



## NATIONAL SUMMARY SHEETS ON EDUCATION SYSTEMS IN EUROPE AND ONGOING REFORMS

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### POLAND

#### 1. Education population and language of instruction

In 2006, the number of young people under 29 years of age (15 214 875) accounted for 39,9% of the population, and the number of children of compulsory school age (4 954 097) accounted for 13,0% of the population. The language of instruction is Polish.

#### 2. Administrative control and extent of public-sector funded education

As of 5th May 2006 there are two separate ministries in Poland: Ministry of National Education and Ministry of Science and Higher Education.

In 2005/06 almost all pupils attended public-sector schools (98%). Most of the funds come from the state budget. The administration, organization and decisions relating to the use of financial resources by schools are the subject of consultation between the school and the body running the school, i.e. local authorities (*gminy*) – in case of kindergartens, primary and lower secondary schools, and district authorities (*powiaty*) – in case of post-gymnasium schools. The inspection of teaching standards in schools comes directly under the ministry of education and is represented by a regional administrative body (*kuratorium*).

The advisory body for the higher education policy in Poland is General Council of Higher Education (*Rada Główna Szkolnictwa Wyższego*).

#### 3. Pre-primary education

This educational level is regarded as the first level of the school system. It concerns children from 3 to 6 years of age. As of 2004/2005 six-year-old children are obliged to complete a year of preparation for primary education (under municipal responsibility) called "0 grade". The classes are attached either to kindergartens or primary-schools.

Both private and public schools can be fee-paying, however in the latter case the conditions specified in the legislation apply. Local authorities are in charge of the provision of free of charge classes in public schools in the framework of core curriculum (up to 5 hours a day). Any classes lasting longer than 5 hours and all extracurricular activities are paid for by the parents. Local authorities can organise support to financially disadvantaged families with young children in various forms, e.g.: full or partial kindergarten fee waivers, or financial and material support.

In 2006/07 there were 17 329 pre-school institutions (both kindergartens and pre-school classes attached to primary schools), attended by 862 656 children.

#### 4. Compulsory full-time education

##### (a) Phases

<b><i>Klasa zerowa</i> (pre-school "0" grade)</b>	<b>6 years of age</b>
<b><i>Szkoła podstawowa</i> (6-year primary school)</b>	<b>7-13 years of age</b> <b>Stage 1 – integrated teaching, 7-10 years of age</b> <b>Stage 2 – teaching based on separate subjects, 10-13 years of age</b>
<b><i>Gimnazjum</i> (3-year lower secondary school)</b>	<b>13-16 years of age</b> <b>Stage 3 – teaching based on separate subjects</b>

#### (b) Admissions criteria

All pupils attend school free of charge. The only admission criterion is the age limit (for "0" grade - to have reached 6 years of age during the calendar year in which compulsory education starts, for primary school – to have reached 7 years of age). The admission criteria for gymnasium is the certificate of completion the primary school (to obtain this certificate a pupil needs to sit an external test at the end of primary school).

Parents are obliged to register their children in the school or in kindergartens ("0" grade) nearest to their home.

#### (c) Length of the school day/week/year

The school year is divided into two semesters. It comprises around 185 days between September and June. The compulsory subjects (a maximum of 23 forty-five-minute lessons for Stage 1, and a maximum of 28 to a maximum of 31 - for Stage 2 and 3) are in general spread over five days a week.

#### (d) Class size/student grouping

In 2006/07, the ratio of pupils to teachers in primary education was 13:1. The average class had 20 pupils. The legislation does not define the standards for the number of students in a class. The main criterion for class composition is age.

Only one teacher is responsible for all subjects in the first stage of instruction, with the exception of foreign language teaching (specialist teachers) in those schools in which finances permit this type of teaching. From the fourth year on, each subject is taught by a specialist teacher.

#### (e) Curricular control and content

Core curricula for compulsory teaching are the same for all pupils. For the first stage of primary school the curricula for integrated teaching apply, for the second stage of primary school and gymnasium there are curricula for separate subjects and cross-curricular themes. The schools (teachers) can choose the textbooks from a list approved by the ministry of education. They are free to decide the teaching and assessment methods, introduce innovation teaching methods and choose curricula (from a list approved by the ministry of education). They can also develop their own curricula – based on core curricula – and submit them to the ministry for approval.

#### (f) Assessment, progression and qualifications

The assessment of the knowledge and skills of pupils throughout the school year is not standardised in Poland and remains totally at the discretion of teachers. Assessments are made on the basis of regular written and oral tests. The results obtained at the end of each semester must be approved by the teachers' council of each school. Pupils who obtain unsatisfactory results are required to repeat a year if the teachers' council decides so.

The external evaluation system in compulsory education consists of the following external standardised tests and examinations:

**At the end of 6-year primary school (age 13)** - general, obligatory **test** with no selection function; the entry for the test enables pupils to start education in the gymnasium; it provides pupils, parents as well as both schools, i.e. the primary school and the gymnasium, with information about the level of achievements of the pupils. The skills required in core curricula are examined. The test was conducted for the first time in 2002.

**At the end of 3-year lower secondary school, gymnasium (age 16)** – general, obligatory **examination**, the results of which are indicated on the gymnasium leaving certificate. This examination checks abilities, skills and knowledge in the field of humanities and science (and a foreign language as of 2008/09). It was conducted for the first time in 2002. The results of the test together with the final assessment of the pupils' performance determine the admission to the upper-secondary schools.

All tests and examinations are organised by agencies - 8 Regional Examination Boards supported and supervised by the Central Examination Board.

In 2006/07 there were 14 503 primary schools and 7 076 gymnasia, attended by 2 484 820 and 1 528 755 pupils respectively.

## 5. Upper secondary and post-secondary education

### (a) Types of education

<b>Liceum ogólnokształcące (general upper secondary school)</b>	<b>16-19 years of age</b>
<b>Liceum profilowane (specialised upper secondary school)</b>	<b>16-19 years of age</b>
<b>Technikum (technical upper secondary school)</b>	<b>16-20 years of age</b>
<b>Zasadnicza szkoła zawodowa (basic vocational school)</b>	<b>16-18/19 years of age</b>
<b>Uzupelniające liceum ogólnokształcące (supplementary general upper secondary school)</b>	<b>18/19-20/21 years of age</b>
<b>Technikum uzupełniające (supplementary technical upper secondary school)</b>	<b>18/19-21/22 years of age</b>
<b>Szkoła policealna (post-secondary school)</b>	<b>19-21 years of age (very rarely 20)</b>

As of September 2004 two types of schools have been introduced: supplementary general secondary schools and supplementary technical secondary schools.

### (b) Admissions criteria

The number of points indicated on the gymnasium leaving certificate (based on results achieved in specific subjects and other achievements) including the points received at the gymnasium examination decides about the pupils' admission to an upper secondary school.

The detailed admission rules are defined by each post-gymnasium school which opens admissions to new pupils.

### (c) Curricular control and content

The ministry of education defines core curricula for general education for each subject and cross-curricular theme in all types of school. Teachers can choose the textbooks from a list approved by the ministry. They are free to decide the teaching and assessment methods, introduce innovative teaching methods and choose curricula (from a list approved by the ministry of education). They can also develop their own curricula – based on core curricula – and submit them to the ministry for approval.

### (d) Assessment, progression and qualifications

Assessment at this level of education is similar to the arrangements in compulsory education. At the end of the course, all schools (except for the *szkoły zasadnicze*) organize final examinations (*matura*). The *liceum ogólnokształcące*, the *liceum profilowane*, the *liceum uzupełniające* and the *technikum* may issue *świadcstwo dojrzałości* (a certificate for those who sat for and successfully completed the final examination, which is required for admission to higher education). The *szkoły zasadnicze* issue *świadcstwo ukończenia szkoły zasadniczej* (a leaving certificate that gives students access to the job market). Post-secondary schools prepare their students for professional life.

The ***matura* examination**, entitling pupils for admission to higher education is made up of two parts: external written (prepared and assessed by Regional Examination Commissions) and internal oral (prepared and assessed by school teachers).

The vocational examination, called "***egzamin zawodowy***" (in basic vocational schools, technical upper-secondary schools and post-secondary schools) consists of two parts: written, which examines the knowledge and abilities connected with a specific job and running business activity, and a practical one, which examines the skills necessary to perform the job.

All tests and examinations are organised by agencies - 8 Regional Examination Boards supported and supervised by the Central Examination Board.

In 2006/07 there were 2 543 general upper secondary schools with 732 908 pupils, 4 104 technical and specialised upper secondary schools with 717 475 pupils and 1 760 basic vocational schools with 229 170 pupils. In the same school year there were 3 738 post-secondary schools attended by 327 876 students.

## 6. Higher education

As of 5<sup>th</sup> May 2006, higher education is supervised by a separate ministry: Ministry of Science and Higher Education.

### (a) Types of institution

The following types of state higher education institutions can be found: universities, technical universities, agricultural academies, schools of economics, teacher education schools, medical academies, maritime schools, academies of physical education, artistic schools, theological schools, higher vocational schools, military schools, and internal affairs schools. There also exist non-state higher education institutions including higher vocational schools.

The following types of study are distinguished by the new law (Act of 27 July 2005 "Law on Higher Education"): full-time and part-time studies. The full-time studies are defined as the basic type of studies, unless the school's statutes decide otherwise. Full-time daytime studies at state HEIs are free of charge, with the exception of repeating classes required in the case of courses failed by a student.

### (b) Access

The final examination certificate (*świadectwo dojrzałości*) is required by all institutions for admission to higher education. Admission is based on the results of *egzamin dojrzałości* examination. Additional admission requirements depend on the type of institution or faculty (e.g. predisposition tests in the field of arts and sports).

### (c) Qualifications

Higher vocational education (the first cycle studies - according to the Act of 27 July 2005 "Law on Higher Education") lasts from 3 to 4 years and finishes with the vocational qualification diploma and the title of *licencjat* or *inżynier* which gives access to the job market or to extended higher studies (the second cycle studies) and obtaining the title *magister* or equivalent. Only full time daytime studies at public universities are free of charge.

Uniform master degree studies at the universities and other university-type institutions last from 4.5 to 6 years. They finish with the *dyplom ukończenia studiów wyższych* (the university higher education diploma). Students are awarded the title of *magister*, *magister sztuki*, *magister inżynier*, *magister inżynier architekt*, or *lekarz*, *lekarz dentysta*, *lekarz weterynarii*, *magister pielęgniarstwa*, *magister położnictwa*, depending on the field of studies they have followed. Master degree holders can apply to do a doctorate (the third cycle studies).

In the process of harmonising Polish higher education with the recommendations of the Bologna process the following changes have been introduced:

- two – cycle studies (described above),
- supplement to a diploma (as of January 2005 compulsory in all HEIs)
- the system of ensuring quality and issuing accreditation (State Accreditation Committee – *Państwowa Komisja Akredytacyjna*).

In the academic year 2006/07 there were 448 HEIs in Poland (both public and non-public) and 1 941 400 higher education students.

## 7. Special needs

Special education is an integral part of the Polish education system. This is reflected in legislation, which is common to both mainstream and special education.

Children can be qualified for suitable forms of special education on the basis of the opinion issued after the psychological, pedagogical and medical examination, carried out by specialists from psychological and educational services centres or external experts,

Most children with special educational needs are taught in separate schools or special classes in mainstream schools (1.78% of all pupils in compulsory education). 11.7% of all disabled pupils learned in integration classes organised in primary schools, gymnasia and post-gymnasium schools in the school year 2005/06. Integration is subject to the favourable recommendation given by the competent authority and/or the parents.

## 8. Teachers

Teachers must have a higher education qualification. The type of training required depends on the teaching level.

- I. Primary education level: the teacher is required to graduate from the first or second cycle studies (they last 3 or 5 years, teachers are awarded the titles of *licencjat* or *magister*) - ISCED 5 A (B.A. or M.A.), or from teacher training colleges (they last 3 years and finish with a diploma) – ISCED 5B.
- II. Lower secondary education level: a degree of *licencjat* or *magister* is required (ISCED 5A B.A. or M.A)
- III. Upper secondary education level: a *magister* degree is required (ISCED 5A M.A. only)

The completion of professional training is also required at all the levels of education. The concurrent model prevails, though the consecutive model is also available for all 3 levels of primary and secondary education.

According to teacher training standards, teachers should undergo professional training, they should be competent to teach two subjects, they should be computer literate and know a foreign language (at least at the B2, B2+ level of the Common European Framework of References for Languages).

The amended Teachers' Charter, adopted on the 18<sup>th</sup> of February 2000, has introduced four categories in the teaching career:

- Trainee teacher
- Contract teacher
- Appointed teacher
- Chartered teacher

Chartered teachers with an outstanding record may also be awarded the title of honorary school education professor.

In the school year 2004/05 there were 543 610 full-time teachers in Poland, of whom 33 890 were trainee teachers (6,2%), 88 100 contract teachers (16,2%), 296 250 appointed teachers (54,5%), 125 370 chartered teachers (23,1%) .

## 9. Current reforms and priorities

The proposal for a curricula reform has been prepared and is currently in the process of public consultation. The curricula reform: „The school – demanding but pupil-friendly” proposes to lower the age of starting the education, so that compulsory full-time education will cover children 6 years of age. The year 2008/09 will be the Year of Kindergarten Kid and new forms of pre-school education will be opened.

As of 2009 kindergarten psychologists will assess whether or not the child is ready to start the school i.e. they will formulate the diagnosis of the school maturity. On the basis of this diagnosis the parents can request postponing the compulsory education for their child.

Children aged 3- 5 will be covered by pre-school education more widely. As of 2009/2010 all five year old children will have the right to pre-primary education. The same year all the zero grade classes will be turned into pre-school centres.

The aim of the reform is to enhance the quality of education, and to tailor the teaching content to lowered age of starting the school and to the increased number of people wanting to get the upper-secondary education.

The reforms plans to introduce a smooth transition from the pre-school to primary education: there will be no more than 25 people in the classes of the first stage of primary school and there will be more extra-curricular classes for the gifted children and children in need of special support.

At the level of lower secondary school (gymnazjum) the reforms aims at adjusting the curricula of lower and upper secondary school to increase the efficiency of the 6 year cycle. Two foreign languages are to be introduced at the level of the secondary school (one of them will be continued from the primary school). The first four years of secondary education will cover general knowledge in all the main subject areas.

A compulsory external exam in a foreign language is planned to be introduced as of 2008/09.

Other proposed changes include: enhancing the quality of general education in basic and upper secondary vocational schools and giving wider choice of extra-curricular subjects in lower and upper secondary schools.

The new core curricula at the gymnazjum level, which boosts pupils' awareness to make rational decisions, proposes to introduce the modules to be selected from the pool of sports, artistic and technical subjects ( 2 hours per week) in addition to the compulsory course in general education.

Basic vocational school is to prepare the pupils to perform a specific job and to equip them with general education and the knowledge of one foreign language.

At the level of upper secondary school the reform proposes the elements of specialization i.e. two or three subjects at the extended level and a choice of extracurricular activities: ICT, sports and humane subjects.

The technical upper secondary school is to prepare the pupils to perform a specific job and to equip them with good general education, the knowledge of two foreign languages and two or three subjects at the advanced level.

The supplementary technical upper secondary school is to complement the general education from the basic vocational school, to offer two foreign languages and two or three subjects at the advanced level.

Some changes are going to be introduced in the system of the external exams. Apart from the above-mentioned foreign language exam at the end of lowersecondary school, mathematics is planned to be introduced as a Matura exam subject as of 2009/2010.

The curricula reform will cover the years 2009-2015. The pupils starting the education in the first year of the reform will be equipped with free textbooks in all the years of the reform.

For more detailed information on education systems in Europe, you may consult the EURYDICE data base, EURYBASE (<http://www.eurydice.org>)

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