



NATIONAL SUMMARY SHEETS ON EDUCATION SYSTEMS IN EUROPE AND ONGOING REFORMS

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POLAND

1. Education population and language of instruction

In December 2008, the number of young people under 29 years of age was 14 762 463 and accounted for 38.7% of the population, and the number of children of compulsory school age was 4 761 363 and accounted for 12.5 % of the population. The language of instruction is Polish.

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

In 2008/09 almost all pupils attended public-sector schools (98%). Most of the funds come from the state budget. In line with the Education System Act of 1991, schools can be of two types: public (state) schools, which offer free education within the framework of the core curricula, and non-public schools. The latter can be civic (social), church or private schools. All these schools may have their own curricula, which are approved by the Minister of National Education. They are financed by fees received from parents. Funds can also come from private enterprises and foundations. Non-public schools with the rights of public schools are eligible for a grant calculated according to the number of pupils, which equals 100% of the average cost of educating a pupil in a public school. Non-public schools in Poland have the right to issue school certificates that are recognized by all other schools and by the universities. They may be distinguished from the public schools by their individualized teaching programmes, by a wider range of curriculum choice and by a higher standard of foreign language teaching.

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 upper secondary schools.

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

The Ministry of National Education is responsible for nearly the whole system of education, with the exception of higher education which is under the supervision of the Minister of Science and Higher Education. Vocational schools, which in the past were run by other ministries, are now the responsibility of the Ministry of National Education. At present only a few schools (artistic – only with respect to artistic subjects, as well as correctional institutions) are under the supervision of the Ministry of Culture and the Ministry of Justice, respectively.

The reform of the State administration system and the education reform assume that only the national educational policy will be developed and carried out centrally, while the administration of education and the running of schools, pre-school institutions and other educational establishments are decentralized. The responsibility for the administration of public kindergartens, primary schools and gymnasia has been delegated to local authorities (communes). It has become the statutory responsibility of *powiaty* (districts) to administer upper secondary schools, artistic and special schools. The provinces (voivodships) have the coordinating function, supervising the implementation of the policy of the Ministry and being responsible for pedagogical supervision.

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 exceeding the 5-hour daily limit 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 2008/09 there were 17 280 pre-school institutions (both kindergartens and pre-school classes attached to primary schools), attended by 919.1 thousand children. The overall participation rate is 63.1% for children aged 3-6 (In 2007/08 there was: in cities: 75,2%, in the countryside 39,0%); 94,5% for 6 year-olds in "0" grades and 52,7% for children aged 3-5.

4. Compulsory full-time education

(a) Phases

Children must attend compulsory education for ten years from six years old.

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

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

The admission criterion for gimnazjum is the certificate of primary school completion (to obtain this certificate a pupil needs to sit an external test at the end of primary school).

In 2008/09 there were 14 067 primary schools and 7 204 lower secondary schools (gimnazja), attended by 2 294.4 thousand and 1 381.4 thousand pupils respectively.

(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 minimum 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 2007/08, the ratio of pupils to teachers in both primary and lower secondary education was 13:1. The legislation does not define the standards for the number of students in a class except for the grades 1-3 of primary school where it is recommended that the number of students in a class does not exceed 26. The main criterion for class composition is age.

Only one teacher is responsible for all subjects at 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, created at the central level, 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 *gimnazjum* there are curricula for separate subjects and cross-curricular themes. (see also point 9, curricular reform)

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 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.

(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 the 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 *gimnazjum*; it provides pupils, parents as well as both schools, i.e. the primary school and the *gimnazjum*, 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 the 3-year lower secondary school, *gimnazjum* (age 16) – general, obligatory examination, the results of which are indicated on the *gimnazjum* 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 upper-secondary schools.

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

5. Upper secondary and post-secondary education

(a) Types of education

Compulsory part-time education in the school or out-of-school forms lasts until 18 years of age.

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

In 2008/09 there were 2 386 general upper secondary schools with 686.4 thousand pupils, 3 146 technical and specialised upper secondary schools with 622.4 thousand pupils and 1 784 basic vocational schools with 239.1 thousand pupils. In the same school year there were 3 369 post-secondary schools attended by 344.1 thousand students.

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

The detailed admission rules are defined by each post-*gimnazjum* 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 the 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 *zasadnicze szkoły zawodowe*) organize final examinations (*egzamin maturalny*). The *liceum ogólnokształcące*, the *liceum profilowane*, the *liceum uzupełniające* and the *technikum* may issue *świadectwo maturalne* (a certificate for those who sat for and successfully completed the final examination, which is required for admission to higher education). The *zasadnicze szkoły zawodowe* issue *świadectwo ukończenia zasadniczej szkoły zawodowej* (a leaving certificate that gives students access to the job market). Post-secondary schools prepare their students for professional life.

The *matura* examination (*egzamin maturalny*), 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 (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 a 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.

6. Higher education

As of 5th May 2006, higher education has been 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. All the following types of HEIs may have the status of university or non-university institutions depending on whether at least one of their organisational units has the right to confer PhD degree.

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 Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) are free of charge, with the exception of repeating classes required in the case of courses failed by a student.

In the academic year 2007/08 there were 455 HEIs in Poland (both public and non-public) and 1 937.4 thousand higher education students.

(b) Access

The final examination certificate (*świadectwo maturalne*) is required by all institutions for admission to higher education. Admission is based on the results of *egzamin maturalny* 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 of *magister* or equivalent.

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),
- diploma supplement (as of January 2005 compulsory in all HEIs)
- the system of ensuring quality and issuing accreditation (State Accreditation Committee – *Państwowa Komisja Akredytacyjna*).
- ECTS

7. Special needs

Special education is an integral part of the Polish education system. This is reflected in the 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 (1.67% of all pupils in compulsory education). 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 5A (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 have a good command of 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 18th 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.

Trainee and contract teachers have the status of contractual employees; appointed and chartered teachers enjoy the status of career civil servants.

In the school year 2007/08 there were 490 500 full-time teachers in Poland, of whom 27 300 were trainee teachers (5,6%), 84 800 contract teachers (17,3%), 193 300 appointed teachers (39,4%), 185 100 chartered teachers (37,7%).

9. Current reforms and priorities

- The age of starting primary school lowered

According to the legislation adopted in 2009, compulsory pre-primary education will start at the age of 5 as of 2011, and compulsory primary education at the age of 6 as of 2012. In compliance with the new legislation, before 2012 parents have the right to send their 6-year old children to school if they wish so, and schools are obliged to enrol these children.

- Curricula reform introduced

The curricula reform has been introduced and will be implemented gradually beginning with the school year 2009/10. In the school year 2009/10 the new core curricula have been introduced into pre-primary schools, first grades of primary schools and first grades of lower-secondary schools, next year the reform will encompass first and second grades of primary and lower-secondary schools and gradually, year by year, it will reach all the grades throughout the whole education system. The implementation of the curricula reform will be completed in general upper secondary schools and basic vocational schools in six years i.e. by the year 2015; in technical upper secondary schools and upper secondary schools with artistic profiles by the year 2016, in supplementary upper secondary schools by the year 2017.

The main aims of the reform are to:

- adjust the content of teaching to the present population of pupils,
- prolong time allowed for implementing the general knowledge cycle i.e. give teachers and students of lower secondary and upper secondary schools enough time to cover all the necessary knowledge by creating a coherent curriculum for the 6/7-year period instead of dividing it into two separate, repetitive three-year cycles,
- adjust the core curriculum to the perceptive ability of younger students as a result of lowering the school starting age.

- Changes in the system of external exams

Mathematics is to be introduced as an obligatory *Matura* exam subject as of 2009/2010. It will replace an exam in a subject selected by a student. Thus each student will take the same set of basic subjects and have the right to choose one up to three additional subjects depending on the requirements of the HEI he/she will apply to be accepted into.

- A new programme “ Joyful School”

The Ministry of National Education has launched a new programme “ Joyful School” which is to provide school running bodies with financial support for the purchase of educational aids and equipment for the organisation of school playgrounds in order to cater for the proper psychophysical development of the youngest students. The aim is to create at schools conditions comparable to these of pre-school standards.

- Higher education - a reform of the system undergoes wide public consultation

Its main aims are to improve the quality of teaching and research and focus on innovation. Changes in organisation (simplifying academic career procedures) and teaching content will be introduced. Teaching will be better adjusted to the needs of the Polish industry. The reform envisages a more individualised and flexible system of choosing the forms and scope of study. It also aims at enhancing solutions to open Polish universities to foreign students and improving access to HEIs for the disabled students.

Once the process of consultation is completed, the reform assumptions will be reflected in the Law on Higher Education and a number of other regulations and recommendations of the Minister of Science and Higher Education.

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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