

Profile on economic inclusion for people with disabilities and older workers: Poland

Purpose and scope: This profile responds to the three pillars of the EBRD's *Economic Inclusion Strategy* (access to employment and skills, finance and entrepreneurship, and services) and aims to provide targeted support to the efforts of the EBRD and its partners to better understand the needs of people with disabilities (PWD) and older workers. It is not intended to be an exhaustive overview of all issues affecting people with disabilities and older workers in this country. It was prepared for the EBRD using publicly available sources.

Country context	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Population: Poland has a population of 38 million in 2019 (World Bank, 2020a). 40 per cent of the population live in rural areas (World Bank, 2020b). • Economy: Poland is classified as a high-income country, with a GDP of US\$ 628.2 billion in 2019 and GDP per capita of US\$ 16,543 (World Bank, 2020a). In 2018 the service sector added 56.6 per cent of GDP, industry 28.4 per cent (manufacturing 16.9 per cent) and agriculture 2.2 per cent (World Bank, 2020b). Poland's economy was one of the strongest in the EU in 2019, growing at 4.1 per cent (World Bank, 2020a). The Covid-19 pandemic has caused a sharp economic deceleration, with 0.4 per cent growth expected for 2020. Unemployment rose from 3 per cent in 2019 to 5.7 per cent in April 2020 (CASE, 2020). • Prevalence/responses to Covid-19: Over 909,000 cases of Covid-19 have been reported as of November 2020 (WHO, 2020). Several legislative measures have been adopted to mitigate the economic impact of the crisis, providing for wage subsidies for affected employers, (partially) releasing employers from social security contributions, increasing childcare allowance and other measures (Dentons, 2020; KPMG, 2020).
People with disabilities (PWD)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are an estimated 4.5 million PWD in Poland (Grudziewska et al, 2020). This includes 3.05 million PWD of working age (Statistics Poland, 2020a). 16.6 per cent of PWD of working age were economically active in 2020, with an employment rate of 15.9 per cent. 18.5 per cent of men and 14.7 per cent of women were economically active (Statistics Poland, 2020a). The total economic activity rate among the working age population (15-64) was 70.1% in 2020 (Statistics Poland, 2020a). • Employment and skills: The Labour Code expressly prohibits discrimination on the grounds of disability and the Disabled Persons Act sets an employment quota of 6 per cent for employers with >25 employees (as well as all government entities). PWD also benefit from additional labour protections, such as reduced working hours and additional leave (DPA, Arts 15, 19, 20). Meanwhile, employers may receive subsidies for adapting workplaces to PWDs' needs, and the wages of PWD are subsidised depending on the level of disability (DPA, Art 26). PWD are entitled to receive a vocational training stipend and employers are entitled to reimbursement of up to 70 per cent of training costs incurred in the training of PWD (DPA, Arts 40-41). Sheltered workshops employ people less able to compete in the open labour market (Pasteczka-Cholewa, 2019). The State Fund for the Rehabilitation of the Disabled (PFRON) runs a number of special programmes aimed at widening the number of PWD in employment. Social partners are increasingly involved in process of updating and implementing Poland's National Reform Programme for the EU's Europe 2020 Strategy, which outlines key labour market measures for strengthening the economic participation of PWD (Republic of Poland, 2019). • However, labour market participation among PWD remains low, in part due to a fragmented and outdated disability assessment system, with women with disabilities experiencing particular difficulties in finding employment (ANED, 2019; AWD/WEI, 2018). A "benefits trap" reportedly acts as a disincentive to employment (ANED, 2017) and workplaces have struggled to fulfil the 6 per cent employment quota (ANED, 2019). Participation of PWD in higher education is said to be low due to lack of public awareness and support for inclusive education, as well as a lack of adapted infrastructure (Konwencja, 2018). • Finance and entrepreneurship: PWD entrepreneurs are entitled to financial support in the form of a one-off loan. Loan subsidies and subsidies for social insurance contributions are also offered (MFLSP, 2019; OECD, 2018). State-owned banks and enterprises must ensure digital and informational accessibility, although the requirement does not apply to private-sector firms (Act on Digital Accessibility, Art 5). Overall, there is limited policy focus on

entrepreneurship among PWD and awareness of the availability of financial support is low (OECD, [2018](#)).

- **Services:** [The Act on Providing Accessibility for People with Special Needs](#) (Art 6) mandates obligations for public entities, NGOs and private contractors to the public sector to ensure physical, digital and information accessibility for PWD through implementation of universal design principles. Poland's [Accessibility Plus 2018-2025](#) programme is also aimed at improving service accessibility, including of transport and banking services (Republic of Poland, [2018](#)). Warsaw and Krakow have reportedly made significant progress in transport accessibility (Age Platform Europe, [2019](#); Tille, [2019](#)). However, accessibility regulations related to buildings, public space and electronic information are reportedly frequently ignored and enforcement is weak (Konwencja, [2018](#)).
- **Covid-19:** During the pandemic, PWD were affected by issues including the temporary closure of vocational rehabilitation centres and a lack of information in accessible formats (Bretan, [2020](#); GPD, [2020b](#)). Wage subsidies for employees with disabilities were increased slightly to protect employment (PIT, [2020](#)). To ensure administrative continuity for PWD, the validity of certificates confirming disability or degree of disability whose expiration date fell during lockdown were extended (Republic of Poland, [2020](#)).

Older workers

- In 2020 there were 7.3 million people aged 50-64 (around 19 per cent of the population) (Statistics Poland, [2020b](#)). 63 per cent of persons aged 55-64 were economically active in 2020, with an equal share of men and women (Statistics Poland, [2020a](#)). The employment rate of older workers stands at 62 per cent in 2020, compared to 68 per cent among the overall working-age population and employment rates of at least 80 per cent among the 25-54 age group (Statistics Poland, [2020a](#)).
- **Employment and skills:** The [Labour Code](#) prohibits age discrimination and the government has stated that reaching retirement age is not a valid reason for dismissal (Republic of Poland, [2017](#)). The [Promotion of Employment and Labour Market Institutions Act](#) provides for subsidies for employers of previously unemployed workers over the age of 50. There is a policy objective for 2014-20 to enhance and extend working lives, with specific measures relating to more effective training, improved age-friendly working conditions and increased efficiency of labour market programmes for older workers (EC, [2020](#)). Although the employment rate of older workers has risen since 2000, discriminatory practices in employment are still observed (Stypinska and Turek, [2017](#)). Involvement in lifelong and vocational education is low (Republic of Poland, [2014b](#); OECD, [2019](#)).
- **Finance and entrepreneurship:** Business creation by people aged 50 and over is reported to have increased in recent years, but older people remain one of the least active groups in entrepreneurship activities – in 2017, entrepreneurship among those aged 50-64 was estimated at 22.7 per cent (OECD, [2018](#)). In 2020, 550,000 individuals aged 55-64 were in self-employment from a total of 2.44 million economically active (Statistics Poland, [2020a](#)). There is a lack of targeted support for and policy focus on older entrepreneurs. Access to online banking and digital entrepreneurship opportunities is reportedly constrained by a lack of digital skills among adults aged 45 and over (EC, [2019b](#)).
- **Services:** Older workers have benefited from recent progress in ICT training as part of policy programmes aimed at addressing digital exclusion, but a digital skills gap persists (Republic of Poland, [2017](#); CASE, [2020](#)). There is no express policy focus on access to transportation services for older workers, although some may benefit from broader accessibility policies. Public transport networks offer discounts for older individuals, however, poor public transport links in rural areas may disproportionately affect older workers who are over-represented among the rural population (Hebel et al, [2019](#); Zawajska, [2019](#)).
- **Covid-19:** There is no express focus on older workers in government policy to mitigate the economic impacts of the crisis. Older workers have reportedly been particularly vulnerable to job losses during the pandemic, with concerns that employers have pressured older workers to quit because the government's Anti-Crisis Shield policy allows reductions in employment to occur "by terminating the employment relationship with an employee...with an established right to a retirement pension or disability pension" (Polish News, [2020](#)).

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