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THE COMPLEMENTARY ROLE OF FOREIGNERS IN THE LABOUR MARKET OF THE WEST POMERANIAN VOIVODESHIP

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Purpose: The aim of this study was to characterize foreigners in the labour market of the West Pomeranian Voivodeship and to identify and assess the key aspects of the complementary role they play in that market.
Design/methodology/approach: This study draws on a review of the relevant literature, an analysis of existing data, and inferences based on statistical data and the author's expert knowledge, gained while serving as a member of the Regional Labour Market Council (WRRP) in Szczecin. The geographical scope of the study covers the West Pomeranian Voivodeship, and the time frame is 2020-2025.
Findings: Research has shown that the share of foreigners in the labour market in the West Pomeranian Voivodeship between 2020 and 2025 was significant. Seven key aspects of the complementary role played by foreigners in the market under study were identified. Foreigners, primarily citizens of Ukraine, were the ones who most effectively filled the employment gap in the region's industrial processing sector.
Research limitations/implications: The short time frame of the study did not allow for the identification of emerging long-term trends. Another significant limitation was the lack of more detailed regional data—specifically at the provincial level—in official statistics. This gap was partially filled by unpublished data from the WRRP in Szczecin.
Practical implications: The results of the study may be useful to business owners operating in the West Pomeranian Voivodeship in terms of their human resources policies.
Originality/value: The study is based on the most up-to-date as well as unpublished data for the region under study, which is what makes it valuable. The identified aspects of the complementary role played by foreigners in the labour market of the West Pomeranian region should be considered original.
Keywords: the labour market in the West Pomeranian Voivodeship, foreigners in the labour market, the complementary role of foreigners in the labour market, the employment gap, skills shortages.
Category of the paper: Research paper.

1. Introduction

Foreigners play a significant role in the Polish labour market. According to data from the Social Insurance Institution (ZUS, 2025), 725,000 foreigners were registered for pension and disability insurance in Poland in 2020. At the start of 2026, ZUS records showed 1.29 million legally employed foreigners, representing an impressive increase of 77.9%. Ukrainian nationals accounted for the largest share of foreigners in the Polish labour market, at 5.2% in 2025[1]. Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022 was a key factor that further intensified the migration trends observed in Poland.

The number of foreigners varied across the country's regions. In 2025[2], the highest numbers resided in the Warsaw Capital Region (221,000), Lower Silesia Voivodeship (127,300) and Wielkopolskie Voivodeship (116,700), whilst the lowest was in Swietokrzyskie Voivodeship (9,100). In the West Pomeranian Voivodeship, 56,500 foreigners were employed in the year under review, accounting for 5.3% of the total. Men predominated (30,600), followed by women (25,900) (GUS, 2026a). The West Pomeranian region ranked 8th among all voivodeships, placing it in the middle of the table. The West Pomeranian Province was a significant labour market for foreigners, including Ukrainian citizens. Research in this area is therefore crucial, particularly in light of the demographic changes taking place, the region's peripheral location, and the demand for specific professions where there is a shortage of workers, as well as the professional skills and qualifications that are essential for the region's development and for building its competitiveness.

2. Literature review

The issue of international migration is frequently addressed by researchers due to its significant importance for the functioning of the global economy. For many years, Poland was not really a destination for economic migration. Significant changes were observed following Poland's accession to the European Union (Puzio-Wacławik, 2010). The year 2014 is considered a turning point, when more immigrants arrived in Poland than in the previous six years combined (Ambroziak, Schwabe, 2016, pp. 151-186). In turn, in 2017, according to OECD data (2019), Poland was the destination for the largest number of temporary workers globally. Another significant point on the timeline is 2022, when the Russian Federation's military invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022 caused a substantial influx of refugees into the Polish labour market. According to the latest data from the Central Statistical Office (GUS,

[1] As at 30 June 2025.
[2] Data for July 2025.

2026b), by the end of August 2025, over 1.1 million were working in Poland. Their share of the total workforce in Poland stood at 6.7%. In summary, over the last decade, as never before, there have been so many foreigners on the Polish labour market who have significantly shaped its functioning.

The literature describes the findings of numerous studies indicating that immigration has a positive impact on economic growth (e.g. Butyter, 2024; Kałuża-Kopias, 2023; Chen, Fang, 2013). Deloitte (2025, pp. 22-25) examined in detail the economic impact of refugees from Ukraine on the Polish economy, demonstrating that: (1) they contributed to a 1.5% increase in Poland's real GDP in 2022, 2.3% of GDP in 2023 and 2.7% of GDP in 2024. This corresponds to a GDP increase of PLN 98.7 billion in 2024; (2) they increase government revenue as employees, entrepreneurs[3] and consumers. In total, government revenue rose in monetary terms by PLN 25.0 billion in 2022, PLN 39.1 billion in 2023 and PLN 47.0 billion in 2024; (3) they generate additional output and demand; (4) with the entry of Ukrainian refugees into the Polish labour market, the economy has adapted, resulting in greater specialisation and higher productivity.

The literature also indicates that foreign nationals working in Poland play a significant complementary role in meeting labour demand and help to fill shortages in shortage occupations (Baron-Polańczyk, Klementowska, 2018; Solga 2023; Niewiadomska, 2024). The fulfilment of this role by foreigners is of particular importance in countries and regions experiencing negative demographic trends, such as an ageing population or depopulation. These processes are more advanced, particularly in peripheral areas (Jończy, 2023).

3. Methodology

The aim of this study was to characterise the presence of foreigners in the labour market of the West Pomeranian Voivodeship, and to identify and assess the key aspects of the complementary role they play in the market under study. To achieve this aim, three research questions were formulated: (1) How did the labour market in the West Pomeranian region develop between 2020 and 2025 in the context of foreign workers? (2) What were the key aspects of the complementary role played by foreigners in the labour market of the West Pomeranian Voivodeship? (2) To what extent did foreigners fill the employment gap in terms of sectors and occupations?

[3] According to the Polish Economic Institute (PIE), a total of 109,100 sole traders run by Ukrainians were established between 2022 and 2025, accounting for 10 per cent of all sole traders registered in Poland during that period. During the same period, 14,500 companies with Ukrainian capital were also established. The majority of Ukrainian sole traders are involved in construction, telecommunications and programming services, and other service activities (Szymańska, Wejt-Knyżewska, Zybertowicz, 2026, pp. 3-4).

The study draws on a review of the relevant literature and conclusions based on statistical data and the author's expert knowledge, acquired whilst serving as a member of the Regional Labour Market Council (WRRP) in Szczecin between 2018 and 2025. The geographical scope of the research covers the West Pomeranian Voivodeship and is determined by the author's place of residence and work. Due to its border location and distance from the centre, this region is considered peripheral. The time frame of the research mainly covers the years 2020-2025, although current information for 2026 has also been included. The choice of this period allowed for the identification of changes in the West Pomeranian labour market before and after the outbreak of the war in Ukraine.

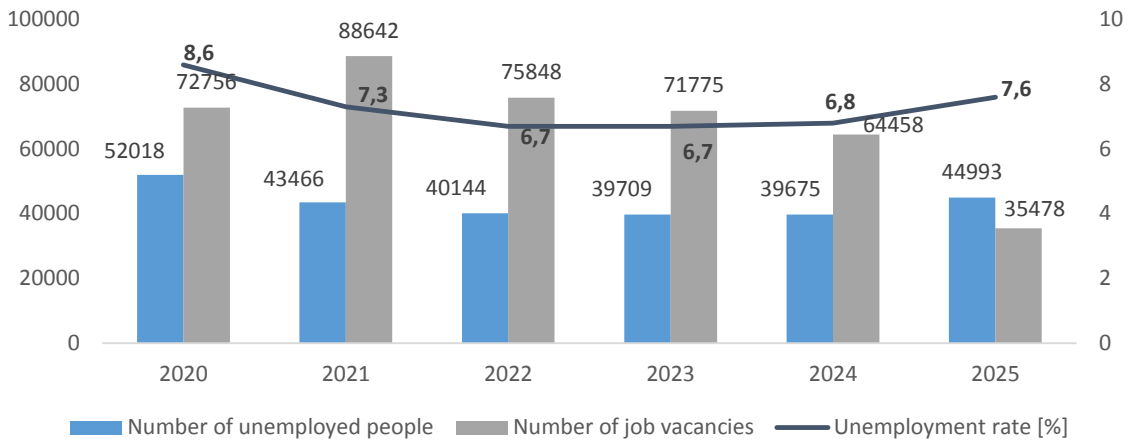
The following research methods were employed to test the research questions and achieve the study's objective: a review of the literature, analysis of existing data, graphical analysis, and logical reasoning and deduction. The study was conducted using data available from official statistics and reports from, amongst others: the Central Statistical Office (GUS), the Social Insurance Institution (ZUS), the Regional Employment Office in Szczecin (WUP), the Polish Institute of Economics (PIE) and Deloitte.

A significant limitation of the study is the short time frame of the research, which does not allow for the identification of emerging long-term trends. Additionally, a major limitation was the lack of more detailed data in public statistics, which covers the subject matter under study at a regional level, i.e. by voivodeships. This gap was partially filled by unpublished data from the Regional Labour Market Council (WRRP) in Szczecin. Formal constraints of the publication, including the length of the article, also meant that the study could only analyse selected aspects of the subject matter, a fact of which the author is aware.

4. Research results

4.1. The labor market in the West Pomeranian Voivodeship

Data from the Regional Employment Office (WUP) in Szczecin (2025a) indicate that between 2020 and 2025, the unemployment rate in the West Pomeranian Voivodeship remained at a relatively low level, falling from 8.6% to 7.6%. This rate was always higher than the national average, which stood at 5.6% in 2025, for example. The unemployed were predominantly people not entitled to benefits, the long-term unemployed and those without professional qualifications. During the period analysed, the number of unemployed in the region fell steadily until 2024, after which a 13.4% increase was recorded in 2025 compared to the previous year (see fig. 1).



*2025 - preliminary data.

Figure 1. Number of unemployed people, unemployment rate and number of job vacancies in the West Pomeranian Voivodeship in 2020-2025*.

Source: own study based on data from the WUP in Szczecin (2025a).

The labour force participation rate in the West Pomeranian Voivodeship rose from 53.8% in the base year to 56% in the target year[4]. Over the same period, the employment rate – that is, the proportion of the working population within the total population – also improved, rising from 51.8% to 54.7%. It can therefore be concluded that, generally speaking, the situation in the region's labour market under review was improving; unemployment remained at a relatively low level, and employers were struggling to find staff in certain sectors and occupations.

Low unemployment and a greater number of job vacancies than jobseekers indicated that the region was experiencing a typical 'employee's market'. It should be emphasised, however, that certain worrying signs in this area emerged in 2025. At that time, compared to 2024, in addition to a relatively slight increase in the unemployment rate of 0.8 percentage points (from 6.8% to 7.6%), a situation was recorded for the first time in the six-year period under review where the number of job vacancies (35,478) was lower than the number of unemployed, i.e. 44,993. In previous years, the opposite was true, although a downward trend in job vacancies had been evident since 2022, and its rate of decline was significantly greater than that of the downward trend in the number of unemployed.

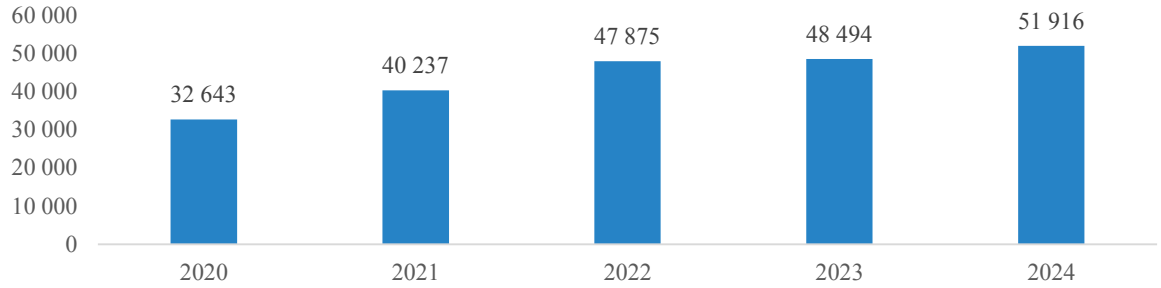
4.2. Foreigners on the labor market in the West Pomeranian Voivodeship

According to data from the WUP in Szczecin (2021), 27,220 work permits for foreigners were issued in the West Pomeranian Voivodeship throughout 2020, i.e. the year prior to the Russian Federation's military invasion of Ukraine (on 24 February 2022). These were mainly obtained by citizens of: Ukraine (67.0%), India (5.8%), the Philippines (5.5%), Belarus (3.0%), Georgia (3.0%) and Uzbekistan (2.0%). By 2025, 56,500 foreigners were already working in the region, with Ukrainian citizens continuing to dominate the figures (67%). Citizens of

[4] Data for 3 quarters.

Belarus (10.6%), Georgia (2.3%), India (2.1%), Colombia (1.6%) and the Philippines (1.4%) accounted for a smaller share (GUS, 2026). As can be seen, the proportion of Ukrainian citizens in the labour market under review remained stable, although their numbers increased. Furthermore, it should be noted that Szczecin Powiat ranked 7th in terms of registered refugees from Ukraine (14,138 people)[5] (Deloitte, 2026, p. 11).

According to ZUS data (2025), at the end of 2024, over 51,900 foreigners were insured in the West Pomeranian Voivodeship, which represents a 59% increase compared to 2020, when there were over 32,600 (see fig. 2.). In July 2025, 56,500 foreigners were working there, representing 4.3% of the national total. In summary, a growing trend in this regard was observed throughout the period under review.



* An insured person employed by several payers based in the same voivodeship is included only once.

Figure 2. Number of foreign nationals* registered for pension and disability insurance in the West Pomeranian Voivodeship between 2020 and 2024.

Source: ZUS (2025).

In total, between 24 February 2022 and 31 December 2025, 111,784 Ukrainian citizens took up employment in the West Pomeranian Voivodeship under the special law act. During this period, 6,293 Ukrainian citizens were registered with employment offices in the West Pomeranian Voivodeship, of whom 4,613 were registered under the scheme providing assistance related to the armed conflict (WUP in Szczecin, 2026).

4.3. Key aspects of the complementary role of foreigners in the labour market in the West Pomeranian Voivodeship

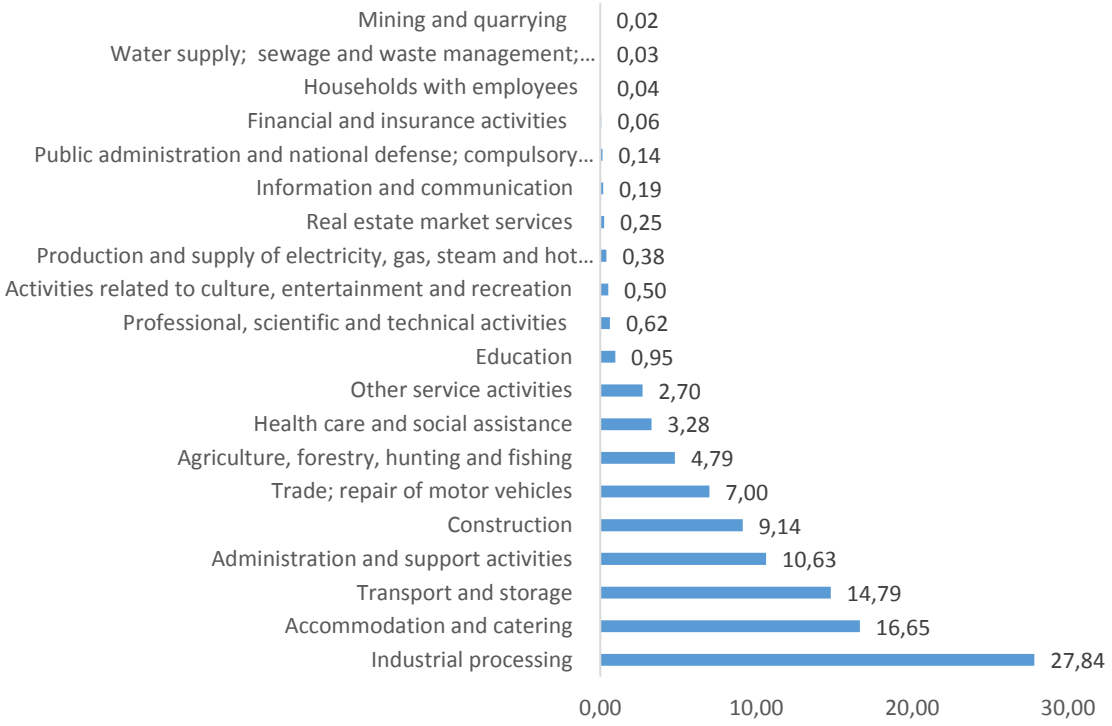
Based on the above description of the labour market in the West Pomeranian Voivodeship, taking into account foreign nationals, it can be concluded that the primary aspect of the complementary role played by foreigners between 2020 and 2025 was an increase in the labour supply. Migrants have expanded the size of the workforce. Despite this, the market under review continued to show, for the most part, an excess of labour demand and unfilled job vacancies (table 1). Thus, foreign nationals only partially filled the regional demographic deficit, which is forecast to worsen. Augustyn (2026) highlights an increase in the median age in the West Pomeranian region of 3.7 years between 2016 and 2024, compared to a national

[5] Data for September 2024.

average of 3.1 years. In the coming years, a major challenge for the region will be the growing proportion of people of post-working age and the simultaneous decline in the number of young people entering the labour market (GUS, 2023). According to the GUS forecast, by 2060 in the West Pomeranian Voivodeship, the proportion of the pre-working-age population is expected to be 14.2%, the working-age population 48.0%, and the post-working-age population 37.8%. These are alarming figures compared to 2024, when they stood at 16.8%, 57.9% and 25.3% respectively (GUS, 2025, p. 3).

Foreign nationals in the province under study also demonstrated growing entrepreneurial activity. According to ZUS data, by the end of 2024 they had established over 2,412 companies. Their number at the end of January 2023 stood at 1,176, representing an increase of over 100% (Klimczak, Wełnic, Skarul, Boroń, 2026). Thus, another aspect of the complementary role of foreigners in the studied market is the development of regional entrepreneurship and the creation of new jobs.

Foreigners took up employment across all sectors of the economy (see Figure 1). Based on data concerning Ukrainian nationals (who were the dominant group in the region), it can be seen that they most frequently took up employment in sectors related to manufacturing (27.84%), accommodation (16.65%) and transport (14.79%). It can therefore be concluded that it was in these sectors that Ukrainian citizens partially filled employment gaps, thereby also supporting the productivity of the firms operating within them.



*As of 3 June 2025, according to data from the CeSAR database.

Figure 3. Employment of Ukrainian nationals under the special law act, by economic sector, in the West Pomeranian Voivodeship in 2025* [%]

Source: own study based on WUP (2025a).

Assessing the extent to which the employment gap has been filled in individual sectors is difficult. However, such an assessment can be made to some extent by analysing the correlation between the data in Fig. 3 and the data showing the structure of job vacancies by occupation in the West Pomeranian region (Table 1). The structure of job vacancies changed in 2025 compared to 2020. Above all, employers' demand for technicians and other intermediate staff increased (by 5.1 pp.), as did demand for specialists (by 4.4 pp.) and service workers and sales staff (by 3.4 pp.). It can therefore be concluded that foreign nationals, including Ukrainians, have filled this labour gap to the least extent. The share of job vacancies for workers performing simple tasks fell the most (by 4 pp.), as did those for machine and equipment operators and fitters (by 3.8 pp.) and for office workers (by 3.2 pp.). This suggests that foreigners are increasingly filling the labour shortages in these occupational groups. However, in all the groups presented, there were still labour shortages of varying degrees in 2025.

Table 1.
The structure of job vacancies in the West Pomeranian Voivodeship by occupational group in 2020 and 2025

Occupational groups	2020 [%]	2025* [%]	2025/2020 pp.
Unskilled workers	31,8	27,8	-4
Industrial and craft workers	21,4	21,2	-0,2
Service workers and sales staff	12,4	15,8	3,4
Technicians and other mid-level staff	5,2	10,3	5,1
Office workers	12,2	9,0	-3,2
Machine and plant operators and assemblers	10,5	6,7	-3,8
Professionals	1,1	5,5	4,4
Farmers, gardeners, foresters and fishermen	2,6	3,2	0,6
Public officials, senior civil servants and managers	0,8	0,5	-0,3

Data for January–June 2025.

Source: Compiled by the authors based on data from the WUP in Szczecin (2021; 2025a).

Foreigners took up employment in sectors and occupations characterised by challenging conditions (taking into account working conditions and difficulty, type of contract, pay levels and staff turnover), thereby filling gaps in unattractive occupations. This is also due to the observed decline in their professional status. The Deloitte report (2026, pp. 25-33) indicates that 40% of Ukrainian refugees aged 25-64 have a higher education qualification but are unable to work in many occupations due to regulatory restrictions. Only 12% of refugees worked in occupational groups requiring higher education.

An analysis of shortage occupations can provide further insight into the issue of foreign nationals filling skills gaps. A comparison of forecasts for 2020 and 2026 clearly shows that the number of such occupations has decreased in most sectors. The exception is the education sector, where this number has increased. In the West Pomeranian Voivodeship, there is a shortage mainly of teachers of vocational subjects and practical vocational training. This is due to the growing popularity of technical, vocational and industry-specific schools, where students gain a profession after passing an exam confirming their vocational qualifications.

Additionally, a problem in the region is the pre-retirement, and not infrequently retirement, age of these teachers. However, the greatest changes have occurred in the construction sector. Whilst demand in the region for workers in many different occupations within this sector was reported practically up to 2024, by 2026 the demand relates exclusively to earthmoving equipment operators and mechanics. This is undoubtedly the result of the sector becoming saturated with workers possessing specific qualifications or professions, as well as changes in market conditions.

Table 2.
Shortage occupations by sector in the West Pomeranian Voivodeship

2020	2026
EDUCACION	
foreign language teachers and language tutors, practical vocational subject teachers, nursery school teachers	early years teachers, practical vocational training teachers, vocational subject teachers, general education and foreign language teachers, nursery school teachers, special school and inclusive class teachers, educators
HEALTHCARE AND SOCIAL CARE SECTOR	
doctors, nurses and midwives, physiotherapists and massage therapists, carers for the elderly or people with disabilities, social workers, psychologists and psychotherapists, medical rescuers	doctors, nurses and midwives, psychologists and psychotherapists, speech and language therapists, social workers and mediators, carers for elderly people or people with disabilities
CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY	
operators and mechanics of earth-moving machinery, concrete workers and steel fixers, pavers, carpenters and joiners, roofers and tinsmiths, building services installers, bricklayers and plasterers, finishing workers	operators and mechanics of earth-moving machinery
MANUFACTURING AND PROCESSING INDUSTRY	
tailors and garment production workers, manual workers in manufacturing and unskilled labour, machine tool operators, bakers, welders, woodworkers and joiners, metalworkers	welders
TRANSPORT/FORWARDING/LOGISTICS	
car body repairers and painters, bus drivers, lorry and articulated lorry drivers, warehouse staff, motor vehicle mechanics	bus drivers, lorry and articulated lorry drivers
FINANCIAL AND LEGAL SECTOR	
finance and accounting staff with foreign language skills, accounting staff, senior accountants	accounting and bookkeeping staff, senior accountants

Cont. table 2.

SAFETY AND SECURITY	
uniformed services personnel	uniformed services personnel
ELECTRICAL AND ENERGY SECTOR	
electricians, electromechanics and electrical fitters	electricians and power engineers
THE FOOD AND TOURISM INDUSTRY	
chefs, kitchen assistants	chefs

Source: compiled by the authors based on data from the WUP in Szczecin (2019; 2025b).

The occupations facing a persistent shortage – i.e. those that have remained in short supply continuously from 2016 to 2025 in the West Pomeranian region – were: independent accountants, carers for the elderly or disabled, bus drivers, welders, lorries and articulated lorries, and nurses and midwives. An analysis of the data presented shows that, in the West Pomeranian Voivodeship during the period under review, foreigners made the smallest contribution to filling the skills gap, with the exception of taking up employment in the construction and manufacturing and processing sectors. Staff shortages in shortage occupations were very difficult to fill due to the fact that, in most cases, these shortages relate to occupations requiring: a very good knowledge of Polish, high qualifications (often confirmed by relevant documents, the acquisition of which takes a long time and is regulated by law), specialist skills or appropriate competences.

5. Conclusions

Between 2020 and 2025, the West Pomeranian Voivodeship experienced what is known as an ‘employer’s market’. During this period, unemployment remained at a relatively low level and employers struggled to recruit staff. The number of foreigners in the region under study increased by 208%, i.e. from 27,200 to 56,500. The largest group consisted of Ukrainian citizens. Their share among foreign nationals in the region remained at a similarly high level, reaching as much as 67% in 2025.

Based on the research conducted, it can be concluded that foreign nationals, predominantly Ukrainian citizens, certainly did not play a substitute role in the West Pomeranian labour market, but rather a complementary one. Seven key aspects of the complementary role of foreign nationals were identified: (1) increasing the size of the regional labour force; (2) addressing the regional demographic deficit; (3) filling employment gaps; (4) supporting the development of regional entrepreneurship (business start-ups) and the creation of new jobs; (5) supporting the productivity of regional enterprises; (6) filling staff shortages in difficult sectors and unattractive occupations; and (7) filling skills gaps, including in shortage occupations.

The study also sought to assess the extent to which foreigners have filled the labour shortage in the West Pomeranian region. The research findings indicate that foreigners have filled employment gaps to the greatest extent by taking up work in sectors related to manufacturing, accommodation and catering, transport and warehousing, as well as administration and construction. Based on an analysis of changes in available job vacancies, it can be cautiously assumed that this applies to occupational groups such as: unskilled labour, machine and equipment operators and fitters, and office staff. An analysis of shortage occupations further confirms that foreign nationals were able to fill staff shortages to a large extent in the construction and industrial processing sectors in occupations where high qualifications or specialist skills are not required. The data collected, however, indicate that to the least extent (and in some cases, presumably not at all) have foreign nationals filled staff shortages in sectors such as: education, healthcare, finance and law, security and safety, or the electrical and energy sectors. It can therefore be concluded that in professions such as, amongst others: doctor, teacher, accountant, lawyer, educator, psychologist, uniformed services officer or electrician/ energy engineer, foreigners were unlikely to possess the relevant qualifications and competences, making it very difficult or impossible for them to fill the skills gap in these sectors. Access to these professions is restricted due to legal regulations.

In summary, foreigners played a significant role in the labour market of the West Pomeranian Voivodeship during the period under review. In the immediate future, the so-called ‘Smart Specialisation Professions of the West Pomeranian Voivodeship’ (ISWZP) will be key to the region’s development. These include: (1) Tourism and quality of life; (2) Next-generation manufacturing; (3) Technologies and services of the future; (4) Chemical products for sustainable development; (5) Smart methods of manufacturing products and machinery; and (6) Blue economy and green transport. Król, Wolny and Szymala (2025) demonstrated in their research that in most of the key ISWZP sectors, there is moderate or high dynamism in terms of changes to the required competences or qualifications. This necessitates continuous improvement and adaptation to changing conditions, both for residents of the region and for non-residents wishing to work here. Appropriately designed migration and education policies are also important as a key factor in building competitiveness in the peripheral West Pomeranian region.

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