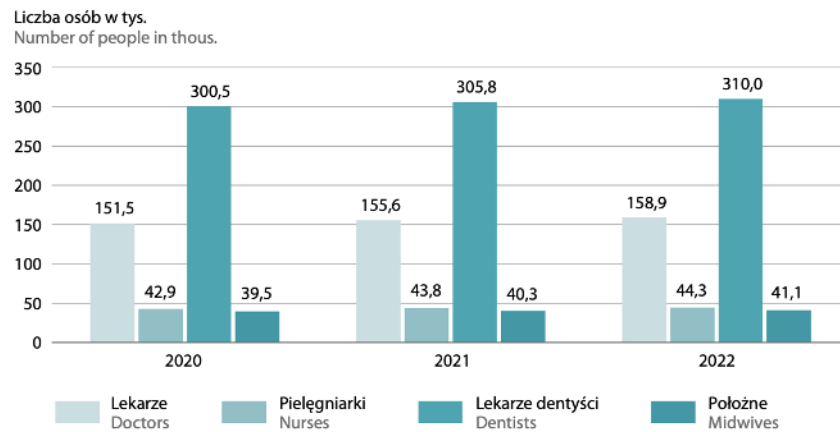

Recognition of the qualifications of refugee doctors
A comparison of European practices

POLAND

Between 2020 and 2023, the number of healthcare professionals in Poland will gradually increase.^{1,2} However, this increase is not enough to **solve the problem of the shortage of medical staff in Poland**. Poland has a lower density of doctors than most EU countries, with 3.4 doctors per 1,000 inhabitants compared to 4.1 per 1,000 in the EU as a whole, and the number of nurses (5.7 per 1,000 inhabitants compared to 8.5 per 1,000 in the EU as a whole) is also one of the lowest in the EU.³

Chart 70. Persons entitled to perform profession of a doctor, dentist, nurse, midwife
As of 31 December



Of the 161,267 doctors authorised to practise in 2024 (as at 30.09.2024), the dominant group (over 19%) was aged between 51 and 60.⁴ The average age of doctors working directly with patients was 49 in 2022 and 48 in 2021. Of all doctors working directly with patients in 2023, the largest group (22%) was aged between 30 and 39.⁵

In 2017, despite an increase in the employment of foreign nationals in the Polish healthcare system, visible in the growing number of work permits issued to non-EU healthcare professionals, the proportion of foreign-trained doctors represented only 2.8% of active doctors, a figure that remains below the EU average of 9.6%.⁶

The number of foreign healthcare professionals in Poland has also increased, partly due to the opening of Polish medical schools to foreign students. Since 1993, most Polish medical schools have launched comprehensive study programmes in English for international students wishing to continue their training outside their home country. In the 2024/2025 academic year, 16 of the 38 Polish medical schools offered programmes in English for international students (medical and dental), in addition to programmes in Polish for national students. This strategy has contributed to an increase in the number of work permits issued to healthcare professionals from non-EU countries.⁷

¹ Statistical Office in Krakow, Centre for Health and Health Care Statistics & Statistics Poland, Social Surveys and Labour Market Department (2023) *Health and healthcare in 2022*, Poland, Figure 70

² Dr. Piotr Łysoń & Department of Social Research and Labor Market, (2024) *Human resources in selected medical professions based on administrative sources in 2023*, Poland

³ OECD/European Observatory on Health Systems and Policies (2023), *Poland: Country Health Profile 2023, The State of Health in the EU*, OECD Publishing, Paris/European Observatory on Health Systems and Policies, Figure 10.

⁴ Supreme Medical Chamber in Warsaw (2024) *a numerical breakdown of physicians and dentists by age, gender and professional title, with the division into practicing and non-practicing physicians taken into account*

⁵ Dr. Piotr Łysoń & Department of Social Research and Labor Market, (2024) *Human resources in selected medical professions based on administrative sources in 2023*, Poland, Figure 2

⁶ European Institute of Health and Sustainable Development (2022), *Health workforce demand and supply: Poland*, Austria, figure 15

⁷ OECD (2019) 'International students in Polish medical schools', in *Recent trends in international migration of doctors, nurses and medical students*, OECD Publishing, Paris.
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1787/3be31b18-en>

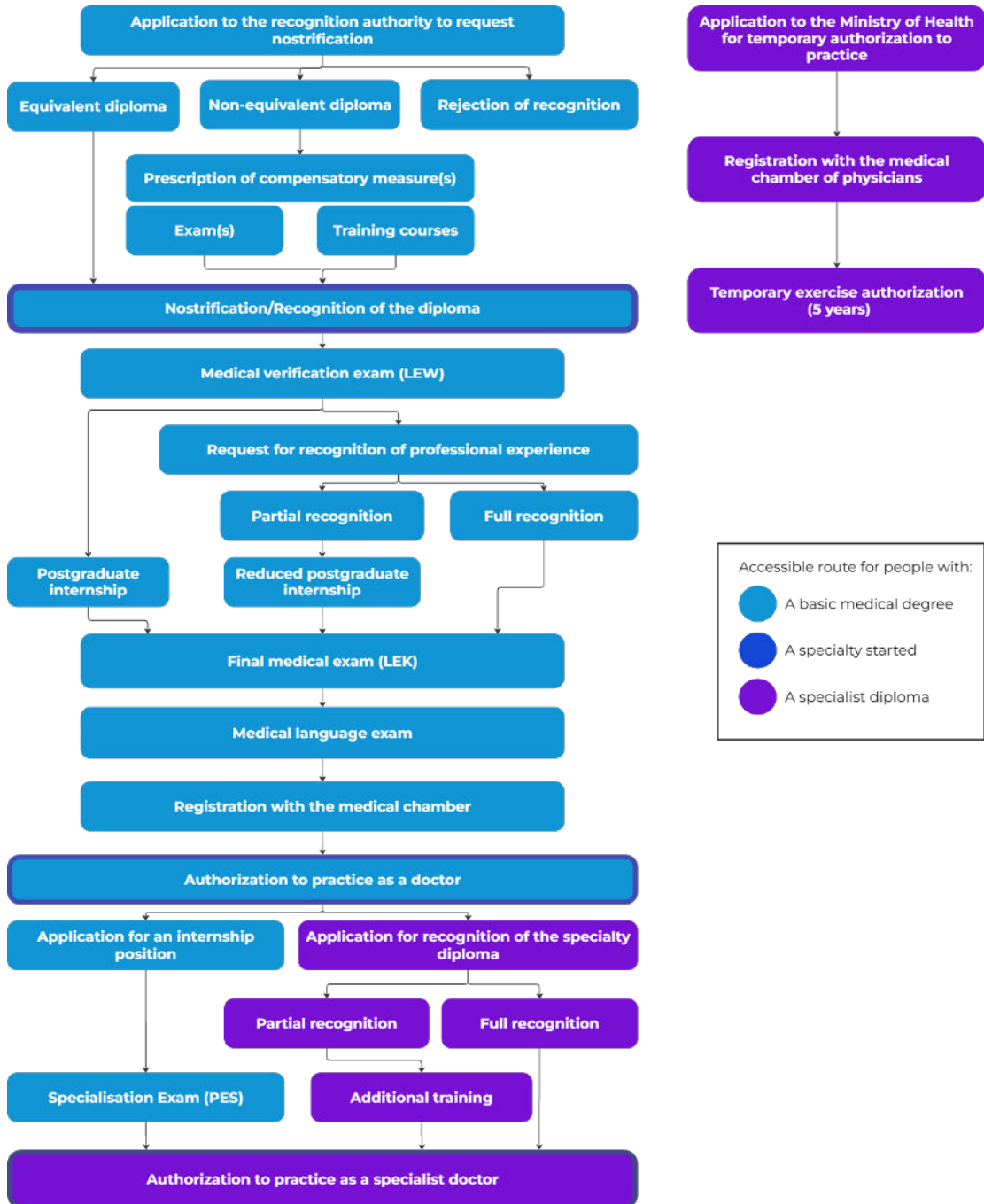


Figure 1: Scheme of the procedure for obtaining a licence to practise in Poland

A) Information and guidance on diploma recognition

The **Ministry of Health website** summarises in Polish the procedure to be followed by healthcare professionals with non-EU diplomas. There is also [a page](#) dedicated to Ukrainian healthcare professionals.

The website of the "[Union Helps Refugees](#)" organisation provides summary information on the procedure for recognition of diplomas and authorisation to practise for doctors, dentists, nurses and midwives, particularly Ukrainians.

The WHO collaborated with the Polish authorities to set up a **telephone information line** for doctors and nurses who obtained their qualifications in non-EU countries, including Ukraine. This line provided comprehensive information on obtaining a temporary licence to practise.

B) Language skills

Confirmation of **proficiency in Polish at B2 level**, including specific knowledge of medical terminology, is required for registration with the medical chamber.

If you are not a Polish or EU citizen, you must obtain a **certificate of language proficiency, which is awarded following a state examination** organised by the Supreme Medical Chamber (NIL). This examination includes a practical test on the ability to communicate with patients and conduct medical interviews. The examination costs around €115.

C) Authorisation procedure

The diploma was originally recognised through the **nostrification procedure at the university** (recognition of the diploma). The award of a diploma does not automatically confer the right to practise medicine in Poland. Since 2021, the applicant must pass **an additional examination (LEW)** to obtain permanent authorisation to practise. It is also required to **complete a postgraduate traineeship or to recognise a traineeship** carried out abroad as equivalent to the Polish one, as well as to **pass the LEK examination** that Polish students must take, as a general rule, at the end of the sixth year of medical school.

Diploma recognition: Nostrification procedure at university

During this recognition procedure, which was the only one in existence before 2021, a university commission **compares Polish and foreign study programmes**, results, and length of studies. If there are differences in the programme or the length of studies, the committee may decide that the doctor must take **additional examinations or training courses**. The nostrification procedure ends with the commission's decision (confirmation of the equivalence of the foreign diploma with its Polish equivalent or refusal of this confirmation).

This recognition procedure is complex and costs **between 700 and 1,400 euros depending on the university** (see appendix). There is no specific programme for refugees to cover these costs.

The review process can take up to 90 days.

Medical examination

The **LEW** (Lekarski Egzamin Weryfikacyjny) **examination** verifies that medical knowledge complies with the Polish curriculum. It was introduced in 2021 and is held twice a year, with a fee of 160 euros. The examination consists of 200 single-choice questions, each with five answer options. To pass, applicants must answer at least 60% of the questions correctly. If unsuccessful, they can retake the exam on another date, but they will need to register again.

Postgraduate course

The traineeship lasts 13 months for doctors (see appendix). It takes place in a medical unit to which the trainee is assigned.

To be eligible for an internship, doctors must

- or request it if they are prepared to do so in Poland;
- or submit a request to the Minister of Health to **have their training period already completed in their country of origin recognised**. There is a **possibility of full or partial recognition of** the period of training previously completed outside Poland. In the latter case, the graduate must complete the traineeship insofar as it has not been recognised by the Minister of Health. Submission of the application is free of charge and the decision must be made within one month.

Since 25 October 2024, the Minister of Health has been **able to recognise the duration of a doctor's work** on the basis of the right to practise obtained **under the so-called shortened procedure** on the territory of Poland as equivalent to the postgraduate internship completed in Poland in its entirety if the doctor meets the following criteria:

- has practised the profession of doctor in Poland for a total of two years, for a total period corresponding to at least the equivalent of one full-time post in a medical entity providing publicly funded healthcare services during that period;
- has obtained a favourable opinion from the head of the medical entity where he/she has practised as a doctor for at least the equivalent of a full-time post for a period of at least 12 months.

In all cases, they must apply to the Chamber of Physicians for "[authorisation to practise the profession in order to complete their postgraduate training course for foreign doctors](#)".

Final medical examination (LEK)

The last step before practising medicine is to take **the final examination**, which all doctors in Poland sit. It is held twice a year, in spring and autumn.

This is a test containing 200 single-choice questions with five answer options per question (see appendix).

The exam is considered passed if at least 56% of the answers are correct. The difficulty and depth of the subjects may be greater than those of the LEW exam. It has a duration of 4 hours. The first attempt is free, while each subsequent attempt costs 23 euros.

Registration with the doctors' medical chamber

Once you have passed the LEK, you need to [register](#) with the Medical Chamber of Doctors. This is free of charge.

D) The speciality

With a specialist diploma

The specialty obtained with a foreign diploma may be fully, partially, or not recognized at all, depending on the circumstances. The application must be submitted to the Polish Ministry of Health.

If the training is deemed sufficient, the applicant can begin working after fulfilling the formal requirements. However, if significant differences exist between the foreign qualifications and the Polish program—though not enough to prevent recognition—it is possible to bridge the gap **by completing additional training in specialized medical institutions**.

Without a specialist diploma

To continue as a specialist, you will first need to obtain "[authorisation to practise as a doctor](#)" and provide the specific documents required to practise as a specialist:

- authorisation from the Minister of Health to pursue a speciality in accordance with the principles specified in the regulations relating to access to and pursuit of studies, participation in scientific research and training by persons who are not Polish citizens;
- a document confirming the consent of the person or entity who will supervise the training periods in the speciality;
- a certificate attesting to the form of financing of the studies or training.

You will therefore need to find an accredited health establishment offering the desired speciality. These programmes are organised in the form of a *rezydentura* (residency). There are two main routes:

- **A state-subsidised residence:** these are places funded by the Polish government but are extremely competitive.
- **Non-residential speciality** (Specializacja w trybie pozarezydentenckim): Originally unsubsidised, students in specialist training are paid the compulsory minimum.

Finally, you must pass the **state specialisation exam (PES)**.

For doctors who have already started a specialty, the specialty must be restarted from the beginning.

E) Accelerated access to work

Simplified access to work for doctors 3 years' professional experience abroad

Since the COVID crisis, it has been possible to obtain a [temporary licence to practise](#) free of charge **while awaiting completion of the recognition procedure**. This authorisation is valid for a **maximum of five years** and cannot be extended. It is valid only for the medical entity employing the person.

The conditions include: training of at least five years prior to obtaining the foreign diploma (in non-EU countries), obtaining specialist doctor status, a certificate from a Polish medical organisation confirming the applicant's willingness to work as a doctor, and **at least three years' professional experience during the five years preceding the application**. The documents required for the procedure are detailed in the appendix.

A doctor interested in this approach needs to find a medical entity willing to employ him or her.

An application form must then be completed and signed, the required documents collected, and the file submitted to the Minister of Health (if the applicant resides in Poland) or to the consul (if the applicant resides outside Poland). The Minister of Health makes the final decision. The consultants are responsible for formulating opinions for the Minister of Health, which are then used to some extent as a substantial basis for the outcome of these procedures.

If the decision of the Minister of Health is positive, you must contact the relevant regional medical council (okręgowa rada lekarska) to complete the formalities.

Procedure for Ukrainians

The law on assistance to Ukrainian citizens during the armed conflict on the territory of Ukraine provides facilities for Ukrainian doctors, dentists, nurses, and midwives. These facilities apply only to Ukrainian citizens who have obtained their medical qualifications outside the territory of the Member

States of the European Union (i.e. in Ukraine, but also in other countries outside the EU). These rules, introduced at the beginning of 2022, were valid until 24 October 2024. They made it possible to avoid the 'nostrification' procedure for diplomas and offered simplified procedures for practising in Poland.

Ukrainian doctors were able to obtain authorisation to practise the profession of doctor for a period of five years and were granted the conditional right to practise a profession in Poland.⁸

Applications for authorisation to practise are submitted to the Ministry of Health. The right to practise gives the right to work in any medical entity. Doctors have been divided into two groups:

1. Without speciality: This first group could only obtain authorisation to work under the supervision of a supervising doctor for 5 years, i.e. for the entire duration of their employment in Poland.
2. With specialty: Doctors in this category were entitled to work under much shorter supervision, i.e. for three months.

The WHO worked with the Ministry of Health and the Medical Centre for Postgraduate Education to develop **a free online course providing essential information on the national health system for Ukrainian doctors**. This course has enabled Ukrainian healthcare professionals to integrate into the Polish system. The mechanism has proved effective and the WHO is currently developing other online courses to help Ukrainian health professionals.

F) Resuming studies

Resuming your studies can be done through **a credit transfer process**, though not all universities offer this option, and admission requirements vary significantly. In most cases, you will need to apply through a standard application process. It may also be necessary to complete the first year of medical studies—often requiring participation in the first-year admissions procedure, which may include an exam—before applying for credit recognition. Once admitted, students can generally enter the second or third year, and in rare cases, up to the fifth year. Some universities offer medical degree programs in English that do not require a B2 level in Polish.

It is possible to obtain a grant to finance your studies, offered by NAWA.

[Information](#) on resuming studies is very patchy. You need to find out from each university.

G) Nurses

Authorisation to practise

Nurses must also have **their diploma recognised through the nostrification procedure at university** and then obtain a **limited licence to practise** issued by the [district nursing council](#). This will enable them to complete a **6-month adaptation period** in a designated medical establishment. At the end of this adaptation period, you will need to apply **for authorisation to practise independently** (the conditions are set out in the appendix).

Simplified authorisation

⁸ They had to meet the following conditions: full legal capacity; good health; proof of irreproachable ethics; medical or dental diploma obtained after studies of at least 5 years' duration, issued in a country other than a Member State of the European Union; command of the Polish language at a level of at least B1.

Since the COVID-19 crisis, like doctors, it has been possible to obtain a **simplified temporary licence** to practise as a nurse in Poland.

The licence is awarded in three options:

1. The right to practise as a nurse for a specified field of professional activity, duration, and place of employment in a healthcare entity (for persons with at least 3 years' professional experience acquired in the last 5 years). Work under the supervision of another nurse lasts one year. Applications may be submitted by anyone who obtained their qualifications outside the EU.
2. Conditional right to practise as a nurse (for people with at least three years' professional experience acquired over the last five years). This option is reserved exclusively for Ukrainian citizens. They can then work under the supervision of another nurse for the first three months of employment.
3. Conditional right to practise the profession of nurse (for people with no professional experience). This option is reserved exclusively for Ukrainian citizens. The work is conducted under the supervision of another nurse for the duration of the employment. The detailed list of documents required for foreign nurses under the above-mentioned procedures is specified in the law on the nursing profession.

There is no time limit on the submission and examination of applications under the first procedure (for a specified scope, duration, and place of practice). However, the deadline for submitting applications under the second and third procedures (conditional procedures) expired on 24 October 2024.

With the licence obtained from the Minister of Health, the nurse must go to the District Chamber of Nurses to obtain the right to practise as such. This licence is valid for a period of 5 years and cannot be extended.

APPENDICES

Recognition of diplomas at university and under the simplified procedure

As part of the "nostrification" procedure, the documents required vary depending on the university. Below is an example of the requirements set by the Medical University of Białystok.

To start the procedure, the following documents must be presented:

1. A completed application to start the nostrification procedure;
2. Diploma obtained abroad with an apostille and a sworn translation;
3. Diploma annexes (diploma supplement) with apostille and sworn translation. The annexes to the diploma must contain information on the subjects studied and the hours of teaching. If this information is not provided initially, it must be requested from the university where the diploma was obtained;
4. A document attesting to the previous studies on the basis of which admission to the medical university was obtained (for example, a certificate or diploma from another establishment);
5. Information on foreign qualifications from the Polish National Agency for University Exchanges ;
6. Original certificate/certificate of accreditation for inspection, photocopy of certificate/certificate of accreditation, copy of translation of certificate/certificate of accreditation;
7. In the event of a change of surname, the marriage certificate ;
8. A declaration of knowledge of the rules of the nostrification procedure.

Within 14 days of submitting the documents, it is necessary to pay a fee. At the Medical University of Białystok, the fee is €1,065.

Fifteen Polish universities are authorised to carry out nostrification.

Under the simplified procedure, the documents required are as follows: application, doctor's diploma and additional certificate or diploma attesting to at least five years' training, specialist's certificate and specialist's training programme, certificate from the medical entity undertaking to employ the applicant, signed declaration indicating proficiency in the Polish language at a professional level, declaration relating to the absence of a criminal record and compliance with ethical standards, a declaration of legal capacity, a medical certificate proving fitness to carry out the required duties, a certificate of "professional cleanliness and compliance with ethical standards", a certificate from the previous employer confirming at least three years' professional experience, in the event of a change of surname, a marriage certificate, a copy of the passport. All documents that are not in Polish must be accompanied by sworn translations and, if necessary, be apostilled. Copies must be certified by a Polish notary or validated by the consul.

As part of the procedure for recognising the period of practising the profession of doctor on the territory of the Republic of Poland as equivalent to the completion of a postgraduate course, the following documents are required: application, certificate and declaration from the medical entity confirming that the doctor has exercised his/her profession in Poland, opinion of the head of the medical entity in which the doctor has exercised his/her profession for at least the equivalent of a full-time job for at least 12 months, certificate of absence, copy of the document entitled "right to exercise the profession of doctor", copy of the decision of the Minister of Health, copy of an identity document.

Internship programmes

The internship programme for doctors includes:

- internal medicine (10 weeks) and blood donation and blood therapy (1 week);
- paediatrics (6 weeks) and neonatology (2 weeks)
- general surgery (6 weeks) and trauma surgery (2 weeks)
- intensive therapy (2 weeks) and emergency medical care (3 weeks)
- family medicine (6 weeks)
- personalised postgraduate work placement (possibility of choosing medical fields other than those mentioned above) (10 weeks)
- medical expertise (3 days)
- bioethics (3 days)
- medical law (4 days)
- oncology prevention (1 day)
- pain management (2 days)
- public health (3 days)
- protective vaccinations (1 day)
- communication with the patient, the therapeutic team and combating burnout (3 days)

LEK exam

In general, the LEK exam consists of 7 to 39 questions on various medical fields, plus a few general questions. The single-choice questions are distributed as follows:

- Internal medicine, including cardiovascular diseases: 39 questions
- paediatrics and neonatology: 29 questions
- general surgery, including trauma surgery: 27 questions
- family medicine: 20 questions
- obstetrics and gynaecology: 26 questions
- emergency medical care and intensive therapy: 20 questions
- psychiatry: 14 questions
- bioethics and medical law: 10 questions
- medical expertise: 7 questions
- public health: 8 questions

Among the examination questions in the fields of internal medicine, paediatrics, surgery, obstetrics and gynaecology and family medicine, there are at least 30 questions in the field of oncology.

Requirements for authorisation of nurses

1. possession of a permanent residence permit
2. possession of an official certificate of proficiency in the Polish language, both spoken and written, to the extent necessary to practise the profession of nurse
3. presentation of a certificate confirming that you practise the profession of nurse in accordance with the regulations applicable in the country where you previously practised the profession
4. presentation of a certificate from the competent authority of the country of citizenship stating that the person has not been deprived of the right to practise the profession, that this right has not been suspended and that no proceedings are pending concerning the deprivation or suspension of the right to practise the profession
5. possession of a final certificate of a school of nursing, or of a certificate obtained in another country and recognised in the Republic of Poland as equivalent to a final certificate of such a school, in accordance with separate regulations, provided that it meets the minimum training requirements laid down by European Union law (recognition of diplomas)
6. the state of health required to practise as a nurse
7. completion of a 6-month adaptation period in a designated medical establishment
8. demonstrating an irreproachable ethical stance.