

COUNTRY PROFILE POLAND

GENERAL INFORMATION

Full name: Republic of Poland
Population: 38.2 million (via UN, 2006)
Capital: Warsaw
Area: 312,685 sq km (120,728 sq miles)
Major language: Polish
Major religion: Christianity
Life expectancy: 70 years (men), 78 years (women) (UN)
Monetary unit: 1 zloty = 100 groszy
Main exports: Machinery and transport equipment, foodstuffs, chemicals
GNI per capita: US \$7,100 (World Bank, 2006)

TVE SYSTEM

General Structure

The system of vocational and technical education in Poland undergoes the reform process commenced in 1999 since when the responsibility of administering vocational and general upper-secondary schools has been taken over by district governments (powiats). They decide on the school network in their area of responsibility, approve the organization of the instruction (specializations, teaching loads, size of classes) proposed by schools and on that basis they allocate financial resources to vocational education and training. Moreover, within the remit of districts governments operate public employment services which should equip schools with up-to-date and reliable data on the labor market situation. This model however has been recently partly reversed – circa 40 large agriculture schools are in 2007 taken over back by the Ministry for Agriculture and Rural Development which means that they will be administered from the central level.

Since 2002 the new types of post-gymnasium (upper-secondary) vocational and technical schools have been established, including:

- a 3-year profiled (specialised) lyceum providing both general education and general (broad) vocational training in 15 profiles related to economic activity; the graduates may either continue their education in a post-secondary (or more precisely – post-lyceum) school to acquire vocational qualifications, or – having passed *matura* (the final upper secondary school examination) – apply for admission to higher education institutions or take up the employment; however this type of school does not bestow formal vocational qualifications, it only provides broad vocational knowledge;
- a 4-year technical upper secondary school – providing both general and strictly vocational (technical) education; the graduates except for *matura* examination (which is not obligatory in any type of school) take the vocational examination and are awarded diplomas certifying vocational qualifications (they obtain the title of *technician*); the great majority of graduates continue their education at tertiary level;
- a 2-3 year basic vocational school – providing both general and vocational education, prepares its pupils to the vocational examination leading to diploma certifying vocational qualifications (title – *qualified worker*); it enables its graduates to continue education in 2-

year supplementary lyceum (leading to *matura* exam) or 3-year supplementary technical school (leading to *matura* exam and a vocational examination and the title of *technician*),

- post-secondary – post-lyceum school (up to 2,5 years) – which enables its graduates with completed upper secondary education (*matura* is not required for enrolling to this type of school) to obtain a diploma certifying vocational qualifications after having passed vocational examination.

Vocational education and training – within the school education system i.e. within the responsibility of the Ministry of Education (MoE) – is provided by public and private schools and training centres. Public institutions are run by district/county government units (*powiat*) or by private units. The latter (natural or legal persons) are allowed to establish and run private schools and training centres after having registered by relevant administration units. The number of non-public schools – especially upper secondary general, post-secondary and schools for adults – has been mushrooming since mid 1990-ties.

Vocational education in Poland is provided within the framework of the official classification of vocational education occupations, currently including 202 occupations. The classification is defined by the regulation of the minister for education following well justified proposals from the relevant sector ministers. For every occupation listed in the classification MoE sets core curricula and teaching programmes – relevant ministers and social partners get involved in the process however their role has not been very active so far. Teachers are allowed to draft curricula and to present them for official admission by MoE. At present the official list of vocational education curricula encloses 340 curricula, including 119 modular ones.

The proportion of general and vocational instruction varies according to types of school, occupations and level of qualifications. The curriculum: subject-based or modular is divided into general education, vocational theoretical education and practical training. In profiled – specialised lyceum the content of general vocational education accounts for circa 14% of the total teaching hours, in technical upper secondary – 38%, in basic vocational school – over 55% of the total teaching hours. In post-secondary schools almost 95% of the total instruction hours and content of the curriculum is devoted to vocational training, including professional foreign languages (mostly English and German).

The proportion between theoretical and practical instruction depends on the types of school and occupations. In profiled – specialised lyceum there is no practical placement at all; in basic vocational, technical and post-secondary schools the relation between theoretical and practical training is defined in curricula for all occupations listed in the official classification.

The dual system in Poland has a long and well established tradition. It is realised twofold: either juvenile workers are enrolled at school (i.e. they are employed part-time and listed as schools students – they have dual status) or they are merely regarded as (juvenile) workers – employed and taking theoretical training at training centres. The number of juvenile workers remains steady for a long time. Even the decline of interest in vocational education observed during the 1990-ies has not affected the dual system. The major association involved in dual system is Polish Craft Association.

As regards the possibilities of continuing education the system is progressive – it means that no “dead ends” occur. For graduates from basic vocational school supplementary types of upper-secondary schools have been established: supplementary lyceum (of 2-year cycle) and supplementary technical school (of 3-year cycle). Consequently all graduates from upper-secondary schools having passed the maturity examination are formally entitled to apply and be enrolled to higher education institutions. However it is reported that the graduates from general upper-secondary schools – general lycea on average perform better on the examination and

achieve higher results. The situation is explained by the simple fact that in general upper-secondary schools more teaching hours are dedicated to general subjects being examined on the maturity examination. Students of technical upper-secondary schools are on the other hand prepared to acquire technical knowledge and vocational skills which is examined during external vocational examination. There were attempts to introduce so called *vocational maturity examination* which would credit and acknowledge the vocational and technical path and enable access to technical higher education institutions (polytechnics) but they were abandoned.

Financing and Expenditures

The funding for the system of vocational and technical education comes from two major sources: central and local government budgets. Local governments receive subsidy from the state budget which – although not earmarked – should be allocated for financing school education. The amount of the subsidy is based on the number of students and calculated with the formula defined by the regulation of the MoE. The formula uses different coefficients (weights) for students of different types of schools. Cost of a student in vocational school is slightly bigger than a student of general education. Nevertheless, the real unit cost of vocational education is much higher than the one for general education what makes the local governments rationalise the expenses and close down costly vocational training institutions.

As regards the expenses of local government entities administering upper secondary schools, there has been a difference in distribution pattern: large gminas – municipalities that run upper secondary schools have allocated on average more funding to general upper secondary schools than to vocational ones. The opposite situation can be observed in districts (powiats).

The role of private sector in funding vocational education is not remarkable – employers still find it the state’s responsibility to cater for vocational education and to provide qualified graduates to the labor market. Within the structure of employers small and medium enterprises prevail who can hardly afford taking an apprentice and provide them with instructors. According to the education act of 1991 the costs of vocational training and practical placements organised by employers are partly reimbursed from the state budget sources.

The major indicators in public spending on education for 2003 are given as follows:

| | |
|--|-------|
| Total Education Expenditure (% of GDP) | 5.62 |
| Expenditure per student, primary (% of GDP per capita) | 22.89 |
| Expenditure per student, secondary (% of GDP per capita) | 21.71 |
| Expenditure per student, tertiary (% of GDP per capita) | 19.75 |

Source – World Bank (WDI Online)

Quality Assurance

The MoE sets legal framework for the quality assurance system and standards for so called pedagogical supervision which is performed by 16 regional educational authorities (kuratoria) employing school inspectors. Their role is first of all to control if the regulations concerning the organization of the teaching process are observed. Some schools apply for quality certificates (like ISO) on the voluntary basis.

Training institutions providing continuing education may apply for the accreditation by kuratoria. They have to prove that they have enough resources – qualified staff, equipment etc as well as approved teaching programmes to get accreditation. The accreditation is given to the institution

not to the programme so it does not affect the right to award certificates or diploma. Only tiny share of the training centres decided to apply for this type of accreditation.

Since 2002 Poland has introduced a system of external examinations at the end of primary, lower secondary and upper secondary schools – both general and vocational. The examinations are carried out by regional examination boards subject to Central Examination Board (CEB). Examination standards and procedures are set in the form of regulation by the MoE in cooperation with social partners and relevant ministries (in case of vocational examinations). Examination standards for vocations taught within the dual system in the craft sector are established by the Polish Craft Association. Since the school year 2003/2004 all vocational schools graduates are entitled to take the external examination certifying vocational qualifications and be awarded a certificate as well as a certificate supplement (both in Polish and English language version). The vocational examination consists of two parts: written and practical. The written part includes the test of vocational knowledge and the tasks related to entrepreneurship and economic activity. During the practical phase students are given practical assignment which they are obliged to perform and to present its results before the commission of independent examiners and observers.

The Students of TVE Systems

Students are steered into vocational or general education path on the basis on their educational attainments in lower secondary schools as well as interests and motivation of their own and/or their parents. The main formal selection criterion to upper-secondary schools is the number of points achieved during lower-secondary school final examination. Upper-secondary schools set point thresholds and other extra-curricular requirements enabling them to attract the most gifted students. The most prestigious general upper-secondary schools set the thresholds on high level what makes the poorer achievers be enrolled to technical and basic vocational schools. Nevertheless in recent time due to shortages of certain skilled workers on the labor market a number of vocational education institutions have regained their status and introduced point thresholds on the levels comparable to the ones used by general upper-secondary schools.

Another way for steering students into VET (on upper-secondary and post-secondary level) is career orientation and guidance system provided in schools (lower and upper secondary), education centres and specific psychological - pedagogical centres. The employed staff includes psychologists, pedagogues and qualified guidance practitioners. There is a possibility of employing career counsellors in schools however it requires the approval of the local government. The approval entails assigning additional funding therefore the number of career guidance practitioners in schools is still very low – in the school year 2005/2006 in upper secondary schools amounted to 346. On the other hand students often benefit from guidance services provided by career counsellors employed in public employment offices (on district and province level) which use the most comprehensive and up-to-date materials and information related to qualification requirements and skills needs reported by employers.

Since the beginning of socio-economic transformation there has been a general trend of decreasing the number of students in basic vocational schools and increasing the number of students of upper-secondary general and technical schools. The rise was especially visible in general upper-secondary schools leading to maturity examination for adults which depicts the widespread growing educational aspirations and the willingness of older population to acquire secondary qualifications and continue education at tertiary level.

Enrollment patterns for 2006 are given as follows:

| | |
|---|-----------|
| Number of Students in Primary Schools | 2,484,800 |
| % of Total Enrollment | 30.14 |
| Number of Students in Lower Secondary Schools | 1,528,800 |
| % of Total Enrollment | 18.55 |
| Number of Students in Basic Vocational Schools | 236,200 |
| % of Total Enrollment | 2.87 |
| Number of Students in General Secondary Schools | 732,900 |
| % of Total Enrollment | 8.89 |
| Number of Students in Specialized Secondary Schools | 160,000 |
| % of Total Enrollment | 1.94 |
| Number of Students in Technical Secondary Schools | 557,500 |
| % of Total Enrollment | 6.76 |
| Number of Students in Post Secondary Schools | 327,900 |
| % of Total Enrollment | 3.98 |
| Number of Students in Tertiary Education | 1,941,400 |
| % of Total Enrollment | 23.55 |
| Number of Students in Schools for Adults | 273,800 |
| % of Total Enrollment | 3.32 |

Source – Concise Statistical Yearbook of Poland 2007

As regards the occupational and specialization structure in vocational education it has remained stable and much immune to the labor market needs. In the school year 2005/2006 (last available relevant data) the following occupations were most frequently chosen by students:

- in technical upper-secondary schools: economics clerk (assistant), mechanic technician, electricity technician, nutrition and household technician, trade and commerce technician;
- in basic vocational schools: car mechanic, small gastronomy cook, shop-assistant, hairdresser, baker;
- in post-secondary schools: office assistant, computer technician, guard and protection technician, beautician (cosmetics), tourist service assistant.

On the other hand the data provided by labor offices inform that employers most often sought for employees representing other occupations than the ones mentioned above, i.e. occupations in the field of social, personal and health care, construction, car driving. Analysing the vocational education offer in terms of the vacancies available in employment services (and bearing in mind that the official employment statistics covers only approximately 20% of all job offers appearing on the market) it is evident that the schooling system duplicates the education structure that is not adjusted to the labor market needs. Educational choices of students are often determined not by their real predispositions and interests but the available school offer.

The chances of finding employment strongly depend on the level of education. Likewise in most developed counties, people with higher education attainment (tertiary qualifications) are welcomed by employers and earn relatively higher salaries. Nevertheless, recently Poland has been facing the shortage of qualified workers in certain branches and fields of occupations caused by decreasing interest in vocational education and training as well as the intensifying emigration of domestic workers to Western European countries. It is reflected inter alia in the falling percentage share of people with basic vocational qualifications (qualified workers) and the

increasing share of people with tertiary qualifications in the general unemployment structure by the level of education.

Table. Shares of unemployed by level of education

| | III 2001 | III 2002 | III 2003 | III 2004 | III 2005 | III 2006 | III 2007 |
|---|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| level of education | 100,00% | 100,00% | 100,00% | 100,00% | 100,00% | 100,00% | 100,00% |
| higher (tertiary) | 2,53% | 3,25% | 3,79% | 4,34% | 4,75% | 5,28% | 5,88% |
| post-secondary and vocational upper-secondary | 20,69% | 21,18% | 21,02% | 21,02% | 21,44% | 21,63% | 21,69% |
| general upper-secondary | 6,14% | 6,17% | 6,15% | 6,45% | 6,87% | 7,63% | 8,35% |
| basic vocational | 36,91% | 36,74% | 36,28% | 35,51% | 34,02% | 32,65% | 30,93% |
| lower-secondary and less | 33,73% | 32,66% | 32,76% | 32,68% | 32,92% | 32,81% | 33,12% |

Source: Ministry for Labor and Social Affairs

It is estimated that circa 35-40% employers encounter problems with finding and hiring appropriately qualified staff.