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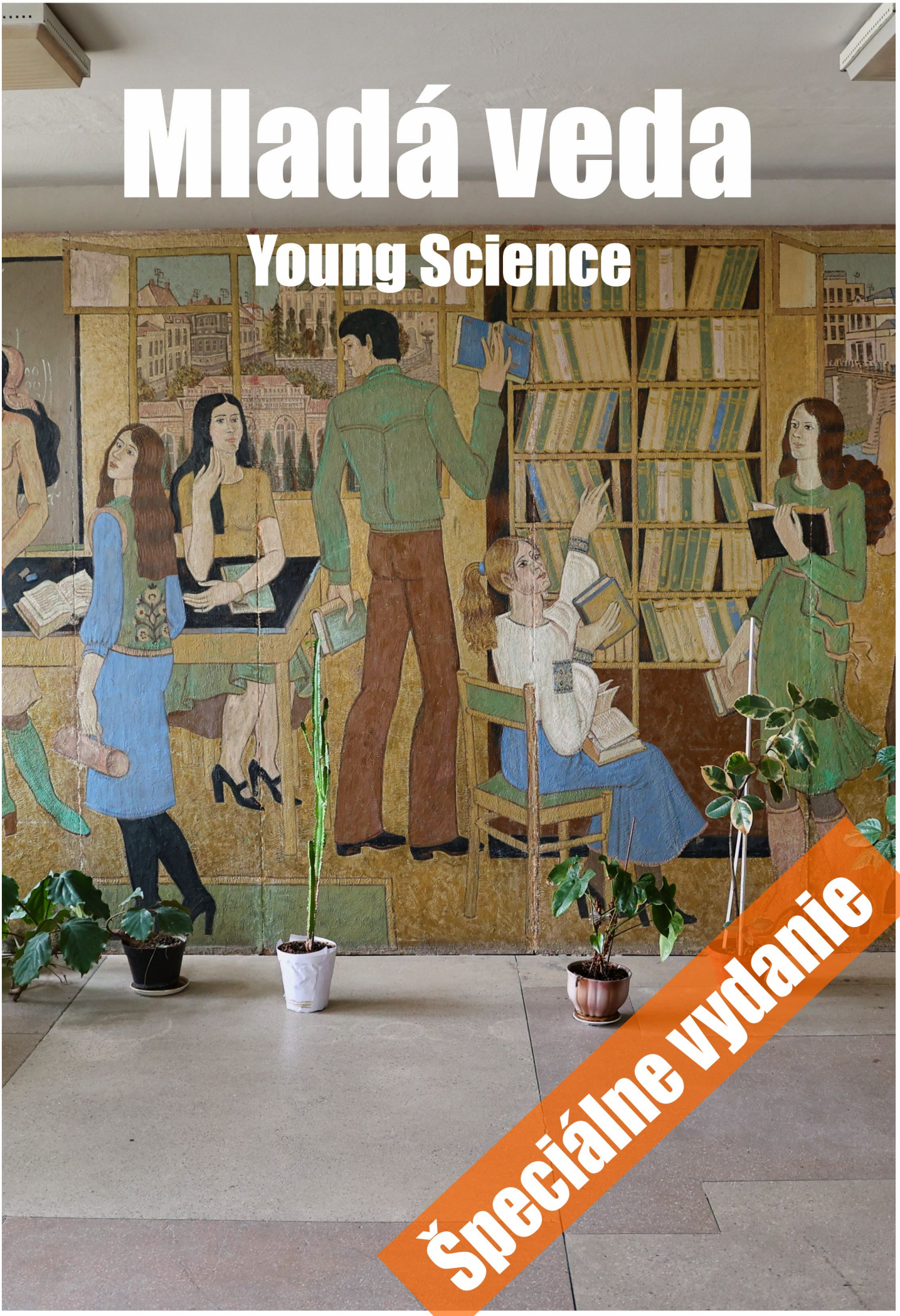
# Mladá veda

## Young Science



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# Mladá veda
## Young Science

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# PREDHOVOR K ŠPECIÁLNEMU ČÍSLU

**Miroslava Knapková**

Rok 2022 predstavoval pre európske vysoké školstvo zásadný medzník. Agresia Ruskej federácie voči Ukrajine vyvolala bezprecedentný pohyb obyvateľstva, ktorého súčasťou boli aj desaťtisíce ukrajinských študentov nútených prerušiť svoj študijný či profesijný život. Európske univerzity sa okamžite ocitli v situácii, ktorá presiahla rámec bežnej internacionalizácie a vyžadovala komplexné riešenia v oblasti inklúzie, podpory a adaptácie študentov-utečencov. Práve v tejto súvislosti vznikol projekt EIUS: European Inclusion of Ukrainian Students, ktorého hlavným cieľom je vytvoriť vedecky podložené poznatky o podmienkach adaptácie, potrebách študentov a efektivite systémových opatrení v rôznych európskych krajinách.

Špeciálne číslo časopisu Mladá veda, ktoré máte pred sebou, je jedným z výsledkom tohto projektu. Predstavuje ucelený súbor teoretických, analytických a empirických príspevkov, v ktorých sa prelínajú právne, sociologické, ekonomické, pedagogické a interkultúrne perspektívy.

Cieľom tohto špeciálneho čísla je poskytnúť viacvrstvový pohľad na inklúziu ukrajinských študentov, ktorý presahuje rámec okamžitej humanitárnej reakcie a ponúka hlbšie porozumenie dlhodobým procesom – od jazykovej a sociálnej adaptácie až po legislatívne aspekty, ekonomické dopady a subjektívne skúsenosti študentov v rozličných európskych kontextoch.

Tematicky možno texty zaradiť do niekoľkých hlavných oblastí:

- Makroúroveň európskej a národnej reakcie na príchod ukrajinských študentov – právne, inštitucionálne, politické a spoločenské rámce; kritické hodnotenie postupov jednotlivých krajín.
- Mikroúroveň univerzitných opatrení a každodenných integračných procesov – skúsenosti študentov, zamestnancov a podporných tímov; opatrenia fakúlt a univerzít.
- Sociálno-psychologické a kultúrne dimenzie integrácie – jazykové motivácie, pocit prijatia, adaptačné stratégie, sociálna izolácia a interkultúrna komunikácia.
- Ekonomické a pracovnoprávne súvislosti – dopady vojny na trh práce, prístup študentov a utečencov k zamestnaniu, pracovnoprávne obmedzenia a bariéry.
- Inovatívne prístupy k podpore inklúzie – storytelling, hodnotovo orientované prístupy, právo na vzdelanie, prevencia izolácie a posilňovanie komunitnej kohézie.

Spolu tieto články vytvárajú konzistentný vedecký celok, ktorý približuje rôzne dimenzie príchodu ukrajinských študentov do Európy. Od analytických a právnych štúdií až po empirické výskumy a prípadové štúdie prinášajú autori komplexné poznatky o výzvach, potrebách aj možnostiach, ktoré tento historický moment prináša európskemu vysokému školstvu.

Zároveň jednotlivé príspevky poukazujú na to, že úspešná inklúzia nie je len technickým procesom, ale vyžaduje si hodnotovo orientovaný prístup, rešpektovanie

kultúrnych špecifík, systematickú podporu duševného zdravia a najmä citlivú, na dôkazoch založenú akademickú politiku.

V mene riešiteľského tímu projektu EIUS vyjadrujem poďakovanie všetkým autorom a recenzentom za ich odborný prínos a mimoriadne úsilie. Verím, že toto špeciálne číslo prispeje k lepšiemu porozumeniu procesov, ktoré formujú európsky akademický priestor v období významných spoločenských zmien, a stane sa podnetom pre ďalší výskum aj praktické opatrenia v oblasti inkluzívnej internacionalizácie.

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# STUDYING TOGETHER: UKRAINIAN STUDENTS' INTEGRATION IN POLISH HIGHER EDUCATION

ŠTUDUJEME SPOLOČNE: INTEGRÁCIA UKRAJINSKÝCH ŠTUDENTOV V POĽSKOM VYSOKOM ŠKOLSTVE

**Valentyna Boksha, Dana Stadnyk[1]**

Autorky článku študujú na Fakulte prírodných a technických vied Univerzity v Rzeszówe v Poľsku. Majú praktické a osobné skúsenosti s inklúziou ukrajinských študentov vo vysokoškolskom prostredí.

The authors of the article study at the Faculty of Science and Technology, University of Rzeszów in Poland. They have practical and personal experience with the inclusion of Ukrainian students in higher education.

**Abstract**

The article explores the experiences of two Ukrainian students studying Informatics and Econometrics at the University of Rzeszów after the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022. Drawing on research about international student integration, intercultural relations, and language proficiency, the authors combine empirical insights with personal reflection to identify key factors that facilitate or hinder integration within Polish higher education. The main enablers include shared academic goals, everyday peer contact, structured language support, clear cultural guidance, and inclusive campus activities. The authors emphasize the importance of transparent teamwork rules, intentional mixing of domestic and international students, and the development of intercultural competence. They also highlight common barriers—particularly language and implicit norms—and propose practical ways to overcome them through mentoring, tandem programs, and adaptation workshops. The study concludes that integration is a mutual, ongoing process: working and studying side by side with Polish peers not only enhances learning outcomes but also fosters belonging, trust, and a shared sense of academic community.

Key words: Students integration, intercultural education, language barriers, academic collaboration

**Abstrakt**

Článok skúma skúsenosti dvoch ukrajinských študentiek, ktoré študujú informatiku a

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ekonometriu na Univerzite v Rzeszówe po vypuknutí vojny na Ukrajine v roku 2022. Autorky, opierajúc sa o výskumy o integrácii zahraničných študentov, medzi kultúrnych vzťahoch a jazykovej kompetencii, spájajú empirické poznatky s vlastnými skúsenosťami, aby identifikovali faktory, ktoré podporujú alebo brzdia integráciu v poľskom akademickom prostredí. Kľúčové prvky podpory zahŕňajú spoločné akademické ciele, každodenný kontakt s rovesníkmi, štruktúrovanú jazykovú podporu, jasné kultúrne smernice a inkluzívne podujatia. Autorky zdôrazňujú význam transparentných pravidiel tímovej práce, zámerného spájania domácich a zahraničných študentov a rozvíjanie medzi kultúrnych kompetencií. Upozorňujú tiež na prekážky – najmä jazykové a normatívne – a navrhujú praktické riešenia prostredníctvom mentoringu, tandemových programov a adaptačných školení. Štúdia uzatvára, že integrácia je vzájomný a nepretržitý proces: spoločné štúdium a spolupráca s poľskými spolužiakmi nielen zlepšujú výsledky učenia, ale aj posilňujú pocit spolupatričnosti, dôvery a spoločnej akademickej identity.
Kľúčové slová: Integrácia študentov, medzi kultúrne vzdelávanie, jazykové bariéry, akademická spolupráca

## Introduction

Since the full-scale war in 2022, Poland has hosted one of Europe's largest inflows of Ukrainian learners across schools and universities, intensifying the longer trend of internationalisation in Polish higher education. Evidence from international-student research is strikingly consistent on what matters for successful integration: (a) regular contact with host-national peers — even "weak ties" like casual classmates — strongly predicts cultural and social satisfaction; (b) a supportive, intercultural teaching climate and sense of belonging are linked to better academic and psychological outcomes; and (c) language proficiency is a persistent threshold for full participation in seminars, group projects, and campus life. We take these findings as our baseline and then examine how they play out in our daily reality as third-year students of Informatics & Econometrics in Rzeszów, outlining what has worked, where frictions remain, and what simple interventions could make a difference this semester.

## Research methodology

In this article, a qualitative approach was adopted, based on the authors' in-depth analysis of the studied phenomenon. A significant portion of the presented descriptions, interpretations, and conclusions was developed on the basis of the authors' direct observations and reflections resulting from their empirical involvement in the explored subject matter. This perspective enables a holistic and contextual understanding of the examined issues, facilitating a deeper insight into their dynamics and determinants. The authors, however, remain aware of the cognitive limitations arising from the subjective nature of the applied research method.

The applied research procedures included an analysis of the relevant literature and a critical review of academic sources obtained from reputable databases such as ejournals.eu, ceo.org.pl, as well as from the digital resources of the University of Rzeszów and other selected Polish scientific repositories. The selection of sources was purposeful and aimed at obtaining materials of high substantive value, allowing for a multifaceted analysis of the studied problem.

**Shared educational goals with Polish students — and why they matter (our view + evidence)**

At the simplest level, our goals match those of our Polish classmates: master the syllabus, pass the hardest exams, ship working projects, and graduate with skills employers trust. In Informatics & Econometrics this translates into clean code, reproducible analyses, well-specified models, and team workflows that meet real deadlines. Sharing that "task frame" lowers cultural friction: everyone is chasing the same deliverables, so roles, sprints, and evaluation criteria are legible to all.

The pay-off of working toward common goals in mixed (Polish–Ukrainian) teams is not just social - it is cognitive. Meta-analytic evidence shows that culturally diverse teams can outperform monocultural ones on complex, non-routine work because they bring complementary knowledge, alternative heuristics, and richer debate - key ingredients for creativity and high-quality decisions when the task is hard and interdependent (Hong and Page, 2004). Crucially, the benefits appear when teams have clear structures (defined roles, transparent assessment, shared artifacts like glossaries) that turn diversity from "noise" into information.

In higher education specifically, studies on intercultural group work find that, while coordination costs exist at first (different communication styles; uneven language confidence), diverse course teams ultimately report gains in creativity, problem-solving, and teamwork skills - provided expectations are explicit and support is available (e.g., model rubrics, peer-mentor check-ins, mixed-nationality project rules) (Popov et al., 2012). That mirrors our experience: once our courses made roles and grading transparent, the "diversity dividend" showed up in better models and clearer presentations.

A second mechanism is friendships and "weak ties" with host-national peers (Summers a Volet, 2008). Longitudinal work on international–host student networks shows that even casual classroom ties with domestic students predict higher cultural and social satisfaction for internationals and smoother collaboration on assignments - effectively accelerating integration into the shared academic goal system (Hong a Page, 2004). In our projects, those weak ties looked simple (a Polish teammate sharing a concise reporting template, or a two-minute vocabulary check before a seminar) but had outsized effects on our performance and confidence.

Finally, when we connect the evidence to practice, three design choices consistently multiply the benefits of shared goals in mixed teams (Page, 2007): (1) explicit task definitions and role rotation (leader, reviewer, "terminology checker"); (2) shared artifacts that reduce ambiguity (glossaries, code style guides, rubric examples); and (3) assessment that recognizes individual contributions within team outputs. Research and our own results converge: with those scaffolds in place, mixed Polish–Ukrainian teams learn faster and produce stronger work than either group alone (Summers a Volet, 2008).

**How cultural diversity enriches our learning on a Polish campus**

Cultural diversity isn't background noise; it's a learning resource. Research across education and organizations shows that heterogeneous groups surface more perspectives, test assumptions more rigorously, and produce better solutions on complex tasks - provided the

work is structured (clear roles, rubrics, shared artifacts). Classic and contemporary findings (from computational models to field studies) point to the same mechanism: diversity expands the pool of heuristics, which improves problem-solving when tasks are non-routine and interdependent.[2] We feel this directly in mixed Polish - Ukrainian teams: debates are livelier, the code reviews sharper, and our final models withstand tougher questions.

Intercultural education literature adds the "how." Deardorff's widely used process model frames intercultural competence as a cycle—attitudes (openness, curiosity) → knowledge/skills (listening, interpreting) → internal outcomes (adaptability) → external outcomes (effective, appropriate communication) (Deardorff, 2006). When courses nudge this cycle—e.g., by requiring perspective-taking in peer review - international teams don't just "get along"; they learn more. That maps onto our seminars: guided prompts ("argue the other side," "translate the result for a non-specialist") consistently raise the quality of both analysis and presentation.

Social networks matter too. Studies on international students show that ties with host-national peers—especially "weak ties" like casual classmates—predict higher satisfaction and smoother academic adjustment. In practice, those micro-bridges are simple: borrowing a local template for lab reports, a two-minute terminology check before class, or an invitation to a student club. Each small contact accelerates belonging and reduces the costs of coordination in diverse teams. Combined with evidence from intergroup-contact meta-analyses (contact reduces prejudice when common goals and cooperative tasks are present), this is a strong case for intentionally mixing teams and designing courses around shared goals (Volet a Mansfield, 2006).

**The language barrier in everyday interactions — what it looks like and what works**

For us, the barrier is rarely one big obstacle; it's dozens of micro-frictions that compound: missing a joke in the corridor, holding back a question during a fast seminar, or misreading a requirement and fixing it at 1 a.m. The practical threshold we felt is moving from "survival Polish" to an independent-user level (roughly CEFR B1–B2). Below that level, you communicate, but self-edit so much that you avoid spontaneous discussions and leadership roles; around B2, you can interact with enough fluency and spontaneity to participate on equal footing in regular exchanges with native speakers. That description aligns closely with the Council of Europe's CEFR "can-do" descriptors and higher-education practice notes.

Evidence also shows that proficiency is not only a classroom issue but a social one: it predicts adjustment, belonging, and the confidence to collaborate with host-national peers—who, in turn, act as accelerators of integration. Systematic reviews and longitudinal studies link better language skills to smoother academic and social adaptation; conversely, insufficient proficiency and information gaps deter participation in international opportunities. What helped most on our campus were low-cost, high-leverage supports tied to real tasks: (1) structured language classes integrated with study skills (note-taking, oral-exam rehearsal, "translate the assignment" drills); (2) peer "tandems" with Polish students (short, regular meetings focused on vocabulary for upcoming labs); and (3) small instructional design choices - slides shared in advance, a shared doc for "parked" questions during class, and a

rotating “terminology checker” in team projects. Research on tandem programs (including Polish cases and e-tandem formats) reports gains in communicative confidence and intercultural competence, which we felt directly: once our tandem routine started, we asked more questions in real time and needed fewer late-night fixes (Council of Europe, 2020).

Finally, technical precision matters in Informatics & Econometrics: one verb (“implement” vs. “outline”) or noun (“assumption” vs. “assertion”) can invert a task. We keep a living “lab glossary” per course and include a two-minute terminology checkpoint at the start of meetings. It sounds trivial, but it reduces rework and subtly changes identity dynamics: you stop being “the international student” and become “the quality gate.” Studies on intercultural teaching and interaction willingness echo this pattern: clear scaffolds plus supportive peer environments raise participation and lower the social costs of speaking up (O’Dowd, 2018).

**When unfamiliar norms and values get in the way — and how to bridge them**

Language is only half the story; norms do the rest. In our first months we misread a few “unwritten rules”: that many Polish courses prize concise, well-scaffolded answers over “thinking aloud”; that emailing a lecturer is fine - but a short, respectful format is expected; that team projects assume early role allocation and steady week-by-week progress (not a last-minute sprint). None of these are right or wrong; they’re just tacit. Without making them explicit, students burn time, confidence, and sometimes grades. The intercultural-pedagogy literature is clear on the remedy: make expectations visible. Simple artefacts - one-page “course etiquette” sheets, sample emails, model rubrics, and a default sprint plan - function as bridges for international and domestic students alike. Guidance for faculty stresses stating classroom agreements and values up front, precisely to reduce ambiguity for learners from diverse backgrounds.

Universities can also externalise cultural context beyond the classroom. We’ve seen effective practices like “Cultural Orientation in Poland” workshops (e.g., at the University of Warsaw) that introduce local communication styles, everyday academic etiquette, and tips for working in multicultural groups (Zhang a Goodson, 2011). These low-cost sessions equip newcomers with shared references so they don’t have to learn norms by trial and error.

There’s a social layer, too. Intergroup-contact research (spanning 500+ studies) shows that frequent, positive contact under common goals and cooperation reliably reduces bias and anxiety between groups - exactly the conditions of a well-designed course team (Zhang a Goodson, 2011). When instructors deliberately mix teams, align them on shared deliverables, and back the work with authority (clear rules, supportive grading), they activate the “contact effect”: less friction, more trust, better collaboration. For us, that translated into quicker decisions, bolder questions in Polish, and stronger presentations.

Finally, institutional signals matter. European reports note that targeted supports for inclusion (peer mentoring, structured orientation, transparent assessment) are most effective when they’re systematic rather than ad-hoc (Carroll a Ryan, 2005). National agencies in Poland (e.g., NAWA) and EU-level initiatives (Erasmus+/EHEA policy work) already encourage such practices; campuses that join the dots—courses, mentoring, orientation—see

smoother retention and integration. In short: make norms explicit, design for mixed teams, and scaffold peer contact. The rest follows.

**Support programs: what exists, what we use, and what's still missing**

Across Poland, universities and national agencies stood up a lot of targeted support after 2022. At system level, the Act of 12 March 2022 granted people under temporary protection access to higher education and relevant scholarships/loans, while the Polish National Agency for Academic Exchange (NAWA) launched **"Solidarity with Ukraine"** (NAWA), enabling universities to host Ukrainian students and PhD candidates and fund cooperation with Ukrainian institutions. These measures were implemented on many campuses and in alliances; examples include University of Warsaw projects and scholarships at Adam Mickiewicz University.

On the ground, universities also built orientation and adaptation offers. A visible model is the University of Warsaw's *Welcome Point* with adaptation workshops and intercultural-communication training—exactly the kind of early "how things work here" guidance that reduces trial-and-error for newcomers (https://welcome.uw.edu.pl/). EU-level reviews (Eurydice/EUA; European Court of Auditors) likewise highlight language training, reserved places, mentoring schemes, and systematic inclusion supports as effective pillars—when delivered consistently rather than ad-hoc (Eurydice, 2022).

Our usage and experience. We benefited most from three low-cost supports (European Court of Auditors, 2024):

- Language + study-skills classes linked to real coursework (note-taking, oral-exam rehearsal);
- Peer tandems/mentoring with Polish students, which gave us vocabulary for labs and social "bridges";
- Administrative clarity (who to contact, what documents, timelines). When these exist and are easy to find, integration accelerates; when they're scattered across websites, students simply miss them.

Local data also supports this report that accessible information and peer mentoring at the University of Rzeszów significantly accelerate integration (Barwińska-Małajowicz et al., 2024).

**The opportunities that studying in Poland opens for Ukrainian students**

For Ukrainian students like us, Poland is not only a safe place to continue higher education—it's a springboard.

Polish curricula in Informatics & Econometrics balance theory with practice: statistics and econometrics are tied to labs in R/Python, and many courses culminate in team projects, posters, or mini-papers. This structure rewards initiative: if you push a project a bit further (clean repo, reproducible code, short methods note), lecturers often invite you to present at a student conference or submit to a faculty bulletin. Mixed Polish–Ukrainian teams have an edge here—different perspectives generate stronger research questions and clearer explanations for non-specialists.

Universities and municipal ecosystems host meetups, hackathons, and job fairs where you can talk to tech firms, banks, and analytics teams. Even a single weekend hackathon builds two assets at once: a concrete portfolio artifact (repo + demo) and a local network of peers who later pass along internship tips. Many companies in Poland offer short paid internships or project-based engagements during the semester; the workload is typically compatible with studies if you plan sprints well.

Advancing from classroom Polish to workplace Polish (e.g., stand-up updates, client emails, presentation Q&A) multiplies options. We found that pairing B2-level Polish with strong English makes you "bilingual operational" on mixed teams: you can read regulations and write internal notes in Polish, while documenting code and presenting in English when needed. That versatility is valued by employers serving both domestic and EU clients.

Poland has active student research clubs (koła naukowe), volunteering hubs, and entrepreneurship societies. Joining one early pays compounding returns: you practice soft skills (moderating, timeboxing, feedback) and gain visible leadership lines for your CV. It also lowers the psychological barrier to approaching faculty for supervision or references.

Being in the EU means mobility windows—summer schools, visiting semesters, joint projects. For us, that translates into realistic pathways: one semester abroad for comparative courses, then back to Poland to finish our thesis with a broader literature base and contacts for data access.

**Potential consequences of intercultural conflicts for peer relations and campus climate — and a de-escalation playbook**

Why it matters. Unresolved intercultural frictions don't just "hurt feelings"; they reshape how teams function and how safe campus feels. In coursework, conflict can stall coordination (missed deadlines, uneven participation), suppress voice (students stop asking questions), and lower performance via mechanisms like stereotype threat—the fear of confirming a negative stereotype—which is linked to measurable drops in test performance and classroom participation. At the climate level, recurring microaggressions (subtle slights or dismissals) correlate with poorer well-being and disengagement, which in turn depresses collaboration and attendance. The inverse is also well evidenced: structured, positive intergroup contact—shared goals, cooperation, normed support—reduces bias and improves cross-group trust, which restores team effectiveness and campus belonging.

Academic consequences (Nadal, 2011) (what we've seen + what research predicts):

- Teamwork breakdown: conflict plus ambiguity → role confusion, "free-riding," last-minute sprints, lower grades. Studies of intercultural group work report early coordination costs unless expectations and roles are explicit.
- Lower participation & idea loss: students who anticipate bias contribute less in seminars and code reviews; stereotype threat effects can quietly erode outcomes on complex tasks.

Social consequences (Steele and Aronson, 1995):

- Trust deficits: repeated microaggressions reduce willingness to collaborate across groups and are associated with stress and worse mental-health indicators among affected students. That disengagement reverberates into clubs and labs.

- Campus climate drift: when incidents go unaddressed, norms reset toward silence; newcomers rely on co-national networks only, which fragments classes and weakens learning benefits of diversity.

**Conclusion**

Studying side by side with Polish classmates has taught us that integration is not an abstract ideal but a daily practice built from three pillars: shared academic goals, explicit supports, and repeated, positive contact. When courses make expectations visible (clear roles, rubrics, small language scaffolds), mixed Polish–Ukrainian teams don't merely "get along"—they solve harder problems and present stronger work. That matches decades of evidence that structured intergroup contact reduces bias and improves cooperation, and that language proficiency unlocks both classroom participation and social belonging.

Above all, integration is mutual. Our friendships and "weak ties" with Polish peers—sharing a report template, walking a new route across campus, or debugging a model together—turned unfamiliar terrain into a place we now call ours. The research is clear, and so is our experience: when universities align goals, guidance, and contact, everyone learns more—and belongs more.

*This article was recommended for publication in the scientific journal Young Science by:*
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