

Country Profile

Poland

Migration and Skill Corridors

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Poland has recently transitioned to a net immigration country due to significant emigration since its EU accession in 2004 and an aging population. Many Polish citizens have emigrated, leading to labour market gaps that migrants, particularly from Ukraine, have begun to fill. Key established migration skill corridors to Poland are from Eastern Europe - especially Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova, and Georgia - and emerging skill corridors can be identified from Asia, particularly India and the Philippines. The presence of skilled migrants in Poland highlights the need for a comprehensive migration, labour market and integration policy in Poland.

Produced by the EU-funded Link4Skills research project, this profile is part of a series providing relevant information about countries where the project is conducting empirical fieldwork. Our focus is on transnational labour migration with particular attention given to migration skill corridors. Countries investigated by the consortium include Austria, Canada, Germany, Ghana, India, Indonesia, Morocco, the Netherlands, Nigeria, the Philippines, Poland and Ukraine.

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1. Introduction

Unlike Western European countries, Poland does not have a long-standing tradition of being a net immigration country. Significant post-EU accession migration of Poles, primarily to the United Kingdom, Germany, and Ireland since May 2004, has resulted in emigration consistently outpacing immigration. At the beginning of 2021, 2.24 million Poles were living abroad (GUS, 2021). Additionally, Poland, with a current population of around 38 million, has been grappling with population aging for years. Projections indicate that Poland's population will decrease by 6.8 million by 2060 and the working-age population will decline by 5.5 million by 2050 (GUS, 2023). Persistent emigration trends and the aging crisis have created a gap in the Polish labour market, which migrants have gradually begun to fill (Górczyńska, 2020). Consequently, Poland has only recently transitioned to having more immigrants than emigrants.

Estimating the total number of migrants living in Poland is challenging due to factors such as irregular migration and the lack of internal borders within the EU. The Central Statistical Office (GUS, 2020) estimated the number of migrants at the end of February 2020 to be 2,213,594, of which 1,390,978 (62%) were Ukrainians. The escalation of the war in Ukraine resulted in many Ukrainian citizens being granted temporary protection status in Poland. By the end of 2023 the figure had reached 952,950, driving up the total number of Ukrainians in Poland to 3,166,418. At that time there were approximately 3.5-4 million migrants in Poland, with Ukrainians accounting for 60-75% of the total (Piekutowski, 2023).

As of April 8, 2024, 882,277 migrants from outside the EU possessed temporary residence permits in Poland ranging from three months to three years (Office for Foreigners, UDSC, 2024). 508,257 of those were citizens of Ukraine, 116,789 of Belarus, 26,676 of Georgia, 19,628 of India, and 19,089 of Russia. Additionally, 117,205 migrants held permanent residence permits, and 4,181 held permits for long-term EU residents.

In 2020, Poland issued 1,311 EU Blue Cards¹ (2.6% of the EU total) for high-skilled migrants, increasing that to 2,139 in 2021 (3.2%) and 3,550 in 2022 (4.3%) (Eurostat, 2024). In 2022, Poland issued EU Blue Cards primarily to migrants from Belarus (1,852), India (1,882), Ukraine (1,489), China (1,091), Egypt (798), Russia (651), Türkiye (861), Tunisia (749), and Pakistan (389).

These statistics show that the number of migrants in Poland is growing every year. Due to the demand for migrants in the labour market, Poland provides more liberal access to its labour market than any other EU country through simplified employment pathways. Despite this, Poland has not developed a clear migration and integration policy. Since 2015 there has been

¹ More about Blue Card at: https://immigration-portal.ec.europa.eu/eu-blue-card/essential-information_en (28/05/2024). Across the EU, the total number of EU Blue Cards granted to non-EU citizens rose from 24 305 in 2017 to 52 127 in 2019. It then fell to 50 234 in 2020 and increased again to 67 730 in 2021 (+ 35 %) and to 81 851 in 2022 (+21 %).

no government document regulating these pathways. This makes it difficult to take advantage of the huge opportunity that migration represents (Piekutowski, 2023).

2. Migration Skill Corridors: An Overview

Relying on public statistics for Poland, Piekutowski (2023) estimates that there are 2.9 million migrants between the ages of 20 and 59 in Poland. The total number of working-age migrants is estimated at around 3-3.2 million. 66% of migrants living in Poland are estimated to be active in the labour market, being either officially employed or working in the economic grey zone.

At the end of 2023, 1,530,000 migrants were working legally in Poland, 261,000 more than the previous year (MRPiPS, 2023). In April 2024, the number of migrants in the social security system amounted to 1,143,303. Most were citizens of Ukraine (762,541), followed by citizens of Georgia (26,345), Belarus (11,345), India (20,741), Moldova (14,431), Russia (12,300), and the Philippines (11,465) (ZUS, 2024). Insured foreigners in Poland work mainly in administrative services (205,303), manufacturing (193,289), transport and storage (163,829) construction (139,182), and sales or service of motor vehicles (10,2092). The next sectors where foreigners find employment are accommodation and food services (74,807), information and communication (56,612), professional activity, science and technology (51,237), the service sector (34,219), health care and social assistance (33,867) and education (24,425) (ZUS, 2024).

2.1 The Eastern European migration skill corridor

Migration skill corridors refer to the pathways through which migrants move from one country to another, often driven by the demand for specific skills in the destination country. In Poland's case, these corridors originate primarily in Eastern European and Asian countries.

Poland has prioritized the Eastern European corridor in attracting migrants from outside the EU. Therefore, Poland primarily liberalized access to its labour market for citizens from the Eastern Partnership member states (with the exception of Azerbaijan). These include Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova, Georgia, Armenia, and (until 2022) Russia. Only citizens of these six countries are eligible for employment in Poland based on a special simplified work permit regarded as a declaration of entrusting work to a foreigner. (In practice, permits are issued now to only five countries as Poland stopped issuing permits to citizens of Russia following its full-scale invasion of Ukraine.) These permits are issued for a maximum duration of 24 months. Prior to 2022 they were limited to 6 months per year. While 782,222 of the permits were issued in 2015, the number rose to 1,979,886 in 2021. Of those permits, 1,635,104 went to citizens of Ukraine (before the escalation of the war in Ukraine). In 2022, there were 1,038,316 permits issued, with that figure dropping to 506,554 in 2023. Of those permits only 175,433 were issued for citizens of Ukraine. Most were provided to citizens of Belarus (200,661), Georgia (85,773), Moldova (38,522), and Armenia (6,165) (MRPiPS, 2024). The reduced number of these permits issued to citizens of Ukraine reflects the fact that as of 2022 they have had different ways to access to the Polish labour market and do not need to apply for such permits.

In response to the escalation of the Russian war in Ukraine on February 24, 2022, Poland enacted a special law granting Ukrainian citizens Temporary Protection (TP) status in Poland. According to this law, Ukrainian citizens (both forced migrants and economic migrants who were already living in Poland before February 24, 2022) received free access to the Polish labour market. Employers are only required to notify the appropriate labour office of the employment of such individuals. In 2023, 784,545 Ukrainians were registered in the labour market, and in 2024, the number rose to 1,078,041 (MRPiPS, 2024). Ukrainians most commonly find employment in the sectors listed above, with manufacturing leading at 334,076, followed by administrative and support service activities at 201,692, transportation and warehousing at 192,688, construction at 76,612, and accommodation and food service at 66,611 (MRPiPS, 2024).

As of May 31, 2024, there are 18,000 qualified Ukrainian professionals registered on LinkedIn who are working in Poland. 3,327 are employed in IT services and consulting, 2,343 in software development, 571 in business consulting and services, 368 in custom software development for IT systems, 345 in computer games, and 206 in cybersecurity and network security. In comparison, there are 28,000 qualified professionals from Belarus in Poland. 7,027 of them are working in IT services and consulting, 5,484 in software development, 2,063 in business consulting and services, 1,142 in custom software development for IT systems, 1,137 in computer games, and 887 in IT systems evaluation and testing.

Although Ukrainians are the dominant group of migrants by far, their numbers have not increased. On the contrary, a decline has been observed, driven by frustration over integration difficulties and the lack of government policies. Ukrainians have been returning to Ukraine or migrating further west, primarily to Germany. According to estimates, 350,000 Ukrainian citizens have already left Poland for Germany (EWL, 2023).

2.2 The Asian migration skill corridor

While the number of Ukrainian citizens in Poland has declined, migration from Asia has increased significantly. In 2022, there were 16,000 Indian citizens registered in the Polish social security system (ZUS, 2022). Citizens of other Asian countries included 6,900 from the Philippines, 4,900 from Uzbekistan, 3,100 from Bangladesh, and 4,500 from Indonesia. Migration to Poland from each of these countries grew again in 2023 (ZUS), with 4,588 new arrivals from India, 2,870 from the Philippines, 2,026 from Uzbekistan, 1,770 from Bangladesh, and 1,759 from Indonesia.

Based on these data, it can be observed that migrant groups from India and the Philippines are the most numerous. Migrants from the Philippines most commonly find employment in industry, the service sector, transportation and warehousing, and construction (ZUS, 2024). Meanwhile, migrants from India are primarily employed in industry, information and communication, professional activities, science, and technology.

As for migrants with specialized qualifications, LinkedIn data for Poland (accessed April 9, 2024) indicate there were 453 specialists from India, with the largest single group working in

IT services and consulting (26), followed by higher education (25), and banking (21). During the same period, there were 109 specialists from the Philippines, with seven employed in the banking sector, six in telecommunications, and five in IT services and consulting.

The data show that migrants from India and Philippines predominate in Poland's Asian migration corridor, just as citizens of Ukraine constitute the largest group in the eastern migration corridor.

3. Migration and Skills

So, what qualifications do these migrants bring to Poland? And what barriers do they face in the Polish labour market in terms of utilising their potential? Available public statistics in Poland do not provide detailed information about the skills or specific occupations of skilled migrants, only limited information about the sectors they are employed in. Therefore, scholars need to rely on dedicated sources. LinkedIn Talent Insight data provide a glimpse into some skills of skilled migrants in Poland. Among Ukrainian professionals, these skills among others include SQL, software development, JavaScript, and IT technologies. Indian professionals excel in finance, analytical skills, accounting, and Python. Filipino professionals' skills are process management, IT consulting, and programming languages.

The percentage of people with higher education among Ukrainians living in Poland in May 2022 (NBP) ranged from 46% in the group of "pre-war migrants" to 50 % in the group of forced migrants. Regardless, many migrants experience deskilling. For example, in 2022, 46% of Ukrainians in Poland worked in positions below their qualifications (Zyzik et al., 2023).

Research by the Polish Economic Institute (Zyzik at al., 2023) shows that Ukrainians in Poland are forced to confront a variety of challenges in the labour market. One of these challenges is discrimination that manifests itself in the form of inadequate or no pay, exploitation of a weaker position in the labour market, and unequal treatment and workload – developments that foster harmful stereotypes (Zyzik at al., 2023). Certainly, these problems affect migrants in Poland in general. On top of that, there are also difficulties related to the recognition of academic degrees and recognition of their qualifications or retraining, which in Poland is a costly and lengthy process.

All of this is because Poland has not developed policies conducive to the integration of migrants into the Polish labour market, thereby making it difficult to tap into their potential. At the national level, there are no talent partnerships established with migrants' countries of origin, and recruitment is mainly done through migrant networks and employment agencies.

At the same time, the ageing population and emigration trends of Poles will continue to affect the Polish labour market. According to the annual Occupation Barometer Survey from 2023, the deficit sectors in Poland include construction, electrical engineering and mechanics, healthcare, transportation and logistics, education, gastronomy, and finance and administration. A simulation by the Polish Social Security Administration shows that completely halting the decline in the number of active human resources in Poland's labour market would require an

increase in the number of working-age migrants by 200,000-400,000 each year (Piekutowski, 2023). That could only be done through an active migration policy.

In utilizing migration to address its future labour needs, Poland should develop a set of clearly targeted policies. These include programs for integration, education, and learning the Polish language. Also essential is a simplified process of recognizing qualifications and academic degrees. Entrepreneurship among migrants must be supported, their employment conditions monitored, and their labour rights effectively protected. More must also be done to generally combat discrimination. Finally, Poland should establish talent partnerships with migrants' countries of origin to ensure a fair flow of skills.

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About the Link4Skills project

Link4Skills is an EU-funded research and project addressing the global challenge of skill shortages and mismatches through innovative, sustainable solutions that foster fair skill utilization and exchange across continents.

Focusing on Europe, Africa, Asia, and America, the project seeks to bridge the gap between skill supply and demand by facilitating re/up-skilling, promoting automation, and encouraging migration as policy options.

Link4Skills is creating an inclusive, participatory policy decision-making environment by integrating a diverse range of stakeholders, including EU decision-makers, inter-governmental institutions, national and subnational decision-makers, employers organizations, employees organizations, and civic society co-development institutions.

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