

# Qualifications Beyond Borders: Recognition of Ukrainian Diplomas and Qualifications in Poland

Study Steering Committee:



Conducted by:

## ■ Motivations and purpose of the study

01.

Poland is one of the main destinations for refugees from Ukraine seeking safety and the opportunity to continue their professional lives.

02.

The proces of recognition of qualifcations and nostrifications of diplomas – seemingly systematised and legislated, but in reality both complex and not inaccessible for foreigners – has proved to be a key challenge.

03.

The objective of the report was to analyse the system of recognition of qualifications – both from a legal and a practical standpoint.

04.

The survey had an applied approach – it is intended to help identify barriers and develop recommendations for implemntation by public institutions, universities, employers and employment agencies, NGOs and industry organisations.

01

**Legal and institutional analysis** regarding the recognition of qualifications of Ukrainian citizens

02

**Survey** addressed to people with Ukrainian qualifications who arrived to Poland after 24.02.2022

03

**Case studies** for occupations selected in each sector – healthcare, education and transport/logistics – to show how recognition routes work in practice

04


**In-depth and group interviews with representatives of key institutions** – ministries, NAWA, CEB, universities, labour office, NGOs or employers



## Scope of the study



# Legal prerequisites for recognition of equivalence of diploma obtained on the territory of Ukraine



- For countries other than EU Member States or EFTA - no multilateral system for the recognition of vocational qualifications is operating.
- A fundamental requirement for gaining access to many regulated professions is **recognition of diploma equivalence**

Recognition of equivalence of diplomas possible after appropriate nostrification of the diploma.

## SUBMISSION OF AN APPLICATION

01. Formal examination of the application by the university nostrifying the request

## CORRECTION OF POSSIBLE FORMAL GAPS

02. Substantive assessment of the application (the university may call for examinations or apprenticeships)

## COMPLETION OF POSSIBLE EXAMINATIONS AND APPRENTICESHIPS

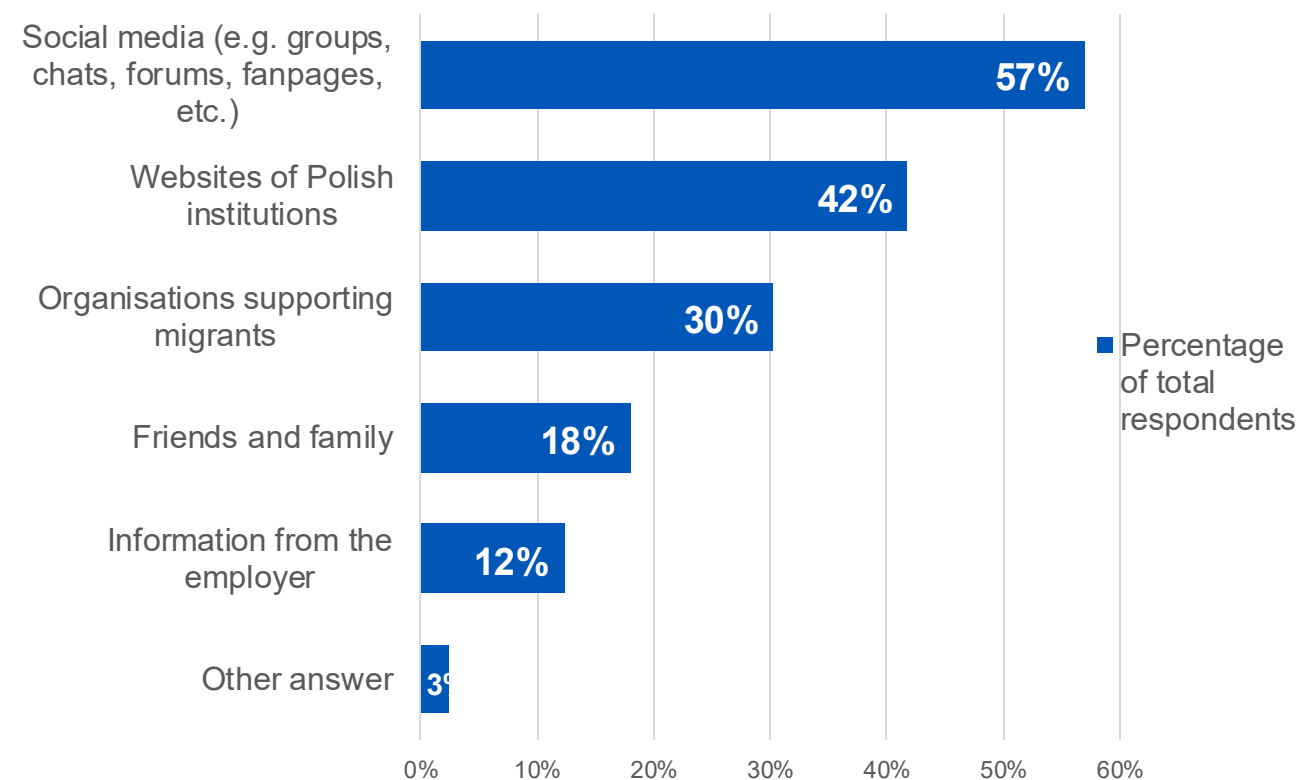
03. Recognition or denial of recognition of a diploma of degree from abroad as equivalent to the equivalent

\*obtained in Ukraine after 20 June 2006 as well as diplomas of doctor, dentist, pharmacist, nurse, midwife, vet and architect

## ■ Survey among refugees

- A sample of **122 Ukrainian nationals and citizens who arrived in Poland after February 2022** and experienced the qualification recognition process participated in the study.
- The goal was to find out about their motivations, experiences and difficulties encountered.
- The majority of interviewees were women with higher education and years of professional experience, primarily in the health and education sectors.

Sources of information on the process of recognition of qualifications



The familiarity level with nostrification procedures at the time of making the decision to recognise qualifications was low, with **49.5%** grading it as poor or moderate.

Only **18%** of respondents considered the available information to be very good.

## ■ Quantitative component - Survey

- Included within the recommendations were: **the development of a central, transparent and multilingual information source with details about procedures along with contacts to relevant institutions.** ,
- It was pointed out there is a need for a **reduction of costs** for applicants and **more trust in foreign work experience.**
- There was also an emphasis on the **significance of improving access** to language courses, counselling support and shortening turnaround time for decisions.

### Benefits of recognition of qualifications:

- Better working conditions or promotion (52.5%);
- Entering of the profession after nostrification (28.8%);
- increased salary (23%);
- New career opportunities (19.7%),
- increased responsibilities (17.2%).

### Barriers the most commonly identified by interviewees :

- high costs (over **PLN 3,000 for 55% of respondents;** over PLN 8,000 for 10%);
- long turnaround times;
- unclear decision-making procedures and disparities between institutions;
- lack of support - **31% of people have not received any aid** throughout the procedure.

## 01. Sasha – dentist

Profile: dentist, 2 years of experience, holder of temporary licence to exercise profession.

Experience with nostrification:

- Appreciated the digital platform of the university in Katowice (easy submission of paperwork).
- Most challenging: language barrier and lack of preparation for exams.
- Examinations assessed as linguistically difficult and not standardized across universities.

Conclusions:

- The system fails to provide preparation support (lack of mentors, courses, counselling).
- Work experience is not formally included in the assessment.
- Digitalisation of the process is a major positive - but not sufficient without substantive support.
- Nostrification is a “career investment”, but very taxing mentally.



## 02. Natasha – nurse

Profile: nurse with 20 years of experience, escaped from the occupied part of Ukraine.

Experience with nostrification:

- She benefited from a conditional right to exercise her profession.
- Started nostrification - faced high costs, language barrier, lack of information.
- The university reduced her fees (after specifying her living situation).
- She had to retake her apprenticeship, examination, and defend her thesis.
- Regulations changed - now she has to provide a language certificate (B1).

Conclusions:

- The system does not take professional experience already acquired in Poland into account.
- High costs, lack of information and user-unfriendly websites are discouraging.
- Social media more efficient than official channels.
- Nostrification did not increase earnings instantaneously, but opened the way to higher education and a sense of security.

### 03. Sofia – music teacher

Profile: education in economics, postgraduate studies in music pedagogy, 10 years of experience as a music teacher in Ukraine, working as an intercultural assistant.

#### Experience with nostrification:

- Refusal of nostrification of economics degree (UJ): too many curriculum discrepancies.
- Unrecognised musical and pedagogical qualifications.

#### Conclusions:

- The system does not provide routes for non-standard educational profiles. There is a lack of institutional support - Sofia acted completely on her own.
- Ultimately she was left working below her qualifications.
- Highlights lack of flexibility, clarity of information and a point of contact.



### 04. Artem – truck driver

Profile: professional driver, compares recognition procedures before and after 2022.

#### Experience with recognition of qualifications:


- The process involved checks, a course, an exam.
- Initially, the language barrier proved to be the biggest challenge. Professional language and documentation are more challenging than day-to-day communication.
- Biggest problem - administrative connections between documents (e.g. residence card → driver's certificate → job).

#### Conclusions:

- The system of procedural interdependencies creates a 'domino effect' - delays of one case block others.
- The employer plays a crucial role - formal support is invaluable.
- The system needs to be digital and be independent of the duration of the residence card.

# Interviews with stakeholders

## Availability of information was identified as one of the biggest challenges.



- 13 in-depth interviews and two group interviews were also conducted with representatives of ministries, universities, NAWA, CKE, NGOs, the labour office, employment agencies and employers.
- The goal was to reconstruct the systemic context of the recognition procedures and to identify its challenges, information gaps and good practices.

01.

Respondents unanimously pointed out that the unavailability of **transparent and central information sources** is one of the biggest issues for migrants.

02.

The information is:

- **scattered** between different sites and institutions;
- often **out of date or not available** in foreign languages;
- **too vague and non-useful**

03.

Existing tools, such as NAWA's "Qualifier", are assessed as **insufficient** - they provide no step-by-step instructions or guidelines on where and how to begin the procedure.

*„THERE IS NO SUCH TAB AS 'NOSTRIFICATION' [ON THE UNIVERSITY'S WEBSITE] AND THERE IS NO E.G.: OUR UNIVERSITY CAN NOSTRIFY IN SUCH AND SUCH FIELDS, HAS SUCH CONTACTS, REQUIREMENTS.”  
(IDI, UNIVERSITY)*

## ■ Numerous procedural barriers

01.

The recognition system is assessed as complex, expensive and incoherent.

02.

The freedom of interpretation of the legislation leads to cases where the outcome of the procedure depends rather on the institution than the actual profile of the candidate.

03.

It also lacks tools to assist communication and traceability of the process.

### ■ Problems identified include:

- **lack of consistent rules between universities** (differences in demands and interpretations of legislation);
- **discrepancies** in acceptable documents and their translations;
- **lengthy turnaround times** of decisions;
- **disregard of work experience** already gained in Poland.

*„EACH UNIVERSITY HAS A DIFFERENT CURRICULUM - YOU CAN SUBMIT DOCUMENTS TO ONE UNIVERSITY AND IT WILL BE ENOUGH, THEN TO ANOTHER AND THERE WOULD BE A NEGATIVE DECISION.”*

(FGI, NGO 1)



## ■ Interviews with stakeholders

### Lack of coherent cooperation between institutions

Respondents drew attention to:

- **lack of a central centre to coordinate** the activities of the entire system;
- **inconsistency of procedures** between universities and professional chambers;
- **lack of information flow** and tools shared between institutions.

Migrants are often sent from one institution to another, each with different interpretations of the regulations.

There is no clarity on the division of competencies, which decreases the predictability and efficiency of the whole procedure.

*„WITH THIS INFORMATION THAT PEOPLE FROM THE UKRAINE, AS WELL AS OTHER FOREIGNERS, GIVE US - THE SYSTEM IS NOT TRANSPARENT. PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS ARE ALSO HAVING DIFFICULTIES TO WHOM TO REDIRECT. THIS INTER-INSTITUTIONAL COMMUNICATION IS NOT COMPLETE.,,  
(IDI, CEB)*

# Recognition of qualifications is crucial for the professional integration of migrants.

It is not only a formal requirement - but also:

- a condition for legal employment in regulated professions;
- an aspect of professional and social integration;
- a token acknowledgement of status, competences and professional identity.

01.

Due to procedural difficulties, many people take up work below their qualifications or decide to obtain a Polish diploma from the beginning.

03.

In many cases, local qualifications (UDT or SEP certificates) are needed. Therefore, migrants often attend vocational courses in Poland and employers are becoming increasingly supportive of this process.

02.

In the technical professions, recognition of qualifications depends on legislation (in regulated professions), the employer and the corporate culture (in non-regulated professions).

04.

In the technical professions, the importance of proficiency in Polish was underlined - not only for everyday communication, but primarily in the context of workplace safety.

*„IF A WELDER OR FORKLIFT OPERATOR WANTED TO INDEPENDENTLY CERTIFY THEIR SKILLS (...) IT WAS SUCH AN ELABORATE PROCESS WITH SO MANY DOCUMENTS THAT IT WAS REALLY MORE WORTHWHILE TO SEND A PERSON ON A TWO-DAY COURSE AND HAVE THE ISSUE WRAPPED UP.”  
(IDI, EMPLOYMENT AGENCY)*

**01** Coordination  
between institutions

**02** Centralisation of  
the process and its  
digitalization



## Recommendations



**03** Streamlining and  
centralising  
information

**04** Coherence of  
procedures

**05** Bridging courses  
supplementing  
qualifications

# Interinstitutional coordination

- Institutions in charge of recognising qualifications - which include universities, ministries, professional chambers and government agencies - operate largely independently, which leads to incoherence, lack of norms and disorientation for migrants.



01.

designation of a system leader (e.g. NAWA, MFLSP or the Ministry of Science and Higher Education) to coordinate operational activities, ensure the flow of information and oversee the consistency of procedures;

02.

organisation of periodic meetings and trainings with key institutions (e.g. universities, chambers, employers, industry organisations, NGOs);

03.

creation of local partnerships between employers, job centres and educational institutions and the active involvement of professional governments in education and advocacy;

04.

improvement of inter-institutional cooperation would involve utilising current resources (e.g. the Inter-Ministerial Team for Migration) and allocating responsibilities between institutions.

## ■ Centralisation and digitalization of the process

Currently, applications for nostrification are often submitted on paper or by e-mail, which makes communication problematic, lengthens delivery times and compromises the transparency of procedures. It is recommended that a central online platform be developed to enable:

- filling in the application form and uploading scans of documents;
- tracking the status of a case in real time (e.g. stages: approval of the application, formal validation, decision);
- communication with the institution and receiving notifications (e-mail/SMS);
- collection of statistical data helpful for monitoring the efficiency of the system.

The system should be integrated with the respective processes of universities, chambers and ministries - and in the future also enable digital submissions of decisions.

## ■ Central source of information

01.

Lack of unified, up-to-date and accessible sources of knowledge about recognition procedures is one of the most commonly reported barriers.

02.

It is recommended to launch an official information portal, available in Polish, Ukrainian and English, which would include:

- descriptions of recognition paths for different professions;
- required documents, fees, deadlines and contact data for institutions;
- step-by-step guides, infographics and answers to frequently asked questions.

03.

This information should also be made known to NGOs supporting migrants. The establishment of a helpline or chat room in Ukrainian could also be useful.

## ■ Standardisation of procedures and standards

- Survey respondents emphasised considerable **differences between universities and institutions** regarding the required documentation, interpretation of the regulations and course of the process. These lead to **unpredictability and a feeling of unequal treatment**.

Pursuing consistency and standardisation does not mean the abolition of requirements - rather, it means the **rationalisation of their application**. This will result in **migrants obtaining full-fledged qualifications more swiftly whilst maintaining the necessary quality and safety standards** (particularly important in the public trust professions).

Recommendations include:

- development of **national standards for documentation and merit** (to be prepared by the relevant ministries);
- allowing the possibility to **credit work experience gained in Poland** (e.g. under temporary permits) as part of the formal requirements;

# Bridging studies to complete qualifications

Many Ukrainian citizens possess qualifications that do not entirely comply with the Polish education system - e.g. “junior bachelor” diplomas or secondary vocational education without a thesis. Currently, these applicants often have to start their education from scratch. Recommendations include:

01.

launching flexible bridging programmes (complementary studies) to supplement programme differences and obtain a Polish diploma

03.

close cooperation of universities with ministries and professional institutions when designing programmes

02.

organisation of part-time, evening or hybrid classes, with credit for prior knowledge and practice

04.

financial and organisational support - e.g. through scholarships, subsidised fees, internships at the place of residence



**SKILLS**  
**ALLIANCE**  
**IN POLAND**