

Migration Skill Corridor Brief

Philippines-Poland

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This brief examines the rapidly expanding Philippines–Poland migration skill corridor, driven by labour demand in sectors such as manufacturing, logistics, construction, and transport. It explores the corridor’s distinctive migration profile, the underutilisation of migrant skills, and the challenges arising from limited bilateral cooperation. The analysis identifies opportunities to strengthen ethical recruitment, skills recognition, and long-term workforce development.

This Migration Skill Corridor Brief is part of a Link4Skills compact publication series examining labour mobility and skills mobility pathways between select countries across Europe, Africa, Asia, and the Americas. Based on the project’s more extensive Migration Skill Corridor reports, the briefs provide concise analyses of migration dynamics, policy frameworks, good practices, and challenges shaping skills mobility, with the aim of supporting fair, sustainable, and mutually beneficial migration pathways.

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Key Messages

- **The “emergent” character of the Philippines-Poland migration skill corridor**

This corridor is described as “emerging” because it is characterized by fragmented infrastructure and a lack of bilateral coordination. Its emergence has been driven by the Polish labor market’s rapidly growing demand for workers in sectors such as manufacturing, logistics, and transport, as well as by the Philippines’ interest in Central and Eastern Europe as a new destination for its workforce.

- **The “originality” of the corridor**

In Poland, Filipino migration takes on a distinctive character, concentrated in male-dominated sectors such as manufacturing, logistics, and construction. This marks a clear departure from global patterns centred on nursing and other female-dominated occupations. This emerging migration skill corridor attracts middle-aged men who view Poland not only as a new target labor market, but also as a strategic gateway to further mobility within the Schengen Area.

- **The underemployment of highly educated Filipino specialists in Poland creates skill mismatch**

Although many Filipino migrants in Poland have post-secondary or technical qualifications, the corridor is dominated not by nurses or other regulated professionals, as is often the case elsewhere, but by mostly male workers in manual, technical, and physically demanding jobs in manufacturing, logistics, construction, and maritime sectors. Many are therefore not “low-skilled” in terms of education or experience, but their qualifications are often not translated into equivalent employment because Poland lacks streamlined recognition procedures, while Polish-language requirements remain a major barrier, especially in regulated professions such as nursing. As a result, the corridor produces skill underutilisation: Filipino workers meet urgent labor shortages, but often in jobs below their formal training and occupational potential.

- **Structural asymmetry in the “bilateral” intentions**

The Philippines seeks to formalize cooperation, while Poland prefers an ad hoc, market-driven, and reactive model. The corridor relies on the activities of private actors, while the Polish government avoids binding Bilateral Agreements.

- **Right-based, ethical and safety migration require formal (state level) cooperation**

Without institutional involvement, the short-term gains of Polish employers come at the cost of ethical risks, as the lack of contracts fosters opaque, nonethical recruitment practices (especially in third countries), high fees passed on to Filipino migrants.

1. Executive summary

The Philippine-Polish migration skills corridor is an emerging and rapidly growing mobility pathway shaped not by geographical proximity, humanitarian crisis, or postcolonial dependency, but by sudden demand in the Polish labor market, exacerbated by labor shortages following COVID-19, the outflow of native workers, and Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, which limited new migration of Ukrainian men due to military conscription and contributed to return migration. Its intensification in recent years also stems from Philippine efforts to expand and diversify overseas labor cooperation beyond traditional destinations such as the Middle East, positioning Poland as a new and attractive destination for Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) in Central and Eastern Europe.

Filipino migration to Poland is characterized by a notable reversal of global trends, particularly the high feminization of Filipino labor migration associated with nursing, caregiving, and domestic work. In Poland, this is reflected instead in the predominance of men employed in technical sectors and manufacturing, as well as a concentration of migrants aged 35–39, according to the Social Insurance Institution (SII, 2024). This emerging corridor attracts mature workers with non-standard professional profiles, for whom “older” age does not constitute a barrier to employment, in contrast to the informal ageism that OFWs may encounter in destinations such as Middle Eastern countries.

Due to the absence of any form of bilateral agreements and MoU regulating skilled migration, the Philippines-Poland corridor is primarily market-oriented and dominated by private actors. Currently, the corridor functions as a non-institutionalized system, which is best describe using the metaphor of “two ships passing in the night” where the Philippines’ readiness to build a structured partnership is met with a lack of mutual interest and only ad hoc, informal actions on the Polish part.

This brings the clash of two distinct governance models. While the Philippines maintains a rigorous, state-led system of migrant worker protection, Poland adopts a reactive approach characterized by strategic non-engagement. This misalignment creates a structural trap: recruitment is accelerated through informal channels or third countries (e.g., the United Arab Emirates) also to bypass the Philippines rules) which simultaneously inflates costs for migrants and can undermine their legal protection.

Filipino migration to Poland, mostly in sectors requiring middle-level skills, has grown rapidly in recent years. Nonetheless, this growth masks the absence of a coherent strategy for utilizing skills. High labor force participation, particularly in manufacturing, logistics, and transportation, does not translate into effective use of Filipino human capital, especially among highly educated migrants.

In addition, the lack of formal procedures for recognizing qualifications in Poland, including credentials such as TESDA certificates in fields like maritime work and welding—leads to de-skilling and the underuse of Filipino talent. Language requirements, particularly for regulated professions such as medicine and nursing, create a further barrier: even highly qualified migrants, including engineers and nurses are often pushed into manual jobs below their skill level, worsening skills mismatch. As a result, OFWs are often valued more for their English proficiency and perceived work ethic than for their professional qualifications.

The migration skill corridor reflects profound structural asymmetry. Poland benefits from the influx of determined, English-speaking workforce, alleviating demographic shortages, while the

Philippines must contend with the risk of losing skilled personnel without any guarantee of knowledge and skills transfer. Though the corridor is based on a circular migration model, its “triple win” potential remains untapped due to a lack of Bilateral Agreements which Poland currently overlooks in favor of formally advocating an intensification of automation.

The future of the corridor depends on a strategic shift toward skills-oriented onward looking management. This requires moving away from ad hoc patching of labor shortages in favor of a formal partnership that integrates ethical recruitment and integration support.

2. Migration dynamics

The number of work permits issued to Filipinos has risen sharply, from over 2,000 in 2018 to approximately 38,000 in 2024, according to data from the Polish Ministry of Labor, Family and Social Policy. The number of newly deployed workers has also increased, from 7 in 2015 to nearly 4,000 in 2024, according to the Philippine Department of Migrant Workers. These figures differ because they capture different ends of the migration skill corridor. Polish data record work permits issued by the destination state, which may include permits that are not ultimately used, renewals, changes of employer, or workers already present in Poland or elsewhere in Europe. Philippine data, on the other hand, capture only workers officially deployed through the Philippine migration-management system. The discrepancy therefore reflects not only rapid growth, but also the corridor’s fragmented governance, including third country hiring, onward mobility, and recruitment pathways that may bypass formal Philippine deployment procedures.

According to the Polish Social Insurance Institution data, 9,730 Filipinos were covered by social security in Poland in 2023. The discrepancy between the number of work permits issued and the number of registered insured workers can be explained by several factors. Polish intermediaries and employers often apply for more permits than the number of workers who ultimately obtain visas and arrive in Poland. In addition, not all OFWs are registered for social security by their employers, meaning that some are not captured in official statistics. Visa access has become a particularly serious bottleneck for Polish employers, especially after the 2023 “visa scandal,” in which senior Polish government officials were allegedly involved in the large-scale acceleration of visa procedures in exchange for money. These difficulties have coincided with the ongoing digitalisation of Poland’s work permit system, further reshaping recruitment and administrative practices.

The corridor shows moderate but increasing growth, driven by labor shortages in key sectors in Poland. The visa scandal has contributed to unauthorized migration and the recruitment of workers outside Manila, including through third countries such as the United Arab Emirates, Hong Kong, and Taiwan. Recruitment agencies operating from third countries, including Arab countries, enable faster recruitment, which serves the interests of private-sector actors who receive limited support from the Polish state. However, these practices take place outside the official Philippine protection system and bypass the ban on recruitment outside the Ministry of Migrant Workers and risk non-ethical treatment. Currently, chaos in the visa appointment online booking system means that migrants work permits often expire before a migrant can obtain a visa since the main challenge is the inability to secure an appointment for visa document submission within the digital reservation system.

3. Policies and agreements

The Philippines-Poland migration skill corridor is characterized by a clash of two distinct systems: the highly structured Philippine model (based on the *1974 Labor Code* and rigorous protection of own workers' rights through the Department of Migrant Workers) and the reactive Polish model, based on market flexibility and ad hoc measures.

In relation to potential facilitations and agreements, the Philippines is not a priority country for Poland. Even the Polish *Migration Strategy for 2025-2030* prioritizes Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries and those with readmission agreements. This means that the Philippines, despite being a key supplier of labor in strategic sectors remains institutionally overlooked and not included in dedicated mobility pathways.

Despite the dynamic growth in the number of workers (38,000 permits in 2024), the corridor operates without any Bilateral Agreement or even Memorandum of Understanding. In 2018 the Philippines reportedly expressed its willingness to formalize relations through a Joint Declaration of Intent (Asis and Ducanes 2024). However, Poland has not yet demonstrated mutual interest in this instrument. A similar fate befell the informal political declarations of 2018. At the time, the Deputy Minister of Family, Labor, and Social Policy claimed that talks with the Philippines were already “taking place” regarding the recruitment of highly skilled workers for the IT, construction, and medical sectors, including elderly care (Żebrowski 2018). This initiative never progressed beyond the declaration phase.

The new *Migration Strategy 2025-2030* and the *2025 Act on the Conditions for Allowing the Assignment of Work to Foreigners in the Territory of the Republic of Poland* represent an attempt to systemically organize the corridor, which some experts describe as the "Wild West" due to the lack of oversight of agencies.

The new regulations aim to increase control over informal intermediation and eliminate legal loopholes that allow recruitment from third countries outside the official Philippine migration protection system (Department of Migrant Workers), which has previously fostered abuses such as hidden deductions from wages.

Lack of proper formal agreements between both countries create a situation in which the recruitment of Filipino workers relies largely on informal networks and private intermediaries. Upon arrival in Poland, informal contacts and ethnic social networks such as religious communities, sports groups, and non-governmental organizations. These become crucial, enabling migrants to change employers or advance professionally, which in some cases opens the door to jobs more aligned with their actual, high-level qualifications.

Although Poland and the Philippines are not yet developing a coherent bilateral migration policy framework, both countries continue to expand their own migration governance systems in parallel, but with different orientations. Poland is increasingly moving toward a settlement-oriented approach, developing new integration and labor migration policies in response to growing economic demand and the need to retain foreign workers. The Philippines, by contrast, continues to rely on a circulation-oriented model, grounded in its long-established institutional infrastructure and migration management practices shaped by decades of labor export experience, maintaining strong links with migrants and encouraging their eventual return. At the same time, OFWs are free to pursue permanent settlement where destination countries provide such opportunities for them. In Poland, where state-led integration structures are still in their nascent

stages, the Migrant Workers Office serves as a vital safeguard, helping to fill institutional gaps and protect workers' rights through Post-Arrival Orientation Seminars (PAOS). In implementing integration policy, Poland is only now moving from a passive model toward building an institutional network, including Migrant Integration Centres (MICs).

These centres, some of which are already operational, are designed to offer standardized Polish language courses (from levels A1 to B2), legal support, and cultural orientation, filling the gap left by the fragmented activities of the previous system. Even if so far the current integration of Filipinos is based mainly on self-organization within religious communities and non-governmental organizations, MICs are intended to become the foundation of systemic support, facilitating access to public services and skills certification processes

4. Good practices

1. **Post-Arrival Orientation Seminar (PAOS) initiatives in destination:** The Philippines' Department of Migrant Workers requires applicants for overseas employment to fulfil the online Pre-Employment Orientation Seminar (PEOS), and the one-day Pre-Department Orientation Seminar (PDOS) for migrant workers before they leave for overseas employment. Upon arrival in the country of employment, the embassies and/or the Migrant Workers Offices (MWOs) conduct the Post-Arrival Orientation Seminar (PAOS). The first PAOS for Filipino migrant in Poland was organized by the MWO based in Prague and the International Organization for Migration in June 2025. This breakthrough event bridged information gaps for newly arrived workers by focusing on cultural differences and new work environment to facilitate better adaptation for newcomers.
2. **Tailored Filipino skilling for specific Polish needs:** Some recruitment agencies and employers have established their own training centers or specialized schools (such as culinary and hospitality institutions, welding companies or transport) in the Philippines to prepare candidates for specific European operational standards before they depart. For instance, these programs train applicants on specific menus and strict operational realities for roles on cruise ships or provide intensive training for truck drivers to ensure they are fully prepared for European traffic rules and technical requirements. This approach helps elevate the quality of the workforce and ensures that migrants are capable of meeting high standards immediately upon arrival.

5. Areas for improvement

Lagging Governance. The corridor is growing rapidly, but governance is not keeping pace. It requires formal institutions and agreements to remain sustainable. Structured Mobility Pilot programs launched in special sectors such as maritime or welding in a form of short contracts could satisfy Poland's labor market needs while respecting the Philippines' preference for a circular and right-based approach.

The Skill Paradox. While recruitment is successful, skill utilization is poor. Too many workers face a lack of recognition for their high qualifications. Skill recognition should be clearer and more achievable.

From Talk to Rules. Ethical recruitment must move toward formalized rules to mitigate the overcharging and other risks associated with third country hiring and weak oversight. A solid formal base could be a cyclical multistakeholder forum for employers, NGOs, and government agencies to build trust and map regulatory bottlenecks, discuss emergence

issues and build good practices in the formal problem-solving process. To unlock the full potential of the Philippines-Poland migration corridor, stakeholders must move toward closer cooperation mostly by involving private recruitment agencies in policy discussions since they understand these challenges the best.

Policy Misalignment. A strategic mismatch exists; the Philippines focuses on circular deployment, while Poland seeks long-term retention. This "mismatch" weakens the corridor.

Urgent Coordination. Stakeholders must now to move from a market-driven "Wild West" to a structured Skills Mobility Partnership. Without coordination, Poland risks losing the global "race for skills". A good start could be a Joint Recruitment Hub – a physical or digital presence in Warsaw and Manila to standardize skilling and unify complaint channels.

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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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