

# POLAND

## Key contextual data

*Compiled by*

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## Early childhood education and care (ECEC)

### Please note

In alignment with country-specific usage, the terms used in this report for the main forms of centre-based ECEC provision are **nursery/crèche** (*żłobek*, 0–2/3), **kindergarten** (*przedszkola*, 2½/3–6) and **pre-primary class/group** (5–6/7)<sup>1</sup> in schools (*oddziały przedszkolne w szkołach podstawowych*). Any additional forms are described where appropriate.

### Historical milestones in ECEC in Poland

Early 20th century	First kindergartens established
1919	The term <i>kindergarten</i> is used for the first time during the Nation Education Reunion (Teachers' Parliament)
1932	The term <i>kindergarten</i> is included in the Act on School Education.
1940s	Expansion of provision following increased entry in the labour market by women
1961	First Act on School Education issued – aims of early childhood education and basis for curriculum
1970s	Expansion of early education for 6 year-olds (introduction of reading elements, emphasis on preparation for primary school)
1991	Amendments to Act on School Education
1990–1993	Following the political changes, responsibilities for kindergartens are delegated to the municipalities.
Up to 1995	Many ECEC settings are closed down.
1999	Further amendments to Act on School Education – reforms focus on schools.
2008	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Early education reform starts – new curriculum for pre-primary education</li> <li>– Introduction of alternative forms of provision: pre-primary education hubs, kids' clubs, playgroups</li> </ul>
2009	Entitlement to a place in kindergarten or pre-primary class introduced for 5 year-olds
2011	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Kindergarten enrolment made compulsory for 5 year-olds and attending a pre-primary class for 6 year-olds</li> <li>– Act on Care for Children up to the age of 3 comes into force.</li> <li>– Responsibility for provision for under 3 year-olds transferred from the Ministry of Health to the Ministry of Family, Employment and Social Affairs.</li> </ul>
2013	Five hours in kindergarten are free of charge for parents; additional hours may not cost more than approx. €0.22 per hour.
2015	Entitlement to a place in kindergarten or pre-primary group introduced for 4 year-olds.
2016	Parents are entitled to decide at what age their child starts school (6 or 7).
2017	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Entitlement to a kindergarten place introduced for 3 year-olds</li> <li>– New Act on School Education (<i>Prawo oświatowe</i>) comes into force, with revised curricula for kindergarten and pre-primary education and confirmation that in justified cases children may be enrolled from the age of 2½ years.</li> </ul>

<sup>1</sup> **Editors' note:** International data sources use varying ways of presenting the age range of children enrolled in ECEC settings. We have chosen the following age-inclusive format for the SEEPRO-3 reports: **0–2** years for children **up to** 3 years of age and **3–5** years for 3, 4, and 5 year-olds in countries with a primary school entry age of 6 years. In Poland the relevant formats are **0–2/3** and **2½/3–5** years and **6–7** years, since primary school may start at age 6 or 7, depending on parental choice.



2021	The ministries for National Education and for Research and Higher Education are merged and renamed as the Ministry of Education and Science.
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Sources: Oberhuemer, Schreyer, and Neuman 2010; Ślusarczyk et al. 2018; Eurydice 2023; OpenLex 2023.

## ECEC system type and auspices<sup>2</sup>

The system of early childhood education and care in Poland is organised in two separate sectors. Childcare settings for children under 3 years of age come under the Ministry of Family and Social Policy (*Ministerstwo Rodziny i Polityki Społecznej*, MFSP 2020). ECEC settings for children from 3 years to school entry at the age of 7 are considered the first stage of the school system and are the responsibility of the Ministry of Education and Science (*Ministerstwa Edukacji i Nauki*) (MES 2021). The municipalities (*gmina*) are responsible for the management, maintenance, equipment and administration of ECEC facilities in both sectors. Monitoring and evaluation of pedagogical work of settings for younger children is also carried out at the municipal level; for pre-primary education settings, they take place at both the voivodeship (province) and municipality levels.

## General objectives and legislative framework

The most important legislation regarding the **childcare sector** is the “Act on Care for Children under the age of 3” (MFSP 2011 with amendments up to 2023). It indicates that the roles of settings are: care, upbringing and education, nevertheless highlighting the custodial aspects, providing meals and rest times, age appropriate indoor and outdoor activities and health and hygiene. The “Act for Entrepreneurs” (2018) describes the infrastructure and sanitation requirements for nurseries and kids’ clubs. Hygiene and Sanitation Guidelines, updated in 2020, also apply.

For kindergartens/**pre-primary education**, the Act on School Education (*Prawo oświatowe*, 2016) and the accompanying regulations have applied since September 2017. Among other things, these formed the framework for the admission of 2½ year-old children to kindergartens. Overarching goals in the early education of children aged 3 and above are described in the national core curriculum which has been in force from the 2017/18 school year and the relevant Ministry of National Education and Science guidance and regulations (Gazette of the Republic of Poland 2017) as supporting and promoting the intellectual, emotional, social, creative and aesthetic dimensions of children’s development; fostering values; and learning a foreign language. Furthermore, supporting children from minority groups concerning only the minorities defined in the Act on national and ethnic minorities (Ministry of the Interior and Administration 2005) and those with special educational needs are mentioned.

Besides the Education Act (*Ustawa o systemie oświaty*, 1991 with amendments up to 2022), which is the main document framing the work of kindergartens (MES 2022), key legislation relating to the working conditions, rights and obligations of professionals is the Teachers’ Charter (*Ustawa o Karta Nauczyciela*, 1982 with amendments up to 2014, Ministry of National Education 1982).

<sup>2</sup> The Eurydice country report on ECEC in Poland provided orientation on legal and regulatory aspects. All other sources are clearly indicated within the text and in the references section.

## ECEC entitlement and compulsory attendance

There is no legal entitlement or obligation for children up to the age of 3 to attend an ECEC setting.

Since 2017, 3 to 7 year-olds have a legal right to a place in an ECEC setting for at least 25 hours per week. Attendance is voluntary for 3 to 5 year-olds whereas for 6 year-olds, attendance at a kindergarten or pre-primary class at school has been compulsory since 2017. The legal entitlement was introduced on a staggered basis: in 2009 for 5 year-olds, in 2015 for 4 year-olds and in 2017 for 3 year-olds.

Priority admission to kindergarten is given to: a child from a large family, with disabilities, whose parents or siblings are persons with disabilities, who is being brought up by only one parent, who is being brought up in a foster family. In addition, each municipality may set additional criteria, which may be based on local social needs.

In recent years, there have been a number of changes to the starting age of primary schooling. Currently, primary school starts at age 7. Since December 2015, attendance has been compulsory for 7 year-olds but optional for 6 year-olds. Parents can apply for an earlier start, provided the child has attended kindergarten for at least one year (Ślusarczyk et al. 2018, 43). This means that, since January 2016, parents can decide whether their 6 years old child should remain in kindergarten or attend school. Most parents decide to enrol their children for school when they are 7 years old.

## Main types of provision

### *Childcare sector*

Since 2011, municipalities are legally in a position to provide **four** different options for children up to 3 years of age. However, the following types of setting are not a requirement and their provision depends on the local needs and resources.

**Nurseries/crèches** (*żłobki*) admit children from 20 weeks up to 3 years of age. Children may attend crèches for a maximum of ten hours per day, however this time may be extended in justified cases, which requires submission of an application by a parent. One Caregiver may look after for up to eight children between 1 and 3 years, and five if children under 1 year or with special needs are enrolled. Group size depends on the amount of square meters available. Children may be enrolled up to the end of the school year in which they turn 3 years, meaning that some 4 year-olds also attend the settings. Most children are between 2 and 3 years of age.

**Kids' clubs** (*klub dziecięcy*) may accept up to 30 children who have to be at least 1 years old.

These two types of facilities, which have a care, upbringing and educational function, must be registered in a municipal register and come under the supervision of the respective municipality. This applies to both public and private settings. They also need positive assessments from fire and health authorities. The availability of places varies greatly from region to region.

**Day care providers** (*dzienny opiekun*) were originally a form of home-based provision and are now becoming increasingly centre-based. In principle, this form of care was supposed to be more informal, comprising groups of five children (upon parental agreement eight children) from 1 up to 3 years of age or groups of three children when a child below the age of 1 or with special educational needs attends. However, due to lower requirements than in the case of crèches and kids' clubs with regard to pre-service education/training of Caregivers and the structural conditions of operation, facilities that combine several day care providers in one space are increasingly common. In 2021, 1,637 such providers supplied 10,131 places (CoM 2022, 12).

A **nanny** (*niania*) may also be employed by parents in their own home for children aged 20 weeks and above. Salary and social security are paid by the parents, who receive partial reimbursements from the Social Insurance institution (Gov.pl 2023). By the end of 2021, there were 4,900 nannies whose employment was co-financed from the state budget (CoM 2022, 18).

Overall, although the number of settings for under 3 year-olds has increased significantly over the past ten years, in 2021 only just over half of the municipalities had such facilities, and especially in rural municipalities there are usually fewer (36%).

According to national statistics, there were a total of 5,304 ECEC settings for under 3 year-olds in 2022. These included 4,446 nurseries and 858 kids' clubs (GUS 2023b, 1) and, in 2021, 1,637 home- and centre-based day care providers (see *Table 1*), with the greater majority of children attending nurseries. This means that over the past ten years, the number of childcare settings for under 3 year-olds has increased immensely, rising by more than 700% between 2012 and 2021 (CoM 2022, 12, own calculations). Most of these facilities are open between 5 and 10 hours.

*Table 1*

**Poland: Number of childcare settings for children up to 3 years of age, from 2012-2022**

Type of childcare setting	2012	2014	2016	2018	2020	2021	2022*
Nurseries/ crèches	791	1,667	2,272	3,155	3,985	4,270	4,446
Kids' clubs	105	384	515	676	795	831	858
Day care provider (home- and centre-based)	30	442	664	1,249	1,576	1,637	
<b>Total</b>	<b>926</b>	<b>2,493</b>	<b>3,451</b>	<b>5,080</b>	<b>6,356</b>	<b>6,738</b>	

Source: CoM 2022, 12, \*GUS 2023b, 1

### *Education sector*

There are **four** types of provision available for 3 to 7 year-olds and, in justified cases, for 2½ year-olds (OpenLex 2023).

**Kindergarten** (*przedszkola*) is the regular form of provision for 3 to 6 or 7 year-olds, with 1,249,173 children enrolled in 13,756 settings in 2022/23 including 7,486 children with disabilities in 350 special education kindergartens (GUS 2023a). Facilities are open all year round, usually for nine hours a day (public settings often have a two-week holiday break when children may be referred to other settings). Same-age groups are the most common form of grouping children in kindergartens, although mixed-age groups may be found in rural areas or in private settings where there are not enough children to form homogenous age groups or because of the pedagogical approach adopted. The children are grouped according to age and sex (mostly in single sex groups); 3 year-olds, sometimes 2½ year-olds (group 1); 4 year-olds (group 2); 5 year-olds (group 3); 6 year-olds (group 4). The final year for 6 year-olds may be organised in primary school and in this case it is called a pre-primary class/group. However, it is organised with same structural characteristics as a group 4 in kindergarten.

**Pre-primary/kindergarten units in primary schools** (*oddziały przedszkolne w szkołach podstawowych*) are an obligatory form of provision for 6 to 7 year-olds. This one year of preparatory pre-primary provision may be organised in kindergarten or primary school. In 2022/23, 260,235 children were enrolled in 7,305 settings (GUS 2023a). In kindergartens such units usually operate five days a week all year round, whereas in primary schools they follow the regular school year.

Two further forms of ECEC are available, but they are relatively rare:

**Pre-primary centres** (*punkty przedszkolne*), with a total of 1,399 settings serving 24,140 children in 2022/23; and **Pre-primary education units** (*zespóły wychowania przedszkolnego*), with a total of 45 units serving 664 children (GUS 2023a).

Both types admit a maximum number of 25 children. Mostly they are organised according to different sets of structural regulations or according to simplified criteria in rural regions with limited resources. Pre-primary education units are usually open for at least three hours per day and 12 hours per week. A pre-primary centre, on the other hand, implements activities on all workdays of the week throughout the school year, except for breaks set by the responsible authority. The basic criterion that distinguishes the two forms is the frequency of classes. Opening hours are flexible, depending on local needs, the needs of parents and the number of children. Alternative forms of pre-primary education have become increasingly popular, e.g. forest, farm or foreign language settings (Ślusarczyk et al. 2018, 66).

According to national statistics, in 2022/23 there were a total of 22.505 ECEC settings for children over 3 years of age (GUS 2023a), though an increasing number of 3 year-olds attend settings in the childcare sector. Currently, the demand for places exceeds the available supply.

## Provider structures

### Childcare sector

Nurseries/crèches and kids' clubs are mostly run by private individuals and organisations. In 2022, there were 4,446 nurseries in Poland, 25,2% of which were public settings providing approximately 40% of all places (indicating that non-public settings are smaller: on average 31 places in private and 61 in public nurseries). Only 18.1% (155) of kids' clubs were run by municipalities (*gmina*). Most (66.2%) of non-public nurseries and kids' clubs were run by legal persons and entities; in the public sector, local governments provided the largest number of nurseries and kids' clubs (96.8%) GUS 2023b, 1, 2).

### Education sector

The administration and organisation of kindergartens is usually the responsibility of the municipalities, which must ensure that sufficient places are available for children aged 3 years and older. In the event that a municipality has a shortage of places in public facilities, it can make a request to private providers and give them subsidies equal to the public fees.

In 2022/23, 52.2% (7,181) of the 13,756 kindergartens were run by municipalities, county governments or provincial self-government units (GUS 2023a). In 2021/22, 36.2% (4,884) were owned by private non-profit providers, 6.1% (825) by commercial companies and 3.4% (457) by religious organisations (GUS 2022, own calculation).

Table 2

**Poland: Number of children in kindergartens and pre-primary settings for 3 to 6/7 year-olds, 2022/23**

	Settings	Children
Kindergartens	13,756	1,472,572
<i>Of which special kindergartens</i>	<i>Of which public: 7,181*</i>	<i>Of which public: 847,224*</i>
	350	7,486
Pre-primary hubs	1,399	24,140
Pre-primary group in kindergarten	45	664

	Settings	Children
Pre-primary units in primary schools	7,305	260,235
<b>Total</b>	<b>22,505</b>	<b>1,534,212</b>

Source: GUS 2023a, \*Own calculations

## Participation rates in regulated ECEC settings

According to Eurostat data, in the past it was unusual for children under 3 years of age to be enrolled in an ECEC setting. In 2022, only 15.9% of under 3 year-olds attended a centre-based setting, but even this represents an eight-fold increase compared to 2005.

Of children between the ages of 3 and school entry, enrolment rates more than doubled, with 62.8% attended an ECEC setting in 2022 compared to only 30% in 2005.

Table 3

### Poland: Enrolment rates in ECEC centre-based settings by age and duration of attendance, 2005–2022

Year	Weekly hours of attendance	Under 3 year-olds in %	3 years to minimum compulsory school age in %
2005	1 to 29 hours	0	8
	Over 30 hours	2	22
	No enrolment in ECEC	98	70
2010	1 to 29 hours	0	10
	Over 30 hours	2	32
	No enrolment in ECEC	98	58
2015	1 to 29 hours	1.1	7.5
	Over 30 hours	4.2	35.5
	No enrolment in ECEC	94.6	57.0
2022	1 to 29 hours	1.6	18.5
	Over 30 hours	14.3	44.3
	No enrolment in ECEC	84.2	37.2

Source: Eurostat 2023b, slight deviations from 100% due to rounding

## Childcare sector

In kids' clubs and nurseries/crèches, children up to the age of 1 were the smallest group (1.2%), followed by the oldest ones from 3 years of age (5.9%) and those from 1 to 2 years of age (39.7%). The largest group of children attending kids' clubs and nurseries/crèches were children aged 2–3 years (53.2%) (GUS 2023b, 2).

Table 4

### Poland: Number and enrolment rates of children in nurseries/crèches, kids' clubs and day care provider settings, by age, 2022

Age	Number	Enrolment rate in %*
0 to 1 year-olds	2,156	0.7
1 to 2 year-olds	70,146	19.8
2 to 3 year-olds	94,116	25.1
<b>Under 3 year-olds</b>	<b>166,418</b>	<b>15.8</b>



Age	Number	Enrolment rate in %*
3 to 4 year-olds	10,447	2.7
	<b>176,865</b>	<b>9.6</b>

Source: GUS 2023b, 2 \*calculated according Eurostat population data 2022

The number of enrolments in ECEC settings for under 3 year-olds has been steadily growing over the last few years. Nurseries/crèches provided about 178,537 care places, which accounted for about 87.2% of all available places. In addition, a total of approximately 4,900 Nannies were enrolled in health insurance at the end of 2021 (CoM 2022, 18).

### Education sector

In 2022/23, 94.9% (GUS 2023a) of children aged 3–6 years participated in various forms of pre-primary education and there were 22,505 registered ECEC facilities, attended by 1,534,212 children. However, participation rates across the country vary substantially from 85% to 95%, depending on the region (GUS 2023a).

Of all children attending ECEC settings in 2022/23, 80.9% were enrolled in a kindergarten and 19.1% in the various other types of preparatory pre-primary facilities (see *Table 5*).

Table 5

#### Poland: Number of children in ECEC settings by age, 2022/23

Age	Kinder-garten	Pre-primary hub	Pre-primary group in kindergarten	Pre-primary class in school	Total
Under 2 years	21,642	771	16	1,769	24,262
3 year-olds	278,984	6,822	223	28,597	315,542
4 year-olds	320,593	7,683	234	41,957	372,023
5 year-olds	337,324	5,561	164	63,181	407,861
6 year-olds	276,292	2,514	24	120,496	401,327
7 year-olds and above	6,852	789	3	4,235	13,197
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,241,687</b>	<b>24,140</b>	<b>664</b>	<b>260,235</b>	<b>1,534,212</b>
Proportion of children attending specific types of ECEC setting*	80.9%	1.6%	0.04%	17.0%	

Source: GUS 2023a, \*own calculations

Age-related enrolment rates according to Eurostat data are shown in *Table 6*. Almost all 5 and 6 year olds attend an ECEC setting, although attendance is only compulsory for 6 year-olds.

Table 6

#### Poland: Number and enrolment rates of children in ECEC settings, by age, 2021

Age	Number of children	Enrolments rates in %
2 year-olds	22,255	5.7
3 year-olds	309,097	76.2
4 year-olds	346,936	89.5
5 year-olds	360,509	96.3
6 year-olds	373,847	98.9

Source: Eurostat 2023h, I

However, in 2021/22, pre-primary education institutions were attended by a much larger proportion of children aged 3–5 years in urban areas (92.9%) than in rural areas (85.3%). The overall attendance rate was 89.7% (Eurydice 2023, 4.1).

## Financing and costs for parents

In 2019, a total of 0.58% of GDP was spent on early education (OECD 2023). According to national statistics, in 2021, 3.7% of GDP was spent on education as a whole, roughly 18% of that for nursery schools and other pre-primary education settings (GUS 2022, 25).

Parents enrolling their children in an **ECEC setting for under 3 year-olds** have to pay a fee and cover the costs for meals. The exact costs are set by the municipality; in the case of private settings, the provider decides on the fees. In some municipalities, such as the city of Warsaw, some private settings are also subsidised and the costs for parents are the same as for the public ones. Fees are lower in the public sector than in the private sector. Since 2018, subsidies for settings providing for under 3 year-olds have also come from the Labour Market Fund.

The salary for a Nanny depends on the arrangement made with the parents. Typically, it depends on her/his professional background but also on the availability and scope of duties that is expected. Parents can apply for a subsidy of up to 50% of the minimum social security contribution of the Nanny they employ.

**Kindergartens** are financed through public subsidies. In public kindergartens, enrolment is free of charge for five hours a day. Additional hours and meals must be paid for. However, the municipality can determine how many hours are free of charge. Since October 2017, an additional hour may not cost more than PLN 1 (€0.22). Families with low incomes receive concessions. For 6 year-olds, attendance is free regardless of the number of hours. If the institution is more than 3 km from the place of residence, the municipality is obliged to provide free transport. Each municipality can decide on partial or total cost reductions.

Since 2016, child benefit (until the child is 18 years old) has also been granted at PLN 500 (€109.90) per month; in addition, there are various models of tax relief. Since 2019, child benefit is paid regardless of household income.

The costs for private kindergartens are significantly higher than for public institutions and vary greatly – between roughly €150 and €350 per month. They also charge an additional admission fee of €50 to €300. Meals are usually included, but costs of €2.50 to €5 per day for meals may still apply (Ślusarczyk et al. 2018, 66).

In 2022, a couple with two children spent about 5% of their net household income on childcare costs<sup>3</sup> (OECD.Stat 2023).

## Staff to child ratios and group size

In **nurseries** and **kids' clubs**, a maximum of eight children are cared for by one professional. If a child with special educational needs or a child under 1 year of age is among them, the group size is reduced to five. In nurseries with more than 20 children, at least one nurse or midwife is also employed, sometimes assisted by volunteer support staff.

Group size is only limited by the square meters available (in kids' clubs there may be a maximum of 30 children in the whole setting, even if the amount of space would allow for more). For the

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<sup>3</sup> The calculation is based on the following fictitious model: two parents working full-time (average income); two 2- and 3-year-old children in full-time care; relevant care allowances included.

first five children 16 square meters are foreseen and it increases by at least 2 m<sup>2</sup> if the duration of the stay of the children does not exceed five hours per day, and by at least 2.5 m<sup>2</sup> if the duration of the stay exceeds five hours per day.

Since 2022/23, the legislation provides for an increase in the group size limits in **kindergartens** and **pre-primary units in primary schools** due to the large number of children from Ukraine. In primary schools the limit is 28 children, including three from Ukraine. In public ECEC settings there are two core practitioners per group, one working in the morning and the other in the afternoon (with about one hour of overlap in the middle of the day). In private settings very often only one teacher is responsible. In both public and private settings core practitioners are usually supported by auxiliary staff; their responsibilities are decided by the respective setting. In integrative settings, additional staff with a special education qualification work alongside the core practitioners. In most cases, children in ECEC settings are divided into same-age groups. However, mixed-age groups can also be formed – especially in rural areas when there are sometimes not enough children to set up same-age groups or due to the chosen pedagogical approach.

## Curricular frameworks

### *Childcare sector*

There is no national curriculum for work in nurseries and kids' clubs. Staff are expected to create a family-like atmosphere for children's play, with an emphasis on their psycho-motor development and working closely with parents. The Centre Leader is responsible for ensuring compliance with health and hygiene regulations and responding to parents' perspectives.

Recently, there has been increased interest in various methods of working with young children, also in settings for children up to 3 years of age. In the public debate, the topic of preparing an educational programme for establishments working with children under the age of 3 is increasingly being discussed, but no related requirements have as yet emerged. Publications on 'good practice' are on the increase. Due to the lack of legislation in this respect, some settings adapt standards for working with children developed by NGOs. One example is the 'Quality from the beginning' Standards of *educare* for 0–3 year-olds by the Comenius Foundation for Child Development (2019). This document provides the pedagogical framework for nearly 80 settings across Poland established by the Foundation under the SPYNKA program ([www.spynka.org](http://www.spynka.org)) to tackle the crises in ECEC sector resulting from the influx of Ukrainian families with children.

### *Education sector*

All kindergartens follow the National Pre-Primary Education Curriculum (*Podstawa Programowa Wychowania Przedszkolnego dla przedszkoli oraz innych form wychowania przedszkolnego*) (MES 2013), issued by the regulation of the Minister of National Education (February 14, 2017) and the primary school core curriculum. The curricular framework also provides for children with intellectual disabilities (Gazette of the Republic of Poland 2017). Recommendations are provided for promoting the physical, emotional, social and cognitive development of children. 17 tasks of pre-primary education are defined, e.g. to create conditions that allow children to develop and play freely in a safe environment.

ECEC staff are required to develop their own centre-specific educational plan, using the national curricular framework as a reference point. The professionals have a free hand in the choice of methods.

## Digital education

No guidelines for supporting digital competence are provided in the Polish national curricular framework for pre-primary education.

## Monitoring – evaluation

In the pre-primary education sector in Poland, the term ‘evaluation’ has been replaced with the terms ‘control’ – here referred to as ‘inspection’. This refers to both internal and external pedagogical supervision and assessment.

### *Child-related assessment*

Assessment of process and pedagogical quality regarding the work with **under 3 year-olds** is not required by law. However, professionals consult with parents and provide information about their child on an ongoing basis).

According to the Regulation of the Minister of National Education of 9 August 2017, professionals working with **over 3 year-olds** with special educational needs should keep records based on daily observations. These provide a basis for identifying specific developmental needs, collaborating with parents and cooperating with counselling and healthcare specialists (Ministry of National Education 2017). Otherwise there are no specific regulations for assessing children in kindergartens.

Professionals working with **6 year-old children** in all types of ECEC facilities are obliged to inform the parents in writing by the end of April about their child’s ‘readiness’ for school. This document relates to the child's mastery of the requirements of the pre-primary curriculum in the physical, emotional, social and cognitive areas. It also includes a description of the degree of independence of each child, their developmental needs, predispositions, aptitudes and interests and any further comments the teacher finds important. Parents decide whether they want to share this information with the primary school staff.

### *Centre-based internal evaluation*

There are no national regulations for internal self-evaluation measures in ECEC settings for **under 3 year-olds** (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2019, 126), whereas in the larger municipalities self-evaluation measures are becoming more and more common.

Centre leaders in **kindergartens** are responsible for mandatory annual internal evaluations, both in terms of scope and subject matter. They are expected to review the alignment of the settings’ educational plan with the National Curriculum and document this in an annual report. At the beginning of each school year, these supervision plans are presented to the Teachers’ Council. Parents’ views are also heard (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2019, 128, 131). The results of internal evaluations are included in external evaluations and are intended to contribute to quality improvement. They are not published.

### *External Evaluation*

Municipalities are responsible for the inspection and supervision in terms of organisation and operation of both public and private settings for **under 3 year-olds** (MFSP 2020). The focus is on the structural characteristics of the settings, namely compliance with legal regulations.

The Ministry of Education and Science and the regional education authorities (*kurator oświaty*, REA) are responsible for the professional supervision of all ECEC settings for **3 to 6 year-olds**

with regard to pedagogical aspects. The latter appoint inspectors from their ranks and carry out the inspections.

External inspection is based on legally defined criteria and take place both on a scheduled and ad-hoc basis. As a rule, documentation provided by the ECEC setting is inspected, an on-site visit takes place and a report is prepared. The choice of instruments (e.g. questionnaires, interviews, etc.) is left to the inspectors. According to the current Regulation (Gazette of the Republic of Poland 2021) there are two main areas of control (§ 22 p.2): (a) the teachers' compliance with the statutory provisions on teaching, upbringing and caring activities; (b) the educational and care processes in the school or ECEC institution and their effects.

The results of the external and internal inspections could provide a basis for monitoring quality in early education and initiating discussions on quality improvement.

## Inclusion agenda

Children with disabilities and children with a background of migration are explicitly included in the National Pre-primary Education Curriculum (2017).

### *Children with special educational needs and disabilities*

Children with special educational needs may attend either a mainstream setting or a special needs institution. In kindergartens, specific groups can also be created in which these children receive individual support. If necessary, the core curriculum can also be adapted to the respective needs of the children.

In 2022/23, there were 350 special kindergartens (approximately 2.5% of all kindergartens), attended by 7,486 children (approximately 0.9% of all children in kindergartens) (GUS 2023a). In 2022/23, 512 mainstream kindergartens provided integrative groups (3.7% of all kindergartens), 62 mainstream kindergartens had special groups (0.5%) and 45 mainstream kindergartens provided both integrative and special groups (2%) (Eurydice 2023). Children with disabilities who have a corresponding confirmation from a counselling centre can also attend special education facilities where they receive the necessary support.

During 2022, 1,600 children under 3 years with disabilities attended mainstream settings, which represents about 0.5% of this age group. More than a half (59.5%) of facilities for young children were equipped with amenities for children with disabilities (GUS 2023b, 1, 3, own calculation).

### *Children with a migration background – Children from Roma communities*

Members of some national and ethnic minorities are guaranteed State support related to the preservation and development of their cultural identity. One of the requirements for inclusion among the minorities receiving State support is that their ancestors have lived in the present territory of the Republic of Poland for at least 100 years (Ministry of the Interior and Administration 2005). The recognised minorities include persons from Belarus, Czech Republic, Lithuania, Germany, Armenia, Russia, Slovakia, Ukraine and Jewish persons. Persons of Karaite, Lemko, Romani and Tatar origin are considered ethnic minorities.

In 2022, only 1.2% of the total population had a non-Polish citizenship, with a large majority (91.9%) coming from countries outside the EU27(2020). Also, among children under 5 years of age, only 0.9% were of non-Polish origin, 92.3% of those came from countries outside the EU27 (Eurostat 2023c).



Roma are one of the four recognised ethnic minorities in Poland. The Act on Ethnic and National Minorities (2005) stipulates their rights to preserve their cultural and linguistic identity. It is recommended that children from these four ethnic minorities should be supported according to their specific needs and given the opportunity to speak their family language.

At the request of parents, public ECEC settings are obliged to offer groups in "national and ethnic minority languages (e.g. Lithuanian, German, Belarusian, Ukrainian or Kashubian) for children over 3 years of age (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2019, 115).

Since 2017, all children are meant to participate in activities that "prepare them for the use of a foreign language"; this has been introduced in all settings although teachers do not have to meet certain requirements for teaching a foreign language. Language tuition is free of charge.

According to Council of Europe estimates, 12,731 Roma (0.1% of the population) live in Poland (European Commission 2022). The new national strategy for the inclusion of the Roma community in Poland (2021-2030) emphasises, among other things, the goal of ensuring that Roma children have sufficient access to and attend kindergartens and pre-primary settings. The Ministry of the Interior will issue minimum standards for the educational activities of ECEC settings and centres for the integration of children which should to be met in order to maintain their funding. Furthermore, additional groups for Roma children are to be created as the one-year compulsory pre-primary year alone may in some cases be insufficient for bridging the educational gap of Roma children before starting primary school. From 2014 to 2020, an average of 168 Roma children per year benefited from the intervention programme (Ministry of the Interior and Administration 2020, 59).

As of 12 September 2023, the UN reported that 1,681,930 refugees from Ukraine are recorded in Poland – the highest share among the European countries. 134,554 (about 8%) of them were children under age 4 (UN 2023).

The maximum group size in ECEC settings has been increased from 25 to 28 if there are at least three Ukrainian children in the group. Support for Ukrainian children is organised at the municipal or facility level. For example, there are some CPD offers on how to deal with traumatised children and families, or special materials such as books or videos. Nevertheless, many professionals feel left alone in the end. Some NGOs, such as the Comenius Foundation's SPYNKA network, have set up about 80 ECEC settings, mainly (but not exclusively) for Ukrainian children, which also employ Ukrainian refugees (Foundation for Child Development 2022).

## Parental leave arrangements<sup>4</sup>

**Maternity leave** (*urlop macierzyński*) is granted for 20 weeks (or more with a multiple pregnancy), of which up to six weeks can be taken before the birth. 14 weeks after the birth are compulsory. There are two payment options: (1) 20 weeks with 100% of the average income (without upper limit) of the last 12 months. Parental leave is then remunerated with 70% of former average earnings. (2) 81,5% of the average income of the last 12 months and the same proportion during Parental leave. The decision on this must be made 21 days after birth.

Fathers receive two weeks of fully paid **Paternity leave** (*urlop ojcowski*), which must be taken in the first 12 months after the birth, either altogether or in two blocks.

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<sup>4</sup> The brief overview in this section is based mainly on the country note for Poland by von Anna Kurowska, Barbara Godlewska-Bujok and Piotr Michoń in the *International Review of Leave Policies and Research 2023* (see *References*).

**Parental leave** (*urlop rodzicielski*) is granted for 41 weeks per family and is paid according to the option chosen before Maternity leave. 23 weeks are a family entitlement, 18 weeks are an individual (nine weeks for mother and father each) and non-transferable entitlement. The time can also be taken in (a maximum of five) parts, at most up to the child's 6th birthday. It is possible for both parents to take Parental leave at the same time. It is also possible to work (at most half-time); Parental leave is then extended accordingly.

Up to 36 months of **Childcare leave** (*urlop wychowawczy*), independent of Parental leave, can be taken by persons who have been employed for at least six months up to the child's 6<sup>th</sup> birthday. 34 months are considered a family entitlement, one month each for mothers only and fathers only. If the household income is less than PLN 674 (€150.60), an allowance of PLN 400 (€89.38) is paid for 24 months. The time can be taken in up to five different parts; both parents can take it at the same time.

To those who are not entitled to a maternity allowance (e.g. students, unemployed), a parental allowance of PLN 1,000 (€223.45) per month is paid.

In 2021, 99% of the beneficiaries of parental leave were mothers. In 2018, fathers took an average of 12.3 days of paternity leave, slightly less than in 2016 (13.2).

## Current challenges for the ECEC system in Poland

*Country expert assessment by*

*Małgorzata Żyto, Marta Pacholczyk-Sanfilippo, and Olga Wysłowska*

### Raising societal awareness of the importance of high quality of ECEC

An increase in societal awareness regarding the crucial role of early childhood education is needed. It is necessary to present the arguments from research and international experience on how the quality of ECEC affects social, educational, economic levels of life in society. For this reason, it is important to assess the main problems of Polish Early Childhood Education, especially the role of education and care in this field, and to prepare recommendations for policy makers, experts, and parents regarding the dimensions of change needed in supporting families with young children.

### Creation of a common vision and a system of cooperation in ECEC

It is necessary to integrate the different ideas, ways of thinking, activities and institutions around the main aim – raising the quality of ECEC. We need a clear vision of the social policy makers for parents, teachers, stakeholders and other people interested in early childhood education. Institutional integration of ECEC by the Ministry of Education and systematic cooperation between three services: education, health and welfare could be a significant challenge for the future. The preparation of well qualified, creative people for working in ECEC, ready to engage in educational and social activities is necessary (Brzezińska and Czub 2012).

### Organisation of ECEC provision

Access to kindergartens and other forms of ECEC provision varies significantly from region to region. Across the country, there are insufficient places to meet the rising demand, particularly in terms of provision for under 3 year-olds in urban areas. Moreover, the children who would profit most from participation are the least likely to attend. The Ministry of National Education has therefore declared an increase in the participation rates as a priority: since June 2013, all 4

year-olds and since September 2017, all 3 year-olds are entitled to a place in a public kindergarten. The municipalities are required to provide the places needed and receive subsidies for ECEC services for children aged 3 years and above. However, concerning provision for the under-threes, this is a significant challenge, since it is mostly only the larger municipalities who are in a position to comply with this requirement. The greatest organisational challenge, however, is the need to merge the two sectors by including services for the youngest in the education sector. This would be a clear acknowledgment of the importance of early childhood education and care for the holistic development of children.

### Social programmes for families

Another challenge is the continuing fall in the birth rate. It has therefore become a government priority to provide a range of support measures for young couples to encourage them in making the decision to have a child. Alongside a year's paid combined maternity leave and parental leave, the parents of each child receive monthly support from the State to the amount of 500 zlotys (the Rodzina 500 plus programme – this is about €104). Despite this, the birth rate was - 3.6 per 1,000 persons in the population in April 2022.

A new programme to support parents of young children is the Family Care Capital. The benefit, introduced in January 2022, is available from the month in which the child turns 12 months old until the end of the month in which the child turns 35 months old. The maximum amount to which the care capital is granted is PLN 12,000 (€2,495) per child. Family care capital is eligible in the amount of PLN 500 (€104) or PLN 1,000 (€207) per month. Parents themselves can indicate whether they want to receive the capital in the amount of PLN 500 for 24 months or in the amount of PLN 1,000 for 12 months. The benefit is available regardless of family income.

However, in April 2022, an additional change was introduced, and if parents have only one child, or the child is already 36 months old and still attending a nursery or kids club, they can receive a subsidy for the child's stay in the chosen type of a setting as part of the family care capital.

## Demographic data

*Please note: For reasons of comparability, data on children are always reported up to 6 years of age, even if compulsory schooling starts earlier or later in some countries.*

### Total population

In 2022 the total population in Poland was 37,654,247. This has been falling slightly but steadily for more than 20 years (2000: 38,263,303; 2010: 38,022,869; 2020: 37,958,138) (Eurostat 2023a).



## Total fertility rate

In 2021, the average total fertility rate in the EU27 (as of 2020) was 1.53. The highest total fertility rate among the 33 SEEPRO-3 countries was in France (1.84), and the lowest in Malta (1.13). Poland was well below the EU27 average with 1.33 (Eurostat 2023d)<sup>5</sup>.

## Children under age 6

Table 7

**Poland: Number of under 6 year-olds in the total population, 2022**

Age	Number of children
Under 1 year-olds	325,293
1 year-olds	354,899
2 year-olds	374,765
3 year-olds	389,709
4 year-olds	406,536
5 year-olds	388,295
<b>Total 0 to under 6 year-olds</b>	<b>2,239,497</b>

Source: Eurostat 2023a

In 2022, 2.8% of the total population were children under 3 years of age, 5.9% were children under 6 years of age. These proportions are slightly above the respective EU27 average.

Table 8

**Poland: Distribution of under 6 year-olds in population by age compared with EU averages, 2000 to 2022, in %\***

Year	Comparison Poland/EU	Under 3 year-olds	3 to under 6 year-olds	0 to under 6 year-olds
2000	Poland	3.1	3.5	6.6
	Ø EU15 <sup>6</sup>	3.2	3.2	6.4
2005	Poland	2.8	2.8	5.7
	Ø EU25	3.1	3.1	6.2
2015	Poland	3.0	3.2	6.2
	Ø EU28	3.0	3.2	6.2
2022	Poland	2.8	3.1	5.9
	Ø EU27(2020)	2.7	2.9	5.7

Source: Eurostat 2023a, \* Own calculations, slight deviations due to rounding

## Single households with children under age 6

61.2% of all households with children under 6 in Poland in 2022 were couple households. Single parent households accounted for only 2.4% – most of them were single mothers (2.2%).

<sup>5</sup> Data for **Ukraine** and the **UK** (2021) are from Statista (<https://www.statista.com/statistics/296567/fertility-rate-in-ukraine/> and <https://www.statista.com/statistics/284042/fertility-rate-in-the-united-kingdom-uk/>). Data for the **Russian Federation** (2021) are from WorldBankData (<https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.DYN.TFRT.IN?locations=RU>).

<sup>6</sup> The data for 2000 include the EU15-Länder at that time (AT, BE, DK, DE, IE, EL, ES, F, FI, IT, LU, NL, PT, SE, UK). The 2005 data (EU25) include CY, CZ, EE, HU, LV, LT, MT, PL, SI, SK. Data for 2015 include the additional EU28 countries BG, RO und HR. Data for EU27 (from 2020) comprise the countries of the EU28 without the UK.

Table 9

**Poland: Households with children under age 6, 2022**

Household type	Total households	Share of all households, in % <sup>+</sup>
Total households	3,826,200	
Couple households	2,340,000	61.2
Other types of households	1,395,000	36.5
Total single households	91,200	2.4
Single households, women	83,300	2.2
Single households, men	7,900**	0.2

Source: Eurostat 2023k, \*Own calculations, \*\*data calculated

**Employment rates of parents with children under 6 years of age**

In Poland, in 2022, the overall employment rate for men (15-64 years) was 79.6% and for women 67.4% (Eurostat 2023j).

In 2022, 59.3% of women and 79.4% of men (18-64 years) with children under 6 were employed. Among the 27 EU-countries (2020), the shares of employed fathers were the second lowest (average 87.2%) and also those of mothers were well below the EU-average (63,6%) (Eurostat 2023e, own calculations).

Table 10a

**Poland: Employment rates of parents with children under 6 compared with other EU countries, 2010 und 2022**

	2010	
	Mothers, in %	Fathers, in %
<b>Poland</b>	57.4	85.6
Highest rate of employment in 27 EU countries <sup>7</sup>	Denmark: 82.7	Netherlands: 93.4
Lowest rate of employment in 27 EU countries	Hungary: 31.7	Latvia: 72.7
	2022	
	Mothers, in %	Fathers, in %
<b>Poland</b>	59.3	79.4
Highest rate of employment in 27 (2020) EU countries <sup>8</sup>	Luxembourg: 81.9	Sweden: 95.1
Lowest rate of employment in 27 (2020) EU countries	Czech Republic: 42.5	Romania: 78.5

Source: Eurostat 2023e

For the SEEPRO-3 countries that were not part of the EU27(2020) in 2021/2022, data are displayed in *Table 10b*.

Table 10b

**Employment rates in non-EU SEEPRO-3 countries, 2021/2022/2023**

Countries	Parents with children under 6 years		Overall employment rate	
	Mothers in %	Fathers in %	Women in %	Men in %
*Norway (2022)	82.9	94.3	75.4	80.1
***Russia (2021/2022)	67.1 (2021)	k.A.	55.6 (2022)	70.4 (2022)

<sup>7</sup> AT, BE, BG, CY, CZ, DK, DE, EE, EL, ES, F, FI, IE, IT, HU, LV, LT, LU, MT, NL, PL, PT, RO, SE, SI, SK, UK

<sup>8</sup> AT, BE, BG, CY, CZ, DK, DE, EE, EL, ES, F, FI, IE, IT, HR, HU, LV, LT, LU, MT, NL, PL, PT, RO, SE, SI, SK

Countries	Parents with children under 6 years		Overall employment rate	
	Mothers in %	Fathers in %	Women in %	Men in %
*Serbia (2022)	64.4	78.3	57.9	71.0
**Switzerland (2022/2023)	46.9	95.3	60.0 61.1 (2023)	83.5 84.2 (2023)
+Ukraine (2021)	n.d.	n.d.	60.7	69.9
+++United Kingdom (2021/2023)	75.6	92.1	++72.3	++79.2
with dependent children	72.4	93.1	++72.1 (2023)	++79.4
with children under 2 years	70.7	95.0		(2023)

\*Eurostat 2023e, 2023j

\*\*[BFS] Bundesamt für Statistik. 2023. *Erwerbsquoten in Vollzeitäquivalenten nach Geschlecht, Nationalität, Altersgruppen, Familientyp* [Full-time equivalent employment rates by gender, nationality, age groups, family type]. <https://www.bfs.admin.ch/asset/de/je-d-03.02.00.01.03>

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## Children at risk of poverty or social exclusion<sup>9</sup>

In 2022, 14.1% of children under 6 in Poland were at risk of poverty or social exclusion. This proportion was significantly lower than the EU27 average (23.3%) for this age group. The share of all persons at risk of poverty or social exclusion in the total population was 15.9% compared with the EU average of 21.6% (Eurostat 2023f).

Historically, the proportion of children in Poland classified as at risk of poverty or social exclusion reached a record high of 31.0% in December 2009 and a record low of 15.8% in December 2020 (Trading Economics 2023, based on Eurostat data).

In 2019, 9.2% of children under 6 suffered from severe material deprivation – higher than the then EU28 average of 5.0%. For the total population, it was 7.9% compared with the EU average of 3.7% (Eurostat 2023g).

This proportion of children in Poland classified as being severely deprived decreased from 30.3% in 2009 (the sixth highest level in the EU at the time) to 6.2% in 2020 (the second lowest figure) (Notes from Poland 2022).

<sup>9</sup> 'At risk of poverty or social exclusion' refers to the situation of people either at risk of poverty (threshold set at 60 % of the national median equivalised disposable income after social transfers), or severely materially deprived or living in a household with a very low work intensity. ([https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Glossary:Material\\_deprivation](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Glossary:Material_deprivation))

Under the programme “Rodzina 500 plus”, families with dependent children are entitled to a child benefit in the amount of PLN 500 (roughly €104) per child up to the age of 18, regardless of the income earned by the family.

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