

The Work of the Berlin Advice Centre for Migration and Decent Work (BEMA) in 2022: Facts and Figures

Summary

In 2022, the BEMA team conducted a total of 5,854 consultations on social, residency, and labour law issues with 4,185 clients from 113 countries. Through the labour law consultations, our clients were able to enforce over 100,000 euros in wage claims ¹.

The year 2022 had significant challenges in store: The war in Ukraine, which started in spring 2022, and the continuing Covid-19 pandemic required the team to adapt quickly, both in terms of expertise and practical handling of the situation.

Just as BEMA was able to resume in-person consultations and trainings, the war in Ukraine shook us in the spring of 2022. BEMA responded promptly to the new situation by creating a [flyer on key aspects of labour rights for newly arriving individuals from Ukraine](#). This flyer helped raise awareness about labour rights among potential clients, as well as stakeholders and policymakers.

Due to structural barriers, refugees are a particularly vulnerable group on the labour market. To meet the increased demand for labour law advice and information, Arbeit und Leben hired two more colleagues to join the BEMA team in the summer of 2022, on behalf of the Senate Department for Labour, Social Affairs, Equality, Integration, Diversity, and Anti-Discrimination (Berliner Senatsverwaltung für Arbeit, Soziales, Gleichstellung, Integration, Vielfalt und Antidiskriminierung). Since then, they have organised the information and counselling service called Hidna Pratsya Berlin (Ukrainian for "Decent Work Berlin"), assisting the target group in asserting their labour rights and in preventing exploitative working conditions.

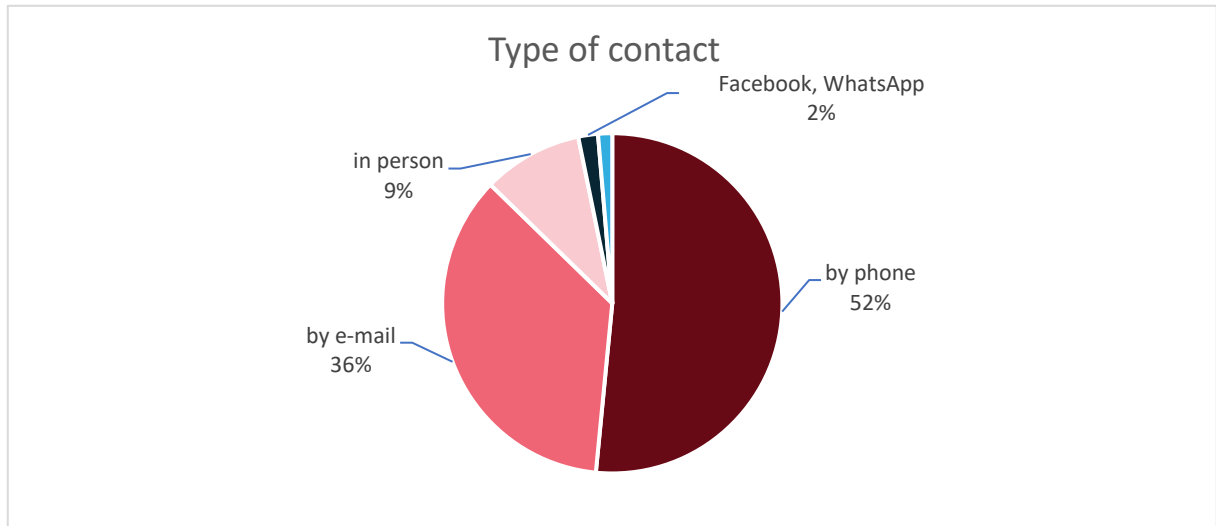
Who is BEMA?

BEMA stands for Berlin Consultation Centre for Migration and Decent Work. BEMA is funded by the Senate Department for Labour, Social Affairs, Equality, Integration, Diversity, and Anti-Discrimination. It is run by Arbeit und Leben Berlin-Brandenburg DGB/VHS e.V. Since 2018, BEMA has been providing support to immigrants and mobile workers in precarious life and work situations to exercise their labour and social rights through counselling, education, and awareness-raising. You can find more information about the background [here](#).

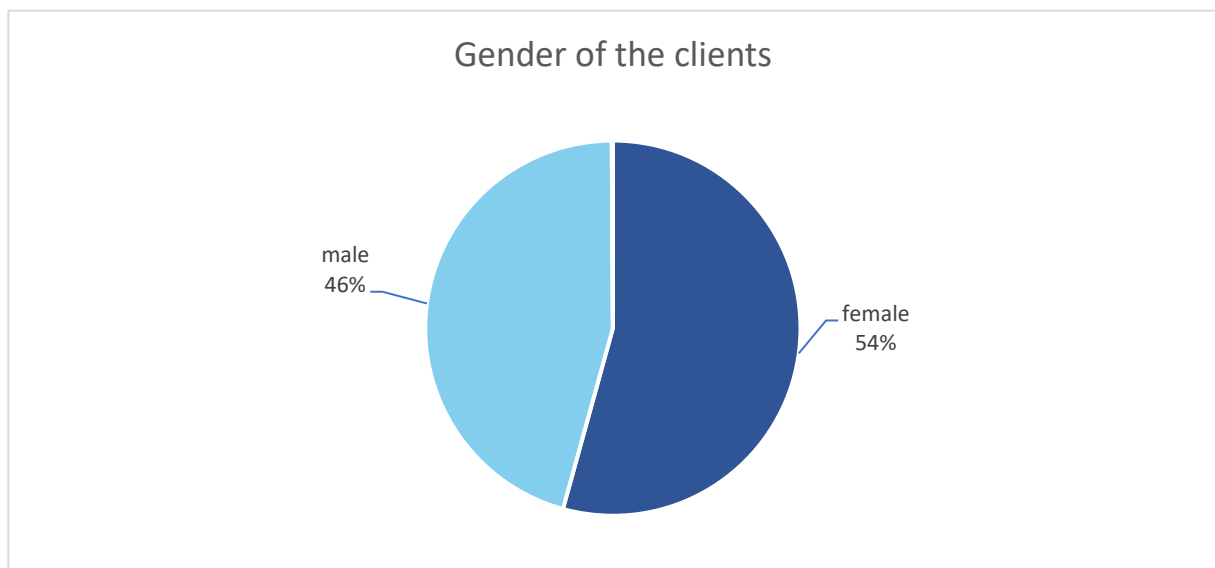
¹ These are predominantly gross amounts, significant social security and tax contributions were also paid retroactively as part of these joint achievements of the clients and consultants.

1. Statistical insights on people seeking advice

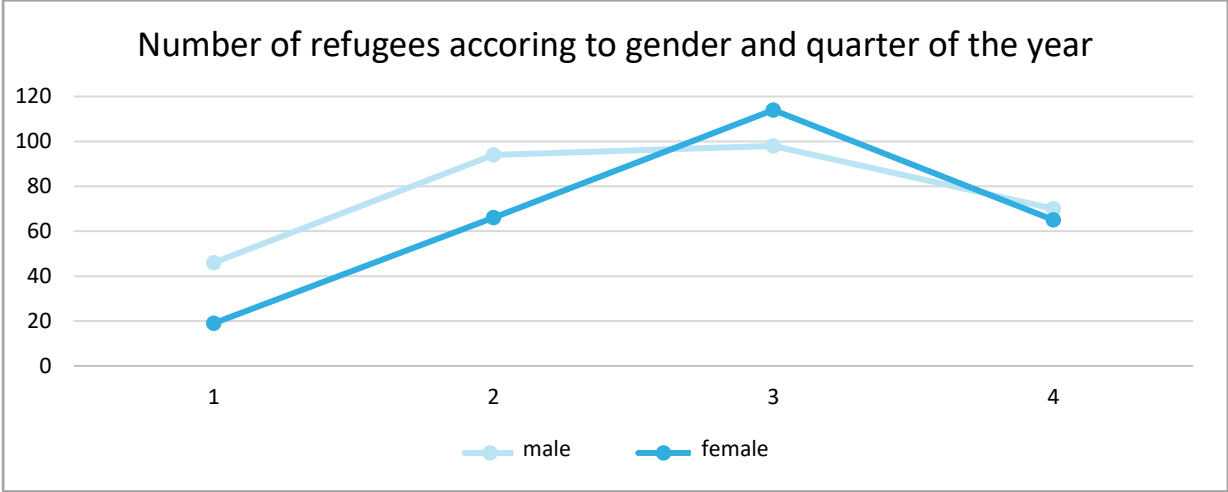
In 2022, the BEMA team conducted 5,854 consultations on issues related to social, residency, and employment law, with 4,185 clients from 113 countries. Throughout the year, there was an increase in personal consultations (respecting rules and regulations around contact restrictions and hygiene measures). The increase can be attributed to the containment of the Covid-19 pandemic and the subsequent removal of many contact and hygiene restrictions. Furthermore, this demonstrates that the visitors have also embraced the new counselling location in Lorenzweg in Berlin-Tempelhof.



The ratio of male and female clients was balanced in 2022, with the proportion of female clients slightly higher, as in previous years, at 54 percent.



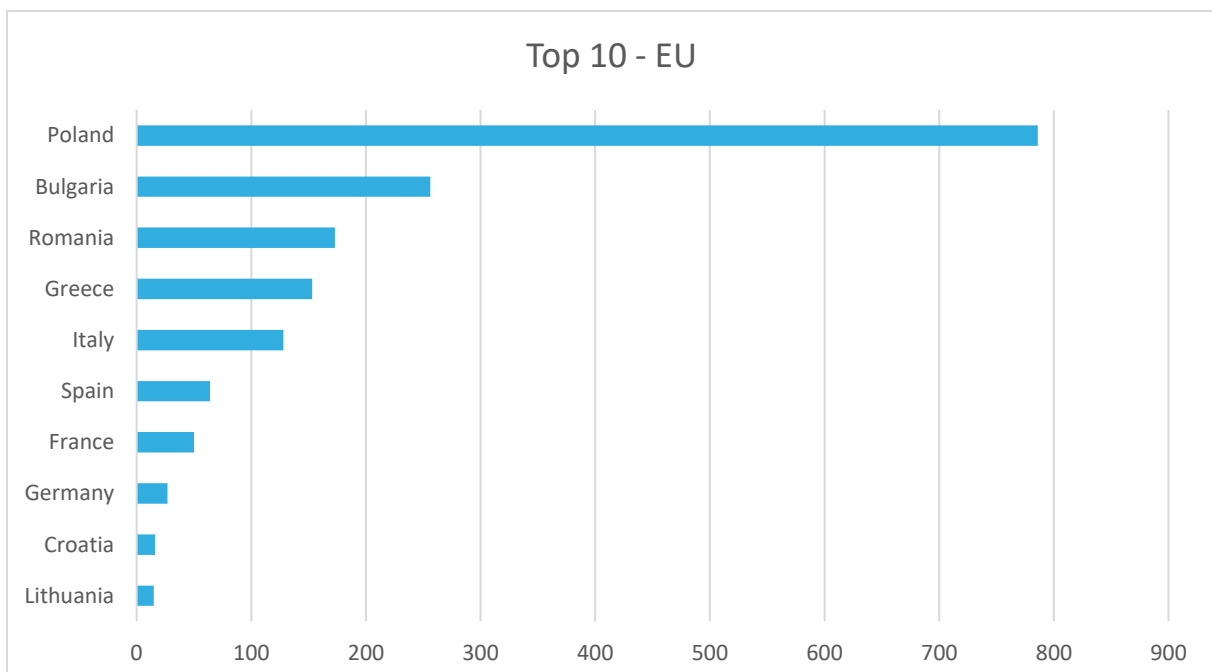
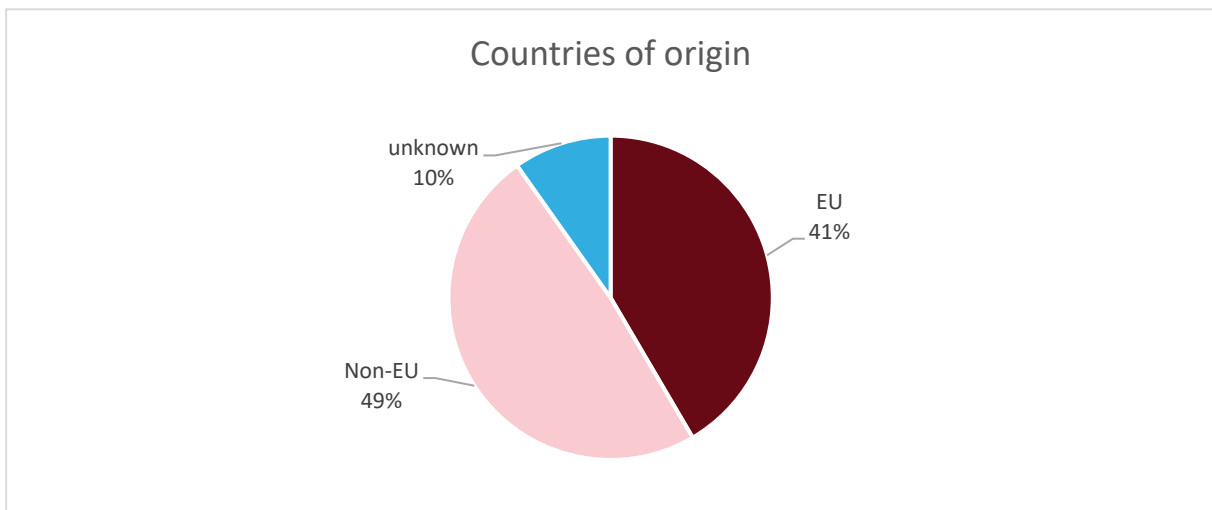
Amongst the group of refugees visiting the counselling centre, the proportion of male clients is typically more than twice as high as that of female clients. In 2022, there was a turning point in the third quarter, which we attribute to the arrival of refugees from Ukraine, who were predominantly women, especially at the beginning of the war.

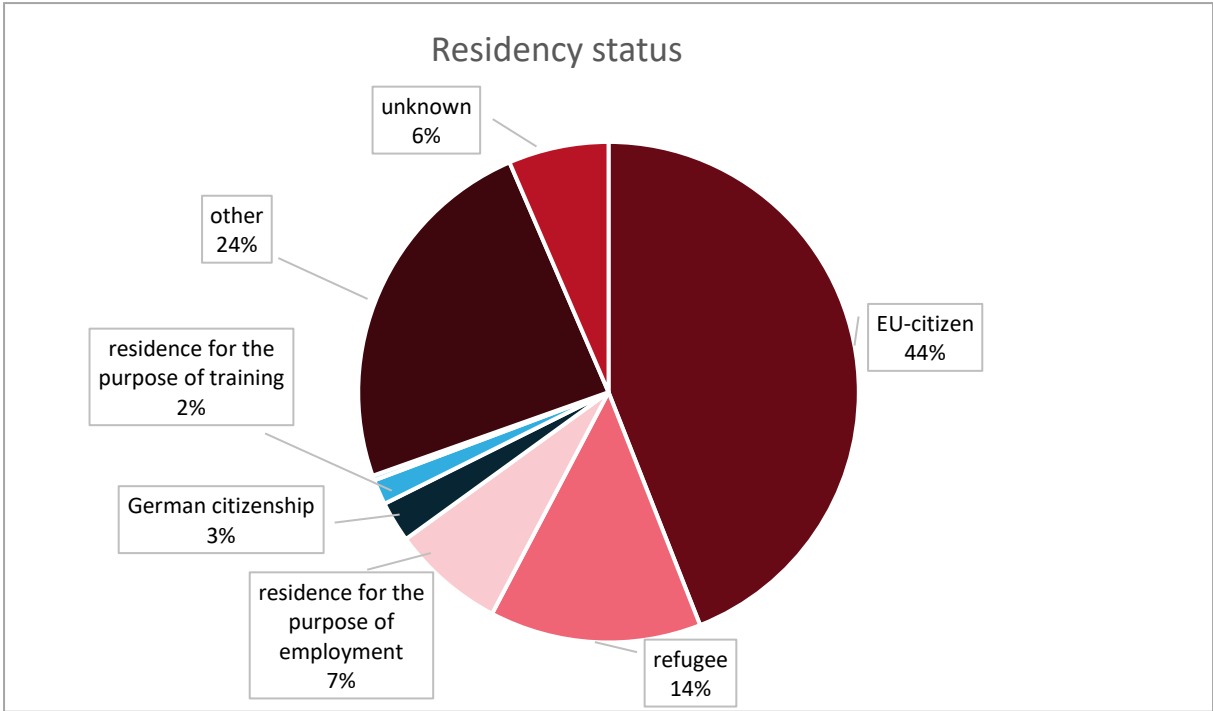
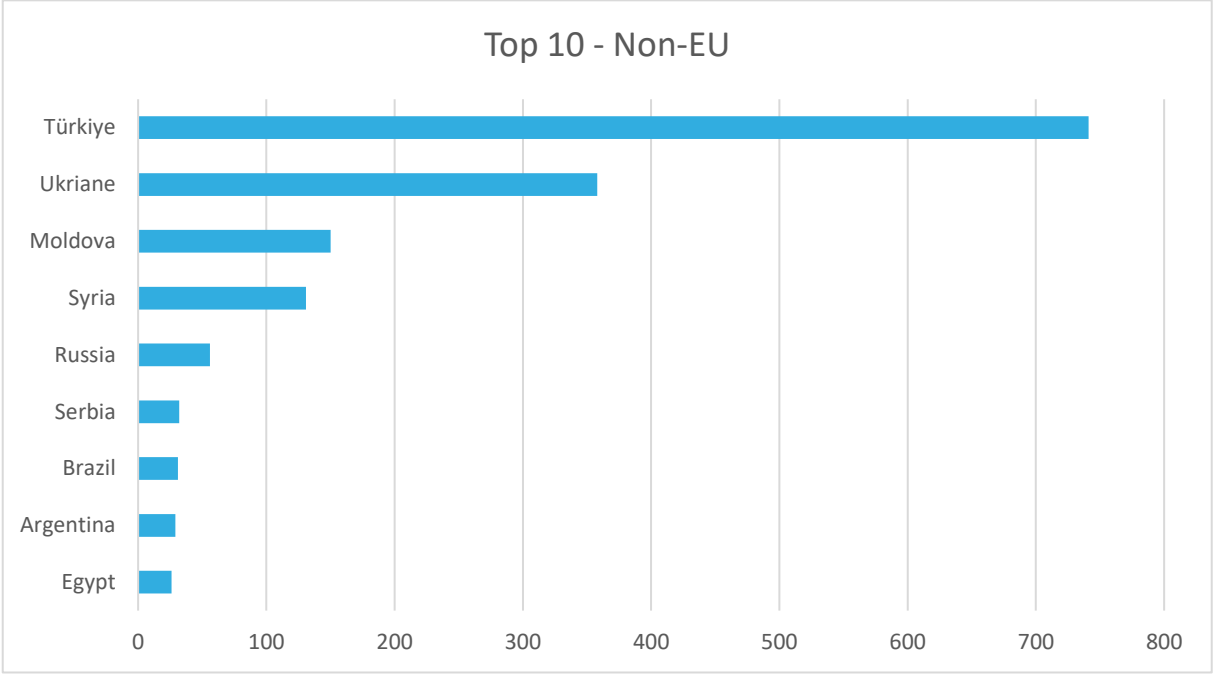


a) Countries of origin and residency status

In 2022, for the first time, more third-country nationals than EU citizens sought advice from BEMA. The most common nationalities among non-EU nationals seeking advice were Turkish, Ukrainian, Moldovan, and Syrian. The significant increase in the number of Ukrainian individuals seeking advice can be attributed to the refugee movement resulting from the war in Ukraine and the expanded services provided by BEMA.

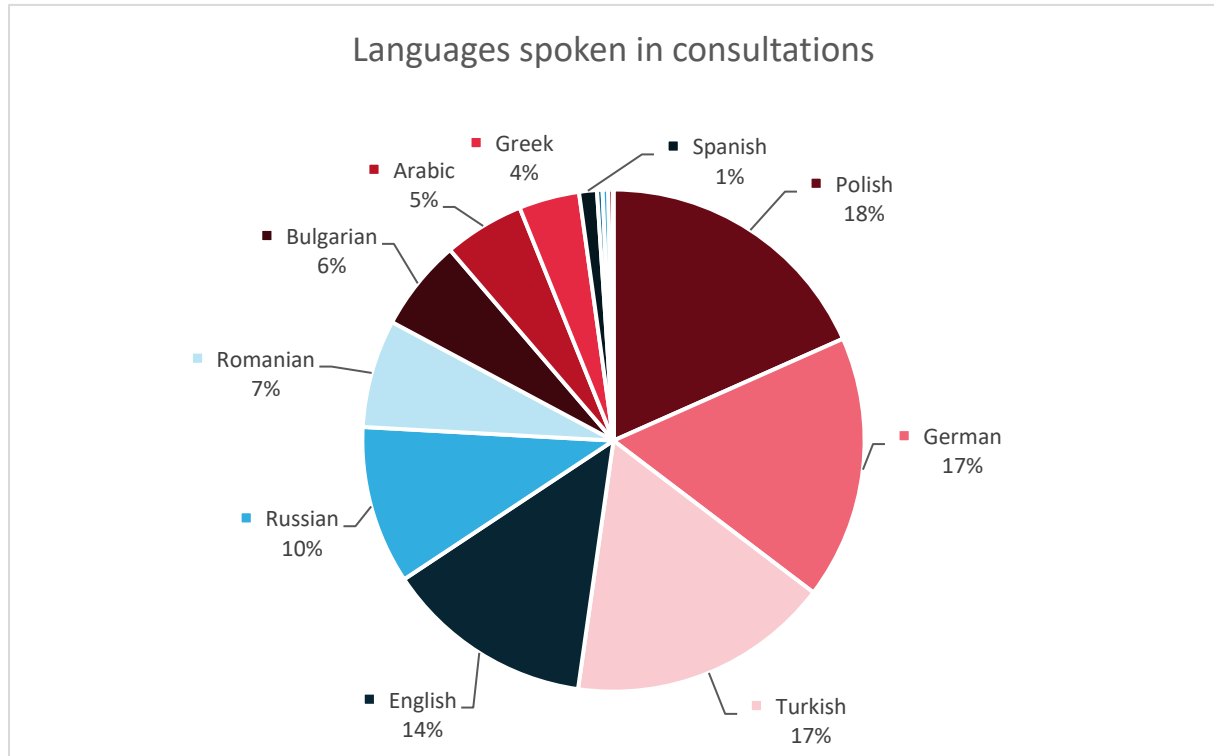
Just over 40 percent of the individuals seeking advice were EU citizens, with the majority being Polish, Bulgarian, Romanian, and Greek nationals. The ongoing high proportion of individuals with unknown origin (almost 10 percent) can be explained by the significant number of telephone consultations. In this type of consultation, origin is rarely addressed unless it is relevant to the subject of consultation.





b) Languages spoken in consultations

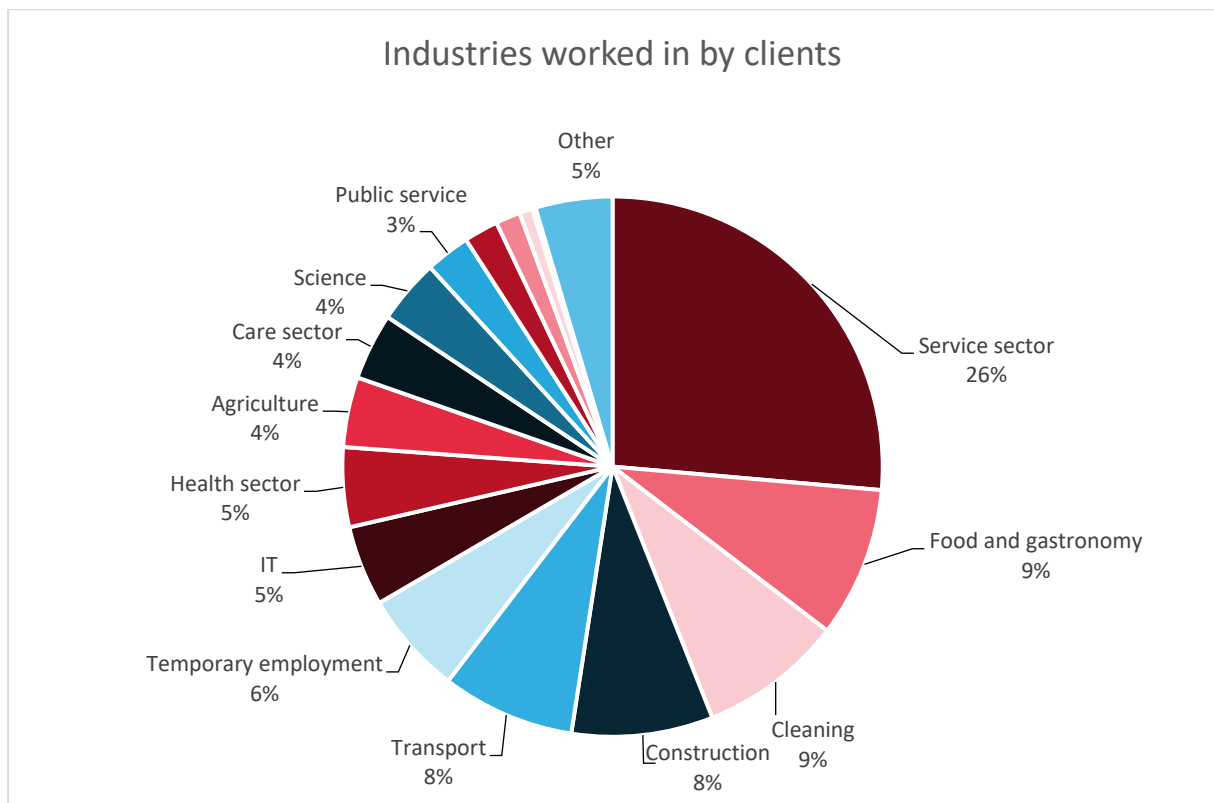
The labour and social rights advice is provided, as far as possible, in the native language of the individuals seeking advice. If necessary, BEMA engages interpreters for the consultation.



c) Industries

As in previous years, the service sector remained the most prominent industry for the workers seeking advice from BEMA in 2022, accounting for 26% of the total. Within this sector, a significant portion of BEMA's clients work as bicycle couriers (also known as riders), office employees, or call center staff. Other notable industries represented were food and gastronomy (9%), cleaning (9%), construction (8%), transportation (8%), and temporary employment (6%).

In 42% of cases no industry data was available. This primarily includes cases of currently non-employed individuals seeking social and legal advice, or consultations on labour rights where the industry was not specified by the clients as it was not relevant to the consultation topic.



d) Main focus areas in consultation

In 2022 the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on employment conditions, particularly for precarious workers, continued to dominate. We received many inquiries from anxious workers with questions about (often immediate) terminations, unpaid wages, as well as short-time work benefits or supplementary support. Migrant workers were disproportionately affected by job losses (due to employment in severely affected sectors), job insecurity (due to atypical employment), poor working conditions (in terms of safety and health protection), and discrimination (regarding healthcare and job opportunities).

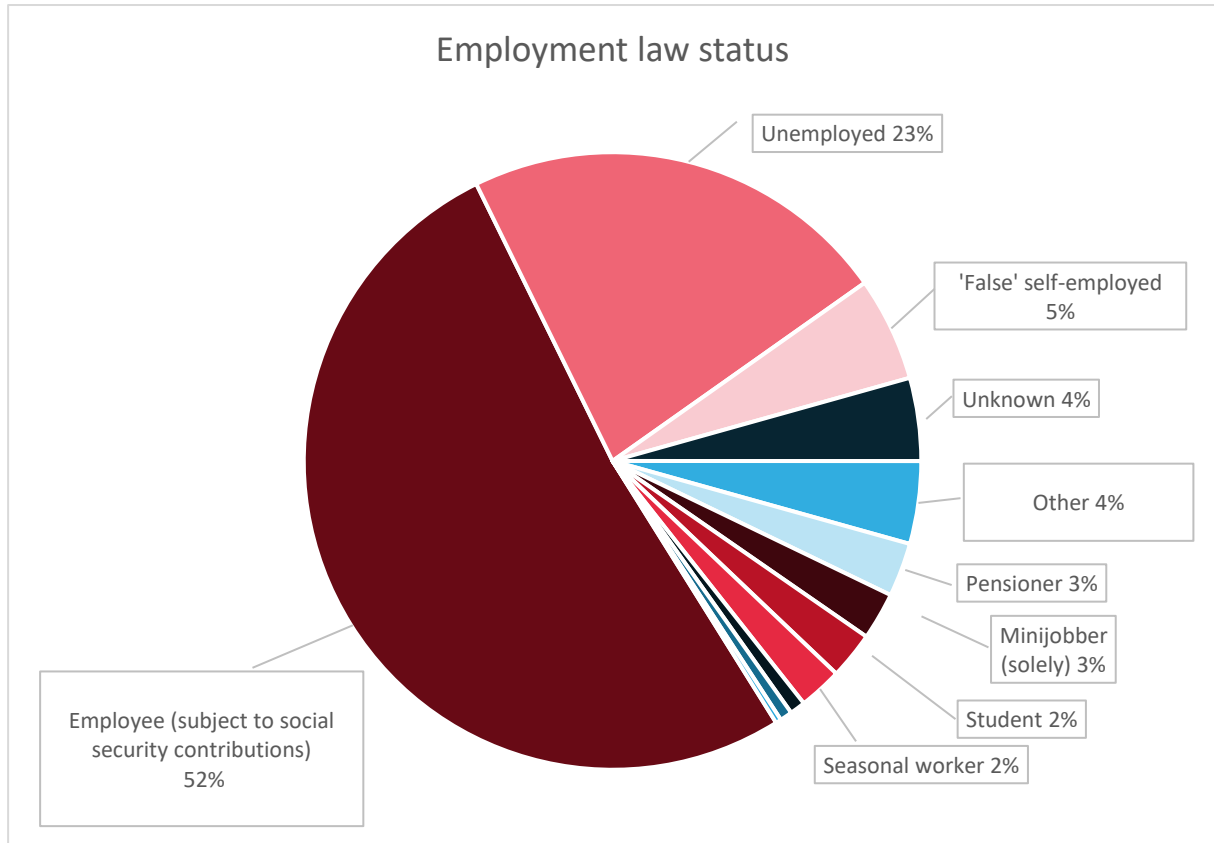
As in previous years, an average of two topics were addressed simultaneously in one consultation. This demonstrates that issues relating to labour, social, and residency law often intertwine. The integrated and specialised consultation approach of BEMA is here particularly helpful in responding to complex queries and situations.

Most frequent topics of consultations

Concerning labour law	Concerning social and residence law
Employment contract	Unemployment benefit II (Arbeitslosengeld II; from 01.01.2023 called „Bürgergeld“)
Termination	Residence status
Wages	Unemployment benefit I (Arbeitslosengeld I)
Vacation/Paid leave	Coordination of social systems
Working hours	Health insurance
Incapacity for work	Work permit
Sickness benefit	Housing/housing shortage
Wage fraud	Social security
Self-employment	Registration in Germany
Income tax	Severe disability

e) Employment law status

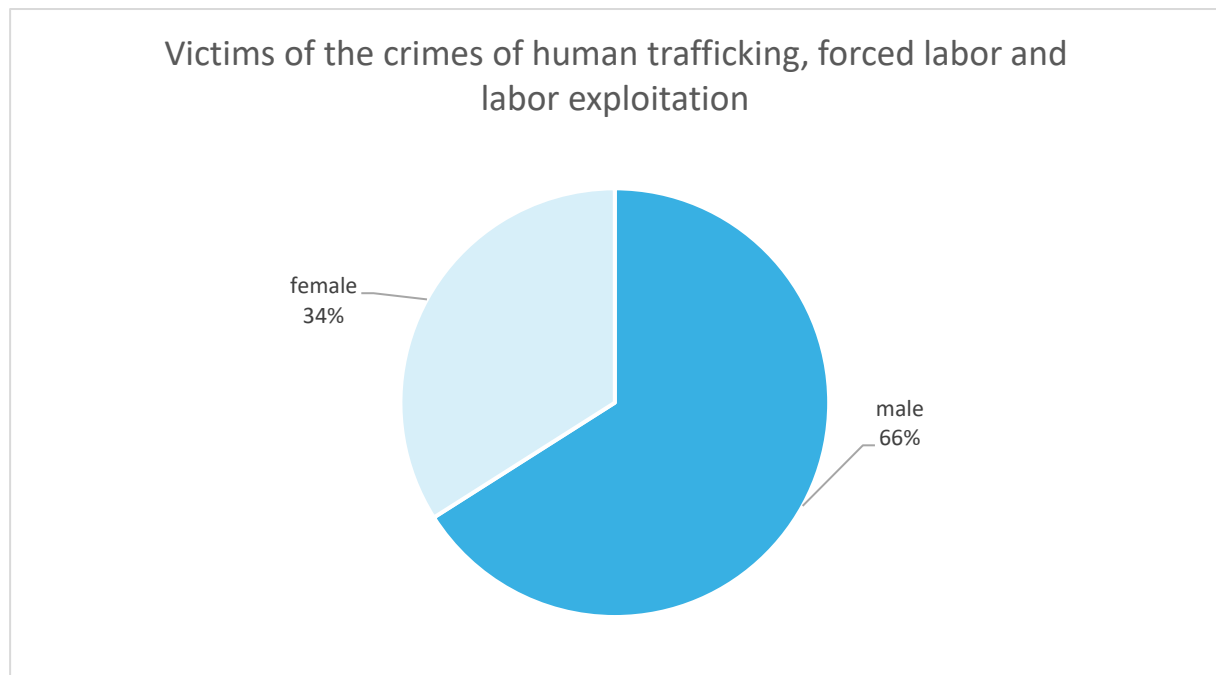
The great majority of the clients were employed. Half of them were in employment relationships subject to social security contributions. Just over one-fifth were unemployed at the time of consultation.



2. Support for victims of human trafficking, forced labour and labour exploitation

BEMA provides specialised counselling on the issues of human trafficking for the purpose of labour exploitation and forced labour² regardless of their willingness to testify in potential criminal proceedings, victims are advised on their legal options and provided with intensive support.

In 2022, a total of 41 individuals who received advice and information were suspected to be victims of human trafficking for the purpose of labour exploitation, forced labour, or labour exploitation as defined in sections 232 et seq. of the Criminal Code. Most of the victims were male.³



The specialised counselling for victims of human trafficking for the purpose of labour exploitation and forced labour in BEMA has gained recognition in recent years. It is part of a network of specialised counselling centres, partner projects and organisations, as well as authorities.

An increasing awareness of signs of coercion and exploitation is accompanied by a rising number of identified victims who are being assisted by BEMA. Given the complex and often long-term support needs of the victims, this counselling service regularly faces its limits.

² "Human trafficking" also includes sexual exploitation and other phenomena. However, BEMA only provides advice for the purpose of labor exploitation and forced labor.

³ The numbers represent the case numbers in our counseling service. Actual victim numbers cannot be deduced from them, as many affected individuals do not seek help from our counseling service. There are several barriers that prevent victims from approaching authorities or counseling centers. Additionally, it still happens that victims are not identified as such or a conclusive determination of whether there is indeed labor exploitation in a suspected case is ultimately not made.

3. Special report: Hidna Pratsya Berlin (Ukrainian for "Decent Work Berlin")

In early summer 2022, Arbeit und Leben was able to expand the BEMA team with two new colleagues. They provide a specialised programme for people who have fled from Ukraine. Through a wide range of services including counselling, training, informational materials, networking, and public relations, BEMA supports this target group in Berlin in asserting their labour rights and preventing exploitative working conditions.

In 2022, Hidna Pratsya Berlin potentially reached a total of 181,190 individuals, with 1,290 of them receiving personal counselling, training, and attending events. Potentially, 179,900 individuals were reached through the digital reach of the groups where information about Hidna Pratsya Berlin was posted. In 328 labour law consultations (including 37 follow-up consultations), 291 individuals received personal advice. A total of 22 trainings took place, both online and in person, providing 349 individuals with basic information about German labour law. Additional outreach and awareness were achieved through numerous field actions and participation in network meetings. Thanks to the extensive reach of social media posts, particularly on Telegram and Facebook, labour law information and invitations to trainings were widely disseminated, potentially reaching 179,900 individuals.⁴

The colleagues of Hidna Pratsya Berlin also participated in professional exchanges and network meetings to promote their services. This resulted in a citywide network of actors who regularly exchange information. The outreach work conducted in refugee accommodations and community venues such as Café Refugio or Café Ukraine was productive in engaging the target group at a low threshold. Building trust was particularly emphasised in direct contact with those seeking advice, as it forms the basis for consultations.

Through Hidna Pratsya Berlin, many displaced individuals who have come to Berlin from Ukraine were informed about and advised on their labour rights. At the same time, the involved actors were sensitised to the focus on decent work for displaced people.

⁴The consultation numbers listed here have already been included in the preceding overall BEMA statistics. However, trainings and network activities can be separately recorded and represented.

4. Publications by BEMA in English

- [Advisory services on employment and labour rights](#) - Information leaflet
- [Work hours calendar](#) - German - English
- [Practical guide for EU workers in Germany](#) - A guide to good working conditions and equal treatment
- [Employment of EU citizens without registration of a German residential address](#) – Info letter

Further information and materials: [Resources and publications | BEMA](#)

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Das BEMA wird gefördert von Berliner Senatsverwaltung für Arbeit, Soziales, Gleichstellung, Integration, Vielfalt und Antidiskriminierung. Träger ist Arbeit und Leben Berlin-Brandenburg DGB/VHS e. V. .