Structure and organization

Early childhood education and care (ECEC) in Poland is divided into two stages:

1. for children aged 0-3 years: in crèches (złobki) and, as from 2011, kids clubs (kluby dziecięce), and settings where care is provided by day-care providers or child minders (opiekun dzienny) and nannies (niania);
2. for children aged 3-6/7 years: in nursery schools (przedszkole), preschool classes (oddziały przedszkolne) in primary schools and other preschool education settings, including preschool education units (zespół wychowania przedszkolnego) and preschool education centres (punkt przedszkolny).

Provision for children aged 0-3

Before 2011, crèches (złobki) were the only institutions or settings providing care to children aged up to 3 years. They operated within the healthcare system, and thus were regarded as institutions providing healthcare services, including disease prevention and care, to children aged 3 and below during their parents' or guardians' working hours. At present, childcare institutions for children aged 3 and below are supervised by the Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Policy [1].

Crèches and day-care providers / child minders and nannies provide care to children aged at least 20 weeks, and kids clubs to children aged 1 year and above. Care can be provided until the end of the school year in which the child reaches the age of 3 or up to the age of 4 in cases where it is impossible or difficult for the child to participate in preschool education. Where children have reached the age of 3 and attend a crèche or kids club, or are supervised by a day-care provider / child minder, their parents are required to provide the childcare institution concerned with a statement explaining reasons for which their children are unable to participate in preschool education.

Provision for children aged 3-6

In accordance with the Act of 14 December 2016, the Law on School Education [2] (Ustawa Prawo oświatowe), preschool education is considered the first level of the school education system. Preschool education institutions in Poland are attended by children from the age of 3 years up to the start of primary school. It is also worth mentioning that the term ‘preschool education’ (edukacja przedszkolna) is increasingly often used in Poland as interchangeable with the term ‘preschool care and upbringing’ (wychowanie przedszkolne) used previously.

Pursuant to the School Education Act of 7 September 1991, a compulsory preschool preparatory year was introduced for all 6-year old children as from 1 September 2004. As from 1 September 2017, these provisions were included in the Act of 14 December 2016, the Law on School Education. As from 1 September 2009, 5-year olds had a statutory right to complete a preschool preparatory year in a
nursery school, preschool class in a primary school or other preschool settings, including a preschool education unit or centre. As from 1 September 2011, this right has been replaced by a requirement to complete a preparatory year in one of the settings mentioned above. As from 1 September 2015, 4-year old children have a statutory right to preschool education. As from 1 September 2017, this right has been extended for 3-year olds.

As from 1 September 2016, the primary school starting age is again 7 years (it was gradually lowered to 6 between 2009 and 2015). Children aged 6 are now required to complete one preschool preparatory year in a nursery school, another preschool education setting or a preschool class of the primary school.

At the parents’ request, children who reach the age of 6 in a given calendar year may also start primary education if they:

- participated in preschool education in the school year preceding the school year of entry into primary education; or
- have a statement confirming that they can start primary education, issued by a counselling and guidance centre.

Thus, parents may choose when their children start primary education (6 or 7 years).

As explained above, preschool education covers children from the beginning of the school year in the calendar year when the child reaches the age of 3 till the end of the school year in the calendar year when the child reaches the age of 7. Where this is justified, a child who has reached the age of 2.5 may participate in preschool education.

Aims

Provision for children aged 0-3

The changes that have been introduced since 2011 to the ECEC system for children aged 3 and below aim to extend the range of services provided by introducing a wider variety of care settings and to enable parents or guardians to choose the most suitable setting. The arrangements proposed should also help parents or guardians to take up employment. The services provided by crèches include the following elements based on the norms set for children of this age: meals, care and nursing, sleep and rest hygiene, indoor and outdoor educational activities, activities preventing diseases and promoting health, corrective activities, and the provision of ad-hoc medical care.

Provision for children aged 3-6

Preschool education covers activities which aim to support the development and education of children at the age of 3 up to the beginning of primary education. The main aims of preschool education are defined in the national core curriculum for preschool education. The core curriculum is established by the Regulation of the Minister of National Education of 14 February 2017 on the core curriculum for preschool education and the core curriculum for general education in primary schools, incl. for pupils with moderate and severe intellectual disability, and for general education in stage I sectoral vocational schools, general education in special schools preparing for employment, and general education in post-secondary schools.

Preschool education aims at supporting comprehensive development of children. Support is provided through care, education and teaching and learning processes. Thus, children can discover their own abilities and the meaning of their activity, and gain experience on their way to the truth, goodness
and beauty. As a result, children achieve readiness to enter the first stage of school education. Nursery schools have the following tasks:

1. Supporting multidimensional activity of children by providing conditions which encourage them to gain experience as part of their physical, emotional, social and cognitive development
2. Providing conditions for children’s free development, play and leisure, while giving them a sense of security
3. Supporting children’s activity which improves their sensory integration and ability to use emerging cognitive processes
4. Providing proper conditions where which encourage children to gain experience so as to ensure continuity in their adaptation processes, and help children who are developing in a non-harmonious way, at a slower or accelerated pace
5. Supporting children in independent exploration of the world, and selecting contents that are adequate for the level of their development, perceptual abilities, concepts and reasoning, while respecting their individual needs and interests
6. Increasing children’s self-esteem, enhancing their individuality and originality, and strengthening their need to create interpersonal relations and participate in a group
7. Creating situations which encourage the development of habits and behaviours leading to independence, caring for health, motor fitness and safety, including safety in road traffic
8. Preparing children to understand their own and other people’s emotions and feelings, and taking care of their mental health, among other things, through real-life situations emerging in a nursery school and task-oriented situations which embrace contents appropriate for children’s intellectual abilities and development expectations
9. Creating learning situations which build children’s sensitivity, including aesthetic sensitivity, with regard to many spheres of human activity: speech, behaviour, motion, environment, dressing, music, dancing, singing, theatre and visual arts
10. Providing conditions for safe and independent exploration of the natural environment surrounding children, which stimulate the development of children’s sensitivity and enable them to learn about values and norms concerning the natural environment, as appropriate for the stage of children’s development
11. Providing conditions for safe and independent exploration of elements of technology in children’s environment, and for designing, tinkering, planning and undertaking purposeful action, and presenting products of their work
12. Collaborating with parents and various communities, organisations and institutions which parents consider to be a source of important values, in order to provide conditions for the development of children’s identity
13. Creating, together with these entities, situations where children learn about values and social norms which come from the family, a group in a nursery school and other adults, including elderly people; and shaping behaviours based on values which children may understand at this stage of development
14. Extending systematically, with parents’ consent, learning contents to include new issues as a result of changes and phenomena emerging in children’s environment which are relevant to their safety and harmonious development
15. Supporting systematically the development of children’s learning mechanisms so that they achieve a level which enables them to start school education
16. Organising classes and activities, in line with the needs, where children can learn the culture and language of a national or ethnic minority or the regional language (Kashubian)
17. Creating learning situations which arouse children’s interest in a modern foreign language and in learning about other cultures.

The core curriculum also states that the following groups do not participate in activities preparing
children to use a modern foreign language:

- children with a certificate recommending special education due to a moderate or severe intellectual disability;
- children with a certificate recommending special education due to multiple disabilities if these include a moderate or severe intellectual disability; and
- children with a certificate recommending special education if their individual education-and-therapy programme indicates that it is not possible to prepare them for using a modern foreign language due to their individual developmental and educational needs and psychological and physical abilities.

Furthermore, the core curriculum defines expected achievements for children in terms of physical, emotional, social and cognitive development upon completion of preschool education. Play is the main form of activity for children in preschool education.

The core curriculum document includes detailed organisational and methodological guidelines.

**Legislation**

**Provision for children aged 0-3**

Arrangements for institutions providing care to children aged up to 3 years, including crèches, kids clubs and day-care providers / child minders, are laid down in the *Act of 4 February 2011 on Care for Children up to the age of 3* [3] (*Ustawa o opiece nad dziećmi do lat 3*).

Before 2011, pursuant to the Act on Healthcare, crèches were classified as public or non-public healthcare institutions. They were established by the Minister of Health, regional authorities or other local government units, or medical higher education institutions. Non-public institutions could be administered by legal or natural persons. At present, the above-mentioned Act on Care for Children up to the age of 3 is the main legislative act concerning various care settings for children aged 3 and below. Care for children aged up to 3 currently falls within the remit of the Minister of Family, Labour and Social Policy (the Minister of Labour and Social Policy between 2011 and 2016).

Crèches and kids clubs can be administered by communes, natural persons, legal entities or other institutions. Administering a crèche or kids club is a regulated activity as currently defined in the Act of 6 March 2018, *the Law for Entrepreneurs* [4] (*Ustawa Prawo przedsiębiorców*). Thus, such settings should be entered onto the Register of Crèches and Kids Clubs kept by the commune (*gmina*) (the lowest-level local government unit).

The Minister of Labour and Social Policy adopted detailed regulations on:

- the infrastructure and sanitation requirements for premises to be used by crèches and kids clubs (2014 Regulation, amended in 2018);
- the scope of training programmes for child minders working in crèches and kids clubs, volunteers and day-care providers (2011 Regulation)(text in Polish [5]:)
- electronic document templates for entering a provider into, changing an entry in, and striking a provider from, the Register of Crèches and Kids Clubs (2014). The Regulation was in force until 31 December 2017. Currently, the arrangements for entry into the Register, changes in entries and striking providers from the Register are laid down by the Act on Care for Children up to the age of 3[1].
Provision for children aged 3-6


The School Education Act of 7 September 1991, which was in force until recently, had introduced the concepts of public and non-public education, including public and non-public nursery schools, and laid down their operational arrangements. Furthermore, the 1990 Act on Local Government (as amended subsequently) had considerable impact on the functioning of nursery schools. Based on the two Acts, the responsibility for the administration of public preschool education institutions was delegated to communes (gmina) (the lowest-level local government units) as from 1 January 1992. Many provisions concerning preschool education were transferred from the 1991 School Education Act to the 2016 Law on School Education.

The administration of public preschool education institutions, including one-year preschool preparatory education, is a statutory task of the commune which establishes, administers, restructures and closes these institutions. As the managing body, the commune is responsible for providing conditions for activities of nursery schools (including repairs and infrastructure projects, administrative and financial support, teaching resources and equipment necessary for teaching); for the appointment and dismissal of nursery school heads (based on a competition); and for approving annual organisational plans of nursery schools.

Pedagogical supervision over preschool education institutions is exercised by the head of the regional education authorities (REA) (kurator oświaty). Both the nursery school managing body and the head of the REA may interfere with preschool activities only insofar as this is allowed by the legislation. Thus, nursery school heads and teachers are free to take decisions on various important matters such as curricula or organisational arrangements. The amended School Education Act has handed over, as from 2016, the supervision over local government units as regards school and nursery school networks back again to the heads of the REA. The commune council may establish a network of public nursery schools, preschool education classes in primary schools and other preschool education settings only upon receiving a positive opinion from the head of the REA. At the same time, the remit of the head of the REA has been extended to include giving opinions on so-called organisational sheets of nursery schools, schools and other educational institutions.

The Minister of National Education has adopted detailed regulations on the following issues:

- outline statutes for public nursery schools and schools (2001 Regulation, last amended in 2013; replaced by the provisions of the Act of 14 December 2016, The Law on School Education, and the Regulation of 17 March 2017 on the detailed organisational arrangements for public schools and public nursery schools);
- core curricula for preschool education and general education in individual types of schools (2012 Regulation, amended in 2014 and 2016, and replaced, as of 1 September 2017, by the Regulation of 14 February 2017 on the core curriculum for preschool education and the core curriculum for general education in primary schools, incl. for pupils with moderate and severe intellectual disability, and for general education in stage I sectoral vocational schools, general education in special schools preparing for employment, and general education in post-secondary schools);
- rules and procedures for admission to public schools (2004 Regulation; in 2014, its provisions were integrated into the School Education Act (amended in 2013) and, subsequently, into the
Law on School Education);
- documentation of the teaching process to be kept by nursery schools, schools and other public educational institutions (2014 Regulation, amended in 2016; a new Regulation of 25 August 2017);
- the arrangements for counselling and guidance (psychological and educational support) in public nursery schools, schools and other public educational institutions (2013 Regulation, amended on 28 August 2017);
- the arrangements for counselling and guidance (psychological and educational support) in public nursery schools, schools and other public educational institutions (Regulation of 9 August 2017, amended on 16 August 2018);
- the approval of preschool education curricula, school curricula and textbooks for use in schools (2012 Regulation; in 2014, provisions on preschool education and school curricula were integrated into the School Education Act (currently, incorporated into the Law on School Education); in the same year, a Regulation was adopted on the approval of textbooks for use in schools);
- the approval of textbooks for use in schools (a new Regulation of 1 March 2017)
- state certificates, diplomas and other school documentation (2010 Regulation; amended in 2015; a new Regulation of 18 January 2017, and a new one of 26 April 2018);
- safety and health in public and non-public schools and educational institutions (2002 Regulation, amended in 2010, 2011 and 2018);
- allocation of targeted State-budget grants to communes for the co-financing of preschool education tasks (2013 Regulation, amended in 2015; new Regulations of 25 April 2017 and 14 December 2017);
- types of alternative preschool education settings, conditions for their establishment and their operational arrangements (a new Regulation of 28 August 2017, amended in the same year);
- fire safety requirements for premises used by a preschool class or preschool classes in the primary school and by a nursery school established through the transformation of a preschool class or preschool classes in the primary school (a new Regulation of 25 August 2017, amended in the same year);
- detailed arrangements for granting and withdrawing permits for the establishment of public schools and other public institutions by legal and natural persons (Regulation of 18 August 2017);
- the admission process and supplemental admission process in public nursery schools and schools and other public educational institutions (Regulation of 16 March 2017);
- requirements to be fulfilled by candidates for the position of head and other management positions in public nursery schools, primary schools and post-primary schools and other public educational institutions (Regulation of 11 August 2017);
- documentation on the teaching process, educational and care-related activities to be kept by schools, and types of such documents (Regulation of 25 August 2017).

[1] As from March 2018, a regulated activity is defined in the Law for Entrepreneurs.
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