



Country profile: Poland

A report for the cross-European programme *Working for inclusion: the role of the early years workforce in addressing poverty and promoting social inclusion*



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The programme

Working for Inclusion is examining how improving the qualifications and skills of those working with our youngest children is helping to reduce poverty and improve social inclusion.

Taking place from February 2009 - January 2011, the programme encourages and facilitates discussion and debate over the role of the early years workforce. It will enable greater, more extensive and effective dialogue between local and national governments, education and qualification providers, employers, practitioners and policymakers.

Programme partners

The programme is led by Children in Scotland in partnership with:

La Bottega Di Geppetto, Italy
Nordland Research Institute, Norway
Comenius Foundation for Child Development, Poland

Research

The programme encompasses research, which offers a clear picture of early years services and their workforce across the EU and how these relate to levels of poverty and social inclusion.

In addition, country profiles of Scotland and the UK, Poland, Norway, Italy, Slovenia, France, Denmark, Portugal, Sweden and Hungary have been produced. This data will contribute towards policy development at EU level as well as Scotland and the rest of the UK. The research is led by Professor Peter Moss and Dr John Bennett.

Study visits

Study visits in the four partner countries will address four key themes relating to poverty and social inclusion and the early years workforce. These visits will form the basis of a report on each theme, published by Children in Scotland on the project website (www.childreninscotland.org.uk/wfi), and publicised throughout member states at local and national levels.

Each partner country will provide the context for exploring particular key challenges within the early years workforce:

- Working with the child as an active agent in their own learning (Italy)
- Working with diversity, in particular ethnicity, language, disability and gender (Scotland)
- Inclusive workforce models for rural and remote areas (Norway)
- Exploring the role of the pedagogue in working in an inclusive way with children and families, across agencies and age groups (Poland).

Contents

Glossary of key terms	5
Social context of early childhood	6
Demographic, social and economic	6
Government	6
Employment of parents	7
Tax and social expenditure	7
Leave policies for young children and their families	7
Current cultural attitudes to child-rearing	7
Historical overview (19th century to present)	9
Key concepts and important influences in Early Childhood Education and Care	11
The structure of ECEC	12
Service organisation and provision	12
The governance of early childhood services	12
System financing	13
Data collection, monitoring and research	13
Access levels of children 0-6 years and strategies to expand access for excluded groups	15
Overall access levels	15
Access levels for different groups	15
Children with additional support needs and rights	15
Strategies to promote inclusion	16
Conditions for quality improvement and assurance	18
Workforce	18
Other conditions of quality	21
Relationship and transitions between ECEC and school	24
Note on out-of-school services	25
Current developments and issues	26
Acknowledgments	28

Glossary of key terms

Main services

Złobek – centre for children under three

Oddział zlobkowy - centre for children under three with fewer children than in *złobek*

Przedszkole – centre (kindergarten) for children from three to six years

Oddział przedszkolny – pre-primary class in primary school mainly for six-year-old children

Main occupations

Opiekunka dziecięca, pielęgniarka - in *złobki* (nurseries) child carer, nurse

Nauczyciel wychowania przedszkolnego – kindergarten teacher (literally ‘preschool upbringing teacher’)

Other terms

Urlop macierzyński – maternity leave

Urlop wychowawczy – parental leave

Social context of early childhood

Population: 38.1 million; **Density:** 122 inhabitants per km²; **Total fertility rate:** 1.27; **Children in lone parent households:** 5%

Part-time employed as % all employed: 13% (women), 7% (men); **maternal employment (women with child aged 0-3/3-6):** No information

GDP per capita at PPP as % EU27 average: 53%; **Children 'at risk of poverty':** 25% (all), 46% (lone parent); **Ratio of income of top 20% to income of bottom 20%:** 5.6

Tax receipts as % GDP: 34.5%; **public expenditure on education as % GDP:** 5.4%; **public expenditure on social protection as % GDP:** 19.6%, of which 0.8% on family/children

Period of leave after birth: 20 weeks maternity leave and parental leave until 36 months after birth per family. Maternity leave is paid at 100% of previous earnings; a means-tested flat-rate parental allowance (€115 per month) is paid for 24 months (36 months if more than one child) to all parents whose child does not attend crèche or kindergarten.

Demographic, social and economic

Poland has a population of just over 38 million, with a density just above the average for the EU. Though the fertility rate has begun to grow gradually since 2004, it remains among the lowest in the EU.

Poland has a homogeneous population, with only around 3% from minority groups and only 2% foreign born. A 2005 Act recognises nine 'national minority' languages (Byelorussian, Czech, Lithuanian, German, Armenian, Russian, Slovak, Ukrainian and Jewish); four 'ethnic minority languages (Karaim, Lemko, Romany, Tatar); and one community using the 'regional language' of Kashubian.

Poland has one of the lowest levels of per capita income by EU standards, about half the EU average, and has high levels of inequality and child poverty. About one in four children

live in poverty (rising to nearly half among children in lone parent households), and the level of income inequality (using the income ratio of the 20% highest and lowest in the population) is well above the EU average. Poland is one of eight member states where child poverty is above (or equal to) the EU average *and* the risk of children being in poverty is significantly higher than for the overall population (SPC, 2008: 15, Table 1). Poland is ranked 20th among EU member states for child wellbeing, and 49th in the world on the Gender Gap Index.

Government

Poland is a unitary state, with four levels of government: regional (*województwo*), district (*powiat*) and municipal (*gmina*). There are 16 regions, 379 districts and 2,478 *gminas*; most of the latter are in rural areas. There was strong decentralisation to democratically-elected municipalities after the Communist

Social context of early childhood

regime in 1989.

Employment of parents

Although there is no comparative data on employment rates for women with young children, the overall rate for women with children aged 0-18 years (46%) is well below the OECD average (62%) (OECD, 2007; Table 3.2). Levels of part-time employment are low compared to the EU average for women, and about average for men.

Tax and social expenditure

Taxation levels are below the EU average. Public expenditure on education is above the average, but expenditure on social protection overall and on children and families in particular are substantially below the average.

Leave policies for young children and their families

Poland has maternity and parental leave, but no paternity leave. Maternity leave is 20 weeks at full pay, though longer for multiple births; 14 weeks is obligatory. Parents may take parental leave until a child is three and may benefit, like all parents, from a flat-rate 'parental allowance' either until two years after birth (if a first child) or three years (if there is more than one child) - but only if monthly income does not exceed €145 and if children do not attend a nursery or kindergarten. Parental leave can be taken until a child's fourth birthday, full time or part time, and in one or several blocks of time.

The available official statistics do not show the incidence of parental leave among parents entitled to take leave, the proportion of parents who receive parental allowance, or the average duration of leave; and despite the fact that fathers have been entitled to parental leave since 1996, no data about their

take-up is collected. A more precise picture of take-up of parental leave comes from analyses of data collected in the second quarter of 2005 using a module added to the Labour Force Survey (Kotowska and Baranowska, 2006; Matysiak, 2007). Among those entitled to take parental leave, nearly 50 per cent of mothers but only 2.5 per cent of fathers took the leave. Due to the low benefit level and means testing, parental leave was most used by low paid mothers and mothers with low levels of education; leave was taken by 37 per cent of mothers with university education, 54 per cent with secondary education, and 61 per cent with the lowest educational level. Women with higher qualifications (specialists and managers) were more reluctant to take leave than women employed in personal service sector or offices.

About 70 per cent of women who took parental leave were entitled to parental allowance (ie their household income was low enough to be eligible).

Current cultural attitudes to child-rearing

Despite low levels of nursery and kindergarten provision, demand is also low, especially for nurseries, reflecting a belief in favour of mothers providing full-time care for children and against maternal employment. This belief is strongly supported by the influential Catholic Church that "has always upheld the ideal of the mother as the preferred provider of care and education for infants and small children" (Heinen and Wator, 2006: 204). This view can also be "explained partly by the fact that Poles tend to merge femininity with maternity: the Polish woman is above all a mother, and if she can, she should remain with her child as long as possible. The only valid reason for placing a child in group care is economic need" (ibid: 206).

In a national survey in 1998, 71% of the

Social context of early childhood

population agreed that women should leave paid work at least until their children reached three years of age. In a cross-national study of 12 European countries, conducted between 2000 and 2003, 58% of Polish informants agreed with the statement that “although work is important for most women, home and children are more important” (former East Germany, 34%; Hungary, 79%); and 61% agreed that “it is the husband’s responsibility to earn money...the wife’s task to perform household work” (former East Germany, 31%; Hungary, 71%) (Pongrácz, 2008).

Another reason for low demand for nurseries is the bad reputation they have acquired, particularly under Communism:

This opinion is still widely held among

Polish mothers, even those who declare they have never visited [a centre] (Portet 2003b), and it is reinforced by specific representations of child wellbeing...While Swedes believe that age one is the most favourable for integrating a child into group care, and the French send infants as (sic) a few months (Jensen and Sineau 1998), Poles publicly declare their preference for prolonged care by mothers. Even child care professionals, while praising the benefits of these institutions, share this opinion. Thus most Poles prefer to start children in group care at age three and are more willing to do so when there is a place available in a nursery school (kindergarten), since the child care centres (nurseries) are held in such low regard (Heinan and Wator, 2006: 205-6).

Historical overview (19th century to present)

1895 -1918: Poland was partitioned between the Austro-Hungarian Empire, Prussia and Russia, with each occupying power applying its own education system.

Early 20th century: first kindergartens established.

1906: The first guidelines for kindergartens by Maria Werycho. The introduction says: "We open kindergartens in order to help parents who cannot or do not know how to take care of their children (...) they are to instil cultural elements in children, develop religious, moral and social feelings, stimulate mental abilities for absorbing future learning at school."

1918: independent Poland re-established and development of national education system.

1944-55: Women recruited into labour force to meet shortage. Development of early childhood services: nurseries grow from almost none to 50,000 places; kindergartens quintuple to nearly 400,000 places.

1956-70: reduced demand for women in labour market and budget difficulties; expansion of services slows.

1970-1984: marked increase in places, but still only places for five per cent of under-threes and 50 per cent for three to six-year-olds, one of the lowest levels in Central and Eastern Europe.

1972: maternity leave extended from one to three years of child care leave, unpaid.

1981: Child care leave becomes parental leave and fathers can take it in some circumstances; means-tested payment. Widely used by mothers.

1989-2002: number of children in nurseries and kindergartens falls, by 70 per cent and 30

per cent respectively, due to introduction of fees and closures by companies and municipalities.

1990: Law on local self-government – municipalities are obliged to provide kindergartens - unpaid teaching and caring for at least five hours a day, the time necessary for the implementation of core curriculum. The central government does not provide funds for the new tasks of the municipalities. As a result, between 1991 and 2002, three-quarters of kindergartens and nurseries are closed. Municipalities take over nurseries too.

1991: Kindergartens, for children over three years, designated first level of education. Law on health care centres which also includes establishment of nurseries.

Mid-1990s: parental leave generally available for fathers; very few use it.

1993: in addition to special kindergartens it is also possible to set up integration kindergartens where disabled children can learn together with other children.

2002: core curriculum for kindergartens introduced.

2004: Attendance at kindergartens or pre-school classes in primary school obligatory for six year olds. New regulation of teacher training introduces obligatory training in two specializations: a main specialization and an additional one. For kindergarten teachers, the other specialization is early education.

2008: 'Other forms of kindergarten education' are now possible for children between the ages of three and five, whereas before only kindergartens were allowed. Two new forms of provision defined, which must provide at least three hours a day / 12 hours a week. New core curriculum for kindergartens and schools.

Historical overview (19th century to present)

2009: Following an amendment to the Education Act, attending school will be obligatory for six-year olds from 2012. During a three-year pilot phase, the decision whether to send a six-year old child to school will be taken by parents together with the school principal. Five-year old children have the right

to prepare for school by attending a one-year kindergarten preparatory programme; this will be obligatory from 2011. Changes in pedagogical supervision will allow the education superintendent to focus on the quality of education.

Key concepts and important influences in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC)

The main service for children under three is a nursery, which is regarded by law (1991) as a health care centre; the law defines the care of a healthy child as the provision of a health service. This law illustrates the understanding of a nursery as a place where only child care is provided.

For older children in kindergartens, the new core curriculum announced in 2008 says that their education should combine learning and play so that the children are introduced into the schooling system smoothly and gently. Such was the purpose of the authors of the new core curriculum for the first stage of education and the core curriculum for kindergarten. It sets out the aim of kindergarten education as:

- supporting children in developing their intellectual abilities and in shaping intellectual activities necessary for the children to cope with everyday situations and with further education;
- building a system of values, including the ability to distinguish between good and bad;
- developing children's emotional resistance necessary for rational coping with new and difficult situations, including the ability to cope with stress and failure;
- developing children's social skills which are necessary to improve relations with other children and with adults;
- creating conditions favourable for playing with other children and for learning alongside children with diverse physical and intellectual abilities;

- taking care of children's health and their physical fitness; motivating children to participate in games and physical activities;
- building children's knowledge of the social, natural and technical world and developing their skills for presenting their thoughts so that others can understand them;
- introducing children into the world of aesthetic values and developing their abilities to express their feelings through music, small theatrical forms and art;
- building the feeling of social belonging (to the family, to the peer group and to the national community) and shaping a patriotic conduct;
- ensuring better educational opportunities by supporting their curiosity, activities and self-reliance, and by providing information and developing skills that are important for school education.

The curriculum advises dividing children's time at kindergarten into four parts:

- at least one fifth devoted to playing (children are free to play, the teacher involved only a little);
- at least one fifth (one fourth for younger children) spent outdoors;
- one fifth devoted to various kinds of educational activities, depending on the selected preschool curriculum;
- the remaining two fifths to be used as the teacher thinks appropriate (but this should include taking care of the children, organisational tasks and others).

The structure of ECEC

Poland has a split system of ECEC, with separate government responsibility, types of provision, regulation and workforces for services for children under three and from three to six years.

Service organisation and provision

Main types of service provision

The main type of provision in Polish ECEC is the kindergarten (*przedszkole*), for children from three years of age until they start elementary school aged seven. There are also pre-school classes in primary schools (*oddziały przedszkolne*) for six year olds, so that six year olds may be in either form of provision. In 2008, there were 8,038 kindergartens and 9,033 pre-school classes (*GUS, 2009*).

Most kindergartens are divided into four groups – for three, four, five and six year olds. But in rural areas, kindergartens may be smaller with only one or two groups. Kindergartens must provide at least five hours provision per day and most are open nine hours a day, with teachers working shifts, and throughout the school year.

In recent years, some diversification of provision has occurred. After implementation of a pilot project in 2005, legislation was amended in 2007 to permit – beginning from 2008 – ‘other forms of kindergarten education’ (*inne formy wychowania przedszkolnego*) to be established. Two new forms are defined: kindergarten groups (*zespoły przedszkolne*), which are for children from three to five years and take place several times a week; and ‘kindergarten points’ (*punkty przedszkolne*), which are open throughout the year except for a number of breaks as defined by the organisation providing the service. These “other forms” must be open at least three hours a day and for at least 12 hours a week.

Based on data from the Ministry of Education, there were 1,159 such services in September 2009.

For children under three, the main form of care are nurseries (*złobki*), which usually admit children from four or five months to three years; they are usually open 10 hours a day, 11 months a year. Current legislation also allows for ‘child carers’ (*opiekunki dziecięce*), who may be family day carers or care for children in children’s own homes. This form of childcare may be provided either as a registered economic activity or – far more often – without any formal registration. Because the majority of child carers work unofficially, there is no detailed information about them.

Providers

Most nurseries are provided by the public sector, by municipalities, and there are some private nurseries, in which municipalities sometimes buy places. Most kindergartens and pre-school classes in primary schools are provided by the public sector, in this case municipalities. In 2006/07, nine per cent of children attending kindergartens or pre-school classes used the private sector services, mostly provided by religious organisations, nongovernmental organisations or individuals (*Eurydice 34*).

The governance of early childhood services

National level

Poland has a split system of ECEC, starting with divided governance at the national level. Nurseries (*złobki*) are the responsibility of the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare.

Kindergartens, pre-school classes in schools and ‘other forms of kindergarten care’ for

The structure of ECEC

children over three years are the responsibility of the Ministry of National Education.

Local level

Municipalities (*gmina*) are responsible for the provision of ECEC services for children from three months to six years (nurseries and kindergartens). As administrator, the municipality establishes (decision voted by municipality council), runs, adapts and closes kindergartens and nurseries. Each municipality has separate departments responsible for nurseries (within the health care and social welfare system) and kindergartens (within the educational system).

System financing

Funding for nurseries and kindergartens comes from two sources: municipalities and parents. Municipalities set down rules and levels for parental fees, and can provide financial support to lower income families, eg full or partial fee waivers.

In nurseries, parents pay for meals, averaging 1800 PLN per year. In kindergartens 25 hours per week/per child is covered from the municipal budget. Parents of three to five-year-olds pay a monthly average of 250 PLN for meals and a so-called 'fixed fee', ie 3,000 PLN per year. In many kindergartens parents pay additionally for extracurricular activities run in kindergarten during day-care time by private firms (eg foreign language lessons, dances or theatre workshops). Parents of six year olds in kindergarten or preschools do not pay if their children stay five hours per day only; additional hours and extra activities are paid the same as for three to five- year-old children.

Unit cost per child per year (2009):

Pre-school – depending on financial situation of the municipality: between 4800 PLN - 12000 PLN

Nursery - depending on financial situation of the municipality: average (+/-) 11 000 PLN

Proportion of costs paid by parents (2009):

Pre-school: 8% - 15%
Nursery: (+/-) - 14%

Costs for a 2 year old as % gross earnings of average production earner: No information.

Data collection, monitoring and research

Data on nurseries and kindergartens is gathered by municipalities on a regular basis. This includes: numbers of children attending by age and type of provision, type of provider, group size, numbers and qualifications of staff, and public expenditure.

Since 2005, the Ministry of National Education has gathered data on preschool and school education using an electronic System of Information on Education (*System Informacji Oswiatowej – SIO*). The system collects detailed information concerning teachers' qualification and salaries, kindergartens and school infrastructure and equipment. The system also pertains to institutions and organisations which conduct teacher training. Based on SIO data the National In-Service

The structure of ECEC

Teacher Training Center (a state-funded agency of the Ministry of National Education supporting the development of a national system of teacher training in line with state educational policies) prepares detailed reports concerning the teachers.

Regional education superintendents (*kurator*

oswiaty) also gather data on kindergartens and prepare specific reports for the Ministry of Education.

Information about nurseries is gathered at regional level during the registration process.

Nurseries are solely care providing entities – each nursery works out its own programme, there are no guidelines for the curriculum, nor any quality monitoring system of nurses'/carers' work.

Standards and rules concerning nurseries are developed by municipalities based on Ministry of Health regulations, however they are not obligatory and depend on the municipality. The same applies to monitoring quality – for example some municipalities develop evaluation sheets for parents asking them for their opinion on nursery work.

Access levels of children 0-6 years and strategies to expand access for excluded groups

Attendance at formal ECEC services (EC, 2007):
 Birth to 3 years: 2% (2% attend 30 hours a week or more)
 3 to 6 years: 31 (23 % attend 30 hours a week or more).

Overall access levels

Currently, the compulsory school age is seven, but it will be gradually lowered to six in the years 2009-2011. Attendance at kindergarten or kindergarten class is compulsory for six year olds. From 2009, five year olds have the right to attend preparatory school for one year and compulsory attendance will be introduced for five year olds when the compulsory school age is lowered.

Access levels for different groups

Attendance rates for children under three and from three to six years are the lowest in the EU, according to the EC's own statistics. Statistics from the Polish Ministry of Education show rather higher attendance rates for children over three years than the EC statistics: in 2006/7, 45 per cent of three to five year olds (The System of Education in Poland, Ministry of Education, 2008). More recent data from the Central Statistical Office shows an average of 53 per cent of three to five year olds attending in 2008. But these are still far below the universal or near universal cover in most other member states. Attendance only reaches these levels among six year olds – 97% – but is compulsory for this age group.

Attendance rates – at around two per cent – are particularly low for children under three and much lower than for children over three; although numbers of places have fallen substantially since the late 1980s, there were never more than places for five per cent of children. ECEC services are distributed very unequally,

with fewer kindergarten places in poorer regions most affected by unemployment. Attendance varies greatly between urban and rural areas, being highest in cities, and lowest in rural, sparsely populated areas. In 2008, according to the Central Statistical Office, 70 per cent of three to five year olds went to kindergarten in urban areas, more than twice as many as in rural areas (30 per cent). In 484 municipalities (20 per cent of all Polish municipalities) there are no kindergarten or 'other forms of kindergarten education'.

There are also substantial differences in attendance for children in different regions, with particularly low levels in Eastern and North-Eastern Poland (Eurydice 29).

Children with additional support needs and rights

Disabled children older than three can attend 'special' or 'integration' kindergartens before they start attending school; kindergarten education for children with learning difficulties is not obligatory, but children can exercise their right to attend. In special kindergartens the group size may vary between six and 16. They use programmes recommended by the Ministry of Education for regular kindergartens.

Since 1993, as a result of new Ministry of National Education regulations, there is a trend for services to integrate children with disabilities into kindergartens. In 2006/07, 118 kindergartens (out of 7,794) had 865 'integration' classes. In 2008 there were 75 "special kindergartens" only for children with

The structure of ECEC

disabilities (70 in urban areas, five in rural).

Strategies to promote inclusion

Some attempts are being made to improve access to ECEC services in rural areas. "Other forms of kindergarten education" were initiated by Non-Governmental Organisations, which implemented a pilot of alternative forms of kindergarten education and conducted an external evaluation that confirmed the need for – and the high quality – of the new solution. Special funding from the European Social Fund made it possible between 2005-2008 to implement the pilot (with very good results) on a national scale – 20 NGOs helped rural municipalities establish 900 kindergarten centres.

In 2007, legislation was amended to allow municipalities to set up 'other forms of kindergarten care' for three to five year olds,

with the intention that these new forms be organised by municipalities in areas with special demographic and geographical conditions, to supplement the existing network of kindergarten services. These new forms of provision (see 5a above) can be provided by public or private bodies, and those provided by non-public bodies receive public funding equivalent to 40 per cent of per capita expenses in a public kindergarten. Many of these new forms of services are introduced in rural areas, which have no access to other forms of provision.

"Other forms of kindergarten education" are slowly raising the participation rates for kindergarten education in rural areas. Broader participation is hindered by restrictive regulations related to hygiene, safety and organisation that reflect the requirements related to ordinary kindergartens.

Where There Are No Preschools programme

Non-governmental organisations have played an important role in diversification of pre-school services in Poland. A good example of this is the *Where There Are No Preschools* programme (*WTANP*). It was initiated by the Polish Children and Youth Foundation in 2001 and since 2003 run by the Comenius Foundation for Child Development.

Its aim is to provide equal educational opportunities for children aged three to five, especially in rural areas with high unemployment figures, and it is a response to the growing inequalities in the education of young children in Poland.

WTANP draws on experiences from Portugal (*itinerant teachers*), and follows the example of the rural preschool clubs that operated in Poland between the two world wars and in the 1950s.

Where There Are No Preschools helps local communities to create so-called Preschool Centres. Centres (housed in schools, library facilities, community centres or fire stations) offer activities that last three to four hours a day, three to four days a week. The teachers work with groups of 10-15 children aged three to five. The specially-designed program for working with children (see p. 7 b.) follows the early childhood education core curriculum prescribed by the Ministry of National Education. What makes the Centres different from

The structure of ECEC

regular kindergarten institutions is: the focus on education (no care component), less hours, smaller groups, mixed-age grouping, and active parent participation. The teachers involved in the project have attended a special training program (100 hours) designed by the Foundation.

WTANP is flexible, so it can be adjusted to specific local needs and financial budgets. The pilot phase involved eight rural communities, where 23 pre-school centres were created. To date, *WTANP* works with 100 communities that are operating 300 pre-school centres, and 4,000 children participate in the program. External evaluation of the programme shows that children from Preschool Centres perform very well at primary school.

Based on *WTANP* experiences the Ministry of National Education announced a pilot programme for alternative forms of pre-school education. Based on the results of this pilot program 'other forms of kindergarten education' were included in the Law on Education.

In addition, the Polish Government introduced in 2008 the Programme of Educational Development in Rural Areas for 2008-2013. The aim is the development of education in rural areas, raising the quality and the level of education among inhabitants of rural areas. The programme includes, inter alia, supporting the development of the youngest children, dissemination of kindergarten education and developing competences of teachers.

The Ministry of Labour and Social Policy is currently working on a bill on forms of childcare for children under three years, which is to enable the most appropriate dissemination of services for the youngest

children. The government has also announced a programme – "A nursery in every village" – to help municipalities implement the proposed legislation. This includes subsidising the services provided by municipalities.

The Ministry of National Education has stated that one of the main objectives of the educational system in the near future will be extension of preschool education for all children aged three to five. One step towards this goal will be the introduction of mandatory preschool education for five year olds in 2011; another will be supplementing the educational system with alternative forms of preschool education.

Conditions for quality improvement and assurance

Workforce

Structure and education (basic and ongoing)

Type of provision	Title of lead staff & assistant	Pre-service education required	Qualification level
<i>Złobki</i>	<i>opiekunka dziecięca</i> – child carer	secondary vocational medical school	ISCED 4
	<i>pielegniarka</i> - nurse	secondary vocational medical school	
	<i>starsza pielegniarka</i> – senior nurse	university level medical education	
	<i>salowa</i> – assistant	no qualification needed	
<i>Przedszkola</i>	<i>nauczyciel wychowania przedszkolnego</i> – kindergarten upbringing teacher	3-5 years - university level	ISCED 5
	<i>nauczyciel edukacji wczesnoszkolnej</i> – early school education teacher	3-5 years - university level	
	<i>pomoc nauczyciela</i> - teacher’s assistant	3-5 years – university level	

The workforce, like government responsibility and provision, is split with separate groups of workers for children under and over three years. The head of a nursery should have a degree in nursing or another university level diploma related to providing health care services and at least three years experience in nursing; or a vocational diploma related to medicine, a specialised training course and at

least six years experience in nursing. Personnel working in nurseries rarely have a university-level qualification; the focus of their professional qualification is health care.

According to regulations in every nursery there should be a nurse. There is no regulation concerning assistants in nurseries. The number of nurses and assistants depends

Conditions for quality improvement and assurance

on the financial commitments of municipalities. In Warsaw for example there is one nurse in each infant group and one senior nurse for all the groups with older children. The number of assistants in nurseries is decided by the head of the nursery based on the nursery budget and needs.

Kindergarten staff are teachers educated at graduate level. Since 2006 there are three main professional study routes:

Route 1:

Entry requirements: General university entrance requirement; Professional studies: three years Teachers Training Colleges (kolegia nauczycielskie) - non-university higher education institution, ISCED 5A/B; Award: Bachelor / Kindergarten Education (*licencjat na kierunku pedagogika w zakresie wychowania przedszkolnego*).

Route 2:

Entry requirements: General university entrance requirement; Professional studies: three years university, ISCED 5A/B; Award: Bachelor / Early Education (*licencjat na kierunku pedagogika w zakresie wychowania przedszkolnego*); Master degree studies: two years university (*magister pedagogiki w zakresie pedagogiki przedszkolnej*).

Route 3:

Entry requirements: Bachelor degree in early education or Masters degree in other educational studies; Professional studies: two years postgraduate study - an optional extra, and requirement for centre leadership/management; Award: Masters degree / Early Education (*magister pedagogiki w zakresie początkowej edukacji*).

A five-year Masters degree is increasingly

popular, and is now a requirement for the head of a kindergarten, who is also expected to complete courses in management and marketing.

Professional development for teachers is provided by Universities (Pedagogy Faculties) and National and Regional In-Service Teacher Training Centres (a state-funded agency of the Ministry of National Education), as well as by Training Centres run by for-profit and non-profit organisations.

Kindergarten staff may be supported at various times by the following professionals: (1) a psychologist (*psycholog*), (2) a pedagogue (*pedagog*), (3) a music teacher with a speciality in movement education (*muzyk – specjalność rytmika*). Both psychologists and pedagogues are educated to Masters level (five years university); and the music teachers have six years higher secondary level training at a school of music, sometimes with an additional specialisation in movement education.

It is common for teacher's assistants to work with teachers in groups of three and four year olds in kindergartens.

Teachers qualified in kindergarten or early education work as staff in pre-school classes in primary school.

Most women who work as child carers in their own or children's homes (as a registered economic activity) do not have any qualification for working with children and such qualifications are not needed.

Work conditions and support

The basic salary for nursery workers (who work 40 hours per week) is determined by the Ministry of Health, and depends on their level of qualification; in 2009, it was 2500 PLN for a carer and 2600 PLN for a nurse.

Conditions for quality improvement and assurance

Kindergarten teachers have the same rights, duties and pay as teachers in the first three grades of school. However, teachers in kindergarten have longer teaching hours (and therefore fewer non-contact hours) than teachers in pre-school classes and primary schools – 25, 22 and 18 hours respectively. The decision concerning basic salary is made by Ministry of Education, depending on the level of qualification. In 2009 basic salaries for kindergarten teachers were between 1800-2400 PLN.

Municipalities decide on additional bonuses, which can be related to responsibility and incentives. The head of the nursery or kindergarten decides on the award of these bonuses. In both types of service, there is an additional seniority bonus of three to 20 per cent of basic salary.

Rural teachers additionally get a 'housing' allowance (*dodatek mieszkaniowy*) and a rural allowance (*dodatek wiejski*), which are 15 per cent and 10 per cent of basic salary respectively.

An established system of career advancement enables teachers in Poland to progress from one stage to the next:

- (1) Following at least one year as a probationary teacher, a commission decides whether the teacher may advance to the next stage to become
- (2) A 'contract teacher'.
- (3) To become a 'Teacher with a secure post' it is necessary to pass an examination held by a commission appointed by the municipality.
- (4) 'Diploma teachers' have to pass an exam held by a *Kuratorium* comprising a teacher, three experts, a kindergarten director, a trade union representative and a local government official.

In order to be eligible for the post of headmaster of a kindergarten it is necessary to have completed stages (3) and (4).

Workforce profile

The ECEC workforce is overwhelmingly female, with women making up 99 per cent of kindergarten teachers.

The average age of kindergarten teachers is 40, which is relatively high. Only 2.3 per cent of kindergarten personnel are younger than 25. Over a third (35 per cent) have more than 20 years professional experience.

Workforce recruitment and evidence of shortages

There is severe shortage of teachers with adequate qualifications for pre-school education in rural areas. Low birth rates and a decrease in the number of kindergartens in rural areas in the last two decades have led to pre-school studies being rarely chosen, and people with such qualifications easily find employment in cities, where demand for pre-schools is very high. To provide pre-school education for all three to five year olds, as the government proposes, will require 25,000 teachers.

Trade unions and other workforce organisations

Teachers' unions have a considerable role in shaping current education policy. The Minister of National Education is obliged to consult teachers' unions on the most important decisions, and in certain cases must have their approval. The law on education cannot be amended without the consent of the teachers' unions. There are also trade unions for nursery employees. There is no information about the proportion of early childhood workers who belong to these trade unions.

Conditions for quality improvement and assurance

The participation of social partners (individuals, institutions and organisations) in school activities does not occur on a large scale. However, the legislative framework concedes significant rights to parents and pupils as members of the school councils – they have the same rights as teachers – and these three groups have equal representation (one-third each) in the school councils.

Other conditions of quality

National standards (including staffing, environment)

Standards concerning organisational and safety requirements for nurseries are set out in Ministry of Health regulations. In a nursery, there should be rooms for children (for playing and separate rooms for sleeping), space for prams, sanitary space (including toilets, washbasins, at least one shower). There should also be separate rooms for different age groups, particularly for infants. The minimum area for one child should be 3.0 m². Infants should have the opportunity to lie down in the open air (eg on a terrace) and the nursery should have an open air playground that is inaccessible to outsiders. For the infant group (four to 12 months) there is one nurse per three children, for children between one and two years old, one for five children.

Standards concerning organisational and safety requirements for kindergartens are set out in National Ministry of Education regulations. The number of children in each group (or class) cannot exceed 25 children, and the numbers are smaller in kindergartens where children with disabilities are integrated, eg 15 to 20 with three to five children with disabilities. Generally, each group has two teachers, working in shifts, eg one working until midday, the other from midday (Eurydice 30), so that in practice there is one adult for up to 25 children.

Core curriculum for services

A new core curriculum for the kindergarten was introduced in 2008. As preschool education is to support the mental development of children so that they are well prepared for the transition to school, teachers are obliged to conduct ongoing observations and analyse the children's behaviour (accompanied by documentation). This helps them learn about the children's individual mental abilities and define their developmental needs. Also, during the year prior to the beginning of the first class of the primary school, the teachers analyse the children's readiness for undertaking learning at school. This process should be completed at the beginning of the second half of the school year, so that there is time to undertake compensatory activities.

On the basis of such diagnoses, the preschool teacher prepares individual programmes for supporting and correcting the development of the children who need it. The programmes are used for conducting educational and developmental activities.

There are no official recommendations or guidelines on methods of teaching, but generally emphasis is placed on play and children's spontaneous activity. Some kindergartens follow specific pedagogical approaches such as Montessori. During the Communist regime there was little opportunity to work with such approaches and theories, but there is now renewed interest.

In August 2009, The Ministry of National Education, together with the National In-Service Teacher Training Centre, announced a 'Competition on the best programmes of kindergarten education'. The aim was to select and disseminate the best programmes that are in compliance with the new core curriculum. The selection committee evaluated positively six programmes that can be used by

Conditions for quality improvement and assurance

kindergarten teachers. The first prize was awarded to the programme 'Good start for the kindergartener', designed by Monika Rościszewska -Woźniak, which is used by teachers participating in the Comenius Foundation for Child Development programme *Where There Are No Kindergartens* (see box in section 6d).

Licensing and inspection

Supervision of nurseries is the task of the Ministry of Health. At the regional level, nurseries (both public and non-public) are registered and supervised by national health institutions responsible for national health policy. While registering they gather detailed data concerning number and age of children, qualification of staff etc. They also systematically control hygiene and safety requirements.

Administrative and pedagogical supervision of kindergartens has been separated. General supervision (organisational, administrative and financial) is carried out by the body managing the kindergarten. Pedagogical supervision over the school is exercised by the regional education superintendent (*kurator oswiaty*). They are responsible for general administration of education in a region and for the monitoring of quality, and appointed by the head of the region. The education superintendent is, therefore, a regional administration official supervised by the region and responsible for implementing the policy of the Minister of National Education.

Quality control

In 2009, a new system was introduced for supervising kindergartens and schools. The forms of pedagogical supervision are: (i) evaluation, (ii) control and (iii) support. Evaluation is conducted in the following areas:

- effects of the didactic activities, of taking

care and of upbringing;

- processes in the school or in the centre which serve its development;
- functioning of the school or the centre in the local community, particularly in the area of cooperation with the parents;
- management of the school or the centre.

Evaluation includes collecting and analysing information and determining the level of compliance with Ministry requirements, with five levels identified: A is the highest level of compliance, E the lowest level. In order to conduct an external evaluation in a kindergarten or school, the Ministry of Education's regional educational authorities (*kuratoria*) appoint an evaluation team. The external evaluation cannot hinder regular activities in the kindergarten or school and cannot last longer than five working days within two successive weeks.

The local educational authorities control compliance with requirements related to educational and care-providing activities. The aim is to assess if kindergartens and schools comply with the law.

The tasks assigned to the kindergarten/school manager related to the quality of education:

- organising an internal evaluation and using the evaluation results for improving the quality of work;
- monitoring of the teachers' compliance with the legal requirements related to educational and care-providing activities;
- supporting the teachers in carrying out their tasks, particularly by:

organising training and meetings

Conditions for quality improvement and assurance

motivating teachers for professional development

observing the teachers' activities and presenting the results of observations to them.

Attention to children's outcomes

According to the new core curriculum, to achieve the aims of the kindergarten education it is necessary to support children's development and education in 15 areas, including, among others: developing social skills, providing assistance with developing children's speaking skills, supporting intellectual development, providing health education, education through art, teaching children how to respect plants and animals, teaching children how to take care of their own safety and the safety of others, teaching children about family, patriotic and civic values. Each area includes two to seven indicators for evaluating the child's readiness for the transition to school.

Family and community involvement

In the 1999 Education Act, parents are guaranteed the right to participate in decisions about their children's education. According to the new core curriculum, in order to secure uniform pedagogical standards, teachers should present the core curriculum to the parents; involve the parents in the process of developing children's specific skills; inform the parents about the kindergarten's current programme and about children's successes and problems; and encourage the parents to participate in decision-making in the kindergarten.

However, education is still regarded as the responsibility of the kindergarten or school. There are few established parent boards in kindergartens and schools, and it seems that parents also lack the motivation to get involved. This lack of engagement was illustrated by a research study from 1998 to 2005 (Mendel, 2006). Active participation by parents still appears to be the exception rather than the rule. A number of initiatives in the kindergarten sector are therefore focusing on strengthening the links between early childhood centres and families.

Relationship and transitions between ECEC and school

In Poland, not enough importance is attached to the subject of transition. Even proper pedagogic terminology is lacking. Although each kindergarten is obliged to follow a programme to help children adapt to kindergarten, it applies only to children who enter the kindergarten at the age of three. These programmes are adequate for new kindergarten groups but not for individual children. In most cases, adaptation is treated as a formal requirement and is limited to one meeting with parents and one or two visits by the child to the kindergarten in June, before the child starts school (September).

In recent years, mostly in big cities, special activities have been organised for two year olds to help them adapt to kindergarten (usually once a week for two hours). The activities are paid for by parents and take place in public kindergartens. They are run by private firms; sometimes pre-school teachers

play with children at the events, sometimes people with no pedagogic qualifications.

Beyond the introduction in 2004 of the compulsory pre-primary class there were no official strategies for improving the transition from kindergarten to primary school in Poland, no traditions of close co-operation between the staff in both institutions, and until now little attention to this topic in initial professional education. The most common procedure is parent-teacher meetings at the beginning of the school year.

The new core curriculum changes this. In order to get good educational results, the school curriculum, starting in grade one, has to be a continuation and broadening of the preschool education. Preschool teachers should be familiar with the school curriculum and the school teachers should know the core curriculum of preschool education.

Note on out-of-school services

For pre-school age children in big cities there are different kinds of activities, like sport, art, language lessons etc. They are organised mainly by private companies and parents pay high fees for their child's participation. There are also activities organised by non-governmental organisations, which get special grants from different sponsors (municipalities or foundations). The most difficulty is in rural areas where such activities rarely if ever take place.

There is a wide variety of 'out-of-school services' for children in compulsory school. Every school offers extracurricular activities led by teachers who are employed and paid by the school. These activities take various forms, including: activity groups, such as school groups of the Polish Red Cross, the Polish Tourist Society (PTTK) or the Environment Protection League, scouts and the school sport's union; thematic activities, such as choirs or musical groups; and special units created by the school and led by teachers, such as activity clubs and school day rooms. In general, school day rooms "offer a

space for pupils to do their homework and to wait for their parents. In the school year 2004–2005, there were 8,039 day rooms and 6,874 canteens available in all primary schools in Poland, and 23.4 per cent of all primary school-age children spend their free time in day rooms" (Eurofound 19; <http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/pubdocs/2006/236/en/1/ef06236en.pdf>)

Day rooms are open before school (eg from 07.00) and afterwards (eg to 17.00). Teachers often work in these rooms, receiving additional payments for doing so.

There are also services not based in schools, for example Youth palaces, which are after-school care centres for children and teenagers, providing theme-based activities, such as arts, other artistic activities and sports. Youth palaces aim to develop the scientific, artistic and social interests of children and young people and offer them entertainment, sport and cultural facilities.

Current developments and issues

Current developments

The Ministry of Work and Social Policy has prepared a bill - a so-called 'family law' - on forms of childcare for children under three. According to this proposal, nurseries are no longer health care centres and will be moved from Ministry of Health to Ministry of Work and Social Policy control. It envisages that new forms of early childhood education and care will be provided, including:

- nurseries

(type: care and upbringing; with aims and requirements very similar to those existing today),

- child club

(type: care and education; for children from one year, run by qualified person; children can stay no longer than 25 hours per week/five hours per day; five children per one child carer)

- child garden

(type: care and education; for children from one year; children can stay no longer than 12 hours per week/four hours per day; open seven days in a week; staff qualification as in child club; additionally volunteers can work after special training; five children per one child carer)

- daily parent

(type: care and education; for children from 20 weeks to three years; run by the parent in their own home; qualification – special 160 hours training; five children per one daily parent)

- childminder

(type: individual care in child's home by persons with qualifications).

These new types of early childhood education and care will be provided for children from 20 weeks - for nurseries and 'daily parents' - and from one year for others, up to three years. If a municipality has no kindergarten or other forms of preschool education, then this service provision will be extended until children are five. Care together with upbringing and elements of education have been planned.

The system will be built on the principle of accessibility for all, with no admission criteria. The register of the forms of services will be kept by municipalities. Once registered, the services can be provided and the supervision of the formal requirements will be carried out by these authorities. There is an opportunity for starting daily parent services, with parents being contracted by the municipality. It will also be possible to establish centres for day-care parents to provide counselling and advice.

Expert's issues

The most important issue for early childhood education and care in Poland is limited access to pre-school education and nursery care for children from birth to five, and the low quality of services for young children.

The main obstacles to high quality nursery care are: (i) lack of diversification of services; (ii) lack of staff qualified to work with the youngest children; (iii) lack of quality programmes for working with young children.

The main obstacles to high quality pre-school education and care are: (i) 'other forms of kindergarten education' are not flexible enough to be adapted to the needs and possibilities of rural municipalities; (ii) lack of government subsidies; (iii) lack of staff

Current developments and issues

qualified to work with the youngest children; (iv) curricula are too traditional and do not include the latest methodological solutions (eg child-centered approach) and very few hours are devoted to supervised teacher training for working with young children. Pre-school education also requires more staff working with young children; there should be the possibility of employing pedagogues appropriately trained for working in kindergartens.

An additional obstacle to the development of

pre-school education is a negative attitude of teachers unions towards:

'other forms of kindergarten education';

pre-school education provided by non-governmental organisations and by for-profit private institutions;

allowing people with other pedagogical qualification than pre-school education and early education to work in kindergartens and "other forms".

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