

Poland **My First** **Choice**

**A short guide for
international
applicants for study**

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Foreword

Poland is an attractive place to study. This is evidenced by the recorded constant and systematic increase in the number of foreign students. According to data from the POL-on system, 102.2 thousand foreign students study in Poland. This is due to the following factors: high level of the higher education system, qualified academic staff, rich offer of studies in foreign languages (mainly English), relatively low costs of living, rich historical and cultural heritage. It all determines decisions to study in Poland.

The Polish National Agency for Academic Exchange, as the entity responsible for internationalization, establishes programmes supporting academic mobility. Our activities are based on creating an attractive offer for students, which is why our portfolio includes programmes such as: *Poland My First Choice*, Preparatory courses NAWA,

Banach NAWA, Anders NAWA and Zawacka NAWA. We also offer universities, through the Welcome to Poland programme, tools to create appropriate academic infrastructure, animate academic life and integrate foreign students with Polish students. This programme enables creating the so-called *welcome centres* – places on university maps where people interested in studying in Poland and foreign students can get answers to their questions and help.

The *Poland My First Choice* programme has become a ticket to Poland for 66 scholarship holders from 19 countries in Europe, Asia, North and South America. The largest number of beneficiaries came from France, Italy and the USA. The fact that almost $\frac{3}{4}$ of scholarship holders would definitely recommend participation in the programme to their friends is a good prognosis for the future. The next edition of the programme is an opportunity to reflect on how to effectively model the programme so

that the number of scholarship holders systematically increases and satisfaction with the programme is at least at a comparable level.

In the compendium below you will learn, among others: on the Polish higher education system, the principle of recruitment for studies in Poland, scholarships for studies in Poland and the KWALIFIKATOR system. The small volume is an excellent guide for every foreigner who would like to spend “the most beautiful time of their life” in the heart of Europe – between the Oder and the Bug rivers.

Dr Dawid Kostecki

Director of the Polish National Agency for Academic Exchange



Basic terms and abbreviations

Apostille – Certification that a given document comes from the appropriate office. Thanks to the apostille, you can use a foreign official document in Poland.

Foreigner – A person who does not have Polish citizenship, has not applied for Polish citizenship and does not have dual citizenship (Polish and foreign).

Matriculation examination – In other words, the Matura exam – an exam conducted for graduates of secondary schools (general secondary school, technical secondary school, second-level vocational school) in order to provide a secondary school-leaving certificate.

Common European Framework of Reference for Languages – An international tool of the Council of Europe for describing language competencies of foreign language learners.

European matriculation examination – In other words, the European Baccalaureate (EB) certificate. It is equivalent to the Polish school-leaving certificate. The document is issued to graduates of **EUROPEAN SCHOOLS**.

International matriculation examination – In other words, the International Baccalaureate (IB) certificate. It is equivalent to the Polish school-leaving certificate. The document is issued by the **INTERNATIONAL BACCALAUREATE** in Geneva.

NAWA – Polish National Agency for Academic Exchange.

Parametric evaluation – Evaluation of the scientific activities of a university or other scientific unit. As part of the parametric evaluation, categories are assigned. The highest categories are A and A+, the lowest category is C.

PMFC, POLAND MY FIRST CHOICE NAWA – scholarship programme.

Statutory period of education – The number of semesters specified in the study programme, during which it is necessary to complete the field of study.

Host university – A university where the NAWA scholarship holders study.

Internationalisation of higher education – A process that can be measured by the following parameters: presence of students and PhD students from abroad, number of people from outside Poland who plan to complete full studies, visits of students and PhD students to foreign institutions, participation in international scientific projects, presence of research in international publications.

Certificate of maturity – A document confirming the completion of the secondary stage of education, presenting the results of the matriculation exam (matura) and entitling to take up higher education.



Higher education in Poland

Higher education institutions (HEIs) in Poland are divided into **public and non-public**. Classes at non-public HEIs are conducted in the same way as at public HEIs. Public HEIs are run by the state or local government. Non-public HEIs are run by private entities and introduce their own rules for tuition fees.

Some HEIs have the status of **university-type higher education institutions**. They can award the academic title of doctor and can be both public and non-public.

More information on higher education in Poland and a list of public and non-public universities can be found **HERE**.

Types of studies

Higher education in Poland has a three-level structure. Higher education includes first- and second-cycle studies or uniform master's studies. The third degree of studies is a doctorate.

Polish universities offer full-time and part-time studies. Full-time studies mean that at least half of the teaching activities require the direct participation of lecturers and students. Part-time studies mean that classes are held as weekend meetings with various frequency.

First-cycle studies

Those who have a secondary school-leaving certificate can start first-cycle studies. They end with obtaining a professional bachelor's or engineer's degree. It is the Polish equivalent of the BACHELOR title. Bachelor's studies last at least six semesters, and engineering studies last at least seven semesters. A first-cycle diploma allows you to continue your studies at second-cycle studies.

Second-cycle studies

Second-cycle studies may be started by those who have completed first-cycle studies. They end with obtaining the professional title of "Magister" or "Magister inżynier". It is the Polish equivalent of the MASTER title. Second-cycle studies last three or four semesters.

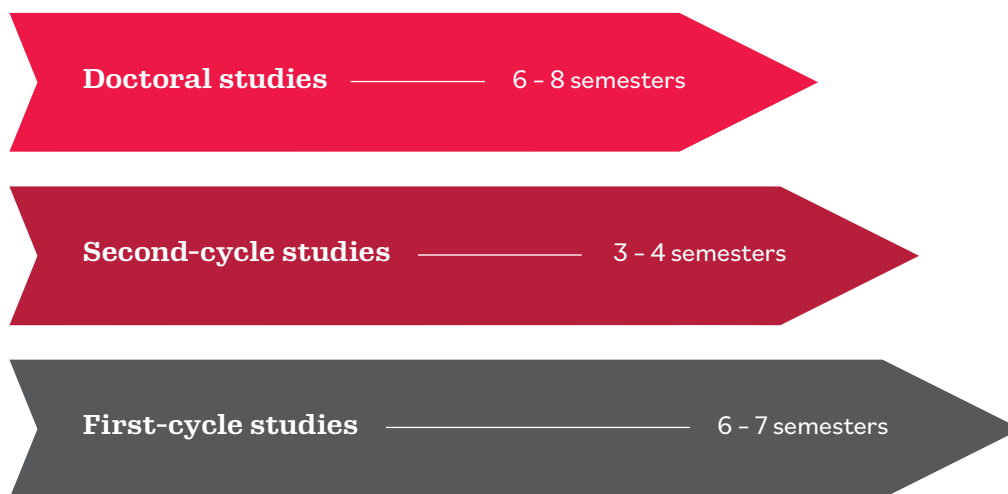
Uniform master's studies

Uniform master's studies may be started by those who have a secondary school-leaving certificate. Uniform master's studies also allow you to obtain a degree of "Magister", i.e. the Polish equivalent of the MASTER title. They last from nine to twelve semesters and are offered only in the following fields of study: acting, conservation and restoration of works of art, canon law, medical and dental studies, law, medical analysis, medicine, film production and photography, pharmacy, psychology and veterinary medicine.

Doctoral studies

A doctorate can be started by those who have completed second-cycle studies or uniform master's studies. A doctorate allows you to obtain a doctoral degree in a specific field of science or art. In 2019, the model of doctoral studies and the way to admission for a doctorate changed. Previous doctoral studies have been replaced by **DOCTORAL SCHOOLS**. Doctoral studies (current third-cycle studies) will be phased out gradually. Education at doctoral schools is conducted in at least two disciplines. It is to ensure a creative and interdisciplinary approach to scientific research. The rules of admission to the doctoral school depend primarily on the university.

→
Illustration 1: Scheme of higher education in Poland (excluding uniform master's studies)



Foreign students at Polish universities

More and more foreigners study at Polish universities. According to the **DATA OF STATISTICS POLAND, IN THE ACADEMIC YEAR 2022/2023**, 105,400 foreign students studied in Poland for at least one academic year. This is **17.9%** more than in the previous academic year. In this period, a total of 1,223,600 students studied at Polish universities. This means that 8% of people studying in Poland were foreigners.

Most of the foreigners came from European countries. The largest group came from **Ukraine** (48,100 or 45.6% of all foreigners), **Belarus** (12,000 or 11.4% of all foreigners) and **Turkey** (3,800 or 3.6% of all foreigners). Non-citizens of Poland most often chose universities in the Mazowieckie voivodeship.

Among the 15,800, most foreign graduates came from Ukraine (43.6%), Belarus (11.8%) and India (3.4%). The largest number of people graduated from studies related

to business, administration and law (33.2% of the total number of foreign graduates).

Welcome Centres

Polish universities carry out various activities to promote WELCOMING CULTURE, i.e. to improve the quality of education, strengthen attitudes of openness and tolerance, and facilitate the integration of people from outside Poland and the local community. NAWA supports Polish universities in improving the competencies of all employees to work with people from abroad and in creating the infrastructure needed to host foreign students.

As part of the WELCOME TO POLAND Programme, WELCOME CENTRES were established and developed - points of service for foreign students or foreign staff at Polish universities. WELCOME CENTRES are to provide professional support to foreign students and influence the change of academic culture. They are friendly places on the university map, people interested in studying in Poland and students can get answers to their questions and help there. WELCOME CENTRES inform about the structure of the university, administrative procedures and educational offer.

WELCOME CENTRES operate at 53 universities and scientific institutes in Poland.

Courses preparing for studies in Polish

Polish universities support people who plan to study in Polish. For example, **THE MARIA CURIE-SKŁODOWSKA UNIVERSITY**, **THE UNIVERSITY OF SILESIA**, **THE JAGIELLONIAN UNIVERSITY** and the **UNIVERSITY OF WROCLAW** run intensive preparatory courses of various lengths.

The courses are paid. Participants are also responsible for their food, accommodation, insurance and visa costs. After passing the final exam, participants of the courses receive a certificate and independently apply for admission to the chosen study programme. As part of the courses preparing for studies, classes in Polish culture and history as well as in specialist subjects may be organised. The university may also provide assistance in attending lectures in the chosen field of study based on language practice.

Many universities, including private universities, offer preparatory courses for studying in Polish. Details about the programme, costs and organisational issues can be found on the websites of individual institutions.

Under some NAWA programmes, you can get a scholarship for a preparatory course.

Polish language courses for people participating in exchanges

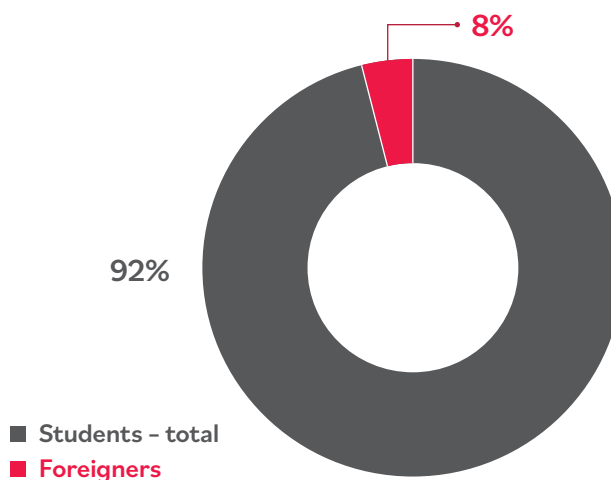
Polish universities also organise Polish language courses for people who do not plan to study in Polish. The offer of such courses is diverse. You can choose between semester and year courses for people participating in the Erasmus+ programme and other international exchanges, intensive courses lasting several weeks, language courses for foreigners, as well as face-to-face and online courses.

More information can be found on the website of the selected university.

Summer Polish language courses

Summer courses are another possibility to learn Polish. They are organised by, among others, the **UNIVERSITY OF WARSAW**, **THE UNIVERSITY OF SILESIA** AND **THE JOHN PAUL II CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY OF LUBLIN**. NAWA finances some summer Polish language courses. NAWA's summer courses offer not only an opportunity to learn the language, but also to learn about Polish culture and history as well as contemporary Polish society. Participation in an NAWA summer course, including accommodation and meals, is free of charge. Participants cover only the cost of travel to Poland and the cost of medical insurance.

Information on dates and registration is published on the **NAWA SUMMER COURSES** website.

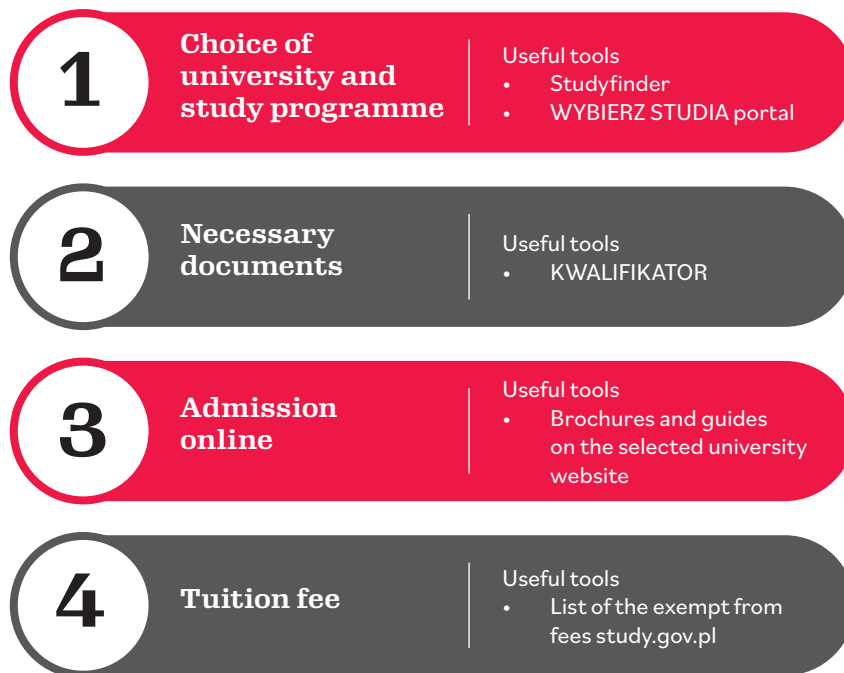


↑
Diagram 1: Foreigners studying at Polish universities



Admission to studies in Poland

Illustration 2: Recruitment at a Polish university step by step →



General principles

A person applying for admission to studies must have a secondary school-leaving certificate and meet the conditions set by the university.

Universities require a Polish secondary school-leaving certificate or a document obtained abroad recognised by Polish regulations or international agreements as equivalent to a Polish secondary school-leaving certificate. Such a document obtained abroad must entitle you to apply for admission to studies at any type of university in the country

in which it was issued. It can be a foreign high school diploma, an IB diploma, an EB diploma or a higher education diploma obtained abroad. The document must be legalised or apostilled.

KWALIFIKATOR – a system developed by NAWA, as described below, will help you complete the documents.

Matriculation examination results are the basis for applying for admission to first-cycle studies and uniform master's studies. To start second-cycle studies, a bachelor's degree (or equivalent) and meeting the conditions set out by the university are required.

Tuition fees

Universities may conduct an additional entrance examination if it is necessary to check artistic talents, physical fitness or other special predispositions, or if the person applying for admission to studies has a secondary school-leaving certificate obtained abroad. The exams may not concern the subjects covered by the matriculation exam.

Universities also require knowledge of the language of future studies. Most often, it is Polish or English at the B2 level of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages. Studies in some fields may require a higher level of language proficiency. Universities independently determine how language competencies should be documented and publish a list of accepted certificates on their websites. Some universities test language skills during the admission process.

Admission is done via online systems. Those applying for studies register in the online system on dates set by the university. In application systems and on websites, you will find all the important dates: start and end date of online registration, announcement of results, submission of documents, and possible additional exams.

Admission involves certain costs. Students must pay an application fee for each study programme they apply for.

Foreigners in Poland pay tuition fees for each semester/year of study. The amount of fees is determined for each study programme.

Many groups are exempt from paying tuition fees. Persons who do not have Polish citizenship may be exempted from paying fees by a decision of the Rector. The decision of the Minister or the NAWA Director to award the scholarship also exempts a student from fees. Exemptions from tuition fees do not apply to part-time studies.

Fees for education at non-public higher education institutions are determined by each higher education institution. In such cases, the issue of payment is settled individually between the students and the non-public university hosting them.

At present, no fees are charged for the education of foreigners studying full-time in Polish at public universities for:

- citizens of a Member State of the European Union, the Swiss Confederation or a Member State of the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) - parties to the Agreement on the European Economic Area and their family members living in Poland;
- those who have been granted a permanent residence permit or are long-term residents of the European Union;
- those who were given refugee status in Poland;
- those enjoying temporary or subsidiary protection in Poland;
- those who have obtained a temporary residence stay permit to join their family;
- those with a certificate certifying Polish language proficiency at the C1 level issued by the State Commission for the Certification of Polish Language Proficiency as a Foreign Language;

- holders of a Pole's Card;
- those who have received a decision on the declaration of Polish origin;
- spouses, children or parents of Polish citizens living in Poland;
- those who have been granted temporary residence permits for the purpose of carrying out scientific research or participating in short-term scientific mobility.

How to find a study programme?

Tools created specifically for foreign students will help you to find the right study programme:

- The **STUDYFINDER*** search engine created by NAWA is available in Polish, English and Chinese and includes all types of studies;
- The **WYBIERZ STUDIA** portal is in Polish and provides information on study programmes and the quality assessment of training in a particular study programme;
- The **RAD-ON** portal in Polish and English allows you to search for information on doctoral schools.

KWALIFIKATOR system

NAWA makes it easier for candidates to ensure that they have the documents necessary to study or continue their academic career at a Polish university. The online database **KWALIFIKATOR** is used for this purpose.

Thanks to the KWALIFIKATOR system, you can:

- quickly find information about foreign diplomas;
- assess the level and status of the diploma in the country where it was awarded;
- find out how a diploma or a degree is recognised in Poland.

KWALIFIKATOR also indicates the legal basis for the rights of the person presenting the diploma and generates a **RECOGNITION STATEMENT** as a PDF document. The NAWA electronic signature guarantees the reliability of the information.

KWALIFIKATOR is available in Polish and English and is constantly updated with information from other countries.

Instructions for using KWALIFIKATOR can be found **HERE**.



Poland offers a great and competitive range of multilingual study programmes in all fields, either free or at reasonable tuition fees. Poland is a champion in innovation and IT, social and business studies, language studies. On top of that, students enjoy being students in here, and the university culture gives them the freedom to plan their studies accordingly and develop an open line of communication with academic staff.

Ioannis Plaketas, Greece
Poland My First Choice scholarship holder,
2020-2022



Scholarships for studies in Poland



ANDERS
NAWA

Gen. Anders Programme

The following two chapters will present in detail the Poland My First Choice (PMFC) Scholarship Programme, but NAWA also offers other scholarships for people coming to Poland from abroad. Below you can check which of these programmes might be suitable for you.

The **aim** of the programme is to create opportunities in Poland for young people of Polish origins and to improve their knowledge of the Polish language.

WHO CAN APPLY FOR THE SCHOLARSHIP?

Young people from the Polish diaspora who are interested in pursuing full-time first-cycle studies, uniform master's studies or second-cycle studies in Poland in the Polish language. The programme is open to holders of the Pole's Card and people with Polish citizenship and citizenship of another country.

PROGRAMME COUNTRIES:

no geographical restrictions.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF PARTICIPATING IN THE PROGRAMME?

- monthly scholarship at public and non-public universities supervised by the Minister of Education and Science;
- exemption from tuition fees at public universities;
- scholarship for an annual preparatory course for studies in Poland.

DURATION OF THE SCHOLARSHIP:

The scholarship is awarded for a preparatory course and for the first-cycle, second-cycle or uniform master's studies in the statutory period of education.

MORE INFORMATION ABOUT THE PROGRAMME CAN BE FOUND AT:

WWW.NAWA.GOV.PL/EN/STUDENTS/FOREIGN-STUDENTS/THE-GEN-ANDERS-PROGRAMME

CONTACT THE PROGRAMME COORDINATOR:

POLONIA@NAWA.GOV.PL



Table 1: The most important information about the Anders NAWA Programme

Stefan Banach Scholarship Programme



The **aim** of the programme is to improve the level of education and professional qualifications of foreign students and graduates by enabling them to complete second-cycle studies at Polish universities.

WHO CAN APPLY FOR THE SCHOLARSHIP?

Students in the last year of first-cycle studies and graduates* of such studies in the fields of engineering and technical sciences, agricultural sciences and exact and natural sciences.

Citizens of eligible European and Central Asian countries may also choose humanities and social sciences.

*The diploma of the first-cycle studies cannot be obtained earlier than 2 years before the call for proposals is announced.

PROGRAMME COUNTRIES:

Albania, Angola, Argentina, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Brazil, Columbia, Ethiopia, Georgia, India, Indonesia, Iraq, Iran, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Kenya, Kosovo, Lebanon, Macedonia, Moldova, Montenegro, Nigeria, North Macedonia, Palestine, Peru, Philippines, South Africa, Senegal, Serbia, Tanzania, Tunisia, Ukraine, Uzbekistan, Vietnam.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF PARTICIPATING IN THE PROGRAMME?

- monthly scholarship at public and non-public universities supervised by the Minister of Education and Science;
- exemption from tuition fees at public universities;
- if Polish is chosen as the language of instruction, the possibility of attending an annual preparatory course for studies in Poland with the scholarship.

SCHOLARSHIP DURATION:

The scholarship is awarded for the preparatory course and for second-cycle studies in the regulatory period of education.

MORE INFORMATION ABOUT THE PROGRAMME CAN BE FOUND AT:

WWW.NAWA.GOV.PL/EN/STUDENTS/FOREIGN-STUDENTS/THE-BANACH-SCHOLARSHIP-PROGRAMME

CONTACT THE PROGRAMME COORDINATOR:

BANACH@NAWA.GOV.PL



Table 2: The most important information about the Banach NAWA Programme



Zawacka Exchange Programme: offer for Incoming Students and Scientists

The **aim** of the programme is to establish or deepen academic cooperation through individual visits from Poland and arrivals to Poland in accordance with the provisions of bilateral intergovernmental agreements.

WHO CAN APPLY FOR THE SCHOLARSHIP?

Students and scientists, depending on the international agreement.

PROGRAMME COUNTRIES:

Bulgaria, China, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Egypt, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Japan, Kazakhstan, Moldova, Mongolia, North Macedonia, Palestine, Romania, Rwanda, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Switzerland, Thailand, Taiwan, Tunisia, Ukraine, Vietnam, Yemen.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF PARTICIPATING IN THE PROGRAMME?

- scholarship to cover the costs of the study of a research stay at the Polish higher education or scientific institution - if the international agreement provides for the payment of a scholarship by the Polish party;
- scholarship in the form and amount provided for by the provisions of the sending country - in the event that the international agreement provides for the payment of a scholarship by the sending party.

SCHOLARSHIP DURATION:

from 3 days to 12 months in the academic year, depending on the international agreement, based on which the cooperation is based.

MORE INFORMATION ABOUT THE PROGRAMME CAN BE FOUND AT:

WWW.NAWA.GOV.PL/EN/STUDENTS/FOREIGN-STUDENTS/EXCHANGE-PROGRAMME-FOR-STUDENTS-AND-SCIENTISTS-AS-PART-OF-BILATERAL-COOPERATION-OFFER-FOR-INCOMING-STUDENTS-AND-SCIENTISTS

CONTACT THE PROGRAMME COORDINATOR:

WYMIANA@NAWA.GOV.PL



Table 3: The most important information about the Zawacka NAWA Programme

Polonista – Scholarship and Fellowship Programme



The **aim** of the programme is to promote the Polish language and to popularise Polish studies and studies about Poland in the world.

WHO CAN APPLY FOR THE SCHOLARSHIP?

Students of Polish studies, studies about Poland or Polish programmes implemented, among others, as part of Slavic studies in the field of Polish, Polish culture and knowledge about Poland, as well as scientists from foreign universities and scientific institutions.

Winners and finalists of the Polish Literature and Language Olympiad organised abroad may also participate in the programme.

PROGRAMME COUNTRIES:

no geographical restrictions.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF PARTICIPATING IN THE PROGRAMME?

- monthly scholarship*;
- exemption from tuition fees at public universities.

*the amount of the scholarship depends on the participant's academic status

SCHOLARSHIP DURATION:

The scholarship is awarded for the period of the research project implementation or studies in Poland

MORE INFORMATION ABOUT THE PROGRAMME CAN BE FOUND AT:

WWW.NAWA.GOV.PL/EN/THE-POLISH-LANGUAGE/PROGRAMME-FOR-STUDENTS-OF-POLISH-STUDIES

CONTACT THE PROGRAMME COORDINATOR:

POLONISTA@NAWA.GOV.PL



Table 4: The most important information about the Polonista NAWA Programme



**Poland My First Choice
(PMFC) scholarship**



POLAND
MY FIRST CHOICE
PROGRAMME

The Poland My First Choice (PMFC) scholarship programme was launched in 2019, with four calls for proposals being announced since March 2019. The first three calls (2019, 2020 and a supplementary call in 2020) were implemented as part of the NAWA project co-funded by the European Union. The call for applications in the new edition of the programme, which is fully funded from the state budget, took place in May 2023. The new edition uses the mechanisms and standards developed during the first edition of PMFC.

Aims and target groups of the programme

The main objective of the PMFC was to support the internationalisation process of Polish universities by encouraging individuals with very good academic records to pursue second-cycle studies at Polish universities. The programme was aimed at people from countries with developed education systems. The main objective of the PMFC is in line with the NAWA strategy; it strives to increase the number of foreign students with outstanding academic achievements at Polish universities and to disseminate information about the Polish system of higher education and science outside Poland.

In the 2018/19 academic year, prior to the launch of the programme, 78,300 foreigners studied in Poland, accounting for 6.4% of all students at Polish universities.¹ Half of the foreign students were people from Ukraine. The PMFC programme was intended to help increase the number of foreigners studying at Polish universities and to further differentiate their countries of origin.

It was assumed that students of very high academic levels and from countries with high-quality university education would contribute to the introduction of positive changes at Polish universities and accelerate the development of a new, innovative academic culture. The creators of the programme assumed that scholarship holders from countries with developed education systems and a high level of internationalisation of higher education would expect valuable educational programmes from Polish universities and professional administrative services. This

¹ Report of Statistics Poland on higher education in the academic year 2018/19 (preliminary results) https://stat.gov.pl/files/gfx/portalinformacyjny/pl/defaultaktualnosci/5488/8/6/1/szkolnictwo_wyzsze_w_roku_akademickim_2018_2019.pdf

would encourage Polish universities to make the necessary changes.

The first three calls for proposals were open to citizens of the following countries:

AUSTRALIA	GREECE	NEW ZEALAND
AUSTRIA	HONG KONG	NORWAY
BELGIUM	HUNGARY	PORTUGAL
BULGARIA	ICELAND	REPUBLIC OF KOREA
CANADA	IRELAND	ROMANIA
CHILE	ISRAEL	SINGAPORE
CROATIA	ITALY	SLOVAKIA
CYPRUS	JAPAN	SLOVENIA
CZECH REPUBLIC	LATVIA	SPAIN
DENMARK	LIECHTENSTEIN	SWEDEN
ESTONIA	LITHUANIA	SWITZERLAND
FINLAND	LUXEMBOURG	TAIWAN
FRANCE	MACAU	URUGUAY
GERMANY	MALTA	USA
GREAT BRITAIN	NETHERLANDS	



Table 5: Programme countries in the first three PMFC calls for proposals

Citizens of the following countries could apply for a scholarship if

- they did not have Polish citizenship and did not apply for Polish citizenship.
- at the time of submitting their application, they studied in the last year of first-cycle studies in the country of the programme or obtained a first-cycle degree in the country of the programme no earlier than two years before the start of the call for proposals.

EXAMPLE: If the call for applications took place in 2019, the date of the diploma of graduation could

not be earlier than 2017.

- They could show they have:
 - » knowledge of Polish at the level of min. B2, if they planned to start second-cycle studies in Polish.
 - » knowledge of English at the level of min. B2, if they planned to start second-cycle studies in English.

The scholarship included second-cycle full-time studies at **UNIVERSITIES SUPERVISED BY THE MINISTER OF EDUCATION AND SCIENCE**. Studying under the PMFC scholarship was only possible in the study programmes of units with the **HIGHEST PARAMETRIC ASSESSMENT, A AND A+**. This changed in 2023. In the 2023 call for proposals, applicants could choose any field at the university-type higher education institution supervised by the Minister of Education and Science.

Applicants were free to choose their university, study programme and language of studies.

The PMFC scholarship was paid during the statutory period of education for a maximum of 12 months per academic year. Scholarship holders were exempt from tuition fees at public universities and received a monthly stipend of PLN 2,000. The issue of payment for studies at non-public universities was agreed upon individually between the scholarship holder and the university. Non-public universities could exempt scholarship holders from fees. The final decision on admission to studies and the financial conditions of education was made by the universities.

Selection was made through a competition. As part of the merit assessment, the outline of the planned master's thesis was evaluated. There was also an interview with the Evaluation Team appointed by the Director of NAWA. Detailed information on the conditions for obtaining the scholarship, deadlines and necessary documents were published in the call for applications **ON THE WEBSITE OF THE PROGRAMME**.

PMFC programme in numbers

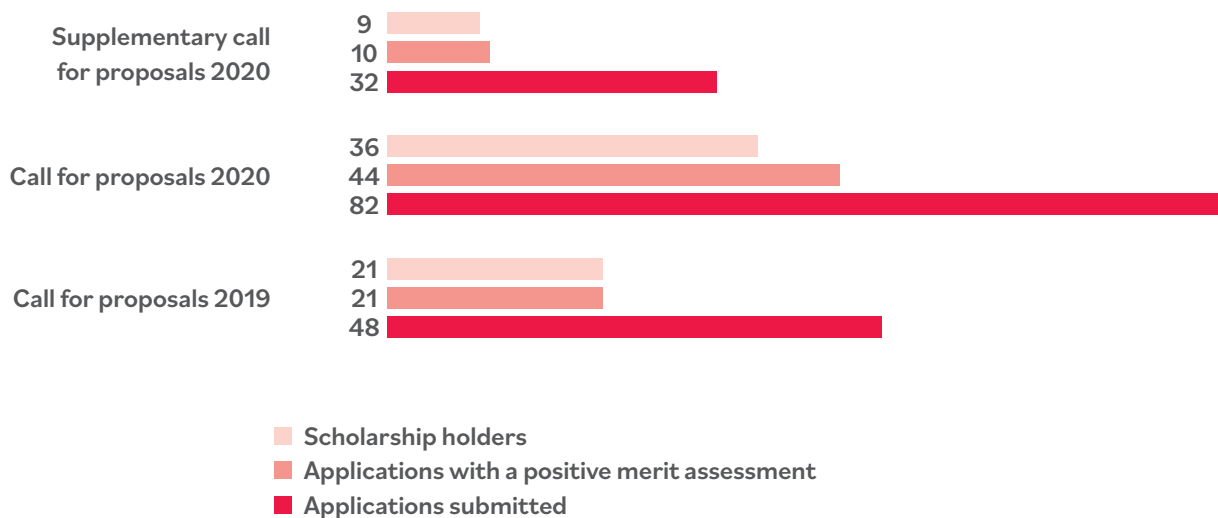
In this chapter, we are presenting the most important statistics about the programme.

66 people participated in the first two editions of the programme. During the programme implementation, the number of submitted applications increased. In the 2020 main call, 41% more applications were submitted than in 2019, demonstrating a significant increase in interest in the programme. The quality of the submitted applications also improved – between the 2019 and 2020 calls for proposals, the number of applications that passed a positive merit assessment increased by 10%.

The diversity of the regional scholarship holders was high. People from 19 countries in Europe, Asia, South and

North America participated in the first two editions of the programme. The largest groups of scholarship holders came from France (18 persons), Italy (9 persons) and the United States (9 persons). 55% of scholarship holders were men.

The PMFC Programme mainly reached people who have already had experience of studying abroad. Only 29% of scholarship holders participated in the programme as their first travel to study at a foreign university. This is how **Joanna Pottle** from the USA, who studied at the Jagiellonian University in Krakow, describes her international experience prior to her participation in the PMFC:



→
 Diagram 2: Changes in the number of applications submitted and the success rate



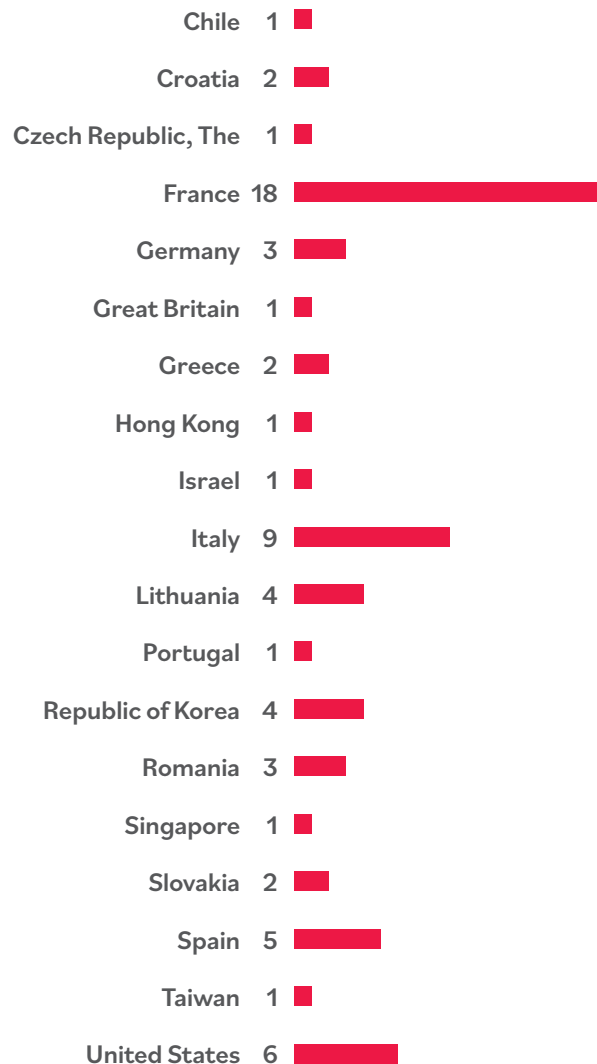
My first visit to Poland was in 2018 on an artistic workshop exchange to Kraków for a few weeks in the summer, which I also did the following summer in 2019 and between those trips, I did a research trip to Poland as part of my bachelor's thesis project (...). Before that, I also received a scholarship to study abroad in Italy on a short summer exchange for art history as part of my double major in Art History and Studio Art, with an Art Education track.

The largest numbers studied at the University of Warsaw (12 persons), the Lodz University of Technology (11), the Jagiellonian University in Krakow (9), the University of Wrocław (7) and the Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań (6). Studies in social and humanities were the most popular fields of studies among scholarship holders (78% of PMFC students in total). 9% of scholarship holders chose exact and natural sciences; the same percentage chose engineering and technical sciences. The least popular fields were medical sciences, health sciences and art.

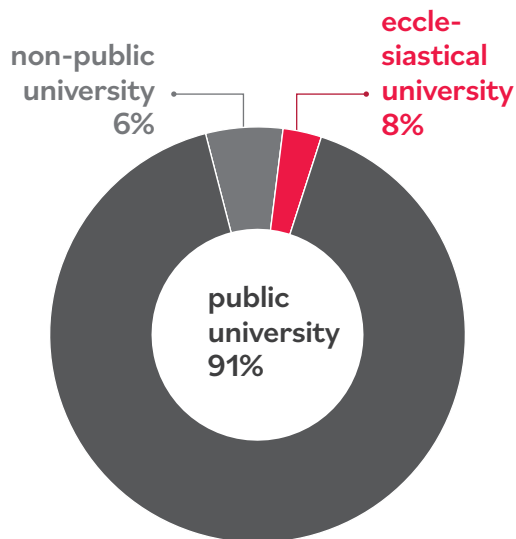
→
Diagram 3: Countries of origin of the PMFC scholarship holders

The most frequently selected study programmes were in the field of:

- international relations and international security,
- management, economics and finance,
- philology,
- cultural studies,
- data science and analytics.



The vast majority of scholarship holders studied at public universities, with only 6% choosing non-public universities. The legal status of the universities hosting PMFC scholarship holders was as follows:

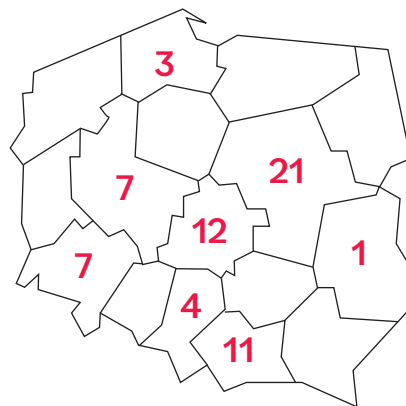


↑
Diagram 4: Legal status of the host university

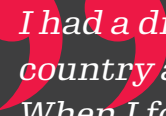
As many as 86% of the scholarship holders studied in English, which may indicate that the PMFC scholarship was chosen by people who had no previous ties to Poland and did not speak Polish, who perceived the PMFC scholarship as one of the stages in building their international academic or professional career.

PMFC scholarship holders studied in nine Polish cities; 67% of them chose the most populous cities in Poland - **Warsaw, Krakow and Lodz**. Participation of universities in the programme was uneven across regions. In half of them, none of the universities hosted scholarship holders, which is illustrated by the map showing the number of PMFC scholarship holders by region.

This suggests that, with appropriate promotion and information support, there is potential for further internationalisation of universities in other centres, such as Gdansk, Lublin, Katowice or Gliwice, where up to three people studied under the programme. Such potential also exists in the regions where A and A+ rated universities are located, and which did not receive any scholarship holders in the first two editions of PMFC.



↑
Illustration 3: Number of PMFC scholarship holders per region



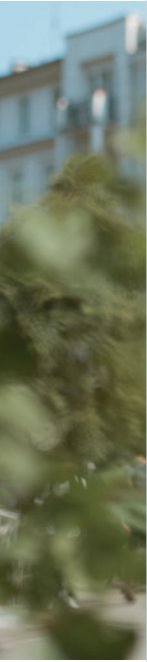
I had a dream to study in another country and gain new knowledge. When I found a call for applications for the Poland My First Choice programme, I immediately knew that I wanted to take advantage of it and study in Poland, especially as the level of architecture studies here is very high.

Dominika Ľudviková, Slovakia
Poland My First Choice scholarship holder,
2020-2022



**Experiences
of former
scholarship holders
of the PMFC**

Joanna Pottle,
USA



Rafaela De Negri, Italy



Ioannis Plaketas, Greece





Jose Caloca, Spain



Amalia Manti, Greece



Jiyoung Kim, Republic of Korea



Enzon Tan, Singapore

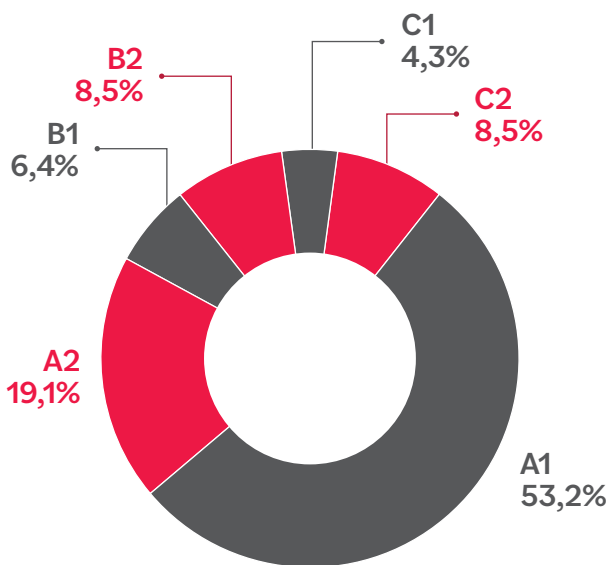
In this chapter, we present the results of a survey carried out among scholarship holders. We will also give a voice to people who were able to study in Poland thanks to NAWA.

50 people took part in the survey. Participants had the opportunity to skip individual questions and not answer them.

The statements of the scholarship holders and the results of the survey paint a varied picture of the experiences of foreigners studying at Polish universities. For the majority of PMFC participants, participation in the programme was a success. 74% of respondents would definitely recommend the programme to their friends. The percentage of dissatisfied people is relatively low – 6% of scholarship holders view their experience with PMFC critically. Participation in the scholarship helped 94% of respondents to develop skills in solving typical problems in their field of study. It was also an impulse to broaden academic knowledge for 89% of scholarship holders.

Only 4% of scholarship holders did not complete a full study programme during the scholarship period, and a further 4% completed a full study programme but did not submit a thesis. The reasons given for not completing their studies were psychological problems and a wrong choice of the study programme. In light of the responses, it would be worthwhile to include mental health support in the WELCOMING CULTURE being developed at Polish universities, and to ensure the further development of tools to help students choose the right study programme, such as the **STUDYFINDER** search engine created by NAWA.

More detailed information on the motivation for studying in Poland and the experiences of the scholarship holders have been grouped thematically in the following chapters. They not only form a mosaic of individual experiences and conclusions from the evaluation, but can also be an impulse for the further development of the scholarship programme.



↑
Diagram 5: Level of knowledge of Polish among scholarship recipients

Why Poland?

Among the reasons for choosing Poland as a study destination, the scholarship holders indicated a long tradition of higher education, Poland's geographical location in the centre of Europe, the friendly and international environment of Polish universities and an attractive labour market.

Poland has many historically significant universities that made breakthroughs in various academic fields, hence vouching for their academic rigour and quality. There are also other factors, such as being geographically centred in the European continent, which would suggest that one can experience the cultural diversity of West, Central and Eastern Europe, all in one place.

Enzon Tan, Singapore
SGH Warsaw School of Economics

Poland offers a great and competitive set of multilingual study programs in every specialisation, either for free or with decent tuition fees.

Ioannis Plaketas, Greece
Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznan

The main reason was the welcoming feeling both the university and NAWA made me feel like they really wanted me to come and share what I have as an individual and student.

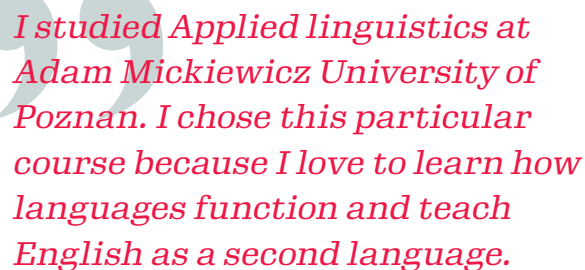
Rafaela De Negri, Italy
Jagiellonian University in Krakow

Scholarship holders present Poland as an attractive place to study and work, but participation in the programme did not necessarily contribute to improving their knowledge of Polish. For 49% of respondents to the evaluation survey, the PMFC scholarship was not significantly associated with learning Polish. More than half of the scholarship holders reported that they had known Polish at the beginner level (A1, according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages). Detailed information on how scholarship holders assessed their level of Polish language proficiency is shown in the graph.

The relatively low level of Polish proficiency among scholarship holders may indicate that the scholarship holders did not consider Poland as a place of permanent residence and work, or that the language courses offered at Polish universities did not always meet the needs of the scholarship holders. The source language is another factor influencing the process of learning Polish. If the source language is not Slavic, learning takes longer and requires more intensive support.

Choice of university and study programme

In choosing their study programme, scholarship holders were guided by their academic interests and chose university programmes that were a continuation of their first-cycle studies or related to their previous research projects.



I studied Applied linguistics at Adam Mickiewicz University of Poznan. I chose this particular course because I love to learn how languages function and teach English as a second language.

Amalia Manti, Greece
Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznan

When choosing their study programme, scholarship holders also considered their future careers. Some already had a clear idea of what they wanted to do in the future.

Studies at Polish universities

More than half of the scholarship holders (52%) rated the quality of classes as good, with 29% rating it as very good. Only 6% were not satisfied with the quality of teaching.

I wanted to expand my horizons when it came to building businesses in an international setting.

Enzon Tan, Singapore
SGH Warsaw School of Economics

The reason why I chose SGH and the course Advanced Analytics – Big Data is because I wanted to extend my studies from Economics to the Data Science field to become a data scientist.


Jiyoung Kim, Republic of Korea
SGH Warsaw School of Economics

83% of PMFC scholarship holders were very satisfied or satisfied with their studies.

The curriculum was well crafted, with a good combination of theory and practical, project work and examination, to ensure a holistic approach to the subjects offered.

Enzon Tan, Singapore
SGH Warsaw School of Economics

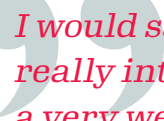
Scholarship holders also praised the atmosphere at the university and the attitude of academic staff - 83% found their lecturers friendly or very friendly, and 71% described the general atmosphere as good or very good.



During my studies, I met many interesting people, cool colleagues and an amazing thesis supervisor with whom I had a great time cooperating.

Dominika Ľudviková, Slovakia
Silesian University of Technology

Communication was facilitated by the high level of English among the academic staff. None of the respondents rated the academic staff's level of English as poor or very poor. Knowledge of English among administrative employees was rated lower. Almost 12% of respondents said that administrative staff had a poor or very poor command of English. The percentage of people who rated the efficiency of administrative services as poor or very poor was also relatively high (29%). 12% also saw shortcomings in university infrastructure, such as classroom equipment or access to the necessary computer software.



I would say some courses were really interesting and helpful with a very well organised curriculum while some courses were conducted using a little bit outdated programming language.

Jiyoung Kim, Republic of Korea
SGH Warsaw School of Economics

Life in Poland

Polish cities have turned out to be friendly and safe places to live in. This was the opinion of 89% of respondents. The cultural and entertainment life in the city of study was a positive aspect of studying in Poland.

Poznan has a great environment and culture. I was really happy to spend my time there, and I will gladly go back again if there is an opportunity. The environment is safe and friendly.

Amalia Manti, Greece
Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznan

Despite recent increases in prices and rents, 81% of respondents mentioned the relatively low cost of living as another advantage of studying in Poland. For more than half of the respondents (57%), the scholarship was enough to cover food and living costs. 15% had enough money for extra expenses. However, there was a fairly large group of people for whom the scholarship was not enough to cover accommodation and food (23%). The large variation in responses may be due in part to differences in the cost of living depending on the city and region. A relatively large group (42%) would raise the amount of the monthly scholarship to PLN 3,000.

Scholarship holders mentioned their Polish language skills as one of the barriers they faced when coming to Poland. This was particularly complicated for those who took part in the 2020 call for proposals, who studied mainly remotely during the pandemic.

I didn't know Polish, but I managed to overcome the barrier, even though it required a lot of work and effort. Especially since part of my studies was during a pandemic and classes were held remotely.

Dominika Ľudviková, Slovakia
Silesian University of Technology

Socialising with others during the lockdown was also difficult.

The timing of my studies was extremely unusual, as my two-year programme took place from 2020 to 2022, in large part during periods of lockdown in COVID. (...) I selected the program also knowing it would be conducive to online learning, and as I was lucky enough to be physically in Kraków, I didn't feel as isolated or separate from the programme, my professors, fellow students and local life than if I was in my own country or another country tuning in purely remotely.

Joanna Pottle, United States
Jagiellonian in Krakow


Choosing the right study programme could also be a challenge.

I think it's important for the university to assess if the student is genuinely passionate and eligible to pursue the study in the specific major by improving the admission system.

Jiyoung Kim, Republic of Korea
SGH Warsaw School of Economics

Plans after the scholarship

Scholarship holders' plans focused on two issues: further education and employment. The vast majority (70%) planned to take up a job. 28% of scholarship holders planned to return to their country of origin to continue their studies or work. Almost half planned to stay in Poland, including 38% who wanted to work here. For a fifth, the PMFC scholarship was a preparation for further studies or work abroad.



After graduating, I returned to Singapore and am currently running my own business in the F&B space. However, I do see the growth potential of Poland, and I intend to establish my businesses in Poland in the near future.

Enzon Tan, Singapore
SGH Warsaw School of Economics



**New edition of the
Poland My First
Choice programme**

The new edition of the programme again provides you with the opportunity to obtain a scholarship for full-time second-cycle studies in Poland.

Who can apply for the scholarship?

Citizens of countries and territories covered by the programme who are studying in the last year of their first-cycle studies in a programme country or who have completed their first-cycle studies in a programme country no earlier than two years before the announcement of the call for proposals.

What are the benefits of participating in the programme?

- monthly scholarship for full-time second-cycle studies
- exemption from tuition fees at public universities

What universities can I study at?

You can study at any **UNIVERSITY-TYPE HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION SUPERVISED BY THE MINISTER OF EDUCATION AND SCIENCE.**

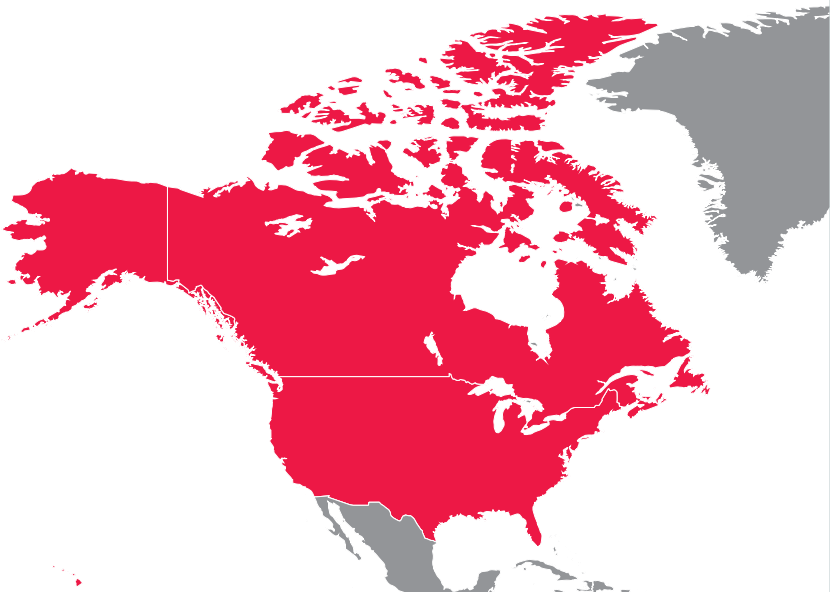
What study programme can I choose?

There are no restrictions on the study programme. Applicants make their own choice of second-cycle studies based on the offer of universities from the list of universities covered by the programme.

NOTE: Simultaneously with the submission of the scholarship application, you must complete the application process for admission to your chosen study programme.

How long will I receive the scholarship?

The scholarship and the right to exemption from tuition fees are granted for the statutory period of education.



Which countries and territories are participating in the new edition of PMFC?

Australia, Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Canada, Chile, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Great Britain, Greece, Hong Kong, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Macau, Malta, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Portugal, Republic of Korea, Romania, Singapore, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Taiwan, Uruguay, USA



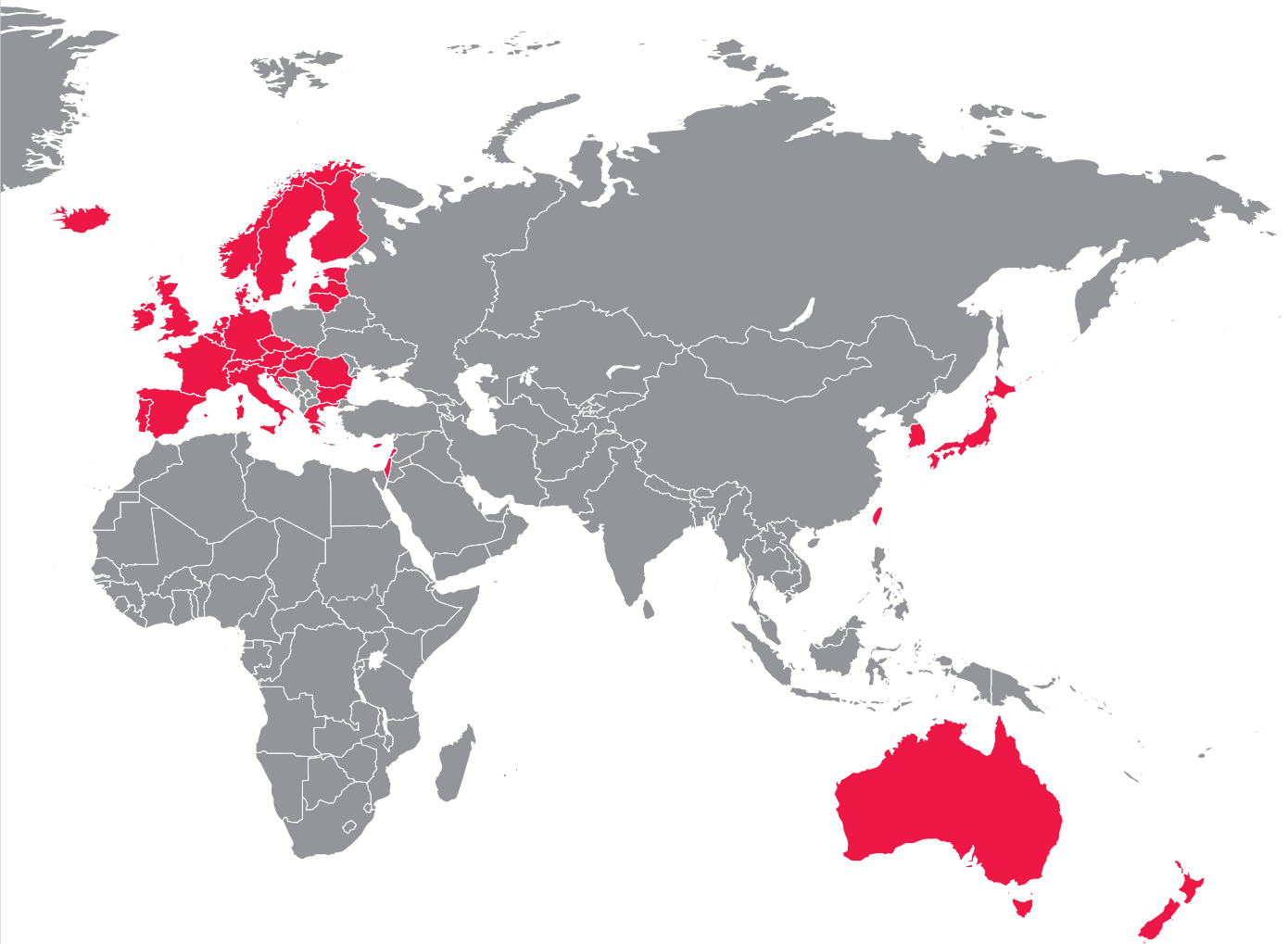


Illustration 4: Countries and territories participating in the new edition of PMFC

All information about the programme, rules and deadlines for submitting applications can be found at: WWW.NAWA.GOV.PL/STUDENCI/STUDENCI-ZAGRANICZNI/PROGRAM-POLAND-MY-FIRST-CHOICE

Contact NAWA:

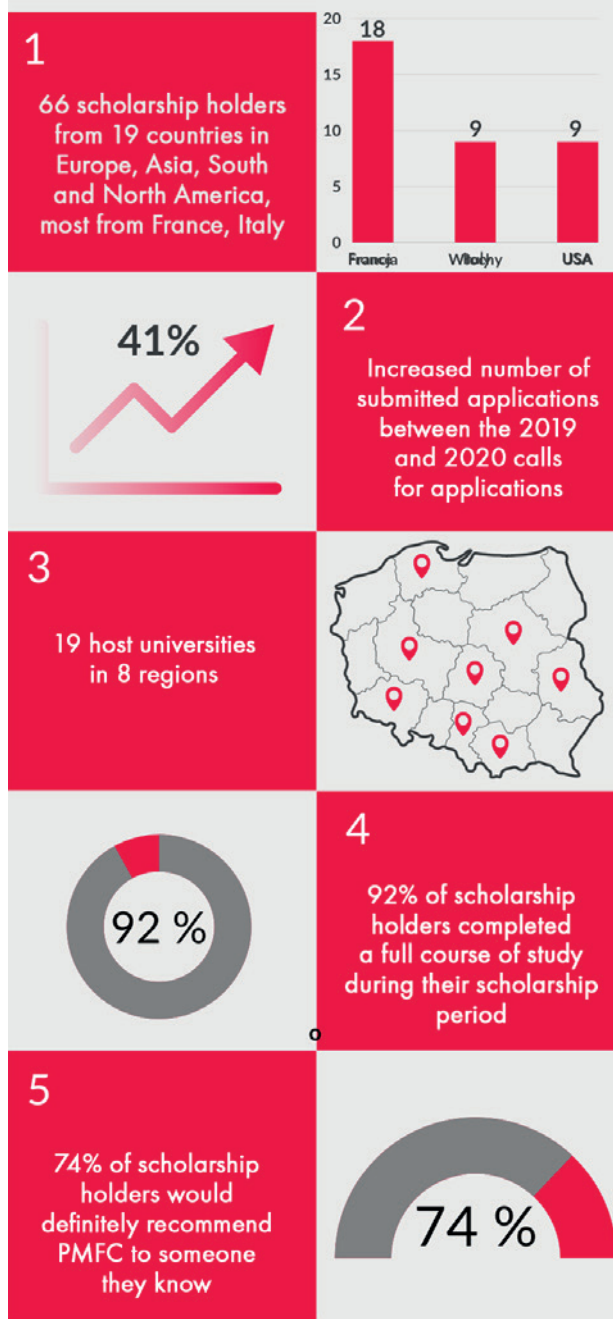
Programme Coordinator: PMFC@NAWA.GOV.PL



Summary

For most scholarship holders, participation in the programme was a positive experience. Polish universities turned out to be friendly and safe places, helpful in gaining knowledge and skills useful for future careers. Poland is becoming an increasingly attractive place to study, as evidenced by the growing number of students who are not Polish citizens. Scholarship programmes are certainly a factor in increasing interest in studying in Poland.

The evaluation of the programme shows that the attractiveness of Polish universities for foreign students is determined by the high level of classes and the competent and open academic staff they offer. The efficiency of the university administration and the intercultural competencies of its staff, including their knowledge of English, are certain challenges. There are solid grounds for increasing the participation of foreign students in Polish academic life, but further investment in WELCOMING CULTURE is needed - creating an atmosphere of openness, professional support and equal treatment for all people studying in Poland. WELCOMING CULTURE also means taking into account the needs of people and groups with difficult access to higher education, such as people with disabilities, people with chronic illnesses or people belonging to minority groups.



→
Illustration 5: PMFC in numbers

NAWA's support and the clarity of procedures for applying for a scholarship are also important. Almost 78% already rate contact with NAWA as definitely or rather good, and this potential is worth developing in the new edition of PMFC. Promotional activities and reaching more people with information about the scholarship will also be crucial. Scholarship holders pointed out that it was not always easy to find the PMFC offer.

In the new edition of the programme, it would also be worthwhile to conduct in-depth qualitative research to understand the negative experiences of people who, in the survey, rated certain aspects of their stay in Poland negatively. The next edition of the programme will also be an excellent opportunity to carry out a comprehensive evaluation, which will enable an in-depth analysis of the scholarship holder's motivation, as well as the barriers and challenges they face.

 www.nawa.gov.pl

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Poland My First Choice. A short guide for international applicants for study

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