

# **DON'T GET CHEATED AT WORK**

**A GUIDE FOR FOREIGN STUDENTS**



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A lot of students work to help finance their studies and cost of living in Poland. There are some things to know before you start working here. This guide will explain how to avoid some of the common problems that foreign students sometimes have at work.

## **1. Don't trust informal, oral agreements.**

People should have a work contract signed BEFORE they start work. In it, there should be clear information about the wages, working hours and any special working conditions.

Sometimes businesses don't give contracts or promise them later. It could be that you'll never receive it. This should be a big red flag for you that maybe they will cheat you. Common forms of cheating include paying less than what was agreed, or not making payment at all.

## **2. Make sure that both your employer and you have a system of evidencing the hours worked.**

Many students work in jobs where the working hours might not be fixed. For example, one week you might work 10 hours, the next week 15. All employers are required to evidence the working hours. Ask how your hours are evidenced. If you are in doubt that they are being evidenced, try to gather your own evidence - for example, keeping a notebook, making photos or keeping anything to prove that you worked.

Unfortunately, this is a big area of wage theft. If you have your own evidence, you might be able to get what you are owed, but if not, you can be cheated.

See **A Foreigner's Guide to Wage Theft and What to Do About it:**  
<https://zsp.net.pl/files/wage-theft-foreigners.pdf>

*These first two points are often the causes of wage theft. They occur in many industries, such as gastronomy (cafes, restaurants and catering), child care and domestic services, construction and small retail shops. We can point out two employers that you need to be careful with: **Zabka** and **UberEats**. Zabka is a franchise and some shop operators are not honest. There have been hundreds of incidents of wage theft at various Zabkas. With UberEats, there are some people who subcontract their contracts with UberEats, hiring students or other third parties. They have the contract with UberEats and may or may not offer a contract to you. This is a shady deal from a legal standpoint and there have been cases where these people just disappear without paying anybody their money.*

### **3. Watch out for illegal deductions.**

Any type of penalty an employer makes has to be 1. stated in the contract and 2. the employee has to be given a written notice that the deduction will be made and has to sign it.

A boss cannot just take 50 zloties from your pay as a penalty for whatever they want. The work contract has to explicitly state if a penalty can be made. For example, it might say if you are more than 10 minutes late to work, you will be fined a certain amount of money. All deductions from your pay must be documented.

#### **4. Don't work for a subminimum wage!**

Many students work part-time or irregular hours and have a civil-law contract. Your hourly rate should be 30.5 złotych gross. How much is that in hand? This should be 23 złotych and 94 groszy.

#### **5. Right to work in Poland**

International students with a student visa or a temporary residence permit for the purpose of studying can work without a separate work permit. EU citizens and holders of a Karta Polaka (Pole Card) do not need any work permits. During the school year, international students are allowed to work legally for 20 hours per week, and 40 hours during vacation.

#### **6. Different types of contracts**

In Poland, students can work under different types of contracts, including Umowa o pracę (Employment Contract), Umowa zlecenie (Mandate Contract), Umowa o dzieło (Specific-task Contract), and Umowa o praktyki studenckie i absolwenckie (Student and Postgraduate Internship Contract).

An employment contract is the most beneficial. It can be for a trial period (for example, for 3 months), for a fixed term (for example, one year) or indefinite. With employment contracts you are entitled to paid vacation, sick leave and maternity leave. You also cannot be fired at any time without a reason.

(If you want to have sick leave insurance on a mandate contract, you have to pay for this yourself.)

Sometimes employers avoid giving an employment contract and give a mandate contract because they don't have to pay for your vacation or sick leave and it is easier to fire you. If you work at job at specified hours every week and have to perform your work in a given place, with a boss or supervisor overseeing you or telling you what to do, you might be entitled to an employment contract, even if you got a mandate contract.

A Specific-task contract is usually to complete one piece of work. For example, if you are going to make a website for somebody and this work is a one-time job, that is the contract you should get.

A B2B contract means that you have your own company and you send an invoice to another business. This might be used if you perform specific tasks for the company but some businesses use this to avoid the obligations of a work contract.

*Many IT services, language schools or tutoring services require students to use B2B contracts. B2B contracts do not require a minimum wage to be paid. Be careful - with some work you may be required to finish a specific task for a lump sum and it might be less than the minimum wage.*

An internship contract is not guaranteed a minimum wage. Most student internships are paid, although this might be less than the minimum wage. Statistically, full-time internships pay more. In high-paying fields, internships are usually better-paid. As of May 2025, the average pay for a full-time intern in Warsaw is 4500 zł, just under the minimum wage of 4666 zł.

## **7. Taxes**

Students under the age of 26 have a tax benefit whereas over the age of 26, taxes might be deducted, making your net salary lower.

## **8. Some restrictions and entitlements**

If you are under 18, you cannot work night shifts or sell alcohol or tobacco. (Some business such as certain Zabka stores ignore this law.)

If you have an important exam or class, your employer has to give you time off to attend.

You need to have 11 hours break before your shifts. For example, if you finish working at 9PM, you cannot be asked to start work the next day at 6AM.

You are entitled to a break every six hours (but in practice, the breaks come earlier than after 6 hours of work).

**If you have questions about your specific situation or you have been cheated, you should take action! Stand up and fight for your rights!**

Contact Związek Syndykalistów Polski: [is@zsp.net.pl](mailto:is@zsp.net.pl).  
In Warsaw, [warszawa@zsp.net.pl](mailto:warszawa@zsp.net.pl)



Union of Syndicalists  
Multi-branch Union, Warsaw