



Industrial relations and social dialogue  
**Poland: Developments in  
working life 2022**

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**Eurofound reference number:** WPEF23023

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# Introduction

The topics of the war in Ukraine, the energy crisis and skyrocketing inflation dominated the 2022 industrial relations and political discussions. Additionally, in 2022 significant changes to the Labour Code, the introduction of regulations on remote work, and the debate on implementing the Work-Life Balance Directive have been vocal issues. Finally, significant public attention was devoted to the National Recovery and Resilience Plan (NRRP), which is still subjected to political disagreement between the Polish government and the European Commission.

## Political context

The Law and Justice, a social-conservative party, has been ruling Poland for eight years. One of the factors that supported the election's win and allowed the party to maintain power is the 500+ Programme. The programme provides parents with financial support; they receive PLN 500 (€106 as of January 2023) per month for each child under 18 years old. The Chairperson of the party is Jarosław Kaczyński, who is an influential policymaker, especially considering critical political decisions. Since 2017 the Prime Minister has been Mateusz Morawiecki. Under his governing position, the Ministry of Finance is marginalised, and many expenses are funded outside the budget. The current minister, Magdalena Rzeczkowska, cooperates closely with Morawiecki, especially in introducing the so-called anti-inflation shields. Inflation is one of the main political topics in Poland, mainly because in 2022, it recorded its highest numbers since 1997. Poles remember the hyperinflation of the early nineties (after the collapse of Communism) and are afraid of its comeback.

As far as the labour market is concerned, since August 2021, the labour department has belonged to the Minister of Family and Social Policy – Marlena Małag. She is not expected to lose her position until the 2023 parliamentary election. Any replacements of the minister are a challenge for the Law and Justice party because their parliamentary majority is weak and depends on fractious coalition partner United Poland. Małag does not hold any significant position in the Law and Justice party, and her influence is limited in government games.

Regarding political aspects of social Dialogue, Solidarity remains the most important Polish trade union. Its current Chairman is Piotr Duda, who oftentimes cooperates with the government but sometimes opposes its anti-social reforms. The tripartite body is the Social Dialogue Council, which helps to maintain Dialogue among 7 employer representatives (e.g., Confederation Leviathan, Employers of Poland), employees (Solidarity, Trade Unions Forum, All-Poland Alliance of Trade Unions) and government representatives. Relations between partners had faltered after Maciej Witucki, the president of the Confederation Leviathan, was detained by the Central Anticorruption Bureau when he was participating in a meeting of the praesidium of Social Dialogue Council in October 2022. All 9 representative social partner organisations issued a joint statement, reading that "we do not comment on the guilt of the detainee; however, we strongly protest against such law enforcement methods and do not agree that state services should act in such a manner".

In 2023 the government is expected to present new social programmes due to parliamentary elections in October/November, which will shape the political agenda in the following months; however, further details as of January 2023 are limited.

# Actors, institutions and processes

## Social partners

In 2022, the list of representative social partner organisations remained the same as in the previous year. According to the Act of 24 July 2015, on the Social Dialogue and other institutions of social dialogue, organisations need to meet the following criteria: i) have Over 300,000 employees/members aligned under an organisation, and ii) represent the economic activity in over half of PKD (NACE) economic areas. Then, they are considered "representative" and can participate in tripartite dialogue on a national level. As of 2022, there are 9 representative social partners: 3 trade unions (NSZZ "Solidarity", All-Poland Alliance of Trade Unions (OPZZ) and Trade Unions Forum) and 6 employers organisations (Employers of Poland, Confederation Lewiatan, Business Centre Club, Polish Craft Association, Union of Entrepreneurs and Employers). In 2021, the Federation of Polish Entrepreneurs met the representativeness threshold, enabling participation in the Social Dialogue Council.

While the "representative" social partners remain the most important, considering the impact on policymaking, also other organisations were growing in media visibility and social recognition. Non representative social partners, such as Workers' Initiative or Union Alternative, seek alternative union actions suited to Poland's laissez-faire organised labour market. They try to organise unofficial strike events, unionise precarious workers hired on temporary contracts, are actively present in the mainstream media and cooperate with grassroots social movements. Further, in 2021, the first union representing self-employed, called Against, was established to: "become a partner to each government and market player so that the voice of the two and a half million self-employed is heard and respected and [their] demands are implemented".

Notably, the 2021 opinion poll study indicated a rise in public trust towards trade unions. While unionisation is still low and accounts for around 6%, over 50% of respondents were optimistic about trade unions. This is the highest peak in trust and the best result in over 20 years when the trade unions' role dramatically decreased during the 90s economic transformation (CBOS, 2021).

## Social dialogue bodies or frameworks

The latest available 2021 summary of the Social Dialogue Council activity suggests that the representative social partners in 2021 were invested in COVID-19-related issues such as pandemic-related occupational health and safety provisions, vaccinations in the workplace or the support for the business and employees facing pandemic-related hardships. Further, the Council discussed remote work issues and changes to the Labour Code, the National Recovery and Resilience Plan draft, the political environment surrounding the NRRP and issues of European Funds for 2021-2027 and effective operationalisations of funds. The 2022 Social Dialogue Council summary should be available around April 2023.

In 2021, the National Recovery and Resilience Plan was subjected to public consultations. Later, in 2022, the first measures started to be implemented, despite the political disagreement between Law and Justice government and European Commission on judicial system reform.

In April 2021, representative social partners issued a joint statement on the democratisation of NRRP implementation, calling for establishing the NRRP Monitoring Committee. In 2022, the

Ministry of Funds and Regional Policy announced that, as requested, the NRRP Monitoring Committee would be created to overview NRRP implementation, composed of a total of 70 members: governmental representatives, local government representatives, social partners, and social benefit organisations amongst other relevant institutions.

However, social partners, NGOs and other public organisations debated the composition of members and the scope of the Committee competencies (Rzeczpospolita, 2022). Some organisations issued a protest, as they were, at first, not eligible to participate in the call for members. They claimed that the preference was given to an organisation aligned with the government. While the Ministry has addressed that dispute, other issues sparked the debate. As of January 2023, 60 members have already been chosen; however, the list is confidential.

Further, only the Chair of the Committee, the Ministry representative, can issue a call for analysis and expert report on the measure implementation, which limits the possibility of the actions for other Committee members. The Committee is thought to meet once a year, which is claimed to be insufficient to monitor NRRP implementation effectively. Lastly, as of January 2023, the Committee has not started proceedings, as Ministry scheduled the first meeting only when Poland claims the first payment to be received as part of the NRRP (Żółciak and Osiecki, 2022).

## Other working life-related institutions

On 12 March 2022, the Act on Assistance to Ukrainian Citizens in Connection with the Armed Conflict on the Territory of Ukraine came into force; Ukrainians can now register with the Polish Labour Offices as unemployed or seeking work. The Voluntary Labour Corps may also carry out tasks on employment promotion and labour market institutions for Ukrainian citizens eligible to work in Poland who are at least 15 years old and under 25.

## Governmental responses to inflation

In December 2021, the government introduced the first "anti-inflationary shield" and entered into law in two tranches. The first was in effect from 20 December 2021 and encompassed lowering excise on fuels (cut to a minimum level required by the EU) and electric energy (cut to zero) as well as exempting fuels from retail-trade tax. The second one came into force on 1 January 2022 and included lowering VAT taxes on natural gas (8% instead of 23%) and electricity and heating (5% instead of 23%). A subsidy for low-income households<sup>i</sup> was introduced (PLN 400- €85 per household, PLN 4.7 billion - €1 billion in total).

In early 2022 the government introduced the second shield. It encompassed additional VAT cuts: i) from 23% to 8% for fuel and heating, ii) further cut for natural gas (0% instead of 8%), iii) from 8% to 0% on fertilisers and iv) from 5% to 0% for food. Additionally, gas prices were frozen for households and public services providers (hospitals, schools, nurseries, social assistance institutions, cultural institutions, and churches).<sup>ii</sup>

All the above measures were introduced for a short period (3-4 months) and then extended. Reduced VAT rates for natural gas, fuels, fertilisers, electricity and heating were finally abandoned by the end of 2022. Reduced VAT rates for food are still in effect at the beginning of 2023.

Overall costs for the general government (including the loss in tax revenue) of these inflationary shields were estimated at approximately PLN 80 billion (€17 billion) in 2022. Most of these expenditures were financed by new-debt issuance of extra-budgetary funds.

Monetary policy tightening caused rising mortgage instalments (over 95% of issued housing credits in Poland are variable rate mortgages). In response to that, in July 2022 the government introduced credit moratoria<sup>iii</sup> (so-called "holidays"): four out of six mortgage instalments in the second half of 2022 could be, on request, postponed until the end of credit payment horizon with no additional costs for the borrowers. The Programme also encompassed 2023, when four other mortgage instalments (one per quarter) could be postponed. Banks had to incur losses from this Programme.

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<sup>i</sup> Eurofound (2022), [Counter-inflation Shield](#), case PL-2022-4/2120 (measures in Poland), COVID-19 EU PolicyWatch, Dublin

<sup>ii</sup> Eurofound (2022), [Price control and subsidies for heating for households and vulnerable](#), case PL-2022-34/2776 (measures in Poland), COVID-19 EU PolicyWatch, Dublin

<sup>iii</sup> Eurofound (2022c), [Help with mortgage payments](#), case PL-2022-21/2361 (measures in Poland), COVID-19 EU PolicyWatch, Dublin



# Collective bargaining and inflation

## How inflation features in wage negotiations

Poland does not have centralised wage negotiations, except the minimum wage negotiation process. Further, the wage can be subjected to the collective bargaining processes on multi-company and company levels. In the case of the latter, some media releases informed about collective bargaining processes, where inflation was featured:

- Employees representatives of the coal mine JSW called for: a "pay increase corresponding to an increase in the inflation rate to 16% with a simultaneous adjustment for inflation starting in January 2022" (NaszeMiasto.pl, 2022)
- Employee representatives of the public transportation company MPK Częstochowa called upon the increase in line with the inflation, mentioning that: "drivers do not agree to do the responsible job of transporting residents for such low pay. The crew legitimately fears that they will not be able to provide their families with the necessities of life" (Wyborcza. Pl, 2022)
- Company-level Hutchinson trade union, Solidarity, organised the strike as the employer proposed a pay increase not adequate to the rising inflation and growth in prices of primary products during the collective bargaining process (Sucha24.pl, 2022)

## Examples of recent responses

Public sector employees' wages will grow by 7.8% in 2023, significantly lower than the government inflation forecast of 9.8%.

Most employers were reluctant to tie pay rises with inflation. Still, some agreed on "anti-inflationary" one-off bonuses, ranging from a couple of hundred PLN (some retail chains) to approximately average wage or higher in the mining sector (Money.pl, 2022).

The miners' unions were also able to negotiate regular pay rises amounting to long-term government inflation projections in their "social contract" covering a period of up to 10 years (Forsal.pl, 2022).

# Developments in working time

## Changes to legislation

No significant changes in working time legislation came into force in 2022.

However, the 2022 Labour Code revision provides two measures which are in close relation to the working time issues:

- 1) Introduction of the additional paid break- employees working more than nine hours will be entitled to an extra paid break of at least 15 minutes, and employees working more than 16 hours are entitled to another 15 minutes of paid break.
- 2) Introduction and amendments of different working systems: remote working, flexible working time schedules (flexitime, individual working schedule, weekend working time system, shortened working week system and intermittent working time) and part-time working. The most important changes include:
  - Remote working:

The amendment to the Labour Code comes into force in April 2023, laying legal grounds for working out of office. The law states that employers should set their own rules regarding who can work remotely and on what conditions (in dialogue with trade unions or other representatives of employees). Caregivers (parents of small children or people taking care of family members with disabilities or illnesses), pregnant or employees with disabilities are a priority group when applying for remote work. Notably, the employer can still deny it, but the decision has to be justified due to the matters concerning the organisation of work or a characteristic of the employee's position). The responsibility for health and safety is put chiefly on employees. However, the employer has to provide all the necessary equipment and training. The employer will also reimburse the costs of remote work, such as electricity. In addition, for 24 days per annum, employees might request "occasional remote work", with less regulatory burden and without extra reimbursement.

- Flexible working system:

Changes are an effect of the EU Work-life balance directive. Parents of young children will be privileged to access flexible working schedules (within the legal framework already present in the Labour Code) or move to part-time work.

The other solutions have already existed in the Labour Code.

## Bargaining outcomes

Bargaining is not a popular social dialogue instrument in Poland and is mainly used at the individual workplace level. The most prominent bargaining cases noted in 2022 included negotiations in the rail and urban public transport, social care and mining sectors, but none tackled the issue of working time. The demands involved mainly remuneration policies.

In July 2022, the government presented the new Act on Collective Bargaining project that might change this instrument's status. However, though the consultations with social partners have been conducted, the legislative is still under consideration, and its entering into force remains unknown. The act draft foresees the number of measures which are aimed at the facilitation of the bargaining processes, such as:

- Extending the scope of collective bargaining and including all workers, not only workers under regular employment conditions but also atypical workers.
- Regulations of the time scope of the collective bargaining and describing the timeframe for specific actions done by employers and employee representatives.
- Regulations on employee representation and defining the rules starting collective bargaining.
- Introducing the possibility of judicial support in bargaining resolution or appointing collective bargaining mediator associated with the Ministry of Family and Social Policy.

## Debates on duration and organisation

1. In 2022, a political debate on shortening working time has taken place. Primarily, left-wing opposition parties strongly support shorter working weeks, such as Lewica Razem, who submitted a legislative proposal of 35 hours a working week. Further, the leader of the major opposition force Platforma Obywatelska proposed some sort of experimentation on this. Several polls on the subject showed the proposal of "less work for the same pay" is widespread throughout Polish society, so it is likely to be a widely discussed topic in the upcoming election campaign. However, as of January 2023, the Ministry of Family and Social Policy declares it is not working on any proposals (StrefaBiznesu.pl, 2023).
2. Work on implementing the EU work-life balance directive into Polish law lost momentum in the middle of the year. The draft legislation was approved by the government's European Affairs Committee at the beginning of August but has not yet been addressed by the Council of Ministers' Standing Committee. The law provides for an extension of parental leave from 32 to 41 weeks (provided that each parent chooses at least nine weeks). Employees will also receive an additional two days of force majeure leave and five days of care leave. Work on the regulation may accelerate in 2023 - the current draft legislation assumes that the law will come into force from 1 August 2023, and the government could boast about improving the situation of employees before the elections.
3. The Labour Code amendment, introducing remote working regulations and rules for employee sobriety testing, is already in the final legislative straight. The Sejm should consider the Senate's amendments in January, after which they will be submitted to the president for signature. It means that the new regulations may come into force still in Q1 2023. The provisions on remote working have a two-month *vacatio legis* (three months if the Sejm accepts the Senate's amendment on the matter). The bill leaves the decision on how much work is done remotely to the interested parties but provides the structure for intra-company negotiations and regulations. It also offers remote work outside these structures, so-called "occasional remote work", of 24-30 days a year. This flexible solution could be used if unexpected circumstances make working from the office challenging or impossible.

## Labour market shortages and social partners

Social partners discussed labour market shortages during their activities on behalf of the Social Dialogue Committee or on behalf of their organisations. For example, during the 2022 plenary meeting of the Social Dialogue Council was, to a large extent, related to that topic. Social partners discussed the 2022 Occupations Barometer report showing that significant staff shortages could affect 30 occupations in construction, manufacturing, TSL (transport, forwarding, logistics), healthcare, education, accounting and catering. Further, participants discussed issues of labour shortage and supply chain disruption in the automotive sector and matters of vocational education and training.

## Other important policy developments

### Labour market shortages

On 21 June 2022, the Council of Ministers in Poland adopted **the National Action Plan for Employment for 2022 (NAPE)**. The Action Plan is prepared based on the provisions of the Act of 20 April 2004 on Employment Promotion and Labour Market Institutions (Journal of Laws of 2022, item 690, as amended); it is developed in a two-year cycle. The NAPE 2022 in January and February 2022 was subject to agreement and public consultation. The employment policy priorities for 2022 respond to current challenges. These include the need to strengthen the economy and labour market after the pandemic and the ongoing war in Ukraine. Further, the NAPE aims to address long-term trends observed in the global economy for several years, some of which have accelerated in the last two years (digitalisation and technological progress).

The main objective of the NAPE 2022 is to increase labour force participation and employment, and the specific goals - implemented through directional measures - are:

- Better matching of human resources' skills to labour market requirements
- Increasing the quality of employment and labour productivity in Poland
- Effective and equitable use of Poland's human capital
- Modernisation of Public Employment Services functioning and increase of effectiveness of active labour market policies
- Effective and targeted management of economic migration.

The Polish economy has started to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic, which has highlighted shortages in the labour market. According to the 2022 edition of the Occupational Barometer, a **nationwide short-term forecast of various professions, there are 30 occupations in Poland for which employers will struggle to find qualified professionals**. The market agency, Manpower, estimated that more than 60% of Polish entrepreneurs might struggle with a skilled staff shortage in 2022.

As a result of the Russian aggression against Ukraine, Europe has experienced a humanitarian crisis. Over the past 12 months, more than 8 million Ukrainians have crossed the Polish-Ukrainian border. At the end of 2022, more than 650,000 Ukrainians will be working in Poland. Some of them decided to stay in Poland. According to the Ministry of Family and Social Policy, by the end of 2022, more than 650,000 Ukrainians have worked officially in Poland's labour market, helping to mitigate the labour shortage gap. To plug those gaps, the Polish government has rushed to integrate refugees from Ukraine, including relaxing requirements to enter the labour market, for example, suspending the need to obtain a work permit and making it easier for specific qualifications to be recognised.

Several research projects are being developed in Poland that systematically collect data and aim to support public policies, policymakers, employees, and employers with labour market forecasts regarding labour shortages or skills mismatches. In addition to the above-mentioned Occupational Barometer, The Institute for Structural Research (IBS) has implemented the Polish labour market forecasting system. It is a project to develop an effective forecast system to address the skills gap and respond to the labour market need. The forecast of skills remains challenging, especially considering the dynamically changing environment and development of the labour market.

## Employment status and contracts

The 2022 revision of the Labour Code provides several changes within the general employment area, creating the legal foundation and rules for remote work:

- Remote work can take place in the location previously agreed upon with the employer;
- The Labour Code introduces the "occasional remote work". Occasional remote work can be requested by the following category of employees: i) a pregnant employee, ii) workers bringing up a child to the age of four, iii) workers caring for another member of their immediate family or another person living in their household, and iv) people with a disability, then the employer needs to grant the permission for the remote work.
- Establishing rules for sobriety control that can take place in the location of the remote work.
- Establishing protection and financial support for a worker in remote working conditions; these regulations oblige employers to provide any necessary equipment to perform remote work and contribute to fixed costs related to remote work.
- Employers are obliged to conduct risk assessments for remote work.

The NRRP includes a milestone on providing social security for workers, regardless of employment type. Civil law contracts, one of the so-called "junk" contracts, do not offer equal social security compared with regular employment contracts. As of 2021, National Statistics estimations suggest that 407 000 workers are employed based solely on junk contracts, and additionally, more workers share junk contracts with other forms of employment. The NRRP includes the milestone 'A4.7 Limitation of Labour Market Segmentation', which would introduce mandatory social security contributions regardless of the type of the contract. The initial schedule suggests that the change should occur until March 2023; however, no further details are available as of January 2023. The NAPE 2022 mentions that the Ministry of Family and Social Policy plans to: "undertake analytical work on possible legal solutions and continue to monitor the labour market in this regard". However, social partners called for postponing the measure until 2024 and wondered about the scope of the reform. Employers' organisations pointed out the unprecise wording of the measure, which does not make clear if the social security contributions would be applied only to the "junk" contracts or would be applied to all forms of "junk" contacts or civil law contracts only (Ojczyk and Sewastowicz, 2022).

## Self-employed

The most notable legal change is the "Act of 9 June 2022, amending the Personal Income Tax Act and certain other acts", which introduced significant changes to the social security payments and is part of broad governmental agenda called "New Polish Deal".

While the beforementioned legal changes impacted a variety of regulations, the most significant changes to self-employment include:

- Lack of the possibility to deduct 9% of the health security payment (effectively making health security payment mandatory among other security payments).
- Introduction of "middle-class tax relief" aimed at eliminating the negative effects of the non-deductibility of the premium health for taxpayers who run "one-person- economic activity" and their income does not exceed PLN 13,000 (€7,265) threshold.

The legal change sparked a vivid debate, especially on the administrative and financial burden on the self-employed and the effectiveness of social security coverage. The trade union representative Against claimed that self-employed people are exposed to the constant changes in legislation and pointed out that the tax system complication can cause a threat to the financial stability of self-employed. Further, he indicated the bottlenecks of social coverage for self-employed. In the past, the self-employed could opt not to pay social security payments. After "New Polish Deal", they are entitled to support proportional to the security payments they made. Therefore, in some cases, the social support received by the self-employed can be minimal.

Further, some publications discussed the regulation's impact on bogus self-employment or self-employment people's opinions on the changes. For example, the expert of the Polish Economic Institute argued that the solution could create a disincentive to choose bogus self-employed, which should encourage the creation of more jobs based on regular employment. On the other hand, the Union of Entrepreneurs and Employers study indicated that over half of self-employed study respondents negatively evaluated the solution, fearing potential financial losses and the necessity of increasing the prices of their products. Notably, the beforementioned Union of Entrepreneurs and Employers study negatively referred to any form of social security payments for self-employed people in principle.

## Wage setting

According to the Minimum Wage Act, the minimum wage rate for the next year is proposed by the Council of Ministers by 15 June of every year and discussed through negotiations within the Social Dialogue Council (SDC). If the Social Dialogue Council cannot reach a consensus by 15 July, the minimum wage level for the following calendar year is decided solely by the Council of Ministers.

In 2021, the SDC did not agree on the minimum wage. In May 2022, trade unions issued a joint statement, calling for "[increase] from 1 January 2023 by 16.28% (PLN 490- €104), and from 1 July 2023 by a further minimum of 7.15% (PLN 250- €53)." The statement underlined the dramatic rise in living costs and argued for securing the most vulnerable workers accordingly. On the other hand, the employer's representatives emphasised the importance of counteracting inflation and called for the lowest increase possible. According to the press release, employers' representatives called for a new wage-setting mechanism that would not hamper combating inflation. In their opinion, minimising inflation would be a better solution to secure vulnerable workers.

In the end, in 2023 minimum wage will be increased twice: from PLN 3,010 (€640) gross to PLN 3,490 (€743) from 1 January, while from 1 July, it will amount to PLN 3,600 (€766). The double increase directly results from high inflation- usually, the minimum wage increases once a year.

Further, the relatively high nominal minimal wage increase and double change sparked the debate about the rising impact on the different sectors. For example, the Ministry of Education and Science teachers' ordinance separately regulates teachers' pay to secure more beneficial working conditions. Interestingly, after the minimum wage increase to entry-level teachers, they would not have the guarantee of better than minimum pay. Consequently, the Ministry proposed the following pay increases by 7,8 % when compared with September 2022 level:

- Entry-level teacher - PLN 3,690 gross (€785)
- Appointed teacher - PLN 3,890 gross (€828)

- A certified teacher - PLN 4 550 gross (€968)

The primary teachers' trade union- Polish Teachers Unions, called higher a 15% increase compared with the previous year. As of January 2023, the teacher's minimum pay level is still being discussed.

## Gender pay gap

The most significant change was the development of the National Action Programme for Equal Treatment 2022-2030. As of 5 March 2020, Anna Schmidt is the Government Plenipotentiary for Equal Treatment. During her function, the National Action Programme for Equal Treatment 2022-2030 was prepared, publicly consulted, and announced on 24 May 2022. In the gender pay gap area, the Programme foresees four main tasks to bridge the wage and pension gap. Moreover, during the introduction of Directive 2019/1158 (*The Work-life Balance Directive*) into Polish legislation, the issue of wage inequality was briefly discussed. However, it can be pointed out that the public debate on gender pay and pension gaps is virtually non-existent in Poland. If the issue is raised, it is mainly by NGOs.

## Health and safety

The 202e revision of the Labour Code included unified and codified regulations on occupational safety and health. However, no significant health and safety changes have been identified.

On 31 January, the Minister of Family and Social Policy released a rule for identifying work-related accidents, classifying them legally, and setting the guidelines and deadline for accident reports. It introduced clear procedures and uniform accident forms for determining the circumstances and causes of accidents at work, as defined in the Act on Social Insurance for Accidents at Work and Occupational Diseases.

## Work–life balance

2022 was a year of preparation and consultation for the drafting and alignment of the Labour Code with the implementation of Directive 2019/1158 (*The Work-life Balance Directive*), Directive 2019/1152 (*Transparent and predictable working conditions in the European Union*) and the regulation of remote working.

**Remote work:** on 13 January 2023, remote working was introduced into the Labour Code. The law provides for both remote working and hybrid working (partly at home, partly in the company) according to the needs of the particular employee and employer. Remote working is a supporting solution for families with children, which also worked well during the pandemic. Remote working will also be able to be recommended to an employee in exceptional cases such as a fire or flooding of the workplace. "Occasional remote work" has also been introduced and will be granted at the employee's request for 24 days per calendar year. However, the provision is non-binding, as the employer can refuse to provide it.

Legislative work is currently underway to formulate and implement the changes required by two EU directives:

- On transparent and predictable working conditions in the European Union.
- On work-life balance for parents and carers.



On 10 January 2023, the government announced the first draft, and on 26 January, the first reading was held. On 10 January 2023, the government adopted the draft, and on 26 January, the first reading took place in the Polish parliament. Among other things, the proposed legislation provides for parental leave of up to 9 weeks for each parent and care leave of 5 days per calendar year. Parental leave will be longer. Today it is 32 weeks in the case of the birth of one child and 34 weeks in the case of multiple pregnancies. After the changes, it will be 41 and 43 weeks. The possibility of taking time off work for force majeure will be introduced (urgent family matters of 2 days or 16 hours per calendar year with half pay) (Prawo.pl, 2022).

## Lifelong learning and skills development

Since early 2022, the following key legislation and policy actions have been adopted within the field of life-long learning and skills development.

First, the National Recovery and Resilience Plan relates to lifelong learning in Component A - Resilience and competitiveness of the economy, in two sub-goals. It also focuses on digital skills in Component C- Digital Transformation. Regarding Component A, both measures related to adult education are in their early implementation phase. In December, the Ministry of Education and Science concluded calls for support activities to develop 120 Vocational Skills Centres (BCUs). A minimum of 20 BCUs are expected to be established by the end of 2023 and another 100 by the end of 2024. As a result of negotiations with the European Commission, at least 60% of students of BCUs will be required to be adults. The Ministry's second call was to support the other measure under Component A: building a system for life-long learning coordination and launching the 'Voivodeship Coordination Team for Vocational Education and Life-Long learning' in each region.<sup>1</sup> Further, some measures under Component C are also in implementation: the Digital Competence Development Centre, functioning as part of the Chancellery of the Prime Minister, has been launched and has already started its operations. The Centre is responsible for adopting and implementing the Digital Competences Development Programme 2030 (PRKC), which was the subject of public consultations in the Summer of 2022.<sup>2</sup>

Other policy-related changes in skills development include the Adapting of the 2022-2025 VET Action Plan. The Plan contains developing non-formal forms of education or actions to promote lifelong learning and supporting regional authorities in creating solutions suitable to local skills shortages and labour market needs. Further, the beforementioned NAPE 2022 targets life-long learning. Two out of five strategies' goals address life-long learning directly: "Goal 1. Better adjustment of adult skills to the labour market needs" and "Goal 3. Effective and just management of national human capital". Both goals foresee several actions fostering life-long learning, such as reforms of the National Training Fund, implementation of the European Classification of Occupations, Skills/Competencies and Qualifications (ESCO) within the IT system of public employment services and the development of innovative forms of support for people aged 45/50+.

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<sup>1</sup> Administratively, Poland is divided in 16 regions called voivodeship.

<sup>2</sup> The PRKC Program was scheduled to be adopted in the third quarter of 2022 but has not yet been implemented. Regarding adult learning, the Programme proposes training adults on digital skills, focusing on those at risk of digital exclusion.

Additionally, the Integrated Qualifications System, which was established in 2015, was further expanded with new features. The System in the national registry consolidates certified training offers. The System has acquired recent developments and new functionalities in line with Council recommendations on individual learning accounts and Micro-credentials.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> My Portfolio ([Moje Portfolio](#)) is an online tool/learning account that allows the creation of a portfolio and tracks trainings and competencies gained within each qualification. Badge+ ([Odznaka +Odznaka +](#)) is a browser-based application for issuing, staging, storing and sharing digital (micro)credentials in the form of Open Badges standard and digitally secured pdf certificates.

# Working life of Ukrainian refugees

## Employment and working conditions

Any Ukrainian citizen with the fixed right to stay in Poland can also work in the Polish labour market. That applies to Ukrainian refugees as well. Many have social connections with job migrants from Ukraine who came to Poland before February 2022 and relied on these migrant networks while accommodating abroad. Although Poland leads the *laissez-faire* style policies when it comes to labour market organisation and has no government-level migration strategy despite welcoming the highest number of third countries citizens as workers in the whole EU, in the context of high refugee influx it introduced several specific solutions that aim to resolve problems specific for the migrants.

A significant administrative solution enabling other steps towards increasing migrants' quality of life was assigning PESEL numbers to refugees willing to profit from offered public aid (such as healthcare, school education, and financial incentives). This solution allowed the government to track the number of refugees staying in the country and their status (i.e., gender, age, employment).

After Russian aggression on Ukraine, Poland opened the borders for Ukrainian citizens, resulting in millions of refugees entering the country. Since Ukraine banned the possibility of leaving the country for men aged 18-65, most refugees fleeing to Europe were women and children. That sparked additional needs in the care, education and health sectors – especially the latter two are regulated with adequate legislation, resulting from a Special act on aid to Ukrainian refugees fleeing in the result of Russian aggression:

1. From March 2022 until August 2023, Polish schools may hire teachers from Ukraine if their Polish is on a level sufficient to support Ukrainian students who do not speak Polish at all, based only on the personal declaration. University degree recognition is not obligatory in that case.
2. From March 2022 until August 2023, it is possible to hire a physician or dentist with Ukrainian citizenship if they can present a diploma obtained in any third country. As in the case of the teachers, university degree recognition is not obligatory.

Indirectly, workers have been supported thanks to enabling Ukrainian companies to operate from Polish territory. Polish Investment and Trade Agency (PAIH), a body providing advisory services for any entrepreneur who wants to establish a company in Poland, provided funds for this purpose.

From 8 June 2022, Polish employees hiring Ukrainian citizens are obliged to notify the poviats (NUT-3 level) employment office. Further, they need to guarantee that the migrant worker is offered working hours and payment declared in the job offer (the solution aiming at the fact that Ukrainians often obtained decreased salaries compared to Polish citizens).

On 6 July 2022, there were changes in the Polish labour code that tackled migrant workers' situation as well. In cooperation with several private companies and NGOs, the Chancellery of the Prime Minister introduced an online portal dedicated to Ukrainians with weekly-updated, verified job offers called [pracawpolsce.gov.pl](https://pracawpolsce.gov.pl). The portal is accessible in several languages, including Ukrainian and Russian, is free to use and does not demand providing a CV – the user can only submit a given form (Helak M and Szyszkowski, 2022).

## Social partner initiatives to support Ukrainian refugees

Polish reaction to the war in Ukraine was widespread since it is impossible to briefly point out all the social partners' initiatives that were held since 24 February 2022. Social partners and grassroots initiatives provided the most prominent responses. This section presents several categories of the most significant or impactful aid organised for the sake of Ukrainian refugees by social partners.

1. **Numerous informal charity collections of food, clothing, furniture and funds for Ukrainian refugees.** Such initiatives were organised by official organisations and private persons throughout the country and were especially common until the end of spring 2022. According to several public polls, most Polish people participated in them. Some collections are organised until now, usually with a specified purpose: buying a specialised vehicles, rebuilding a shelter in a warzone, etc.

Among the biggest collections was one of Polish Humanitarian Action, a significant Polish NGO dedicated to serving humanitarian aid (especially medical). Until January 2023 the organisation succeeded in raising almost PLN 32.5 million and the collection has not yet been finished.

2. **Local governments organise housing and social aid.** Numerous cities, especially the biggest ones (Warsaw, Kraków, Łódź, Poznań, Wrocław, Gdańsk, Katowice), reserved funds for supporting refugees. There were offered places to stay (some within public properties, some in cooperation with local universities or biggest companies), mobile cards, Wi-Fi access, clothing, first medical aid, and general support at the reception points.

Due to the proximity to the Ukrainian border, the officials from Lublin are among the most engaged local entities. From the beginning of the war, they have created several hotlines dedicated to refugees and their supporters, offered additional housing resources for 850 people, created food delivery points, gathered information on refugees willing to work in Lublin and supported them in the job search etc. There is also a dedicated city representative responsible for refugee aid coordination and the city-supported Lublin Social Committee for Aid to Ukraine, consisting of several local NGOs and private persons.

3. **Free transport for Ukrainian refugees.** Polish railways (Polskie Koleje Państwowe, PKP) granted Ukrainian refugees the right to travel on a train without any fare from 25 February until 1 September 2022. This initiative included relations connecting border towns with other cities as well as international relations from Poland to Czechia, Germany, Austria, Slovakia and Hungary. Some regional rail operators offered free travel to refugees as well. The Ukrainian refugees were also accommodated with free public urban transport in some cities from the early spring. Among the involved cities were i.a. Warsaw, Łódź, Gdańsk, and Katowice. The duration varied depending on the city, but Szczecin was last to withdraw this solution in June 2022 (Helak, 2022).

## Commentary and outlook

In 2022 and early 2023, Poland working life developments included several events. First, in the first half of 2023, the government, administration and social partners focused on supporting Ukrainian refugees. A significant administrative solution enabling other steps towards increasing migrants' quality of life was assigning PESEL numbers to refugees willing to profit from offered public aid (such as healthcare, school education, and financial incentives) and granting the right to work.

2022 was another year of ongoing difficulties in implementing the NRRP. While the main obstacle remains a milestone in the justice system reform, other measures and milestones are ongoing. A significant development is the establishment of the NRRP Monitoring Committee. The Monitoring Committee's activity and careful evaluation of the NRRP implementation could provide an important platform to strengthen social partners' position.

Further, in 2022 Labour Code was amended, parallel with measures implementing the Work-Life Balance Directive. In both cases, changes included solutions for regulating remote work and supporting work-life balance. Labour Code established regulations enabling remote working and introduced a provision to ensure safety during remote work, such as risk assessment for remote work or financial support for employees in remote work. Additionally, Labour Code introduced flexible working time schedules (flexitime, individual working schedule, weekend working time system, shortened working week system and intermittent working time). The Work-Life Balance Directive introduced or extended existing provisions supporting working partners. It proposed parental leave of up to 9 weeks for each parent and care leave of 5 days per calendar year. It also prolonged parental leave from 32 weeks in the case of the birth of one child and 34 weeks in the case of multiple pregnancies to 41 and 43 weeks, respectively.

Additionally, more measures are yet to be discussed and possibly introduced in 2023. These include i) the directive-based measures on transparent and predictable working conditions in the European Union and work-life balance for parents and carers, ii) NRRP measures such as the milestone on labour market segmentation that aims to provide social security for all workers, regardless of the employment type, and iii) other measures such as the novelisation of the Act on Collective Bargaining. These topics will significantly impact the working conditions and will be subject to discussions with social partners.

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WPEF23023

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**The European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (Eurofound) is a tripartite European Union Agency established in 1975. Its role is to provide knowledge in the area of social, employment and work-related policies according to Regulation (EU) 2019/127.**