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RIGHT TO WORK IN POLAND – GUIDE FOR REFUGEES



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Introduction

This guide has been created to support refugees, people under temporary protection, asylum seekers, and others who have recently arrived in Poland and want to understand how to work legally. It explains the different types of protection, what documents you need, and how to confirm your right to work. The language is simple so that people with different levels of English can use it.

Understanding your legal status is an important first step. In Poland, different groups have different rights. Recognised refugees, people under subsidiary or humanitarian protection, and those with temporary protection usually have the right to work without a separate work permit. Asylum seekers may gain the right to work after six months. This guide helps you identify your status and understand what it allows you to do.

Working in Poland requires certain documents, such as a residence card, temporary protection certificate, or a special work authorisation for asylum seekers. Employers must check these documents before hiring you. In most cases, the process is simple and quick. This guide explains which documents you need, how to keep them valid, and what steps to take if your situation changes.

Starting work as soon as you understand your rights can make settling in Poland easier. Employment helps with stability, independence, and integration. Poland offers opportunities across many sectors, including construction, logistics, hospitality and services. This guide gives you practical steps and reliable sources of information so you can begin work confidently and safely.

01

Understanding the different types of legal protection in Poland



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To work legally in Poland, you must first understand the type of protection you have. Each status comes with different rights and responsibilities. Full official explanations are available on the Office for Foreigners website: <https://www.gov.pl/web/udsc>.

Recognised refugee status

If the Polish authorities have granted you refugee status, you are protected under Polish and international law. You may live and work in Poland without a work permit. You will receive a residence card (karta pobytu), which confirms both your identity and your right to work. More information is available at UNHCR Poland: <https://help.unhcr.org/poland/access-to-services-for-recognized-refugees/rights-of-recognized-refugees-in-poland/>

Subsidiary Protection

If you do not meet the requirements for refugee status but still face danger in your home country, you may receive subsidiary protection. This protection gives you full access to the labour market, without needing a work permit. You will receive a residence card showing this status. The body that decides on granting such protection is the Head of the Office for Foreigners

Humanitarian protection

Humanitarian protection is granted for serious humanitarian reasons. People with this status also have full access to work. As with other forms of protection, the residence permit confirms your right to work.

Temporary protection (including many people from Ukraine)

Temporary protection allows people escaping war or crisis to stay and work in Poland legally. You do not need a separate work permit. You must show your temporary protection document and your PESEL number (usually with the “UKR” mark). Employers may have to declare your employment online, but this is their responsibility. Full information is available at: <https://www.gov.pl/web/udsc-en/temporary-protection>.

Asylum seekers waiting for a decision

If you have applied for asylum, you are an asylum seeker. During the first six months after applying, you cannot work. After six months, if there is still no decision, you may request a certificate that allows you to work legally. Once you have this certificate, you do not need a work permit. More information is available at: AIDA (detailed explanation) – <https://asylumineurope.org/reports/country/poland/>.

| The documents needed to work legally

To work in Poland, you must show the employer documents that confirm both your identity and your right to work. The exact documents you need depend on your legal status in Poland. Employers are required by law to check these documents before offering you a job.

If you are a recognised refugee, or have subsidiary protection or humanitarian protection, your right to work is shown on

your residence card, known as a karta pobytu. This card confirms your legal status and gives you full access to the labour market without a separate work permit.

If you are under temporary protection, you must show the document proving your temporary protection and your PESEL number with the correct annotation, often “UKR”. These documents confirm that you may work in Poland. No work permit is required.

If you are an asylum seeker and six months have passed since you applied for asylum, you may receive a special certificate that allows you to work while your asylum application is still being processed. When presenting this certificate to an employer, you must also show your temporary identity document.

Regardless of your status, you should always carry an identity document such as a passport or travel document. Employers must confirm who you are and check your documents before you begin work.

For official explanations about residence permits and related documents, visit the Government of Poland’s website: MOS - Moduł Obsługi Spraw <https://mos.cudzoziemcy.gov.pl/>

| How to check if you have the right to work

If you are unsure whether you currently have the right to work in Poland, there are several ways to check. Understanding your status is important because your right to work depends directly on the type of protection you hold, how long you have been in Poland and whether your documents are still valid.

Start by looking at your residence card, known as a karta pobytu, if you have one. This document clearly states whether you are a recognised refugee, or whether you hold subsidiary protection or humanitarian protection. Any of these three forms of protection give you full access to the Polish labour market without needing a work permit. If your residence card shows one of these statuses, you can work immediately.

If you are under temporary protection, your right to work is confirmed through your PESEL number, usually marked with the “UKR” annotation, and your temporary protection document. Employers will often ask to see both. If these documents are valid, you may work legally in Poland, and you do not need to apply for any additional permit.

If you are an asylum seeker, the rules are slightly different. Asylum seekers cannot work during the first six months after submitting an asylum application. To understand whether you now have the right to work, check the exact date when your asylum application was officially submitted. If six months have passed and you have still not received a final decision, you are eligible to apply for a work authorisation certificate. This certificate gives you the right to work while waiting for the outcome of your case. You must show this certificate, together with your temporary identity document, when applying for work.

If you are still uncertain about your rights, or if your documents are unclear or expired, you can contact your local Voivodeship Office (Urząd Wojewódzki). Staff there can check your status on the system and explain what documents you need. You can find a list of Voivodeship Offices on the official government website: <https://www.gov.pl/web/gov/uw>.

If you prefer independent advice, you may contact trusted organisations such as UNHCR or local NGOs that assist refugees. UNHCR provides clear explanations about the right to work and different protection statuses at: <https://help.unhcr.org/poland>. These organisations can help you understand your documents and guide you through the next steps if anything is missing or unclear.

| What employers in Poland must do

When an employer in Poland hires someone who holds refugee status or any form of international or temporary protection, the procedure is usually straightforward. The employer's main responsibility is to confirm your identity and check that your documents clearly show your right to work. The exact steps they must take depend on your legal status, but in most cases the process is simple and does not require any special paperwork.

If you have refugee status, subsidiary protection or humanitarian protection, the employer does not need to apply for a work permit on your behalf. You have full access to the labour market, and you may be hired under the same conditions as Polish citizens. The employer must look at your residence card (karta pobytu) to verify your status and check your identity document, such as a passport or travel document. Once this is done, you can be hired without any additional procedures.

If you are under temporary protection, employers may need to register or report your employment using the online system required by Polish regulations. This process is quick and is the responsibility of the employer, not the worker. You do not need to apply for any extra permit or complete any additional forms yourself. You only need to provide valid documents, such as your PESEL number with the correct annotation and your temporary protection certificate.

If you are an asylum seeker and you have been issued a work authorisation certificate after six months, the employer must keep a copy of this certificate in their records. The employer still does not need to apply for a separate work permit, but they must check that the certificate is valid and that you also hold the temporary identity document issued during the asylum procedure.

Regardless of your legal status, all employers in Poland must comply with Polish labour law. This means they must give you a written contract, follow rules on working hours, breaks, salary, health and safety standards, and pay your wages on time. They must also register your employment with the relevant social insurance authorities. Employers who fail to follow labour law can face penalties, and workers have the right to report violations.

If you ever feel unsure about whether your employer is following the rules, or if you need information about your rights at work, you can visit the National Labour Inspectorate (Państwowa Inspekcja Pracy – PIP). Their official website offers guidance in several languages: <https://www.pip.gov.pl>

. The Labour Inspectorate can explain what a fair contract should look like, how wages should be paid, and what to do if a problem arises with your employer.

Employers may sometimes be confused about the rules for hiring refugees or people with temporary protection. If this happens, you can direct them to official government information from the Office for Foreigners <https://www.gov.pl/web/udsc> or the Ministry of Labour, or encourage them to contact the labour office or the Zielona Linia support service <https://zielonalinia.gov.pl> for clarification.

02

Step-by-step guide to start working in Poland



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Starting work in a new country can feel overwhelming, but the process in Poland is usually straightforward once you understand the steps. These steps apply to refugees, people with subsidiary or humanitarian protection, people under temporary protection and asylum seekers who have received the right to work after six months. Following this guide will help you prepare properly and avoid delays or misunderstandings with employers.

Step 1: Identify your legal status

Your legal status determines your right to work, so it is important to know exactly which category you belong to. Check whether you are a recognised refugee, have subsidiary protection, have humanitarian protection, are under temporary protection or are an asylum seeker. If you are not sure, check your documents or contact your local Voivodeship Office. You can find the list of offices at: <https://www.gov.pl/web/gov/uw>.

Step 2: Gather all necessary documents

Before applying for work, collect the documents that prove your identity and your right to work. These usually include your residence card, temporary protection confirmation and PESEL certificate, or your work authorisation certificate if you are an asylum seeker after six months. Employers must check your documents, so having them ready will speed up the hiring process.

Step 3: Check the validity of your documents

Always check that your documents are still valid. If your residence card or temporary protection documents are close to their expiry date, apply for renewal as early as possible. Expired documents may stop you from working legally and cause problems for both you and your employer. The Office for Foreigners provides information on renewing documents at: <https://www.gov.pl/web/gov/zamelduj-sie-na-pobyt-staly-dla-cudzoziemcow-en> .

Step 4: Make copies or take photos of your documents

Employers in Poland often keep copies of your documents for their records. It is helpful to make photocopies or store clear photos of your documents on your phone. This also protects you if your documents are lost or damaged, as you will still have a record of what you held.

Step 5: Provide your documents when applying for work

During the application or hiring process, show your employer the documents confirming your right to work. Refugees and protected persons do not need work permits, so these documents are usually enough. If you are under temporary protection, your employer may need your PESEL details for a simple online registration.

Step 6: Allow the employer to complete the required procedures

Once your employer has seen your documents, they may need to complete certain steps depending on your status. For example, they may need to register your employment if you are under temporary protection. This is their responsibility, not yours. You do not need to apply for anything unless the authorities specifically instruct you to do so.

Step 7: Begin working legally

After your employer has checked your documents and completed any required notifications, you can begin work. Make sure you receive a written contract and keep a copy for yourself. Knowing your rights at work will help you stay safe and avoid exploitation. For information about workplace rights and safety rules, visit the National Labour Inspectorate: <https://www.pip.gov.pl>.

| Keeping your status valid

Your right to work in Poland depends entirely on your legal status and the validity of the documents that prove it. If your documents expire, become damaged, or are lost, your right to work may be temporarily paused until the issue is corrected. For this reason, it is important to understand how to maintain your status and keep all documents up to date.

Start by regularly checking the expiry dates on your residence card, temporary protection documents, PESEL certificate or asylum-related papers. These dates are usually printed clearly on the documents. Do not wait until the last week to renew your status. Many refugees and protected persons experience delays because they apply too late. Most offices allow you to begin the renewal process months before the expiry date, and applying early helps prevent breaks in your right to work.

If you hold refugee status, subsidiary protection or humanitarian protection, you will usually hold a residence card (karta pobytu). This card must be renewed before it expires. If it is close to its expiry date, visit your Voivodeship Office to begin the renewal procedure. Information about residence permits and renewal can be found at: <https://www.gov.pl/web/gov/uslugi-dla-obywatela/#cudzoziemiec-w-polsce>.

If you are under temporary protection, check the rules for your specific protection period. Temporary protection often has special extensions and announcements made by the government. The most accurate information is available on the official government page: <https://www.gov.pl/web/ochrona-en> or <https://www.gov.pl/web/udsc/zezwozenia-na-pobyt-dla-obywateli-ukrainy-objetych-ochrona-czasowa>. Employers may ask you to provide updated documents if the protection period changes.

If you are an asylum seeker, keep track of your temporary identity document and your work authorisation certificate (if you have one). These documents may also have expiry dates. If they expire, you need to request updated versions from the relevant authorities. Losing these documents can cause difficulties, so store them safely.

It is also important to keep your personal information up to date. If you move to a new address, have a new telephone number, or change your passport, inform the Voivodeship Office as soon as possible. Keeping your information current helps avoid problems with your legal status.

If your documents are lost or stolen, report this to the authorities immediately and request replacements. While waiting for new documents, keep any temporary confirmation you receive. Employers may ask to see these documents to confirm your legal situation.

By keeping your documents valid and up to date, you protect your right to work and avoid interruptions in employment. If you ever feel uncertain, you can contact your Voivodeship Office, UNHCR (<https://help.unhcr.org/poland>) or a local support organisation for assistance.

| What to do if you change jobs

Changing jobs in Poland is usually a simple process for refugees and people under protection, but it is important to understand what steps are required so that your employment remains legal. Your right to work is linked to your legal status, not to a specific employer. For this reason, most protected persons can move from one job to another without any extra permits.

If you hold refugee status, subsidiary protection or humanitarian protection, you may change employers freely. You are treated the same as a Polish citizen in the labour market. This means you do not need to apply for new permission or inform any authority when you leave a job or start another one. When you begin a new job, the only requirement is to present your residence card (karta pobytu) and identity document to your new employer, so they can verify your status.

If you are under temporary protection, you may also change jobs without needing a work permit. Temporary protection gives you general access to the labour market. However, your new employer may need to register your employment through

the online system required for workers under temporary protection. This step is quick and is the responsibility of the employer, not the worker. You only need to provide the documents that confirm your status, such as your PESEL number with the correct annotation and your protection certificate.

If you are an asylum seeker with a work authorisation certificate (issued after six months of waiting), you are allowed to change employers as long as your certificate remains valid. When you move to a new job, you must show your new employer both your certificate and your temporary identity document. The employer will keep copies of these documents for their records. You do not need to contact the authorities or request a new certificate when changing jobs, unless your current certificate is close to expiring.

Regardless of your status, there are a few practical things to remember when changing jobs. Always ask your previous employer for any final documents you may need, such as proof of employment or salary summary, as these may be useful in the future. Make sure your phone number and contact details are up to date, and be ready to provide them to your new employer.

It is also important to keep your legal documents safe during the transition period. Employers must see original documents, so store them securely and avoid carrying them unnecessarily. If any documents are close to expiry, begin the renewal process before starting your new role.

If you are unsure about the process or if you face difficulties when changing jobs, you can contact the National Labour Inspectorate for advice: <https://www.pip.gov.pl>. You may also speak to organisations such as UNHCR (<https://help.unhcr.org/poland>), Fundacja Ocalenie (<https://ocalenie.org.pl>) or Migrant Info Point (<https://migrant.poznan.pl>), which offer free support for refugees and migrants in Poland.

| Common situations and how to handle them

When working or looking for work in Poland, many refugees and people under protection face similar questions and situations. Knowing how to respond can help you avoid problems and feel more confident when speaking with employers or authorities. Below are some common situations and practical advice on how to handle them.

One common situation is when an employer asks for a work permit. Refugees, people with subsidiary or humanitarian protection, and people under temporary protection do not need a work permit. Your residence card or protection documents already give you the legal right to work. If an employer is unsure about this, stay calm and explain that your status allows you to work without any additional permit. You may show them the official government information from the Office for Foreigners: <https://www.gov.pl/web/udsc> or the UNHCR information page: <https://help.unhcr.org/poland>.

Another situation is when employers are not sure how to hire someone with temporary protection. This is common because the rules are different from other types of work permits. If the employer is unsure, you can point them to the official temporary protection information page: <https://www.gov.pl/web/udsc-en/temporary-protection>. The employer may also contact the labour support service, Zielona Linia, for help: <https://zielonalinia.gov.pl>. Remember that the responsibility for any required registration lies with the employer, not with you.

Some people worry that changing employers may affect their right to work. For most refugees and protected persons, your right to work is linked to your legal status, not your job. You may move from one employer to another without any special permission, as long as your documents remain valid. Asylum seekers must continue to hold a valid work authorisation certificate if they have one.

You may also face situations where your documents are missing, expired or unclear. If your documents have expired, speak to your Voivodeship Office as soon as possible. Expired documents can temporarily remove your right to work until they are renewed. If your documents are lost or stolen, report this and request replacements straight away. Always keep digital copies or photos of your documents so you can prove your identity and status if needed.

Another common issue is misunderstanding between employers and workers due to language barriers. If you do not understand something in your contract or workplace instructions, do not be afraid to ask for clarification. Employers are required by Polish labour law to make sure workers understand the terms of their employment, including working hours, wages, health and safety rules and rights at work. You can find information about worker rights on the National Labour Inspectorate website: <https://www.pip.gov.pl>.

If you ever feel you are being treated unfairly, are asked to work without a contract, or believe your rights are being violated, you can seek help from trusted organisations. The National Labour Inspectorate can advise you on how to resolve workplace problems, and free help is also available from organisations such as Fundacja Ocalenie (<https://ocalenie.org.pl>) or the Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights (<https://www.hfhr.pl>). These organisations support refugees and migrants with employment advice, legal assistance and information.

Knowing how to handle these common situations can help you work safely and confidently in Poland. With the right information and support, you can avoid misunderstandings and protect your rights at every stage of employment.

| Where to get help or more information

If you need help understanding your right to work, renewing your documents or resolving problems with an employer, there are many reliable places in Poland where you can receive free and trustworthy support. Knowing where to look can make the process much easier and give you confidence when dealing with legal or employment issues.

One of the most important sources of information is **UNHCR Poland**, the United Nations Refugee Agency. Their website explains rights for recognised refugees, people under temporary protection and asylum seekers in simple, clear language. You can find information on work rights, documents, access to services and legal procedures at: <https://help.unhcr.org/poland>. UNHCR also works with partners across Poland, so they can direct you to local organisations that offer face-to-face assistance.

The **Government of Poland – Office for Foreigners (Urząd do Spraw Cudzoziemców)** provides official and up-to-date information about protection statuses, residence permits, the asylum process and temporary protection. Their website explains each type of protection and the rights that come with it, including access to work. You can read the official guidance at: <https://www.gov.pl/web/udsc>. For temporary protection specifically, the government's English-language page offers clear information at: <https://www.gov.pl/web/udsc-en/temporary-protection>.

For help related to employment, contracts and job opportunities, you can contact **Zielona Linia**, the national labour support service. They provide guidance on legal employment, workers' rights, job searching and labour procedures. Their website and telephone support line are designed for both Polish people and foreigners: <https://zielonalinia.gov.pl>.

If you need more detailed legal information about the asylum process and rights of asylum seekers, the **AIDA – Asylum Information Database** offers in-depth reports about how Polish asylum law works in practice. Their Poland country report is regularly updated and can be found at: <https://asylumineurope.org/reports/country/poland>.

For questions about workplace safety, contracts, wages or employer responsibilities, you can contact the **National Labour Inspectorate** (Państwowa Inspekcja Pracy – PIP). They provide information in several languages and can explain what to do if you believe your rights are being violated. You can find more information at: <https://www.pip.gov.pl>.

Many refugees also receive valuable support from local non-governmental organisations (NGOs). These organisations offer free legal help, social support, job advice and assistance with documents. Some trusted organisations include:

- **Fundacja Ocalenie** – support with documents, legal guidance and integration: <https://ocalenie.org.pl>
- **Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights** – legal assistance for migrants and refugees: <https://www.hfhr.pl>
- **Caritas Polska** – humanitarian help and community support: <https://caritas.pl>
- **Migrant Info Point (Poznań)** – information and support for foreigners: <https://migrant.poznan.pl>
- **Warsaw Multicultural Centre** – information, events and community support:

<https://centrumwielokulturowe.waw.pl/>

These organisations are experienced in supporting newcomers and can help you understand your documents, confirm your status and guide you through job-related procedures. Many also offer translation support or multilingual assistance. If you live outside a major city, you can still receive help. Most Voivodeship Offices offer information desks for foreigners, and many smaller organisations cooperate with larger NGOs to provide regional support. The list of Voivodeship Offices is available at: <https://www.gov.pl/web/gov/uw>.

No matter which type of support you need—legal advice, job information, document guidance or help understanding your rights—there are many trustworthy services available in Poland. Reaching out early can help you avoid problems and ensure that you start work safely and legally.

| Frequently asked questions

Many refugees and people under protection have similar questions about working in Poland. Below are answers to some of the most common concerns, explained in a simple and practical way.

1. Do I need a work permit to work in Poland?

In most cases, no. If you have refugee status, subsidiary protection or humanitarian protection, you do not need a work permit. You have the same rights to work as a Polish citizen. If you are under temporary protection, you also do not need a work permit. The only group that may need additional steps are asylum seekers, who must wait six months before applying for a work authorisation certificate.

2. Can I work full time or part time?

Yes. Your right to work does not limit your working hours. You may work full time, part time, on a fixed-term contract or on a permanent contract, depending on what the employer offers.

3. Can I change employers freely?

Yes. Refugees, people under subsidiary or humanitarian protection, and people under temporary protection can change jobs without applying for new permits. Asylum seekers can also change employers as long as their work certificate is still valid.

4. What happens if my documents expire?

If your documents expire, your right to work may pause until you renew them. Always check expiry dates early and begin renewal at your Voivodeship Office before the deadline. If your documents are lost or stolen, request replacements immediately.

5. Can I work while waiting for my asylum decision?

Not at first. During the first six months after submitting your asylum application, you are not allowed to work. After six months, if you still have no decision, you may apply for a work authorisation certificate. This certificate allows you to work legally while waiting for the outcome of your case.

6. Do I need to tell the government if I start a new job?

No. You do not need to inform the authorities when you start a new role. However, your employer may need to make a simple online declaration if you are under temporary protection. This step is the employer's responsibility.

7. Is it safe to work without a contract?

No. Working without a contract can put you at risk. You may not receive wages or proper protection in case of an accident. By law, all workers in Poland must have a written contract. If an employer refuses to provide one, you should seek help from the National Labour Inspectorate: <https://www.pip.gov.pl>.

8. What if I do not speak Polish?

Many workplaces in Poland employ international staff and do not require Polish at the start. Employers often provide

training or instructions in simple language. You can also use translation apps. Some NGOs offer free Polish lessons to help you adapt more easily.

9. Where can I report problems at work?

The National Labour Inspectorate (Państwowa Inspekcja Pracy) can help with issues such as unpaid wages, unsafe conditions or discrimination. Their website is: <https://www.pip.gov.pl>. You can also contact organisations like Fundacja Ocalenie, Refugee.pl, or UNHCR for advice.

| Practical checklist for refugees preparing to work

This checklist helps you prepare for legal employment in Poland. You can use it before applying for jobs or starting a new role.

- Know your legal status. Make sure you understand whether you are a recognised refugee, under subsidiary or humanitarian protection, under temporary protection or an asylum seeker awaiting a decision.
- Gather all your documents. This includes your residence card, temporary protection certificate and PESEL confirmation, or your work authorisation certificate if you are an asylum seeker after six months.
- Check that your documents are valid. Look at expiry dates and apply for renewal early if needed. Renewals often take time, so do not wait until the last minute.
- Prepare your identification. Carry your passport, travel document or temporary identity document, as employers must confirm your identity before offering work.
- Make copies of your documents. Keep photocopies and save clear photos on your phone. This protects you if your documents are lost or damaged.
- Check your contact details. Make sure your phone number and e-mail address are correct and easy for employers to use.
- Think about the type of work you want. Consider your skills, experience and what type of job you are physically able to do. This will help you apply for suitable roles.
- Be ready to show your documents to employers. Most workers with protection do not need a work permit, but employers must confirm your right to work.
- Understand your rights at work. You must receive a proper contract and be paid fairly. If you are unsure, you can contact the National Labour Inspectorate or trusted organisations for help.
- Keep your documents safe. Store them securely and avoid carrying them unnecessarily. If they are lost or stolen, request replacements as soon as possible.

Following this checklist will help you start work confidently, legally and safely in Poland.