

Career Paths in the Legal Professions

Marzena Błaszczuk, Michał Zemelka

Editing: Martyna Bójko

1. Purpose and scope of the study

The purpose of the study was to build a dataset making it possible to reconstruct and analyse the career paths of people practising legal professions and the scale of movement between individual professions, in particular between the public prosecution service, the bar, the attorney-at-law profession, the notarial profession and the judiciary.

The study is intended to establish which career paths occur most frequently, which professions are most open to people with experience in other legal professions, and to what extent individual professional groups recruit from their own internal training and promotion pathways.

The analysis covers the years 2020–2025 and seven professional groups: advocates, attorneys-at-law, notaries, court enforcement officers, prosecutors, judges, and candidates put forward by the National Council of the Judiciary for appointment to the office of judge. The data was gathered through our own monitoring.

To collect the data, a total of **7 initial freedom of information requests** were sent. All of them were addressed to the competent institutions on **29 June 2026**. The addressees were: the Polish Bar Council, the National Bar of Attorneys-at-Law, the National Council of Notaries, the National Council of Court Enforcement Officers, the Ministry of Justice, the National Public Prosecutor's Office and the National Council of the Judiciary. In the case of the National Bar of Attorneys-at-Law, a further message concerning the request submitted earlier was sent on 30 June 2026. This was part of the follow-up correspondence and not a separate request. Replies from the institutions arrived in July 2026. The individual bodies provided data of varying scope and level of detail. In addition, 3 in-depth interviews were conducted with people who had decided to change their career path within the legal professions.

2. The nature of the data collected

The analysis reveals significant differences in how lawyers' previous careers are recorded.

For judges, information is available both on the number of appointments in individual years and — for some of them — on the profession or status immediately preceding the appointment. The NCJ data additionally makes it possible to analyse the number of people presented to the President and the previous professions of some of them. For prosecutors, the data is broken down by year and by previous profession or status. Other sources are less complete. The National Council of Court Enforcement Officers does not collect data on the previous careers of people appointed as enforcement officers, while the data on advocates consists primarily of headcounts at the end of each year.

Comparisons between professions therefore require caution: “no data” should not be equated with a value of zero, and not all categories are defined identically by the individual institutions. Unless indicated otherwise, the figures given come from the [summary of the monitoring conducted](#).

3. Judicial appointments

Between 2020 and 2025, the President of Poland appointed **2,387 judges of the common courts**.

The distribution across individual years was, however, highly uneven:

Year	Number of judges appointed	Share of appointments 2020–2025
2020	269	11.3%
2021	669	28.0%
2022	573	24.0%
2023	352	14.7%
2024	231	9.7%
2025	293	12.3%

2021 stands out most clearly, with 669 judges appointed. That was almost 2.5 times more than in 2020 — a year-on-year increase of around 149%.

2022 was also a year of very high numbers: 573 people. In 2021–2022 alone, 1,242 judges were appointed, i.e. 52% of all judges appointed over the entire six-year period.

A clear decline is visible after 2022:

- 2023: 352 appointments,
- 2024: 231 appointments.

In 2024, the number of appointments was as much as around **65.5% lower than in the record year 2021**.

In 2025 there was a moderate rebound — the number of appointments rose from 231 to 293, i.e. by around **27%**, but it still remained well below the level of 2021–2022.

The data therefore points to a very pronounced concentration of judicial appointments in the first part of the period analysed.

Similar dynamics can be seen in the data of the National Council of the Judiciary on people presented to the President of Poland with a motion for appointment to the office of judge.

Year	Number of people presented to the President
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2020	345
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2021	864
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2022	489
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2023	420
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2024	252
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2025	245
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Once again the clear outlier is **2021 – 864 people**. They accounted for around one third of all 2,615 candidates presented to the President in the period 2020–2025.

Compared with 2020, this figure rose in 2021 by around **150%**.

A downward trend then set in. Both the NCJ data and the data on actual appointments therefore show particularly high activity in **2021–2022**, followed by a significant reduction in the number of new appointments and presentations.

The number of candidates presented by the NCJ in a given year should not, however, be compared directly with the number of people appointed in the same period. The presentation and appointment process may cross calendar-year boundaries, so the data does not describe exactly the same groups of people.

The scale of the 2021–2022 increase is well illustrated by comparing the number of appointments with the size of the judicial corps as a whole. According to Statistics Poland, at the end of 2021 the common courts employed 9,156 judges, and at the end of 2022 – 9,341, while 669 and 573 appointments respectively were recorded in those years. The number of appointments therefore corresponded to around 7.3% of the headcount in 2021 and 6.1% in 2022, which confirms that the peak observed was significant also in relation to the size of the entire common judiciary.

4. Changes in the professional profile of people presented by the NCJ

The NCJ data also shows how much the previous career path of people presented to the President changes from year to year. The share of court assessors among them was:

- 2020 – 14.3%,
- 2021 – 78.9%,
- 2022 – 39.4%,
- 2023 – 43.7%,
- 2024 – 68.5%,
- 2025 – 79.5%.

In 2021 and 2025, assessors clearly dominated among the people whose previous profession could be established.

In 2020, 2022 and 2023, by contrast, people moving from other legal professions carried relatively more weight. In 2022, for example, the categories indicated included:

- 69 assessors,
- 58 advocates,
- 38 attorneys-at-law,
- 7 prosecutors.

In 2025 the proportions were entirely different:

- 147 assessors,
- 19 advocates,
- 15 attorneys-at-law,
- 4 prosecutors.

This may indicate that not only the number of people moving into the judiciary changed over time, but also the **professional profile of those presented for appointment**. It should be stressed, however, that the breakdown of previous professions covers only some of all the people presented by the NCJ.

5. Judicial appointments by previous profession

For the whole 2020–2025 period, information is available on the immediately preceding profession or status of 1,068 people appointed to the office of judge.

Previous status or profession	Number
court assessor	714
advocate	209
attorney-at-law	103
prosecutor	32
notary	6
habilitated doctor of legal sciences	4
court enforcement officer	0

Court assessors were the largest group – around two thirds of the people falling into the categories indicated.

A clear flow from the independent legal professions is also visible. Over six years, 209 people who had previously practised as advocates and 103 attorneys-at-law became judges.

Moves from the prosecution service were rarer – 32 such cases were recorded.

The Ministry's data does not, however, include an annual breakdown of previous professions, so it is impossible to establish whether, for example, advocates or prosecutors were appointed in particularly large numbers in any specific year.

6. The prosecution service – a marked rise in appointments in 2024–2025

The dynamics of prosecutorial appointments differ from those observed in the judiciary.

The main table of the National Public Prosecutor's Office records:

Year	Number of appointments
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2020	123
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2021	158
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2022	128
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2023	129
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2024	205
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2025	202
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Between 2020 and 2023 the number of appointments was relatively stable, ranging from 123 to 158 a year. A clear change came in **2024**, when the number of appointments rose from 129 to 205. That is an increase of around **59% year on year**. In 2025 the number held at practically the same, very high level – 202 people.

In total, **407 appointments were recorded in 2024–2025**, which is around **43% of all 945 appointments** included in the main table for the whole 2020–2025 period.

7. The prosecution service as an internal pathway

In every year analysed, prosecutorial assessors clearly dominated appointments to the office of prosecutor.

Their numbers were:

- 2020 – 115,
- 2021 – 152,
- 2022 – 126,
- 2023 – 127,
- 2024 – 198,
- 2025 – 189.

They accounted for between around 94% and over 98% of appointments in individual years.

The rise in appointments in 2024 therefore stems primarily from the increased number of prosecutorial assessors appointed. That figure rose from 127 in 2023 to 198 in 2024. At the same time, a small but noticeable change appears in 2025: **12 of the people appointed had previously been advocates**. This was the highest figure in the whole period.

The scale of appointments is worth setting against the size of the prosecution service as a whole. According to Statistics Poland, the number of prosecutors employed remained relatively stable over the period studied: 5,831 in 2020, 5,882 in 2021, 5,907 in 2022, 5,863 in 2023 and 5,879 in 2024. This means that the 205 appointments recorded in 2024 corresponded to around 3.5% of the prosecutorial headcount at the time, whereas in 2020–2023 the analogous ratio was around 2–2.7%. At the same time, the rise in appointments did not translate into a comparable increase in the total number of prosecutors – between the end of 2023 and the end of 2024 the headcount grew only from 5,863 to 5,879. This indicates that appointments should be interpreted not as a simple increase in the size of the prosecution service, but primarily as an element of staff turnover and replenishment, including the movement of assessors into prosecutorial posts.

8. The notarial profession – a more stable number of appointments

The number of notaries appointed was far more stable than the number of new judges or prosecutorial appointments.

Year	Number of notaries appointed
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2020	171
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2021	197
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2022	178
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2023	190
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2024	209
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2025	168
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The largest number of notaries was appointed in **2024 – 209 people**, and the smallest in **2025 – 168 people**.

After the rise from 190 in 2023 to 209 in 2024, 2025 brought a fall of around **20%**. Among the previous professions indicated, attorneys-at-law and advocates appear most often. 2021 stands out in particular, with 18 attorneys-at-law and 10 advocates among those later appointed as notaries.

The scale of notarial appointments is worth setting against the size of the profession as a whole. According to the National Council of Notaries, the number of notaries running practices grew steadily: from 3,806 in 2021 through 3,949 in 2022, 4,083 in 2023 and

4,214 in 2024 to 4,297 in 2025. The annual number of appointments corresponded to roughly 4–5% of practising notaries – 197 appointments in 2021, for example, accounted for around 5.2% of the headcount at the time, and 209 appointments in 2024 for around 5.0%. At the same time, the number of notaries running practices grew by 491 between 2021 and 2025, while 942 appointments were made over the same period, which shows that the number of appointments cannot be equated with growth in the size of the profession. The National Council of Notaries data also points to a significant scale of professional mobility: in 2021, 838 notaries (21.7%) running practices had entered the profession without completing a notarial traineeship, after previously working in other legal professions; in 2022 the figure was 834 people (21.12%), in 2023 – 815 (19.80%), and in 2024 – 790 (18.45%). This means that around one fifth of practising notaries in the first part of the period studied had previous experience in other legal professions, although the share of this group gradually declined.

9. The number of advocates is growing

The data on advocates consists of year-end headcounts. It shows very steady growth in the size of the group.

The total number of advocates rose from 24,336 in 2020 to 29,506 in 2025. That is an increase of **5,170 people, or around 21% over five years**. Growth occurred in every consecutive year, with no period of decline. At the same time, the group of advocates not practising grew faster. Their number rose from 4,459 to 5,880, i.e. by around **32%**. The number of practising advocates grew over the same period by around **19%**.

As a result, the share of those not practising rose from around 18.3% of all advocates in 2020 to around 19.9% in 2025.

10. Attorneys-at-law

For 2021–2025, data is available on the total number of entries on the list of attorneys-at-law:

- 2021 – 2,370,
- 2022 – 2,100,
- 2023 – 2,022,
- 2024 – 1,949,
- 2025 – 2,364.

Between 2021 and 2024 a steady fall in the number of entries can be observed (of around **18%**). In **2025, by contrast, there was a very clear rebound** – the number of entries rose from 1,949 to 2,364, i.e. by more than **21%**, reaching almost exactly the 2021 level.

A very clear difference concerns entries made under Article 25(1)(3) of the Act on Attorneys-at-Law, i.e. the category covering people with previous experience in other professions or in the positions specified there.

In 2020, the categories analysed recorded:

- 463 advocates,
- 48 judges,
- 39 prosecutors,
- 8 notaries.

That adds up to **558 people**.

In subsequent years the analogous figure was considerably lower:

- 2021 – 193,
- 2022 – 191,
- 2023 – 210,
- 2024 – 238,
- 2025 – 229.

2020 alone therefore accounts for around **34.5% of all 1,619 cases** falling into these categories over the entire six-year period.

The scale of new entries is worth setting against the total number of attorneys-at-law. According to data published by the National Bar of Attorneys-at-Law, the number of attorneys-at-law entered on the lists grew steadily: from 50,079 in 2021 through 51,669 in 2022, 53,202 in 2023 and 54,964 in 2024 to 56,415 in 2025. That is growth of around 12.7% over four years, even though the number of new entries fell between 2021 and 2024. Annual entries corresponded to around 3.5–4.7% of the total number of attorneys-at-law: 2,370 entries in 2021 accounted for around 4.7% of the headcount at the time, 1,949 entries in 2024 for around 3.5%, and 2,364 entries in 2025 for around 4.2%. The data therefore shows that the fall in new entries between 2021 and 2024 did not mean the profession was shrinking — the total number of attorneys-at-law continued to grow.

11. Summary of the interviews

The interviews conducted with three people practising legal professions show that career paths do not always follow a traditional, pre-planned model, and that their course is shaped both by opportunities that arise and by institutional constraints. Interviewees considered changing profession or employer mainly because of routine, years spent at the same career stage, and a lack of promotion prospects — particularly in the prosecution service.

Changing profession itself was seen as possible, but as requiring adjustment to a different model of work: the difficulties involved both formal procedures, such as waiting for a

resolution, entry on a professional list or taking part in a competition for a judicial post, and changes in daily habits, working hours and the level of job security. At the same time, experience gained in the previous profession was rated as a significant asset, especially because it gave a better understanding of how other participants in proceedings operate, of the organisation of work, and of the perspective of “the other side”. Interviewees saw the individual legal professions as fairly separate and not fully permeable milieus, with barriers that were not only formal but also mental and cultural, tied to the need to adapt to a different professional role. The rules in force were generally assessed as allowing mobility, although the absence of any automatic route — particularly for moving into the judiciary — and the requirement to take part in competitive procedures may constitute a real barrier. It was also noted that changing profession is easier at an earlier career stage, whereas over time it carries greater risk and calls for a more deliberate decision.

12. Conclusions

The analysis of annual data reveals several clear patterns.

The strongest wave of judicial appointments fell in **2021–2022**. Over those two years, more than half of all judges from the six-year period studied were appointed. The NCJ data likewise shows an exceptionally high number of people presented to the President, above all in 2021.

Different dynamics can be seen in the prosecution service. Up to 2023 the number of appointments remained relatively stable, and then in **2024 it rose by almost 60%** and held at a similar level in 2025.

The notarial profession was marked by far greater stability, with no abrupt year-on-year changes.

Among attorneys-at-law, two things stand out: a very high number of moves from other professions in 2020, and the rebound in the total number of entries on the list in 2025 after several consecutive years of decline.

Among advocates, by contrast, there is steady, regular growth in the size of the whole group between 2020 and 2025.

The data therefore indicates that mobility and the size of the legal professions did not change evenly. Individual professions follow different cycles: 2021–2022 were exceptional for the judiciary, 2024–2025 for the prosecution service, while 2020 stands out in the data on movement into the attorney-at-law profession.

The data points to a clear coincidence between changes in the pace of appointments and the course of the rule of law crisis, particularly with regard to the judiciary. In 2021–2022, when the status of the National Council of the Judiciary and the procedure for appointing judges were already among the main problems identified by the European Commission, the highest number of judicial appointments in the whole period analysed was recorded. This peak overlapped with a pronounced assessor cohort effect: in 2021 the NCJ examined 334

proceedings concerning the conversion of a district court assessor's post into a judicial post, and in 333 cases the candidacy received a positive opinion. After 2023 the number of new appointments fell markedly; at the same time, the European Commission noted that the Minister of Justice had stopped publishing information about some vacant posts in the common courts, citing the need to avoid deepening legal uncertainty while concerns about the independence of the NCJ persisted. A different trend is visible in the prosecution service: the rise in appointments in 2024–2025 coincided with reorganisation and staffing changes in the prosecution service and with the maturing of successive large cohorts of prosecutorial assessors — in 2023, for example, KSSiP graduates selected 148 assessor posts. These relationships do not prove any simple causal link, but they do indicate that the pace at which posts were filled was shaped simultaneously by assessor cycles and by institutional changes connected with the rule of law crisis and the measures taken in response to it. The data therefore shows that the dynamics of legal careers are shaped not only by individual professional decisions, but also by the design of promotion pathways and current institutional conditions.