ACCESS TO INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION BARRIERS IN MIGRANT INTEGRATION PROCESSES: EVIDENCE FROM A QUALITATIVE STUDY IN POLAND

Francesco Pio Dilillo[1]
Pegaso Digital University
francescopio.dilillo@unipegaso.it

Laura Sara Agrati
Pegaso Digital University
laurasara.agrati@unipegaso.it

Double Blind Peer Review

Citation
Dilillo, F. P., & Agrati, L. S. (2026). Access to information and communication barriers in migrant integration processes: Evidence from a qualitative study in Poland. *Italian Journal of Health Education, Sport and Inclusive Didactics, 10*(3).

Doi: https://doi.org/10.32043/gsd.v1i3.1760

Copyright notice:

© 2023 this is an open access, peer-reviewed article published by Open Journal System and distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited.

gsdjournal.it
ISSN: 3103-5744

ABSTRACT

This study explores the role of communication in accessing information within migrant integration processes through a qualitative analysis of 12 semi-structured interviews conducted at an integration centre in Zielona Góra, Poland. The findings show that access to information is often mediated by informal networks, social media and language skills, shaping participants' ability to engage with services and opportunities. Although the centre provides important support in terms of guidance and communication, several critical issues emerge, including limited dissemination of information and language barriers, particularly in the early stages of integration. The results suggest that communication practices play a key role in enabling inclusion and represent a crucial dimension of initial integration processes in a new social, institutional and territorial context.

KEYWORDS

Migrant integration; communication barriers; access to information; Poland; qualitative study

Received 2026-06-28
Accepted 2026-10-26
Published 2026-10-30

[1] This article is the outcome of a shared collaboration with the Professor Laura Sara Agrati. In particular, Professor L.S Agrati contributed to the abstract and reviewed the manuscript, F.P Dilillo is responsible for the writing and drafting of the article.

1. Introduction

Arriving in a new country means crossing not only a geograpchical border, but also an information and communication barrier. In the early stages of the migration experience, knowing where to go, who to turn to and how to find one's way can make the difference between inclusion and marginalisation. Access to information therefore becomes an often-overlooked resource: when it is lacking, even rights and services that are formally available risk remaining out of reach.

This article explores communication and information barriers in migrants' initial integration through twelve semi-structured interviews conducted at an integration centre in Zielona Góra, Poland.

It examines the information channels used by participants and how communication shapes their access to local services and institutions The study highlights the relationship between communication practices and migrants' access to information and services. This study is part of the doctoral research project "Diversity Management: welcoming diversity and the school as its promoter", which aims to analyse the role of educational contexts in inclusion and integration processes, with particular attention to the adult migrant population.

From this perspective, the case of the integration centre in Zielona Góra represents an empirical in-depth study that explores the role of communication, access to information and reception practices, while contributing to the comparative dimension of the project in relation to the role played by educational institutions.

2. Theoretical framework: information, communication and integration

The integration of migrants is a multidimensional process involving employment, legal status, language, access to services, social relations and participation in local life. The model proposed by Ager and Strang (2008) provides a useful framework, as it interprets integration as the interplay of material, social and institutional dimensions. From this perspective, integration can also be understood as an information-based process: in order to participate in their new context, migrants must understand services, procedures, rights and channels of access. Access to information is therefore a key resource for integration. Lloyd et al. (2017) conceptualise refugees' "information landscapes" as environments of institutions, documents, relationships and communication channels that must progressively be understood and navigated. When these environments are fragmented or linguistically inaccessible, access to services becomes more difficult .Oduntan and Ruthven (2020) show how refugees' information needs are linked to concrete situations of uncertainty and to specific stages of the integration process, during which the ability to find comprehensible information affects their capacity to find their way and make decisions.

Along migration routes, information circulates through both formal and informal channels: institutions, integration centres, social workers, fellow countrymen, friends and online groups. In the early stages after arrival, word of mouth and social media can become essential tools for navigating the maze

of paperwork, employment, accommodation, healthcare services and available opportunities.

However, these channels do not guarantee equal access for everyone. Social media facilitates the circulation of information and strengthens migrant networks, but it does not eliminate inequalities linked to digital access, the quality of networks and the reliability of the information shared (Dekker & Engbersen, 2014).

Communication barriers, particularly language barriers, have a direct impact on people's ability to access services and exercise their rights. Language is not merely a tool for everyday communication, but a genuine infrastructure for integration: it enables people to understand documents, interact with public bodies, look for work, ask for help and build relationships. From this perspective, the integration centre under consideration can be seen as a space for mediation: it does not merely offer services, but makes the local area more understandable by translating complex information into more accessible formats.

3. Territorial and institutional context of the research

3.1 The Polish migration context and the case of Zielona Góra

The processes of migrant integration take shape within specific territories, characterised by particular social, institutional and communicative conditions. In recent years, Poland has taken on an increasingly significant role as a destination country for migrants, gradually moving away from its previous historical profile as a country predominantly characterised by emigration. This transformation concerns both the arrival of people fleeing the war in Ukraine and the growth of migration flows linked to work, economic mobility and the

presence of third-country nationals. According to the OECD, in 2024 around 180,000 new immigrants were granted a residence permit in Poland valid for more than twelve months, with the majority of arrivals linked to work (OECD, 2025) .

A decisive turning point was the outbreak of the war in Ukraine in 2022, which made Poland one of the main European host countries for people fleeing the conflict. According to Eurostat, as at 30 April 2026, Poland was hosting 971,255 people from Ukraine under temporary protection, accounting for 22.2 per cent of the total recorded in the European Union (Eurostat, 2026). This influx has had a tangible impact on local reception systems, administrative services, schools, the labour market and social support structures. In this context, Zielona Góra provides a useful local setting for observing everyday practices relating to access to information. Situated in the Lubuskie Voivodeship, in western Poland, the city has a population of around 140,000 and is one of the two regional capitals. According to data from the Statistical Office in Zielona Góra, the Lubuskie Voivodeship had a population of 963,601 as at 31 December 2025 (Statistical Office in Zielona Góra, n.d.). The city's geographical location, not far from the German border and situated in an area characterised by cross-border mobility and trade, helps to make it a significant case study for understanding how integration policies play out in the daily lives of migrants.

3.2 The European framework and the 'Your fate is in your hands' project

This case study forms part of a broader European framework dedicated to the integration of third-country nationals. The European Commission's Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion 2021–2027 refers to the principle of 'inclusion for all' and identifies education and training, employment, health, housing, participation in the host society and the strengthening of partnerships between

different institutional levels as key areas for action (European Commission, 2020).

In this context, European funds allocated to migration policies play an important role in supporting local projects aimed at the linguistic, legal and social inclusion of foreign nationals. One such instrument is the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund, established for the period 2021–2027 with the aim, amongst other things, of supporting legal migration and contributing to the integration of third-country nationals (European Parliament & Council of the European Union, 2021).

The project "Your fate is in your hands – social and professional support for foreigners" is co-funded by the European Union and implemented at local level in the Lubuskie region of Poland. The project is listed in the Kohesio database amongst the initiatives funded under the Lubuskie 2021–2027 regional programme, with a planned duration from January 2024 to December 2026 (European Commission, 2026).

The overall objective of the project is to support the social and professional integration of foreign nationals living in the region, translating general European guidelines into practical measures for beneficiaries. The project is aimed at adult foreign nationals holding non-Polish passports, including economic migrants and beneficiaries of international protection. A significant proportion of the beneficiaries are Ukrainian nationals who arrived in Poland after the outbreak of the war, but the project has a broader scope, targeting people from different national backgrounds.

3.3 The Integration Centre as a practical space for integration

The Zielona Góra Integration Centre for Foreign Nationals (Centrum Integracji Cudzoziemców Zielona Góra) operates as a local support hub within a public support system designed to promote the inclusion of third-country nationals. The centre is not merely a place where services are provided, but a space where individual needs, information and pathways are brought together. Here, integration policies meet very practical situations: learning a language, understanding a document, dealing with a government department, seeking guidance or simply finding a place where one does not feel isolated.

The centre's activities are divided into three main areas of operation. The first concerns linguistic integration, through Polish language courses organised by level and aimed at developing skills useful in everyday life, in accessing services and in entering the labour market. The second concerns administrative and legal support, through advice, guidance on documentation, the translation of official documents and information sessions with representatives of public bodies. The third area concerns social inclusion and community participation, through cultural activities, workshops, excursions, art workshops and social events.

The centre therefore acts as a bridge between migrants and the local community. Through guidance, support and language assistance, it helps to bridge the gap between new arrivals and the institutions. Participation in the activities is voluntary and free of charge, and the organisation allows for a degree of flexibility to accommodate participants' work commitments.

4. Methodology

4.1 Research design

The study is based on an exploratory qualitative approach, aimed at understanding the role of access to information and communication barriers in migrants' integration processes. This research design was chosen to enable an in-depth analysis of the participants' experiences and the meanings they attributed to their journey within the integration centre. Data were collected through semi-structured qualitative interviews. This method allows for a common framework to be followed across participants, whilst maintaining the flexibility required to explore aspects that emerged during the conversation (Corbetta, 2014; Adams, 2015). The interview guide, which had been discussed with the supervisor before data collection began, consisted of twelve main questions organised into four thematic areas: access to the project, experience of participation, personal impact and overall assessment. The questions were open-ended, so as to encourage narrative responses and allow participants to recount their individual experiences.

4.2 Participants and sample profile

The sample comprised twelve adult users of the integration centre who had participated in at least one of its activities. Participants were recruited voluntarily during the researcher's visits to the centre. Staff provided information on the weekly activity schedule and helped identify opportunities to approach potential participants, who were then invited by the researcher with the support of a staff member. Participation and audio recording were entirely voluntary and subject to informed consent. Recruitment therefore followed a voluntary convenience-based approach linked to users' attendance at the centre, without predefined sampling quotas or additional selection criteria.

Variable	Distribution
Total number of interviewees	12
Women	9 (75%)
Men	3 (25%)
Ukraine	6 (50%)
Philippines	2 (16.7%)
Colombia	2 (16.7%)
Belarus	1 (8.3%)
Cuba	1 (8.3%)
Mean age	46.3 years
Age range	28-74 years

Table 1 – Profile and distribution of the sample (n = 12)

As Table 1 shows, the sample consists mainly of women, with Ukrainians forming the largest group in terms of numbers. However, the presence of participants from the Philippines, Colombia, Belarus and Cuba helps to define a group that is diverse in terms of geographical origin and migration history. The age of the participants, ranging from 28 to 74, also allows us to observe a variety of experiences: from young people and those of working age to older participants, for whom the centre often also serves a social, emotional and community-building function.

4.3 Data collection

The interviews were conducted face to face at the integration centre in Zielona Góra and lasted approximately 15–20 minutes. English was the main language used. When participants were not sufficiently comfortable communicating in English, linguistic mediation was supported by a European Union digital transcription and translation tool, which in these interviews was used to render Ukrainian speech into Italian. The translated output facilitated transcription and subsequent analysis, while introducing an additional layer of linguistic mediation that may have affected some nuances of the original accounts. Before each interview, participants were informed about the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of participation, the intended use of the data and the measures adopted to protect anonymity. Consent to participate and to audio-record the interview was obtained before data collection.

Many participants were already familiar with the centre and its staff. This familiarity appeared to contribute to a relaxed setting in which participants were willing to share their experiences and personal stories. At the same time, recruitment with the support of centre staff and participants' existing relationship with the organisation may have encouraged courtesy or socially

desirable responses. This possibility was considered during interpretation, and positive evaluations of the centre are therefore treated as participants' reported experiences and perceptions rather than as independent evidence of its effectiveness.

4.4 Data analysis

The data were analysed using thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke (2012). All interviews were coded by the researcher who conducted the fieldwork, using Microsoft Excel to organise and compare the material. Following transcription, the interviews were read repeatedly to become familiar with the data. Relevant segments of participants' responses were assigned initial descriptive codes capturing the main experience, perception or issue expressed in each passage.

Codes emerging across different interviews and questions were then compared. Codes referring to similar experiences or meanings were refined and grouped into broader categories, from which candidate themes were developed. These themes were reviewed against the original excerpts and across the full dataset and progressively refined until six overarching themes were identified. Because coding was conducted by a single researcher, codes and candidate themes were repeatedly checked against the original material to maintain analytical consistency.

The analysis was predominantly inductive, although the interview guide provided an initial framework for the conversations. Its four predefined areas structured data collection but were not used as predetermined final themes. Initial codes were generated from participants' responses, allowing recurrent patterns to emerge across different questions and interviews. The final thematic structure therefore developed through an iterative interaction

between the topics addressed in the interview guide and patterns identified in participants' accounts.

During the final three interviews, the main thematic patterns identified in the earlier material were largely confirmed and further elaborated, while no additional overarching themes emerged. Rather than treating this as evidence of formal thematic saturation, it is reported as a descriptive indication of increasing thematic stability within this dataset.

4.5 Ethical considerations, anonymisation and use of quotations

Before data collection, participants were informed about the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of participation, the use of the interview material and the measures adopted to protect their identity. Informed consent was obtained for both participation and audio recording. Participants were assigned sequential identifiers from P1 to P12, and identifying information was excluded from transcripts and quotations used in the manuscript. Access to the research setting was facilitated by the researcher's host tutor, who introduced the researcher to the integration centre as part of the development of the local research network and initially proposed the possibility of conducting interviews with centre users. Once the study design and interview procedure had been defined, data collection was approved by both the host tutor and the centre's deputy manager.

Audio recordings, transcripts and coding materials are stored in a protected cloud environment accessible only to the researcher. Centre staff and other participants do not have access to the recordings, complete transcripts or analytical files. Data will be retained only for the period required for the research and subsequent publication process, in accordance with applicable institutional data-protection requirements, and will then be securely deleted.

The involvement of centre staff was limited to facilitating access to potential participants and the organisation of recruitment. Where digital linguistic mediation was required, the translation tool was used solely to facilitate communication and transcription. The possible influence of the research setting and participants' existing relationship with the centre is acknowledged as a methodological limitation. Quotations are presented in anonymised form and are used as qualitative evidence supporting the interpretation of the themes rather than as representative statements about all centre users.

5. Results

The thematic areas of the interview guide guided the data collection, but the overarching themes discussed in this section emerged from the process of thematic analysis of the interviews, in line with the approach of Braun and Clarke (2012). This distinction allows us to separate the data collection tool from the interpretative patterns identified in the analysis.

Analysis of the twelve interviews revealed six main thematic clusters: language; the centre as a legal and institutional mediator; relational capital and the quality of reception; empowerment differentiated according to migration trajectory; cultural and community integration; and communication and access to information as a critical juncture. These themes should not be understood as isolated dimensions; rather, they capture interconnected aspects of how participants described the relationship between communication, access to information and their integration experiences. The results show, in fact, that for participants, inclusion does not depend solely on the existence of services, but on the practical possibility of knowing that they exist, understanding how they work and feeling able to use them.

5.1 Language as an infrastructure for integration

The linguistic dimension emerges as a cross-cutting theme throughout the entire integration process. In the interviews analysed, learning Polish is described not only as a means of communication, but as a prerequisite for everyday independence, access to services, entry into the labour market and building relationships within the new social context. Above all, language serves a practical function. It enables people to cope with ordinary yet crucial situations, such as visiting the doctor, going shopping, understanding directions, dealing with public authorities or navigating administrative procedures. As one participant put it:

“When you arrive in a foreign country and don’t know the language, it’s very difficult even to go to the doctor or the supermarket. Once this barrier is removed, everything becomes easier” *(P12, Ukraine, aged 50).*

The testimonies show that the language barrier is a real obstacle to accessing information and services: not knowing the language often means not knowing what to ask, who to turn to, or how to interpret the answers. Improving language skills therefore boosts personal confidence and the ability to find one’s way around the local area. In the case of Ukrainian refugees, particularly among older participants, language also takes on an emotional and relational significance. One participant states:

“The Polish language courses have helped me a great deal. Now I can understand the people here better and talk to them in everyday life” *(P5, Ukraine, aged 56).*

Participants associated improved language skills with easier access to everyday services, greater confidence and reduced feelings of isolation. Language therefore emerged as both a practical and relational resource.

5.2 The centre as a legal and institutional mediator

A second overarching theme concerns the centre's role as a mediator between participants and the local institutional system. The interviews reveal that the centre is perceived as an important point of reference for legal and administrative guidance, particularly in dealing with bureaucratic procedures, translating official documents and correcting any procedural errors. The support provided enables participants to better understand how institutional procedures work and to deal with issues relating to documentation, public services and their legal status with greater confidence. As one participant states:

"They help us a lot with documents and translations. Without this support, it would be very difficult to know what to do" *(P2, Philippines, aged 33).*

This account highlights the centre as a space for linguistic and legal-institutional translation, capable of supporting participants with documentation and administrative matters. In this sense, the centre acts as a bridge between migrants and institutions, promoting legal stabilisation and more secure access to institutional services.

5.3 Relational capital and the quality of the welcome

A further theme that emerged concerns the quality of the welcome and the relational capital generated by the centre, which participants described as an accessible, humane and flexible space. The centre thus appears not only as a

place providing access to services and information, but also as a space offering recognition and a sense of belonging. One participant stated:

“It’s a very good project. It really helps foreign people understand how to live here and feel part of the community.” (P3, Colombia, aged 28).

This account highlights how the support offered by the centre is perceived not only in practical terms, but also as an opportunity to gradually integrate into the local community. The expression ‘feeling part of the community’ refers to a fundamental aspect of integration, linked to building social ties and overcoming the feeling of being an outsider. The atmosphere at the centre is frequently described by participants as ‘homely’ or ‘friendly’.

“I’ve met new people here and we’ve become friends. This has helped me a lot because when you arrive in a new country, you often feel lonely” *(P8, Ukraine, aged 74).*

Participants described the centre as a setting for social interaction and relationship-building. Trust in staff and organisational flexibility were frequently associated with continued participation and a stronger sense of belonging.

5.4 Perceived changes across different migration trajectories

A comparative analysis of the interviews shows that changes associated by participants with their experience vary according to migration trajectory, personal circumstances and initial level of vulnerability. Participants reported different forms of perceived change, including pragmatic, emotional, relational, professional and community-related changes. In some accounts, particularly among older Ukrainian refugees, the need to rebuild a sense of everyday life

following experiences marked by loss, separation and concern for family members emerges strongly. One participant recounts:

“Before, I used to sit at home and cry because my son is fighting in the war. Now I come here every day, take part in activities and no longer have time to cry” *(P7, Ukraine, aged 67).*

This account shows how attending the centre is not merely a way of taking part in organised activities, but also a means of coping with grief and breaking out of domestic isolation. The distance from her son and her country of origin remains a heavy burden in the participant’s life, but the centre offers a space where her daily life can be filled with relationships, shared activities and moments of respite. In this account, the perceived change is primarily emotional and relational: it does not equate to full social or occupational autonomy, but to the possibility of regaining a minimal sense of balance and a sense of belonging within the new context.

Younger economic migrants more often described practical changes related to communication, orientation and employment. One participant states:

“Before, I felt very tired and hopeless. After attending the centre, I’ve learnt new things and have more confidence in myself” *(P1, Philippines, aged 35).*

In this case, integration comes about through the acquisition of skills and through feeling welcomed and recognised. Self-confidence stems from new information and from the experience of being in a place where one feels listened to and supported. The centre is described as a setting associated with learning opportunities, increased confidence and the possibility of planning for the future. Among Ukrainian refugees aged over 55, there is also a clear role in

emotional recovery and the stabilisation of daily life. One interviewee emphasises:

“As I have a disability, it is very important for me to be able to come here. It is not only useful, but also good for the soul. Here I can communicate with other people and feel part of the community” *(P6, Ukraine, aged 58).*

The quote highlights a less visible aspect of integration: the need for connection, continuity and a sense of belonging. For the most vulnerable participants, language and cultural activities provide opportunities to break out of isolation, alleviate trauma and rebuild a daily routine. The centre thus acts as a space for stabilisation, where communication with others restores a sense of meaning and familiarity to the present.

Some participants in employment also described becoming points of reference for other migrants by sharing information and supporting informal networks. Overall, participants reported different types of perceived change according to their needs, vulnerabilities and migration trajectories.

These perceived changes appear to be context-specific and closely related to participants’ personal trajectories and living conditions.

5.5 Cultural and Community Integration

Participants described the cultural, artistic and recreational activities organised by the centre as opportunities for social interaction, participation and a sense of belonging. For some participants, particularly older people, these activities provide opportunities for socialising, sharing and reconnecting with themselves.

One participant says: “During the sessions, they also asked us to draw. I really enjoyed it; I drew pictures of nature and it made me feel good” *(P6, Ukraine, aged 58).*

This account suggests that artistic activities may provide opportunities for personal expression and social interaction, particularly for participants experiencing isolation or vulnerability.

5.6 Communication and access to information as a critical aspect of integration

The issue of communication and access to information cuts across all the dimensions identified in the analysis. Participants’ accounts suggest that, in the early stages of the migration journey, integration depends not only on the availability of services, opportunities and institutional mechanisms, but also on the practical ability to learn about, understand and make use of them. In the absence of clear and accessible communication channels, even the resources available locally risk remaining invisible or difficult to access.

Participants often describe access to information as a mediated process: through informal networks, social media, fellow nationals, centre staff or people already integrated into the local community. One participant recounts:

“I only found out about the centre nine months after I’d arrived in Poland. I didn’t know about it because the information is mainly on Facebook.” *(P11, Cuba, aged 30).* This account clearly shows that the problem is not merely the existence of services, but their visibility. The centre was present in the local area, but information about it was not readily accessible.

Reliance on Facebook and informal channels may therefore contribute to delays in accessing support, particularly for those who are not yet part of strong

local networks or who are unaware of the channels through which information is disseminated.

Those with better language skills, stronger social networks or prior familiarity with institutional systems appear better able to find their way and turn the information they receive into independent decisions. Conversely, those with fewer communication resources risk remaining more exposed to uncertainty, dependence on intermediaries and difficulties in accessing services. Communication therefore plays a central role in the initial integration processes. It is not merely about conveying messages, but about fostering guidance, trust and autonomy.

Access to information becomes a critical factor because it connects migrants to the local area, to services, to institutions and to the opportunities available. Integration does not depend solely on what the local context offers, but on what migrants are actually able to see, understand and access.

5.7 Summary of established findings

For the purpose of providing a more concise synthesis of the findings, the six overarching themes were subsequently organised into five structural findings in Table 2. In this synthesis, “relational capital and the quality of reception” and “cultural and community integration” were combined into a broader finding concerning relational and community participation, as participants’ accounts in both areas converged around social interaction, participation, belonging and interpersonal relationships. The remaining four themes were retained as distinct findings.

Table 2 – Summary of the qualitative findings emerging from the analysis of the interviews

Evidence	**Presence in the dataset**	**Interpretive function**
Language as an infrastructure of integration	12/12 interviews	Enabling condition for everyday autonomy, access to services, employment and personal confidence
Legal-institutional mediation	10/12 interviews	Documentary stabilisation and facilitation of access to rights
Relational capital and quality of reception	12/12 interviews	Building trust, participation, sense of belonging and continuity in attending the centre
Perceived changes across migration trajectories	12/12 interviews (with internal variations)	Reported pragmatic, emotional, relational or professional changes across different participant profiles

Communication as a structural issue	5-6 interviews	Delayed access, dependence on social media and need for greater multilingualism

The summary confirms that the centre supports participants on several levels: linguistic, administrative, interpersonal and emotional. Interview counts are reported descriptively to indicate recurrence within the dataset and should not be interpreted as quantitative measures of prevalence or statistical significance.

However, access to information remains one of the weakest links in the process.

The problem is not merely the existence of the services, but whether migrants are actually able to find out about them, understand them and access them in a timely manner and in the necessary ways.

6. Discussion

The findings suggest that initial integration is closely linked to the ability to access, understand and use the information available in the new social context. In line with a multidimensional understanding of integration (Ager & Strang, 2008), the data suggest that settling into the new environment depends not only on work, documentation or language learning, but also on the ability to find one's way around. In this sense, integration also appears to be a process of information orientation.

Participants' accounts position language as an important foundation for integration. It not only enables better communication in everyday life, but also provides access to spaces, services and opportunities that would otherwise be

difficult to reach. Knowledge of Polish strengthens participants' autonomy, facilitates understanding of documents and interaction with institutions, and reduces dependence on intermediaries. At the same time, it has an emotional dimension: speaking the host country's language, even if only partially, helps people feel less vulnerable and isolated, and more capable of dealing with situations that are initially intimidating.

Participants frequently described the centre as an important point of reference when navigating situations of uncertainty. In their accounts, it was perceived not merely as a place where services were provided, but as a setting that facilitated interaction with local institutions and the wider community. Legal and administrative support, language courses and community activities were described as helping participants better understand procedures and opportunities that could otherwise be difficult to navigate. The centre was experienced as a form of mediation not only between languages, but also between participants and unfamiliar institutional practices. A key element concerns the relational dimension. The quality of the reception, the helpfulness of the staff and the atmosphere of trust built up within the centre encourage continued participation. This finding suggests that access to information is not experienced as a purely technical matter. People do not seek information in the abstract: they seek it within relationships, places and contexts where they feel safe enough to ask questions, make mistakes, return and try again.

Similarly, Mena Montes et al. (2026) show that digital technologies and informal actors can facilitate access to information and support networks, but they do not replace the need for mediation, trust and support throughout the integration process.

The findings also suggest that participants did not experience the centre in the same way. The changes they associated with participation varied according to migration trajectory, age, personal circumstances, language proficiency and

initial levels of vulnerability. For some participants, the centre was described primarily as a source of practical support in relation to employment or administrative matters; for others, it was associated with opportunities for socialisation, emotional support and greater stability in everyday life. These differences reinforce the interpretation of integration as a context-dependent process that may take different forms according to individual circumstances and migration histories. Communication remains the critical issue. Despite the centre's positive role, some participants highlight difficulties in initially accessing information, a reliance on informal networks and social media, and a need for clearer, multilingual channels. This finding is consistent with studies highlighting the role of migrant networks and social media in the circulation of information, but also their limitations in terms of accessibility, reliability and digital inequalities (Dekker & Engbersen, 2014). The problem, therefore, concerns not only the existence of services, but their actual communicative accessibility. Overall, the study suggests that making a service accessible does not simply mean offering it, but communicating it clearly, promptly and in a way that is easy to understand. Inclusion often begins with very practical steps: understanding a document, knowing where to go, finding someone willing to listen, and receiving an explanation in the right language or through a trusted person. It is in these everyday steps that inclusion ceases to be an abstract principle and becomes a lived experience.

7. Conclusions

This article has analysed the role of access to information and communication barriers in migrants' integration processes, based on twelve semi-structured qualitative interviews conducted at an integration centre in Zielona Góra, Poland. The findings suggest that participants perceived access to clear and comprehensible information as an important condition for navigating the early

stages of integration. When information is clear and comprehensible, the local area becomes easier to navigate; when it is fragmented or linguistically inaccessible, even existing services risk remaining out of reach.

In participants' accounts, the centre emerged as a space for linguistic, legal-institutional and relational mediation. Language courses, administrative support and community activities were described as resources that facilitated access to services and opportunities for social interaction and belonging. This aspect appears particularly relevant for the most vulnerable individuals, for whom integration also depends on the opportunity to re-establish a routine, break out of isolation and feel part of a community.

The study has several limitations. The small sample and the focus on a single integration centre limit the transferability of the findings beyond the context examined. Participants were recruited voluntarily among individuals already attending the centre, and their existing relationship with the organisation and its staff may have influenced their willingness to express criticism. The predominantly positive assessments reported in the interviews should therefore be understood as participants' perceptions rather than as evidence of programme effectiveness. Linguistic mediation in some interviews may also have affected certain nuances of the original accounts.

Despite these limitations, the study provides a context-specific account of how participants perceived communication and access to information as relevant to their integration experiences. Future research could extend the analysis to other centres, local contexts and migrant groups, and further examine the relationship between institutional communication, informal networks and access to services.

In conclusion, integration does not begin simply when a person finds a job, obtains a document or learns a language. It begins even earlier, when she manages to work out where she is, what options are open to her and who she

can turn to without feeling lost. From this perspective, effective communication is not merely an organisational matter, but an important component of how reception and integration are experienced in everyday life.

References

Adams, W. C. (2015). Conducting semi-structured interviews. In K. E. Newcomer, H. P. Hatry, & J. S. Wholey (Eds.), *Handbook of practical program evaluation* (pp. 492–505). Jossey-Bass. https://doi.org/10.1002/9781119171386.ch19

Ager, A., & Strang, A. (2008). Understanding integration: A conceptual framework. *Journal of Refugee Studies, 21*(2), 166–191. https://doi.org/10.1093/jrs/fen016

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2012). Thematic analysis. In H. Cooper, P. M. Camic, D. L. Long, A. T. Panter, D. Rindskopf, & K. J. Sher (Eds.), *APA handbook of research methods in psychology, Vol. 2: Research designs: Quantitative, qualitative, neuropsychological, and biological* (pp. 57–71). American Psychological Association. https://doi.org/10.1037/13620-004

Corbetta, P. (2014). *Metodologia e tecniche della ricerca sociale*. Il Mulino.

Dekker, R., & Engbersen, G. (2014). How social media transform migrant networks and facilitate migration. *Global Networks, 14*(4), 401–418. https://doi.org/10.1111/glob.12040

European Commission. (2020). *Action plan on integration and inclusion 2021–2027* (COM/2020/758 final). EUR-Lex. https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52020DC0758

European Commission. (n.d.). *Your fate in your hands – Social and professional support for foreigners*. Kohesio. Retrieved June 26, 2026, from https://kohesio.ec.europa.eu/en/projects/Q7355858

European Parliament & Council of the European Union. (2021). *Regulation (EU) 2021/1147 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 7 July 2021 establishing the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund*. *Official Journal of the European Union*. https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/reg/2021/1147/oj/eng

Eurostat. (2026, June 10). *4.37 million under temporary protection in April 2026*. https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-eurostat-news/w/ddn-20260610-1

Lloyd, A., Pilerot, O., & Hultgren, F. (2017). The remaking of fractured landscapes: Supporting refugees in transition (SpiRiT). *Information Research, 22*(3), Article 764. https://informationr.net/ir/22-3/paper764.html

Mena Montes, N., Yang, Y., & Visser, M. (2026). Navigating Integration in The Netherlands: Syrian Refugees, Digital Practices, and Inclusive Communication. *Social Inclusion, 14*, Article 10946. https://doi.org/10.17645/si.10946

Oduntan, O., & Ruthven, I. (2020). Situational information behaviour. *The International Journal of Information, Diversity, & Inclusion*, *4*(2), 5-21. https://doi.org/10.33137/ijidi.v4i2.34033

OECD. (2025). *International migration outlook 2025: Poland*. Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/2025/11/international-migration-outlook-2025_355ae9fd/full-report/poland_9206f6b3.html

Statistical Office in Zielona Góra. (n.d.). *Data of Lubuskie Voivodship*. Retrieved June 26, 2026, from https://zielonagora.stat.gov.pl/en/data-of-lubuskie-voivodship-/