



## CONTEMPORARY LABOUR MARKET AS A PLACE OF CREATING A PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY

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**Keywords:** labour market, education, professional identity

**Abstract.** The aim of this study is to show the relationship between the contemporary labour market, education, and a sense of professional identity. Therefore, the presented text includes an analysis of the labour market, paying attention to its development prospects. It also indicates new tasks for education, which requires both quantitative and qualitative changes to the coherence of the labour market with modern education, taking into account the need to acquire new competencies needed in the future to create a sense of professional identity.

### WSPÓŁCZESNY RYNEK PRACY JAKO MIEJSCE KREOWANIA TOŻSAMOŚCI ZAWODOWEJ

**Słowa kluczowe:** rynek pracy, edukacja, tożsamość zawodowa

**Streszczenie.** Celem niniejszego opracowania jest wskazanie na związek pomiędzy współczesnym rynkiem pracy, edukacją a poczuciem tożsamości zawodowej. Prezentowany tekst obejmuje zatem analizę obowiązującego współcześnie rynku pracy, ze zwróceniem uwagi na perspektywy jego rozwoju. Wskazuje również na nowe zadania dla i w edukacji, która wymaga zarówno zmian ilościowych, jak i jakościowych prowadzących do koherencji rynku pracy z nowoczesnym kształceniem uwzględniającym konieczność zdobycia nowych kompetencji, potrzebnych w przyszłości do kreowania poczucia tożsamości zawodowej.

## Introduction

Regardless of the positions taken, it must be acknowledged that we are living in specific times marked by incompetence, unpredictability and ambivalence of meaning. These are times that encompass a reality that is global, found, and in fact formed by man and, regardless of the attempts made to assess it, real and requiring coherence between the individual and their world.

A significant element of this contemporaneity is the dynamic development of new technologies, the expansion of information transmission tools, the automation of methods and means of management, control and communication. A visible effect of contemporaneity is also that the development strategies of individual countries focus on investing in human resources, which on the one hand become an accelerator of economic growth of societies, and on the other are created by the prevailing labour market.

## Modern labour market

Modern times are marked by perhaps the most dynamic changes in human history in terms of labour market requirements. It is estimated that nearly 70% of children currently in primary school will be working in occupations that do not exist yet. In the last ten years, the global market has witnessed the emergence of such occupations as:

- mobile app developer (creator/developer of mobile apps);
- chief happiness officer (a person whose job it is to increase employees' sense of happiness within the company);
- cloud computing specialist;
- sustainability manager;
- cryptocurrency analyst;
- podcast producer;
- growth hacker (a person working in digital marketing);
- drone operator (a person who controls, for example, a fleet of drones);
- vlogger (a person who posts videos they have filmed online);
- tik-tok influencer (a person who publishes material on the TikTok platform) (*Infuture Hatałska...*, 2021).

Industries in which there is currently a shortage of staff have been identified for the Polish labour market. This is of particular importance for the education

process, which takes into account the demand for specific professions as never before. These include:

- manufacturing industry: machine tool operators, electricians, electrical fitters, carpenters, welders, locksmiths, tailors;
- construction industry: concrete mixers, reinforcers, bricklayers, plasterers, pavers, roofers, tinsmiths, carpenters, earthmoving equipment operators and finishing workers;
- transport industry: bus, lorry and tractor-trailer drivers;
- catering industry: chefs and bakers;
- pharmaceutical and cosmetics industry: production workers and shop workers (including online);
- service sector: hairdressers;
- medical industry: doctors, nurses, paramedics, physiotherapists, carers of the elderly and disabled (Kwiatkowski, 2021, pp. 96–97).

Among the most frequently mentioned surplus professions, one can mention travel agents, tourism service organisers, sociologists, or other representatives of the humanities. Thus, when considering industries with staffing shortages, it is primarily necessary to educate skilled workers and technicians.

Indicating the need for changes resulting from the new challenges of the labour market, the Ministry of Development, Labour and Technology issued an Ordinance amending the Ordinance on the classification of professions and specialities for the needs of the labour market and its scope of application. According to the draft, which was to enter into force on 1 January 2022, there will be a total of 242 changes compared to the current list of occupations. The new list will include 81 new professions, e.g. shop chain manager, physiologist, optical engineer integrated circuit designer, Internet of Things engineer, crime analyst, and computer game tester. At the same time, three professions that no longer function will be removed from the classification, namely early childhood educator, job club leader and typist. Eleven professions will also be renamed.

The new qualification of occupations is also justified by the current state of employment. According to data from the Central Statistical Office (GUS), the number of employed people in Poland – as at September 2020 – was 9 million 580.6 thousand. The largest number of employed – 2 million 418 thousand found employment in the industrial processing section. Compared to 2019, there was an increase in employment in the information and communication section (by 3.1%), the number of employees in the professional and scientific, technical and transport and warehouse management sections increased by more than

2%. There was a 1.9% increase in employees in the water supply, sewage and waste management and remediation sectors, and a 0.2% increase in employment in the construction section. There was no change in employment in the accommodation and catering section, while administration and support activities lost 4.7% of employees. There was also a significant decrease in employment in the financial and insurance activities section – 4.6%. The number of employees in 2020 in each section is shown in Figure 1 below.

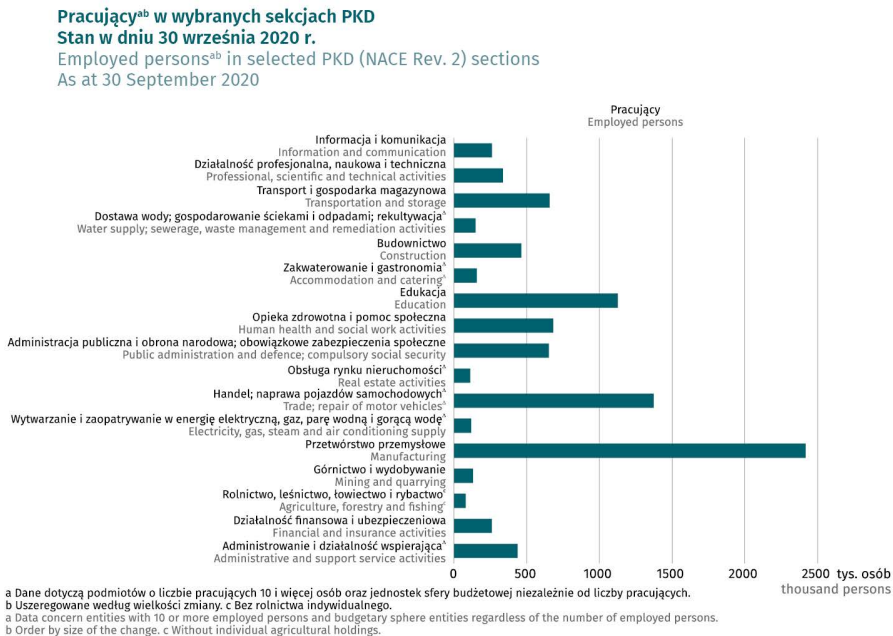


Figure 1. Employed in selected sections of the Polish Classification of Activities (PKD) as of 30th September 2020.

Source: CSO, *Employment is falling, although not in all sectors. Here are the latest CSO figures*, <https://www.pulshr.pl/rekrutacja/zatrudnienie-spada-choc-nie-we-wszystkich-sektorach-oto-najnowsze-dane-gus,78629.html> (31.10.2020).

The situation in the labour market therefore depends to a large extent on continued technological advances, but also on the epidemic situation in which we find ourselves. After 2020, it was predicted that in 2022 we would be dealing with the market of the employee, where it is the potential candidates for work who dictates the conditions for entrepreneurs (apart from industries that were strongly affected by the crisis due to the pandemic), while employers will have to work out models of work of subordinate teams and take care of motivating employees, as well as decide what the organisation of work will look like after

the pandemic. It may also be noted, as indicated in the PwC report “Young Poles on the labour market” (2021), that due to the dynamics of changes within the labour market, the perception of the scope of competences required to find satisfactory employment is also changing, which include:

- the ability to adapt to and be open to change;
- IT skills, knowledge of programming languages;
- ability to learn quickly;
- combining different skills;
- effective time management;
- coping with stress;
- communication skills.

When discussing the prospects for the employment market, it is worth recalling the research conducted by the international education group Pearson, the Nesta Foundation and the expert Martin School, who, in developing the report Future of Skills. Employment 2030, focused on identifying the skills and knowledge areas that, given projected trends, social and political changes, will be most in demand by employers. These include:

- social skills;
- interpersonal skills;
- system skills;
- cognitive skills.

According to the authors of the report Future of Skills. Employment 2030, there will be a need for people who feel the need for continuous learning and are able to teach others, having the ability to think logically, deduce, cooperate, solve complex problems, correctly diagnose existing situations and make decisions. Important competences are also expected to include active learning and listening, clear communication, monitoring and evaluation of results, quick reaction, time, financial and people management, negotiation and persuasion, creativity and visualisation. Desired areas of knowledge are expected to include: technology, science, life sciences, medical sciences, foreign languages, education, as well as those involving construction and design, media production and communication, management, economics and accounting, safety, security and food production.

The situation on the labour market outlined here, as well as the predictions related to its functioning in the future, to a large extent determine the need to adopt appropriate educational solutions, where the priority is to educate people in occupations where there is a shortage of staff, paying particular attention

to creating among learners not only technical competences, but also soft competences, needed in the ability to cope with change, both in the professional, social, intellectual and emotional-motivational sphere.

## **Education and the labour market**

Reflecting on the direction of development and change within the labour market also requires consideration of the need to create a skilled workforce, which is now becoming a strategic element in the functioning of the economy both nationally and globally.

In Poland, analysing secondary education resources, it can be noted that 1401158 young people studied in public schools (excluding schools for adults) in 2020/ 2021. This included 44% of students in technical schools, and 42% in general secondary schools. In trade schools, there studied 14% of young people. Thus, it can be seen that technical schools have 8% more students (CSO data).

Attendance of young people at technical or general education schools varies within individual voivodeships. Technical and trade schools are attended by young people residing mainly in rural areas and small towns, while general education schools have the highest percentage of young people residing in urban and metropolitan areas (Figure 2). This is probably to a large extent due to the local demand for employees in a particular profession.

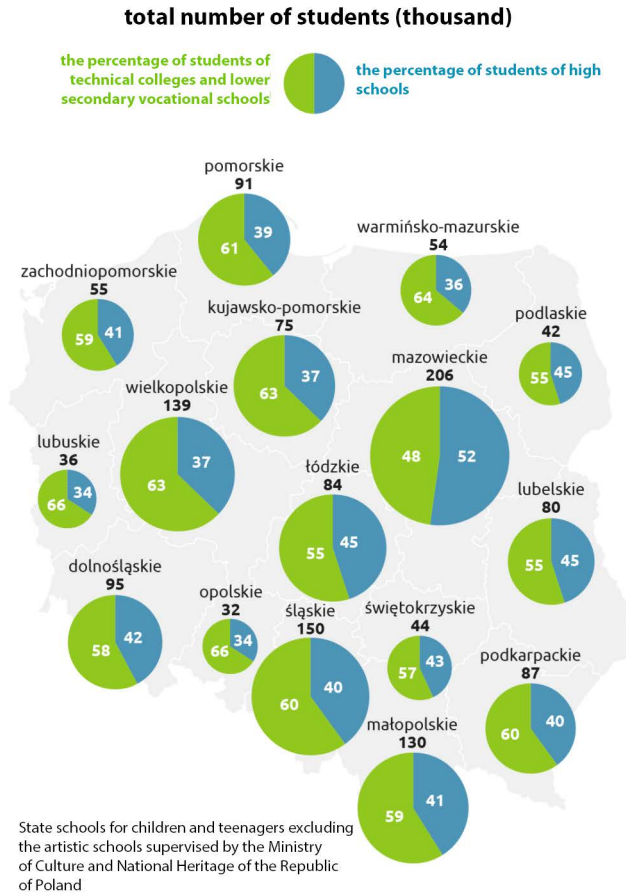


Chart 2. Education in Poland. Number of students attending selected secondary schools

Source: Z. Socha, *Image of technical education in terms of Industry 4.0*, [in:] *Industrial Automation*, <https://automatykaprzemyslowa.pl/automatyka-robotyka/obraz-edukacji-technicznej-pod-katem-przemyslu-4-0/> (31.10.2020). (Graph. Lech Mazurczyk)

With regard to higher education, several new trends can also be noted. Data published in June 2021 by the Central Statistical Office shows that more than 1.2 million more students were being educated compared to the previous year, with a successive decrease in the number of students between 2010 and 2019, down by 34%. One factor in the decline in the number of students is the family fertility rate, which has been declining over the years, and not insignificant is also the labour market’s demand for skilled workers. It is most likely that the increase in the number of students in 2020/2021 is due to the possibility of online courses.

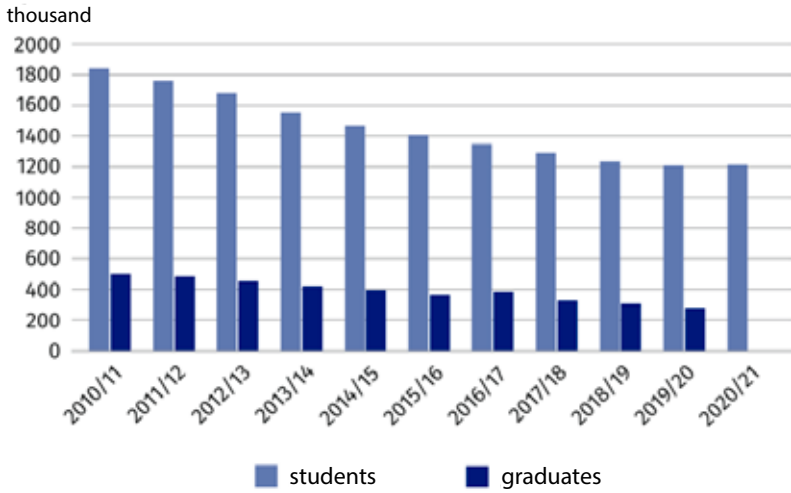


Chart 3. University students and graduates (including foreigners)

Source: CSO data

The most popular study groups for 2020/2021 were business, administration and law (22.3% of all students), technology, industry and construction (14.8%), social sciences, journalism and information, and health and social care (11.9% each). A reduction in the number of people studying the humanities can therefore be seen, reflecting the needs of the labour market.

When treating the relationship between the employment market and education, reference should be made not only to quantitative changes, covering the number of students in technical and trade schools, general education schools, higher education schools, or taking into account the fields of study chosen by young people. Certainly, one should also refer to qualitative changes indicating education as a strategic resource of societies in creating the world of the future. This is because there is a growing “demand” for innovative, creative employees seeking unique solutions. This is related to the requirement for increasingly higher professional competences, requiring lifelong learning to be able to adapt to rapid, often unanticipated changes. Therefore, the main goal of education should be to strive for effective use and continuous updating of knowledge by both teachers and students. As the report *Future of Skills. Employment 2030* (2017, p. 51), it is mainly about four types of knowledge: declarative, relating to facts, cause-and-effect related to principles and the laws found in science, procedural, enabling action, expert knowledge to facilitate reaching people with knowledge of interest.



Thus, the challenge for contemporary education is:

- Enabling students to design their educational pathway not only within the formal structures in place, but also informally;
- Encouraging and motivating learning;
- The development of effective learning skills, leading to the need for life-long learning;
- Developing a more personalised approach to learners;
- Skilful use of new technologies and innovative solutions;
- Greater ability to generate interest in the content being taught;
- Effective verification of skills and acquired knowledge;
- Transforming the role of the teacher who, in view of the full access of students to other sources of knowledge, should take on the role of mentor, sharing practice and experience;
- The development of a new module in teacher education, developing the ability to
  - solving complex problems, developing and implementing projects, as well as
  - soft skills including the ability to work in and manage a team.

## **Professional identity and the labour market**

When treating work as that form of human activity which is inscribed in one's identity, it is reasonable to refer to Anna Brzezińska's concept of identity in roles. Three stages are distinguished in the formation of an individual's identity related to the social roles he or she performs:

1. Stepping into roles:
  - the orientation phase, concerning the acquisition of basic information as to the role's prescription and the conditions for its fulfilment, i.e. the recognition of the range of social expectations and requirements, the rules of the group or institution, the required set of technical skills, the rules of interpersonal functioning, role constraints and risk factors, power and authority relations,
  - The cognitive phase, i.e. learning mainly by imitating the behaviour of others, according to the prescribed role of behaviour; this is, however, only the reproduction of the external form without recognising and analysing the hidden rationale (meaning) behind it and being guided

by the principle of maximising rewards and benefits and minimising penalties and losses.

2. Full adaptation to the role:

- the adaptation phase, i.e. the increasingly efficient execution of the role's prescription thanks to the adequate use of the knowledge and skills acquired in the first stage, constantly extended and improved thanks to the individual's own activity,
- the innovation phase, i.e. the introduction of changes to the provision of the role, but only within the framework of the recognised convention; the changes mainly concern the procedures of conduct, the conditions and organisation of the activity, rather than the objectives and their justifications.

3. Crossing the role creatively:

- the creative adaptation phase, consisting of a creative, highly individualised use of the knowledge and skills already possessed and the experience previously gained in the role; a process of fundamental revision of the role's prescription through reflection on its justifications begins,
- the phase of self-realisation, in which the innovations introduced are radical in nature and consistent with the vision of personal development that the individual has developed (Brzezińska 2000, pp. 241–242).

The indication of the realisation of identity in roles is undeniably linked to the various forms of activity of the individual, namely playing, study and work. The latter form of activity is associated with the individual taking up work activities, which are a consequence of environmental conditions (family, e.g. material and social status, institutional, e.g. style of functioning of local communities, labour market), genetic conditions (level of individual development) and own activity. A consequence of entering adulthood is a change in lifestyle, in which there is a balance between privacy and career.

In such a situation, a special role is assigned to work, understood as “the value through which all other values are created and function socially” (Wiatrowski, 2007a, p. 54). Work also plays an outstanding role in an individual's life, as it not only satisfies his or her needs but also stimulates further development.

Irrespective of the way the role of work in people's lives is approached, from being seen as a necessity for survival to a quality that provides an opportunity for self-realisation, it must be acknowledged that work is a primary determinant of the creation of an individual's identity during their working life. According

to Z. Wiatrowski, “line of professional development of the employee” is the proof of that, in particular (2007b, pp. 67–68):

- The start of the process of forming a professional identity already takes place during pre-vocational and pro-vocational training, and even more so in the school and college process of vocational training leading to the award of the relevant qualification;
- The acceptance and consolidation of professional identity takes place over a long (about 40-year) period of professional activity, in which professional development leading to a possibly complete professional identity takes place through successive processes: the completion of professional preparation on the job, socio-professional adaptation, professional identification and stabilisation, and the achievement of professional success and the concretisation of a professional career;
- transcending the role is expressed in consolidated professional success and in the pursuit of professional mastery and career satisfaction.

Creating a professional identity within the changing needs of the labour market as conceptualised by Wim Meeus (1996, pp. 569–598), which is an extension of the model of James E. Marcia (1996, pp. 551–558), requires consideration of three dimensions of identity: commitment, in-depth exploration and reconsideration of commitment. The first of these accounts for the decision to make a career choice, the second involves commitment through the exploration and deepening of knowledge about the object of choice, which is the profession, and the third provides the opportunity to make an effort to change a given choice when it is no longer satisfactory. This pathway thus offers the possibility to choose one’s professional pathway through the prism of one’s own interests, intellectual capacities, material capacities, emotional needs in connection with the changing needs of the labour market. Thus, professional identity, by taking into account the revision of commitment, offers the possibility to develop multiple identities within the current labour market, or to turn one professional identity into another.

## Conclusions

The specificity of modernity involving a global reality, characterised by constant changes in various areas of human life, requires new competences to find one’s place in this world full of ambivalent meanings. One of the significant elements of the reality in force, both in individual, group and collective terms,

is the need for societies to invest in human resources, which, on the one hand, become an accelerator for the economic growth of societies and, on the other, are created by the labour market in force. Thus, the search for a professional identity to match the socio-economic changes that are taking place at an unimaginable pace requires an education that creates opportunities for the development of multiple identities, or the conversion of one into another.

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