

A long term welcome for Polish refugees

On 31 October 1944, 733 Polish refugee children and 105 adult caregivers sailed into Wellington Harbour in New Zealand. Within a few days they settled into the Polish Children's Camp at Pahiatua, north of Wellington.

The children had been invited by the Prime Minister of New Zealand for the remainder of World War II. They had lost their homes and family members following the 1939 German invasion of Poland, the occupation of Eastern Poland by the USSR and subsequent deportations of 1,700,000 Polish people to the USSR.



Martyna Wojtkowska: researcher

“WE HAVE WAR IN UKRAINE RIGHT NOW AND WE HAVE REFUGEES CLOSE TO OUR BORDERS AND THIS STORY OF THE PAHIATUA CHILDREN IS SOMEHOW PARALLEL TO THE STORY NOWADAYS.”

- Martyna Wojtkowska: researcher at the Pilecki Institute, Warsaw

Capturing testimonies for the future

Martyna Wojtkowska has been undertaking research into the lives of the remaining Pahiatua children on behalf of the Pilecki Institute in Warsaw.

Her research involves talking to the remaining Pahiatua children in both Poland and New Zealand, as well as their descendants.

“Can you imagine an 85-year old Polish woman who dances haka in her living room? Or a daughter who discovers in her mother's archives five diaries, which describe day by day her war memories, the way she got to New Zealand and time spent in New Zealand with all her teenage ups and downs?”



Remembering the past to inform the future

The Pilecki Institute was established to facilitate the international analysis of issues and developments that were of key importance for the political history of the 20th century.

The Institute focuses on honouring persons who gave aid and succour to Polish citizens and Poles of different citizenship in those difficult times.

The Institute also undertakes and publishes research and runs a wide educational programme. It is currently running a major project to document the testimonies of Ukrainian men and women in Poland.

The story of the Pahiatua children, along with excerpts from Ms. Wojtkowska's interviews will be made into a six-part podcast series later in 2022.

“MY FIRST INTERVIEW WITH MRS. ALEXANDRA FROM KRAKÓW SURPRISED ME WITH THE FACT THAT THIS OVER EIGHTY-YEAR-OLD, ELDERLY WOMAN DANCED HAKA IN FRONT OF ME WHICH IS INCREDIBLE, EXPRESSIVE AND ...”

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New Zealand's relationship with the EU is significant. The EU is an important partner for New Zealand; we share values, perspectives and interests that make us closer than geography would suggest.

LEARN MORE ABOUT THE PAHIATUA CHILDREN AND NEW ZEALAND'S PARTNERSHIP WITH THE EU
www.mfat.govt.nz/closetoEU



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