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# Belonging as a Strategy of Migrant Integration

## Zadomowienie jako strategia integracji imigrantów

**Abstract**

**Aim.** The article conceptualises belonging as a central strategy of migrant integration, understood not as an emotional add-on but as the infrastructure of everyday life. Focusing on Ukrainian families in Poland after February 24, 2022, the study shifts the perspective from the logic of "reception" to the logic of inclusion. It examines how home-making practices—language, relationships, routines, and material arrangements—enable migrants to transform institutional spaces into places of lived belonging. Special attention is given to educational institutions as key "laboratories of belonging."

**Methods and materials.** The analysis is based on qualitative individual and focus group interviews (IDI/FGD) conducted in cooperation with Save the Children, supplemented with statistical data on the presence of people from Ukraine in Poland. The study adopts an interdisciplinary theoretical framework combining migration studies, sociology, and educational research. Partic-

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ular emphasis is placed on micro-level institutional practices such as bilingual communication, the role of intercultural assistants, predictable daily routines, and administrative accessibility.

**Results and conclusion.** The findings show that "soft" everyday practices generate "hard" integration outcomes: they improve school attendance, stabilise learning processes, shorten administrative procedures, and build trust. Belonging emerges as a key condition for durable integration rather than its secondary effect. The article concludes that effective integration requires the systemic design of an infrastructure of belonging through language, routines, relationships, and accessible procedures. After 2022, Polish schools and preschools became practical laboratories of inclusion where legal frameworks are translated into the lived experience of being "at home."

*Keywords***:** belonging, migrant integration, Ukrainian refugees, education, home-making, local institutions, school

**Abstrakt**

**Cel.** Celem artykułu jest ukazanie przynależności (*belonging*) jako kluczowej strategii integracji migrantów, rozumianej nie jako dodatek emocjonalny, lecz jako infrastruktura codziennego życia. Autorka analizuje doświadczenia ukraińskich rodzin w Polsce po 24 lutego 2022 roku, ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem roli instytucji edukacyjnych jako „laboratoriów przynależności". Praca podejmuje próbę przesunięcia akcentu z logiki recepcji na logikę inkluzji i wskazuje, że trwała integracja zależy od praktyk zadomawiania (*home-making*), czyli od języka, rytuałów, relacji i materialnych warunków codzienności.

**Metody i materiały.** Podstawą empiryczną są jakościowe wywiady indywidualne i grupowe (IDI/FGD) przeprowadzone we współpracy z Save the Children, uzupełnione aktualnymi danymi statystycznymi dotyczącymi obecności uchodźców z Ukrainy w Polsce. Analiza została osadzona w interdyscyplinarnych ramach teoretycznych studiów nad przynależnością, migracjami i edukacją. Szczególną uwagę poświęcono mikro-praktykom instytucjonalnym, takim jak komunikacja dwujęzyczna, rola asystentów międzykulturowych, organizacja rytmu dnia oraz procedury administracyjne.

**Wyniki i wnioski.** Wyniki pokazują, że „miękkie" praktyki codzienności mają „twarde" skutki integracyjne: zwiększają frekwencję szkolną, stabilizują proces uczenia się, skracają procedury administracyjne i budują zaufanie. Przynależność okazuje się warunkiem trwałej adaptacji, a nie jej efektem ubocznym. Autorka konkluduje, że skuteczna integracja wymaga systemowego projektowania infrastruktury przynależności poprzez język, rytuały, relacje i dostępne procedury. Szkoły i przedszkola w Polsce po 2022 roku stały się realnymi laboratoriami inkluzji, gdzie prawo i polityka przekładane są na codzienne doświadczenie „bycia u siebie".

*Słowa kluczowe***:** przynależność, integracja migrantów, uchodźcy z Ukrainy, edukacja, zadomawianie, instytucje lokalne, szkoła

## Introduction

After 24 February 2022, the everyday lives of many Ukrainian families split into two parts: the "before" and the "after." Poland—very quickly becoming one of the main places of refuge—had to respond not only to logistical challenges but, above all, to the question of the possibility of dwelling: whether and how a person who has just lost their home can feel at home somewhere else. In this paper, I propose a shift of emphasis from the language of "reception" to the language of inclusion: this paper treats belonging not as an emotional "add-on" but as the infrastructure of everyday life, without which all institutional solutions remain reversible. I am interested not only in whether the state and local governments provided access to services, but in how places—schools, kindergartens, after-school clubs, secretariats—were transformed into laboratories of belonging, where procedure meets care and legal provisions become lived experience.

I begin from the distinction that belonging has both an intimate dimension (the feeling that "this is my place") and a political dimension (the rules that determine who is allowed to feel this way). It is precisely in this gap that home-making emerges as a practice: the rhythms of the day, languages, objects, and relationships that render a space habitable. For this reason, I place micro-mechanisms at the centre: bilingual information and forms, stable roles for intercultural assistants, a predictable schedule of meals and rest, the "first contact face" at the school office. These are what lower the "entry" threshold and shift the boundary from "I am admitted" to "I am at home here." At the same time—as the literature on deservingness shows—belonging is often "hooked" onto tests of worthiness; hence, the integration strategy proposed here focuses on the architecture of hospitality that removes from the outset conditions that are irrelevant to learning and living together: it does not stigmatise bilingualism, it provides real access to Polish as a second language (PL2), it simplifies procedures and stabilises bridging roles. The empirical backbone of this work consists of qualitative interviews (IDI/FGD) conducted in cooperation with Save the Children (2021)—read today as a sensitive seismograph of early home-making experiences—as well as current data on the scale and structure of the presence of people from Ukraine in Poland. In subsequent sections I show that "soft" components (language, rituals, relationships) have "hard" effects: they improve attendance, stabilise learning, shorten administrative pathways, and build trust. In this sense, home-making does not compete with law and policy—it animates them, creating conditions under which integration becomes durable. My proposal is simple, though it requires discipline: to design integration as a relational pedagogy of place, stitching policies and resources together with the micro-practices of the day, so that "I am here" can really mean "I am at home here."

## Theoretical Background

The notion of belonging — now central in migration, cultural, and educational studies — has a longer and richer history than one-line definitions suggest. It has evolved: from a psychological sense of rootedness in a group, through sociological and cultural approaches to identity and integration, to its contemporary understanding as a dynamic practice of everyday life, unfolding in relationships, places, and rituals (Antonsich, 2010; Yuval-Davis, 2011). In the 1990s and after, with the intensification of mobility, migration, and displacement, the term increasingly began to replace the overly narrow categories of "citizenship" or "integration" which — important in themselves — proved insufficient to describe vibrant, multicultural societies (Antonsich, 2010).

In the classic, and now frequently cited, distinction proposed by Antonsich, belonging has two inseparable dimensions: the intimate (place-belongingness) and the political (the politics of belonging). The first is the internal feeling that "I am in the right place," the second is the set of institutional rules and practices that enable or constrain this feeling (Antonsich, 2010; Yuval-Davis, 2011). In this sense, belonging is not a status conferred once and for all but a process of negotiation between the individual and the social, administrative, and cultural order. It is not reducible to a passport, registration, or language proficiency alone; it encompasses the sphere of recognition, experiences, and emotions — elements that easily escape bureaucratic descriptions of integration (Yuval-Davis, 2011).

In the twenty-first century, belonging has also become a counterweight to othering — the mechanisms of exclusion and dehumanisation of "others." As powell and Menendian argue, cohesion does not grow out of border control or the rhetoric of "order" alone, but out of enabling positive, everyday interactions that embed people in shared practices: mutually recognised rules, reciprocity, and the predictability of encounters. It is precisely these interactions that construct the minimum of trust needed for cohabitation — and thus a belonging that is not a declaration but a daily experience (powell & Menendian, 2020). In a similar spirit, European social policy frameworks emphasise that practices of positive interaction — short conversations in the school office, bilingual explanations of rules, joint work on a task in class, a safe after-school club — create the "soft infrastructure" without which the slogans of inclusion become hollow (Orton, 2023). This focus on "infrastructure" is both normative and organisational: belonging becomes measurable not only by attendance or school enrolment, but also by the density and quality of contacts that an institution can sustain.

This shift has a solid grounding in research on intergroup contact: as long ago as the 1950s, Allport indicated that contact "works" when the conditions of equal status, common goals, cooperation, and institutional support are met; later meta-analyses demonstrated that the effect is not purely "psychological" but translates into behaviour

and norms (Allport, 1954; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). These are precisely the conditions that are realised in the well-designed everyday life of a school: common tasks, clear rules, institutional approval of bilingualism, and the presence of "bridging" figures make "others" into co-participants. In the language of social capital, this means cultivating "bridges" without undermining "bonds": bridges connect groups and reduce distance, bonds sustain safety, and trust in the rules of the game holds the whole together (Ager & Strang, 2008; Putnam, 2000/2007). This is why belonging does not compete with integration policy – it embodies it: it translates the language of law and quality standards into a world of practices, where procedure meets care and everyday contact meets recognition (Antonsich, 2010; Yuval-Davis, 2011).

The war in Ukraine and the influx of large groups of refugees after 2022 have introduced these distinctions into Polish academic and public discourse in a particularly striking way. The scale and pace of change have forced questions that do not fit simple formulas of "guest" and "host": how long can one be "on the way"? When does temporariness become a way of life? And what does it mean today to "be at home" where everything still calls for domestication? In response, research on belonging has shifted the focus from formal procedures to practices of home-making: the rhythm of the day, language as a tool and sign of recognition, gestures of hospitality on the part of institutions that genuinely lower thresholds (Antonsich, 2010; Yuval-Davis, 2011).

This shifted centre of gravity has consequences for both policy and research. If belonging is produced rather than "granted," then the task of institutions becomes the organisation of conditions for its production: simple, predictable, and accessible. This applies especially to education and childcare: wherever translations, intercultural assistants, preparatory classes, stable recruitment procedures, and timetables stitched to the realities of families appear, the process of belonging accelerates and "being in the right place" ceases to be a phrase and becomes an experience (Orton, 2023; powell & Menendian, 2020). In this understanding, belonging does not negate the importance of legal frameworks; it complements them by showing that between the letter of regulation and everyday life there is ongoing work on "home" that can be supported or hindered.

## Methodology

Thanks to the opportunity to access interviews conducted in cooperation with Save the Children, I was able to gain a unique perspective on the process of home-making among Ukrainian families in Poland. The analysis of these conversations allowed me to confront theoretical approaches to belonging and home-making with practice—confirming that these are not abstract constructs but experiences that are

genuinely lived in everyday life (Antonsich, 2010; hooks, 2009). In the statements of teachers, intercultural assistants, and parents, it is clearly visible how small, repetitive activities — translating forms, bilingual notices, flexible adjustments of schedules, attentive conversations in the school office — transform the threshold of an institution into a space where one can begin to feel "in the right place." In this sense, belonging appears as a process of "making home" at the scale of the day: embodied, relational, and co-produced by people and institutions (Antonsich, 2010).

## Findings

From the perspective of professionals, early childhood education and pre-schooling play a particularly important role – the first "threshold of hospitality" on which the everyday comfort of the child and family depends. "From the very beginning we focused on accessibility in Ukrainian,"[1] recalls a preschool employee; "I wrote every announcement in Polish and Ukrainian – this gave peace of mind both to children and parents," adds a teacher from a preparatory class. In another interview, one reads: "The glossary at the entrance turned out to be more important than we thought," and a school principal admits: "Parents often did not know where and what papers they had to submit," to which they responded with the practice of "redirecting" families to schools with free spots and organising information duty: "The intercultural assistant closed all the formalities in one day." These short voices illustrate Antonsich's thesis about the two dimensions of belonging: intimate calm and a sense of safety arise when the political-institutional dimension becomes predictable and benevolent (Antonsich, 2010).

The speed of the social response after 2022 — despite the lack of full institutional preparedness — translated into a series of concrete solutions in Polish education: preparatory classes, the hiring of intercultural assistants, the spread of bilingual communication and the strengthening of wellbeing (Chrostowska, 2024; Ministerstwo Edukacji i Nauki, 2024). Set against the magnitude of the challenge — Poland is among those EU countries with the highest ratio of people under temporary protection to total population — these measures represented an attempt to lower the "entry" threshold into preschool and school (Eurostat, 2025). Comparative economic analyses at the same time point to the unprecedented scale of coordination and logistics and its consequences for public services (UNHCR Poland & Deloitte Polska, 2025) – something that in the interviews emerges as a daily struggle over places, transport, and stitching together daily schedules. From the children's perspective, rituals proved most important: predictable meals, quiet naps, the steady voice of a teacher; these are what provide meaning

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[1]   All statements were translated by the authors.

and continuity which — as hooks reminds us — emerge from the smallest gestures of care rather than from programmatic declarations (hooks, 2009).

The essence of this change is the shift of emphasis from "do you meet the conditions?" to "how do we create conditions?" in which belonging can be generated and sustained day after day. In Antonsich and Yuval-Davis's perspective, belonging has two dimensions — intimate and political — and reveals itself precisely where procedures meet care: in the school office, in the corridor, at the notice board (Antonsich, 2010; Yuval-Davis, 2011). Bilingual information, stable posts for assistants, clear recruitment paths and accessible PL2 are not "nice extras" but the infrastructure of belonging: they lower the cognitive and emotional cost of entry, so that the child and parent can move from "being admitted" to "being at home." It is at exactly this point that Ager and Strang's logic of bridges-bonds-links operates: intergroup bridges are strengthened by bilingual communication and shared tasks; family and diasporic bonds are stabilised by a predictable rhythm of the day; links to state structures are provided by assistants and simple procedures (Ager & Strang, 2008). When these three dimensions are stitched together, the contact effect is activated – not only psychological but normative: the school legitimises cooperation and equal treatment, which long-term studies have associated with reduced social distance and the building of trust (Allport, 1954; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006).

From this perspective, Polish institutions after 2022 function as laboratories of belonging: places where it becomes clear that effective refugee policy does not boil down to "hard" infrastructure, but requires an organic coupling of people, procedures, and languages. It is not about replacing law with "softness" but about embodying law in practices that lower thresholds on a daily basis: forms translated before translation becomes necessary; an assistant who closes a case "in one day"; a schedule of meals and rest so predictable that it ceases to be an issue. In such a paradigm, belonging does not compete with legal frameworks; it completes them by indicating what in fact determines everyday "being at home": the density and quality of contacts, predictable rhythms and recognition in language and space. This is why "soft" effects have hard consequences: they alter attendance, stabilise learning, reduce processing times, lower the number of conflicts — and in the longer term translate into the durability of adaptation.

The notion of the "laboratory of belonging" functions in sociological and pedagogical literature as a metaphor for places where relationships, a sense of safety, and recognition are created on a daily basis — conditions necessary for a person to be able to make themselves at home. The focus is not on "institutions" in the purely legal sense, but on spaces of interaction where the hospitality of the threshold is put to the test: the school office, the counsellor's room, the preschool classroom, the after-school club, the municipal office. In line with research on belonging (Antonsich, 2010; Yuval-Davis,

2011), it is precisely there that belonging appears not as a state possessed "from above" but as a practice tested in concrete contexts.

In Yuval-Davis's account, the institutional threshold is the place where the micropolitics of inclusion and exclusion unfolds every day: a conversation with the school office, enrolling a child in preschool, filling out forms, the decision to admit. Crossing the threshold means not only access to resources, but also symbolic recognition — a confirmation that "I have the right to be here" (Yuval-Davis, 2011). This dimension of recognition intertwines with procedural conditions, and together they constitute the ground on which the sense of "being at home" is built.

Antonsich proposes a distinction between the intimate (place-belongingness) and the political (politics of belonging) dimensions of belonging, and emphasises that in practice these two dimensions meet precisely in such laboratories: emotions and structures, everyday life and politics, feelings, and rules (Antonsich, 2010). From this perspective, small interventions — bilingual announcements, the presence of an intercultural assistant, flexible opening hours that are clearly stitched to family life — can act as levers of real inclusion. They do not simply "supplement" the system; they activate it.

Pedagogies of place and home studies help refine what happens in these laboratories. As hooks writes, belonging arises from small gestures of care and being-with; it is not a declaration but a practice of being together (hooks, 2009). The perspective of home-making sharpens this intuition: home is composed of rituals and things — from predictable mealtimes to the timetable — and "home-making" is relational and material work through which space becomes habitable (Blunt & Dowling, 2022). In a phenomenological sense, it is also a matter of bodily orientation: people "position themselves" in relation to corridors, desks, the office door, and this determines whether they feel "addressed" and recognised in a place (Ahmed, 2006). For this reason, the "laboratory of belonging" can be understood as a pedagogy of hospitality: learning from and with each other, in which difference becomes, not an obstacle, but a source of knowledge about the shared world; a place where care takes the form of language, objects, and rhythms; not only intentions.

This picture is further refined by humanistic geography: transforming "space" into "place" requires time, meanings, and repeated practices (Massey, 1994; Tuan, 1977). In schools this is expressed in rhythms that organise bodies and attention: bells, naps, shared meals, repeated sequences of actions. These are not trivialities – they are the politics of rhythms, through which the "here and now" ceases to be alien (Lefebvre, 2004). From this perspective, the library, after-school club, or canteen can function as "third places" where everyday co-presence reduces distance and generates tacit rules of coexistence (Oldenburg, 1989). And if we add "learning through participation" — communities of practice in which competence and belonging grow through real co-operation — we obtain a mechanism of belonging that does not require exams in "fitting in," but an invitation to co-doing (Lave & Wenger, 1991). In this sense, "laboratory"

is not an elegant metaphor but an operational one: it indicates that hospitality must be designed in the language of timespace (rhythms and layouts), relationships (bridges and bonds), and materiality (boards, forms, tables), because it is in these dimensions that belonging truly operates (Antonsich, 2010; Yuval-Davis, 2011).

Why is this picture needed today? Classical models of integration — assimilationist or "assistance-based" — do not exhaust the experiences of long-term mobility and complex identities. The metaphor of the laboratory shifts the focus from the question "do you meet the conditions?" to "how do we create conditions?" in which belonging can be produced and sustained. This shift dovetails with the concept of bridges-bonds-links: we design bridges between groups (joint tasks, bilingual communication), maintain family and diasporic bonds (a predictable rhythm of the day), and ensure open links with state structures (clear procedures, intercultural assistants) — in other words, we build the infrastructure of belonging instead of assuming that it will emerge on its own (Ager & Strang, 2008). When these three dimensions "hold together," belonging becomes experiential: in the classroom, in the after-school club, at the school office window. After 2022 in Poland, it was precisely schools, preschools, and local initiatives that most clearly showed that hospitality can have a structure — it can be programmed into rhythms, languages, and layouts of places — and that everyone benefits from this structure: refugee persons and communities who are learning to co-inhabit.

With the wave of refugees from Ukraine, educational institutions and local governments in Poland had to reorganise their work in a very short time – from admitting the first children and families, through procedural adaptation, to transforming their own rhythms of functioning so as to include new members of the community. By the end of 2025 this process, though still incomplete, had visibly shifted the system from a logic of "reception" to a logic of inclusion: building practical pathways of belonging in preschools and schools – that is, in places where everyday life "weighs" the most (Chrostowska, 2024; UNICEF, 2025).

At the level of statistics, the picture is precise. In October 2024, 195.3 thousand children and students from Ukraine were registered in the Polish education system, of whom 152.3 thousand were of school age – this is the highest level since the beginning of the full-scale war (Świdrowska & Stano, 2024). Students from Ukraine were present in 58% of Polish schools, *i.e.*, in nearly 12.5 thousand institutions; in some cities their share was clearly higher – in Wrocław it reached 7.8% of the school population, with a national average of around 4% (UNICEF, 2025). At the same time, from September 1, 2024, children and young people from Ukraine living in Poland were covered by the obligation to participate in the Polish education system (one-year preschool preparation, compulsory schooling, and compulsory education), which led to increased enrolment and a "tightening" of educational pathways (Ministerstwo Edukacji Narodowej, 2024). In European terms, Poland remained in 2025 one of the countries with the highest rate

of temporary protection beneficiaries – 27.3 per 1,000 inhabitants, which well illustrates the scale of the burden and integration challenges (Eurostat, 2025).

The transformation was not only quantitative but qualitative. Institutions introduced preparatory classes, hired intercultural assistants, and bilingual communication (Polish–Ukrainian) became the standard in many schools and preschools; beyond "hard" procedures, they also modified daily rhythms (transport logistics, afternoon support classes, translated materials for parents) so that the institutional threshold would be genuinely hospitable (Chrostowska, 2024; Ministerstwo Edukacji i Nauki, 2024). At the same time, reports noted a decrease in the proportion of students in upper-secondary schools participating in Polish as a second language (PL2) classes — from around 60% in April 2024 to 42% in October 2024 — which calls for explanation (whether this is due to formal recognition of language levels, lack of access to classes, or school overload) (UNICEF, 2025). Over this, long-standing infrastructural tensions (premises, staffing) in many municipalities, already present before 2022, required organisational and financial interventions once student numbers increased (Chrostowska, 2024).

From a comparative perspective, Poland's experience suggests several conclusions for other systems. First, the rapid establishment of policies around a "hospitable threshold" — bilingual communication, intercultural assistants, accessible procedures — reduces uncertainty and accelerates home-making among refugee families (Chrostowska, 2024; UNICEF, 2025). Second, local educational institutions have become practical laboratories of belonging, where belonging is "made" step by step, in daily rhythms and micro-interactions. Third, numbers — although important — are not enough; language, rituals, and relationships have commensurate weight in creating the sense that "here I am at home" (UNICEF, 2025). By the end of 2025, Poland was increasingly operating not in the mode of a one-off "reception," but of systemic inclusion; consolidating this course, however, requires further stabilisation of funding for bridging roles (assistants, PL2), investment in staff competences, and continuous monitoring of participation and needs (Chrostowska, 2024; Eurostat, 2025; Ministerstwo Edukacji i Nauki, 2024).

The experience of the last three years shows that home-making is not a "soft" margin of adaptation but its boundary condition. When there is no sense of familiarity with place, people, and daily rhythms, even the best-designed procedures remain reversible. In this sense, belonging ceases to be a story about emotions alone and becomes a theoretical framework for describing societies in motion: communities that are constantly learning to co-inhabit – negotiating the meanings of "being at home" and "being with others." The literature suggests that belonging is not a thing to be owned but a relation and a process: a weave of rootedness in places and people and the categorizations that enable or constrain these relationships (Antonsich, 2010; Yuval-Davis, 2011). This processual-relational turn dovetails well with the interview material: home-making starts at micro-scales — at the office threshold, in the preschool cloakroom, on the notice

board—where procedure meets care and everyday life takes precedence over abstraction. It is, therefore, not so much the "effect of a programme" as a practice of being together: over time it becomes stable enough to carry the weight of family life and education.

It is at this micro-scale that one can best see how the intimate and political dimensions of belonging intertwine in practice (Antonsich, 2010). "At the beginning it was difficult; only bilingual announcements calmed parents down," "The glossary at the entrance turned out to be more important than we thought," "When a child falls asleep peacefully in preschool, I know that they are starting to feel safe" – these three voices from the interviews are not anecdotes but indicators of a mechanism: they show that the feeling of being "in the right place" appears when the infrastructure of the institution (language, information flow, predictable rhythms) aligns with needs and emotions. Yuval-Davis's approach reminds us here of the politics of belonging: institutional thresholds are the stage of the micropolitics of recognition—this is where small decisions are made that determine whether someone feels they "have the right to be here" (Yuval-Davis, 2011). Every successful micro-intervention (a form in an understandable version, a bilingual notice on the door, a phone call to an assistant, a flexible pick-up time) undermines bureaucratic inertia and activates daily continuity.

Including the perspective of home-making strengthens this picture: "home" is not an address but an activity – assembling the world from rituals, objects, and relationships that are at hand (Blunt & Dowling, 2022). In education this happens through material details: the schedule of meals, quiet places to rest, the steady voice of an adult who leads the class in two languages. These elements anchor belonging and shift it from the level of declaration to the level of experience. At the same time, the contemporary debate on deservingness warns that belonging is often conditioned by norms of "worthiness" – hierarchies of "good/desired" newcomers seep into practices and language, forcing constant proof that one "deserves to belong" (Blachnicka-Ciacek *et al.*, 2021). This framework explains why unconditional gestures of hospitality are so important and why, alongside procedural thresholds, symbolic thresholds must also be dismantled: otherwise, the intimate dimension of belonging remains fragile.

The resulting conclusions do not boil down to a checklist of solutions but to a coherent framework of practices. First, belonging must be designed as a relational pedagogy of place: closely stitching policies and resources (frameworks, funding, staffing), together with micro-practices (gestures, language, rhythms) in the real time and space of the school. Second, home-making pathways should be read through the lens of bridges-bonds-links: bridges connecting groups, family, and diasporic bonds, and links to state structures (Ager & Strang, 2008). These three dimensions explain why intercultural assistants can "close" formalities in a single day, why bilingualism reduces cognitive stress, and why a predictable daily schedule stabilises behaviour – because each is a building block of a different segment of belonging. Third, belonging should be systematically decoupled from tests

of "worthiness": if belonging is to be durable, it must cease to be a precondition and become a common good – a practice of co-feeling and co-responsibility that functions independently of changing hierarchies of migrant valuation.

## Discussion and Conclusion

From this perspective, Poland constitutes a laboratory of belonging for Europe: not because everything has succeeded, but because in a short time lasting pathways have formed between policy and everyday life. Where institutions cease to be mere "task receivers" and become hosts of relationships, belonging starts to function like infrastructure: it carries the rhythm of life forward, makes planning possible and transforms "I am here" into "I am at home here." Understood in this way, home-making does not compete with law and procedure – it animates them, because it ensures that legal provisions become lived experience. And this is precisely why the durability of adaptation is measured today not only by enrolment or attendance rates, but by whether the everyday lives of families and schools can be smoothly stitched together: whether there is a language that connects; a rhythm that does not fall apart every morning; and relationships that "hold" the community even when the world outside continues to shift.

In conclusion, the empirical material and theoretical frameworks converge on a single image: belonging is neither a luxury nor rhetoric – it is the infrastructure of everyday life that determines the durability of adaptation. This is most clearly visible in the field of education and care: where the institutional threshold is hospitable and language and procedures "speak" to people, home-making gains momentum; where the rhythm of the day is predictable and relationships are sustained, "being admitted" shifts into "being at home." These micro-mechanisms align with what theory describes: the intimate and political dimensions of belonging meet in practice (Antonsich, 2010; Yuval-Davis, 2011), home-making anchors belonging in rituals and things (Blunt & Dowling, 2022; hooks, 2009), and the map of bridges, bonds, and links explains why bilingualism, the role of assistants, and predictable procedures have a cumulative effect on the sense of safety (Ager & Strang, 2008). In post-2022 Poland, data and experience confirm this: the scale of temporary protection and the coordinative effort of the state and local governments, bridging solutions in schools and the rapid learning of institutions, and finally the ordinary practice of the day in which legal provisions become lived experience (Chrostowska, 2024; Eurostat, 2025; Ministerstwo Edukacji i Nauki, 2024; UNHCR Poland & Deloitte Polska, 2025). If we add sensitivity to the pitfalls of "worthiness"—hierarchies that demand constant proof of the right to belong—it becomes clear that the durability of the process depends on whether recognition is treated as a condition of learning and living together, not as a reward for conformity (Blachnicka-Ciacek *et al*., 2021). In this perspective,

the Polish case remains a laboratory of belonging: not an ideal one, but sufficiently coherent to show that hospitality can be designed and maintained over time.

Thus, the conclusion is not a full stop but an invitation to continue carefully "stitching" everyday life. I show that belonging is a relational practice embedded in place; that schools and preschools can translate grand words about integration into a world of small, repeated gestures; that language, rhythm, and relationships can function as bridges and links that carry a community through times of uncertainty. The final conclusion is simple and demanding at the same time: if we want adaptation to be durable, we must continually invest in what is not visible at first glance — in a readable threshold, bilingual communication, stable bridging roles, accessible PL2, rituals that organise the day, and a culture of recognition that does not test "worthiness" but opens the possibility of being together. Only then will "I am here" remain "I am at home here," and the community — rather than being an administrative sum of enrolments — will become a space of co-habitation sustained by care and responsibility. This is work that does not end with a report or a school year; it is work that begins anew every day.

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