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The Result of the Meeting of Voluntary Migrants with Forced Migrants at the Volunteering Background – Research Report

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ABSTRACT

The aim of the paper is to present the specificity of voluntary work of Erasmus+ Spanish students (voluntary migrants) in aid of children in Polish primary schools attended by foreigners (often forced migrants). The first – theoretical part of the text presents the outline of migration issues, including forced and educational migration as well as voluntary work. The second part of the text shows methodological assumptions of qualitative research, which was conducted using the method of individual cases in June 2022 among Spanish volunteers working on behalf of the Dialog Foundation in Bialystok, Poland. Chosen research results concerning the activities undertaken by the volunteers, their motivation to act and the multilateral benefits from their work have been shown. In the light of the results of the research, Spanish volunteers contributed to the integration of pupils in the primary schools, in which they conducted workshops. The results of the research may hopefully be useful to develop further educational research concerning volunteering in aid of children in an intercultural environment.

KEYWORDS:

voluntary migrants, forced migrants, volunteering, Erasmus+ programme, primary schools, Spanish students, war in Ukraine

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Introduction

The last few years have dramatically affected human lives. Health crisis concerning Covid-19, economic crises, migration crises as well as the war in Ukraine are just the examples. We live in the times of non-obviousness, when new dangers lurk around the corner. At the same time, globalization processes make people move more and more often, changing their places of residence. There are many reasons for migration, such as a desire to improve the economic situation of the family or a trip for educational purposes, e.g. under the Erasmus+ programme. There is also a large group of migrants who are forced to leave, because of persecution or armed conflicts in their countries. In the article, we present an interesting example of a meeting between voluntary and forced migrants and the results of this meeting. The purpose of this text is to present the specificity of work of Spanish Erasmus+ students – voluntary migrants, in aid of pupils from primary schools in Bialystok attended by foreigners, including forced migrants i.e. refugees from Ukraine.

Migrations – definitions, causes and types

The movement of people from one place to another is very common in society. This is a popular phenomenon that has many effects, both positive and negative. Of course, this process also has its reasons, it is usually related to various life situations, social aspects, etc. Migration is a form of mobility that consists in changing one's permanent place of residence. The word migration comes from the Latin word "*migratio*", which means resettlement. Nowadays, migrations are defined as "the process of spatial displacement of people, change of place of residence (stay) of people who move from the place of origin (place of departure) to the place of destination (place of arrival)" (*Nowa Encyklopedia Powszechna PWN*, 1996, p. 214).

Such demographic, spatial displacement of the population physically affects society, both the individuals who migrate, but also the communities, to which these people arrive. According to Eisenstadt (1953), migration is a kind of physical transition, which is associated with abandoning one environment, in which one lives, and moving, changing the environment to another, which, importantly, differs from the previous one. Such forms of population mobility lead to development, as well as to the identification of individuals with each other. The presence of dissimilarity is associated with the emergence of changes and conflicts. Therefore, it is worth remembering that migrations arise for many different reasons and causes. Migrations are the subject of interest in many scientific fields. For example, great interest in this process lies at the heart of economics or law (Winiecka, 2016).

Migrations can be divided into internal – concerning the area of one's own country, and external – changing the place outside the borders of one's country. For the sake of this article, we would mainly focus on foreign migrations. Migrations are determined by various aspects. One of them may be voluntariness or lack of voluntariness of the mobility, depending on the fact if a migration is voluntary or forced. A free-will decision is made by an individual or a group of people, who autonomously decide to change their place of residence. Usually, such a voluntary decision should not be related to the political situation of the country, unlike forced migration. According to the United Nations Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, (1951), people who are outside their country of origin for reasons of feared persecution, conflict, generalized violence, or other circumstances that have seriously disturbed public order and, as a result, require international protection are called refugees.

Another axis that is important in terms of perception and type of migration is the goal. In this respect, mobility can be divided into economic and non-economic migrations. On the one hand, migrants want to improve their economic situation, whether in an individual context or to improve the material life of their entire family, and this is when economic migration occurs. Non-economic migrations appear when migrants are motivated by their individual and personal desires, needs such as; learning, freedom, the need to change their environment. Although it is worth mentioning that in reality, the economic area is often connected with the non-economic area. Another criterion is the duration of the movement process. Zofia Kawczyńska-Butrym (2009) divides migration into periodic, settlement that is short-term, and seasonal, circular that is long-term. Such a division is related to the length of stay of migrants outside their original place of residence (Walczak, 2016).

Migrations can be considered from many different levels: economic, political, psychological or historical (Danilewicz, 2010). When it comes to the psychological aspect, migrations are related to identity and awareness, economically, the mobility of the population brings changes and certain consequences, e.g. regarding the labour market. Historically, the movement of people has shaped the world, culture. The economic issue is often related to earnings, the political issue, to elections, the situation of the country compared to other countries.

Educational migrations as an example of non-economic migrations

Non-economic foreign migrations for educational purposes constitute an interesting category. This type of migration may occur when an individual feels the desire or the need to continue or start their education abroad, outside the country of their current residence, recognizing that there are better educational opportunities in another

country. International learning mobility is defined as transnational mobility, which aims to enable the acquisition of new knowledge, skills, development of intercultural competences, as well as learning a foreign language (*Green Paper*, 2009). This form of activity is conducive to both young people, students who have decided to take part in such mobility, but also brings positive experiences for the staff, who work with young people and take part in their upbringing and education. Getting to know different cultures or languages opens societies to differences, draws attention to common features. Participants' individual educational and professional paths are shaped. Thanks to such mobility, education brings the possibility of cooperation, participation and exchange of experiences. New ideas and solutions appear, and thus innovation develops, etc. And the programme that particularly supports international educational mobility is Erasmus+. This programme pays attention to the development in the field of mobility through the cooperation of various partner organisations by completing part of the studies at a selected partner university, conducting internships, apprenticeships, participation in lectures conducted by experts (Kubaczyk, 2015).

Students' mobility activities should be combined with the European Erasmus programme. Its beginnings date back to 1987, but it has been operating as a separate programme called "Erasmus+" since 2014. Its main assumptions include establishing cooperation between individual higher education institutions from different countries, exchange of experience and joint search for more effective solutions, concepts of action in the field of education by academic teachers, enabling and facilitating students to study abroad (Narkiewicz-Niedbalec & Kołodziejska, 2015).

The exchange of views, ideas and cooperation between people from different backgrounds with different cultures and realities of life is conducive to innovation. Consequently, in the long term, this programme is to result in the development of science and higher education, as well as the economic development of European countries. More than 30 European countries participate in it, including not only EU Member States. This is a specific type of exchange that has many positive effects, not only for universities or countries. Each student, as an individual participating in the programme, reaps many benefits. The trip is an opportunity to broaden the horizons in perceiving the world, to open up to new perspectives of thinking, to draw valuable elements from foreign cultures. This leads to personality development, enriches competences useful on the labour market, such as the ability to cooperate, conduct dialogue, work out compromises, tolerance towards differences, courage, communication in a foreign language and other specific skills useful in particular professions. Erasmus + programme pays special attention to the Key Competences for Lifelong Learning – a concept presented by European Commission (2018), including knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed for personal fulfilment and development, employability, social inclusion and active citizenship. It is often a challenge that makes young

people overcome their own barriers, face difficulties related to, for example, using a foreign language, adapting to a new environment and solving problems on their own. This programme contributes to European education that is strengthening the sense of European identity, belonging to the community created by the inhabitants of Europe. This idea is not intended to unify the higher education system. Rather, it assumes comparing the functioning of universities in order to learn from each other, taking into account the diversity of cultures and traditions. The Erasmus+ programme enables international acquaintances and friendships and is a valuable, unforgettable adventure in the lives of young people (Narkiewicz-Niedbalec & Kołodziejska, 2015).

A few words about volunteering

The concept of volunteering comes from the Latin word "voluntarius", which is translated as voluntary, willing, good will. This term is used to describe unpaid, voluntary and conscious permanent or occasional work for others (Lalak & Pilch, 1999). The "others" in this context are people who are not related by blood or friendship to the person providing them with support. A person who undertakes the aforementioned non-compulsory activities in accordance with the above principle is called a volunteer (Kołodziejczyk, 2002). According to Matulayová (2011) volunteers not only do not expect monetary remuneration for their work, but also incur their own costs, devoting their time, energy, using knowledge and skills for the benefit of another person or community.

Voluntary work brings many positive changes both in the immediate environment of the volunteer and in a wider dimension. This activity is related to many areas. According to Roguska (2010), these include education, culture, social welfare, ecology, health (e.g. blood donors), public safety, spiritual and religious life, collections and charity events, and organizing free time. Volunteering therefore contributes to building a conscious and active society. Contemporary European youth policy is focused on "the development of youth work as a specific youth policy area – non-formal youth education and self-education aimed at enabling young people to learn from experience and experiment (volunteering, autonomy, self-management)" (Acienė & Rauckiene-Michaelsson, 2022, p. 19).

Volunteering popularizes active provision of various types of support to those in need, involvement in solving problems. It is also a factor shaping the attitude of readiness to take responsibility. However, not all the people who undertake voluntary work aim to improve the functioning of society. Volunteers' motives for action vary. According to Reykowski (1989), volunteering can include three types of pro-social activities: altruistic, helping and cooperative. The first of these are activities, in which a volunteer

strives to sacrifice their own personal rights in order to help another person. Assistance activities consist in striving to achieve benefits for another entity while incurring by the volunteer only those costs that naturally result from involvement in a given activity. On the other hand, the purpose of cooperative activities is to benefit both the other person and the volunteer. The volunteers' motivations can be related to two types of altruism distinguished by Karyłowski (1982): exocentric (externally motivated) and endocentric (internally motivated). In the first case, the most important reason for volunteering are the needs of the person requiring assistance. In the second, the factors that motivate the volunteer to act are the effects of his work related to himself, such as self-satisfaction, increased self-esteem or avoidance of guilt caused by inaction. The fact that involvement in volunteering may result from various motives is also proved by Bacelewska's (2004) research. She notes that the surveyed volunteers have, among others, religious motives, thanks to which a person understands volunteering as an expression of love for one's neighbour. The actions of others result from philosophical motives, in the light of which, it is worth helping others, because we may also need help in the future. There are also emotional motives that are associated with an emotional reference to a person in need, compassion. Satisfying the need to be useful or simply enjoying being with other people is a common motive. Based on the information presented, it can be concluded that people who undertake voluntary work do not always decide to do it without expecting any kind of gratification. This fact allows us to question the term often accompanying the notion of volunteering in colloquial language – "selflessness". Although the idea of volunteering excludes financial remuneration, it leaves space for volunteers to achieve intangible benefits.

Exchange and acquisition of new experiences, gaining new skills, learning cooperation, assertiveness and organization of work, shaping openness to new ideas and challenges, raising self-esteem, developing interpersonal skills through direct contact with people of different characters and in different life situations are just some of the benefits listed by Roguska (2010). It is worth emphasizing that volunteering can increase the attractiveness of a potential employee on the labour market. According to Roguska (2010), anyone can become a volunteer and fulfill themselves in the most appropriate area, taking into account age, experience, profession, amount of free time, etc.

These aspects may determine the level of involvement of a given individual in social work. Załuska (1996) divides volunteers into "moment activists", who join individual actions under the influence of impulse, and "permanent activists", who combine constant voluntary work with the meaning of their lives, considering it a necessity for proper functioning in society. She also describes a third type – the so-called "mid-distance runners". These are people undertaking voluntary activities with the intention of temporary involvement, until a specific goal is achieved, e.g. obtaining a written

certificate useful when applying for gainful employment. This term is also used to describe people who have stopped volunteering for various reasons.

However, taking into account the conditions of voluntary work and its benefits, it may seem particularly encouraging for young people, who have not started their professional career yet, have not started a family, and have little experience. Jadwiga Przewłocka (2011) points out that although this group has little financial resources, unlike others, it has time that can be spent on social purposes. And it is the lack of time that is often presented as an explanation for the lack of commitment. This observation may explain the popularity of volunteering among pupils and students. An exemplary form of volunteering activities of students can be the "PROJEKTOR" educational and upbringing programme described by Tetwejer (2014) and Gmitrzak (2010), or the "European Voluntary Service" programme mentioned by Roguska (2010), enabling young adults to go and participate in environmental, cultural and social projects outside their homeland, or the activity of the international non-governmental organisation Global Volunteers. As far as international volunteering is concerned, European Solidarity Corps programme is worth mentioning, which is the new European Union initiative that enables young people to show solidarity with communities in their respective country as well as abroad through volunteering projects (https://eusolidaritycorps.eupa.org.mt/).

Methodological assumptions of the research

The qualitative research, the results of which are presented in this text, was conducted in June 2022. According to the naturalistic approach in social sciences, which definitely favours the researcher's readiness to take up topics that are close to personal interests (Lofland, Snow, Anderson, & Lofland, 2009), we raised the issue that is very important for us, as we are volunteers, who have been working in the Dialog Foundation in Białystok. The specificity of work of foreign volunteers supporting students from Polish primary schools was the subject of our research. The purpose of the exploration was to identify activities undertaken by the volunteers, their motivation and the benefits from work. The main research problem was formulated in the form of a question: What is the specificity of work of foreign volunteers supporting students from Polish primary schools? The main research question was followed by detailed questions such as: What types of activities do volunteers undertake to support students in primary schools in Białystok? What is the motivation of the volunteers? What are the benefits of their work? We conducted the qualitative research with six Spanish Erasmus+ students, who started to volunteer in Poland after the outbreak of the war in Ukraine. We applied the method of individual cases, in which we used the technique of an interview. For the analysis of qualitative data, we applied the elements of the concept

of Matthew B. Miles and A. Michael Huberman (2000), which consists of the following activities: data reduction, data representation, as well as deriving and verifying conclusions. According to this concept, apart from the description, matrices and networks are used to present data.

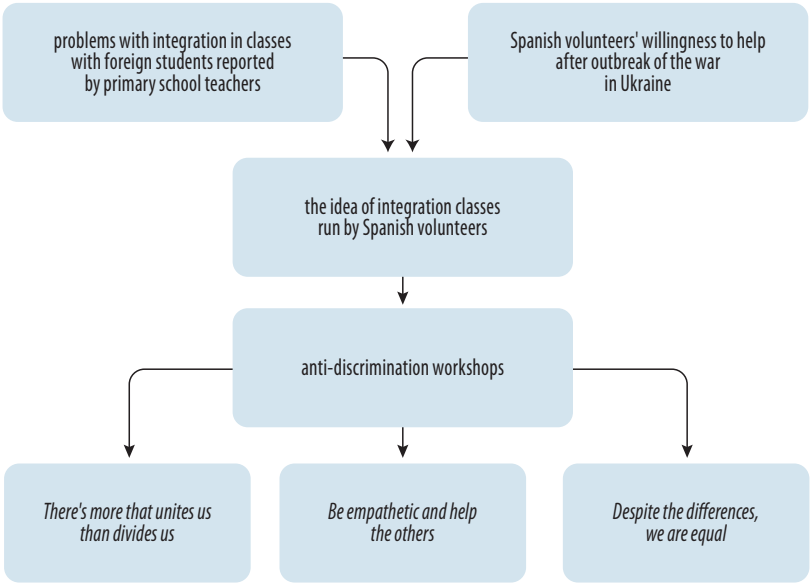
Selected research results

Six female volunteers, aged 21–22, participated in the research. Only women's representation proves the feminization of voluntary work, especially in the field of social assistance. All of the respondents were Erasmus+ Spanish students, studying at the Faculty of Law (4 people) and the Faculty of History and International Relations (2 people) at the University of Bialystok in 2021/2022 academic year. Volunteers studied law, criminology and international relations. The voluntary experience of the respondents varies. Two of the respondents have never volunteered before, the rest had some voluntary experience such as working in the animal shelter. One person volunteered for a year while studying abroad in the United States. It was in a residency for the elderly and her job was to talk to seniors, feed them, accompany them, play games together.

Spanish students contacted the Dialog Foundation shortly after the war in Ukraine broke out. They did not want to remain indifferent to the tragedy beyond the eastern border of Poland, they wanted to help in any possible way. Due to the fact that there was mass movement of Polish volunteers, who could communicate with Ukrainian refugees, it was hard to find an activity for non-Polish and non-Ukrainian speaking volunteers from Spain. On the other hand, almost since the beginning of the war, the Dialog Foundation received disturbing information from primary school teachers about the inappropriate behaviour of Polish and Ukrainian students towards students from Russia and Belarus who study in schools in Bialystok. According to the teachers, children, who did not understand exactly what was happening beyond our border, heard only some news on tv and adult conversations and very often generalized that since the Russians attacked Ukraine, all Russians are bad. And due to the fact that Belarus is an ally of Russia, Belarusians are also bad. Such beliefs reflected into unacceptable behaviour towards Russian and Belarusian students such as insults or dislike.

In order to meet the reported needs, three scenarios of integration lessons for classes attended by foreign students were prepared by Spanish volunteers. The volunteers conducted 25 lessons in 5 primary schools in Bialystok between April and June 2022. Each scenario of the anti-discrimination workshops was planned for a 45-minute lesson for the age group of 7–10 year olds. Although all three lessons covered the topic of tolerance and integration, each of them emphasized different aspect. The first one

titled: *There's more that unites us than divides us* highlighted the topic of similarities and differences between people. The aim of this workshop was to make children aware that there are some features that people have in common and some that make them unique. The second scenario titled: *Be empathetic and help the others* emphasized the sensitivity for the others, volunteering and empathy. The last one *Despite the differences, we are equal* paid attention to the equality in such contexts as nationality or disability. According to Matthew B. Miles and A. Michael Huberman (2000) concept of the analysis of qualitative data, Network 1. presents the process of creating anti-discrimination workshops mentioned above.



Network 1. From the need to the action

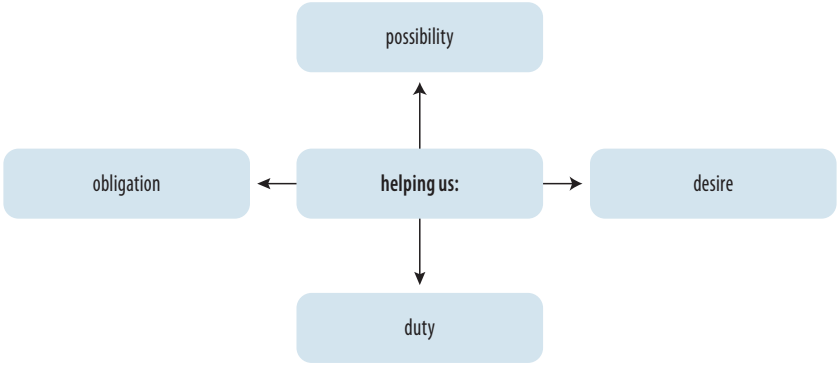
Source: authors' own research

Each scenario was constructed on the basis of the similar scheme:

1. Introduction
2. Warm up activity
3. A short movie
4. Discussion
5. A game
6. Conclusions

All the workshops were conducted in English language by Spanish volunteers, but there was always a Polish volunteer accompanying them in order to help with translation. Therefore, the added value of the workshops was the exposure to English language as well as selected phrases and expressions in Spanish. The lessons designed for young students were dynamic, diversified in terms of engaged senses and used methods. Children were listening to the songs and singing, dancing, watching short movies, speaking, participating in movement games. Each lesson ended with a summary and a discussion about what the children had learned. The pupils had also possibility to say what they liked and what disliked in the lesson.

Motivation for volunteering was one of the researched aspects. According to Karyłowski (1982) among the reasons for undertaking voluntary work by Spanish volunteers, exocentric altruistic motives dominate. Volunteers perceive their volunteering in Poland through the prism of the possibility of help, duty, desire to help, and even commitment (Network 2).



Network 2. Different understanding of helping from the perspective of the volunteers

Source: authors' own research

In order to prove altruistic motivation, some of the volunteers' statements are worth quoting:

> "Unfortunately, during my Erasmus in Poland I had to live very closely with the war against Ukraine. Seeing the situation generated by the conflict, I saw myself obliged to help, contributing everything I could".
>
> "Because of the situation of the country at the moment and the desire of contributing to improve that situation and help others".
>
> "I believe in a quote: "be the change you want to see in the world". If we want to create a better society, we must act".

> "After the war between Russia and Ukraine, I felt I had an extraordinary opportunity to help, being so close to the conflict".

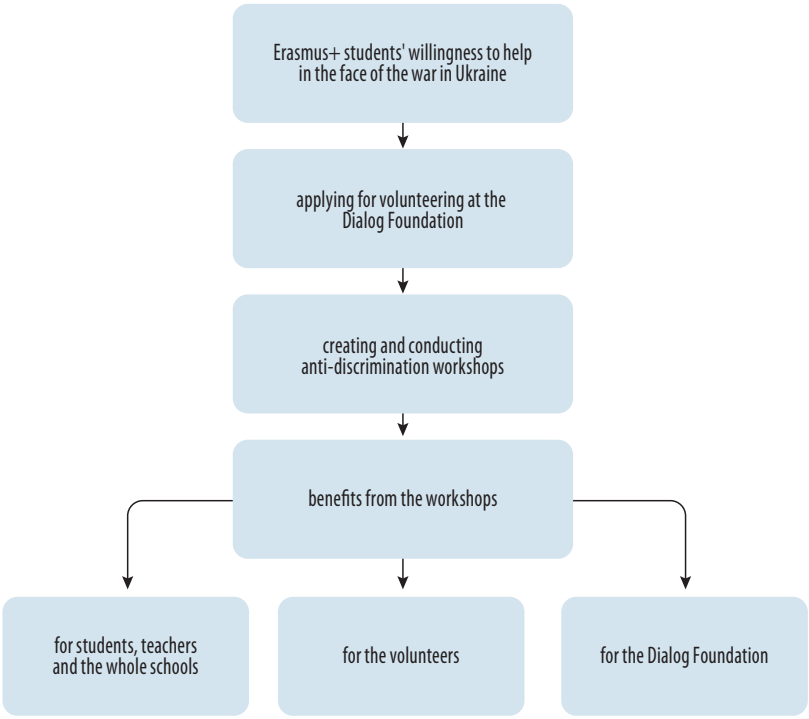
Undoubtedly, volunteering brings a lot of benefits, especially now, when there is a real war beyond Polish border. They can be considered from the perspective of the volunteers, students and teachers from primary schools or the organisation itself, in which or on behalf of which the volunteers work. The surveyed volunteers perceive numerous benefits from their work. Everyone agrees that volunteering in aid of integration of students in primary schools was a very enriching experience, bringing them joy, satisfaction and the feeling that they did not stay indifferent towards the difficult situation. Volunteers emphasize that students learned respect for others, tolerance, empathy, understanding. The multilateral benefits from the volunteering are presented in Matrix 1. in accordance with Matthew B. Miles and A. Michael Huberman (2000) concept of the analysis of qualitative data.

Matrix 1. The benefits from volunteering from the perspective of the volunteers

Beneficiary	Benefits
volunteers	acquiring new skills concerning communication tools
	developing new personal qualities like patience, perseverance, humility, creativity
	adjusting and coping with new situation
	satisfaction from help
	enriching their Erasmus+ experience
	spending their time in a constructive way, feeling needed
students	learning about discrimination, tolerance, equality and understanding and respect towards the others
	receiving social and psychological support
	being sensitive to the needs of others, learning about empathy and helping others
	broadening horizons, opening minds
	receiving interesting lessons, different than the regular ones
	exposure to English and Spanish
teachers	receiving help in integration of the classes with foreigners
organisation	satisfaction from being helpful

Source: authors' own research

Further analysis of the material collected during the research, described and reduced for the first time in Matrix 1., enables to construct Network 3. showing the cause and effect relationships regarding the volunteering of the respondents.



Network 3. Causes and effects of voluntary work of the respondents

Source: authors' own research

To illustrate the benefits, some of the respondents' statements have been presented:

> "It was an enriching experience from my point of view, and I think it helped the children and teachers to open their minds".
>
> "Volunteering helped me see many things from another perspective and seeing that the schools and the children thanked us deeply for the help made me very happy. It is an experience that, without a doubt, I recommend to anyone".
>
> "Teaching kids to respect one another and don't judge others, we are all at the same level".
>
> "The children were very enthusiastic and kind with us. They couldn't stop to smile and hug us. Also, the teachers were always so kind and grateful… To have had the opportunity of life that was incredible".

> "The feeling I got from it, not only because of the behaviour of the kids towards us volunteers, but also how they treated one another, especially those who were immigrants".
>
> "For the schools, I think it was helping kids understand about discrimination, empathy and helping others from people different from their teachers and also for me it was helping the community be a little bit more understanding with one another".

Spanish volunteers claim they would never forget voluntary experience in Poland. Pupils at school treated them as special guests, they have nice memories from voluntary work, even though the context of their work was very difficult. Volunteers state that the most memorable for them are "the gestures of love the children gave us knowing us for very few time". Children were hugging volunteers, gave them some small presents they had made themselves as thanks (drawings, crafts, etc.). In order to illustrate the most memorable experience or situation, one of the volunteers quote has been presented:

> "Everyday I had the opportunity to volunteer was memorable, because everyday we had the opportunity to meet a kind teacher so grateful for our help and a group of kids that couldn't stop to hug us, that our hearts couldn't bear to think that that will have an end".

Another volunteer recalls one Ukrainian boy, who "was concerned if, after coming from a different country, we were adjusting fine and we're able to make friends". A boy who had problems with adapting in Poland himself was worried whether Spanish students would acclimate to Poland or whether they would have difficulties like him.

Positive effects of the workshops have been observed in all the schools, even though there were only three meetings with volunteers, class integration has increased. According to the teachers, the level of discrimination and intolerance decreased. Students understood that they can make friends with all the children regardless of their nationality. Moreover, they learned about volunteering and helping other people. Both the students and the teachers were grateful to the volunteers for enriching the process of education, for showing by their own example that different does not mean worse. Spanish students made children aware that despite coming from different country, they have a lot in common.

All of the researched volunteers would love to start volunteering when they are back in Spain. One of them is thinking about helping children from dysfunctional backgrounds by spending time with them, helping with homework, another one is planning to volunteer during Christmas food collecting for the people with less resources.

Conclusion

The war in Ukraine changed the lives of many people, not only in Ukraine but also in Poland, a country that has received many Ukrainian refugees. After the outbreak of the war, in some primary schools in Bialystok attended by foreigners, disturbing behaviours and attitudes among pupils have been reported. At the same time, Spanish Erasmus+ students, who did not want to stay indifferent in the face of the war, wanted to volunteer and help. This unusual meeting of the voluntary migrants with young refugees from Ukraine and other children attending Polish primary schools, resulted in designing and conducting anti-discrimination workshops in aid of integration of the students.

In the light of the results of our research, an important role in teaching tolerance and integration played Spanish volunteers, who, in an interesting form, made students aware that despite coming from different countries, there are more similarities between them than differences. The positive reception of workshops at schools, both by children and teachers, proves that it is worth undertaking this type of initiative, thus diversifying standard lessons. Through cooperation with volunteers from the Dialog Foundation, schools became a part of the community school trend. Nowadays the space outside education is becoming more and more important for social development and education, that is why, cooperation with the local non-governmental organisations may be beneficial. We treat the selected research results as an inspiration and implication to a broader and in-depth reflection on volunteering that has special humanitarian values and at the same time can be very useful in intercultural environment in the schools.

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