



# **National system overview on education systems in Europe**

**2011 Edition**





# POLAND

JUNE 2011

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## 1. Education population and language of instruction

In December 2010, the number of young people under 29 years of age was 14 317 080 and accounted for 37.5 % of the population. The language of instruction is Polish.

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

In 2009/10 almost all pupils attended public-sector schools (98 %). Most of the funds on education 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. 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 those pupils 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.

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 gymnasias 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 years of age. For children aged 3-4 pre-primary education is voluntary and is subject to parental decision.

Before 2011/12 six-year-old children were obliged to complete a year of preparation for primary education. Since September 2011, in relation to the planned lowering of school starting age, all five year olds are obliged to complete a year of preparation for primary education in kindergartens or other pre-school institutions.

Both private and public schools can be fee-paying, however in the latter case the conditions specified in the legislation apply. Local authorities are responsible for 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 2009/10 there were 17 444 pre-school institutions (both kindergartens and pre-school classes attached to primary schools), attended by approximately 983600 children. The overall participation rate was 67.3 % for children aged 3-6 (in cities: 81.5 %, in the countryside 48.2 %)

### 4. Compulsory education

#### (i) Phases

Children must attend compulsory full-time education for ten years from the age of six. Compulsory part-time education in the school or out-of-school forms lasts from 16 until 18 years of age.

|                                                  |                                                                                                                                                                   |
|--------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <i>Oddział przedszkolny</i> (pre-school class)   | 6 years of age (5 years from 2011)                                                                                                                                |
| <i>Szkoła podstawowa</i> (6-year primary school) | 7-13 years of age (6 years from 2012)<br>Stage 1 – early school education, 7-10 years of age<br>Stage 2 – teaching based on separate subjects, 10-13 years of age |
| <i>Gimnazjum</i> (3-year lower secondary school) | 13-16 years of age<br>Stage 3 – teaching based on separate subjects                                                                                               |

## (ii) Admissions criteria

All pupils attend public school free of charge. The only admission criterion is the age limit (for pre-school class – 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 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 2009/10 there were 13 968 primary schools and 7 224 lower secondary schools (*gimnazja*), attended by approximately 2 234 900 and 1 322 100 pupils respectively.

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

The school year is divided into two semesters. It comprises minimum 178 days (max. 38 weeks) between September and June. The compulsory subjects are in general spread over five days a week.

## (iv) Class size/student grouping

In 2009/10, the ratio of pupils to teachers in primary education was 13:1 and in lower secondary education – 17:1. 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). From the fourth year on, each subject is taught by a specialist teacher.

## (v) Curricular control and content

Core curricula for compulsory teaching, created at the central level by groups of experts appointed by the Ministry of Education, 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.

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 which are approved by the school head. They can also develop their own curricula – based on core curricula – and submit them to their school head for approval.

Compulsory educational subjects:

- Stage 1 (grades 1-3, primary school): early school education, additionally Religion or Ethics.
- Stage 2 (grades 4-6, primary school): Polish language, History and civics, modern foreign languages, Mathematics, Natural science, Music/ Art, Technology, Computer science, Physical education, lessons with class tutor, additionally – Religion or Ethics.
- Stage 3 (grades 1-3 of the *gimnazjum*): Polish language, History, Civic education, Modern foreign language, Mathematics, Physics and Astronomy, Chemistry, Biology, Geography, Art/Music, Technology, Computer studies, Physical education, lessons with class tutor, additionally Religion or Ethics.

(vi) **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 external tests and examinations are organised by agencies – 8 Regional Examination Boards supported and supervised by the Central Examination Board.

## **5. Post-compulsory education/upper secondary and post-secondary level**

(i) **Types of education**

Compulsory part-time education in the school or out-of-school forms lasts from 16 until 18 years of age (in line with the Constitution of the Republic of Poland).

|                                                                                                |                                     |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| <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>Uzupełniające liceum ogólnokształcące</i><br>(supplementary general upper secondary school) | 18/19-20/21 years of age            |
| <i>Technikum uzupełniające</i><br>(supplementary technical upper secondary school)             | 18/19-21/22 years of age            |
| <i>Szkoła policealna</i> (post-secondary non-tertiary school)                                  | 19-21 years of age (very rarely 20) |

In 2009/10 there were 2 446 general upper secondary schools with approximately 658 100 pupils, 2 932 technical and specialised upper secondary schools with around 614 900 pupils and 1 411 basic vocational schools with 220 700 pupils. In the same school year there were 3 210 post-secondary schools attended by approximately 284 800 students.

## (ii) 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.

## (iii) Curricular control and content

At the level of upper secondary education there are curricula for separate subjects and cross-curricular themes. 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 which are approved by the school head. They can also develop their own curricula – based on core curricula – and submit them to their school head for approval.

Core subjects (included in outline timetables):

**General upper secondary school:** Polish language, 2 foreign languages, History, Civic education, Culture studies, Mathematics, Physics and Astronomy, Chemistry, Biology, Geography, Introduction to entrepreneurship, Information technology, Physical Education, Defence Training, lessons for class tutor, lessons for additional subject teaching envisaged in the curriculum, additionally non-compulsory Religion or Ethics.

**Specialised upper secondary school:** Polish language, 2 foreign languages, History, Civic Education, Culture studies, Mathematics, Physics and Astronomy, Chemistry, Biology, Geography, Introduction to entrepreneurship, Information technology, Physical education, Defence training, lessons for class tutor, lessons for specialisation related teaching, additionally non-compulsory Religion or Ethics.

**Technikum:** Polish language, 2 modern foreign languages, History, Civic education, Cultural studies, Mathematics, Physics and astronomy, Chemistry, Biology, Geography, Introduction to entrepreneurship, Information technology, Physical education, Defence training, lessons for class tutor, lessons for vocational training according to vocational curriculum for a given profession, additionally non-compulsory Religion or Ethics.

**Basic vocational school:** Polish language, modern foreign languages, History and civic education, Mathematics, Physics and astronomy, Geography with environmental protection, Introduction to entrepreneurship, IT, Physical education, Defence training, lessons for class tutor, vocational training according to relevant curriculum, additionally non-compulsory Religion or Ethics.

## (iv) Assessment, progression and qualifications

Assessment at this level of education is similar to the arrangements in compulsory education.

A pupil is promoted to a higher grade if he/she has received 'acceptable' marks or above for all compulsory subjects at the end of the school year. In the case of one 'unsatisfactory' mark the pupil can take an exam in this subject. A pupil who is not promoted and has not passed the exam has to repeat the same grade. (There is also a possibility of a conditional promotion only once during the educational cycle upon the consent of the teachers' council)

At the end of the course, all schools (except for the *zasadnicze szkoły zawodowe*) organize final/matriculation 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 *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.

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.

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

## 6. Higher education

### (i) Types of institution

The following types of state higher education institutions can be found: *uniwersytet* (university), *uniwersytet techniczny* (technical university), *uniwersytet uzupełniony innym przymiotnikiem* (university with another adjective), *politechnika* (polytechnic), *academia* (academy). 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 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 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 2009/10 there were 461 HEIs in Poland (both public and non-public) and 1 900 000 higher education students.

### (ii) 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).

### (iii) Qualifications

The first cycle studies (Bachelor) – according to the Act of 27 July 2005 'Law on Higher Education' – last from 3 to 4 years and finish with the vocational qualification diploma and the title of *licencjat* or *inżynier* which gives access to the job market or to the second cycle studies and obtaining the title of *magister* or equivalent. Only full-time daytime studies at state HEIs are free of charge.

Uniform (long cycle) master degree studies (offered only in 11 fields of study including e.g.: medicine, law, psychology, directing) at universities and other university-type institutions last from 4.5 to 6 years.

Second cycle studies and long cycle studies (Master) finish with the *dypłom ukończenia studiów wyższych* (the university higher education diploma). Students are awarded the title of *magister*, *magister sztuki*, *magister inżynier*, *magister inżynier architekt*, *magister inżynier architekt krajobrazu*, *magister inżynier pożarnictwa* or *lekarz*, *lekarz dentysta*, *lekarz weterynarii*, *magister pielęgniarstwa*, *magister położnictwa*, *magister farmacji* depending on the field of study they followed. Master degree holders can apply to do a doctorate (the third cycle studies).

## 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 (1.69 % 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 stage of education.

1. Primary education stage: 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.
2. Lower secondary education stage: a degree of *licencjat* or *magister* is required (ISCED 5A Bachelor or Master).
3. Upper secondary education stage: a *magister* degree is required (ISCED 5A Master only).

The completion of a 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 continuous professional development, 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 and 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 (on the basis of the Teachers' Charter); appointed and chartered teachers enjoy the status of career civil servants (also on the basis of the Teachers' Charter).

## Poland (June 2011)

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In the school year 2009/10 there were approximately 494 900 full-time teachers in Poland, of whom around 22 600 were trainee teachers (4.6 %), 95 800 contract teachers (19.3 %), 153 000 appointed teachers (30.9 %) and 214 900 chartered teachers (43.4 %).

*Unrevised English*

Information provided by the Polish Eurydice Unit.

For more detailed information, you may consult EURYPEDIA which provides descriptions of educational systems and policies in the Eurydice network countries:

<http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurypedia>