

# Economic migrations to Poland in 2008–2018

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**Abstract:** The aim of the article is to present the stream and structure of economic migrants to Poland between 2008–2018. The first part presents economic migrations in their theoretical aspects, explaining the concept and presenting definitions. Then, the institutional and legal conditions of economic migration to Poland with particular emphasis on documents required by Polish labour market were presented, i.e. work permits, seasonal work permits and declarations of entrusting work to a foreigner. The next part presents data on the number of issued statements and work permits, indicating the potential number of economic migrants. Data from the Social Insurance Institution regarding foreigners registered for retirement and disability insurance were also presented. Moreover, data analysis and evaluation were performed. The article ends with a summary.

**Key words:** migrations, economic migrant, work permit, labour market

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## 1. Introduction

Poland is defined as a country of emigration, which can be justified taking into consideration the level of mobility of Poles in recent decades. Poland's accession to the European Union in 2004 significantly influenced the further increase in the flow of migration of Poles who massively joined the European labour market. In relation to these population flows, until recently migrations to Poland were not a massive phenomenon. In the post-war period, Poland was closed to the influx of people from outside, except for the few arrivals from the countries of the former Eastern Bloc. Poland was not considered as an attractive destination for migrants, which resulted from the level of economic development, low wages or the level of social benefits. The system transformation led to gradual changes in this respect, and the subsequent economic growth with the support of the European Union allowed gradual reduction of income differences in Poland in

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relation to Western European countries. Until recently, the inflow of immigrants to Poland in comparison to the inflow to Western European countries was relatively small, but the situation changed significantly after 2014, i.e. since the outbreak of the conflict in Ukraine. What is more the increase is also the effect of the entry of the new *Act on foreigners*, introducing simplifications in the legalization of stay in Poland. The purpose of this article is to answer the question: how did the stream of economic migrants flow to Poland in 2008–2018 and how was it structured?

## 2. Economic migration in the theoretical approach

The term *migration* is derived from the word *migratio* (Latin ‘resettlement’) and means “territorial displacement associated with a relatively permanent change of residence” (Okólski, 2003, p. 407).

Considering migrations according to the criterion of space, Eisenstadt described them as “the physical transition of an individual or group from one society to another. This transition usually requires abandoning a certain social environment and entering into a different, different character” (Eisenstadt, 1953, p. 169). In this context, migration is considered in the separation category. The migrant chooses or is forced to part with family, friends, representatives of the ethnic group, nation, which results in a change in social relations. In turn, a change in the economic environment should be understood as a displacement between areas with different patterns of economic behaviour (e.g. from the countryside to the city, from a developing country to a developed one). Against this background, migration is considered, among others, in the category of changes in the economic status of the migrant (Górny and Kaczmarczyk, 2003).

Bogue (1959) stated that the term *migrant* should be used to refer to people permanently changing their place of residence. So he began the idea of considering migration according to the criterion of residence or stay. This view was supported by Lee (1966), according to which migration should be defined as a change of residence of a permanent or semi-permanent nature, with no significant displacement distance. It is also irrelevant whether this phenomenon is forced or voluntary, internal or external. Displacements without a permanent change of residence, which is a special manifestation of human mobility, are commonly referred to as circulation (Skeldon, 2012).

“Recognizing the need to improve international migration statistics [...] the United Nations Department of Statistics (UNSD) and the European Statistical Office (Eurostat) have carried out a number of activities that have resulted in proposing draft recommendations for international migration statistics” (UN, 1998, p. III). The recommendations concerned, inter alia, ways of defining international migrations and other concepts related to this phenomenon. An international migrant was defined as a person who changed their habitual residence. With this definition, the home country is where the person lives, “that is, the country in which they normally spend their rest time during the day. Temporary travel abroad for recreational, holiday, visiting friends and family, business, therapeutic or religious purposes do not change a person’s whereabouts” (UN, 1998, p. 10). The United Nations has also proposed ways of defining long-term and short-term migrants. A long-term migrant is considered to be a person

who “moves to a state other than their country of permanent residence for a period of at least one year (12 months) with the effect that the country of destination has actually become their permanent residence. From the country of departure point of view the person will be a long-term emigrant, and in the receiving country a long-term immigrant” (UN, 1998, p. 10). In turn, a short-term migrant was considered to be a person who “moves to a country other than his country of permanent residence, for a period of at least 3 months, but shorter than a year (12 months), except for cases where the transfer to a given country takes place for recreation, vacation, visiting friends and family, business, therapeutic or related to religious worship” (UN, 1998, p. 10).

There is no functional definition of migration in the Polish legal system. The term *foreigner* is used in relation to people coming to Poland and staying on its territory, in accordance with the Act currently in force on December 12, 2013 on foreigners. A foreigner is defined as “anyone who does not have Polish citizenship” (Journal of Laws of 2013, item 1650, pp. 2/279). In addition, the Act uses the term *mobility*, which is understood as “the right of a foreigner to enter and stay on the territory of the Member States of the European Union in order to work in the host State unit based in a given Member State of the European Union” (Journal of Laws 2013 item 1650, pp. 4/279).

Sjaastad (1962), representing the economic approach to the phenomenon, described migration as the migrants’ desire to increase the rate of return on their human capital reduced by migration costs. Whereas Borjas (1989) described it as an attempt to achieve individual benefits by people, both in terms of income and in terms of personal satisfaction. The economic approach to migration theory is also based on Hicks’s formulation: “the differentiation of net economic benefits, mainly the difference in net salary is the main reason for migration” (1932, p. 76).

To correctly understand the essence of migration processes, it seems crucial to identify the factors responsible for taking by migrants activities leading to change. According to the main objective criterion, migration is divided into economic and non-economic (Halfacree, 2004).

The decisive motive for economic migration, also known as economic migration, is to improve the economic situation of the migrant and his family. Their most important goal is employment generating greater (wage and non-wage) economic benefits than obtained in the country of origin. The desire to receive higher income may not be the only reason for migration, but it should be decisive. With this method of definition, persons who would not migrate in a situation where higher salary could not be achieved should not be considered as economic migrants (Jończy, 2010).

### 3. Institutional and legal conditions of labour migrations to Poland

The status and situation of the migrant on the labour market in the host country as well as the legality of their stay is important (Kondoh, 2000). The legality of a migrant’s stay in the territory of the host country does not necessarily mean that they have been granted the right to work. At this level, a distinction can be made between following situations (Kawczyńska-Butrym, 2009):

- Both the migrant's entry into the country, their stay and start of work, for example on the basis of an employee visa, are legal.
- The entry and stay of a migrant is legal, but the migrant entered the host country, for example on a tourist visa, and then started employment without having the permission to do so.
- The migrant's stay is illegal and he cannot legally start employment.

There are the following documents admitting to the Polish labour market:

- 1) Work permit.
- 2) Seasonal work permit.
- 3) Declaration on entrusting work to a foreigner.

Work permits are issued by the voivode at the employer's request. A foreigner must apply for a residence permit independently, so that they can legally perform work in Poland on the basis of a work permit (up to 3 months it is possible to work under visa-free travel, if such a solution has been introduced for a given country). The work permit specifies the employer, job position or type of work performed by the foreigner, the lowest salary that a foreigner may receive in a given position, working time and the period of validity of the permit. There are several types of work permits (type A—when a foreigner is employed in an entity in Poland; B—when a foreigner performs a function in the management board, acts as a general partner or a proxy, C—in the case of delegating a foreigner to Poland). Authorization procedures and criteria differ depending on the type of authorization. Posted workers must have employment conditions not worse than those specified in Polish labour legislation in areas such as working time, overtime, minimum wage, health and safety, parental rights, etc. The employer may sign both an employment contract and a civil law contract with the foreigner (e.g. contract of mandate, contract for specific work). The contract should be signed in writing (MRPiPS, 2019).

A seasonal work permit (type S) is issued by the staroste (the lower administrative level) at the employer's request. This is a new instrument introduced on January 1, 2018. The employer may apply for a seasonal work permit for a foreigner who is already in Poland and has a residence permit enabling work (e.g. visa—with the exception of visas issued for tourist purposes, use of temporary protection or arrival for humanitarian reasons) as well as for a foreigner who will just apply for entry to Poland. A seasonal work permit is issued for a period not exceeding 9 months in a year. The following are applications in sectors such as agriculture, gardening, tourism, as part of activities considered seasonal as defined in the Regulation of the Minister of Family, Labour and Social Policy of 8 December 2017 on subclasses of activities according to the Polish Classification of Activities (MRPiPS, 2019).

Based on the *Declaration of entrusting the performance of work to a foreigner*, only citizens of Armenia, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, Russia and Ukraine can be employed. This is called simplified procedure and it applies to works that are not considered as seasonal. The condition for performing work under the simplified procedure is the entry by the poviát labour office of a statement on entrusting the performance of work to a foreigner in the register of declarations at the employer's request, and the possession by the foreigner of a document confirming the title to stay in Poland, which entitles to work. The declaration of entrusting the performance of work to a foreigner entitles to be employed for a period of up to 6 months

within the next 12 months. While working on the declaration, the foreigner may change the employer. However, the new employer must obtain a new document admitting to the labour market for the foreigner. A foreigner may only work for the employer indicated in the declaration (MRPiPS, 2019).

## 4. Economic migrations to Poland in 2008–2018

### 4.1. Work permits issued

The scale of the influx of economic migrants to Poland can be proved by data referring to documents enabling legal work, including work permits. In 2018, the most frequently applied for work permit the citizens of eight countries presented in Table 1. The table contains data on the number of permits issued in the years 2008–2018.

Table 1. Number of work permits issued in 2008–2018 by migrant's country of origin

Country of origin	Year											
	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	
Ukraine	5400	9504	12,894	17352	19,375	20,416	24,945	48,010	103,208	192,547	238,334	
Nepal	181	838	2110	1200	471	524	392	596	1211	7075	19,912	
Belarus	1325	1669	1937	1350	1723	1723	1591	1893	4577	10,518	19,233	
India	733	1164	1189	787	811	1300	763	993	1345	3938	8362	
Bangladesh	54	213	676	646	233	314	282	314	718	2412	8341	
Moldova	1218	601	675	977	609	699	897	1322	2560	3792	6035	
Georgia	109	143	94	154	171	203	225	88	141	398	2752	
Uzbekistan	356	295	434	617	957	948	1040	1396	826	1409	2634	
Others	8646	14,913	16,613	17,725	14,794	12,951	13,528	11,174	12,808	13,537	23,165	
<b>Total</b>	<b>18,022</b>	<b>29,340</b>	<b>36,622</b>	<b>40,808</b>	<b>39,144</b>	<b>39,078</b>	<b>43,663</b>	<b>65,786</b>	<b>127,394</b>	<b>235,626</b>	<b>328,768</b>	

Source: Author's own elaboration based on data from the Ministry of Labour Market Department of the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy.

The number of work permits issued increased from 18,000 in 2008 to nearly 329 thousand in 2018, i.e. by 18 times. The largest increases in nominal terms occurred in 2015–2018, noting a change from 66 thousand in 2015, up to 127 thousand in 2016, 236 thousand in 2017 and 329 thousand in 2018. The number of permits issued (in thousands) and the dynamics of changes are presented in Figure 1.

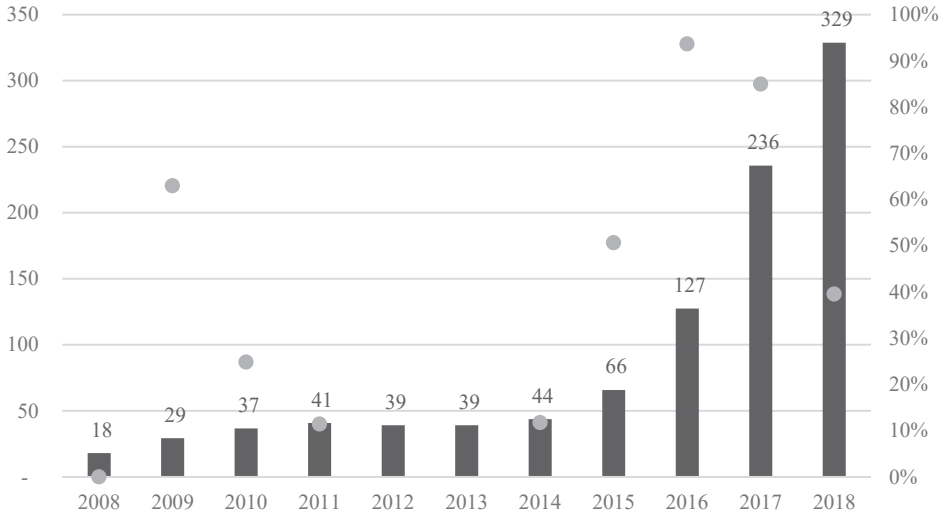


Figure 1. The number of work permits issued (in thousands) and the dynamics of changes (% year on year) in 2008–2018

Source: Author’s own elaboration based on data from the Ministry of Labour Market Department of the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy.

So far the most work permits were received by Ukrainian citizens. In 2018, they received 12 times more permits than Nepalese and Belarusians, who took respectively 2nd and 3rd place in the ranking. The share of work permits issued to citizens of Ukraine, Nepal, Belarus and other countries in total permits issued by Polish institutions is shown in Figure 2.

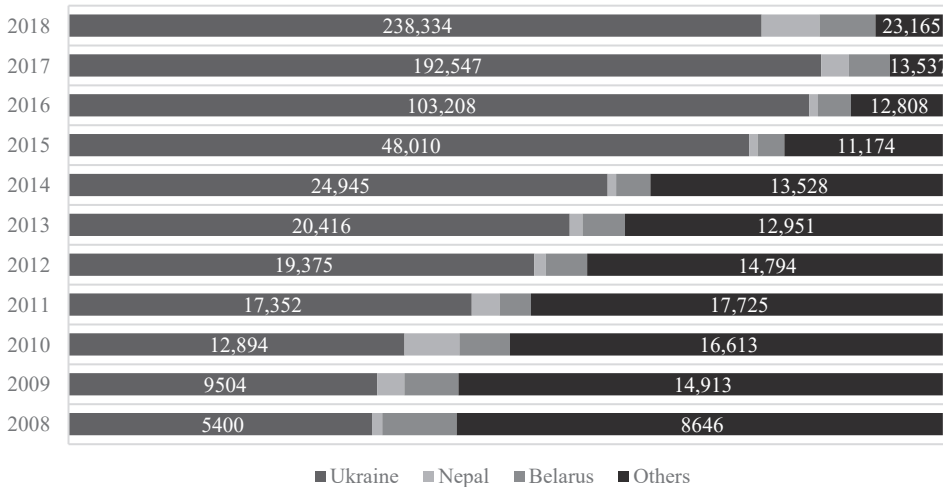


Figure 2. Proportion of work permits issued to citizens of Ukraine, Nepal and Belarus in total permits issued in 2008–2018

Source: Author’s own elaboration based on data from the Ministry of Labour Market Department of the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy.

The share of work permits issued to Ukrainian citizens in total permits increased steadily from 2008 to 2017. In 2018, there was a decline in this share, but this is due to the new instrument introduced on January 1, 2018—seasonal work permit (type S), which is used by Ukrainian citizens.

#### 4.2. Issued declarations of intention to entrust and entrusting performance of work

The declaration of the intention to entrust work (applicable in the years 2007–2017) and the declaration of entrustment of work (applicable since 2018) are instruments for legalizing the work of foreigners in Poland, which by the ease of meeting the procedural requirements are by far the most popular among economic migrants and their employers. Table 2 presents data on the statements issued in 2008–2018, divided by migrant's country of origin.

Table 2. Number of statements issued regarding the intention to entrust the performance of work in 2008–2018, broken down by country of origin of migrants

Country of origin \ Year	Year										
	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018*
Ukraine	142,960	180,133	169,490	239,646	223,671	217,571	372,946	762,700	1,262,845	1,714,891	1,446,304
Belarus	12,606	4860	3623	4370	7636	5194	4017	5599	23,400	58,046	62,805
Russia	1147	674	595	963	1624	1260	1227	1939	3937	6150	6718
Moldova	—	2747	5912	13,024	9421	9248	6331	9575	20,650	31,465	36,742
Georgia	—	—	453	1774	1384	2343	2103	1366	1698	11,126	28,008
Armenia	—	—	—	—	—	—	774	1043	1597	2786	1648
<b>Total</b>	<b>156,713</b>	<b>188,414</b>	<b>180,073</b>	<b>259,777</b>	<b>243,736</b>	<b>235,616</b>	<b>387,398</b>	<b>782,222</b>	<b>1,314,127</b>	<b>1,824,464</b>	<b>1,582,225</b>

\* The data relates to declarations of entrustment of work performance.

Source: Author's own elaboration based on data from the Ministry of Labour Market Department of the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy.

Originally the so-called simplified procedure was available to citizens of Ukraine, Belarus and Russia. From 2009, the procedure was also available to citizens of Moldova, from 2010 Georgia, and from 2014 also Armenia. By far the most statements in the entire analyzed period were issued to Ukrainian citizens. In record 2017, a total of 1.82 million statements were issued, of which Ukrainians received 1.71 million (94%).

When analyzing data on declarations of intention to entrust work to a foreigner, whose registration was completed at the end of 2017, with data on declarations on entrusting work to a foreigner, effective from 1 January 2018, it should be noted that since 2018 the scope of data regarding statements has changed. Currently they apply only to works that are not considered as seasonal. Hence, the decrease in the number of statements issued in 2018 compared to 2017. The number of statements issued in 2008–2018 and the dynamics of changes are presented in Figure 3.

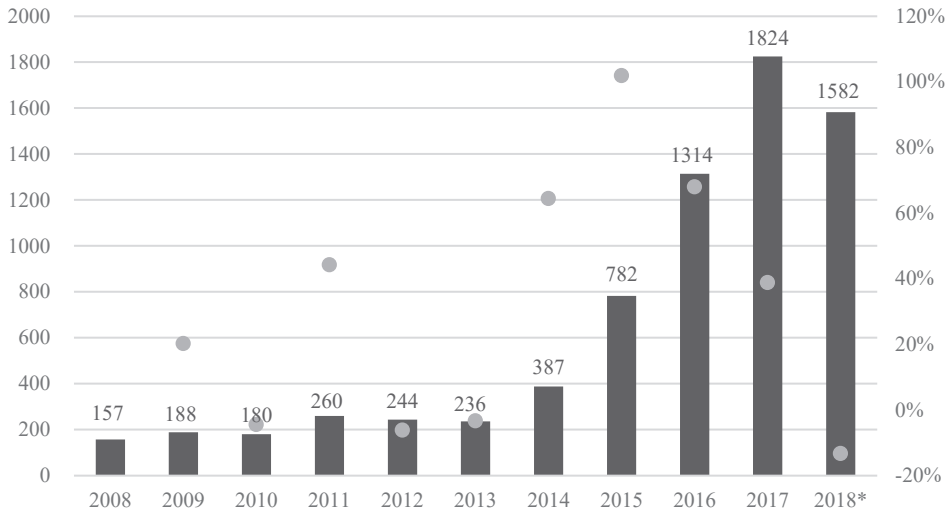


Figure 3. Number of statements issued about the intention to entrust the performance of work and the dynamics of change (% , year on year) in 2008–2018

\* The data relates to declarations of entrustment of work performance.

Source: Author's own elaboration based on data from the Ministry of Labour Market Department of the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy.

The large number of statements issued does not mean that eventually so many foreigners came to Poland as some of them eventually resign from leaving. It does not also mean that a certain number of foreigners in Poland work permanently. Half of the employees from Ukraine come to Poland for a period of 1 to 3 months, and every fourth from 3 to 6 months. This means that the majority of Ukrainian citizens treat their stay in Poland as an opportunity for short-term earnings and use a simplified employment procedure that allows them to work for 6 months within 12 months (Personnel Service, 2018).

In 2018, a total of 121,436 seasonal work permits were issued, the vast majority of which were granted to Ukrainian citizens. Table 3 shows the countries to which citizens have been issued the most permits.



Table 3. Number of seasonal work permits issued in 2018

Country of origin	Seasonal work permits issued
Bangladesh	16
Belarus	607
Philippines	15
Georgia	199
India	38
Moldova	359
Nepal	192
Russia	45
Ukraine	119,926
Other countries	39
<b>Total</b>	<b>121,436</b>

Source: Author's own elaboration based on data from the Ministry of Labour Market Department of the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy.

### 4.3. Applications for old-age and disability pension insurance

All persons who have the status of an employee, contractor or person conducting non-agricultural business activity are subject to compulsory retirement and disability pension insurance, in accordance with the provisions on the social security system. Foreigners who work in Poland are also subject to these insurances (except in special cases).

The data from the Central Register of Insureds indicate that the number of individuals who were subject to retirement and disability insurance and who had citizenship other than Polish increased from 65,000 in December 2008 to nearly 570 thousand in December 2018 (Table 4 and Figure 4). This means a nearly 9-time increase, while the number of foreigners from the EU countries increased by 2-time, and from the non-EU foreigners increased by almost 11-time. As at December 31, 2018, the number of foreigners from the EU countries was 36,000 people, while the number of foreigners from outside the EU—nearly 534 thousand, including 421 thousand people with Ukrainian citizenship (78.8%). Next in terms of numbers were also for migrants from outside the EU, followed by citizens of Belarus (34.1 thousand), Vietnam (8.1 thousand), Moldova (7.6 thousand) and Russia (7.5 thousand). At the end of 2008, foreigners constituted less than 1% of the total insured, while as at December 31, 2018 their share was already 3.6%. The increase in the number of foreigners registered for retirement and disability insurance was characterized by the highest dynamics in the case of non-EU migrants, in particular Ukrainian citizens (26-time increase in the period 2008–2018; impressive nominal growth from 16.2 to 420.7 thousand economic migrants) and Georgia (a 37-time increase). Also noteworthy are data on citizens of countries not yet considered important from the point of view of immigration to Poland: India (6-time increase to 5.9 thousand),

Nepal (15-time increase to 2.7 thousand) and Bangladesh (19-time increase to 1.3 thousand) (Adamowicz and Nasiński, 2019).

Table 4. Number of foreigners registered for pension and disability insurance by citizenship—at the end of the year

Year	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018*
Total	65,041	69,813	69,813	78,608	93,012	101,083	124,349	184,188	293,188	440,255	569,724
EU citizens	16,350	17,138	17,138	19,048	22,242	24,656	27,349	29,421	31,694	24,116	35,960
Non-EU citizens, including:	48,691	52,675	52,675	59,560	70,770	76,427	97,000	154,767	261,494	406,139	533,764
Ukrainians	16,237	18,602	18,602	21,777	29,713	32,989	49,150	101,150	194,418	316,474	420,723
Belarusians	4184	4320	4320	4927	6035	6387	7094	8903	14,351	24,013	34,143
Vietnamese	3004	3481	3481	3951	4655	5267	6041	6146	6528	7592	8138
Moldovans	789	643	643	817	994	12,317	1767	2628	5024	6510	7656
Russians	3018	3201	3201	3448	3661	3832	4178	4692	5691	6654	7569

Source: Adamowicz and Nasiński, 2019.

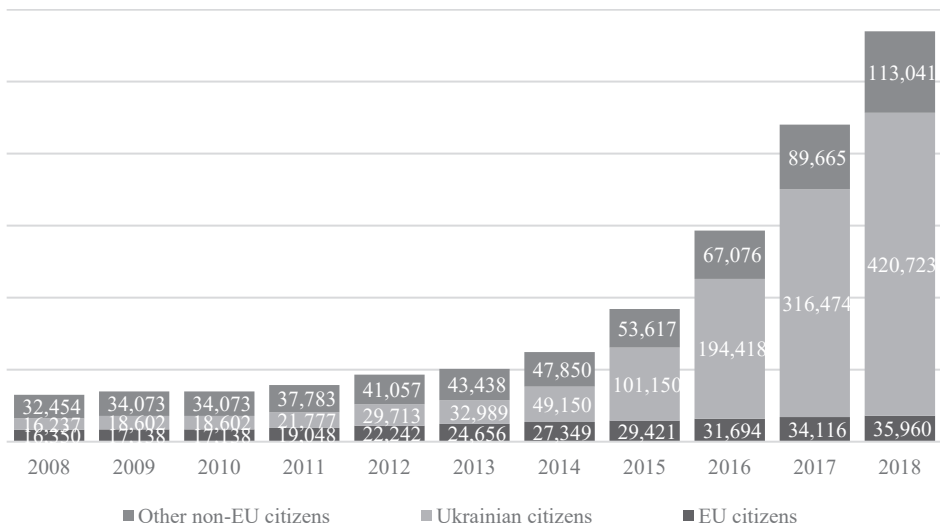


Figure 4. Comparison of the number of foreigners registered for retirement and disability pension insurance—at the end of the year

Source: Adamowicz and Nasiński, 2019.

In the analyzed period, the structure of foreigners registered for insurance, divided by citizenship, changed dynamically (Table 5 and Figure 5). The share of foreigners from the EU regularly decreases (from 25.1% in December 2008 to 6.3% in December 2018), while the

share of foreigners from outside the EU is steadily growing (from 74.9% in December 2008 to 93.7% in December 2018). The largest changes are observed in the increase in the share of Ukrainian citizens (from 25.0% in December 2008 to 73.8% in September 2018).

Table 5. Structure of foreigners registered for retirement and disability pension insurance by citizenship (in %)—at the end of the year

Year	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018*
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
EU citizens	25.1	24.5	24.5	24.2	23.0	24.4	22.0	16.0	10.8	7.7	6.3
Non-EU citizens, including:	74.9	75.5	75.5	75.8	76.1	75.6	78.0	84.0	89.2	92.3	93.7
Ukrainians	25.0	26.6	26.6	27.7	31.0	32.6	39.5	54.9	66.3	71.9	73.8
Belarusians	6.4	6.2	6.2	6.3	6.5	6.3	5.7	4.8	4.9	5.5	6.0
Vietnamese	4.6	5.0	5.0	5.0	5.0	5.2	4.9	3.3	2.2	1.7	1.4
Moldovans	1.2	0.9	0.9	1.0	1.1	12.2	1.4	1.4	1.7	1.5	1.3
Russians	4.6	4.6	4.6	4.4	3.9	3.8	3.4	2.5	1.9	1.5	1.3

Source: Adamowicz and Nasiński, 2019.

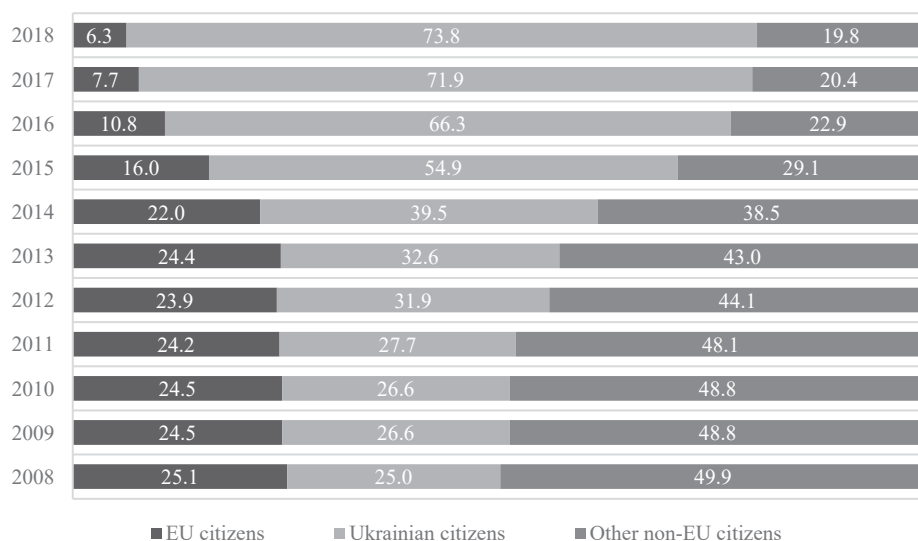


Figure 5. Changes in the structure of foreigners registered for retirement and disability pension insurance by citizenship (in %)—as at the end of the year

Source: Adamowicz and Nasiński, 2019.

The data presented in this part of the study do not include foreigners working in Poland without a formal agreement between them and the employer. The actual number of economic migrants working illegally in Poland is difficult to estimate.

In addition, some labour migrants work on the basis of a contract for specific work, from which social security contributions are not paid. The analysis of employment of foreigners carried out by the National Labour Inspectorate showed that on the basis of a contract for specific work in 2014, 15% of foreigners subjected to control were employed (as much as 65% in the agricultural sector). It is worth emphasizing that employing foreigners on the basis of specific work contracts is not justified in the vast majority of cases due to the form and conditions of work, and only serves to circumvent the provisions governing the obligation to register an employee for social insurance, which allows the employer to reduce labour costs (PIP, 2016).

## 5. Summary

In recent years, Poland has unexpectedly become one of the leaders of the European Union in terms of the influx of economic migrants. Statements about the intention to entrust work to a foreigner, i.e. the so-called simplified procedure, were mostly issued for Ukrainian citizens. In 2008–2018, the share of statements for Ukrainian employees in the total number of statements issued ranged from 91% to 97%. At the end of 2018, as many as 570 thousand foreigners were subject to retirement and disability insurance, which is almost 9 times more than at the end of 2008. The mass influx of economic migrants to Poland, especially after 2014, has become a fact, which is confirmed by data on work permits issued and declarations of intention to entrust work and social insurance applications.

Assessing the stage of the process of transforming Poland into an immigration country is extremely difficult, both by the nature of migration processes (large fluctuations, short-term migrations) or the imperfection of official data sources. Considering the ever-growing employment gap in Poland, which may amount to up to 1.5 million people by 2025 (PWC, 2019) and the growing real wage, further pressure from employers on creating easier access to the Polish labour market for economic migrants should be expected, which will result in maintaining the trend of increasing their population in Poland.

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## Migracje ekonomiczne do Polski w latach 2008–2018

**Abstrakt:** Artykuł przedstawia dane na temat strumienia migracji ekonomicznych do Polski w latach 2008–2018. W pierwszej części zaprezentowano migracje ekonomiczne w ujęciu teoretycznym, wyjaśniając pojęcie i prezentując definicje. Następnie przedstawiono uwarunkowania instytucjonalno-prawne migracji zarobkowych do Polski, ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem dokumentów dopuszczających do polskiego rynku pracy: zezwolenia na pracę, zezwolenia na pracę

sezonową i oświadczenia o powierzeniu wykonywania pracy cudzoziemcowi. W dalszej części zaprezentowano dane dotyczące liczby wydanych oświadczeń i zezwoleń na pracę, świadczących o potencjalnej liczbie migrantów ekonomicznych. Przedstawiono również dane Zakładu Ubezpieczeń Społecznych w zakresie cudzoziemców zgłoszonych do ubezpieczenia emerytalnego i rentowego. Dokonano analizy i oceny danych. Artykuł zakończono podsumowaniem.

**Słowa kluczowe:** imigrant, migrant ekonomiczny, zezwolenie na pracę, rynek pracy