



REPORT 1

on digital skills and competencies with recommendations

Poland

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M I N T E

This report summarises the results of a meta-analysis (mapping) of migrants' digital skills and competencies, focusing especially on Ukrainian migrants who arrived in Poland no earlier than 24 th February 2022, that is after the Russian invasion on Ukraine. The meta- analysis included examination of digital sources of information and services such as internet websites, available to migrants in general, and especially to Ukrainian migrants/ war refugees.

This report describes how communication with displaced Ukrainians in Poland is conducted. For this report, I mapped reports on migrants published by Polish governmental institutions and research centres both in Polish and English. To map the information available to Ukrainian migrants in Poland, we examined and analysed websites of ministries, local authorities including municipalities, and NGOs.

KEY FINDINGS

01.

The public administration offices in Poland use internet websites to pass information to the general public, including migrants.

02.

There are no standard practices regarding foreign languages versions on public administration websites, however, many websites have more than one foreign language version, usually English, Russian and Ukrainian, sometimes also French and German.

03.

After the arrival of displaced Ukrainians, the governmental website in Ukrainian was set up to inform them about life in Poland and available help. The link to this website can be found on all government websites.

04.

Although Poland ranks low in the Digital Economy and Society Index (DESI), the Covid-19 pandemic was the time when many digital services available to citizens were developed. These services are only in Polish but they can be accessed by all those who have the PESEL (Polish registration number), so they are also available to displaced Ukrainians.

INTRODUCTION

Immigration to Poland - Paths of entrance and basic socio-demographic information on the Ukrainian refugees

Until almost 2020, Poland was an emigration country. When the communist regime weakened in the 1980s, around 1 million Polish people decided to emigrate. When Poland joined the EU in May 2004 and Polish citizens got the right to legally work abroad (at first in only 3 EU countries and then in all), then again over 1 million Poles emigrated to look for a better life abroad (PAN 2014). According to the National Census in April 2011 over 3,5 million permanent Polish inhabitants stayed abroad for over 3 months (NSP 2011). However, with time this trend started to be outbalanced by immigration.

Year by year Poland started to become a destination country for numerous migrants seeking a new place to live. Only since 2015 the number of foreigners residing in Poland has grown substantially. According to the 2011 national census, the number of foreigners registered as living permanently in the country was 55,400. In December 2021, as many as 875 090 foreigners were registered in the Polish social insurance system, with the main groups being Ukrainians (71,7%), Belarussians (8,1%), Georgians (2,75), and Russians (1,6%) (ZUS, 2022).

With the outbreak of the war in Ukraine the numbers changed dramatically. In September 2022 there were 1,05 million people and 72% of them were Ukrainians (Kurkowska 2022). However, these data inform mostly about people who worked legally. Moreover, the estimates on the Ukrainian war refugees influx do not show its dynamics, including travels back and forth to Ukraine. Since February 2022 the biggest number of Ukrainians in Poland was in April 2022 and it was estimated at 3,2 million (including 1,5 million that arrived before the war) (Wojdat and Cywiński 2022). A survey conducted by the National Bank of Poland in April and May 2022 showed that 50% of refugees had higher education and 60% of women arrived in Poland with children (NBP 2022). At the end of January 2023, 1 534 939 Ukrainians registered in Poland for the temporary protection scheme (UNHCR 2023 – see Table 1).

All of them received the Polish registration number called PESEL. However, some of these PESEL numbers were deactivated as their holders left Poland for more than 30 days so, at the end of January 2023, the number of active PESELS was at 971 271.

Table 1. The Ukrainian PESEL holders according to sex and age, percentage.

Age	Women, percentage	Men, percentage
60+	6	2
18-59	39	12
12-17	7	7
5-11	9	9
0-4	4	4

<https://data.unhcr.org/en/situations/ukraine/location/10781>

The biggest number of PESELS were issued to Ukrainians in 3 voivodeships, i.e. Mazowieckie (203 434), Dolnośląskie (108 401) and Śląskie (96 788) (UNHCR 2023). The foreign migrants residing in Poland can belong to several **legal categories**:

- EU migrants enjoy the same rights as Polish citizens, however, when they stay longer than 3 months they register with the voivodship office.

- Non-EU migrants called also third countries citizens need a visa to arrive in Poland and then a stay permit and work permit. Migrants from the former USRR countries belong to this group but enjoy a special legal status. They are seen as potential to fill the gaps in Polish labour market and enjoy the simplified procedure of getting work and stay permits. Since January 29, 2022, citizens of particular Third countries (Armenia, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, Russia, and Ukraine) are allowed to work for 24 months in Poland without the need of applying for a work permit (Pankowska 2022; Czechowicz 2022).

- Before the war Ukrainians enjoyed the same rights as other migrants from the former USRR countries. But on 4th March 2022, the European Council granted them temporary protection with that gave the right of residence, access to the labour market and housing, medical assistance, and access to education for children (European Council, 2022; European Commission 2023) for a period of one year (later extended to March 2024). Then on March 14, 2022, the special act on helping Ukrainian citizens came into effect in Poland and specified how those rights work in practice. According to this special act, Ukrainian citizens obtained the right to legally work and run businesses in Poland, as well as to be part of the education system (also adults) and to use the national healthcare system for a period of 18 months (Dziennik Ustaw Rzeczpospolitej Polskiej, 2022).

FINDINGS

Communication with migrants

The public administration communicates with migrants posting information on their websites.

The legalisation of stay for foreigners with exception of Ukrainians is done in the voivodship office. Ukrainians to legalize their stay are obliged to apply for the PESEL number in any community office.

There are two governmental websites related to the situation in Ukraine and Ukrainians: “Site for citizens of Ukraine” (<https://www.gov.pl/web/ua>) and “Pomagam Ukrainie” (<https://pomagamukrainie.gov.pl/>).

The governmental website titled “Site for citizens of Ukraine” (<https://www.gov.pl/web/ua>) was set up to help displaced Ukrainians. It has only one language version – Ukrainian and thus it marginalises the diversity of the Ukrainian population as there are also Russian speakers.

It also excludes Poles or other EU nationals who would like to check what kind of assistance is offered to Ukrainians. The website contains information on:

- how to obtain the PESEL number
- how to legalize stay in Poland
- how to get financial help (of 300 PLN per person)
- how to get legal assistance
- information on medical assistance, employment, education, and other
- important everyday tips such as how to change a keyboard to the Ukrainian alphabet.
- there is also a link to the brochure “Living and working in Poland” in Polish, Ukrainian, and English.

The other governmental website “Pomagam Ukrainie” addresses 2 types of recipients: those who as a result of the war in Ukraine need help and those who offer help for Ukraine and the victims of the war. This website is more inclusive as the content is provided in Polish, English, Russian, and Ukrainian. The information is related to the needs of Ukrainian citizens but is quite basic. The website informs that more information on staying in Poland can be found “on the website for Ukrainian nationals” and redirects to the “Site for citizens of Ukraine” which, as we stated above, has only the Ukrainian version.

The offices for foreigners are part of voivodships offices. Poland is divided into 16 voivodships regions and the capital city of each region host a voivodship office where a foreigner can legalise their stay and receive a stay permit. Each voivodship office has its website with all information on the application procedures for different documents. There is no standardised approach to the information provided to foreigners. Hence, there are voivodships where:

- all information is in Polish (e.g. Podlaskie, Mazowieckie, Łódzkie, Rzeszowskie, Kujawsko-Pomorskie, Wielkopolskie),
- there is a website in two or three languages – e.g. Małopolskie - Polish and English; Zachodniopomorskie and Pomorskie: Polish, English, and Russian,
- there are multiple language versions of the website. For example, Dolnośląskie voivodship website has Polish, English, German, French, Ukrainian, and Russian versions.

The most important, however, is the fact that foreign language versions of voivodship websites are incomplete and contain only the information that their authors consider as important to foreigners – mostly those related to the legalisation of stay. Every voivodship website, even those that provide information only in Polish, placed the Ukrainian flag somewhere on its. Clicking on it redirects to the governmental website in Ukrainian “Site for citizens of Ukraine” (<https://www.gov.pl/web/ua>). Interestingly, some voivodships’ websites are in Polish but they contain a section addressing foreigners that has several language versions. If foreigners manage to enter the proper tab on the main page, there will be information in 2 or 3 languages. For example – the foreigner department in Wielkopolski Office has its website in Polish, English, Russian, and Ukrainian, while Mazowiecki office published some information for foreigners in English and Ukrainian.

The analyses of voivodship offices’ websites show a trend typical also for other public administration institutions and NGOs. They commonly add to their website the Ukrainian flag that redirects to the governmental website with basic information on legal issues and help for Ukrainians. However, there are also cases, where institutions and NGOs (e.g. Krakow’s Otwarty Krakow - <https://otwarty.krakow.pl/>) do not limit themselves to redirecting to this governmental website but also translate their websites into Ukrainian and Russian.

Apart from the Internet communication migrants are reached by posters. They are visible, especially at train stations where the Ukrainian flag is used to appeal to Ukrainian migrants. Such posters usually inform in the Ukrainian language where to go to receive some assistance and are tailored to the needs of this group.

Many institutions, even those working with foreigners such as the Foreigners' Departments in Voivodship offices do not employ workers with foreign language competencies.

The situation changed only recently when the war in Ukraine started and Poland welcomed millions of war refugees. Firstly, some migrants with Polish, Ukrainian, and Russian language competencies volunteered to help. Then some of them were employed to provide services in the necessary language. Therefore, migrants who decide to contact public offices both with the use of traditional technology or digitally may meet the language barrier. The email in a foreign language may remain ignored and the phone call disconnected.

Generally, the digital competencies of the Polish society are low. According to the 2021 edition of the Digital Economy and Society Index (DESI) Poland ranks 24th of the 27 EU member states. It means that many institutions, especially SMEs have problems with finding IT specialists to integrate digital technology and fully use the possibilities offered by available digital technology (DESI 2021). This situation was also pointed out by the European Commission in 2015, as Poland was listed (alongside the Czech Republic, Hungary, Greece, and Turkey) as a state characterised by the absence of lifelong learning strategies that integrate the use of digital technologies; (ECORYS and BERTESMANN Stiftung 2015).

The skills as such are vastly analysed by the OECD (2019a), e.g. the analysis of the adults' skills (PIAAC) lists ICT as one of the key competencies. Within Building Effective National Skills Strategies the OECD points out that the skills of the Polish youth were improving (see Dashboard of skills in OECD 2019b).

The progress in the use of technologies (ICT) is a result of access to the EU structural funds and later of the Covid-19 pandemic. The EU funds provided the possibility to implement various tools to be used by patients within the healthcare system, such as an individual patients profile (IKP). Patients' Portal was introduced to make it possible to monitor individual situations, i.e. visits, medicines and surgery/specialists' prescriptions in electronic form.

The system was built along with introduction of the e-registration and basic telemedicine services as a part of remote consultation and access to basic healthcare services. At the same time, the E-Citizen (MObywatel) application was developed, which allows to download all the important documents to the e-wallet. Currently, all of these services need other language versions to serve migrants.

Migrants' digital competencies

The digital competencies of migrants in Poland were not the subject of analyses yet. The preliminary analysis of displaced Ukrainians' digital skills is provided in our report "Report II: Digital spaces".

RECOMMENDATIONS

01.

The institutions, especially those serving foreigners should have their website in at least 3 languages: Polish, English, and Ukrainian.

02.

The icons with different language versions should be easily visible in the right top corner of the website.

03.

The foreign language version should mirror the Polish one. It will show the Polish language speakers that they are not excluded from the communication and that they have the access to the same content as foreigners.

04.

All the forms provided to foreigners in digital governmental institutions should be in 3 languages with exactly the same boxes and instructions in Polish, English, and Ukrainian.

05.

The public institutions should assign a person to receive and answer correspondence in other languages than Polish. Currently, many emails in foreign languages are treated as spam and sent to the trash.

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