

December 2015

THE SYSTEM OF EDUCATION IN POLAND IN BRIEF 2015

Polish Eurydice Unit



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ORGANIZATION, ADMINISTRATION AND FINANCE OF EDUCATION

The education system in Poland has the following specific features:

- public school sector dominates over private;
- includes a system of external examinations carried out at the end of primary as well as of lower and upper secondary school;
- grants teachers a unique professional position regulated by the Teacher's Charter, pertaining to their employment, salaries and promotion;
- combines centralized educational policy and governance (the Minister of National Education and the Minister of Science and Higher Education) and decentralized administration of educational institutions (local government authorities).

The Constitution of the Republic of Poland guarantees:

- Every person has the right to education,
- Education is compulsory until the age of 18,
- Education in public schools is free of charge,
- Parents are free to choose schools other than public schools for their children,
- Public authorities provide citizens with general and equal access to education.

There are public and non-public schools. Non-public schools comprise civic schools, church-administered schools and private schools, which can be financed from tuition fees paid by pupil's parents, and from other sources such as private business or foundations. Non-public schools with public school status are entitled to receive from the general subsidy an amount of funding equal to that granted to public schools.

The Polish system of education distinguishes **compulsory full-time education** and **compulsory part-time education**. The former concerns pupils between the ages of 5 and 15, whereas the latter – young people of 15-18 years. Full-time education entails attending school in the required period of time, while part-time education may be followed both in school or in out-of-school settings such as on-the-job training. As far as youngest children are concerned, all 5-year-olds are required to follow one year of pre-school education before they go to primary school.

The system of education is centrally managed by two institutions – **the Ministry of National Education** and **the Ministry of Science and Higher Education**. The former, together with regional pedagogical superintendents, supervises schools and kindergartens while higher education is managed centrally by the Ministry of Science

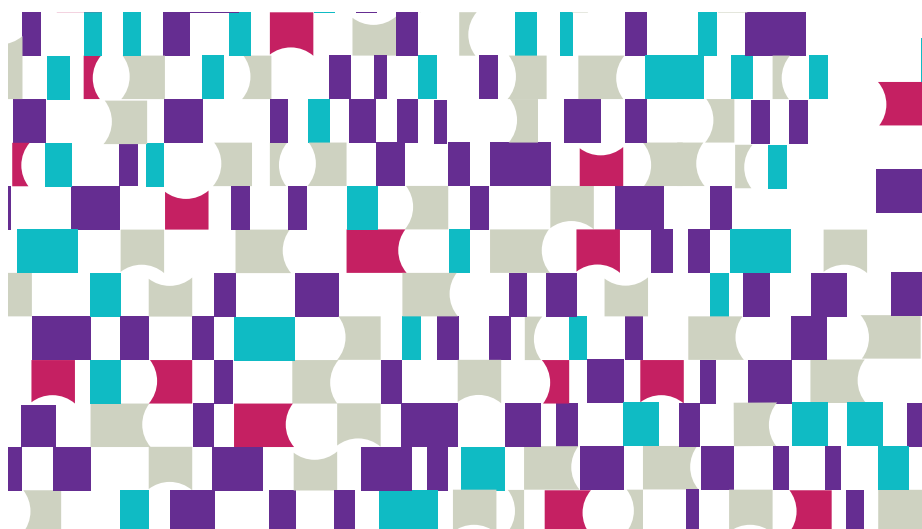


and Higher Education, advised by the Central Council for Science and Higher Education. Yet, universities as a rule are autonomous which means that all academic and internal matters are solved within the framework of their own structures and authorities.

Educational policy is framed at the central level, whereas administration and management over kindergartens, primary and secondary schools are the responsibility of local authorities. Administrative and organizational matters as well as public funding allocation remain in the hands of schools and school governing bodies – communes (in the case of public kindergartens, primary and lower secondary schools) and districts (in the case of public upper secondary schools).

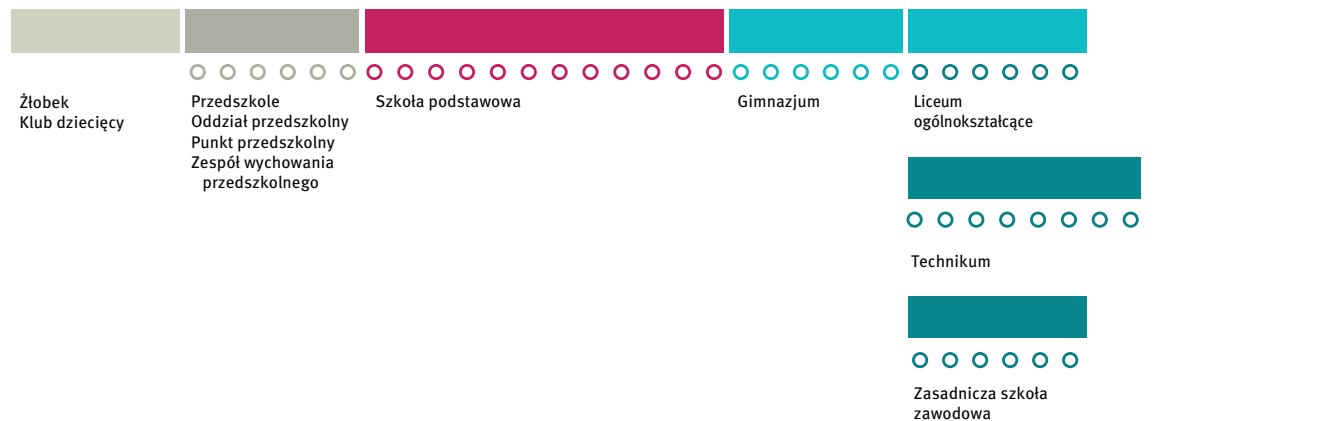
The greater part of financial support for education comes from the public budget. The amount of the general subvention for all local government units is defined annually in the budgetary act.

In the school year 2013/14, as many as 95 per cent of pupils at the compulsory schooling age attended public schools providing free education within the core curriculum.



AGE OF PUPILS

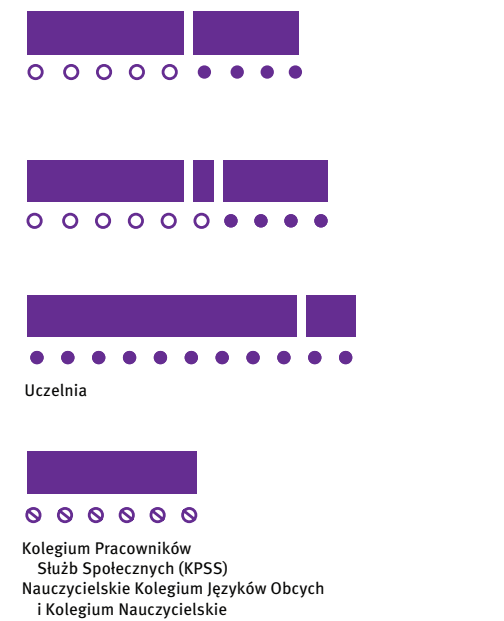
0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22



- Early childhood education and care (for which the ministry of education is not responsible)
- Early childhood education and care (for which the ministry of education is responsible)
- Primary education
- Secondary general education
- Secondary vocational education
- Post-secondary non-tertiary education
- Tertiary education (full-time)
- Compulsory full-time education
- Compulsory part-time education

THE DURATION OF STUDIES (IN YEARS)

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8



Allocation to the ISCED 2011 levels:

- ISCED 0
- ISCED 1
- ISCED 2
- ISCED 3
- ISCED 4
- ISCED 5
- ISCED 6
- ISCED 7

Reference year 2015/16

EDUCATIONAL STAGES

Early childhood education and care

Early childhood education and care (ECEC) consists of two stages for two age groups that are provided with different settings.

ECEC for children aged 0–5 years	
Children aged 0–3	Children aged 3–5
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ crèches (<i>żłobki</i>) ■ kids clubs (<i>kluby dziecięce</i>) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ kindergarten (<i>przedszkola</i>) ■ pre-school classes in primary schools (<i>oddziały przedszkolne w szkołach podstawowych</i>) ■ pre-school centres (<i>zespoły wychowania przedszkolnego</i>) ■ pre-school units (<i>punkty przedszkolne dla dzieci starszych</i>)

Crèches and kids' clubs formally do not belong to the system of education, but are subject to the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy. Attendance at crèches is optional and is determined by parents. Care provided by crèches is subject to a fee equal either to the amount specified in regulations (hourly rate plus meals) in the case of public crèches, or to the amount set by the crèches themselves in the case of private ones.

Kindergartens and other pre-school institutions are part of the system supervised by the Ministry of National Education. Pre-school education is optional for children aged 3-4 years (since 2014 every 4-year-old has a place of care guaranteed), but compulsory for 5-year-olds. Education and care provided in public and private kindergartens are subject to a fee, but this varies significantly with the type of institution. In public kindergartens, it is the communes that provide education and care for no less than 5 hours a day free of charge. When this time is exceeded, parents are charged for the extra hours and for additional classes and meals. As of September 2013, however, the rate per each extra hour cannot be higher than 1 PLN, inclusive of additional classes. In addition, communes respond to local families' needs by arranging various forms of support for those living in extremely unfavourable conditions, e.g. by full or partial exemption of fees and by provision of material goods.

In the school year 2013/2014, there were almost 21,5 thousand pre-school institutions attended by almost 1,3 million children.



Participation of 4-year-olds in pre-school education in 1998, 2009 and 2014

1998	28%
2009	53%
2014	71%

Compulsory education

Full-time **compulsory education** lasts 10 years and comprises: the last year of pre-school education, followed by 6 years of primary school and 3 years of lower secondary school.

Stages in compulsory education	Duration	Age of pupils
Kindergarten (<i>Przedszkole</i>)	1 year	5*
Primary school (<i>Szkoła podstawowa</i>)	6 years	6–12**
Lower secondary school (<i>Gimnazjum</i>)	3 years	12–15***

* since 2011 r.

** or 7-13 for those starting primary school at the age of 7 (2014/2015 or earlier)

*** or 13-16 for those starting primary school at the age of 7 (2014/2015 or earlier)

In the school year 2013/14, there were 13,4 thousand primary schools and 7,6 thousand lower secondary schools, attended, respectively, by 2,15 and 1,14 million pupils.

Admission requirements

Education in **primary schools** is free of charge for all pupils and the only requirement for admission is the age of a child. In the school year 2014/15, the compulsory schooling starting age was lowered from 7 to 6 years of age (which concerned 6-year-olds born in the first half of the year), and from 2015/16, all children aged 6 are required to start primary school.

Pupils are admitted to **lower secondary school** (*gimnazjum*) on the basis of a primary school leaving certificate and the external test taken upon its completion. Currently, pupils attending *gimnazjum* are aged 13-16.



The school year comprises around 180 days, from September to June, and is divided into two semesters. The compulsory subjects are in general spread over five weekdays. The legislation defines the standards for the number of pupils in a class for grades 1-3 of primary school only, where it is recommended that the number should not exceed 25. If this number is exceeded an additional teacher is engaged. The main criterion for class composition is age. At the first educational stage (grades 1-3), the curricula for integrated teaching apply and one teacher is responsible for all subjects with the exception of foreign language teaching (specialist teachers). For the second stage of primary school and for lower secondary school, there are curricula for separate subjects and each subject is taught by a specialist teacher.

Core curricula for compulsory teaching are the same for all pupils and are developed at the central level by experts appointed by the Ministry of National Education. Teachers may choose textbooks from the list approved by the Ministry. They also decide on teaching and assessment methods and may introduce innovative teaching methods. Moreover, teachers can choose alternative teaching programmes or, based on core curricula, develop their own. Any curricula chosen, have to be submitted to the school head for approval.

Compulsory subjects at particular educational stages

Compulsory subjects at particular educational stages			Curriculum
<p>Stage 1 (grades 1-3, primary school): early school education, including elements of: the Polish language, social and natural sciences, mathematics, technology, modern foreign language, music and arts, computer science, physical education.</p>	<p>Stage 2 (grades 4-6, primary school): Polish language, history and civics, modern foreign language, mathematics, natural science, music/arts, technology, computer classes, physical education, lessons with class tutor.</p>	<p>Stage 3 (grades 1-3 of the lower secondary school): Polish language, history, civic education, two modern foreign languages, mathematics, physics, chemistry, biology, geography, art/music, technology, art classes, IT, education for safety, physical education, lessons with class tutor.</p>	

The assessment of the knowledge and skills of pupils throughout the school year remains at the discretion of teachers provided that the internal school assessment system is observed. Assessment is carried out 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 can repeat a year if the teachers' council so decides.



The external pupil assessment consists of the two standardized examinations:

- The **6th-grade test** – organized at the end of primary school; a general, compulsory external test based on the core curriculum, with no selection function; completion of the test enables pupils to start education in the lower secondary school; it provides pupils, parents and both schools with information on the level of pupils' achievements,
- The ***gimnazjum* leaving examination** – organized at the end of the 3-year lower secondary school; a general, obligatory external examination based on the core curriculum. It consists of three parts: humanities (history, civic education and the Polish language), mathematics and natural sciences (including biology, chemistry, physics and geography) and a modern foreign language. The results of the examination together with the final assessment of a pupil's performance determine admission to upper secondary schools.

All external tests and examinations are organized by eight regional examination boards, supported and supervised by the Central Examination Board.

Non-compulsory education

Non-compulsory general and technical upper secondary and basic vocational schools, governed by district authorities, are attended by the great majority of young people aged 16-19/20, who are still subject to part-time compulsory education, although they no longer fall into the full-time category. Apart from upper secondary schools, there are post-secondary non-tertiary schools addressed to those with general secondary preparation, which last 1 to 2,5 years and lead – upon passing relevant examinations – to vocational qualifications.

Schools in non-compulsory education		
Type of school	Term	Age of pupils
general upper secondary school – <i>liceum ogólnokształcące</i>	3 years	16-19 (15-18)
technical upper secondary school – <i>technikum</i>	4 years	16-20 (15-19)
basic vocational school – <i>zasadnicza szkoła zawodowa</i>	3 years	16-19 (15-18)
post-secondary non-tertiary school – <i>szkoła policealna</i>	1-2.5 years	19-21 (18-20)



Admission to upper secondary school depends on the number of points indicated on the lower secondary school leaving certificate (based on the results in subjects and other achievements) including the points received at the *gimnazjum* leaving examination. Details of the admission process are defined by the respective upper secondary schools.

In the school year 2013/14, there were 2,3 thousand general upper secondary schools with 550 thousand pupils, 2 thousand technical upper secondary schools with 515 thousand pupils, 1,7 thousand basic vocational schools with 184 thousand pupils and 2,4 thousand post-secondary schools with 273 thousand pupils.

Teaching programmes and textbooks

In upper secondary schools each subject has its own curriculum based on the core curricula for general education for all types of school. Subjects can be taught at basic and advanced (extended) level and pupils choose 2-4 subjects which they follow with a view to taking the Matura examination. These subjects must include at least one of the following: history, geography, biology, chemistry or physics.

Teachers are free to choose textbooks from the list approved by the Ministry of National Education and they can also decide on teaching and assessment methods, and may introduce innovative teaching methods. Moreover, teachers can choose alternative curricula or – based on core curricula – develop their own. Any curricula chosen have to be submitted to the school head for approval.

Compulsory subjects in individual types of schools*

<p>for general upper secondary school: the Polish language, modern foreign languages, second modern foreign language, History, Civic education, Culture studies, Mathematics, Physics, Chemistry, Biology, Geography, Introduction to entrepreneurship, Information technology, Physical education, Education for safety, lessons with class tutor, lessons for additional subject teaching envisaged in the curriculum at extended level.</p>	<p>for technical upper secondary school: the Polish language, modern foreign languages, second modern foreign language, History, Civic education, Culture studies, Mathematics, Physics, Chemistry, Biology, Geography, Introduction to entrepreneurship, Information technology, Physical education, Education for safety, lessons with class tutor, subjects at advanced level, theoretical vocational training, practical vocational training.</p>	<p>for basic vocational school: Polish language, modern foreign language, History, Civic education, Mathematics, Physics, Geography, Biology, Chemistry, Introduction to Entrepreneurship, IT, Physical Education, Education for safety, theoretical vocational training, practical vocational training, lessons with class tutor.</p>
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Curriculum

* Subjects **shared for general and technical upper secondary school**, **shared for technical upper secondary and basic vocational school**, shared for all types of schools.



Assessment arrangements at this level of education are similar to those in compulsory education. A pupil is promoted to the next grade if they have received at least "acceptable" marks for all compulsory subjects at the end of the school year. In the case of one "unsatisfactory" mark, a pupil can take a subject examination. If not successful, he or she has to repeat the grade. In the case of one "unsatisfactory" mark during the full educational cycle, conditional promotion is possible subject to the consent of the teachers' council. Once the educational stage is completed, secondary schools carry out final/matriculation examinations and pupils receive relevant certificates.

Testing and qualifications

The **matriculation examination** (*Matura/ egzamin maturalny*) is administered by general and technical upper secondary schools, and, if passed, entitles pupils for admission to higher education. It is made up of an external written part (prepared and assessed by regional examination commissions) and an internal oral part (assessed by examination committees). The *Matura* is based on the requirements (outcomes) defined in the core curriculum.

The **vocational qualification examination** (*egzamin potwierdzający kwalifikacje w zawodzie*) administered in basic vocational, technical upper secondary and post-secondary schools evaluates pupils' knowledge and skills within the scope of a particular (single) qualification defined in the core curriculum for vocational education. The number of examinations for a given vocation depends on the number of separate qualifications required, and in fact includes from one to three separate examinations for a given vocation. The examination consists of written and practical parts. Once the certificates confirming all the qualifications in the given vocation are issued and the required level of education is completed, the graduate obtains a diploma confirming vocational qualifications.

All examinations closing the upper secondary school stage are standardized and external, organized by eight regional examination boards supported and supervised by the Central Examination Board.

Higher education

Tertiary study programmes are provided in higher education institutions offering first-, second- and third-cycle study programmes. Uniform master's studies (5 or 6 years) are provided in particular areas only, such as medicine or law. Doctoral programmes, except these provided at HEIs, are also offered by research institutions such as the Polish Academy of Science. Apart from the higher education sector, but arranged within parallel provision, there are colleges of social work that allow graduates to obtain a first-cycle degree diploma at a higher education institution.



Higher education comprises numerous types of institutions, starting from universities and medical academies, through HEIs of economics, of art, of physical education and of maritime studies, plus technical, agricultural, theological and pedagogical HEIs, as well as military and government service HEIs. They are officially considered university-type if at least one of their internal units has the right to confer PhD degrees. HEIs with no such rights have a non-university (professional) status.

Under the Law on Higher Education, there are full-time and part-time study programmes. Full-time studies (day studies) at public HEIs are free of charge, apart from fees for courses repeated. Part-time studies (evening, weekend and extramural) at public HEIs and programmes at non-public HEIs are subject to tuition fees at levels set by particular HEIs.

In the academic year
2013/14, there were
439 public and non-public
HEIs attended by 1,55 million
students



The final upper secondary examination certificate (*świadectwo maturalne*) is required by all institutions for admission to higher education. Admission, as a rule, is based on the results of the *Matura* examination, but particular HEIs may set additional requirements, e.g. aptitude tests in the field of arts or sports.

First-cycle degree programmes last 6 or 7 semesters and end with professional qualification diploma and the title of *licencjat* or *inżynier* (equivalent to a Bachelor's degree) which gives access to the second-cycle programmes (4-5 semesters). These along with uniform (long-cycle) master's degree studies (9 to 12 semesters) lead to the title of *magister* (equivalent to a Master's degree). Master's degree holders can apply for access to doctoral studies.



ADULT EDUCATION

Adult education aims to enable adults to gain and/or extend their knowledge, acquire vocational qualifications and skills for professional or personal reasons, or adjust to innovative technologies or change their work. Adult education is provided in school and non-school settings, and well as in the form of non-degree postgraduate programmes at HEIs. School settings are public and non-public schools for adults, whereas non-school settings refer to public continuing education centres, practical training centres, as well as further- and in-service training centres. There is also a system working to train the unemployed and job-seekers.

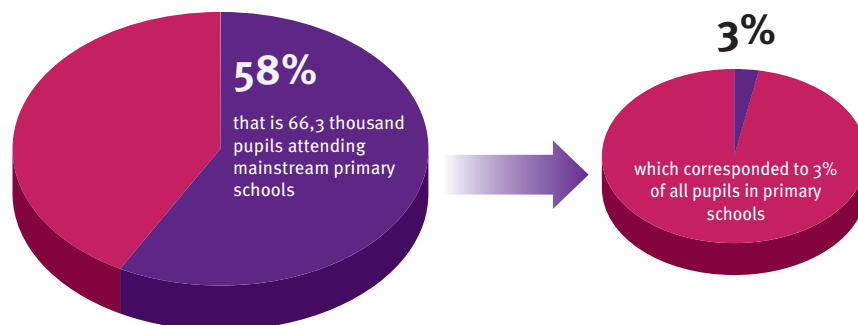
Educational institutions in adult education and training	
Formal education i.e. institutions providing training, which ensure certified learning outcomes	Non-formal education i.e. institutions providing training, which do not ensure certified learning outcomes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ schools, ■ continuing education centres, practical training centres, further and in-service training centres, ■ higher education institutions, ■ other educational institutions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ schools, ■ continuing education centres, practical training centres, further and in-service training centres, ■ higher education institutions, ■ other educational institutions, ■ employers, employees, social communities.



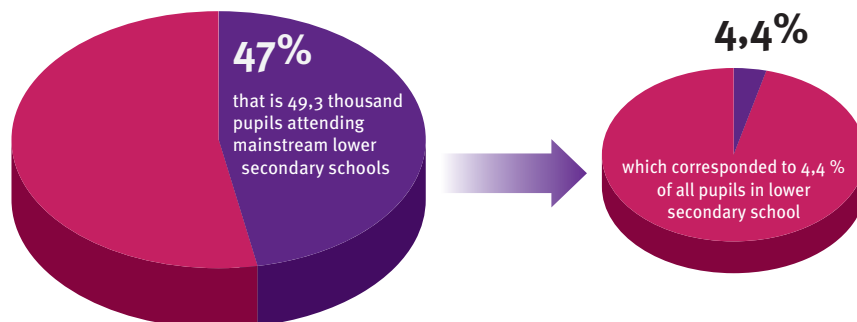
SPECIAL EDUCATION

Special education is an integral part of the Polish education system. Children are qualified for suitable school arrangements once specialists have given an opinion based on psychological, pedagogical and medical examination. *Circa* half of children with SEN are taught in special schools or special classes in mainstream schools, and the other half attend integration and mainstream schools and classes. Around three per cent of all pupils in primary schools and four per cent in lower secondary schools are SEN children. Mainstream schools admit SEN pupils upon the written consent of their parents and/or a relevant body.

Pupils with a statement of need for special education at the level of primary school in the 2013/2014 school year.



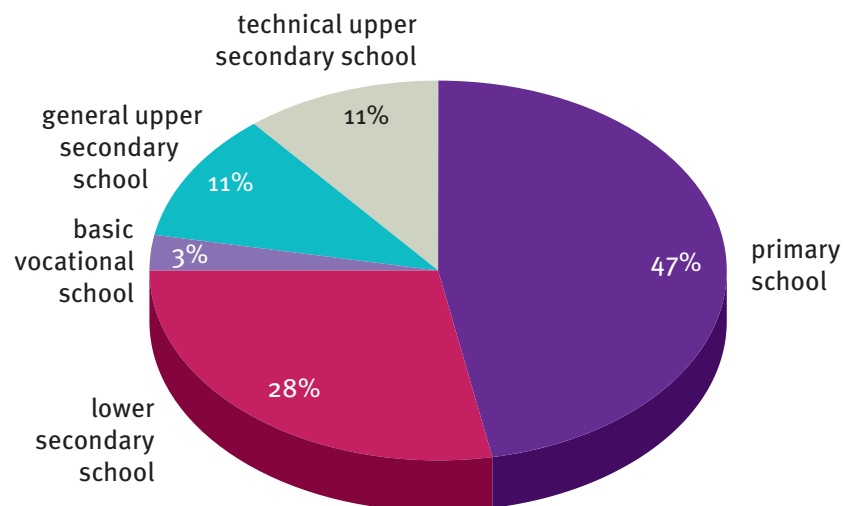
Pupils with a statement of need for special educational the level of lower secondary school in the 2013/2014 school year.



TEACHERS

Teachers, as a rule, are required to have an HE degree, but the type of training is subject to the educational stage at which they teach. The relevant regulations indicate that for pre-school institutions and primary schools, teachers have to hold at least a first-cycle degree diploma, whereas for secondary schools, they need to hold a second-cycle degree diploma. In the course of the initial teacher training, a teacher-to-be is supposed to follow compulsory modules including subject-related training, training in psychology, and pedagogical/ methodological training.

Percentage of teachers according to the school type



The Teachers' Charter specifies four categories in the teaching career:

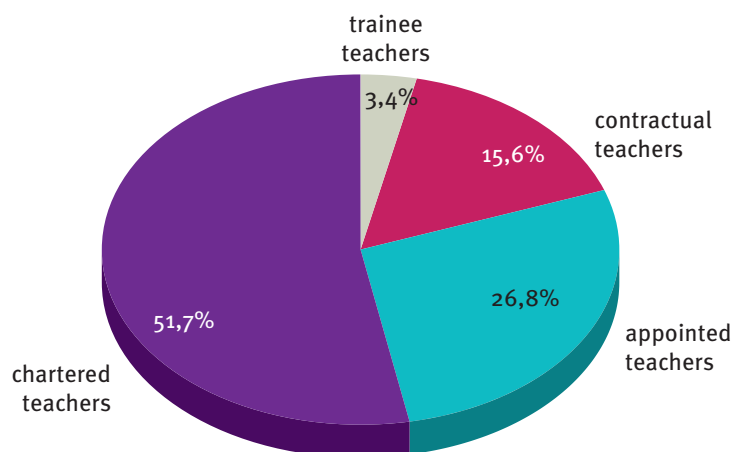
- 1) trainee teacher,
- 2) contract teacher,
- 3) appointed teacher,
- 4) chartered teacher.

According to the Teachers' Charter, trainee and contract teachers have the status of contractual employees (trainee teachers – for a fixed term, contract teachers – for an unlimited term), whereas appointed and chartered teachers enjoy the status of career civil servants. Chartered teachers with an outstanding record may also be awarded the title of honorary school education professor. Academic teachers are subject to separate legislation.

Career stages



Percentage of teachers according to career stage



In the school year 2013/14, there were around 476 thousand teachers in Poland (in full-time equivalents). Over half of them were chartered teachers and almost one third - appointed teachers. The vast majority of teachers work in primary schools.



EURYDICE - UNDERSTANDING EDUCATION IN EUROPE

The Eurydice Network provides information on, and analyses of, European education systems and policies. At present it consists of 41 national units based in 37 countries participating in the EU's Erasmus+ programme (EU Member States, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Montenegro, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Norway, Serbia, Switzerland and Turkey). It is coordinated and managed by the EU Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency in Brussels, which drafts its studies and provides a range of online resources.

The Polish Eurydice Unit (which has been functioning since 1996, currently within the Foundation for the Development of the Education System) provides content about Poland for all Eurydice publications, in cooperation with experts from the Ministry of National Education, the Ministry of Science and Higher Education and research institutions. It coordinates and supervises the production and constant updating of the bi-lingual Polish dossier in the Countries section of the Eurydice webpage. It also produces Polish language versions of the most important Eurydice reports.

For more information on other education systems in Europe and Eurydice publications visit the Polish Eurydice website:

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Edited by the Polish Eurydice Unit.

Editor in chief: Beata Maluchnik

Editing cooperation: Magdalena Górowska-Fells, Anna Grabowska


Proofreading: Poliglota Biuro Tłumaczeń Anna Podoracka

Typesetting: Piotr Konopka

© Foundation for the Development of the Education System

Warsaw 2015

ISBN 978-83-64032-90-5


Polish Eurydice Unit
Foundation for the Development
of the Education System
ul. Mokotowska 43, 00-551 Warszawa


www.eurydice.org.pl
tel. 22 463 13 70
eurydice@frse.org.pl