



Social campaign Dom PL
Summary report of implementation
Humanity in Action 2016 Fellowship – Warsaw Incubator of Ideas



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1. INTRODUCTION

Our American-Polish team has been working for 10 days on Dom PL, a social campaign addressing challenges facing immigrants and refugees in the Polish context. Although the rate of immigration in Poland is one of the lowest in EU (foreigners represent about 0,5% of Poland's inhabitants)¹, immigration is a very hot topic in the Polish media and political discourse. Unfortunately there is not enough substantive debate in the mainstream Polish media and immigrants and refugees are used very often as a tool for awaking fears of Poles. **Our goal was then to create a raising-awereness campaign targeted at middle-class Poles, mainly living in big or middle-sized cities (considering our Facebook page outreach), age scope: 16-40, who may be prone to prejudices towards foreigners based on lack of well-detailed information, dependable data, and professional research.**



1.1. KEY DEFINITIONS

- **Foreigner** - broad term encompassing all of the individuals of non-polish citizenship
- **Migrant** - a person who leaves its country of origins². According to the motivations and contexts of the departure, a more detailed typology of migration reasons may be proposed (one of the most often quoted is economic migration, meaning changing the country of stay/residence due to economic scarcity and lack of opportunities in the labour market).
- **Refugee** - legal notion established within the framework of international public law, with the core pillar being the so called "Refugee Convention" - the 1951 Refugee Geneva Convention. The document determines conditions necessary for granting refugee status (within the broader term of international protection). According to them, refugee status may be granted to people seeking international protection out of legitimate fear of persecution in their country of origin due to factors such as: race, religion, nationality, political beliefs or affiliation to a particular social group. Such a person cannot or is unwilling to seek protection in their own country due to

¹ Based on: Urząd ds. Cudzoziemców, *Ważne dokumenty, stan na 01.01.2016 r.*, Warszawa.

² *Pojęcia i definicje* [w:] <http://uchodzcy.info/infos/pojecia-i-definicje>.

those reasons. It is noteworthy that asylum seekers (people awaiting refugee status) escape from zones of severe armed conflicts, war, and persecution caused for instance by ethnic cleansing, systematic violence targetted at civil populations, or widespread inhuman treatment³.

Moreover, it has to be underlined that the right to seek refuge is considered as a fundamental human right, outlined in article 14 of Universal Human Rights Declaration - a document of international soft law, regarded by many scholars as bounding universally as the customary law.

All **asylum seekers** are bound to be protected also by **the principle of non-refoulement** which forbids nations from sending such persons back to their country of origin where the risk of persecution is considerably high. Also, it's illegal to prevent people from crossing the national borders when they declare will to seek international protection⁴.

In light of severe migration outbreaks such as the recent European migration crisis, a phenomena of **human trafficking** may occur. It should be understood as a process or activities consisting of illegal recruitment, detention transporting of people with recourse to violence, threats, ruse or financial exploitation. Human trafficking is listed as one of the most serious transnational threats to human security in the contemporary world, alongside the drugs and illicit arms trades⁵.

Due to pervasive misconceptions in the Polish public discourse and press, it is important to underline the stigmatising dimension of the concept of **"illegal" migrants**. No person seeking international protection can be defined as illegal. Migration or entry to a country without necessary documents cannot be labelled as illegal activity, suggesting that such persons are to be considered criminals. The correct notion is **"illegal residence"** whereas such migrants should be refered to as **"migrants of undocumented/irregular status"**⁶.

1.2. EUROPEAN REFUGEE CRISIS – KEY FIGURES

The ongoing refugee crisis (as labelled by press and politicians) in Europe is an outcome of complex interplay of factors: the flawed European approach to migration and asylum policy in the EU and the international context (war in Syria, the activity of ISIS, the situation in North Africa and in the Middle East, etc.). 2015 is considered the year of the outbreak of the current international crisis, with an astonishing 1,2 million asylum applications lodged in EU member states in that year⁷. According to UNHCR data, among asylum seekers coming to Europe, the majority consist of Syrians (49%), Afghans (21%), and Iraqis (8%)⁸.

In global dimension, people prone to forced migration in 2015 outnumbered the amount of 60 million, 20 millions of refugees among them. 86% of them originated from developing countries. The United Nations estimates that in 2016 Europe may receive around 20 milion asylum-seekers⁹.

³ Ibidem.

⁴ Ibidem.

⁵ Ibidem.

⁶ Ibidem.

⁷ *Obecny kryzys migracyjny* [w:] <http://uchodzcy.info/infos/obecny-kryzys-migracyjny>.

⁸ Ibidem.

⁹ Ibidem.

1.3. POLISH CONTEXT – BACKGROUND FOR THE CAMPAIGN

In light of data collected during the 2011 Polish National Census, 99,8% of Poland's population consists of persons with Polish citizenship and foreigners amount only to 0,15% of the population¹⁰. In fact, this number seems to be actually higher now, amounting the average estimated level of 0,55%. According to data from the Office for Foreigners in Poland there are 211,869 foreigners with necessary documentation of residence in our country¹¹. The level of openness of Poles towards accepting asylum-seekers is now the lowest since May 2015 - one in three respondents (33%) claims that Poland should grant temporal protection to people fleeing zones of armed conflicts, yet 61% is convinced that Poland shouldn't accept refugees at all¹². Only 4% of respondents agree that Poland should grant asylum and permit permanent residence to refugees - what can be considered as a marginal approach¹³.

In context of receiving asylum-seekers and granting the refugee status, it is within the state's interest to design a comprehensive integration programme with aim to integrate refugees into Polish society. It's important to stress that integration should always be perceived as a both-sided social process, imposing obligations on both migrants (foreigners) and local communities (citizens of the state granting protection). The ultimate goal of a principled integration is to secure the sustainability and independence of migrants in a new society in areas such as housing, social & health care, access to education and labour market, bearing in mind the principle of equality of citizens and migrants. In Poland, the process of shaping of the integration programme remains in capacity of the Ministry for Family, Labour and Social Policy. The most recent strategy was outlined in a policy paper "Polish policy of foreigners' integration - aims and guidelines" from 2013¹⁴.

Moreover, it remains vital to underline that Poland as member state of the European Union is a part of European Common Asylum System, founded on the basis of so called Dublin Regulations (III currently in force) and the Schengen Information System (SIS II which permits to maintain databases of identity data of migrants). The Dublin Regulation's primary aim is to determine the state responsible for processing of asylum applications when an asylum-seeker enters the EU.

Mrs. Agnieszka Kosowicz, head of Polish Migration Forum, stresses that for last 15 years work with migrants and refugees was a complete niche, absent from public debate and awareness. Significant changes in the discourse were seen in August/September 2015. Currently there is a shortage of meaningful debates on Poland's migration policy, with politicians tend playing antimigrant tones in order to get votes.

¹⁰ Soral W. [et al.], *Stosunek Polaków do imigrantów oraz jego korelaty – na podstawie Polskiego Sondażu Uprzedzeń 2013*, Centrum Badań nad Uprzedzeniami, Warszawa 2014.

¹¹ Urząd ds. Cudzoziemców, op. cit.

¹² Centrum Badania Opinii Społecznej, *O kryzysie migracyjnym po zamachach w Brukseli, Komunikat z badań nr 69/2016*, Warszawa 2016.

¹³ Centrum Badania Opinii Społecznej, *Stosunek Polaków do przyjmowania uchodźców, Komunikat z badań nr 24/2016*, Warszawa 2016.

¹⁴ *Sytuacja uchodźców w Polsce* [w:] <http://uchodzcy.info/infos/sytuacja-uchodzcow-w-polsce>.

2. Dom PL - AN INSIGHT INTO IMPLEMENTATION

2.1. FROM CONCEPT TO TANGIBLE REALISATION

The concept for the Dom PL was born out of the concern to produce a counternarrative to recent widespread negativity towards foreigners in the Polish public discourse. We theorized that the rise of radical nationalistic rhetoric in Poland, mixed with policy of fear-mongering and poor quality of media messages, were founded in a common fear of “the Other”. Our team decided to deal with this problem with a campaign proposing a positive approach to the presence of foreigners in Poland. Instead of concentrating on the hate speech, discrimination, and many obstacles that immigrants in Poland face every day, we wanted to emphasize the common ground held by all who live in Poland, regardless of origins. Out of this hope to fight against the negative public opinion of refugees and migrants by sharing positive representations of newcomers to Poland using social media, mainly photos and video, we conceptualised the message of our action. The goal became then to show that Poland may be a home for all of the people that consider it as such, regardless of their various origins and backgrounds.

2.2. EXPERIENCES IN IMPLEMENTATION

Phases of implementation:

- brainstorming on the general concept, brand and the slogan
- getting in touch with Polish Migration Forum in order to gain some advices
- creating the brand of the project along with invitations (in Polish, Russian and English) which were then sent to NGOs working with migrants and foreigners
- contacting networks of friends and professionals in the field of integration policy
- participation in events in course of the International Refugee Day (i.e. Migrant Tram, Human Library) as well as attending at Etno Liga tournament
- conducting interviews in the streets of Warsaw
- conducting research in statistical data on the immigration issue in Poland
- launch of the campaign on Facebook
- Editing of graphic materials



We asked each participant of our campaign a simple question: *What do you love about Poland?* Honest responses of Poles, immigrants, and refugees showed us that sometimes we, as a society, focus too much on the differences between people instead of looking for similarities that can be a first step for starting a dialogue. By sharing such positive representations and the human face of “the Others”, we hope to fight against the negative public opinion of refugees and migrants and the perception of those who were not born in Poland as eternal outsiders.

The main challenge was to approach refugees in Warsaw, as they aren't always willing to be featured in such public initiatives due to the fear of persecution from the political regime they escaped or risk of stigma in Poland. With empathy towards this issue, we proposed in each case not to disclose the identity of a person interviewed.

It appeared nevertheless very helpful to use networks build during the fellowship, such as the Conflict Kitchen team or Fundacja dla Wolności. One of our most satisfying experiences was a spontaneous visit to the Multicultural Centre, where we got to know the founder of Poland's Amnesty International Office and the founder of Foundation ADULIS.

Over the course of the campaign we all became graphic designers, film-makers, photographers, and detectives looking for the people who would like to join our campaign. Our number one enemy was time - we would have loved to have had more time and to engage more people with the project. With more time we may also have been able to establish ourselves more officially in order to gain the trust of a broader range of participants. We certainly faced a fair amount of rejection, especially when soliciting people on the streets, and sometimes a bit of suspicion, though no experience was ever terribly unpleasant.

With every new meeting with our amazing participants, we became more addicted to our idea! It was a great pleasure to see smiles on their faces and to hear their opinions about the project. Although it is a small social campaign thanks to them we got to know that we are doing something really important. And in spite of the tiredness (and occasional discouragement) it was really a great time.

3. CONCLUSIONS AND LESSONS LEARNED

We are certainly happy to have developed a positive and heartwarming narrative of our initiative which could be used as a strong innovation in current political debate about immigration in Poland, the refugee crisis but also in a wider context of Polish identity. Our action's most powerful message seems to be conveyed by the video which encompasses almost all of the answers received during the interviews.

We remain assured that there is a potential to be explored within the scope of the campaign, as the video could be used on social media, in public institutions or even in schools or public transportation in Warsaw. It could serve as a trigger for meaningful discussion about integration, showcasing individual stories that prove the success of foreigners' sense of belonging to collective Polish identity. The simple question *What do you love about Poland* is catchy and doesn't imply the refugee/immigration issue at first sight, thus could be shared with various audiences and recipients in our country.



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