof of stable income sufficient to support themselves and their dependents.

This reflects a broader policy orientation described as so called "equality on paper," wherein migrants are granted formal rights but denied substantive equality of opportunity. Integration measures have had limited success in fostering social cohesion; instead, prevailing policies have contributed to public perceptions of migrants as outsiders, reinforcing exclusionary attitudes, xenophobia, while eroding social trust.

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II. BRIEF EXPLANATION AND THE CONTEXT

The key dimensions define Poland's contemporary approach to migrants' integration are as follows: First, since 2022, Poland has been transitioning into a New Immigration Destination (Pędziwiatr & Maziarz, 2022), diverging from Castles and Miller's (2003) original typology. This shift merges characteristics of economic migration and refugee reception, with authorities adopting a utilitarian stance that frames migrants as a flexible labour reservoir. Second, integration is not institutionalized as a distinct policy domain, but is fragmented across migration and social policy frameworks. This reflects a selective and instrumental logic, wherein migrants are variably constructed as either economic assets or security threats (Ślęzak & Bielewska, 2022; Bielewska et al., 2024).

III. LEGAL AND STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK

Poland, akin to Czechia, lacks a dedicated legal framework for migrant integration. Instead, integration-related provisions are dispersed across multiple legal instruments. These include: (1) international treaties transposed into domestic law; (2) constitutional protection for ethnic minorities and foreigners; (3) the Act on Foreigners, which governs a broad spectrum of migration statuses; (4) sectoral legislation addressing integration through education, labour, healthcare, and social assistance; and (5) the Act on Social Assistance, which explicitly links integration support to beneficiaries of international protection.

Since 2016, Poland has operated without a formal migration policy document, a gap increasingly visible following the 2022 influx of forced migrants from Ukraine. As of October 2024, a new migration strategy is under governmental development, though it faces criticism from academia and civil society. While Poland is bound by EU and international law, current legal analyses typically focus on national legislation, excluding sub-legal instruments such as local ordinances, executive directives, and internal administrative acts.

The key laws overarching migrants' integration as listed below (Marszycki, 2024)**:**

1. **The Constitution**2 – while primarily addressing citizens and individuals within the national territory, also indirectly encompasses migrants through its foundational principles. There are some provisions that affect migration policy and the integration of migrants, such as a/ the official language used[3], b/ the rules for acquiring Polish citizenship – by birth to parents who are Polish citizens, or via other cases specified in the law, i.e. the Act on Polish Citizenship[4] and the Act on Repatriation[5], c/ protection of ethnic minorities, d/ the issue of granting asylum and granting refugee status (art. 56), which are linked to the act[6] and international regulations[7] binding on the Republic of Poland.
2. **The Act on Foreigners**[8] – regulates key administrative and legal aspects of migration management, including border crossing, visa issuance, residence permits (temporary

[2] Constitution of the Republic of Poland of April 2, 1997 (Journal of Laws No. 78, item 483, as amended), hereinafter referred to as the Constitution.

[3] These agreements include, among others: agreement with Ukraine [Agreement between the Government of the Republic of Poland and the Government of Ukraine on cooperation in the field of culture, science and education, drawn up in Kiev on May 20, 1997 (Journal of Laws of 2000, No. 3, item 29)].

[4] Act of April 2, 2009 on Polish Citizenship (consolidated text: Journal of Laws of 2023, item 1989), hereinafter referred to as the Act on Polish Citizenship

[5] Act of November 9, 2000 on repatriation (consolidated text: Journal of Laws of 2022, item 1105), hereinafter referred to as the Repatriation Act.

[6] See The Act of June 13, 2003 on Granting Protection to Foreigners in the Territory of the Republic of Poland (consolidated text: Journal of Laws of 2023, item 1504, as amended), hereinafter referred to as the Act on Granting Protection to Foreigners

[7] See Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, done in Geneva on July 28, 1951 (Journal of Laws of 1991, No. 119, item 517) and the Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees, done in New York on January 31, 1967 (Journal of Laws of 1991, No. 119, item 517).

[8] Act of December 12, 2013 on Foreigners (consolidated text: Journal of Laws of 2024, item 769), hereinafter referred to as the Act on Foreigners.

and permanent), documentation, legality of stay, return procedures, detention, and the maintenance of relevant registers and databases. A foreigner is defined as any person who does not have Polish citizenship[9], yet granting protection to foreigners encompasses various forms such as[10]: a/ the refugee status; b/subsidiary protection; c/ asylum; d/ temporary protection.

3. **The Act on National and Ethnic Minorities and on the Regional Languages**[11]– relates to certain migrants, who may qualify for additional protections under the legal status of national or ethnic minorities (see the Act of 6 January 2005 on National and Ethnic Minorities). It enumerates 9 national minorities—Belarusians, Czechs, Lithuanians, Germans, Armenians, Russians, Slovaks, Ukrainians, and Jews—and 4 ethnic minorities—Karaites, Lemkos, Roma, and Tatar.
4. **The Act on Social Assistance**[12]– the legal framework contains only a narrow, explicit reference to migrants' integration, limited to individuals granted refugee status or subsidiary protection (Section II, Chapter 5). It **frames integration primarily as a component of social assistance, rather than as a comprehensive policy** (art. 91 and 91a)**.** Consequently, support is restricted to a specific subset of migrants—namely, recognized refugees, beneficiaries of subsidiary protection, and unaccompanied minors—**highlighting the absence of a universal, systemic integration strategy**. The assistance for a foreigner is provided as part of an individual integration program agreed between the District Family Support Centre and the foreigner.
5. **Polish citizenship and repatriation** – individuals of Polish origin may acquire citizenship through repatriation under a distinct legal pathway. Persons entering Poland on a national visa for repatriation purposes automatically obtain Polish citizenship upon crossing the national border, thereby circumventing the standard naturalization procedures applicable to other foreign nationals (Art. 4).
6. **The Act on Free Legal Aid** – in many areas of life, the situation of migrants originating from other countries than Ukraine, has not been regulated. While the Act does not explicitly designate foreigners as beneficiaries, it also does not exclude tchem from access to its provisions. Such assistance is particularly vital for migrants, who often face linguistic and institutional barriers that hinder their understanding of Polish legal and administrative systems.
7. **The Act on the Promotion of Employment and the Labour Market Institutions**[13] – provides frames for participating in the labour market, foreigners and migrants can get financed the Polish language training for the unemployed and job searching foreigners. It also presents sanctions for illegal employment of foreigners and actions to their detriment.
8. **The Education Law**[14] – introduces significant parity between foreign and Polish nationals in access to education (Chapter 7). Foreigners are entitled to pre-school education, as well as compulsory education in public primary and art schools, under the same conditions as Polish citizens (art. 165(1)). These provisions reflect a formal commitment to educational inclusion for migrant children. Those foreigners subject to

[9] Article 3 point 2 of the Act on Foreigners.
[10] See art. 3 section 1 of the Act on Granting Protection to Foreigners.
[11] Act of January 6, 2005 on National and Ethnic Minorities and on the Regional language (consolidated text: Journal of Laws of 2017, item 823), hereinafter referred to as the Act on Minorities
[12] Act of March 12, 2004 on Social Assistance (consolidated text: Journal of Laws of 2024, item 1283, as amended), hereinafter referred to as the Act on Social Assistance.
[13] Act of April 20, 2004 on the Promotion of Employment and Labour Market Institutions (consolidated text: Journal of Laws of 2024, item 475, as amended).
[14] Act of December 14, 2016 - Education Law (consolidated text: Journal of Laws of 2024, item 737, as amended).

compulsory education are entitled to attend public secondary schools under the same conditions as Polish citizens, until the age of 18 or completion of secondary education. The legislation includes a defined list of foreigner categories eligible for this equal treatment, reinforcing formal educational parity within the public system. It offers also: a/ free learning of the Polish language for a maximum of 2 years, b/ the employment of a teacher's assistant who speaks the language of the country of origin, c/ the employment of an intercultural assistant.

9. **The Law on Higher Education and Science**[15] – foreigners may continue their higher education (i.e. studies, postgraduate studies, doctoral schools and other forms). The law deals with granting scholarships, study fees exemption, and degrees' recognition and their equivalence.
10. **The Act on the Social Insurance System**[16] – in the case of work and education, foreigners can participate in the social security and health insurance systems which is facilitated by and those relating to health care services[17] provide for the possibility of using this type of insurance by foreigners.

Table 1 looks at situation of immigrants within the social security system and it shows a diversity of benefits and entry criteria, highly nuanced according to the foreigners' situation.

Table 1. Migrants and diversity of entitlements within the Polish social security system

Social security system	Social security benefits	Qualifying criteria for immigrants
Family	**Multiple:** family allowances, one-off childbirth grant, parental benefit, child upbringing benefit, maternity, parental and paternity allowances and leave	Most foreigners insured in Poland—including seasonal and self-employed workers—are eligible for family benefits, which are means-tested and contingent on the child's age and educational status. Additionally, the 800+ Programme provides unconditional support for the second and subsequent children, regardless of age. Access to maternity, parental, and paternity allowances and leave is granted to individuals covered by either mandatory or voluntary health insurance schemes.
Health	**Multiple services:** primary healthcare, specialist out-patient care, hospital treatment, dental treatment, rescue and medical transport services, medicines and medical devices. **It covers also benefits for**: a/ caregivers, b/ long-term care, c/ health cash benefits	Access to public healthcare is granted to all individuals covered by health insurance through the National Health Fund (NFZ), including those holding work visas, fixed-term residence permits (excluding irregular migrants), long-term EU residence permits, and their registered family members residing in Poland. Additionally, EU and EEA nationals insured in their home countries are entitled to healthcare in Poland under cross-border healthcare arrangements. However, access remains contingent on formal insurance coverage, which may exclude certain categories of temporary or informally employed migrants

[15] Act of July 20, 2018 - Law on Higher Education and Science (consolidated text: Journal of Laws of 2023, item 742, as amended).
[16] Act of October 13, 1998 on the Social Insurance System (consolidated text: Journal of Laws of 2024, item 497, as amended).
[17] Act of August 27, 2004 on Health Care Benefits Financed from Public Funds (consolidated text: Journal of Laws of 2024, item 146, as amended).

Incapacity (disability)	**Disability benefits** (disability pension, training pension) as well as **benefits compensating accidents** at work and occupational disease (pension, lump-sum compensation)	Third-country nationals with legally recognized incapacity for work may qualify for disability benefits, provided they have completed the requisite employment period. Additionally, all insured third-country nationals who suffer a work-related accident or occupational disease are entitled to either lump-sum compensation or a disability pension, in accordance with Polish social insurance regulations.
Old-age survivors (i.e. widows and widowers)	**Retirement pensions and survivor's benefits** (survivor's pension, funeral allowance)	All insured third-country nationals participating in Poland's retirement scheme are entitled to old-age pensions. Survivor's pensions are available to third-country nationals whose deceased family member was eligible for a retirement or disability pension, as well as a one-time funeral allowance is granted to those bearing the funeral costs.
Social assistance	**Social assistance benefits** (permanent allowance, periodic allowance, earmarked allowance and the special needs allowance, benefit and loan for economic independence, assistance for becoming independent and to continue education)	Social assistance benefits in Poland are non-contributory and accessible to third-country nationals holding either a permanent residence permit (permit to settle) or an EU long-term or temporary residence permit. Eligibility is contingent on legal residence status rather than prior contributions to the social insurance system.
Unemployment	Unemployment benefits (unemployment allowance, pre-retirement benefit)	Unemployment benefits are available to third-country nationals who hold either a permanent residence permit or an EU long-term or temporary residence permit, provided they have been employed for at least 365 days within the preceding 18 months and have earned at least the statutory minimum wage.

Source: own work based on Marszycki (2024)

IV. ASSISTANCE TO CITIZENS OF UKRAINE

However, in response to the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022 and the activation of the EU Temporary Protection Directive, Poland enacted the Special Act of 12 March 2022 to regulate assistance for Ukrainian nationals. The Act introduced a comprehensive framework of integration-oriented measures, including:

(a) registration and assignment of a PESEL identification number;
(b) access to the mObywatel digital identity application;
(c) eligibility for social assistance benefits;
(d) full access to the labor market and public employment services;
(e) an IT platform to facilitate employer contact;
(f) inclusion in child-support programs such as "800+" and "Active Nursery";
(g) access to psychological and food assistance;
(h) entitlement to healthcare services.

The Act also ensures access to free legal aid, civic counseling, and legal education, thereby supporting the broader integration of Ukrainian refugees into Polish society. ***The Polish special act draws from the EU regulation which is translated it into the legal system. The presence of Ukrainian was regarded as temporary and lacked a comprehensive integration policy. The governments have been acting within boundaries set up by the European Union.*** Following the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine and the EU's activation of the Temporary Protection Directive, Poland enacted a Special Act (March 12, 2022) to support displaced Ukrainians. While initially framed as temporary—with protection extended incrementally to 2026—this

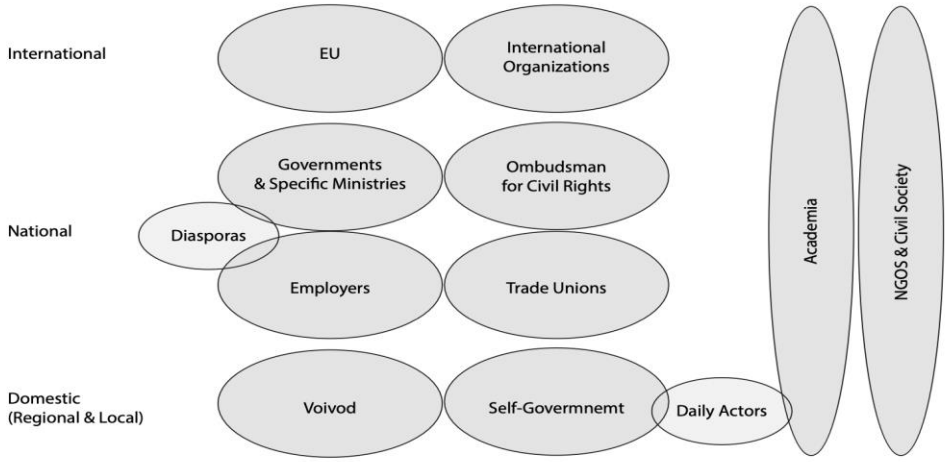
response catalyzed a shift in local governance. Municipalities, already leveraging development policy as a proxy for migration governance pre-2022, assumed a central role in integration efforts, emphasizing social cohesion and non-exclusionary practices. Local authorities and NGOs became key actors in shaping integration at the grassroots level.

Following an eight-year policy vacuum, the Polish government introduced a new strategic document on October 15, 2024: *Complex and Responsible Migration Strategy for Poland 2025–2030*, titled "Re-gain Control. Provide Security." For the first time, integration is treated as a distinct and integral component of migration policy. The strategy emphasizes language acquisition, cultural orientation, civic participation, and community engagement to prevent segregation. The strategy outlines targeted programs, including: a/ support for Ukrainian forced migrants as transnational actors; b/anti-radicalization initiatives for culturally distant groups, with provisions for forced return in cases of security threats; c/ expanded Polish language and cultural education programs; d/ employer-supported integration schemes for economic migrants; e/ school-based integration for migrant children and their families; f/ establishment of Foreigners' Integration Centers in 49 sub-regions, primarily serving migrants from Ukraine and Belarus (*Odzyskać kontrolę*, 2024).

V. ACTORS AND THEIR ROLES

Taken the context, it is visible that integration governance is multi-scalar, involving central, regional, and local authorities operating within EU and international legal frameworks. This multi-level governance model is characterized by inter-institutional cooperation and the involvement of non-state actors, including NGOs, academia, and civil society. This particular aspect is depicted below on graph 2, with emphasis on those three levels of the *de facto* migrants' integration policymaking.

Graph 2. Migrants' integration governance – levels and actors



Source: own work

The table below outlines how migrants' integration is organised, both in terms of supervision and responsibility. Finally, it looks at roles played by actors there.

Table 2. Institutional arrangement of migration governance in Poland

Name	***Supervision***	***Responsibility and position***
	International level	
European Union and its institutions 	The EU, through its institutions supports the Member States in their efforts to integrate migrants. There is a substantial framework such as: a/ a legislative framework for integration, e.g. Common Basic Principles for Immigrant Integration Policy in the EU; b/ funding programmes (for the period 2021 - 2027 it includes: the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund – AMIF, The European Social Fund Plus (ESF+)); c/ policy instruments that influence social cohesion (e.g. anti-discrimination legislation); d/ opportunities for mutual learning, cooperation, etc.	Operationally, a key player responsible for EU policy on migration and home affairs is the Directorate-General for Migration and Home Affairs of the European Commission.
Supranational and international actors	They focus on various fragmented areas of policymaking within own interest taken their mandate in the international relations arena	Some examples can be listed: a/ the UN agencies including the UNHCR, IOM, UNICEF, and WHO enhancing social integration policies and practices b/ PICUM – platform for undocumented migrants c/ the OECD – analysis and policy recommendation d/ ICMPD – contributes to the development of better and safer migration policies and programmes.
	National level	
The government *of the Republic of Poland managed by the Prime Minister (KPRM)*	Specific ministries, that deal with migration and migrants' integration in accordance with the regulations and the present governments' perspective Operationally, main body in charge of migration issues is **the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Administration (in short MSWiA or Ministry of Interior).**[18] It coordinates actions related to migration at large, integration is a secondary matter, via actions of Department of International Affairs and Migration; Department of Citizenship and Repatriation; Department of Religious Denominations and National and Ethnic Minorities	Migrants' integration is coordinated by other ministries, e.g. 1) Ministry of Family, Labour Market and Social Affairs (MRPiPS), 2) Ministry of Education (MEN), 3) Ministry of Higher Education and Science (MSWiN), 4) Ministry of Health (MZ) to name the most important. All other ministries listed support and assist foreigners and migrants in the scope of existing regulations (see tables above).
The Plenipotentiary for Repatriation	S/he is appointed and dismissed by the Prime Minister, at the request of the minister responsible for internal affairs	The advisory and consultative body, i.e. the Repatriation Council.
Office for Foreigners	Reports to the MSWiA (Ministry of Interior)	Deals with and decides on asylum requests and international protection,

[18] Dz.U. dnia 16 maja 2024 r. Poz. 738

		it is in charge of temporary stay for Ukrainian forced migrants.
Domestic level (regional and local)		
Regional and local authorities	*They possess no legislative obligation to shape and implement migrants' integration.*	However, they are responsible not only for delivery of numerous social services in their place but also for welfare of their inhabitants, e.g. infrastructure, regional development (regions), or education, health, social security (local) etc. Taken that their inhabitants are also foreigners the authorities might indirectly possess obligations towards migrants. This issue is highly politicized with some local authorities used the regional development as a tool to assist migrants in their territory.
Regional authorities, i.e. voivods – representatives of the government in the field (region)[19]	Prime Minister	The voivod coordinates the government actions, e.g. crisis, allocation of funds to assist forced migrants, but also repatriation process in the region (this along with the Government Plenipotentiary for Repatriation)
Local self-governments	Independent, acting within the legal framework	Local governments and their actions include: a/ establishing nurseries; b/ acting as governing bodies for kindergartens, schools and other educational institutions; c/ providing assistance to foreigners in the foreigner's place of residence; d/ cooperating with the municipality and the voivod via district family assistance centres Before 2022 local authorities embraced the development policy as a loophole to shape migration and migrants' integration policy. From 2022 onwards the municipalities engaged in aiding displaced Ukrainians – treating the same city inhabitants and migrants. The migrants' integration policies are shaped on the local level by both local authorities and NGOs.
Foreigners' Integration Centers		Direct integration activities, some regions are self-excluded due to decisions of regional authorities, e.g. The Małopolska Region. Still following the Migration Strategy 49 centres are to be set up to support smooth integration of migrants.

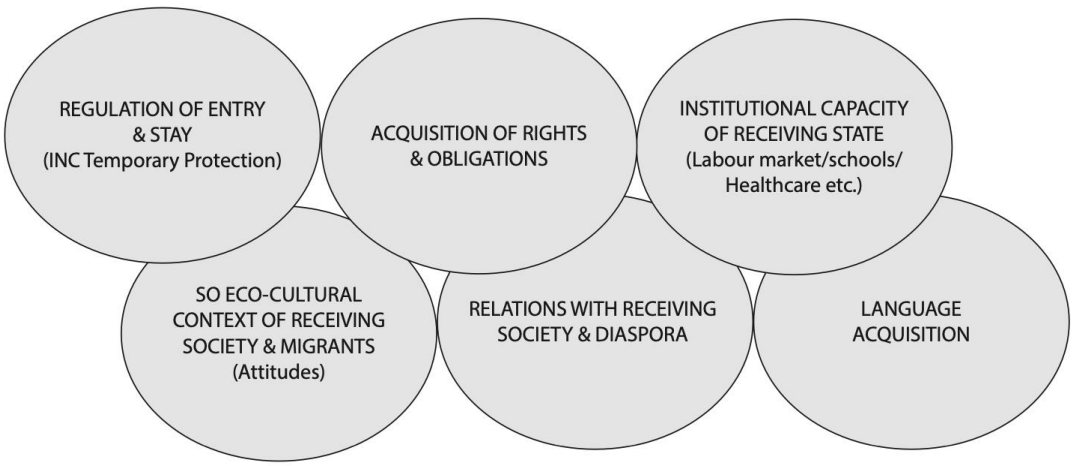
[19] See art. 152 of the Constitution.

Academia	Horizontal activity	Representatives of academia are actively involved in policy shaping and implementation (e.g. Migration Strategy, some serve as high level officials in the government), but also advise, lobby or take a critical stand to solutions offered
NGOs	Horizontal activity	NGOs dealing with migration, engaging in assistance to migrants and lobbying solutions with policymakers
Civil society	Horizontal activity	Civil society at large plays a crucial role in support to migrants, in particular Ukrainian forced migrants, that includes churches, local associations, individuals and local entrepreneurs.

VI. IN CONCLUSION

The landscape of migrants' integration is complicated, taken the history of migration experience and the selectiveness of migration expressed by the Polish authorities (for more see Ślęzak, Bielewska, 2022; Bielewska et al., 2025). The arrival of Ukrainian forced migrants further differentiated the status and position of migrants, those culturally close like Ukrainians and culturally distant like Afghanis. The documents enacted and the approach of the present government, although much appreciated remains a subject of the criticism expressed by academia and civil society organisations. The graph below attempts to show main areas that are dealing with migrants' integration, some of which are already seen in policies and regulations, such as entry and stay, rights and obligations, institutional capacity and language acquisition. Some crucial remain unnoticed by policymakers, e.g. the attitudes of both receiving society and migrants or migrants' relations with the receiving society and diaspora. They do seem to be vital to ascertain the future successful integration.

Graph 3. Six key areas of migrants' integration



Source: own work

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Act of January 6, 2005 on National and Ethnic Minorities and on the Regional language (consolidated text: Journal of Laws of 2017, item 823), hereinafter referred to as the Act on Minorities.

Act of April 2, 2009 on Polish Citizenship (consolidated text: Journal of Laws of 2023, item 1989),

Act of June 15, 2012 on the consequences of entrusting work to foreigners staying in the territory of the Republic of Poland contrary to the regulations (consolidated text: Journal of Laws of 2021, item 1745).

Act of December 12, 2013 on Foreigners (consolidated text: Journal of Laws of 2024, item 769).

Act of August 5, 2015 on Free Legal Assistance, Free Civic Counseling and Legal Education (consolidated text: Journal of Laws of 2024, item 1534).

Act of December 14, 2016 - Education Law (consolidated text: Journal of Laws of 2024, item 737, as amended).

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