



## Youth Wiki national description

# Youth policies in Poland

## 2017

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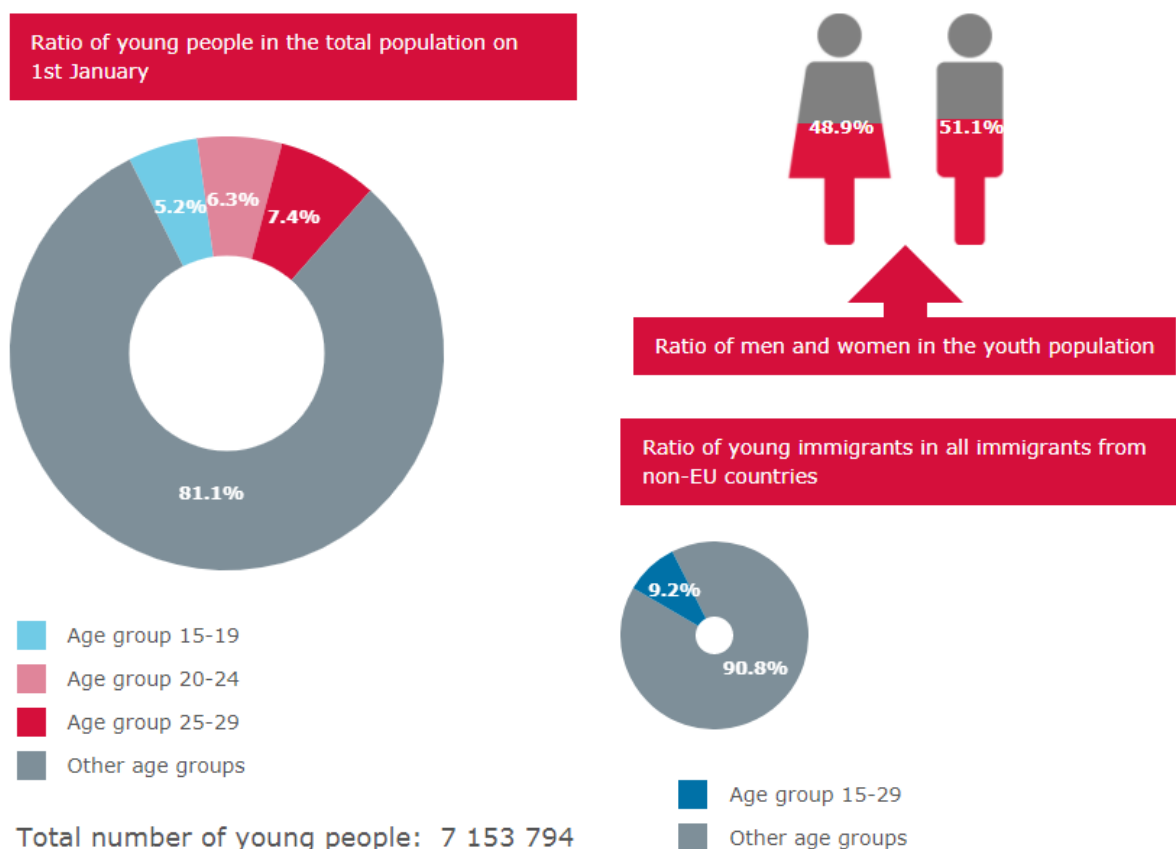
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## Overview

### Young People in Poland



#### References:

Ratio (%) of young people in the total population (2016): Eurostat, yth\_demo\_020 [data extracted on 21/09/2017].

Absolute number of young people on 1 January for the age group 15-29 (2016): Eurostat, yth\_demo\_010 [data extracted on 21/09/2017].

Ratio (%) of men and women in the youth population (2016): Eurostat, yth\_demo\_020 [data extracted on 21/09/2017].

Young immigrants from non-EU countries (2015): Eurostat, yth\_demo\_070 [data extracted on 21/09/2017].

## Youth Policy in Poland

It is impossible to indicate one official document focussing on the needs and rights of young people and regulating issues relating to them. However, this does not mean that Polish legislation does not cover young people's lives, rights and duties. Youth-related regulations are provided in various legal acts, such as the [Constitution of the Republic of Poland](#) (of 1997) Family and Guardianship Code (of 1964, Journal of Laws No. 9 item 59) Labour Code (of 1974, Journal of Laws 1974, Nr. 24, item 141) Juvenile Proceedings Act (of 1982, Journal of Laws 11982 No. 35 item 228), Education Law (of 2016, Journal of Laws 2017 item 59), Act on Higher Education (of 2005, Journal of Laws 2005 No. 164 item 1365), Post-graduate Placements Act (of 2009, Journal of Laws 2009, No. 127, item 1052), or the Associations Act (of 1989, Journal of Laws 1989 No. 20 item 104).

The "[State Strategy for Youth for 2003-2012](#)" (Strategia Państwa dla Młodzieży na lata 2003-2012) (Strategy) prepared before Poland's accession to the EU remains the only document determining the development and directions of Polish youth policy. Currently, there is no strategy in Poland directly relating to young people. The Strategy emphasises the links that exist between youth policy and legal regulations concerning education,

social welfare, national defence, employment and combating unemployment, children's living conditions in families, healthcare, as well as prevention of crime, drug addiction and alcohol abuse.

## 1. Youth Policy Governance

When determining the objectives of youth policy in the Strategy, the Council of Ministers assumed that the Strategy should cover people aged 15-25. The Strategy was prepared by a team composed of representatives of youth organisations, experts researching youth problems and representatives of the Minister of National Education and Sport. The document underwent public consultation with young people and public administration representatives. Work on the preparation of the Strategy was [coordinated by the Ministry of National Education](#), and the Minister of Education was responsible for its implementation. The authors of the Strategy emphasised the necessity to create conditions for the coordination of the activities of the government, institutions and non-governmental organisations working for young people.

The "[State Strategy for Youth for 2003-2012](#)" (Strategia Państwa dla Młodzieży na lata 2003-2012) (Strategy) prepared before Poland's accession to the EU remains the only document determining the development and directions of Polish youth policy. Currently, there is no strategy in Poland directly relating to young people. The Strategy emphasises the links that exist between youth policy and legal regulations concerning education, social welfare, national defence, employment and combating unemployment, children's living conditions in families, healthcare, as well as prevention of crime, drug addiction and alcohol abuse.

### 1.1 Target population of youth policy

In youth policy publications, their authors emphasise the necessity for introducing a definition of youth as a social group a notion that initially included people aged 15-25 (Raczek, 2014). However, as a result of the implementation of new youth programmes, the upper age limit has now been raised from 25 to 29. This change resulted from "the [willingness to offer high quality support](#) to a larger group of young people entering the labour market, and from the standardisation of target groups and the scope of support obtained from the European Social Fund as well as from the Youth Employment Initiative.

[Social policy programmes](#) consider youth as people aged from 13 to 30. The lower age limit coincides with the time when children become "active participants shaping their environment by their own actions" and finish a certain stage of education when "they make important choices regarding their further education". The upper age limit is defined as the stage of becoming self-sufficient and setting up a household. However, under the Ombudsman for Children Act (Ustawa o Rzeczniku Praw Dziecka), "any human being is a child from conception to the age of majority, but "reaching the age of majority is regulated by separate provisions". In accordance with the above Act, the notion of "youth" could refer to people who have reached the age of majority and therefore, have turned 18 or 16. [It is also accepted](#) that "young people" are those under 34 years old as it is difficult to pinpoint the age of passing from youth to maturity. The report "Youth 2011" describing young people's situation in Poland applied the term "youth" to the age group of 15-29 (Szafraniec, 2011). It is this age range that is most frequently indicated when defining the notion of "youth".

[The Central Statistical Office](#) provides no data for such an expanded age range (15-29). Instead, it indicates the following age ranges: 15-19, 20-24 and 25-29. According to data provided by the Central Statistical Office, as at 31 December 2016, Poland had 6,982,115 inhabitants aged 15-29, out of whom 3,562,241 were males and 3,419,874 - females. Young people account for over [18% of Poland's whole population](#). It should be emphasised that [research](#) carried out by the Central Statistical Office uses the notion of "school age groups" which are determined by the age of pupils and students at a specific stage of education: lower secondary (13-15 years of age), upper-secondary (16-18 years of age) and higher education (19-24 years of age)..

## **1.2 National youth law**

### **Existence of a National Youth Law**

The first attempts to lay down the foundations for the functioning of youth policy in Poland were linked to the EU accession process. They resulted in the "[State Strategy for Youth for 2003-2012](#)" (Strategia Państwa dla Młodzieży na lata 2003-2012), however, it "failed to (...) trigger the implementation of EU programmes and to influence the integration of the community of youth organisations". Polish youth policy has [no systemic solutions](#), nor is it operated and coordinated in a consistent way. It cannot be said that before Poland's accession to the European Union there were no activities targeting young people or their activation and inclusion in public life. Such activities were undertaken as part of sectoral policies operated within individual ministries. Poland's accession to the European Union probably contributed to paying more attention to issues relating to young people's lives and functioning (Raczek, 2014).

It is impossible to indicate one official document focussing on the needs and rights of young people and regulating issues relating to them ("Youth Law"). However, this does not mean that Polish legislation does not cover young people's lives, rights and duties. Youth-related regulations are provided in various legal acts, such as the [Constitution of the Republic of Poland](#) (of 1997) Family and Guardianship Code (of 1964, Journal of Laws No. 9 item 59) Labour Code (of 1974, Journal of Laws 1974, Nr. 24, item 141) Juvenile Proceedings Act (of 1982, Journal of Laws 11982 No. 35 item 228), Education Law (of 2016, Journal of Laws 2017 item 59), Act on Higher Education (of 2005, Journal of Laws 2005 No. 164 item 1365), Post-graduate Placements Act (of 2009, Journal of Laws 2009, No. 127, item 1052), or the Associations Act (of 1989, Journal of Laws 1989 No. 20 item 104).

### **Scope and contents**

"The Republic of Poland shall ensure protection of the rights of the child. Everyone shall have the right to demand of organs of public authority that they defend children against violence, cruelty, exploitation and actions which undermine their moral sense" (art. 72 of [the Constitution of the Republic of Poland](#)). Parents have the right to bring up a young person in agreement with their convictions, however, they should take into account his/her degree of maturity, freedom of conscience and his/her convictions (art. 48 of [the Constitution of the Republic of Poland](#)). [Young people's rights](#), being part of the catalogue of human rights, can be divided into four main categories - personal, political (or public), social and economic rights. Coming of age offers young people new opportunities and full participation in public life. Young people - provided they are not incapacitated or deprived of public (or voting) rights - who are 18 or over may participate in referendums, elect the President of the Republic of Poland, Polish Parliament deputies, senators and local government representatives (art. 62 of [the Constitution of the Republic of Poland](#)). Young people under 18 may join associations however, they may not establish non-governmental organisations until they are 18 (Associations Act (of 1989, Journal of Laws 1989 No. 20 item 104). The observance of young people's rights is supervised by the [Ombudsman for Children](#) (Rzecznik Praw Dziecka) and the [Ombudsman](#) (Rzecznik Praw Obywatelskich).

### **Revisions/updates**

Not applicable

## **1.3 National youth strategy**

### **Existence of a National Youth Strategy**

The "[State Strategy for Youth for 2003-2012](#)" (Strategia Państwa dla Młodzieży na lata 2003-2012) (Strategy) prepared before Poland's accession to the EU remains the only document determining the development and directions of Polish youth policy. Currently,

there is no strategy in Poland directly relating to young people. The Strategy emphasises the links that exist between youth policy and legal regulations concerning education, social welfare, national defence, employment and combating unemployment, children's living conditions in families, healthcare, as well as prevention of crime, drug addiction and alcohol abuse.

When determining the objectives of youth policy in the Strategy, the Council of Ministers assumed that the Strategy should cover people aged 15-25. The Strategy was prepared by a team composed of representatives of youth organisations, experts researching youth problems and representatives of the Minister of National Education and Sport. The document underwent public consultation with young people and public administration representatives. Work on the preparation of the Strategy was [coordinated by the Ministry of National Education](#), and the Minister of Education was responsible for its implementation. The authors of the Strategy emphasised the necessity to create conditions for the coordination of the activities of the government, institutions and non-governmental organisations working for young people.

On the basis of diagnosing and referencing the information provided during the consultation exercise, 5 key issues of the Strategy were identified:

- youth education,
- employment,
- young people's participation in public life,
- leisure, culture, sport and tourism,
- health and prevention.

The areas indicated above served as the basis for determining the main objective of the Strategy - "the equalisation of the young generation's development opportunities"- and its strategic objectives:

- Strategic objective 1: Creating and equalising opportunities for development, self-realisation of the young generation,
- Strategic objective 2: Creating opportunities for the development of the young generation's own activity,
- Strategic objective 3: Preventing the marginalisation of the young generation,
- Strategic objective 4: Developing international youth cooperation,
- Strategic objective 5: Building a youth information system,
- Strategic objective 6: Education and continuing professional development for youth workers.

Each of the strategic objectives had its own implementation methods, proposed activities, time limit and responsible entities. However, most of the tasks were left to the Ministry of National Education. The Strategy emphasised the necessity to provide support to young people from rural areas and to those who are disabled or at risk of unemployment or social marginalisation. Moreover, the Strategy was supposed to contribute to the establishment of an official youth representation as well as emphasise the importance of youth organisations, pupil and student governments.

The Strategy did not indicate the amount of funds to be earmarked for the implementation of the programmes and activities, nor did it create a common budget. It was emphasised that local governments would have a key role in financing certain tasks and that most of the tasks would be co-financed by European funds. It is difficult to evaluate the implementation of the Strategy objectives and its influence on Polish youth policy as there is no access to relevant reports and analyses. The problem related to the implementation of the Strategy may be linked to the [choice of the coordinating entity](#). "If the coordination of youth policy was a responsibility of the Office of the Prime Minister, it might possibly contribute to its more effective implementation, and its coordinators would become real partners" (Zielińska, 2009).

When the "State Strategy for Youth for 2003-2012" ceased to apply, no new national strategy regulating Polish youth policy issues was created. The authors of the

[“Governmental Programme for Young People’s Social Engagement for 2015-2016 Active Youth”](#) (Rządowy Program Aktywności Społecznej Młodzieży na lata 2015-2016. Aktywna Młodzież) emphasised the importance of preparing a governmental document defining youth policy. “Laying down the strategic foundation for the implementation of youth policy” seems of paramount importance.

[The Children and Youth Council of the Republic of Poland](#) established in 2016 and operating under the authority of the Minister of National Education (Rada Dzieci i Młodzieży Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej) is working on the draft provisions of the Act on the Youth Council of the Republic of Poland (Rada Młodzieży Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej). Its appointment may contribute to the preparation of a new youth strategy.

It is worth emphasising that despite the absence of a youth act, youth policy is more and more frequently regulated at regional and local levels. Local strategies (or other documents) targeting young people are present at various levels of local governments (province, district, commune). The introduction of unified legislation or guidelines on the development of youth strategies would probably facilitate a regional comparison of activities undertaken for young people as well as the implementation of individual objectives and policies concerning young people.

### Scope and contents

Not applicable

### Responsible authority for the implementation of the Youth Strategy

Not applicable

### Revisions/updates

Not applicable

## **1.4 Youth policy decision-making**

### **Structure of Decision-making**

A debate on official youth representation at central level has been conducted since the onset of the political transformation in Poland (i.e. The Polish Round Table Agreement; 1989). However, up till now no permanent and single authority representing young people’s interests has been created. Work is currently in progress to create an entity whose activity may contribute to the development of Polish youth policy.

It is difficult to pinpoint one central level authority responsible for making decisions relating to youth. At present, decisions on the implementation of individual public policies remain a responsibility of government administration (e.g. the [Minister of National Education](#) is responsible for education and upbringing the [Minister of Sport and Tourism](#) - for physical culture the [Minister of Family, Labour and Social Policy](#) - for social policy and the [Minister of Science and Higher Education](#) - for higher education and research. In 2008 initial declarations regarding the appointment of a Youth Plenipotentiary were submitted to the Office of the President of the Republic of Poland, however, no such plenipotentiary has been appointed yet (Raczek, 2014). It should be noted that the Ministry of National Education has most frequently been indicated as the central authority that supports structures representing youth.

Local government bodies operating at provincial, district and communal levels have all been assigned public tasks; some of which focus on young people. Communal governments are responsible for such matters as healthcare, social services, public education, culture and physical culture (Chmielnicki, 2009). Therefore, communes are responsible for the functioning of nurseries, primary schools, for supporting sports clubs, developing cultural activities, running libraries and supporting families in precarious life situations. Tasks assigned to districts and provinces are supra-communal and do not affect the competence of communes. Such tasks as public education in secondary

schools, prevention of unemployment, stimulation of local labour markets and support provided to the disabled [are supra-communal public tasks](#) falling within the remit of districts. Provincial governments are responsible for running higher vocational institutions, developing economic activity in regions, maintaining libraries, museums and regional theatres.

It should be noted that the development of Poland's youth policy occurs at regional level. Seven provinces have established formal structures supporting and representing young people, such as [The Youth Parliament of Dolnośląskie Province](#) (Młodzieżowy Sejmik Województwa Dolnośląskiego) (established in 2013), [The Youth Parliament of Podlaskie Province](#) (Młodzieżowy Sejmik Województwa Podlaskiego) (established in 2014), [The Youth Forum of Opolskie Province](#) (Forum Młodych Województwa Opolskiego) (established in 2017), [The Youth Parliament of Wielkopolskie Province](#) (Sejmik Młodzieży Województwa Wielkopolskiego) (established in 2017), [The Youth Council of Zachodniopomorskie Province](#) (Rada Młodzieży Województwa Zachodniopomorskiego) (established in 2005), [The Youth Council of Pomorskie Province](#) (Młodzieżowa Rada Województwa Pomorskiego) (appointed in 2015), and [The Children and Youth Parliament of Lubelskie Province](#) (Parlament Dzieci i Młodzieży Województwa Lubelskiego) (appointed in 1996). In August 2017, the administration of Śląskie Province adopted a resolution on the appointment of the [Youth Parliament of Śląskie Province](#). Youth representations operating at regional level have various legitimacies, the most frequent form being a province marshal's consultation body. In Pomorskie, Opolskie and Podlaskie provinces, it is non-governmental organisations that are involved in the activity of formal youth representations, and in the remaining provinces - [units from individual offices](#). In 2014 Świętokrzyskie Province appointed a youth ombudsman operating under the authority of the Office of the Marshal of Świętokrzyskie Province.

Examples of youth representations at regional level:

- Among other things, the objective of the [Youth Council of Zachodniopomorskie Province](#) consists in the promotion of local and regional governance and in ensuring youth participation in the development of civil society. The Council's technical and administrative support is provided by the Secretariat for the Youth of Zachodniopomorskie Province (Sekretariat ds. Młodzieży Województwa Zachodniopomorskiego). The Council [supports the activity](#) of youth councils in towns and communes, youth organisations and student governments.
- Among other things, the Youth Ombudsman operating under the authority of the Office of the Marshal of Świętokrzyskie Province is responsible for intermediary activities between the youth community and the Office of the Marshal, promoting positive examples of youth activity in the region and of positive work performed for young people by various institutions, stimulation of cooperation and for the networking of organisations and youth groups in the region, as well as for initiating and supporting systemic solutions at regional level which boost young people's social participation. In their publication entitled "[Świętokrzyskie Province for Youth. Directions in supporting the social engagement of the youth of Świętokrzyskie Province 2017-2020](#)" (Świętokrzyskie dla młodych. Kierunki wspierania aktywności społecznej młodzieży województwa świętokrzyskiego na lata 2017-2020), the authorities of Świętokrzyskie Province analysed the situation of young people in the region and activities undertaken to increase the social engagement of youth.
- The Youth Parliament of Dolnośląskie Province was established in 2013. Its tasks include "representing youth's interests before the authorities of the province, giving opinion on the proposals and activities of the Local Government of Dolnośląskie Province as well as seeking opinion and [liaising with young people from districts](#)." Moreover, since 1994 the [Wrocław Youth Parliament](#) (Parlament Młodzieży Wrocławia) has been operating in Dolnośląskie Province, [representing youth's interests, promoting civil society and acting as an intermediary](#) between youth and local government authorities

Under Article 5 (b) of the Local Government Act, local government authorities may appoint a youth council as its advisory body. “Boosting young people’s interest and involvement in public affairs at local level is the most important objective of communal youth councils” (Owczarek, 2013). Moreover, communal youth councils facilitate young people’s participation in the process of making decisions affecting their peers. The establishment of consultation bodies such as commune councils is left to local government authorities. Youth councils have their statutes which describe the way in which they operate and how council members are selected. Research conducted by the Polish National Federation of Youth Local Governments (Ogólnopolska Federacja Młodzieżowych Samorządów Lokalnych) provides very extensive data reflecting the number of youth councils operating in communes. In 2007, the operation of 224 youth councils was confirmed, most of them were active in Dolnośląskie, Śląskie and Wielkopolskie Provinces. In 2016, “about 200 youth councils operating under the authority of the governments of communes, towns and, in the case of Warsaw, - also of city districts” were active.

The Alliance of Independent Youth Organisations (Porozumienie Niezależnych Organizacji Młodzieżowych) established in 1989 marked the beginning of attempts aimed at creating a national youth representation. The beginning of the 90’s witnessed the birth of the Polish Youth Council (Polska Rada Młodzieży) which was an advisory body to the government and then to the Minister of National Education. The Council ceased to exist in 1998 and was removed from the European Youth Forum. In 2002, the Ministry of National Education made an attempt to establish a nationwide representation of young people which would officially replace the then already inactive Alliance of Independent Youth Organisations, the Polish Youth Council and the Polish Youth Forum. The following year saw the establishment of the Association Polish Youth Council (Stowarzyszenie Polska Rada Młodzieży). In 2010 consultations were held concerning the appointment of a new Polish Youth Council, which was to be “a union of associations bringing together young people to represent them in the country and abroad and act for them”.

Regulation 40 of the Minister of National Education dated 21 December 2010 was the legal basis for the establishment of the Department of Youth and Non-governmental Organisations (Departament Młodzieży i Organizacji Pozarządowych). Among other things, it was responsible for the implementation of rules resulting from youth-related programme documents, including the State Strategy for Youth for 2003-2012, cooperation with youth organisations and non-governmental organisations active in the field of education and upbringing, coordination of activities in the scope of youth information including the EURODESK15 and PLOTEUS II16 programmes, cooperation with the Public Benefit Activities Council (Rada Działalności Pożytku Publicznego), cooperation with the Foundation for the Development of the Education System (Fundacja Rozwoju Systemu Edukacji) and substantive supervision on the implementation of the “Youth in Action” programme in Poland. When the Department of Youth and Non Governmental Organisations ceased to exist on 28 February 2012, no new unit responsible for youth affairs was established in Poland (Raczek, 2014). In 2016, the Minister of National Education appointed the Children and Youth Council of the Republic of Poland (Rada Dzieci i Młodzieży Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej) operating under the authority of the Minister of National Education. The Council is an advisory body. Its tasks include “expressing opinions and presenting children- and youth-related proposals in the scope of matters remaining within the remit of the education and upbringing area of the government”. The term of the council is one year. The Council is composed of 16 members and their substitutes (16) who are appointed by the Minister of National Education from among students of lower and upper secondary schools. Members and their substitutes represent particular provinces. Recruitment for the second term of the Children and Youth Council came to an end in July 2017.

The Union of Associations Polish Council of Youth Organisations (Związek Stowarzyszeń Polska Rady Organizacji Młodzieżowych (PROM)) set up in 2011 and bringing together 39 member organisations is the only youth representation still active. The Union represents over 250,000 young people. The Union aims to participate in youth policy making,

disseminate the idea of youth participation in public life, inform public opinion about the situation of young people in Poland, support the development of Polish youth organisations and of those which bring young people together. Among the entities that the Union cooperates with are the Public Benefit Activities Council and the Visegrad Group. Since 22 April 2017 the Union is a [full member](#) of the [European Youth Forum](#) which means that "with the remaining 102 Forum member organisations it will exert direct influence on the development of European youth policy ". In April 2017 the Union adopted its position on the matter of youth participation in social and political life. The Union [addressed](#) five areas - support provided to youth organisations, policy makers' readiness to share initiatives with young people, transparency in determining young people's abilities and potential influence in decisions, facilitating young people's access to information as well as long-term thinking building on existing structures and youth organisations. Moreover, the Union presented its position on the [consultation of the project entitled Youth Joined in Action Programme for 2016-2019](#) (Młodzież Solidarna w Działaniu na lata 2016-2019) (2016), [amendments to the programme "Flats for Young People"](#) (Mieszkanie dla Młodych) (2015) and [amendments to the Associations Act](#) (ustawa Prawo o stowarzyszeniach ) (2014). The Union is currently cooperating with the Parliamentary Group Supporting Youth Councils Operating within Local Government Units (Parlamentarny Zespół ds. wspierania młodzieżowych rad przy jednostkach samorządu terytorialnego) to create a team which will prepare [amendments to the specific article](#) in the Local Government Act which regulates the functioning of communal youth councils. As the Union brings together only selected youth organisations, it is [not regarded as an entity which fully represents the youth community](#).

Bodies dealing with youth matters are present at various levels of administration. [The Education, Science and Youth Committee](#) (Komisja Edukacji, Nauki i Młodzieży), composed of 41 deputies, operates within the Parliament of the Republic of Poland. The Committee deals with matters relating to "preschool, primary school, comprehensive secondary school, vocational, post-graduate and higher education (...), leisure, physical culture and sport for children and youth, care of children and youth (...) scientific cooperation abroad, pupil and student governments (...) fulfilling the aspirations of the young generation and to young people's social and occupational adaptation". There is a [standing youth subcommittee](#) composed of 14 deputies and working within the Committee. At the moment the Committee is not working on any bill directly concerning youth policy. The bills that have been analysed so far refer to the education system.

29 April 2016 marked the appointment of the [Parliamentary Group Supporting Youth Councils Operating within Local Government Units](#) (Parlamentarny Zespół ds. wspierania młodzieżowych rad przy jednostkach samorządu terytorialnego), which aims at providing support and advice to youth councils, integrating communities linked to youth councils and promoting the idea of active citizenship through participation in the work of youth councils. The Group [cooperates](#) with the Polish Council of Youth Organisations and with the Children and Youth Council of the Republic of Poland operating under the authority of the Minister of National Education.

Students' interests at central level are represented by the [Student Parliament of the Republic of Poland](#) (Parlament Studentów Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej), which is appointed on the strength of the Higher Education Act. This Parliament has the right to express opinions and present motions in matters relating to students, and give opinion on student-related normative acts (Act on Higher Education of 2005, Journal of Laws 2005 No. 164 item 1365). It also [organises training](#) and workshops raising students' qualifications, supports student projects, inspires international student exchange and participation in the international student movement. The Student Parliament of the Republic of Poland brings together the student governments of all Polish higher education institutions.

Among the [advisory groups](#) that work for the Minister of Science and Higher Education is the [Young Scientists' Council](#) (Rada Młodych Naukowców), whose tasks include the identification of barriers to development and supporting young scientists' careers,

initiation of young scientists' contact with representatives of economic circles, and preparation of opinions and recommendations regarding the science and innovation policy of the country. Due to its specific character, the Council represents the interests of young scientists whose age equals the upper age limit for the youth age group.

1 October 2017 witnessed the launch of the [National Agency for Academic Exchange](#) (Narodowa Agencja Wymiany Akademickiej - NAWA) which will "support academic exchange and the internationalisation of higher education and science. NAWA will disseminate information relating to the Polish education system and promote the Polish language abroad". NAWA will be able to award funds to students, doctoral students and employees of higher education institutions or institutes. NAWA's budget will amount to about PLN 140,000,000. NAWA may become an operator dealing with EU funds. Ministries and local governments will be able to approach NAWA to manage their own scholarship programmes.

### Main Themes

As there is no specific youth-related act and no national youth strategy, no document determining the development of youth policy can be indicated. Activities undertaken on behalf of young people by the central government, national authorities and local government authorities are specified in legislation and presented in strategies adopted by the government.

In February 2013 the Council of Ministers adopted the "[Long-term National Development Strategy. Poland 2030. The Third Wave of Modernity](#)". (Długookresowa Strategia Rozwoju Kraju. Polska 2030. Trzecia Fala Nowoczesności). This strategy, as part of Strategic Objective 3 [which aims to improve the accessibility and quality of education at all stages and increase the competitiveness of science] raises issues relating to the education of children and young people and to the necessity of adapting the education system to changing social and economic needs in order to facilitate transfer from education to the labour market.

The "[Responsible Development Strategy](#)" (Strategia na rzecz Odpowiedzialnego Rozwoju) (Strategy) published in 2017 by the Ministry of Development updates the "Country Development Strategy 2020" (Strategia Rozwoju Kraju 2020) - a mid-term country development strategy adopted by a resolution of the Council of Ministers on 25 September 2012. The document presents the strategic tasks of the country and contains recommendations for public policies. The Strategy is "the basis for changes to the development management system, as well as to existing strategy papers (strategies, policies, programmes) and for the verification of other implementing instruments". The main objective of the Strategy consists in "creating conditions for facilitating the rise of income levels of Polish inhabitants while increasing social, economic, environmental and territorial cohesion", as well as in specific objectives:

- Specific objective 1: Sustained economic growth increasingly based on knowledge, data and organisational excellence,
- Specific objective 2: Community-sensitive and territorially-balanced development,
- Specific objective 3: An effective state and institutions which are dedicated to growth as well as social and economic inclusion

The EU youth strategy indicates seven areas which are reflected in national strategies and programmes directly or indirectly relating to young people. The individual objectives of the EU Youth Strategy and tasks (e.g.: governmental programmes and strategic projects) which are likely to contribute to their implementation are presented below:

- Education and training: e.g. the programme Youth Joined in Action (Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Policy),
- Employment & entrepreneurship, e.g. [Guarantees for Youth](#) (Gwarancje dla Młodzieży) (Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Policy), [Active Forms of Preventing Social Exclusion - the new dimension 2020](#) (Aktywne Formy Przeciwdziałania

- Wykluczeniu Społecznemu - nowy wymiar 2020 (Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Policy),
- Health & well-being, e.g. Programme Club (Klub) (Ministry of Sport and Tourism),
- Participation: e.g. the programme Youth Joined in Action (Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Policy),
- Voluntary activities: e.g. the programme Youth Joined in Action (Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Policy),
- Youth & the world, e.g. [Programme Mobility Plus](#) (Mobilność Plus) (Ministry of Science and Higher Education),
- Creativity & culture, e.g. [The National Readership Development Programme](#) (Narodowy Program Rozwoju Czytelnictwa) (Ministry of Culture and National Heritage).

The choice of a specific target group is based, among other things, on the results of research and diagnoses presented in a given Strategy, programme or strategic project.

### **The National Agency for Youth**

The National Agency for Youth, which is responsible for youth policy at a central level, does not operate in Poland. Youth-oriented tasks are carried out by the central government as well as national and local government authorities in accordance with their competences.

### **Policy monitoring and evaluation**

It is difficult to clearly identify the way in which activities relating to youth policy are monitored and evaluated as there are no relevant documents and reports and no state-run centre dealing with youth-related research. A youth act and/or a national youth strategy would probably contribute to setting out the directions of the development of Polish youth policy which would then be systematically evaluated.

## **1.5 Cross-sectoral approach with other ministries**

### **Mechanisms and actors**

In 2014 the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy appointed a group dealing with the social participation of young people. The group was meant to review and analyse governmental documents relating to youth policy and EU strategic papers concerning youth policy and to prepare a youth social participation programme (decision of 7 February 2014). [The Youth Policy Group](#) (Zespół ds. Polityki na Rzecz Młodzieży) operates within the Public Benefit Activities Council, which is an advisory body working for the Minister of Family, Labour and Social Policy. The Group [contributed to the preparation of the project "National Youth Programme. Active Youth"](#). In 2015 the Minister of Labour and Social Policy made a decision to adopt the Programme for Young People's Social Engagement (Program Aktywności Społecznej Młodzieży) (decision of 27 August 2016). The main objective of the programme consists in increasing development opportunities and improving young people's start in social and professional life. The actions envisaged are divided into four priority areas:

- Priority 1: Passions and interests,
- Priority 2: Social engagement and active citizenship
- Priority 3: Development of competences and skills useful on the labour market.
- Priority 4: Support infrastructure.

The activities that were envisaged under those priorities have not been implemented. In 2016 the programme was abandoned on the strength of a decision of the Minister of Family, Labour and Social Policy (decision of 15 January 2016). In May 2016 the Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Policy adopted the programme [Youth Joined in Action](#). The programme's implementation period was set out from 2016 to 2019 (decision of 29 April 2016). The main objective of the programme is to "facilitate the creation of a space in which young people can pursue activities which impact positively on their identity, family,

social, cultural and professional life”. The programme envisages activities within five separate priority areas:

- Priority 1: Identity and passions,
- Priority 2: Social solidarity and voluntary service,
- Priority 3: Young citizens,
- Priority 4: Competences and skills,
- Priority 5: Support for young people.

Priority 3 Young Citizens envisages support for various activities, including those oriented towards:

- young people’s participation in the life of local communities and in representative democracy,
- young people’s participation in the decision making process by extending consultation and social agreements with youth,
- participative ways of designing places of integration and leisure,
- building and supporting regional and local youth websites,
- encouraging participation in local and national elections,
- taking up local initiatives, such as happenings, social activism in various areas,
- young people organising themselves into informal and organised groups (ordinary associations, associations, etc.),
- facilitating partnerships and intra- and cross-sectoral cooperation networks.

The programme allows non-governmental organisations and entities specified in Art. 3 (3) of the Public Benefit Activities and Voluntary Service Act (Ustawa o działalności pożytku publicznego i o wolontariacie) to apply for funding for projects implemented within separate priority areas. Although the programme started in 2016, no call for proposals concerning public tasks under this programme has been announced.

The “[Responsible Development Strategy](#)” indicates youth-related strategic projects whose implementation will contribute to the achievements of the objectives set:

- Included in education - “a new model of educating children, youth and adults with disabilities and special educational needs, aiming to increase the employment opportunities of disabled school leavers and graduates.” The Ministry of National Education is the entity responsible for the implementation of the programme.
- Guarantees for Youth - “a programme addressing the individual and comprehensive employment and educational activation of young people entering the labour market (unemployed, economically inactive and jobseekers).” The Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Policy is the entity responsible for the implementation of the programme.
- Youth Joined in Action - “a package of actions aimed at creating and shaping young people’s social engagement by organising voluntary service, participation in social life, developing competences, social values and skills.” The Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Policy is the entity responsible for the implementation of the programme.
- The programme “Club”, which is “a programme supporting the activity of sports clubs (targeting children and youth) which are local centres of social activity and active leisure, developing social ties and competences such as teamwork, perseverance or diligence.” The Ministry of Sport and Tourism is the entity responsible for the implementation of the programme.

Other sectoral and cross-sectoral programmes and projects with young people as beneficiaries include:

- [The programme “Family 500+”](#) (Rodzina 500+) which started on 1 April 2016. Under the programme, parents and guardians of children under 18 may be granted support amounting to PLN 500 for every second and subsequent child. Families on a low income may be granted support for the first child or the only child if their monthly net income is at or below PLN 800 or PLN 1200 when the child is disabled. The programme “Family 500+” [covers](#) 3,992,000 children under 18. The amount awarded to the beneficiaries of the programme in 2017 is almost PLN 13,932,000,000.

- [The programme "Support for Starters"](#) (Wsparcie w starcie) is run by the Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Policy to support the development of entrepreneurship. This programme allows higher education students in their final year, those who graduate from either high school or higher education, as well as registered unemployed persons to apply for low-interest loans not exceeding PLN 70,000 to start a business or create a job for an unemployed person. The pilot edition of the programme was launched in 2013. Since November 2014 the programme has been implemented in all provinces.
- [The Student Loan and Credit Fund](#) (Fundusz Pożyczek i Kredytów Studenckich) set up at [Bank Gospodarstwa Krajowego](#) offers student loan interest subsidies. Loans can be awarded to students or doctoral students who started studying before turning 25. When granting loans, priority will be given to people on low per capita income.

Projects implemented as part of the [operational programme Knowledge, Education, Development](#) play a vital part in the development of youth policies, including activities aimed at preventing unemployment and boosting young people's employability. Young people under 30, including those with disabilities, who are not in education, employment or training (NEET) are the final recipients of support offered as part of those projects.

[The Children and Youth Parliament](#) (Sejm Dzieci i Młodzieży) is one of the first initiatives aimed at increasing young people's social engagement and arousing their interest in involvement in public life. The first session of the Children and Youth Parliament took place in 1994 on the initiative of the Polish Parliament Chancellery and the President of the Polish Humanitarian Action, Janina Ochojska. Young deputies debated the issue of "War as a threat to a happy childhood". The Children and Youth Parliament is held every year on 1 June, which is International Children's Day. By 2017, 23 sessions of the Youth Parliament have been held. In recent years, the Children and Youth Parliament has debated the following issues: student governance (2010), voluntary service (2011), democracy in schools (2012), ecological development (2013), parliamentary election (2014), public space (2015), memorial sites (2016), local heroes in the public domain (2017). Resolutions adopted by the Children and Youth Parliament are recommendations submitted to educational institutions in Poland, however, the implementation of those recommendations is not monitored. Resolutions adopted by the Children and Youth Parliament are non-obligatory. The 23rd session of the Children and Youth Parliament dated 1 June 2017 introduced a [provision referring to "granting the status of a permanent opinion giving entity to the Children and Youth Parliament"](#), which may mean the necessity to appoint official representation of young people at central level, thanks to which youth will be able to have a say in the issues that they consider important. The Parliament Chancellery (Kancelaria Sejmu), Institute for National Remembrance (Instytut Pamięci Narodowej), Education Development Centre (Ośrodek Rozwoju Edukacji) and the Ministry of National Education were the organisers of the 23rd session of the Children and Youth Parliament.

Poland develops various initiatives with young people in mind. At local and regional level most of those initiatives are implemented by non-governmental organisations which may obtain funding for public tasks targeting young people by way of open calls for proposals launched by local governments. The Public Benefit Activity and Voluntary Service Act mentions one task in the area of public tasks which directly targets young people; that is activities on behalf of children and youth, including recreation activities for children and young people. It should be noted that the main areas of the activity of non-governmental organisations in Poland in [2015 were](#):

- sport, tourism, recreation, hobbies (55%),
- education and upbringing (53%),
- culture and art (35%),
- local development (21%),
- social services, social security (21%)
- healthcare (20%).

Examples of activities implemented for the benefit of young people by non-governmental organisations at nationwide levels include:

- [The programme “Equalise opportunities”](#) (Równać szanse) initiated in 2001 and aiming to “equalise young people’s chances for a good start into adulthood”. The programme targets people aged 13-19 living in localities with a population of up to 20,000. Under this programme, non-governmental organisations, libraries, community centres and informal groups may apply for subsidies to implement projects contributing to the development of young people’s competences and skills. 16 editions of the programme have already been launched during which over 2,700 projects have been implemented with the participation of over 140,000 people. The programme is implemented by the Polish Children and Youth Foundation (Polska Fundacja Dzieci i Młodzieży) and funded by the Polish-American Freedom Foundation whose contribution to the programme amounts to USD 13,521,555.

[The programme “PROJECTOR” \(PROJEKTOR\)](#) – a student voluntary service, implemented by the Educational Enterprise Foundation (Fundacja Edukacyjna Przedsiębiorczości). The programme is authored and funded by the Polish-American Freedom Foundation. The programme aims at “prevention of exclusion and the activation of children and young people coming from Polish small towns and villages by developing their passions and interests, and discovering the talents and potential not only of students but also of project participants”. As part of the programme, student volunteers implement educational projects for the benefit of younger people living in villages and small towns. Since 2003, over 10,000 students have implemented over 32,000 programme-related educational projects in 2,356 Polish schools. The contribution of the Polish-American Freedom Foundation to the programme [“PROJECTOR - student voluntary service”](#) amounts to USD 6,214,367.

## **1.6 Evidence-based youth policy**

### **Political Commitment to Evidence-Based Youth Policy**

Strategic programmes and projects implemented for the benefit of young people are evidenced by research reflecting the situation of young people in Poland. The authors of those documents rely on available research and analyses prepared by public, private and non-governmental institutions.

In August 2011 the Office of the Prime Minister issued a report entitled [“Youth 2011”](#) which (so far) may be regarded as the most extensive and multidimensional analysis of Polish youth. Apart from the report “Youth 2011” no other governmental paper concerning Polish youth has been published. Emphasis should be put on the fact that young people’s situation has always been analysed for the purposes of programmes created for youth. The “Governmental Programme for Young People’s Social Engagement for 2015-2016. Active Youth (Rządowy Program Aktywności Społecznej Młodzieży na lata 2015-2016. Aktywna Młodzież) describes the situation of young people in Poland from a number of viewpoints, i.e.:

- social capital, trust and relationships,
- participation in lifelong learning,
- physical activities of young people,
- addiction to the Internet, nicotine and alcohol as well as imbalanced diet and sleep deprivation,
- young people’s mental health and its disorders,
- young people’s cultural engagement,
- young people’s social engagement including voluntary service,
- trust in politicians as well as interest in politics and public affairs,
- young people’s position on the labour market,
- young people at risk of social exclusion,
- disabled young people,
- building intergenerational solidarity,

- absence of a system supporting the social engagement of young people and youth groups.

A diagnosis prepared for the purposes of the programme "[Youth Joined in Action for 2016-2019](#)" adopted by the Minister of Family, Labour and Social Policy in 2016 indicates the following areas (as well as problems and challenges):

- the search for identity (challenges linked to shaping one's own identity and concept of self),
- social capital (higher levels of mistrust among young people in comparison with those older than them and professionally active),
- social solidarity (weakened inter-group solidarity, increase in materialistic and egocentric attitudes),
- participation in life-long learning (about 5% of Poles are participants in lifelong learning),
- young people's physical activities (over 90% of young Poles spend their free time on activities not requiring movement and physical exertion, 55% of school infrastructure not used),
- addiction to the Internet, nicotine and alcohol as well as imbalanced diet and sleep deprivation (growing number of pupils taking drugs, engaging in dysfunctional Internet use, overweight - in over 20% of young people aged 15-29 in 2009),
- young people's mental health and its disorders (according to research conducted by WHO and EZOP Poland, about 20% of young Poles show symptoms of depression),
- young people's cultural engagement (drop in young people's cultural engagement, decreasing readership, less interest in the activities of cultural institutions),
- young people's social engagement including youth voluntary service (22% of people aged 15-25 are involved in voluntary service),
- trust in politicians, interest in politics and public affairs (absence of trust in politicians, low turnout on elections, establishment and development of youth communal councils),
- young people in the labour market (low level of competence among young people entering the labour market, NEET, unstable employment status due to employment forms),
- young people at risk of social exclusion (risk of poverty, addictions, violence, absence of activity, worse living conditions),
- young people with disabilities (youth aged 15-24 accounts for 4.6% of working-age disabled people),
- intergenerational solidarity (the necessity to open up to intergenerational cooperation due to a growing generation gap),
- supporting the social engagement of young people and youth groups (low level of young people's social competences, poor integration between formal and informal education in terms of initiating social engagement, insufficient support provided by adults, low level of cooperation between youth and school authorities).

### **Cooperation between policy-making and research**

There is no single state-run centre which would deal exclusively with research in the youth field. It is impossible to indicate one body which is responsible for cooperation with centres and institutions conducting youth research. The [Youth Research Institute](#) (Instytut Badań nad Młodzieżą) as an organisation operating in Poland from 1972 to 1991. The Institute was supervised by the minister responsible for education and upbringing. When the Institute ceased to operate, it was transformed into the [Youth Research Centre at the Institute of Applied Social Sciences of the University of Warsaw](#) (Ośrodek Badań Młodzieży w Instytucie Stosowanych Nauk Społecznych Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego). The Centre "does not work for political parties but is open to the needs of the State administration, local governments, non-governmental organisations, schools, parents and other youth educators (...)" The Centre also conducts research and professional evaluations in cooperation with other domestic and international institutions." In 2005, together with the Ministry of National Education and Sport, the

Centre prepared the "White Paper on Polish Youth" (Fatyga, 2005). Two truths about active participation. Conditions and opportunities for young people's active participation in local communities from the perspective of the youth policy of the Council of Europe" (Biała Księga młodzieży polskiej. Dwie prawdy o aktywności. Uwarunkowania i możliwości działania młodzieży w środowisku lokalnym w perspektywie polityki młodzieżowej Rady Europy) which is a valuable document describing the situation of young people in Poland in the period when the country began its membership of the European Union.

Authors of youth programmes rely on reports and analyses from various centres and research institutes such as the [Central Statistical Office](#) (Główny Urząd Statystyczny), [Centre for Public Opinion Research](#) (Centrum Badania Opinii Społecznej), private and public entities, non-governmental organisations (e.g.: "[Stocznia](#)" [The Laboratory of Social Research and Innovations](#) - Pracownia Badań i Innowacji Społecznych "Stocznia").

[The Central Statistical Office](#) (GUS) is a public administration body which is accountable to the Prime Minister. GUS collects and publishes statistics and conducts research into various aspects of public and private life. Data related to Poland's economy, society and environment is collected in the [Local Data Bank](#) (Bank Danych Lokalnych) which is run by GUS. Thanks to the [Atlas of Regions](#) (Atlas Regionów) data relating to a specific thematic area is spatially visualised to show distribution in regions or local areas. [The Area-specific Knowledge Bases](#) (Dziedzinowe Bazy Wiedzy) present data illustrating demography, education, the labour market and people's living conditions.

The Public Opinion Research Centre (CBOS) organises, prepares and publishes public opinion polls and submits their results to central government bodies, public institutions and society. CBOS receives funds from the State budget which are intended to meet operational costs and task implementation as well as finance non-commercial publications.

[The National Centre for Research and Development](#) (Narodowe Centrum Badań i Rozwoju (NCBR) is an executive agency implementing tasks relating to science, technology and innovation policies operated by the State. NCBR manages the implementation of strategic scientific research programmes and development work.

### **National Statistics and available data source**

In 2016, following a request from the [National Bureau for Drug Prevention](#) (Krajowe Biuro ds. Przeciwdziałania Narkomanii), CBOS conducted research entitled "Consumption of psychoactive substances by young people - Youth 2016" (Konsumpcja substancji psychoaktywnych przez młodzież - Młodzież 2016), and the report "[Youth 2016](#)" (Młodzież 2016) is its result. The report addresses the following spheres of young people's lives:

- family home, parents and peers,
- standard of living of upper secondary school leavers,
- school relations,
- aspirations, aims and life plans,
- politics, democracy and economy,
- patriotism, nationalism and attitude to foreigners,
- religiousness,
- religion taught in schools - participation and evaluation,
- young people and sex,
- attitude to abortion,
- interests and activities,
- participation in games with a gambling element,
- young people and psychoactive substances.

In 2013 and 2010 [similar research](#) into the situation of young people was conducted by CBOS.

The report "[Youth 2011](#)" (Młodzi 2011) issued by the Office of the Prime Minister is currently the most extensive source of youth information. The report presents the first generations of Poles "brought up in an independent, democratic and free-market state, but living in families and adult communities which had to find their place and reorganise their lives in new political and economic circumstances" (Odorzyńska-Kondek, 2011). Young people were regarded as one of the basic "resources on which the strategy of building a modern society and country can rely". [The report](#) is organised into 10 chapters addressing various aspects of young people's lives:

- Chapter 1: Time for Youth. On the necessity for generational exchange in Poland,
- Chapter 2: How to characterise today's youth? Crucial life issues, aspirations and expectations,
- Chapter 3: Demography,
- Chapter 4: Education and new challenges,
- Chapter 5: Work and entering the labour market,
- Chapter 6: Unity and intimacy: marriage, family, alternative choices,
- Chapter 7: Consumption, free time, new media – areas for manifesting status and self-creation,
- Chapter 8: The Young Generation and the new system – beliefs, attitudes and presence in the public sphere of life,
- Chapter 9: Health and hazardous behaviours of youth,
- Chapter 10: Young people and social cohesion.

The report contains 35 recommendations for the policy of the government which result from the research and analyses described in the report. The recommendations refer to the following areas:

- education (equalisation of social differences, introduction of new technologies, provision of effective career guidance, improvement of higher education quality, scholarship programmes and eliminating regional differences),
- labour market (paying attention to the legal aspects of employment contracts concluded with people starting work, support and promotion of entrepreneurship, flexibility of work, reduction of employment costs, dissemination of solutions combining work and child care, extending child care provided by institutions),
- health and social care (supporting fertility rate, changes to family benefits and care provided to the disabled, supporting activities aimed at obtaining accommodation for young families),
- culture (access to cultural property, creation of culture),
- engaging the young generation in activities for its benefit (e.g. its future), but also in activities benefiting others, participation in consulting and creating solutions concerning young people, participation in social and political life and civic activity (Odorzyńska-Kondek, 2011).

In 2011 the Laboratory of Social Research and Innovations "Stocznia" published the report "[Youth in rural areas](#)" (Młodzież na wsi) where it presented the everyday life, lifestyles, opportunities and aspirations of young people living in rural areas and small towns. The authors of the report emphasised the deficiencies that affect young people from rural areas:

- deficits related to the existing availability of what's on offer (insufficient number of cultural institutions in rural areas, lack of activities for youth approaching the upper age limit, organisation of the cultural availability in central localities, limited market for services, lack of ideas for innovative undertakings),
- deficits pertaining to social relations (non-differentiated social relationships (homogeneous groups), limited contact with young adults, absence of mentors and youth workers, projects implemented for youth but not with youth, difficulty in finding partners for joint initiatives),
- deficits of competence and knowledge (inappropriate choices made in subject of study, lack of knowledge of various occupations, inability to use local resources to create one's own business),

- deficits of available space (no space for meetings with peers, local institutions do not trust youth),
- deficit of available choices (limited range of courses of action, limited funds, limited social networks),
- deficiency in young people's relations with institutions (no adaptation of activities to young people's needs and capacities, absence of trust in youth, young people not involved in planning activities relating to them),
- a deficit of sufficient cooperation (failure to involve parents in decisions relating to young people, absence of cooperation between institutions acting for youth) (Strzemińska, Wiśnicka, 2011).

### **Budgetary Allocations supporting research in the youth field**

The report "[Youth 2011](#)" remains the only youth-related document published by the Office of the Prime Minister. It is impossible to indicate one (exclusively governmental) line of funding for research on youth. The research discussed was conducted as part of tasks performed by separate agencies or organisations.

## **1.7 Funding youth policy**

### **How Youth policy is funded**

No single source of funding for activities relating to Polish youth policy can be identified. Projects and programmes with young people in mind are financed from funds being at the disposal of individual ministries, governmental agencies or local governments. Based on available information, it is possible to quote the amounts that are earmarked for strategic programmes and projects for young people in 2017:

- [Programme CLUB](#): PLN 35,000,000 (PLN 24,000,000 in 2016)
- [Programme "Family 500+"](#): PLN 13,932,000,000 (over PLN 17,000,000,000)
- [National Readership Development Programme](#): PLN 87,000,000 (PLN 87,000,000 in 2016)

Projects relating to increasing employment opportunities funded under the operational [programme Knowledge, Education, Development](#) within 2014-2020 will receive over EUR 2,000,000,000 out of the programme budget of over EUR 5,430,000,000.

[The Children and Youth Council of the Republic of Poland](#) operating under the authority of the Minister of National Education has no budget of its own. Expenses relating to its operation are covered from a budget remaining at the disposal of the Minister of National Education. The bill relating to the establishment of the Youth Council prepared by the Children and Youth Council of the Republic of Poland operating under the authority of the Minister of National Education presents a proposed budget which could be put at the disposal of the Youth Council. The budget is estimated at about PLN 2,600,000.

As there are no sources available and because it is difficult to estimate the amount of support already provided (e.g.: as part of grant competitions organised at local, regional or national levels or competitions organised by non-governmental bodies) it is difficult to estimate the amount of funding which has reached non-governmental organisations implementing projects mobilising young people.

### **What is funded?**

Not applicable

### **Financial accountability**

Not applicable

### **Use of EU Funds**

Not applicable

## **1.8 Cross-border cooperation**

### **Cooperation with European countries**

Activities targeting youth are mainly developed at national, regional and local levels. Horizontal recommendations related to youth policy and to international youth cooperation focussing on common goals are mainly worked on at EU and international levels.

On 17 June 1991 the Polish and German Ministers of Foreign Affairs signed an agreement between the government of the Republic of Poland and the government of the Federal Republic of Germany, concerning German-Polish youth cooperation. When the [Polish-German Youth Cooperation](#) (Polsko-Niemiecka Współpraca Młodzieży) (PNWM) was established, the Republic of Poland and the Federal Republic of Germany signed the Treaty of Good Neighbourship. PNWM is an international organisation and the only Polish-German institution of that kind. The Council of the Polish-German Youth Cooperation (Rada Polsko-Niemieckiej Współpracy Młodzieży) is the supreme organ of PNWM. [The Council of the Polish-German Youth Cooperation](#) is composed of 24 members - 12 from Poland and 12 from Germany. Each party is represented by 6 representatives of ministries and governmental institutions and 6 representatives of non-governmental organisations. [The Council of the Polish-German Youth Cooperation](#) is jointly presided over by the Polish Minister of National Education and the German Minister of Family, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth.

[The International Visegrad Fund](#) is the only institution supporting not only cooperation between Visegrad Group states (established in 1991) but also their joint representation in third countries. Its objectives are implemented thanks to financial support provided to cultural cooperation activities, youth exchange, scientific exchange, cross-border cooperation and tourism.

On 9 September 2015, the [Polish-Ukrainian Council of Youth Exchange](#) (Polsko-Ukraińska Rada Wymiany Młodzieży) was established on the strength of the Agreement between the Government of the Republic of Poland and the Cabinet of Ministers of the Ukraine. The Council aims to encourage youth and youth workers to undertake joint activities, “which will bring the countries closer together, facilitate the discovery of common roots, fight prejudice and stereotypes in the perception of their common history and in today’s relations.”

On 22 April 2017 the [Polish Council of Youth Organisations](#) (PROM) [became a full member](#) of the [European Youth Forum](#).

### **International cooperation**

Central administration representatives participate in the [Eastern Partnership Youth Fora](#) (Fora Młodzieży Partnerstwa Wschodniego) (FMPW) organised during Eastern Partnership summits. On 22 and 23 June 2017 Warsaw hosted the 3rd Eastern Partnership Youth Forum. The previous editions of FMPW were hosted by Lithuania (October 2013) and Latvia (February 2015).

## **1.9 Current debates and reforms**

At the moment, the shape of Polish youth policy and the way in which youth is to be represented are being discussed. [The Children and Youth Council of the Republic of Poland](#) operating under the authority of the Minister of National Education “conceived the initiative to create a permanent body representing young people’s interests” and create a space for young people in which they will be able to act at national, regional and local levels. The Council organised 16 consultative meetings entitled “[What kind of representation does Polish youth need?](#)” in all provinces. The turnout was over 400 individuals from over 100 youth organisations. A draft act on the youth of the Republic of Poland was presented at the meetings. [The Youth Council](#) will aim to:

- participate in the creation, support and dissemination of youth policy,
- develop and disseminate social engagement and participation in public life among young people,
- protect young people's rights and interests,
- integrate youth communities and support youth mobility,
- support and disseminate the idea of voluntary service among young people.

Provincial Youth Councils (Wojewódzkie Rady Młodzieży) working on behalf of the young people from individual regions will be established in all provinces as part of the Youth Council. People aged 16-26 being members of communal youth councils, working in non-governmental youth organisations or just interested in becoming a member of a Council will be able to apply for membership of provincial youth councils. The Assembly of the Youth Council of the Republic of Poland will be the supreme organ of the Council. It will be held with the participation of representatives from provincial youth councils. The Youth Council will have a legal personality and - thanks to being permanently financed by the Minister responsible for education and upbringing - it will be able to implement youth-related tasks. Representatives of the Children and Youth Council of the Republic of Poland operating under the authority of the Minister of National Education are planning to present their draft legislation in the Parliament of the Republic of Poland. In opposition to the draft legislation, shadow ministers have prepared [main principles for a youth act](#) proposed by them - creation of the foundations for youth policy, inclusion of young people in decision-making, youth participation in social life and development of a youth information system.

The [education reform](#) that was initiated in 2016 and whose implementation started on 1 September 2017 is one of the key reforms affecting young people's lives. The previous education system (6-year primary school, 3-year lower secondary school, 4-year comprehensive secondary school, 4-year technical secondary school, 3-year vocational school and post-secondary schools) will be replaced by 8-year primary schools, 4-year comprehensive secondary schools, 5-year technical secondary schools, 3-year 1st degree trade schools, 2-year 2nd degree trade schools, 3-year special schools preparing for work, and post-secondary schools. Lower secondary schools have been gradually closed down since the beginning of the school year 2017/2018.

## **2. Voluntary Activities**

In the contemporary sense of the term, volunteering has been present in Poland since the early 1990s, and NGOs, and especially association movements, have become its natural field of action. It was only then that their activity in Poland could be completely independent of the will of the political power. It is worth stressing, however, that the approach to volunteering has evolved over the last twenty years to promote pro-social attitudes, primarily rooted in the axiological basis of systemic solutions that facilitate co-operation with volunteers in various areas of social life, thus combatting social exclusion by involving citizens in participatory processes.

### **2.1 General context**

#### **Historical developments**

Polish volunteering goes back to the 12th century, when social problems were first recognised as an issue. However, for centuries the attempts to solve them through social work or mutual help have not had any legal or formal basis nor nomenclature that would resemble the terminology we use today – those involved in relief efforts were referred to as 'social activists' and 'altruists', such as Henryk Jordan, Janusz Korczak, or their literary incarnations: Stanisław Wokulski or dr Tomasz Judym. The noteworthy forms of activity that preceded, but, to some extent, still influence, contemporary volunteering (and the closely related charitable activity) in Poland include the initiatives and attitudes of the

first kings; the educational and care-giving activity of the religious orders brought to Poland; the charitable activity of the 19th and 20th century industrialists; and the initiatives of outstanding Poles from the interwar period. All of which formed the early institutional framework for volunteerism.

In the contemporary sense of the term, volunteering has been present in Poland since the early 1990s, and NGOs, and especially association movements, have become its natural field of action. It was only then that their activity in Poland could be completely independent of the will of the political power. It is worth stressing, however, that the approach to volunteering has evolved over the last twenty years to promote pro-social attitudes, primarily rooted in the axiological basis of systemic solutions that facilitate co-operation with volunteers in various areas of social life, thus combatting social exclusion by involving citizens in participatory processes.

In 1996, the [BORIS Foundation](#) published „[Rocznik](#)”, which was devoted entirely to volunteering and contained what was most likely the first legal analysis of the relationship between the volunteer and the organisation and the first model of a volunteer contract of mandate. In 2000, provisions on volunteering for the first time made it into legal acts, including a Regulation of the Minister of Labour and Social Policy, which regulates the work of volunteers at institutions of care for children and youth. However, it was not until 2003 that this phenomenon became fully regulated in legal terms, upon adoption of the [Act on Public Benefit and Volunteer Work](#) (Act on Public Benefit and Volunteer Work, Journal of Laws (Dz.U.) of 2003, No. 96, item 873, as amended; the provisions of this Act are discussed in Section 2.4). The first institution promoting this idea, which was, at the same time, the first manifestation of its institutionalisation, was the [Volunteering Centre](#) founded in Warsaw in 1993, whose main area of activity still remains as the intermediation between volunteers, on the one hand, and institutions and persons needing their help, on the other.

All the activities aimed at institutionalising and legal regulation of volunteering in Poland do not alter the fact, however, that it is still less common in Poland than in countries with more established democracy. Sociologists point out that this is due to the lack of recent widespread awareness of the tradition of volunteering, passed down from generation to generation, as previous experiences in this area were discontinued in the Polish People's Republic (volunteering in Poland after World War II was limited to the [Polish Scouting Association](#) (*Związek Harcerstwa Polskiego*- ZHP) and religious movements and organisations). Another factor is the material underdevelopment of the Polish society; and, consequently, the dominant attitude towards raising the standard of one's living and satisfying the basic needs, coupled with the low awareness of non-governmental organisations, which are the natural environment for voluntary activity. A curious feature of volunteering in Poland is also the peculiar discrepancy between declared values and real behaviours. In one aspect "the belief in the effectiveness of joint actions is strengthening throughout society, and models that encourage the dissemination of such activity are also increasingly available; in addition, Poles are mostly socially-minded and support human solidarity rather than fighting for their own interests, believing that joint action for their environment can be effective and bring tangible benefits to the local community." (Boguszewski, 2016). It is worth noting, however, that "an egoistic approach to life is mostly displayed by the youngest respondents (35% of them claim that nowadays one should focus on their own issues, without regard for others), as well as pupils and students (38%)."

## Main concepts

The first institution that promoted the idea, the [Volunteering Centre](#), defines volunteering as "deliberate, voluntary activity that goes beyond the ties of family, friends and colleagues" and, as a consequence, define a volunteer as "any natural person who out of their own free will, voluntarily and for no fee provides services to organisations, institutions or individuals that go beyond the ties of family and friends". This definition, which has been used for years, has given rise to a number of doubts arising, for

example, from the difficulty in identifying the boundaries of 'ties of family and friends' – i.e., is helping our grandmother's friend with her shopping 'volunteering'? If not, then perhaps the key to a definitional distinction is how the potential volunteer comes into contact with the person, and even the group or environment, for which he or she will work. It is also not clear whether help given to neighbours during a natural disaster, which is a common practice in the Polish countryside, should be considered (one-time) volunteering, or whether regular work for the parish should be considered full-time volunteering. According to the [data](#) of the [Central Statistical Office of Poland](#) (*Główny Urząd Statystyczny* - GUS), in 2012 only 2% of people involved in such activity declared that they had signed an agreement in this respect. Another issue is the distinction between formal and informal volunteering, which is not mentioned in the 2003 [Act on Public Benefit and Volunteer Work](#), but was widely discussed at the time of its adoption. According to the statutory definition, a volunteer is "a natural person who voluntarily and without pay performs services in accordance with the provisions of the Act" (Article 2.3), where a member of an association may also be a volunteer (Article 42.3). There are several significant differences between those definitions: firstly, the Act significantly formalises the volunteer's actions by placing them in a clearly defined legal framework, describing the relationship between the volunteer and the institution that benefits from their work (this has resulted, *inter alia*, in some volunteer's activities being referred to as "informal volunteering", or even 'grey area volunteering'). On the other hand, the latter definition does not impose the previously indicated limitation regarding close relationships between the volunteer and those who benefit from their help. Further problems arise (especially when trying to estimate the scale of the phenomenon) from the relationship between volunteering and membership in an association. The Act does not make a distinction between them, which, of course, has its justification in the real world – associations, as the most common legal formula for non-governmental activity, rely on the voluntary work of their members (for many years studies distinguished between those activities based on the assumption that one cannot be a volunteer for the association they are a member of). On the other hand, it would be difficult to set clear boundaries and determine which members of the association are volunteers and which are not.

It seems that in a situation of such significant doubts, it would be easiest to ask Poles directly whether they consider themselves volunteers, but the obstacle here is the lack of awareness of this concept, even among those socially engaged (due to the low level of civic education) – according to a [report](#) prepared by the [Centre for Public Opinion Research](#) (*Centrum Badania Opinii Społecznej* - CBOS), when asked directly whether they are a volunteer, only 6% of Polish men and women responded affirmatively (Boguszewski, 2016).

The last issue is the frequent misuse of the concept of volunteering to denote traineeships (such as student placements and traineeship) and unpaid internships. It should be emphasised that the above – just like 'community work' in the Polish People's Republic or alternative civilian service at institutions such as care centres, community centres or hospitals in lieu of compulsory military service before it was abolished – do not meet (or meet but to a very limited degree) the voluntary condition of volunteering, and the concept is sometimes abused to obtain unlawful unpaid work, especially from young workers.

At the conclusion of the definitional considerations, it is worthwhile to place volunteering in the broader context of action for the social environment, especially the contemporary understanding of the concepts of charity and charitable action. Disregarding the historical evolution of those concepts (especially when it comes to the distinction between religiously and non-religiously motivated actions), simply put, both volunteering and philanthropy (a second branch of this kind of activity, involving financial or material assistance) are now part of them.

## 2.2 Administration and governance of youth volunteering

### Governance

If we assume that a system is a set of elements that form a relatively autonomous whole segregated from the environment, within which internal links and interactions can be identified and an overall function of that whole can be defined, it must be said that such a system with regard to youth volunteering exists only in a dispersed and uncoordinated form. This is due to at least two reasons relating to both constituent elements of this term: on the one hand, there is no specialised public policy dedicated to this specific age group in Poland, and on the other, there is no co-ordinated system for the development and support of voluntary activities.

The main players involved in the development of volunteering (without identifying young people as a separate age group) include:

- relevant departments within ministries – an entity that could be considered the body responsible for activities related to the issues of public benefit and volunteering activities (and co-operation of the public sector with the third sector, as well as social economy and social co-operation) is the [Department of Public Benefit in the Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Policy](#). Volunteering issues are also dealt with by other ministries in areas related to their competences, including the [Ministry of National Education](#), [the Ministry of Sport and Tourism](#), [the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage](#), and [the Ministry of Science and Higher Education](#), while the [Team for Sustainable Development and Corporate Social Responsibility in the Ministry of Development](#) is responsible for the development of employee volunteering;
- local governments: Each local authority implements bespoke projects aimed at the development of community activity – they usually involve participatory budgets and co-operation with non-governmental organisations, but there are also schemes dedicated to the development of volunteering, and even specifically youth volunteering, such as the schemes operated by the authorities of Warsaw: [Active Warsaw Youth](#) (*Aktywna Warszawska Młodzież*) and [Warsaw Volunteers](#) (*Ochotnicy Warszawscy*);
- public institutions at the local level, such as Social Welfare Centres or Cultural Centres (within the framework of the projects implemented);
- non-state actors, including, in particular, Volunteering Centres and Non-Governmental Organisation Support Centres as well as large nationwide non-governmental organisations such as Voluntary Fire Brigades.

It terms of actions directed at young people, the following should be mentioned:

- education sector: at national level, the [Ministry of National Education](#) announces the “[Volunteer of the Year](#)” (*Wolontariusz Roku*) competition, which aims to spread the idea of volunteering among young people and popularise positive attitudes and actions of school youth. The school year 2016/2017 was announced as the [Year of Volunteering](#) by the Ministry of National Education. Activities for the promotion of community action among the youth are also undertaken by specialised units of local authorities and, of course, individual schools – by running volunteer clubs (or implementing the “[Volunteering in School](#)” (*Wolontariat w szkole*) scheme), but also by involving pupils in nationwide events of such as [The Great Orchestra of Christmas Charity Foundation](#) (*Fundacja Wielkiej Orkiestry Świątecznej Pomocy*), the Spring Association and their “[Noble Box](#)” (*Szlachetna Paczka*) action, [Caritas Polska](#) and their “[Christmas Children’s Aid](#)” (*Wigilijne Dzieło Pomocy Dzieciom*) or the “[Christmas Food Collection](#)” (*Świąteczna Zbiórka Żywności*) by [Food Banks](#);
- dedicated non-public youth organisations and schemes, including Scouting Associations, the “[Equalising Opportunities](#)” (*Równać Szanse*) scheme of the [Polish Children and Youth Foundation](#), the “[Youth and Philanthropy. Active Youth – Engaged Citizens](#)” (*Młodzież i filantropia. Aktywna młodzież – zaangażowani obywatele*) scheme of the [Foundation for Poland](#), the “[Act.pl](#)” (*Działasz.pl*) scheme of the [Civic Education Centre](#), the “[Older Brother, Older Sister](#)” (*Starszy brat, starsza siostra*)

scheme of the [Sursum Corda Association](#) or the “[Magnificent Eight](#)” (*Ośmiu wspaniałych*) competition organised by the [World Foundation](#).

### Cross-sectoral cooperation

As there is no nationwide, centrally administered and managed youth volunteering system, no planned and co-ordinated sharing of responsibilities takes place between the national and the local levels. Nor does any co-operation exist in this respect between agencies, ministries and departments. According to a document entitled the “[National Action Plan for the 2011 European Year of Volunteering in Poland](#)” (*Krajowy Plan Działania dla Europejskiego Roku Wolontariatu 2011 w Polsce*), “systemic solutions, which are a good example of volunteering legislation in Poland, are contained in the Act of 24 April 2003 on Public Benefit and Volunteer Work” (the provisions of this Act are discussed in Section 2.4 Laws and regulations on Youth Volunteering).

A network of [16 Regional Volunteering Centres](#) across Poland, and their associate members – Local Volunteering Centres, are striving to build the foundations of a co-ordination system. All the networked Volunteering Centres in Poland work on the basis of common standards of action. However, they have a limited impact both territorially – at most to the province (*województwo*) level or regional level, and systematically – due to the lack of management competences and financial resources resulting from the fact that they are non-public institutions. They are not, of course, dedicated exclusively to the youngest age group among volunteers, although they sometimes undertake special activities in this area.

## 2.3 National strategy on youth volunteering

### Existence of a National Strategy

In Poland, there is no national strategy for youth volunteering, and the only document which contains elements of strategic solutions for volunteering in general is “[The Long-Term Policy for the Development of Volunteering in Poland](#)” (*Długofalowa polityka rozwoju wolontariatu w Polsce*) (see Section 2.5 for youth volunteering aspects of this document). Those provisions are a response to the need to develop a document of this kind mentioned in the “[National Action Plan for the 2011 European Year of Volunteering in Poland](#)”. The diagnosis described in the document mentions key challenges in this area, such as the fragmentary knowledge of volunteering in Poland; the low prestige of volunteering in the social consciousness of Poles; and the insufficient support for the development of volunteering. The document is supposed to correspond to the assumptions underlying such strategic documents as “[The Long-Term National Development Strategy for 2011-2030](#)” (*Długookresowa Strategia Rozwoju Kraju na lata 2011-2030*), “[Mid-Term National Development Strategy for 2011-2020](#)” (*Średniookresowa Strategia Rozwoju Kraju na lata 2011-2020*), “[Strategy for Social Capital Development](#)” (*Strategia Rozwoju Kapitału Społecznego*), “[Strategy for Human Capital Development](#)” (*Strategia Rozwoju Kapitału Ludzkiego*), “[Efficient State](#)” (*Sprawne Państwo*), and the Action Plans associated with those strategies, being the executive documents.

### Scope and contents

Regarding the development of volunteering in general, the assumptions contained in the document “[The Strategy for Social Capital Development 2020](#)” (*Strategia Rozwoju Kapitału Społecznego 2020*) seem to be the most essential. The document was adopted in 2013 and the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage was appointed as the body responsible for its implementation. There is currently no information on its implementation (the [website](#) of the [Ministry of Culture and National Heritage](#) contains reports for 2013 and 2014, but neither is there any information about its discontinuation, therefore the document should be considered as still valid. Challenges related to the building of civil society and the development of social participation mechanisms are addressed by Specific Objective 2, which also includes provisions on volunteering: both

personal and in the context of corporate social responsibility (CSR). Volunteering is defined as “the simplest form of action for the common good” and it is mentioned that “both its corporate and personal dimensions are a manifestation of civic activity, which promotes the attitudes of co-operation and increases mutual trust, thereby contributing to the growth of social capital. Volunteering also plays a significant role in fostering social inclusion and solidarity. Development of volunteering is an important challenge due to the growing weight of issues such as social exclusion or discrimination”. However, despite the declaration regarding “the need to develop a document constituting a draft long-term policy for the development of volunteering in Poland, which will lead to strengthening of the systematic approach to volunteering and its development”, this never happened. In the document, the only reference to age groups is to people aged 50+, but the mention of “initiatives for the promotion of new forms of volunteering, such as e-volunteering, or volunteering using new technologies being an expression of positive civic activity on the Internet” could potentially be seen as important from the point of view of development of youth volunteering.

Assumptions laid down in the following two documents should be considered of key importance when it comes to the development of youth volunteering:

- [“The Governmental Programme for Young People’s Social Engagement for 2015-2016: Active Youth”](#) (*Rządowy Program Aktywności Społecznej Młodzieży na lata 2015-2016 Aktywna Młodzież*). The document provides for a subsidy scheme complementary to the actions undertaken under the [“Citizens’ Initiative Fund 2014-2020”](#) (*Fundusz Inicjatyw Obywatelskich na lata 2014-2020*) scheme and in line with [“The Human Capital Development Strategy”](#) (*Strategia Rozwoju Kapitału Ludzkiego*). Most importantly, the scheme was intended as an introduction to designing a public policy dedicated to young people, referred to as long-term youth policy. The authors of the document pointed out that “in Poland, a support system for youth groups, including informal groups and youth organisations, is not developed”. From the point of view of development of youth volunteering, Priority 2 seems to be of key importance as it explicitly lists volunteering as one of many desirable forms of activity and describes it as a “form of involvement in community affairs, helping others, and enhancing personal knowledge and skills”. The scheme included educational and promotional activities aimed at present and potential volunteers, activities to integrate both the volunteers themselves and the organisations which benefit from their services, development of long-term youth volunteering, and taking measures to increase recognition of the skills acquired during volunteering in the labour market. As regards financing of the Youth Social Action Programme - “Active Youth”, the document points to national funds from the state budget amounting to PLN 20 million per annum (to be earmarked annually in the financial plan of the minister for social security) and introduces the principle of pre-financing the activities under competition-based grants ranging from PLN 10,000 to PLN 100,000;
- The Departmental Programme [“Youth Joined in Action 2016-2019”](#) (*Młodzież Solidarna w Działaniu na lata 2016-2019*), which, in spite of not containing any explicit reference, but due to its nearly identical structure (and extensively repeated passages) can be considered to be a continuation of [“The Governmental Programme for Young People’s Social Engagement for 2015-2016: Active Youth”](#) (*Rządowy Program Aktywności Społecznej Młodzieży na lata 2015-2016 Aktywna Młodzież*) (this assumption seems also to be supported by the statement that “the programme will complement the actions of government administration related to organising and maintaining the positive effects of the World Youth Days (26-31 July 2016 in Krakow)”). This document too considers the development of volunteering and social solidarity as one of their main priorities (Priority 2). A significant difference is the inclusion of a table with indicators/measures for each Objective (in the case of the Objective “development of volunteering and social solidarity”, the indicator is the number of volunteers participating in the projects), their base value in 2015 (for the Objective in question it is 0), the estimated target value in 2019 (for the Objective in question it is 4000), and source of indicator data (for the Objective in question they

are reports on the implementation of tasks subsidised through a competition). Because the Programme is currently in place, a more detailed discussion of the key objectives to be achieved through the actions planned (under Priority 2) seems justified here. They include: intra- and intergenerational solidarity; youth volunteering for those in need, excluded or threatened with exclusion; integration, education and promotion of volunteering; long-term volunteering; skill-based volunteering, particularly in rural areas and small towns and in social economy entities; increasing the recognition of skills acquired during volunteering; preparation of volunteers for giving first aid, including at state, historical and religious events. Crucially, specific addressees of activities within this age group (as discussed in Section 2.4.4) have been identified, including: young parents, youth with disabilities, youth from dysfunctional families, excluded young people or those threatened with social exclusion, persons gaining independence upon leaving a care institution, foster care, or prison. It is also emphasised that the Programme will contribute to promoting the need to increase the recognition of skills acquired through volunteering in formal education and among employers. The Programme also identifies entities entitled to use the funding, namely the non-governmental organisations referred to in Article 3.2 and the entities referred to in Article 3.3 of the Act on Public Benefit and Volunteer Work. The financial plan of the Programme has been described in the same way as in the previous scheme, but the maximum value of the grant provided through a competition has been significantly increased to range from PLN 20,000 to PLN 200,000.

### Responsible authority

The same institutions are responsible for the implementation, co-ordination and monitoring of both the “Governmental Programme for Young People’s Social Engagement for 2015-2016: Active Youth” and the Departmental Programme “Youth Joined in Action 2016-2019”. The Managing Authority is the minister for social security (currently the Minister of Family, Labour and Social Policy); who also oversees its implementation, while monitoring is the responsibility of the Managing Authority and the Board of Public Benefit Activity. Under both Programmes, the Managing Authority is responsible for the management and implementation of the Programme, including preparation of a competition for its Operator, acceptance of applications from beneficiaries, selection of projects to be co-financed and signing of contracts with beneficiaries, monitoring of the implementation of individual projects, reviewing of the beneficiaries’ use of funding, including on-site inspections, and retaining documentation in accordance with the procedures for archiving Programme-related documents.

### Revisions/Updates

The strategies described above were preceded by “[The State Strategy for Youth for 2003-2012](#)” (*Strategia Państwa dla Młodzieży na lata 2003-2012*), whose Strategic Objective 2 (“Creating opportunities for the development of the young generation’s own activity”) pointed to the need to undertake activities for the development of youth volunteering, including creation of a database on youth volunteering in Poland and abroad (to be implemented by the Ministry of National Education and Sport) and dissemination of foreign forms of youth volunteering (to be implemented by the Ministry of National Education and Sport, the Youth Programme, and the Polish-German Youth Co-operation). In summary, the most important differences in comparison to current schemes include: much less importance was attributed to the development of volunteering, a different institution was responsible for implementation at government level (Ministry of National Education), and – unlike the subsequent funding from the budget of a single ministry (Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Policy) – financing (described as “potential” and estimated at approximately PLN 2 billion per year for all activities) was based on a number of sources, including the budgets of many ministries (Health, Sport, Culture) and local governments, special funds deriving from surcharges on State-monopoly games and from advertising of alcoholic beverages, Structural Funds of the European Union (European Social Fund under Priority 2: “Building a knowledge-

based society”, and the Integrated Operational Programme for Regional Development). The Programme did not contain any mechanisms of control and evaluation of the manner of its implementation and of its outcomes, and it was also much more general in nature (for example, it did not contain a diagnosis of the initial state of affairs).

## **2.4 Laws and regulations on youth volunteering**

### **Stand-alone law**

Provisions specific to youth volunteering do not exist, and issues related to volunteering are generally governed by the [2003 Act on Public Benefit and Volunteer Work](#) (Journal of Laws (Dz.U.) of 2003, No. 96, item 873, as amended; [latest amendment](#) entered into force on 25 March 2017). The aim of the legislator was to ensure a balance between securing the basic rights of volunteers and maintaining sufficient flexibility of the legal relationship. [The Act on Public Benefit and Volunteer Work](#) is the first piece of Polish legislation to define basic concepts in this area: ‘volunteer’ – “a natural person who voluntarily and without pay performs services in accordance with the provisions of the Act” (Article 2.3), where a member of an association may also be a volunteer (Article 42.3), as well as ‘non-governmental organisation’ and ‘public benefit activity’. Since then, the Act has been amended on numerous occasions and now regulates the rules for engaging volunteers, their rights and obligations, and the benefits they are entitled to.

### **Other official documents containing guidelines on youth volunteering**

There are no other documents explicitly regulating the issue of youth volunteering, but the [Law on Associations](#) makes general reference to volunteering issues: “An association bases its activities on the voluntary work of its members. To manage its affairs, an association may hire employees, including its members” (Article 2.3) however the [Law on Foundations](#) makes no such reference. It should be emphasised that the regulations contained in the [Act on Public Benefit and Volunteer Work](#) regarding volunteering are (with a few exceptions) completely independent of labour law regulations – the provisions of the Civil Code apply to agreements concluded between the beneficiary and the volunteer in matters not regulated in the Act on Public Benefit and Volunteer Work (Article 44.5). Due to this provision, any relationships not regulated by the Act are governed by civil law with its principle of contractual freedom, rather than by the extensive labour law which serves other purposes. Voluntary work is not an obstacle to acquiring and maintaining an unemployed status (Article 2.2.1 of the Act on Employment Promotion and Labour Market Institutions). Tax matters are regulated by the Civil Code (the value of the volunteer’s services is not considered a donation to the beneficiary) and tax laws, in accordance with which neither the value of the volunteer’s services to the organisation (Article 12.4.16 of the CIT Act of 15 February 1992, as amended, Journal of Laws (Dz.U.) of 1992, No. 21, item 86.) nor the value of benefits received by volunteers from the organisations as listed in the Act on Public Benefit and Volunteer Work: training, medical checks, food, personal protection equipment, and insurance contributions (Article 21.1.113 of the PIT Act of 26 July 1991, as amended, Journal of Laws (Dz.U.) of 1991, No. 80, item 350.) nor the value of services received from volunteers by natural persons being beneficiaries of the organisation are subject to taxation.

### **Regulations on standards of quality**

As regarding quality standards, the provisions of the [Act on Public Benefit and Volunteer Work](#) once again fail to refer to specific age groups. In order to strengthen the legal certainty of both parties regarding the scope, method and duration of voluntary services, the obligation to sign an agreement with the beneficiary is envisaged, which must include a provision on the possibility of its termination (where the service is provided for more than 30 days, a written agreement is required, and if the period of time is shorter, only if the volunteer requests so). The agreement should include elements such as responsibilities and working time, and, optionally, the issue of a certificate, a commitment to reimburse travel expenses or a statement from the volunteer that they

exempt the organisation from this obligation. The Act provides for certain obligations of both parties to the agreement: the beneficiary of the volunteer's work must inform them of the resulting health and safety risks and methods of protection against the risks, describe their rights and obligations, and provide the benefits described in Section 2.5.4.

The regulations described in Section 2.4.2, which make volunteer work independent of the complex and formalised labour law and the tax law, are, according to the legislator, a manifestation of state support for volunteer activities (by abandoning excessive bureaucracy and formalisation). However, the Act on Public Benefit and Volunteer Work also describes direct positive measures, such as the creation by public authorities of organisational units whose objectives are to include promotion, organisation and strengthening of the volunteering infrastructure.

Three issues are of particular significance to young volunteers. The first is due to the fact that the agreement that binds the volunteer with the beneficiary is a civil law contract and as such, in the case of a minor, requires the consent of a statutory representative, i.e. usually a parent. The second relates to working time – although, as stated above, labour law does not apply here, but it is good practice to mirror its provisions on the duration of work of minors, which should neither exceed 6 hours per day for persons under 16 years of age, nor should it exceed 12 hours a week (2 hours a day) during school year and 35 hours a week (7 hours a day) during school holidays. These are not legal regulations, but recommendations of the Volunteering Centre regarding good practice. The third issue concerns internships and traineeships, which are often (consciously or not) confused with volunteering, therefore it is important to emphasise the important differences (including legal) between these three different instruments for improving the qualifications and experience of young people. Magdalena Arczewska writes: "in accordance with the law, traineeships are, by their very nature, a temporary construct and should be easy to implement by the persons concerned. The graduate traineeship agreement is not a contract of employment, because it has been constructed as a special type of contract between an employer and a graduate. It can only last for 3 months. Crucially, a traineeship does not limit the graduate's right to obtain the status of an unemployed person and to receive benefits, nor does it prevent them from engaging in volunteering. On the other hand, internship may last up to 12 months and is usually paid for. In the case of internship funded by a district (*powiat*) Employment Office, the status of an unemployed person is required, and the internship is based on an agreement concluded by the District Governor (*starosta*) with the employer. It is harder to get an internship than a traineeship, which is due to the fact that payment is received for an internship. During the period for which the internship grant is awarded, one is not entitled to the unemployment benefit (...). Finally, volunteer services may be provided only to a beneficiary that is a community organisation or a public institution. Therefore, there is no possibility of engaging in volunteering for an economic operator. Volunteering is, in principle, unpaid for." (Arczewska, 2016).

### Target groups

The departmental programme "[Youth Joined in Action 2016-2019](#)" identifies specific target audiences among young people whose participation is preferred. These are: young parents, youth with disabilities, youth from dysfunctional families, excluded young people or those threatened with social exclusion, persons gaining independence upon leaving a care institution, family custody, or prison. The specific reasons for addressing volunteering activities to these groups are not explicitly mentioned in the document, but it can be concluded from the description that such engagement is thought to have a positive impact on meeting basic psychological needs (i.e. sense of security, stability, belonging), strengthening social inclusion in the local environment, and improvement of the knowledge and skills of the representatives of these target groups.

## 2.5 Youth volunteering at national level

### National Programme for Youth Volunteering

There is no separate scheme in Poland that could be considered as fulfilling the criterion of a national programme for youth volunteering. Documents containing elements of a strategic nature in this area are discussed in Section 2.3. Some themes regarding youth volunteering are contained in "[The Long-Term Policy for the Development of Volunteering in Poland](#)" (*Długofalowa polityka rozwoju wolontariatu w Polsce*). One of its Strategic Objectives is "to strengthen volunteering as a form of civic activity leading to the socio-economic development of Poland"; it consists of three Operational Objectives, two of which include activities related to the development of youth volunteering:

- Operational Objective 1 ("development of a volunteering culture") aims to: "educate teachers in developing the social competences of children and young people"; "organise, support and promote volunteering in educational institutions"; "facilitate and encourage the acquisition of experience in volunteering by children and young people"; and "promote a diversity of volunteering (diverse forms of volunteering, volunteering for people in different age groups, including children and youth)";
- Operational Objective 3 ("Strengthening of Public Policies for the Development of Volunteering") intends to "create a Youth Volunteering project".

The lack of a national programme for youth volunteering, results in the increased importance of strategies created at the level of individual regions or cities. It is worth pointing out the Warsaw City Volunteering project, "[Warsaw Volunteers 2.0 for the years 2016-2020](#)" (*Ochotnicy Warszawscy 2.0 na lata 2016-2020*), which is often referred to as a model and inspiration for activities undertaken in other localities. In the project, the youngest volunteer group is treated as one of the target groups: "It is necessary to organise, support and promote volunteering in institutions of education of all levels. It is important to encourage children and young people to gain volunteering experience from the pre-school stage through the successive stages of general education." The document highlights the importance of volunteering as a means of "strengthening intergenerational solidarity through the involvement and co-operation of youth and older people at the same time".

### Funding

Because Poland does not have a separate scheme that could be considered as fulfilling the criterion of a national programme for youth volunteering, no budget assumptions can be identified in this respect. (Very general budgetary assumptions concerning strategic documents or containing general volunteering-related themes are discussed in Section 2.3 National Strategy on Youth Volunteering.)

### Characteristics of youth volunteering

According to a 2016 study by the [National Bureau for Drug Prevention](#) (*Krajowe Biuro Przeciwdziałania Narkomanii*), one in three young respondents declares their affiliation to informal groups, associations, organisations, clubs, fan groups, unions or religious movements. This, of course, does not mean that they are volunteers, as the greatest number of students are affiliated with sports and fan clubs, unions and associations (17%), or culture and hobby clubs (9%). Organisations and associations related to social activities come third (6%). According to data released by the [Central Statistical Office of Poland](#) (GUS), the overall proportion of adults (aged 15 and over) engaged in voluntary activities is decreasing (from 10.3%, or 3.3 million, in 2011 to 8.5% in 2016) and is still the lowest in Europe; an alarming trend is also shown in the number of hours worked in this way: in 2011 it was an average of 12 hours in four weeks per person, and in 2016 it was only an average of 8 hours per volunteer. Unfortunately, this downward trend is also related to youth volunteering: in 2011, in the 15 to 24 age group it was, on average, 15.4% (in the youngest study group aged 15 to 17 – 18.9%, and in the group aged 18 to 24 – 11.8%). According to data from 2016, the level of volunteering activity for people

aged 15 to 24 was at only 9.5%. Those results are also confirmed by studies (carried out in three provinces: Lubuskie, Zachodniopomorskie and Wielkopolskie) by the [Youth Activity Factory](#) (*Fabryka Aktywności Młodych*- FAM) in 2013 concerning the perception of volunteering as a form of spending one's free time among lower secondary school students: although 87% of the respondents have had some experience of volunteering in their lives, having, for example, participated once in some action, 82% of the respondents viewed volunteering as an unappealing form of spending time, and only 7% of the young people declared willing and regular involvement in actions organised by local NGOs. The respondents have repeatedly stressed that the voluntary groups in their schools were not particularly visible and that in their opinion they were not functioning very well. On the other hand, young people are more likely than older people to call their social involvement 'volunteering', as indicated by the answers to the question: "Did you work as a volunteer last year?"; the percentage of affirmative responses across the population is 6%, and in the 18 to 24 age group is as high as 14%. This is probably due mainly to the mass involvement of young people in one-time voluntary work during the finale of the [Great Orchestra of Christmas Charity](#) and activities like the "[Noble Box](#)". Young people are more likely to engage in voluntary activities within their immediate surroundings, which is supported by the fact that "especially pupils and students, more often than others, talk about volunteers in their circle of friends and colleagues in school or college", and that there is also a growing number of youth organisations. More than 6% of the respondents declared themselves to be active participants of said youth organisations in 2016 (Boguszewski, 2016). In terms of preferred places and means of action (again, this does not necessarily mean volunteering only), "the youngest respondents (aged 18 to 24), mainly pupils and students, are distinguished by their activity in sports unions, clubs and associations as well as in youth organisations (scouting, student clubs and associations, etc.), in art groups such as choir, dance and theatre groups, and scientific societies". (Boguszewski, 2016). In turn, the Regional Volunteering Centre in Łódź points to youth clubs of the Polish Red Cross and Caritas and the School Volunteer Clubs (initiated by the national network of Volunteering Centres in 2006, aimed at voluntary activation of youth from lower secondary and upper secondary schools, and attempting to take young people's spontaneous willingness to act and put it into a more solid and systematic organisational framework) as the main places where youth volunteering is happening.

### Support to young volunteers

The provisions of the Act on Public Benefit and Volunteer Work indicate that an institution using the work of a volunteer must provide them with safe and hygienic conditions for their services as well as personal protection equipment and personal accident insurance, and also – if the volunteer is working in the territory of another country in the area of an armed conflict or a natural disaster – personal accident insurance and medical treatment abroad insurance, unless those benefits arise from other provisions. The volunteer has the right (which they may voluntarily waive) to receive reimbursement of travel expenses and subsistence expenses, and the relevant agreement should also lay down rules for covering other costs of the volunteer's work, such as training costs or liability insurance.

### Quality Assurance

There are no regulations in Poland for quality assurance of youth volunteering or volunteering in general. There is no national registry of organisations that offer the opportunity to work voluntarily. For those looking for such opportunities and for institutions and organisations looking for volunteers, the main source of knowledge and contacts is the network of Volunteering Centres (described in Section 2.2 Administration and Governance of Youth Volunteering), which consists of regional and local volunteering centres and some infrastructural (umbrella) non-governmental organisations. The only way to withdraw support for an organisation that is not properly running its volunteering programs is an inspection by sponsors during the funding period. The Act on Public Benefit and Volunteer Work also provides for the possibility of withdrawing the status of Public Benefit Organisation (a status which includes, among other things, the right to

participate in the 1% tax donation mechanism), however, this only occurs if an inspection carried out by the minister shows that the organisation is guilty of the irregularities described in the Act, but they include formal irregularities (lack of reports, unreported public collections, or inadequate accounting of grants), rather than irregularities that are identified on the basis of an in-depth evaluation of the quality of the activities carried out.

The available information regarding volunteering in Poland comes primarily from surveys by the [Centre for Public Opinion Research](#) (*Centrum Badania Opinii Społecznej* - CBOS) and the [Klon/Jawor Association](#), but it is mostly quantitative data and does not in any way constitute a source of knowledge about the quality of youth volunteering programmes.

## **2.6 Cross-border mobility programmes**

### **EU programmes**

[European Voluntary Service - EVS](#) projects are being implemented within the framework of the [EU Erasmus+ Youth](#) (European Voluntary Service) programme for the years 2014-2020, which in 2007-2013 was part of the Youth in Action programme. The programme is co-ordinated in Poland by the [Foundation for the Development of the Education System](#) (*Fundacja Rozwoju Systemu Edukacji* - FRSE), the National Agency for the Erasmus+ Programme. FRSE is also responsible for monitoring the course and outcomes of the programme and disseminating the results of research and analysis. Erasmus+: Youth is aimed at young people, people working with them, and organisations that work for the youth, as well as institutions that have an impact on the development of non-formal education. It consists of three key actions: Learning Mobility of Individuals, Co-operation for Innovation and Exchange of Good Practices, and Support for Policy Reform.

Those interested in participating in the European Voluntary Service must find a sending organisation in Poland that will deal with the formalities related to their trip. Any person aged 17 to 30 legally residing in Poland (excluding those who were volunteering under the Youth in Action programme) may travel abroad as part of the European Voluntary Service. On the other hand, any organisation wishing to participate in the European Voluntary Service and host or send volunteers must obtain [accreditation](#) for this purpose. It is worth highlighting the success of the [Dialog Foundation](#), which has been implementing the European Voluntary Service since 2009 and is accredited to send volunteers and to co-ordinate projects. In 2013 its ["EVS for Refugees"](#) project was awarded by the European Commission, and in 2016 its "EVS for the Caucasus" project won the EDU-Inspirations competition in the non-formal youth education category.

### **Other Programmes**

Information materials on international volunteering programmes do not provide data on the extent of the involvement of the Polish state in its funding. The Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs finances the ["Polish Aid Volunteering"](#) (*Wolontariat polska pomoc*) programme, which involves Polish organisations sending volunteers to work under projects and with partner organisations in the countries where those projects are being implemented. The programme has been implemented since 2008 and its aim is to support the direct involvement of Polish citizens in assisting the inhabitants of developing countries and dissemination of knowledge about the problems of those countries in the Polish society. Unfortunately, information on the funds spent for this purpose only includes aggregated data on bilateral and multilateral Official Development Assistance, the most recent being a summary for 2015.

Other major international volunteering programmes include:

- work camps of the [Association for the Promotion of Volunteering](#) (*Stowarzyszenie Promocji Wolontariatu*);

- work camps, European volunteering and long-term volunteering projects of the [One World Association](#) (*Stowarzyszenie Jeden Świat*);
- Global Volunteer projects of the [AIESEC Poland Association](#);
- the “Don Bosco International Voluntary Service” (*Międzynarodowy Wolontariat Don Bosco*) and the “Youth for the World” (*Młodzi Światu*) projects of the [Salesian Mission](#);
- international volunteering within the framework of humanitarian aid and the development assistance projects of the “[Polish Centre for International Aid](#)” Foundation (*Polskie Centrum Pomocy Międzynarodowej*).

### Legal framework applying to foreign volunteers

Since volunteering is a service [equivalent to work](#) (but not work as such), a foreigner is not required to obtain a permit to provide voluntary services. The rules that apply to foreigners are the same as for volunteers who are Polish citizens. If a foreign national is entering into a co-operation agreement for a beneficiary in the Republic of Poland and the volunteering agreement is for a period longer than 30 days, then personal accident insurance must be taken out for such a volunteer. In addition, as part of the co-ordination of social security systems in the European Union, citizens of the EU Member States benefit from the protection granted to them under European legislation. On the other hand, liability insurance is available in cases defined in specific regulations, i.e. where volunteers provide services in care institutions, and in other cases the beneficiary may take it out at its own discretion. Unfortunately, no information on this topic is available on the website of the [Office for Foreigners](#), where volunteering is incorrectly equated with traineeship at the Office (the differences are discussed in Section 2.4.3 Laws and Regulations on Youth Volunteering).

## 2.7 Raising awareness about youth volunteering opportunities

### Information providers

Public sector activities aimed at raising awareness of the availability of youth volunteering at national level are limited to the publication of basic regulations (again regarding volunteering in general and not specifically youth volunteering) on the website of the [Department of Social Economy and Public Benefit of the Ministry of the Family, Labour and Social Policy](#), under the [Volunteering tab](#) and organisation of the “Volunteer of the Year” competition by the [Ministry of National Education](#). Undoubtedly, the largest compendium of knowledge on volunteering is available on the website of the nationwide network of [Volunteering Centres](#). The network also organises cycles of meetings addressed to volunteer service organisers (e.g. within the framework of the Warsaw Volunteer Project), runs the Online Volunteer Service Agency, and organises a nationwide competition called the “[Colours of Volunteering](#)” (*Barwy Wolontariatu*). Similar activities are organised by regional and local Volunteering Centres, as well as many organisations supporting the Polish non-governmental sector (infrastructural organisations).

### Key initiatives

Poland has the [Association for the Promotion of Volunteering](#) (*Stowarzyszenie Promocji Wolontariatu*), which mainly deals with “the promotion of the idea of volunteering as a special form of international youth contacts” and [a portal](#) devoted to online volunteering as well as other projects exploiting the potential of new technologies for strengthening civil society and increasing the level of social engagement. International Volunteer Day (5 December) is celebrated, but its celebrations are organised spontaneously and optionally by the individual organisations and institutions, without national co-ordination. Significant youth volunteering promotion effects have in recent years been produced by events such as Euro 2012 or Youth Days in 2016, and the media are annually publicising mass charity events based on voluntary work (such as those mentioned in Section 2.2.1 Administration and Governance of Youth Volunteering). Volunteering could potentially be promoted within the framework of the Programmes of Co-operation with Non-

Governmental Organisations, which are mandatorily adopted (under the Act on Public Benefit and Volunteer Work) by local governments, but unfortunately promotion and organisation of voluntary service is nowhere to be found among the priority public tasks planned. Schools and their volunteer groups acting for the local community seem to be the key institutions for the development of youth volunteering, but “as it turned out during an analysis of the websites and social media profiles of schools across Poland, which was performed by the [Youth Activity Factory](#) (*Fabryka Aktywności Młodych* - FAM) volunteers from April to June 2014, 90% of schools do not have information on their school volunteer group or any volunteer activities on their website. If there is volunteer activity at a particular school, its website or Facebook profile will not tell us anything about their achievements or who the leader of volunteering activity is in that school. As a result, such unselfish actions of young people for the local community go without notice and the organisers of volunteering activity are not given any recognition.”

## **2.8 Skills recognition**

### **Policy Framework**

None of the described documents which concern volunteering contain any specific regulations pertaining to the skills acquired by volunteers, therefore any proposals or solutions in this regard cannot be considered as universally applicable. Another consequence is the lack of clear provisions on the mechanisms that allow the recognition of skills acquired by volunteers. However, some provisions concerning the necessity of introducing such mechanisms are contained in “[The Long-Term Policy for the Development of Volunteering in Poland](#)” (*Długofalowa polityka rozwoju wolontariatu w Polsce*), whose Action 3.3.2 (“Creating mechanisms to increase the attractiveness of long-term volunteering”) points to the need to “focus on the benefits that volunteering brings to volunteers themselves”. With regard to young volunteers, the authors of the programme postulate “the introduction of additional credits for the thousands of hours worked as a volunteer to help them get into higher education institutions or even obtain a scholarship for the most socially committed ones”, and stress that “volunteering can also be an important part of one’s career. Long-term engagement in volunteering is sometimes more beneficial for people entering the labour market than traineeships. It is important for employers to be able to appreciate volunteering as part of one’s career and to promote those who engage in volunteering”.

Provisions regarding the skills acquired by volunteers are only available in volunteering guides, which are not of obligatory nature. The exception is the Youthpass certificate, which is guaranteed for participants of the EU Erasmus+: Youth programme (described in Section 2.6 Cross-border Mobility Programmes) (it contains details of the skills gained during volunteering in the project), but this is a consequence of EU regulations, rather than Polish regulations. The broadest discussion of those issues is found in the “Youth Joined in Action” document, which clearly states that “the implementation of projects under the Programme is intended to give rise to a situation where young people, treated as sovereign entities of social life, have an identity strongly rooted in their own community as well as competences and skills that will enable them and facilitate functioning in the family, society and the labour market”. It mentions, among other things, the importance of volunteering in the development of skills and competences that are in deficit but are key in professional work, such as the ability to show initiative and entrepreneurship, co-operation with others, communication, learning skills, educational goal setting, planning and monitoring of one’s own work, and motivation building. The document also mentions the planning of activities “to increase the recognition of skills acquired during volunteering”. Unfortunately, despite the fact that most of the documents and guides which describe how to build good volunteer relationships often include provisions regarding the conclusion of co-operation with a volunteer, when it comes to the skills acquired by them, they usually mention, at most, giving them feedback. We rarely see provisions such as those in the “[Warsaw Volunteers](#)” (*Ochotnicy*

*Warsawscy*) document, which explicitly recommend “giving them a certificate or a reference”.

### Existing arrangements

The Act on Public Benefit and Volunteer Work is the only document in Poland that is obligatory in the area of volunteering. Unfortunately, despite the fact that it contains a provision regarding the requirements for a volunteer in terms of their qualifications (they should be “appropriate to the type and scope of services provided, if the obligation to hold such qualifications and comply with the relevant requirements arises from separate regulations” – Article 43), the list of a volunteer’s rights (described in Section 2.5.4) contained in this Act does not mention any obligation from the institution which benefits from their work to, at minimum, certify the skills acquired by the volunteer.

Since December 2015, the Act on the Integrated Qualification System has been in force in Poland. Article 4 reads that the Integrated Qualification System creates “the possibility of recognising learning outcomes acquired through non-formal and informal learning”, but the concept of volunteering does not appear once in the entire piece of legislation (Act on the Integrated Qualification System of 22 December 2015, Journal of Laws (Dz.U.) of 2016, item 64). In turn, a specialist publication on the Integrated Qualification System says that “from 1 October 2016, the role of National Co-ordination Point (NCP) for the Polish Qualification Framework shall be performed by the Minister of National Education, under a resolution of the Interdepartmental Team for Lifelong Learning and the Integrated Qualification System. This ensures an appropriate combination of the functions to be performed by the NCP and the tasks of the Minister of National Education defined in the Act as the Integrated Qualification System co-ordinating minister” (Sławiński, 2017). Unfortunately, although the Encyclopaedia contains an entry on informal learning, the term ‘volunteering’ appears only once in the entire publication: “informal learning also denotes the acquisition of new knowledge and skills >as a bonus< while working, volunteering as well as doing various activities related to social and family life” (Sławiński, 2017). In addition, although the skills it goes on to list are undoubtedly achievable through volunteer involvement – especially of young people (project management, foreign language skills, use of computers and computer programs, knowledge and skills needed to care for others), neither the Act nor the Encyclopaedia contain any regulations regarding the recognition of skills specifically acquired by volunteers.

In Poland, there are no national regulations that facilitate recognition of the knowledge, skills and competences of young volunteers as part of formal education, e.g. in the system of compulsory work practice, [ECTS credits](#), or [ECVET credit](#) system, and introduction of such solutions remains dependent on the awareness of their usefulness among representatives of the authorities of each higher education institution.

## 2.9 Current debates and reforms

In July 2017, a [bill of the Act on the National Institute of Freedom – Centre for the Development of Civic Society](#) (*Narodowy Instytut Wolności – Centrum Rozwoju Społeczeństwa Obywatelskiego*) with bills of implementing acts was brought to the lower house of the Polish parliament (*Sejm*). In September 2017, a second reading of the governmental bill was held at the Sejm’s Commission for Social Policy and Family and it was forwarded to the Senate. One of the tasks of the Centre is to support the development of civil society and to support the development of human resources, with particular emphasis on volunteers (Article 24.2), including promotion of grassroots activism, strengthening of the social activist ethos among citizens, and support and dissemination of volunteering (Article 24.3). The bill proposes that those competences be taken away from the Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Policy. The bill proposes that the National Institute – as an executive agency – is to be the new institution responsible for promoting the development of civil society, public benefit activity and volunteering, within the scope defined in the Act on Public Benefit and Volunteer Work. The idea of

establishing the National Institute of Freedom – Centre for the Development of Civic Society (*Narodowy Instytut Wolności – Centrum Rozwoju Społeczeństwa Obywatelskiego*) has raised some doubts, since the NGOs were able to some extent to participate in consultations of the bill, but had no influence on the actual decision to create the Institute, and critics point out that not all the proposals of the public side had been taken into account in the consultations. In addition, the representation of non-governmental organisations in the bodies to act in the Centre has been weakened, and the bill itself has been changed several times without any relation to the points raised during consultations. Due to the fact that the Government Legislative Centre has also submitted far-reaching comments and objections regarding the bill, this has furthermore forced its major modifications after closure of the public consultation. In addition, some organisations are widely criticising the proposed possibility of announcing competitions by the Centre on the basis of procedures completely different from those contained in the Act on Public Benefit and Volunteer Work, which have been developed through many years of dialogue between the government, local governments and the public (many opinions and extensive discussion of this issue can be found on the website <http://www.ngo.pl/>). The government's communication policy concerning the Centre at the moment of the creation of the present text was unclear – different government entities produced conflicting reports on whether a new bill will be drafted, whether the consultation will be repeated, and when the Centre will begin to operate.

The bill in question states that one of the strategic challenges of the new entity is “volunteering, with particular emphasis on the most difficult forms of non-one-time and long-term volunteering”, and indicates that “the Institute will develop further civil society development programmes in Poland, including the [Polish Solidarity Corps](#) (*Polski Korpus Solidarności*) (a scheme to support long-term and systematic volunteering efforts)”. One source of inspiration for the government project was the American Peace Corps. For now, it is unclear what the proposed solutions will end up looking like, as the efforts of the working group set up at the Prime Minister's office are ongoing. The date of publication of the relevant bill has been postponed several times, which means that the date of launch of the Corps, announced to take place on the Volunteer Day on 5 December, is becoming increasingly unrealistic, especially as the government is announcing extensive public consultations of the proposed solutions.

An important social and economic trend that may have an impact on youth volunteering solution is pointed out by [Magdalena Arczewska, Phd](#): “volunteering is now moving away from being community service and towards internship, traineeship or pro-employment volunteering, which aims to help young people enter the labour market, and, in the long term, find permanent employment. In this approach, volunteering is treated as a labour market institution” (Arczewska, 2017). The trend indicated by researchers from the National Bureau for Drug Prevention is not without significance either; they are writing about the high level of individualism that persists among young people: “the opinion that nowadays a person who wants to achieve something in life should do their own thing, counting only on themselves< is almost as common as in 2013 and much more common than in 1998. At the same time, since 1998, the percentage of young people who believe that the ability to interact with other people is more important has dropped by 19 percentage points (from 45% to 26%), and since 2013 by 2 percentage points (from 28% to 26%) (...) Individualism is therefore [stressed twice as often](#) as co-operation with others.

### **3. Employment & Entrepreneurship**

The issue of youth employment is one of the country's key public policy areas. High youth unemployment has been a persistent characteristic of the Polish labour market since the regime change in 1989. It brought more opportunities for the education of young people, especially at third level. One contributing factor was the partial privatisation of higher education, which caused a snowballing increase in the number of

those institutions. In the first decades of the political transformation, the main action taken by the state for the youth was a policy of counteracting unemployment. Before the accession of Poland to the EU (2004), the youth unemployment rate exceeded 40% and was the highest among Member States (Eurostat). The lack of jobs and satisfactory career prospects for increasingly better educated young people resulted in mass emigration after the opening of the EU labour market. The mass emigration, the increase in financial outlays for active labour market policies (ALMP) targeted at young people (e.g. from European funds), and the growth of jobs in the economy have all contributed to the gradual decrease in youth unemployment.

### **3.1 General context**

#### **Labour market situation in the country**

The issue of youth employment is one of the country's key public policy areas. High youth unemployment has been a persistent characteristic of the Polish labour market since the regime change in 1989. In the first 15 years of the transformation, the difficult situation of school graduates was largely due to the general conditions in the labour market, including: shortage of labour demand (the economy was not creative enough to provide new jobs), large supply of workforce (a period of intense demographic pressure associated with baby boomers entering the labour market), mismatch between the occupation and qualification structure of the population and the changing labour market needs, and imperfect institutional arrangements to support the unemployed (according to: Study of the Professional Activity of Graduates in the Context of Implementation of the First Job Programme. A Report [*Badanie aktywności zawodowej absolwentów w kontekście realizacji programu „Pierwsza praca”. Raport*], Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Policy, Warsaw 2008.). Those factors determined the professional fate of all Poles, including graduates of various types of schools. However, in spite of being exposed to the same set of circumstances arising from changes in the labour market, the youth unemployment rate had always been higher than that among older generations.

The regime change brought more opportunities for the education of young people, especially at third level. One contributing factor was the partial privatisation of higher education, which caused a snowballing increase in the number of those institutions. In the 2013/2014 academic year, 1,549,900 people were studying at 438 third-level schools, compared to just over 400,000 people in 112 schools in 1990/1991. The gross enrolment ratio increased during that time from 12.9% to 49.2% (Central Statistical Office of Poland, GUS). Higher education began to be treated as a remedy for, and a chance to avoid, unemployment. At the same time, there was a decrease in interest in vocational training among young people and a marginalisation of vocational education.

In the first decades of the political transformation, the main action taken by the state for the youth was a policy of counteracting unemployment. Before the accession of Poland to the EU (2004), the youth unemployment rate exceeded 40% and was the highest among Member States (Eurostat).

The lack of jobs and satisfactory career prospects for increasingly better educated young people resulted in mass emigration after the opening of the EU labour market. According to estimates by the Central Statistical Office of Poland (*Główny Urząd Statystyczny - GUS*), at the end of 2015 around 2,397,000 Polish people were temporarily living outside of Poland, i.e. 77,000 (3,3%) more than in 2014. In Europe alone, in 2015 there were about 2,098,000 Polish people, with the vast majority – about 1,983,000 – living in the Member States. [Of the EU countries](#), the highest number was in the United Kingdom (720,000), Germany (655,000), the Netherlands (112,000), Ireland (111,000) and Italy (94,000).

The mass emigration, the increase in financial outlays for active labour market policies (ALMP) targeted at young people (e.g. from European funds), and the growth of jobs in the economy have all contributed to the gradual decrease in youth unemployment.

However, the increase in employment was achieved through the development of various forms of unstable employment. Young people were often employed on temporary contracts or civil law contracts (without social security contributions being paid for them). According to Eurostat estimates, in 2014 more than half of the people employed in Poland aged 15 to 29 worked on fixed-term contracts, which was the highest share of this type of employment in the EU (Eurostat). An overrepresentation of young people found themselves in a category known as the working poor.

The gap between the qualifications and skills of graduates and the needs of the economy and the labour market had also been widening.

The high unemployment rate among young people, the rise of unstable employment and the mass emigration of young people have prompted the authors of reports on youth to label them as the “lost generation”, a dreary prospect that could only be averted by decisive action through public policies (a report prepared on the initiative of the government, [The Youth of 2011](#), 2011: 180).

Poland has been actively involved in the implementation of the [EU Youth Employment Package](#) (2012) designed to boost employment among young people. In December 2013, a roadmap for the implementation of the [Youth Guarantee Initiative](#) was developed. Poland, as an EU Member State with more than 25% of youth unemployment (persons aged 15 to 24), has been provided with support through the Youth Employment Initiative and is expected to receive EUR 550 million from EU funds.

### Main concepts

In current governmental documents, the issues of youth employment and the development of entrepreneurship among young people are a priority.

[The Strategy for Responsible Development](#) until 2020 (with a forecast up to 2030), adopted by the Council of Ministers on 14 February 2017, is a key document of the Polish state in the area of medium- and long-term economic policy. Internal factors hindering sustainable economic growth, which have a negative impact on the stable development prospects of Poland, include some factors directly connected with the employment and entrepreneurship of young people:

- unfavourable demographic processes – ageing of the population and migration from Poland, which has a negative effect on the prospects of providing appropriately qualified and creative workers;
- too few well-paid (and stable) creative jobs, especially in rural areas, guaranteeing professional self-realisation and generating high added value for the economy;
- relatively low and inefficient use of available and potential labour resources, a mismatch between qualifications and market needs, etc.;
- the growth and competitiveness of businesses is based mainly on cost factors (including low labour costs);
- low innovativeness of the economy resulting mainly from insufficient incentives for undertaking innovative activities, low demand for new technologies among Polish companies, low efficiency of co-operation between the academic/research sector, administration, and business.

The main objective of the Strategy is to create conditions for increasing the incomes of the inhabitants of Poland, while increasing cohesion in social, economic, environmental and territorial terms. The Strategy is oriented towards responsible and solidary development through strengthening entrepreneurship, inventiveness and productivity in the economy.

Compared to other age groups, young people in Poland are characterised by a very low professional activity rate (only 39.8%) and low employment rate. Just above one in four persons aged 15 to 24 (28.4%) works, compared with 79.6% of 25- to 34-year-olds and 83% of 35- to 44-year-olds (2016 Research on the Population’s Economic Activity, annual averages, Central Statistical Office of Poland (GUS)). Young people are the most

vulnerable to unemployment. According to the 2016 [Research on the Population's Economic Activity](#) (BAEL), the unemployment rate in the 15 to 24 age group was 17.7%, compared to 6.7% among 25- to 34-year-olds, 4.7% in the 35 to 44 age group, and 4.4% among those aged 45 and more (2016 Research on the Population's Economic Activity, annual averages, Central Statistical Office of Poland (GUS)).

However, it should be stressed that unemployment in Poland is falling, including the youth unemployment rate. According to Eurostat, the harmonised youth unemployment rate in Poland in May 2017 was 14.1%, which was almost three times higher than the total harmonised unemployment rate (4.8%). However, the youth unemployment rate in Poland is lower than the EU average (16.9%). The situation in the labour market in Poland is improving but not for all categories of young people.

Segmentation of the labour market, covering some categories of young people, is still ongoing. Persons with low qualifications or living in economically underdeveloped areas continue to have problems obtaining stable employment contracts, and receive low wages in low-satisfaction jobs. Difficulties with the work/life balance also continue to exist for those with young children, which particularly limits the professional activity of women. Disabled school graduates face problems with entry into the labour market, even after they have received a higher education diploma. There is still an unfavourable institutional environment for setting up one's own businesses, despite the announced changes.

A worrying phenomenon is the increase in the category of young people with various deficits that remain outside the labour market. These include young people from poor families, multiple children families, incomplete families, pathological or dysfunctional families with incapable caregivers, children who leave orphanages, foster families, penitentiaries and correctional institutions, young parents, young mothers, persons with low education and qualifications, early school leavers, people with disabilities, and chronically ill people.

The activities of public institutions in relation to these categories of young people are insufficient and often inaccurate. Various non-governmental organisations (often carrying out unique and highly successful projects) offer their support, but this is limited in scope because of the poor condition, in economic and human resource terms, of this sector in Poland.

Employers are reporting shortages of workers with increasing frequency, including high-end professionals as well as skilled and unskilled workers (e.g. for seasonal jobs in agriculture or cleaning jobs). In 2016, [public opinion polls](#) showed a decline in youth declarations regarding the desire to emigrate for work, which is linked to the improved situation in the labour market.

The missing labour force is offset by mainly [Ukrainian workers](#). In 2016, businesses declared that they had employed 1.3 million people under the simplified procedure of employing foreigners. More than one million are Ukrainians. According to data from the Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Policy, the highest demand was for workers in menial jobs (750,000). The next highest groups were businesses which required industrial workers (247,000), machine operators (112,000), service workers and salespersons (65,000). Other occupational groups represented 10% of all declarations.

## **3.2 Administration and Governance**

### **Governance**

The objectives and tasks of Polish employment policy are defined in the [Constitution of the Republic of Poland](#) of 2 April 1997 (Journal of Laws (Dz.U.) of 1997, No. 78, item 483, as amended). Its implementation is primarily the responsibility of public authorities.

The central role in the [state's public policy concerning the development of employment and entrepreneurship](#) is played by the [Ministry of Development](#), which prepares strategic

documents on economic security and the country's development policy (including employment policy), supervises the use of European funds, and promotes entrepreneurship.

[The Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Policy](#) is, on the other hand, responsible for the preparation of the [National Employment Action Plan](#) and co-ordination of its implementation; co-ordination and development of Public Employment Services; promotion of employment, including policies to counteract unemployment, mitigate the effects of unemployment and stimulate professional activation of jobless people; development of human resources; as well as ensuring uniform application of law; and co-ordination of social security systems.

A detailed legal framework for the labour market policy in Poland is set out in the [Act of 20 April 2004 on the promotion of employment and labour market institutions](#) (Journal of Laws (Dz.U.) of 2017, item 1065, as amended).

The tasks of the state in the area of employment promotion, mitigation of the effects of unemployment and professional activation are implemented on the basis of the [National Employment Action Plan](#) passed by the Council of Ministers, which encompasses the principles of implementation of the [European Employment Strategy](#) and is based on the initiatives of the local governments of communes (*gmina*), districts (*powiat*) and provinces (*województwo*) as well as social partners.

A draft [National Employment Action Plan](#) is prepared by the minister for labour affairs (at the moment, the Minister of Family, Labour and Social Policy) in consultation, in particular, with the minister for economy, the minister responsible for education and upbringing, the minister for higher education, the minister for rural development and the minister for regional development. On the basis of laws adopted by local governments, the authorities of a province are responsible for its development policy (there are 16 provinces in Poland), while each district is responsible for a policy of counteracting unemployment and activation of the local labour market (in 2017 there are 343 district Employment Offices, and together with their branches and service desks they make up more than 440 locations nationwide).

The labour market policy at national level is consulted by social partners (including representatives of trade unions, employers' organisations, and NGOs), as well as by representatives of local governments and educational institutions. At the national level the consultative body of the Minister is the [Labour Market Council](#). At the provincial level, the body that provides province marshals (*marszałek*) with opinions and advice is the Provincial Labour Market Council, and at the district level, district governors (*starosta*) are consulted by the District Labour Market Council.

The state's tasks pertaining to the policy of employment promotion, mitigation of the effects of unemployment and professional activation are performed by [Public Employment Services](#), [Voluntary Labour Corps](#) (*Ochotnicze Hufce Pracy*- OHP), employment agencies, training institutions, social dialogue institutions, and local partnership institutions.

The Act on the promotion of employment and labour market institutions provides for additional forms of support to foster employment of young people (in addition to the standard forms of support available to all categories of the unemployed). Public employment services are equipped with the following tools and labour market instruments dedicated to young people:

- Those who are unemployed under the age of 30 are considered to have "special" status on the labour market and are given priority in referral to dedicated schemes (Article 49).
- Those who are unemployed under the age of 25 should be presented with an offer by the district Employment Office within a period of up to 4 months from the date of registration (Article 50(1)). This offer should be in the form of employment, other

- paid work, training, internship, job skills training for adults, intervention works or public works or other forms of assistance specified in the Act.
- Additional instruments targeted at the unemployed under the age of 30 include training vouchers, internship vouchers, employment vouchers, and housing vouchers (Chapter 13d, Articles 66k to 66n).

The activities of the state aimed particularly at youth at risk of social exclusion and the unemployed under the age of 25 are implemented through the Voluntary Labour Corps (*Ochotnicze Hufce Pracy, OHP*). OHP are government-financed entities supervised by the minister for labour that specialise in youth action (Chapter 5, Articles 11 to 17).

Regarding the education and training of young people, OHP conduct activities aimed at:

- 1) enabling young people who have not completed primary or lower secondary school, or who have not stayed in education after graduating from those schools, to acquire professional qualifications and to complete their primary or lower secondary education;
- 2) enabling young people to complete their general and vocational upper secondary education.

Within the field of employment and prevention of the marginalisation and social exclusion of youth, OHP undertake the following actions:

- 1) act as job centres and organise employment for: young people over the age of 15 who have not completed primary or lower secondary school or have not stayed in education after graduating from those schools; unemployed persons under the age of 25; pupils; and students;
- 2) provide career guidance for young people and Mobile Career Information Centres;
- 3) initiate international co-operation and youth exchange programmes;
- 4) refund the costs incurred by the employer for the salaries and social security contributions of young workers employed on the basis of an employment contract for the purpose of job skills training.

OHP, as labour market institutions, provide free services in the following formats: job centres; career guidance and vocational information services; active job search workshops; organisation of training; labour market schemes.

The duties of OHP are carried out through:

- Mobile Career Information Centres (*Mobilne Centra Informacji Zawodowej*) (49 units),
- Youth Employment Offices (*Młodzieżowe Biura Pracy*) (49),
- Job centres (*Punkty Pośrednictwa Pracy*) (78),
- European Social Fund Vocational Training Centres (*Ośrodki Szkolenia Zawodowego EFS*) (34),
- Regional Vocational Training Centres for Young People (*Rejonowe Ośrodki Szkolenia Zawodowego Młodzieży*) (24)
- Youth Career Centres (*Młodzieżowe Centra Kariery*) (221).

Those entities are supervised by Centres for Youth Education and Work (*Centra Edukacji i Pracy Młodzieży*) (49).

Schemes for the education and employment of disabled youth are supported by a special purpose fund created from contributions paid by employers who do not employ people with disabilities – the State Fund for Rehabilitation of Disabled Persons (*Państwowy Fundusz Rehabilitacji Osób Niepełnosprawnych, PFRON*). The policy of supporting employment of the disabled is defined in the [Act of 27 August 1997 on vocational and social rehabilitation and the employment of disabled people](#) (Journal of Laws (Dz.U.) of 1997, No. 123, item 776, as amended). The funds from PFRON to support vocational activation and employment of young people with disabilities are funnelled to public, private and non-governmental entities as well as to individuals.

On the other hand, the Act of 13 June 2003 on social employment (Journal of Laws (Dz.U.) of 2003, No. 122, item 1143, as amended) regulates the processes of social and occupational reintegration of persons with the lowest chances on the open labour market due to their low qualifications, or lack thereof, and also those having problems with full participation in social and professional life. This applies in particular to homeless people, alcohol or drug addicts, mentally ill people, long-term unemployed, former inmates, refugees, and disabled people. Persons from those categories may participate in activities run by social integration centres and clubs (operated by local government units or by non-governmental organisations appointed to do so by the former) and receive various forms of assistance and support from public funds to aid employability (e.g. funds to establish a social co-operative).

### **Cross-sectorial cooperation**

[The National Employment Action Plan for 2015-2017 \(KPDZ/2015-2017\)](#) was adopted by the Council of Ministers on 10 March 2015. It defines the directions for state policies in the field of the labour market, especially concerning promotion of employment, mitigation of the effects of unemployment, and professional activation. The amount of PLN 29,915,297,000 has been earmarked for the implementation of KPDZ/2015-2017 over three years, of which national funds constitute 89.01% and foreign funds - 10.9% of the total.

The main goal of NEAP for 2015-2017 is to reach an employment rate of 68.1% for people aged 20 to 64 at the end of 2017.

Two priorities have been identified the implementation of which is supported by the actions defined in NEAP for 2015-2017:

Priority 1: Enhancing the effectiveness of labour market management through:

- improving job centre and career guidance services provided by Public Employment Services;
- improving the education system and aligning it better with the expectations of businesses.

The support is targeted primarily at people aged 15 to 24, especially those who are simultaneously not in employment, education or training (NEET).

Priority 2: Increasing adaptability in the labour market through:

- encouraging Poles to change or supplement their qualifications;
- seeking employment outside the current place of residence;
- supporting marginalised people, e.g. long-term unemployed, persons aged 50+, NEET, parents with young children and people with disabilities;
- improving the quality and attractiveness of vocational training and its adaptation to the needs of the labour market.

## **3.3 Skills Forecasting**

### **Forecasting system(s)**

The demand for future jobs in enterprises is estimated by the Central Statistical Office of Poland (GUS). Every year, it prepares a publication on the basis of the results of a [labour demand survey](#). Since 2007, the survey has been conducted using the representative method, on a quarterly basis, and includes national economic operators employing 1 or more persons. Until 2007, the survey included only operators with a workforce of 10 or more.

The information obtained from the survey of enterprises includes: realised and unrealised demand, i.e. jobs filled and job vacancies by occupation; data on the number of newly created and liquidated jobs in the reporting period by workplace characteristics, namely spatial distribution, ownership sector, type of activity, and size.

The basic legal act introducing labour demand surveys in the European Union is Regulation (EC) No 453/2008 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 April 2008 regarding quarterly statistics on job vacancies within the Union.

Another source of information are employment forecasts, which use different data sources.

An example is the forecast published in [Employment Forecasts for Poland until 2020](#). Synthetic Results and Conclusions [*Prognozy zatrudnienia w Polsce do 2020 roku. Syntetyczne wyniki i wnioski*], E. Kwiatkowski, B. Suchecki (ed.), IPIPS, Warsaw 2014. The forecast was prepared as part of the project Analysis of the Labour Market Processes and Social Integration in Poland in the Context of Economic Policy, co-financed by the European Union under the European Social Fund.

During the work on an employment forecast for Poland until 2020, three basic sources of statistical data on the Polish labour market were used. They were:

- the Central Statistical Office of Poland (GUS) and international institutions (such as Eurostat and OECD);
- state institutions compiling databases complementary to those of the Central Statistical Office of Poland, including Employment Offices, the Social Insurance Institution (*Zakład Ubezpieczeń Społecznych* - ZUS) and tax offices,
- institutions and people conducting research on the labour market situation.

The analyses performed by the team are one of the stages in a series of works on the development of an integrated forecasting and information system to predict employment and build an IT system enabling employment forecasting across the country and for each province (not only globally, but also across very large, large, and medium occupational groups).

The Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Policy has implemented a monitoring system for surplus and deficit occupations. In accordance with the provisions of the Act of 20 April 2004 on promotion of employment and labour market institutions (Article 8(1)(3) and Article 9(1)(9)), the preparation of labour market analyses, including monitoring of deficit and surplus occupations, is one of the tasks of provincial governments and district governments in the field of labour market policy.

The main source of information is data on the registered unemployed and job offers by occupation and specialisation originating from the information systems used in Employment Offices. This is supplemented by data from the monitoring of job offers on the Internet conducted by provincial Employment Offices.

Information on deficit, balanced and surplus occupations in Poland is available on the [website of the Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Policy](#). The results of monitoring for provinces and districts are available on the websites of the relevant Employment Offices.

An additional source of information about the demand among employers as well as qualifications and skills requirements is the research conducted by various institutions, including the Educational Research Institute (*Instytut Badań Edukacyjnych* - IBE), Manpower, and Randstad, as part of the [Social Diagnosis](#) panel research carried out in Poland since 2000 (<http://www.diagnoza.com/>).

According to research on the state of human capital in Poland (Social Diagnosis, Analysis of Qualifications and Key Competences for Increasing the Opportunities of Graduates in the Labour Market), there is a need for the development of the following skills, required to implement the government Strategy for Responsible Development until 2020 (with a forecast up to 2030).

1. Transversal skills – to enable playing of social and occupational roles/functions in different contexts, regardless of sector/industry or occupation, which are used in different situations (such as language skills, communication skills or entrepreneurship).

2. Digital skills – which are essential for functioning in today's world, regardless of age or physical fitness, and enable reading digital content and evaluating its credibility, using it in daily life, and expanding the demand base for e-services provided by public and business entities.
3. Professional skills – lack of qualified staff may prevent or hinder the economic development proposed in the Strategy.

Information from forecasts and studies is available in publications and on the websites of the relevant institutions preparing them.

### **Skills development**

Information from employment forecasts and research is used in government documents concerning, among other things, the national development, education and employment policies.

At provincial and district level, this information is used in documents related to regional and local development strategies, including in the planning of the directions of education in upper secondary education.

Implementation of the results of forecasts and analyses in formal education at national, regional and local level has so far failed to produce the intended outcomes.

Conclusions based on [studies of employers](#) indicate that in Poland there is a gap between the skills of employees and the needs of the economy and the labour market, that schools do not educate at the level expected by employers, nor does the content of the curriculum meet expectations. Furthermore, the offer for retraining adults (including those with the lowest level of basic skills) is not sufficiently attractive and flexible.

Studies by the Central Statistical Office (*Young People on the Labour Market 2016*) regarding the situation of young people in the labour market show that the extent to which one's educational background is utilised in the workplace depends on the occupational group. While among specialists more than 70% of the respondents indicated that they found their education highly useful in their professional work, the remaining groups achieved significantly lower results (Chart 1).

## **3.4 Career Guidance and Counselling**

### **Career guidance and counselling services**

#### **Career guidance in schools**

In the 2017/2018 school year, career guidance classes are organised for students in grade 7 and 8 of primary school, lower secondary trade school, general upper secondary school, and technical upper secondary school. The classes are based on a curriculum prepared by a relevant teacher and approved by the headmaster, after consulting the pedagogical council. The curriculum contains information about professions, qualifications, and jobs, as well as opportunities to obtain qualifications that match the needs of the labour market and one's occupational skills.

The career guidance staff within the education system are provided with support from the [Centre for Education Development](#) (*Ośrodek Rozwoju Edukacji - ORE*) (until 1 July 2016, the [National Centre for the Promotion of Vocational and Continuing Education](#) (Krajowy Ośrodek Wspierania Edukacji Zawodowej i Ustawicznej KOWEZiU)).

[ORE](#) is a central public institution for teacher training with nationwide coverage. The body responsible for the Centre is the Minister of National Education. ORE is carrying out a project under the Knowledge Development Education Operational Programme (*Program Operacyjny Wiedza Edukacja Rozwój 2014-2020 (PO WER)*) The project is called "[Effective Educational and Vocational Guidance for Children, Adolescents and Adults](#)" (*Efektywne doradztwo edukacyjno-zawodowe dla dzieci, młodzieży i dorosłych*).

The main goal of the project is: to create a framework for the effective functioning of educational and vocational guidance in the education system.

### **Psychological and pedagogical counselling centres for school youth**

The activities of schools in the field of educational and vocational guidance are supported by public psychological and pedagogical counselling centres, including specialist counselling clinics.

According to data from the [Educational Information System](#), as of 30 September 2014 there were 839 psychological and pedagogical counselling centres in Poland (of which 560 were public), including 44 specialist counselling clinics (of which 19 were public).

The operation of public psychological and pedagogical counselling centres falls under the remit of the educational tasks of districts. There is at least one public psychological and pedagogical counselling centre in each district in Poland, which provides free psychological and pedagogical assistance.

Those counselling centres provide support to children and adolescents who require psychological and pedagogical help or assistance in choosing the direction of their education and their occupation, and in planning their education and career. This assistance is particularly important for students with special educational needs, particularly those with disabilities and illnesses. Help is provided in the form of advice and consultations, workshops, lectures and speeches.

Public psychological and pedagogical counselling centres also provide support to schools, teachers and other professionals in the planning and implementation of educational and vocational guidance (by organising workshops, meetings with teachers, participating in consultations and sitting on teachers' councils).

In addition, the counselling centres provide information and training services regarding educational and vocational guidance aimed at [students, parents and teachers](#).

### **Career guidance at [Voluntary Labour Corps](#) (*Ochotnicze Hufce Pracy*)**

[Voluntary Labour Corps](#) (OHP) are government-financed entities supervised by the Minister of Family, Labour and Social Policy [see 3.2 Administration and governance].

The target audience of the actions undertaken by OHP are:

- Minors (aged 15 to 17) from educationally malfunctioning backgrounds who are not fulfilling their schooling and educational obligations, have problems with graduating, and need to acquire vocational qualifications.
- Persons aged 18 to 25, including those who are looking for a job or want to be retrained, unemployed, school graduates, and students.

OHP, as labour market institutions, provide free services to young people, including job placement and career guidance and information services; conduct workshops on active job searching; organise training; and implement labour market schemes (e.g. under the Youth Guarantee Initiative).

Career guidance at OHP is generally provided to people aged 15 to 25, but is also available to those older if they contact OHP.

Career counsellors provide in-house counselling at Youth Career Centres and mobile counselling by visiting the interested institutions (e.g. schools) with Mobile Career Information Centres.

Career counsellors help choose a future career, plan one's career and education, as well as offer assistance with changing jobs, self-employment or job seeking.

They take into account local employment opportunities as well as the individual professional and personal predispositions of the young person. Their task is also to familiarise their clients with the local labour market and how to look for work.

## **Student Career Centres (*Akademickie Biura Karier*)**

Student Career Centres are entities whose mission is the professional activation of students and graduates of higher education, run by a higher education institution or a student organisation, whose duties include:

1. providing students and graduates with information on the labour market and opportunities for improving professional qualifications,
2. collection, classification and dissemination of job, internship and work placement offers,
3. maintaining a database of students and higher education institution graduates interested in finding a job,
4. assisting employers in obtaining suitable candidates for job vacancies and internships,
5. helping with active job seeking.

In 2014, it was estimated that 346 Student Career Centres were in operation at 442 Polish higher education institutions. However, it should be emphasised that this is an indicative figure only.

## **Career guidance at public Employment Offices**

Career guidance is a labour market service provided by Public Employment Services (district Employment Offices at district level, and career information and planning centres at provincial level).

Career guidance consists of an employee of the Employment Office providing assistance in the form of face to face contact with the person in need of assistance, or via telephone or the Internet.

As part of the career guidance service, Employment Office workers also conduct group meetings in the form of workshops with the people in need of aid.

Career guidance services include assistance with:

- choosing or changing one's profession,
- career planning,
- supplementing professional qualifications,
- defining one's competences and interests,
- planning of professional development.

Career guidance at district Employment Offices and at career information and planning centres is free of charge and is provided in accordance with the following principles:

- accessibility,
- voluntariness,
- equality regardless of sex, age, disability, race, ethnic origin, nationality, sexual orientation, political beliefs, religious affiliation or trade union membership,
- freedom to choose one's profession and place of employment,
- data confidentiality and protection.

## **Career guidance provided by non-governmental organisations**

NGOs specialise in educational and/or vocational guidance for selected categories of beneficiaries, such as disabled people (e.g. [The Fuga Mundi Foundation in Lublin](#)), children and adults with autism ([The Synopsis Foundation](#)), young homeless people requiring various forms of support ([The Monar Association](#)), and young people leaving orphanages or foster families ([The Robinson Crusoe Foundation](#)).

NGOs are complementary to public sector services. Their activities are funded by public, private and European funds.

## Funding

Educational and vocational counselling for pupils, and career guidance for students and adults are free of charge and are financed from public funds.

## Quality assurance

Poland has an institutional support system for pupils in the field of educational and vocational counselling as well as institutions providing career guidance services for students and adults. There is, however, no reliable system for assessing the quality of their performance and evaluation.

Work is ongoing on developing best practice solutions for the functioning of in-school educational and vocational counselling systems at different stages of education in the reformed school system: primary school, lower and upper secondary trade school, upper secondary technical school, general secondary school, and post-secondary school.

The works are carried out under the project [Effective Educational and Vocational Guidance for Children, Adolescents and Adults](#) within the framework of the 2014-2020 Knowledge Education Development Operational Programme.

## 3.5 Traineeships and Apprenticeships

### Official guidelines on traineeships and apprenticeships

Traineeships are organised for both upper secondary school and higher education students, but each are governed by different regulations.

On the job training (*praktyczna nauka zawodu*) taking the form of practical classes or traineeships for upper secondary vocational school students is regulated under the regulation of the Minister of National Education. Its time, place and possible salary depend on the type of school and class. The training takes place on the basis of an agreement between the school and the workplace, which takes in the student. Training can take place at school workshops, practical training centres, and with employers.

Another form of gaining vocational qualifications are apprenticeships for vocational school students, which involve on-the-job training. These are governed by separate regulations. The employer enters into an employment contract with the minor to provide them with vocational training in the form of on-the-job training. Theoretical instruction takes place at a vocational school or in a course. The apprentice is covered by compulsory social insurance and receives a salary. Hiring a minor as an apprentice is reimbursed to employers from public funds.

Tertiary education institutions offer two types of work placements: compulsory and non-compulsory ones. Until autumn 2014, the [Law on Higher Education](#) did not impose on higher education institutions the obligation to include work placements in their curricula. Exceptions to this rule included teacher training courses, veterinary studies, architecture, medical studies, dentistry studies, pharmacy studies, nursing and midwifery.

At present, study programmes with practical profiles must include work placements for students, which last three months at minimum. Faculties may organise student education in an alternate fashion: classroom instruction at the higher education institution and traineeships at the employer's.

For many bachelor's and master's degree programmes, the study programmes include compulsory work placements of a shorter duration.

Non-compulsory work placements are governed by individual arrangements between the employer and the student. Compulsory work placements are based on a contract for compulsory student placement. The employer contracts directly with the higher education institution. The employer defines the curriculum, and undertakes to provide instructional and organisational supervision, as well as a specific position/workstation and tools for the work.

Persons registered with an Employment Office are also offered internships with an employer, which are financed by the Labour Fund. The internships may last up to 6 months, and in the case of unemployed persons under the age of 30, up to 12 months. The intern is employed on the basis of an internship agreement (without entering into an employment relationship), during which the unemployed person is entitled to a scholarship of 120% of the amount of the unemployment benefit rate.

An additional form of activation is the internship voucher, which is an instrument for activating unemployed people under the age of 30. After completing the 6-month internship with an employer selected by the unemployed person, the employer is obliged to employ them for another period of 6 months after completing the internship.

In 2017, a paid internship scheme was launched for young people from the NEET group through the projects "[Unlock Your Potential – ESF](#)" and "[Unlock Your Potential – YEI](#)" implemented by OHP under the Youth Guarantee Initiative. Project participants are on internships with local employers in professions for which they had acquired qualifications during their courses.

### **Promoting traineeships and apprenticeships**

#### **Activities of higher education institutions**

Higher education institutions provide internship and work placement databases on their websites, often complete with reports on past placements completed by their students. Internship and work placement offers are advertised by student career centres, which often also participate in or organise career fair/expos, and prepare brochures on work placements and internships for students.

An important source of information for students are online forums and Facebook groups (such as Erasmus groups) and the websites of organisations that help find a work placement, such as AIESEC or Global Citizen.

In 2014, the Parliament of Students of the Republic of Poland launched an online student work placement database: [lepszepraktyki.pl](http://lepszepraktyki.pl).

#### **Activities of the [Foundation for the Development of the Education System](#)**

The Foundation implements work placement projects financed from European funds. An example is the project "[Transnational Mobility of Students and Graduates and Vocational Education Staff](#)" (*Ponadnarodowa mobilność uczniów i absolwentów oraz kadry kształcenia zawodowego*). This project is implemented within the framework of the 2014-2020 Knowledge Education Development Operational Programme (Programu Operacyjnego Wiedza Edukacja Rozwój 2014-2020 - PO WER).

The Foundation acts as the National Agency for the Erasmus+ Programme for 2014-2020. The work placement abroad scheme may be availed of by undergraduate, master's and doctoral students.

#### **Activities of public institutions of the labour market: Employment Offices and [Voluntary Labour Corps](#) (*Ochotnicze Hufce Pracy*, OHP)**

Information on internships offered by public institutions of the labour market is available on the websites of those institutions and directly from career counsellors and work agents at those institutions.

These institutions, in addition to standard services, also perform additional activities under the Youth Guarantee Initiative. Those are local actions. Participation in projects and terms of participation are available at the respective institutions that are implementing the projects.

## Recognition of learning outcomes

In Poland, the [Polish Qualifications Framework](#) has been developed. It is consistent with the European Qualifications Framework (EQF). It is used to identify, organise and describe qualifications, including:

- learning outcomes obtained through formal education (schools, higher education institutions) and non-formal education received outside the general, vocational or higher education system (e.g. qualification, linguistic or specialist courses – all certified); and
- learning outcomes of informal education (e.g. professional experience and practice, traineeships, internships, work placements and self-learning).

[Works are ongoing](#) to implement the Polish Qualifications Framework into specific areas of education, particularly in vocational and higher education, as well as the labour market.

The National Qualifications Framework for Higher Education consistent with the European education system was introduced in Poland in 2011 as a result of the Regulation of the Minister of Science and Higher Education of 2 November 2011 on the National Qualifications Framework for Higher Education (Journal of Laws (Dz.U.) 2011.2553.1520). All higher education institutions are required to describe their study programmes through learning outcomes in three categories: knowledge, skills and social competences.

Work placements for students are covered by the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) and included in the study programmes.

Work is ongoing on the implementation of the European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET). In order to support the national authorities, a National Team of ECVET Experts was established, which is functioning at the Foundation for the Development of the Education System. The Team's work also involves promoting the ECVET idea by publishing information materials and organising workshops and seminars for different audiences.

## Funding

Vocational schools for young people, vocational schools for adults, lifelong learning centres, and practical training institutions are financed by public funds. The key source of income is the education subsidy received from the central budget. It is divided between communes, districts and provinces on the basis of an algorithm, which is modified each year, applying different weights for particular groups of pupils and schools (including vocational school pupils/students).

In the years 2011-2013, local governments spent an average of PLN 60 billion annually on the financing of educational tasks. Nearly PLN 40 billion came from the education subsidy. The remaining funds are grants from the state budget, including funds from the European Union budget and local government funds. The scale and scope of educational tasks performed by local governments has been very diverse and depended on the wealth (budget) of the particular local government ([NIK 2014](#)).

Employers who organise apprenticeships in the form of on the job training receive a financial contribution from the school where the apprentice is learning.

The Polish legal framework guarantees the financing of employers who enter into an employment contract with a minor for the purpose of vocational training or job skills training. Training subsidies may be granted to enterprises which take in minors for vocational training or job skills training. The amount of the training subsidy per minor depends on the length of the training. It is reimbursed to employers from the Labour Fund.

Work placements for students can be subsidised by higher education institutions through grants from the Ministry of Science and Higher Education and from European funds.

Internships for the unemployed and internship vouchers for unemployed people under 30 years of age are financed from the Labour Fund.

[The State Fund for Rehabilitation of Disabled Persons](#) (PFRON) subsidises various forms of support for vocational activation of people with disabilities; such as internships organised by Employment Offices or other organisations implementing such schemes.

[Vortal of Public Employment Services](#) contains current offers of jobs, internships, traineeships, internships from Employment Offices, job skills training for adults, and work placements for students.

### Quality assurance

The principles and course of traineeships and apprenticeships, as well as various types of internships are often criticised and changes are planned to improve their quality.

There is particularly strong criticism of the system of vocational education and training (basic vocational, secondary and post-secondary). Its ineffectiveness is exposed by the high unemployment rates among vocational school graduates (about 40% in the years 2012-2014), as well as the negative assessment of their skills reported by employers. According to the [Supreme Audit Office](#) (*Najwyższa Izba Kontroli - NIK*), [the main reason](#) for this situation is the mismatch between what the vocational schools offer compared to the needs of the labour market, which results from incomplete recognition of those needs and unsatisfactory conditions for vocational education and training. Another contributing factor has been the way in which vocational education has been financed from the state budget; without taking into account the actual costs of education for particular occupations. As a result, local governments have been abandoning costly education programmes. This has been reinforcing a vocational education model, in which the local infrastructural and personnel resources, rather than the needs of students and the labour market, were the decisive factors when launching a new programme.

The planned education system reform (to come into force in the 2017/2018 school year) aims to strengthen employers' participation in planning and organising traineeships and apprenticeships in trade (previously vocational) schools (see previous section on education).

Higher education institutions [develop their own Education Quality Assurance Systems](#), which take work placements for students into account in the assessment of their learning outcomes. Higher education institutions monitor the quality of education, including work placements, and run surveys to evaluate the quality of placements, as well as organise conferences/seminars to promote good practice standards. [The Polish Accreditation Committee](#) plays an important role in assessing the quality of education, including student placements. It is an independent institution working to ensure and improve the quality of education.

The planned reform of higher education (currently work is ongoing on new legislation) envisages strengthening the importance of work placements in the process of educating students and tightening the link between education and business.

Since 2015, data has been collected through the national system of monitoring the [Economic Fate of Graduates](#) (*Ekonomiczny Los Absolwentów - ELA*) of higher education institutions. The monitoring system implemented by the Ministry of Science and Higher Education is an innovative solution on a European scale. The main source of information is the administrative data from reliable sources – the Social Insurance Institution (ZUS) system and the [POL-on system](#), i.e. the information system on higher education supporting the work of the Ministry of Science and Higher Education.

## 3.6 Integration of Young People in the Labour Market

### Youth employment measures

Youth employment is supported through a range of services and instruments provided for in the [Act of 20 April 2004 on the promotion of employment and labour market institutions](#) (Journal of Laws (Dz.U.) of 2017, item 1065, as amended). Many services and instruments addressed to young people are implemented through public labour market institutions i.e. Employment Offices and [Voluntary Labour Corps](#) (OHP) [see 3.2 Administration and governance].

In Employment Offices, those registered as an unemployed person under the age of 30 may avail of the following services or support instruments:

1. Training
2. Internship
3. Intervention works
4. Job skills training for adults
5. Postgraduate studies
6. Training based on tripartite training contracts between the district governor (*starosta*), the employer and the training institution
7. Housing vouchers
8. Training vouchers
9. Internship vouchers
10. Employment vouchers

Since 1 January 2016, it has been possible to reimburse the employer for part of the cost of salaries and social security contributions for full-time employment of unemployed persons under the age of 30. The refund covers a period of 12 months.

Employment Offices offer funding support which can be obtained for the purpose of starting a business (see 3.9 Start-up Funding for Young Entrepreneurs).

Implementation of the Youth Guarantee Initiative was launched in Poland in 2014. Among the addressees of the [Youth Guarantee Initiative](#) within Poland, four subgroups have been identified. The offering of the Initiative has been adjusted according to the subgroups needs:

- Persons aged 15 to 17 who are leaving school early – persons who neglect the schooling obligation (under 16 years old) or the educational obligation (under 18 years old).
- Persons aged 18 to 29 who are not in employment, education or training (NEET) – including those who require special support, i.e. those who are separated from the labour market, from disadvantaged backgrounds, and from rural areas.
- Persons aged 18 to 29 registered as unemployed – including registered students of extramural and evening study programmes.
- Unemployed youth and job seeking graduates of schools and higher education institutions within 48 months from the date of graduation or receiving vocational qualification, aged 18 to 29 – in terms of support of young entrepreneurship.

Initially, activation measures for young unemployed were carried out exclusively by Employment Offices and Voluntary Labour Corps (OHP).

In November 2014, a loan scheme provided by [Bank Gospodarstwa Krajowego](#) (BGK) (*The National Development Bank*) was deployed throughout the country (the pilot phase covered only three provinces).

In 2015 and 2016, youth activation continued in Employment Offices (also through co-operation with BGK within the framework of the “First Business – Start-up Support” scheme) and through Voluntary Labour Corps.

In addition to the standard activities of Employment Offices and BGK, OHP projects “Action Activation – YEI and ESF” and “Unlock Your Potential – YEI and ESF” are

implemented, which include individual psychological support; group active job search workshops; vocational courses; vocational qualification courses; language courses; ECDL courses; driving courses; entrepreneurship courses; job placement and mediation in the organisation of internships; and internships with employers. In 2017, the implementation of projects "From Training to Employment – YEI and ESF" began for 3,700 professionally inactive persons from the NEET group.

Additional actions will be taken within the framework of central competitions organised under the programme "Young People on the Labour Market" (Knowledge Education Development Operational Programme). The competitions, announced by the Minister of Family, Labour and Social Policy under the Youth Guarantee Initiative, concern projects supporting individual and comprehensive professional and educational activation of young people (unemployed, professionally inactive and jobseekers, especially those not registered at any Employment Office). The aim is to increase the employability of young people under the age of 29 who remain unemployed, especially those who are not in education or training (NEET youth). It is estimated that approximately 18 thousand people aged 15 to 29 will receive support within the framework of those central competitions (in 2017/2018).

**ECAM** – OHP have launched the Electronic Youth Activation Centre (*Elektroniczne Centrum Aktywizacji Młodzieży* -ECAM). It is a service platform for young jobseekers, those with learning difficulties or having problems with functioning in their environment. Through the ICT system, young people can receive specific information about the location of the nearest OHP unit, which can provide them with education or employment assistance. ECAM was created as part of the project "OHP as a Provider of Labour Market Services" thanks to European Union funds from the European Social Fund.

**State Fund for the Rehabilitation of Disabled Persons (*Państwowy Fundusz Rehabilitacji Osób Niepełnosprawnych*, PFRON)** PFRON subsidises services and instruments addressed to people with disabilities offered by Employment Offices. Support can be provided to people with disabilities registered as unemployed and those who do not have an unemployed status but who are looking for work.

In 2017, PFRON launched three pilot programmes aimed at increasing the employment of people with disabilities in the open labour market (including young people). Each programme is expected to provide employment to at least 1,000 people. [<http://www.pfron.org.pl/o-funduszu/programy-i-zadania-pfron/programy-i-z...>]

- The Graduate programme, addressed to graduates and students in their final year at higher education institutions.
- The Stable Employment programme in administration and public services.

The "Work-Integration" programme, addressed to enterprises and non-governmental organisations.

### **Flexicurity measures focusing on young people**

In Poland, measures have been taken to increase the security of employees on the labour market, which involved counteracting the abuse of civil law contracts by employers, temporary work, and low wages. These changes relate significantly to the situation of young people in the labour market, as they are the most affected by these practices.

### **Counteracting the abuse of civil law contracts and introducing a minimum hourly rate**

In order to prevent the abuse of civil law contracts in employment and to protect the lowest paid workers, the Act of 22 July 2016 amending the [Minimum Wage Act](#) and certain other acts (Journal of Laws (Dz.U.), No. 1265, as amended) introduced into the legal framework a guaranteed minimum wage for specific civil law contracts (previously, it applied to only contracts of employment). From 1 January 2017, a minimum hourly rate of PLN 13 is applicable to each hour of commissioned work or services provided

(including via self-employment). In subsequent years, the rate will be adjusted to a level corresponding to the increase in the minimum wage for employees.

The Act also introduces amendments to the Act of 13 April 2007 on the [State Labour Inspectorate](#) (*Państwowa Inspekcja Pracy* - PIP). The tasks of PIP have been extended to include inspection of whether salaries are paid in amounts consistent with the minimum hourly rate. As a result of the findings of such inspections, PIP inspectors will be able to send a letter (including post-inspection conclusions and legal basis) or give oral instructions to pay a salary in the amount consistent with the minimum hourly rate.

### **Changes in the employment of temporary workers**

In 2017, the Act on Temporary Workers and various other laws were amended. The changes are to enter into force on 1 January 2018.

The maximum duration of temporary work has been reduced. A temporary employment agency will be able to delegate a temporary worker to work for a single employer for a period not exceeding 18 months in total in any period of 36 consecutive months. At the same time, the employer will be able to avail of the work of the same temporary worker for a period not exceeding 18 months in total in any period of 36 consecutive months. The law also envisages strengthening the court measures available to temporary workers. They will be able, like other employees, to bring action before a labour court of their choice.

**New list of work forbidden for minors (2016).** The amendment adjusts Polish regulations to EU regulations. Directive 2014/27/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 26 February 2014 has amended Council Directive 94/33/EC on the protection of young people at work.

### **Reconciliation of private and working life for young people**

Projects concerning the reconciliation of working and private life are carried out within the framework of competitions announced by the Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Policy.

In 2017, a practical web-based platform which provides comprehensive information on the mechanisms for reconciling working and private life was developed. It shows employers step by step how to introduce optimal solutions in this respect in their workplace. This platform was developed under the project "[Family and Work – It Pays Off!](#)" co-financed by the European Commission.

2017 (Q4) will see the announcement of the competition entitled "Implementation of Tools to Support the Fight Against Discrimination in the Workplace and Access to Employment in Small Enterprises" under Measure 2.1 Equal opportunities for men and women in all areas, including access to employment, career development, and the reconciliation of working and private life (Knowledge Education Development Operational Programme).

The Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Policy is working on amendments to the [Under-3s Childcare Act](#).

A scheme supporting the development of childcare institutions for children under the age of 3 has been carried out by the Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Policy since 2011 ([Maluch Plus](#)). It envisages co-financing from the state budget – through an open tender – of initiatives for creating new or keeping the existing available places by various entities (public and non-public) in various forms of childcare institutions (crèche, children's club and daycare provider).

### **Funding of existing schemes/initiatives**

The youth employment promotion policy implemented by Public employment services is financed, among other sources, from the Labour Fund (a state-owned special purpose

fund created from employer contributions) and from European funds, and in the case of people with disabilities, also from PFRON funds.

Public employment services may outsource some of their services to private and non-governmental organisations.

Implementation of the Youth Guarantee Initiative is financed from public funds and European funds, e.g. in the years 2017-2018 the effect on the public finance sector will total approximately PLN 2.7 billion annually (including about PLN 1.1 billion of European funds; estimated data).

Projects related to the reconciliation of working and private life carried out through competitions are financed from the state budget and European funds.

### **Quality assurance**

Statistics on youth participation in active labour market policies (ALMP), including the cost-effectiveness and employment effectiveness of the different forms of activation, are collected by the Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Policy and are publicly available.

The results of empirical research indicate, however, that young people are dissatisfied with the quality of services offered; especially young people who have difficulty entering and remaining in the labour market, such as the disabled.

Employment support projects funded by European funds in previous financial perspectives often did not have long-term goals, and those funds were not used effectively.

The diagnosed barriers in the use of EU funds in Poland include (Strategy for Responsible Development until 2020 (with a forecast up to 2030)):

- Insufficient developmental effect of the projects selected for co-financing
- Low effectiveness of the applied forms of support
- Poor effects of support in the area of innovation
- Insufficient potential of the implementing institutions and the beneficiaries to plan and implement strategic development projects affecting socio-economic growth and employment
- Ineffective mechanisms for co-ordination of the various European funding measures

The main task in the current financial perspective for 2014-2020 is to use EU funds to achieve permanent developmental effects in the country.

## **3.7 Cross-Border Mobility in Employment, Entrepreneurship and Vocational Opportunities**

### **Programmes and schemes for cross-border mobility**

The educational and professional mobility of young people takes place primarily within the framework of EU programmes – presently [the Erasmus+ programme](#). There are other multilateral, bilateral and national programmes (co-)financed by Polish authorities and/or by other countries or foreign organisations. Services to promote professional mobility are offered by the [European network of Public Employment Services EURES](#).

### **Programmes and schemes for cross-border mobility**

#### **Erasmus+ in Poland**

The structure of the Erasmus+ programme for 2014-2020 includes the following components:

- Key Action 1. Mobility of Individuals;
- Key Action 2. Cooperation for Innovation and Exchange of Good Practices;
- Key Action 3. Support for Policy Reform;
- Jean Monnet activities;

- Sport – support for sports-related initiatives.

Information on programmes regarding international job mobility, entrepreneurship mobility and career opportunities is available at <http://erasmusplus.org.pl/o-programie/> by sector and by action: school education, vocational education and training, higher education, adult education, youth, central projects, and sports.

### **Voluntary Labour Corps (*Ochotnicze Hufce Pracy, OHP*)**

OHP conduct youth exchange programmes and organise youth holiday excursions, including trips to work in other countries. The international exchange of young people is carried out within the following programmes: Erasmus+, the Polish-German Youth Co-operation, the Polish-Lithuanian Youth Exchange Fund, and the Visegrad Fund.

From 2015, [EURES](#) services are provided (in addition to Employment Offices) at OHP by EURES advisers and EURES assistants, who are employed in 16 OHP Regional Headquarters and 49 OHP Youth Education and Employment Centres.

They are open to the public, free of charge, and addressed to jobseekers interested in moving to another country for employment, as well as to employers who wish to recruit foreign workers.

Students are offered many work placement schemes in other countries with a variety of entities. For example:

International Parliamentary Scholarship of the German Bundestag. The scholarship programme of the German Bundestag and the Berlin Universities – International Parliamentary Scholarship (IPS) lasts five months. The main part of the programme is a 15-week internship at the office of one of the deputies to the Bundestag.

[The Polish-American Freedom Foundation](#) offers [internship scholarships and internships](#) at reputable American companies.

### **Services by Public Employment Services**

#### **Vortal of Public Employment Services**

Contains current job offers in EU and EEA countries.

### **EURES**

In Poland, activities within the EURES network are performed by:

- Provincial Employment Offices
- District Employment Offices
- Provincial headquarters of Voluntary Labour Corps (OHP)
- Youth work and education centres of Voluntary Labour Corps (OHP)
- Entities accredited by the Minister of Family, Labour and Social Policy

The network of EURES advisers and assistants is nationwide.

It is also worth to stress the importance of the [European Job Mobility Portal](#).

### **Legal framework**

#### **Employment of foreigners in Poland**

In accordance with EU documents, Poland accepts the free movement of workers in the Member States of the European Union, the European Economic Area, and Switzerland.

At present, people with the citizenship of an EU Member State, a European Economic Area (EEA) country and Switzerland can work in Poland without obtaining a work permit.

[Employment of foreigners in Poland](#) is governed by the Act of 20 April 2004 on promotion of employment and labour market institutions (Journal of Laws (Dz.U.) of 2017, item 1065) and implementing regulations.

From 1 May 2014, it has also been possible to employ a foreigner on the basis of a temporary residence and work permit. An application for such a permit is made by a foreigner who is already legally residing in Poland, if the work is to be performed for more than 3 months. As a rule, the foreigner should attach to the application a note from the district governor (*starosta*) about the given employer's inability to satisfy its human resources needs, which the employer had previously obtained and given to that foreigner.

The simplified procedure, also known as the "declaration procedure" (without the need to obtain a work permit), applies to citizens of the following countries: The Republic of Armenia, the Republic of Belarus, the Republic of Georgia, the Republic of Moldova, the Russian Federation, and Ukraine. They can work in Poland for 6 months in any period of 12 consecutive months.

### **3.8 Development of Entrepreneurship Competence**

#### **Policy Framework**

In Poland there is no separate strategy for teaching entrepreneurship, however the issue is addressed in several general strategies. The most important strategy is the [Lifelong Learning Perspective](#), which defines the national strategic framework for lifelong learning and vocational training. The strategy is being implemented in the 2013-2020 period and covers all levels of education.

The government [Strategy for Responsible Development until 2020](#) (with a forecast up to 2030) focuses on the development of entrepreneurial competences and support for the creation of new innovative companies in Poland: "The Strategy, oriented towards responsible and solidary development, aims to trigger entrepreneurship, inventiveness and productivity."

Entities involved in entrepreneurship development in Poland include:

Government: Chancellery of the Prime Minister and the following ministries: Ministry of Development, Ministry of National Education, Ministry of Science and Higher Education, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Policy,

Other entities such as the Polish Agency for Enterprise Development, entrepreneurs and their organisations, and banks.

Among them, the [Ministry of Development](#) and the [Polish Agency for Enterprise Development](#) (*Polska Agencja Rozwoju Przedsiębiorczości* -PARP) play a particularly important role in the context of supporting entrepreneurship at policy level. Both the Ministry and the Agency actively participate in the creation and effective implementation of the strategy related to entrepreneurship and innovation.

For a number of years, the [National Bank of Poland](#) has been involved in the promotion of economic and financial education among young people, and operates an economic education portal (<https://www.nbportal.pl/edukacja-w-nbp>). Bank Gospodarstwa Krajowego implements the "[First Business – Start-up Support](#)" scheme of the Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Policy to support the development of entrepreneurship.

The most complete information on the entrepreneurship of young people in Poland is provided by the OECD report: [YOUTH ENTREPRENEURSHIP SUPPORT IN POLAND](#). Rapid Policy Assessments of Inclusive Entrepreneurship Policies and Programmes, 2015.

#### **Formal learning**

Information on entrepreneurship education in schools in Europe, including Poland, is included in the [EURYDICE report](#): Entrepreneurship Education at School in Europe (2016).

The report provides information on primary and secondary education (lower and upper secondary schools), including vocational schools. The reference year is 2014/15 and the

information has been collected in 33 countries within the EURYDICE network. In addition to the extensive comparative description, the report also includes brief information on entrepreneurship education in each country.

Entrepreneurship education in schools in Poland is described on pages 179-180.

“Entrepreneurship Education is explicitly integrated in the curricula.

At ISCED levels 2 and 3, there is a compulsory subject entitled ‘Knowledge about Society’. Within the subject, all students are required to participate in an educational project (20% of the course in ISCED level 2 and 10% in ISCED level 3).

In ISCED level 3, the compulsory subject ‘Introduction to Entrepreneurship’ involves students in social/civic activities and develops their creative skills and initiative. In the optional subject ‘Economics in Practice’, students implement an individual educational project” (Eurydice Report 2016, p 180).

In connection with the planned reform of the Polish education system, which will commence in the 2017-2018 school year, the changes to entrepreneurship education will be described at a later date (due to the lack of availability of all programmes and implementing regulations).

Entrepreneurship is part of the National Qualifications Framework for Higher Education. This means that most third-level students must, at least to a minimum extent, come into contact with entrepreneurship during their studies. However, the potential of students in this field remains unused (OECD Report, [YOUTH ENTREPRENEURSHIP SUPPORT IN POLAND](#), 2015).

A valuable educational initiative of higher education institutions is the effort to transfer knowledge from science to business. An example is Innovative Youth: a thesis competition which has been organised by the Industrial Institute of Automation and Measurements since 2009. Competitions for best theses (engineering and master’s) are organised in the fields of automatics, robotics and measurement, and currently also for best doctoral theses. In the years 2009-2017, 525 entries were submitted to the [Innovation Young competition](#).

### **Non-formal and informal learning**

Entrepreneurship training outside of formal education is conducted by many entities, a substantial part of which is financed by EU funds. Initiatives from previous EU funding programming sessions are available in the OECD Report, [YOUTH ENTREPRENEURSHIP SUPPORT IN POLAND](#), 2015.

The most comprehensive scheme of supporting youth entrepreneurship is offered by the Youth Enterprise Foundation (*Fundacja Młodzieżowej Przedsiębiorczości*) (A member of [Junior Achievement Worldwide](#)).

This is a non-governmental public benefit organisation aimed at preparing children and young people for market economy conditions and enabling young people to acquire the knowledge and practical skills necessary to facilitate the implementation of their professional plans. The Foundation is a member of Junior Achievement Worldwide, the oldest and fastest-growing youth education organisation in the world, currently operating in 120 countries. The Foundation’s schemes prepare young people for entry into the labour market, teach entrepreneurship and how to navigate through the financial world, develop critical thinking skills and shape an active attitude towards life. Currently the Foundation is operating 12 schemes and projects for the youth of primary schools, lower secondary schools and upper secondary schools, under which national competitions are organised. Participants have the opportunity to represent Poland during the international editions of those competitions.

The Ministry of Development launched a pilot version of a new form of support in 2017. This scheme was for people wishing to improve their skills. The Ministry has allocated over PLN 50 million to repayable aid (i.e. interest-free loans with the possibility of partial

remission) for adults from all over the country who wish to take courses or postgraduate studies, [under the Knowledge Education Development Operational Programme](#). Loans will be provided by two operators selected through a competition. The “Education Loans” Fund will be implemented by the Regional Development Agency Foundation in Starachowice, in partnership with the Co-operation Fund Foundation from Warsaw, and the “Nationwide Academic Education Scheme” Fund will be implemented by the Foundation for Enterprise Development in Suwałki.

The “Education Loans” Fund is aimed at adults. The loans are intended only for postgraduate studies, courses, training and other forms of adult education offered by national and international entities (except for level I, II and III study courses), lasting no longer than 24 months.

In 2017, a training and mentoring scheme was launched for graduates and PhD students of Polish higher education institutions who plan to have a career in science, business or public administration - [TopMinds](#). It is a joint initiative of the Top 500 Innovators Association and the [Polish-American Fulbright Commission](#). The aim of the scheme is to:

- Prepare its participants to take on challenges and find their own path to achieve their professional goals,
- Develop interpersonal competences and build proactive attitudes,
- Strengthen the sense of professional and personal value,
- Establish relationships and develop a network of contacts

The scheme offers participation in individual mentoring, meetings and lectures with representatives of various professions and participation in training sessions on the development of interpersonal competences.

### **Educators support in entrepreneurship education**

Entrepreneurship education has not been included in teacher training curricula, but is available through in-service training, which is essential for career advancement (Eurydice Report 2016). In-service training is provided through various types of courses. At present many higher education institutions offer postgraduate studies in entrepreneurship for teachers.

[Centres for Education Development](#) (ORE). In-service training is provided by institutions at central level (Centre for Education Development) and by provincial and district teacher development centres. ORE provides an in-service training offer in the field of teaching entrepreneurship to all lower secondary and upper secondary school teachers.

Postgraduate studies in entrepreneurship for teachers. Such study courses are offered, among others, by the [SGH Warsaw School of Economics](#). These are studies for teachers in lower secondary and upper secondary schools wishing to gain new qualifications in the field of entrepreneurship education. Due to the fact that the course is financed by the National Bank of Poland, the tuition fees for three semesters are PLN 500.

Postgraduate studies in the field of entrepreneurship for teachers can also be completed online (at [Polish Virtual University](#)).

[Youth Enterprise Foundation](#) (*Fundacja Młodzieżowej Przedsiębiorczości*) (A member of Junior Achievement Worldwide) The foundation offers in-service training in entrepreneurship education for all primary and secondary school teachers, including vocational schools. In-service training courses, workshops or free conferences to expand one’s knowledge of issues related to entrepreneurship education are also available.

## **3.9 Start-up Funding for Young Entrepreneurs**

### **Access to information**

Information on how to set up a business and source funding is widely available, and can be located on various websites, including those of the [Ministry of Development](#), the [Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Policy](#), the [Polish Agency for Enterprise](#)

[Development](#), [Bank Gospodarstwa Krajowego](#) (*The National Development Bank*), Employment Offices, Student Career Centres, business incubators, regional and local entrepreneurship support centres, entrepreneurship foundations and associations.

Many of those entities provide information and support upon personal contact.

The website of the [Ministry of Development](#) includes information on loan and guarantee funds, grants, economic zones and Corporate Social Responsibility.

The Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Policy has launched the [Youth Guarantee Initiative](#) website.

Information regarding the forms of assistance when starting a business is available on the [websites of provincial and district Employment Offices](#) and through the Green Line service (i.e. electronic and telephone service centre for clients of Employment Offices from all over Poland):

The website of [Academic Business Incubators](#) provides information and a contact form for interested parties.

The website of [Bank Gospodarstwa Krajowego](#) contains extensive information about the loan scheme for young people provided by the Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Policy - "First Business – Start-up Support":

### **Access to capital**

The "[First Business – Start-up Support](#)" scheme of the Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Policy is implemented by Bank Gospodarstwa Krajowego.

The aim of the scheme is to develop entrepreneurship and create new jobs. Funds for the implementation of the scheme come from the Labour Fund.

A loan for starting a business may be granted to:

- Final year students in higher education institutions
- Graduates of a higher education institution within 4 years from the date of graduation or receiving their vocational qualification
- Registered unemployed

The loan amount is PLN 87,071 (as of 2 August 2017). These are low-interest loans. Repayment period is up to 7 years. Borrowers who have obtained a business start-up loan may benefit from free consultancy and training services.

### **[Academic Business Incubators](#) (Akademickie Inkubatory Przedsiębiorczości)**

Academic Business Incubators were established in 2004. The goal was to create a place in Poland where one could start a business and acquire support without huge risk. The offer is mainly for students, but can also be availed of by other people.

Academic Business Incubators offer the possibility of setting up a Trial Company, without registering a business. The pre-incubation model (Non-ZUS Business) involves using the legal personality of Academic Business Incubators by first-time entrepreneurs for the purpose of setting up their business.

In addition to accounting and legal support, the offer includes using the offices of Academic Business Incubators, consultations with experts, training, mentor support, and other support.

In 2005, the nationwide network of Academic Business Incubators had 12 incubators, while in 2015 there were 56.

In 2006, there were 300 start-ups in the Incubators. In 2015, there were 2,300.

Academic Business Incubators is Europe's leading start-up organisation, setting trends in Poland and abroad, which, together with the Business Link network and the Seed Capital fund, forms a start-up ecosystem comparable to the Google ecosystem.

Since 2004, thanks to Academic Business Incubators, more than 12,000 companies have been created, including well-known brands such as PhotoBlog.pl, Chomikuj.pl, MISBHV, Key2Print, and Glov.

### **Employment Offices**

Employment Offices offer funding support for starting a business (see 3.9) – this is a form of support provided to the unemployed. The amount of funding is specified in a contract, but cannot be higher than 6 times the average salary, i.e. PLN 26,121.30 (as at 1 June 2017). The aid is non-repayable, provided that the conditions specified in the contract are fulfilled.

Those who meet the criteria set out in the Act of 13 June 2003 on Social Employment (Journal of Laws (Dz.U.) of 2003, No. 122, item 1143, as amended) may receive funds for the establishment of a social co-operative (e.g. persons coming out of homelessness, alcohol and drug addicts, mentally ill persons, long-term unemployed, disabled).

Some Employment Offices run schemes which offer funding to young people (aged 18 to 30) for the running of a business. An example is the scheme "Activation of unemployed young people in Warsaw (II)" co-financed by the European Social Fund under the [Knowledge Education Development Operational Programme, Sub-measure 1.1.1.](#)

## **3.10 Promotion of Entrepreneurship Culture**

### **Special events and activities**

In the public policy of the state, the Ministry of Development and its subordinate agency, the [Polish Agency for Enterprise Development](#) (*Polska Agencja Rozwoju Przedsiębiorczości* (PARP)), play an important role in promoting the culture of entrepreneurship.

The website of the Ministry of Development contains basic information on the country's development and economic security policy, [support for entrepreneurship](#) (information on loan and guarantee funds, subsidies, economic zones and Corporate Social Responsibility) and on the [use of European funds](#) (use, projects and outcomes in 2004-2006, 2007-2013 and 2014-2020).

The Ministry of Development issues an annual report: [Entrepreneurship in Poland](#).

One of the main promoters of entrepreneurship in Poland is the [Polish Agency for Enterprise Development](#) (PARP) i.e. a government agency subordinated to the Ministry of Development. PARP is involved in the implementation of national and international projects financed by structural funds, the state budget and multi-annual programmes of the European Commission. Its main objective is to support SMEs. (Small and medium enterprises)

In the years 2014-2020, PARP will be responsible for the implementation of actions under three operational programmes:

- Smart Growth Operational Programme;
- Knowledge Education Development Operational Programme;
- Eastern Poland Operational Programme (supra-regional programme for 5 provinces in Eastern Poland: Lubelskie, Podkarpackie, Podlaskie, Świętokrzyskie, and Warmińsko-Mazurskie).

The Agency offers entrepreneurship training and start-up loans. It co-operates with higher education institutions by supporting start-ups established by graduates and university spin-outs. It provides assistance to business support institutions and organisations, including science and technology parks, incubators and technology

transfer centres, and conducts promotional activities. In 2013, it issued a manual “How to Become and Remain an Entrepreneur”.

One of the manifestations of the Agency’s activity is the annual Polish Product of the Future competition, designed to promote new, innovative technologies.

The Ministry of Science and Higher Education supports entrepreneurial attitudes among students and graduates through training and internship schemes such as the [Top 500 Innovators](#), the largest government scheme to support innovation in science. With classes conducted by eminent practitioners, study visits to foreign centres and internships at the most innovative companies, participants learn how to effectively commercialise the results of scientific research. The planned reform of higher education focuses on promoting entrepreneurship through the development of partnerships for knowledge transfer and strengthening of co-operation between higher education institutions, on the one hand, and businesses and employers, on the other hand.

Activities promoting an entrepreneurial culture among schoolchildren are undertaken by the Youth Enterprise Foundation (A member of Junior Achievement Worldwide).

The foundation organises the [Entrepreneurship Day](#) competition (13th edition in 2017). Over 40,000 pupils from about 700 schools and almost 15,000 companies and institutions participate in the Entrepreneurship Day every year. The competition encourages young people to make the right decisions in planning their further education and career path. By participating in the scheme students are able to obtain information about the education, skills or predispositions necessary to go into a given profession. They can also learn how to organise and manage one’s own business.

It is worth emphasising that young people in Poland [show high acceptance for entrepreneurial attitudes and willingness to set up companies](#). The results of nationwide studies of upper secondary school students show that young Poles want to be professionally independent (Feder, 2017). Young people want to run their own businesses in order to “take matters in their own hands” by planning their careers, increase their wages and develop on the labour market.

### Networks and partnerships

There are several networks of young entrepreneurs in Poland, which tend to focus on graduates of higher education institutions, such as [Youth Business Poland](#), [The Polish Chamber of Young Entrepreneurs](#) (*Polska Izba Młodych Przedsiębiorców*), and [Leviathan Youth Forum](#).

There are also many local associations of young entrepreneurs, such as the [Association of Young Entrepreneurs – Wrocław](#).

In principle, the support networks do not co-operate directly with each other. Efforts are being made to improve relations between the networks. The National Chamber of Commerce is carrying out a project called “Innovative Youth”, which attempts to facilitate co-operation between youth organisations, higher education institutions, business incubators and science and technology parks. The “Innovative Youth” project includes conferences, meetings with business leaders and the “Forum for Young Entrepreneurs” (OECD Report, YOUTH ENTREPRENEURSHIP SUPPORT IN POLAND, 2015).

In May 2017, the 7th edition of the [“Young & Innovative Forum”](#) took place, with 220 participants.

## 3.11 Current Debates and Reforms

Current issues and reforms regarding youth employment and entrepreneurship are linked to the following issues.

**Better support for the process of youth transitioning from school to the labour market.** This is to be achieved through, among other things, the education reform (effective from the 2017/2018 school year) and the planned modernisation of higher

education study programmes. The main goals of those changes are the real inclusion of employers in the education and traineeship processes, at all stages of education, and approximation of the education and research process to the labour market and business needs.

**Limitation of various forms of temporary employment (under employment contracts and civil law contracts) and better protection of employees.**

Consultations on the new labour law are ongoing. The government, considering the high percentage of people working on non-permanent contracts, has recognised the need to introduce comprehensive changes in how employment relations are regulated. Therefore, the Labour Law Codification Committee was established, consisting of representatives of the minister for labour, representatives of the social partners, members of the Council for Social Dialogue as well as representatives of the academia and experts. The Commission is to develop two bills: The Labour Code and the Code of Collective Labour Law (Q1 2018).

**Support for the development of young entrepreneurship and start-ups.** The emphasis on developing innovative attitudes and launching start-ups is related to the development policy of the country, which is geared towards investment objectives and increasing the competitiveness of the economy, by increasing expenditures on science and development of new technologies, supporting Special Economic Spheres and improving the functioning of the business environment.

**Measures to facilitate the reconciliation of working and private life.** This is to be achieved through initiatives aimed at the development of childcare infrastructure and forms of childcare, and the development of housing programmes for young people and families with children (Mieszkanie+ scheme).

**Support for disadvantaged groups in the labour market.** These are the actions undertaken under the Youth Guarantee Initiative and the Knowledge Education Development Operational Programme, as well as PFRON initiatives for the disabled. Work is under way on reforming public labour market institutions (Employment Offices, Voluntary Labour Corps) and looking for more effective and successful solutions, primarily for the NEET group. It is important to support the development of the social economy sector by implementing a system of accreditation of centres for support of social economy entities and allocating additional financial instruments for their development.

Public policy in the area of employment and entrepreneurship (cf. documents such as the [Strategy for Responsible Development until 2020](#) (with a forecast up to 2030), the [National Reform Programme. Europe 2020](#)), is aimed at better preparing young people for the labour market, creating attractive and development-promoting workplaces for young people in Poland as well as encouraging entrepreneurship and encouraging the establishment of new businesses. Priority is also given to creating conditions for better integration of working and private life by supporting the development of housing and social infrastructure (Mieszkanie+ scheme, development of various forms of childcare) and by supporting the demographic development of the country and counteracting the poverty of families with children (Rodzina 500+ scheme). An important aim is to stop the emigration of young people from Poland and to create conditions for the return of economic migrants to the country.

## **4. Social Inclusion**

The main problems affecting young people which can potentially contribute to their social exclusion include:

- searching for their identity in adolescence, shaping their own personality and world view. Lack of financial stability, lack of access to professional support, and lack of

- attractive opportunities to shape their own, as well as national or local, identity are a significant impediment to this process;
- relatively low, in comparison to other age groups, level of generalised social trust, including in politicians;
  - the poor physical condition of young people, caused by the low level of physical activity of young people disability – young people with disabilities are a diverse group, both in terms of the type and degree of disability, and in terms of social, educational and professional activity;
  - poor mental condition of the young generation, including depression and eating disorders – one of the indicators is the increase in suicide rates among children and adolescents. Other manifestations include dysfunctional use of the Internet (including addiction), leading to attention disorders or aggressive behaviour, and substance dependence (nicotine, alcohol and drugs);
  - low level of cultural activity among young people: poor participation in extracurricular activities, decrease in book readership, decreased interest in the offer of cultural institutions and participation in amateur artistic movements;
  - the difficult situation of young people in the labour market due to lack of professional experience and low qualifications, and lack of skills and readiness to adapt them to the requirements of a dynamically changing labour market, low level of key competences useful in professional work (including the ability to show initiative and entrepreneurship, co-operation with others, and communication), low job security and undeveloped social capital in potential workplaces.

## **4.1 General Context**

### **Main challenges to social inclusion**

The threat of social exclusion faced by young people should be considered in [many dimensions](#): starting with financial exclusion, which frequently goes hand in hand with addictions, violence, unemployment, and inferior living conditions (often resulting in school failure of young people and poorer functioning in the community), to lack of opportunity or even lack of choice, to far-reaching consequences that disconnect young people from the entire sphere of higher education, career, or social life. The phenomenon of exclusion reinforces the process of inheritance of poverty, which potentially leads to young people repeating the life scenarios of their parents and guardians (Warzywoda-Kruszyńska, Kruszyński, 2011).

A comprehensive diagnosis of the most important challenges in this area is included in the Departmental Programme "[Youth Joined in Action 2016-2019](#)" (*Młodzież Solidarna w Działaniu na lata 2016-2019*). It should be noted, however, that it contains no estimate of the scale of NEET and that the diagnosis does not yet include the effects of the introduction of the "Family 500+" scheme (*Rodzina 500+*) (described in Section 4.6). The Programme highlighted the great diversity within the researched group, namely the youth, who as "an age group of 13 to 30 year olds is rarely studied as a whole (...) and is diverse – those who are in the formal education and those who had completed that stage have different needs. Also, pupils, students, girls, boys, youth groups from cities and from rural areas, all require a different approach".

The main problems affecting young people which can potentially contribute to their social exclusion include: (1) searching for their identity in adolescence, shaping their own personality and world view. Lack of financial stability, lack of access to professional support, and lack of attractive opportunities to shape their own, as well as national or local, identity are a significant impediment to this process; (2) relatively low, in comparison to other age groups, level of generalised social trust, including in politicians (which translated into weak interest in politics and public affairs and low or superficial participation in democratic and participatory processes at all levels). The low level of trust is also demonstrated by the discrepancy between the declarations that one should be sensitive and ready to help other people, on the one hand, and the low actual regard for the common good (including low or only one-time involvement in volunteering – a

phenomenon described in Section 2.1) and the general weakening of the sense of social solidarity, rise of materialism and egocentricity, on the other hand. This is partly due to focusing on individual success (in life, in education and at work) and the lack of promotion of pro-social attitudes in the family or school. A study of attitudes towards old age conducted by the Centre for Public Opinion Research (*Centrum Badania Opinii Społecznej* - CBOS) also indicates a sense of the growing generation gap; (3) the poor physical condition of young people, caused by the low level of physical activity of young people – according to studies by the Central Statistical Office of Poland (*Główny Urząd Statystyczny* - GUS), an overwhelming majority of leisure time is spent on activities that do not require movement and physical effort (the reason are alleged to be the low quality of physical education at school and the dominance of alternative non-physical ways of spending free time) as well as poor eating habits (leading to being overweight and/or deficiencies) and insufficient sleep; (4) disability – young people with disabilities are a diverse group, both in terms of the type and degree of disability, and in terms of social, educational and professional activity; (5) poor mental condition of the young generation, including depression and eating disorders – one of the indicators is the increase in suicide rates among children and adolescents. Other manifestations include dysfunctional use of the Internet (including addiction), leading to attention disorders or aggressive behaviour, and substance dependence (nicotine, alcohol and drugs); (6) low level of cultural activity among young people: poor participation in extracurricular activities, decrease in book readership, decreased interest in the offer of cultural institutions and participation in amateur artistic movements; (7) the difficult situation of young people in the labour market due to lack of professional experience and low qualifications, and lack of skills and readiness to adapt them to the requirements of a dynamically changing labour market, low level of key competences useful in professional work (including the ability to show initiative and entrepreneurship, co-operation with others, and communication), low job security and undeveloped social capital in potential workplaces. In this context, it seems important to fill the gap in the educational offer (formal, non-formal and informal) with proposals aimed at developing competences highly valued by employers. Young people are often offered employment on the basis of civil law contracts or temporary contracts only, which means that they are less protected against dismissal, and this, in turn, creates a precarious employment situation for such people and thus prevents them from making long-term financial commitments (taking out a mortgage to buy a home) and private commitments (for example, this delays the process of starting a family and the decision to have children). As a consequence, they are reluctant to 'fly the nest' and end up living with their parents until they are 30, thus becoming independent increasingly late. The biggest concern is the phenomenon of staying outside of employment, education or training (NEET). In Poland, the percentage of young people in that situation was estimated at 11.6% in 2011, and mainly concerned young people aged 18 to 24. Being a member of the NEET group not only results in reinforcement of negative patterns in professional life, but also translates into lower trust – including in institutions, less interest and involvement in public affairs (e.g. participation in elections) and [less involvement in social issues](#) (including membership in organisations); (8) being raised out of the natural family environment: in 2011, over 95,000 children were living with foster families and in different types of institutions (emergency care, specialist therapeutic care, socialisation, multifunctional). [Comparisons with data from 2005](#) shows that this phenomenon has been on the rise, mainly due to the increasing behavioural problems among children and adolescents and the still insufficiently effective support to parents at times. (9) large families and incomplete families as factors which [can potentially lead to financial problems and thus exclusion](#) (as evidenced by poverty risk or social exclusion indicators in EU 27. Poverty risk increases with the size of the household and is highest in families with three or more dependent children. A comparatively difficult situation is faced by incomplete families; furthermore, problems associated with poverty and exclusion have a particular effect on children and young people with varying degrees of disability. The significance of those risk factors increases markedly in the context of the low effectiveness of the support system for large families, which may exacerbate the concerns of young people about having children and severely limit the ability of families

who have decided to have children to properly perform their functions as carers. In addition to single parenting and large families, teenage motherhood should also be given due regard. Although the general trend has been in decline since 2008, it has been growing in the case of very young mothers. The financial and non-financial status of children tends to be the same as that of the families and communities in which they are born and in which they grow up. This obvious fact gives rise to the risk of repeating the inequalities in subsequent generations. Children from wealthy and included families become wealthy and included adults, while children growing up in poor and marginalised families remain in the same situation as their parents. According to the methodology adopted for the purposes of the Europe 2020 strategy, over 2.1 million children in Poland (aged 0 to 17) are poor or excluded. This accounted for about 30% of children in this age group. Despite the declining number of poor or excluded children, this figure is obviously still unacceptable. However, it must be stressed that since 2016, a majority of the population groups taken into consideration [has seen a decline in extreme poverty](#), with the greatest improvement in this regard being among children aged 0 to 17 and large families.

### Main concepts

The concept of social exclusion is not explicitly defined in Polish law, even in the [Social Welfare Act](#) (Social Welfare Act, Journal of Laws (Dz.U.) of 2004, No. 64, item 593, as amended), despite the fact it mentions counteracting this phenomenon, while emphasising the role of integrating people and families into their environment (as a goal parallel with self-reliance). Social exclusion sometimes coincides with relative poverty, understood as forced non-fulfilment of those needs that determine the quality of human functioning in a society; in Poland, social exclusion (and thus integration) is primarily thought of in the context of poverty, therefore the aim of integration schemes is to bring individuals back into the labour market so that they can improve their economic situation. Official documents very rarely make direct reference to exclusion stemming from different nationalities and/or belief systems, disabilities and any other social differentiations, which is largely a derivative of the homogeneity of Polish society.

Another issue concerns the way socially excluded groups, or groups facing such a risk, are distinguished – in Polish legislation they are generally not segregated according to the age criterion (except for the oldest generation). As a consequence, social integration of the young generation is also distinguished only in the context of the labour market, and poverty is perceived primarily from the perspective of the family, even if it affects mainly children and adolescents. As a result, young people's poverty appears in the public discourse primarily in the context of becoming self-reliant, including entry into the labour market and access to housing.

## 4.2 Administration and Governance

### Governance

In Poland, issues related to the area of social exclusion remain the domain of the [Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Policy](#). As mentioned in Section 4.1.2 (General context), Polish legislation does not generally distinguish between issues of social exclusion according to the age criterion, so issues related to youth exclusion are dispersed across various departments of the ministry. The name of the Ministry has been changed by adding the word "Family" after the last election in 2015 to highlight the priorities of the current government and its way of looking at social issues. Its flagship social project, "[Family 500+](#)" (*Rodzina 500+*) (described in Section 4.6 Access to Quality Services), is implemented by the Department of Family Policy, which also handles other activities aimed at the family (such as the [Large Family Card](#) (*Karta Dużej Rodziny*)), including youth aged 13 to 18. Other departments of the Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Policy which are responsible for those issued include the Labour Market Department (overseeing the "Youth Guarantee" Initiative (*Gwarancje dla Młodzieży*)) dedicated to supporting young people in the labour market – described in Section 4.7), and, indirectly,

the Department of Social Security and Integration, the Department of Social Economy and Public Benefit, and the Department for ESF Implementation. The Ministry has no department focusing on youth issues (although the age criterion, as a way of organising issues, is present in relation to the oldest generation, as evidenced by the existence of the Department of Senior Policy).

To a certain specific extent, youth matters are also handled by the Ministry of Development (e.g. it manages the [“Youth Employment Initiative”](#) (*Inicjatywa na rzecz zatrudnienia ludzi młodych*) and provides funds for its implementation, monitors ESF spending under the “Youth Guarantee” Initiative and spending under the “Youth Employment Initiative”), and also by the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Science and Higher Education, and the Ministry of Sport and Tourism in their respective areas.

### Cross-sectorial cooperation

Public policies developed by individual departments of the Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Policy are subject to internal consultations (within the ministry), inter-ministerial consultations and (to some extent) are debated by the [Council for Social Dialogue](#) (*Rada Dialogu Społecznego*) – a body set up in 2015 to replace the [Tripartite Commission for Economic and Social Affairs](#). The Council for Social Dialogue is the venue of dialogue between the government, employers’ organisations and trade unions. It passes judgement on legislative bills which fall within the statutory activity of the Council, and it may propose legislative bills itself. The Council for Social Dialogue is responsible for the tasks set out in the five different statutory acts, regarding remuneration in the public service sector, minimum remuneration for work, social security, pensions and disability benefits from the Social Insurance Fund, and family benefits. The main areas of action (and, therefore, of consultations) of the Council for Social Dialogue are issues of the labour market, employment and selected areas of social security and social exclusion, but, again, without a separate focus on youth issues. The regional counterparts of the [Council for Social Dialogue](#) are the Provincial Councils for Social Dialogue (*Wojewódzkie Rady Dialogu Społecznego*).

## 4.3 Strategy for the Social Inclusion of Young People

### Existence of a National Strategy on social inclusion

In Poland there is no document fulfilling the criteria of a strategy for the social inclusion of young people. There are more general documents with the status of programmes, in which such activities constitute one of several elements, often in the context of supporting the family, rather than strictly in age categories. The key documents include [“The National Programme for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion 2020. A New Dimension of Active Inclusion”](#) (*Krajowy Program Przeciwdziałania Ubóstwu i Wykluczeniu Społecznemu 2020. Nowy wymiar aktywnej integracji*) (it includes the Operational Objective, which aims to provide guarantees for the future of the youth– create opportunities for young people to enter the labour market and start a family), and the Programme: [“Active Forms of Combating Social Exclusion – A New Dimension 2020”](#) (*Aktywne formy przeciwdziałania wykluczeniu społecznemu – nowy wymiar 2020*), where one of the Specific Objectives purports to “integrate young people, particularly from communities at risk of social exclusion, into the local environment through education and integrative activities”. These programmes are described in Section 4.4.

### Scope and contents

Not applicable

### Responsible authority

Not applicable

### Revisions/Updates

At the stage of preparations for Poland's accession to the European Union, young people were singled out as one of the partner groups upon which to form the basis of integration. At the then Office of the Committee for European Integration (a government agency which was co-ordinating activities aimed at joining the EU), the Consultation Board for the Youth was established. It was one of the seven Boards forming the National Council for European Integration. As a result, "[The State Strategy for Youth for 2003-2012](#)" (*Strategia państwa dla młodzieży na lata 2003-2012*) was developed. The work of the European Commission inspired this document. The work was supervised by the no longer existing Ministry of National Education and Sport. In this Strategy, youth were defined as a group of 15 to 25 year olds, and the main goal was to "create the right conditions for young people aged 15 to 25 to enable them to participate in social, cultural and political life on an equal footing with other social groups" (Zielińska, 2009). The Strategy identifies five areas of activity: youth education; employment; youth participation in public life; leisure time, culture, sport, and tourism; health and prevention. In 2005 the Strategy was recognised by authorities as a core document in the field of youth policy as a result of the Government's Position on the implementation of the European Youth Pact. A decision was made to take action to improve the quality of private and working life for young people, and the State assumed the role of "organiser of publicly available high-quality education corresponding to the needs of a knowledge-based society and the labour market, creator of market instruments enabling the professional activation of young people, initiator of young people's active participation in social and civic life, and organiser of universal and accessible basic and specialised health care" (Zielińska, 2009). Some of the tasks set out in the Strategy have been implemented, but in 2009 public discourse revealed that it was becoming 'dead' and was no longer treated as a document that organises activities related to youth issues (Zielińska, 2009). Since 2012 there has not been any new strategically significant document created at the central level referring specifically to young people.

## **4.4 Inclusive Programmes for Young People**

### **Programmes specific for vulnerable young people**

"[The National Programme for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion 2020. A New Dimension of Active Inclusion](#)" (*Krajowy Program Przeciwdziałania Ubóstwu i Wykluczeniu Społecznemu 2020. Nowy wymiar aktywnej integracji*) should be considered a key document organising issues related to combating youth exclusion. Unfortunately, it is unclear whether the Programme is still in force as the most recent information on the website of the Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Policy dates back to 2015 (cf. Section 4.8 Current debates and reforms). The Programme is incorporated into other strategic documents, including the [Long-Term National Development Strategy - "Poland 2030"](#). The Third Wave of Modernity" (*Długookresowa Strategia Rozwoju Kraju – Polska 2030. Trzecia fala nowoczesności*), and the Mid-Term National Development Strategy, along with nine integrated strategies, including the "[Strategy for Human Capital Development](#)" (*Strategia Rozwoju Kapitału Ludzkiego*), which plays a leading role in terms of fighting poverty, and the "[Strategy for Social Capital Development](#)" (*Strategia Rozwoju Kapitału Społecznego*).

The Programme's Operational Objective 2 is described as aiming "to provide guarantees for the future of the youth – create opportunities for young people to enter the labour market and start a family. To create a coherent system of efforts in terms of educational, social and professional development to enable young people to prepare for entering the labour market, acquire the necessary competences and skills to facilitate social inclusion, professional activity and family development". This Objective has been broken down into lower-level outcomes and actions. As a whole, it mostly focuses on the socialisation and early-intervention function of the school, modernisation of the education system (focus on developing key competences, creativity, entrepreneurship and co-operation), improvement and promotion of vocational training, and implementation of the first job system. The Programme emphasises the importance of (1) preventing premature

motherhood, and providing adequate assistance to young mothers (parents) and their families; (2) taking special care of families bringing up more than one disabled child, as they frequently encounter difficulties in ensuring adequate rehabilitation for all children, and failure to meet those needs increases the risk of poverty. It was emphasised that in the sphere of education, this amounts to the problem of many disabled children remaining outside of inclusive education, coupled with the general low quality of inclusive education itself, and in the professional sphere – remaining outside of education, training and employment after graduating from lower secondary schools or vocational schools (in particular special needs schools); and (3) striving to ensure equal opportunities in life by reducing the inequalities at the start of life during childhood. A large reduction in the phenomenon of inheriting one's parents' status has been indicated as proof of the effectiveness of such measures.

Strategic areas described in two broader strategy documents are also of relevance for the Programme in question. One of the three strategic areas in the [2020 National Development Strategy](#) refers to social and territorial cohesion. It lists the priority directions of public intervention: (1) increasing the activity of excluded people and people at risk of exclusion (in terms of youth-focused actions, the following are of key importance: better aligning of support through changes in the social benefits system, increased access to rehabilitation, an e-inclusion programme targeting groups at risk of digital exclusion, universal access to high-quality education at all levels, and universal access to culture; providing support to increase accessibility and to improve the quality of flexible forms of childcare, with particular focus on rural areas and small towns; increasing the accessibility of transport to facilitate access to services and labour markets); (2) reducing poverty among the most vulnerable groups (in terms of youth-focused actions, the following are of key importance: increasing the availability of various forms of support for pupils (such as lunches, textbooks, etc); increasing accessibility and improving the quality of flexible forms of childcare, with particular focus on rural areas and small towns; infrastructural projects to enable disabled people to have greater accessibility to public spaces, and new school curricula to include people with disabilities; creation of an effective housing rental system and development of social housing); (3) increasing the safety of citizens (in terms of youth-focused actions, the following are of key importance: raising awareness among consumers about the principles of healthy eating and disease prevention, raising health awareness and encouraging healthy lifestyles through health promotion and education (especially among people with the lowest socio-economic status), and increasing the level of physical activity, with particular emphasis on the promotion of physical activity among children and young people).

On the other hand, the [Strategy for Human Capital Development 2020](#) adopted by the government identifies priority directions for interventions. In terms of youth-focused actions, the changes in public policy are of key importance. These changes, aimed at the young generation, are intended to prevent any limitation or loss of its potential, primarily by supporting the transfer between education (learning and training) and employment, reducing the scale and risk of poverty, especially among children, the elderly and the disabled, and strengthening the preventive measures dedicated to children and families at risk of dysfunction or with difficulties, including development of family forms of foster care. Other directions of intervention concern, among other things, improving the effectiveness of the social benefits system and the system of professional activation and re-integration into the labour market; social integration of immigrants and Poles returning from living abroad; the development of active, including innovative, forms of assistance to people at risk of social exclusion or socially excluded; support for people at risk of or affected by domestic violence; and increasing the availability of housing, including through development of the rental system and development of social housing.

The National Programme for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion (*Krajowy Program Przeciwdziałania Ubóstwu i Wykluczeniu Społecznemu*) attaches particular importance to supporting children in families at risk of poverty or social exclusion, young people having problems with entering the labour market (NEET) and young people with disabilities (with

unmet needs for rehabilitation and medical care, and problems with participation in education). Those target groups only partially correspond with the [EU Work Plan for Youth](#), which identifies specific categories of young people at risk of exclusion: NEETs, young members of minorities, migrants and refugees, young people at risk of developing violent behaviour, homeless people, and young families. An additional difficulty in identifying target groups is the fact that the Polish social security system generally does not make a distinction based on age, but on the specific problem when categorising citizens eligible for social support (subject to certain conditions). Young people are included across those categories.

The second important, and the most up-to-date document, is the Programme: "[Active Forms of Combating Social Exclusion – A New Dimension 2020](#)" (*Aktywne formy przeciwdziałania wykluczeniu społecznemu – nowy wymiar 2020*). The Programme was announced in February 2016 by the Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Policy, the Department of Social Security and Integration, and was created as a result of merging two previous programmes: "Active Forms of Combating Social Exclusion 2011-2015" (*Aktywne formy przeciwdziałania wykluczeniu społecznemu – edycja 2011-2015*) and "After School Care – Children – Work to support children and families in the commune for the years 2011-2015" (*Świetlica-Dzieci-Praca na rzecz wsparcia dziecka i rodziny w gminie na lata 2011-2015*). Two of the challenges described in the Programme refer to young people: "inclusion of youth through social animation and education in the creation of space for its activity, with particular emphasis on strengthening individual social competences" and "educating young people through acquisition of social skills and various forms of spending free time as a preventive measure". As a result, one of the Specific Objectives of the Programme is to "integrate young people, particularly from communities at risk of social exclusion, into the local environment through education and inclusion activities". The main challenges faced by public policies related to counteracting youth exclusion include: (1) building intergenerational solidarity, which is defined as intergenerational cohesion; (2) building a system to support the social activity of youth and youth groups; (3) providing support and promoting social activity through the general education curriculum, study programmes, etc, and facilitating access to non-formal education; (4) preparing an offer dedicated to young people with disabilities.

According to the analysed documents, the main governmental entity responsible for counteracting youth exclusion is the Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Policy and its departments: The Department of Social Security and Integration, the Department of Family Policy, and the Department of Social Economy and Public Benefit. In "The National Programme for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion 2020" (*Krajowy Program Przeciwdziałania Ubóstwu i Wykluczeniu Społecznemu 2020*), Priority 2, in addition to defining the relevant activities (Ensuring coherence of the educational, social and professional activities for children and youth), indicates partners for those activities such as the Voluntary Labour Corps (*Ochotnicze Hufce Pracy*) (for actions aimed at modernising the youth education system through focusing on development of key competences, such as creativity, entrepreneurship and co-operation, improvement of the vocational training model, and promotion of vocational training interlinked with the labour market), as well as institutions of education, labour market and social inclusion for actions aimed at implementation of a comprehensive first job system for young people based on integrated activities. The specific actions described in the documents in question are tied to partners being, in particular, specific institutions falling under the jurisdiction of local authorities, including education institutions and care facilities (schools, care and socio-therapy centres, correctional facilities and shelters for minors), cultural centres, Social Welfare Centres, and District Employment Offices. Non-public partners, such as social inclusion centres and clubs, social economy actors, NGOs, including volunteer centres, are also identified. The Programme: "Active Forms of Combating Social Exclusion – A New Dimension 2020" (*Aktywne formy przeciwdziałania wykluczeniu społecznemu – nowy wymiar 2020*) is implemented by the Department of Social Security and Integration at the Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Policy, and the Audit Office at the Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Policy (central level) and

local non-governmental organisations. Local government units and non-governmental organisations may apply for grants.

## Funding

Funds for the implementation of the “National Programme for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion 2020. A New Dimension of Active Inclusion” (*Krajowy Program Przeciwdziałania Ubóstwu i Wykluczeniu Społecznemu 2020. Nowy wymiar aktywnej integracji*) have been earmarked in the State budget, budgets of local government units, special-purpose funds and European funds (primarily from Regional Operational Programmes, the Knowledge Education Development Operational Programme, and sometimes other schemes such as the 2014-2020 Operational Programme of the Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived).

According to the Programme’s financial plan for 2014-2020, expenses are at PLN 180,228,744 (annual average of approximately PLN 25,747,000). The vast majority of this amount is to come from the State budget (PLN 111,755,579, i.e. 62%), followed by the budgets of local government units (PLN 58,431,778, i.e. 32%). The remaining amount is made up from specifically designated funds and private funds. Financing Priority 1 of the Programme (“Counteracting social exclusion of children and youth”) accounts for 55% of the amount foreseen for the whole programme in 2014-2020 (PLN 98,589,915). The vast majority of these funds are to come from the State budget (73%) and the budgets of local governments (23%). The highest resources under this Priority have been allocated to Measure 1.5 – “Extending the scope of support in the system of financial benefits for families (55% of the funds allocated for the implementation of the entire Priority). This means that most of the money is intended to support families, or, indirectly, to improve the situation of children up to the age of 18. The Programme’s allocation of funds to counteract social exclusion of young people aged 19 to 30 is negligible.

The level of funding for the whole Programme: “Active Forms of Combating Social Exclusion – A New Dimension 2020” (*Aktywne formy przeciwdziałania wykluczeniu społecznemu – nowy wymiar 2020*) (three competitions, including one directly related to youth) amounts to PLN 21,745,000 for 2016-2020, which translates into an annual subsidy of PLN 4,349,000, which can be used to cover up to 80% of project costs.

## Quality assurance

As regards the “National Programme for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion 2020” (*Krajowy Program Przeciwdziałania Ubóstwu i Wykluczeniu Społecznemu 2020*), the following indicators concerning youth have been defined by indicating the base value in 2011 and the target value in 2020: (1) unemployment rate of graduates of schools with vocational education: post-secondary schools and secondary vocational schools, as well as basic vocational schools: base 40.6%, target 35.9%; (2) youth inactivity index, NEET for people aged 20 to 24: base 18.2%, target 16.2%, for people aged 25 to 29: base 21.4%, target 18.0%. The Programme mentions monitoring, ongoing evaluation, mid-term evaluation and post-closure evaluation of the indicators. The monitoring is to be based on collecting and analysing data using the Assessment of Social Welfare Resources tool and also rely on the data collected and verified in MPiPS-03 reports and the statistical and information systems SYRIUSZ and POMOST, as well as the data collected by the Central Statistical Office of Poland (GUS). The Observatories for Social Integration (*Obserwatoria Integracji Społecznej* - OIS), which were created within the framework of the project “Co-ordination for Active Inclusion” (*Koordinacja na rzecz aktywnej integracji*) implemented under the Human Capital Operational Programme 2007-2013, are to be responsible for data collection and research. Those Observatories operate at the Regional Centres for Social Policy. At the central level, the Programme envisaged the establishment of the National Research Platform, which was designed to be a consortium of “the government administration, social partners and civic organisations, and experts (poverty researchers, aid practitioners, people experiencing problems)”. It was supposed to manage all analyses and recommend changes to the Programme. It had also planned

to prepare (from 2015) an annual report on the progress of the Programme. None of those tasks have been accomplished after the parliamentary elections and change of government.

Indicators for the Programme: "Active Forms of Combating Social Exclusion – A New Dimension 2020" (*Aktywne formy przeciwdziałania wykluczeniu społecznemu – nowy wymiar 2020*) assume that N=200 young people will be included in the competition described above, 15 reintegration and local community centres and youth clubs will be involved in project activities, and 20 volunteering initiatives will take place. The Programme foresees that monitoring will be carried out by the Department of Social Security and Integration at the Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Policy. Entities which are awarded subsidies in competitions are required to submit reports on the performance of the public task entrusted to them, and its day-to-day implementation may be subject to evaluation by the staff of the ministry during the monitoring visits.

## **4.5 Initiatives promoting social inclusion and raising awareness**

### **Intercultural awareness**

In Poland, central authorities do not carry out campaigns or other activities to promote the fight against discrimination and racism or to support multiculturalism. These areas remain primarily the domain of non-governmental organisations and, to a lesser extent, some local governments (e.g. Warsaw, which created and financially supported the Multicultural Centre, which has been active for two years and entrusted by the local government to local NGOs). The State body that takes action in this regard is the Ombudsman, who actively opposes various types of discrimination and is responsible for the understanding and protection of human rights. Due to a limited budget, which has been cut back by the ruling coalition, the Ombudsman does not, however, carry out any promotional activities and social campaigns.

In 2016, the Council for the Prevention of Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance (*Rada do spraw Przeciwdziałania Dyskryminacji Rasowej, Ksenofobii i związanej z nimi Nietolerancji*) (established in 2013) was abolished by decision of the Prime Minister. Its task was to "co-ordinate activities undertaken by public administration bodies to combat racial, national and ethnic inequalities, and to combat racism and xenophobia". In the opinion of the government, the Council had been ineffective, and its field of activity was already covered by the Government Plenipotentiary for Civil Society and Equal Treatment (*Pełnomocnik Rządu ds. Społeczeństwa Obywatelskiego i Równego Traktowania*).

### **Young people's rights**

The rights of young people do not constitute a separate category of rights in Polish law or public discourse, as is the case with respect to the rights of children (Poland has a separate Office of the Ombudsman for Children, as enshrined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations). The word 'youth' does appear in the Constitution of the Republic of Poland, for example in Article 68.5, which states that "public authorities support the development of physical culture, especially among children and youth". However, it is unclear who exactly this refers to as the Constitution does not provide any definition of the term 'youth'. A definition of 'youth' is also not to be found in any international convention that Poland is a party to. Basic regulations concerning youth generally relate to limiting the rights of minors, such as being away from home after 11pm or purchasing and using alcohol and cigarettes. Furthermore, restrictions are imposed on their right to intimate life, online shopping, obtaining a driver's licence, entering night clubs, and unassisted doctor visits – which are possible from the age of 16. The actual rights of persons under 18 years of age include mainly limited criminal liability and various discounts on public transport (a privilege that continues beyond that age if the eligible person continues to study). Public campaigns organised by State institutions and aimed at young people to promote good behaviour

include, for example, a campaign to promote sobriety among young drivers, "[My Choice... Life](#)" (*Mój wybór...życie*).

### **Key initiatives to safeguard democracy and prevent radicalisation leading to violent extremism**

Polish schools are not centrally initiating any efforts to fulfil the obligations arising from the Paris Declaration of 17 March 2015 on the commitment of ministers of education to promote – through education – citizenship and common values of freedom, tolerance and non-discrimination. ([Its main objectives are](#) "preventing rapid radicalisation of views and promoting democratic values, fundamental rights, intercultural understanding and active citizenship" and "fostering the inclusion of disadvantaged learners, including persons with a migrant background, while preventing and combating discriminatory practices".)

## **4.6 Access to Quality Services**

### **Housing**

[The Social Welfare Act](#) delineates individual support procedures for persons over the age of 18 who are leaving facilities such as residential care for children and young people with intellectual disabilities, a home for mothers with small children and also pregnant women, a shelter for minors, a juvenile correctional facility, a special education and training centre, a special care centre, a youth centre for socio-therapy providing 24-hour care, or a youth care centre. Activities for the person gaining self-reliance are also aimed at their integration into the environment through community work; providing financial support in the form of cash for gaining independence and continuing education; help in obtaining appropriate housing conditions (including protected housing under supervision and assistance of a social worker) and getting a job; and in-kind assistance for settling in. The condition to receive support is a commitment on the part of the person gaining self-reliance to follow their individual plan towards becoming independent with the assistance of a social worker.

In Poland, housing support (implemented through the allocation of social and council housing), like most other aid programmes, is not age dependent, but means tested. At the same time, many documents refer to housing as a condition for gaining independence by the young generation and to the importance of adequate housing conditions for the development of children and adolescents. A separate programme is comprised of the activities undertaken within the Housing Society (*Towarzystwa Budownictwa Mieszkaniowego*), and under the (soon to be ending) "[Housing for the Young](#)" scheme (*Mieszkanie dla Młodych*), which provided support for the purchase of a first home on the primary market or the construction of a first home. Its beneficiaries were initially only young families (up to 35 years of age), but later also other people (The State covers 10% of the cost of buying an apartment measuring up to 50 sq. m for people without children and 15% for those with children. In addition, for the next 5 years families with at least 3 children may receive another 5%). The "Housing for the Young" (*Mieszkanie dla Młodych*) scheme will be in operation until 30 September 2018 and is to be replaced by the National Housing Programme "[Housing Plus](#)" (*Mieszkanie Plus*), with plans to build affordable housing for rent and to set up special savings banks in which Poles could be putting money aside for their own apartment or house. For people with low income, there is also a system of housing allowances paid by the communes (*gminy*) as part of the social security system.

### **Social services**

As mentioned above, support for the youngest generation in the social security system is implemented primarily through support to families – some types of support are means tested, others are not, and there are also those which apply mixed criteria, including the most significant support at the moment within the framework of the "[Family 500 +](#)" scheme (*Rodzina 500 +*). This support is received for the second and each subsequent child, without any additional conditions, and also for families with a first or only child who

have a net monthly income of less than PLN 800. For families with a child with disabilities, the income criterion is higher and amounts to PLN 1,200 net, and additional support in the amount of PLN 500 per child is also received by foster families and by family-type children's homes under the Act on Family Support and Foster Care System. Importantly, the "Family 500 +" parenting benefit is not included in one's income for the purposes of social welfare benefits, child maintenance funds, family benefits or housing allowances.

Other essential elements of the family support system include: (1) family benefit for parents, one of the parents, or legal or actual guardian of the child, which is means tested ("a zloty for a zloty" rule applies) and is available in relation to children under the age of 18, or 21 if the child continues to attend school and 24 if the child is disabled and continues to attend school or a higher education institution; (2) allowances in addition to the family benefit, such as for the education and rehabilitation of a child with a disability (to cover the increased rehabilitation or education expenses), for raising a child in a large family (third and subsequent children), for a child learning outside of their place of residence, or for single parenting; (3) one off childbirth benefit and parental benefit, which is available for a period of 52 weeks or longer in special cases provided for by law.

A direct form of assistance for young people is support for the unemployed – a person who had worked for 365 days during the last 18 months and received at least the minimum wage may receive the unemployment benefit. Other forms of support for the unemployed include training, job announcements, and subsidies to start a business (mainly through EU funds) – but young people are often prevented from obtaining such benefits due to lack of employment history. Another form of support in the labour market is vocational counselling, which in Poland is provided within the framework of activities being part of (1) educational policy – at psychological and pedagogical counselling centres operating in the education system; (2) higher education – through Student Career Centres (*Akademickie Biura Karier*); (3) labour market policy – targeted to persons registered as unemployed and implemented by units of public employment services: the Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Policy, Career Information and Planning centres (functioning within Province Employment Offices), District Employment Offices, and Voluntary Labour Corps (*Ochotnicze Hufce Pracy*) – as described in Section 4.7.

## Health care

For most young people – until the age of 18, and for those continuing education, until the age of 26 (and older, if they are registered as unemployed) – Poland offers free medical care. There is a separate specialist network of hospitals dedicated to people up to the age of 18 – they are also entitled to free meals and accommodation in children's hospitals in health resorts, children's sanatoria, and sanatoria (for children with significant disabilities, there is no age limit). In 2016, the [Act on Support of Pregnant Women and Families – "For Life" \(\*Za życiem\*\)](#) came into force, under which persons under the age of 18 with a certificate of severe and irreversible disability or incurable and life-threatening disease that arose in the prenatal period or at the time of birth have the right to receive services without being placed on waiting lists.

## Financial services

Financial services dedicated to young people are related to the programmes described in Section 4.6.1, enabling them to obtain independent accommodation.

## Quality assurance

In Poland, there is no separate nationwide system for monitoring and quality assurance (evaluation) of the support described in Section 4.6. Assessments and evaluations are conducted either for the purpose of specific projects, e.g. targeted at beneficiaries eligible for particular types of services, by the institutions providing the services (often at

the level of local government units), or as part of broad assistance programmes, usually when it is a requirement resulting from co-financing from European funds.

## **4.7 Youth Work to Foster Social Inclusion**

### **Policy/legal framework**

Many local and ministerial programmes see the professional development of young people in terms of social inclusion, as an activity that helps to identify, understand and remove barriers to their participation and identification in society. At the central level, however, there is no unified public policy in which professional activity would be perceived in that manner – the programmes and activities described in Section 4.7 do not identify specific groups of young beneficiaries, such as those experiencing discrimination or at risk of radicalisation, migrants, representatives of minorities, young people at risk of developing violent behaviour, or the homeless. An exception are the so-called NEETs, to whom projects financed under the Knowledge Education Development Operational Programme (*Program Operacyjny Wiedza Edukacja Rozwój* (PO WER)) are addressed at provincial (*województwo*) level, and persons in particularly difficult situations, who are helped through central competitions (described in Section 4.7.3). The activities undertaken and the programmes in operation see work primarily as a necessary factor for the financial independence of the young generation. Similarly, as with other activities described, many of the tools to support professional activity are not specifically dedicated to people of designated age groups. To a limited extent, the criteria for a strategic document are fulfilled by the “Updated Implementation Plan for the Youth Guarantee Initiative” in Poland (*Zaktualizowany Plan Realizacji Gwarancji dla Młodzieży w Polsce*) (described in Section 4.7.2), and the measures to support the entry of young people into the labour market are implemented in the form of labour market services stipulated in the [Act on Promotion of Employment](#). These are: career guidance and vocational information services, acting as an intermediary employment service, assistance with active job searches, and vocational training.

### **Main inclusive Youth-Work programmes and target groups**

People under the age of 30 often face serious problems with entering the labour market, partly because young people who leave school are equipped with a certain amount of theoretical knowledge, which, when placed in the context of the labour market, often turns out to be insufficient to find employment. On the other hand, the lack of internship opportunities puts young people in the most difficult situation on the labour market compared with other age groups, and their situation further deteriorates. Also, the laws and the preferences of employers make it hard for them to find stable employment. For this reason, people under the age of 30 are considered to be one of the groups in a special situation on the labour market, entitled to priority support focused on compensating for their deficits in their education, in their vocational experience, and on enabling first-time employment; for example, through the use of instruments influencing the demand side of the labour market (employers) in the form of incentives to employ young people. The reform of Employment Offices in May 2014, in addition to the changed definition of ‘young person’, which now covers all persons under the age of 30 (formerly under the age of 25), also reduced the period (from 6 to 4 months) during which an Employment Office must present them with an offer of a job, internship or skills training.

Through employment services, the State offers young unemployed persons special labour market instruments and schemes aimed at activating the young people and supporting their professional activity. However, the status of unemployed person is not obtainable by any unemployed young person, as ‘unemployed’ is defined as a person who is not employed and is not performing other paid work, capable and ready to undertake employment on a full-time basis, as applicable in the given occupation or service or other paid work, is not attending school, except for those learning at an adult school or taking an extramural exam in such a school or at a higher education institution where they

study on an extramural basis. This means that the definition does not apply to full-time students who have classes on working days.

The Act of 25 September 2015 amending the Act on Promotion of Employment and Labour Market Institutions introduced the scheme "[Work for Young People](#)" (*Praca dla Młodych*). Under that scheme, an employer or an entrepreneur who signs the relevant agreement with the District Employment Office will for 12 months receive a refund of part of the costs of remuneration, bonuses and social insurance contributions spent on an unemployed person under the age of 30 employed on a full-time basis. From the viewpoint of a young employee, the most important aspect is the obligation of the employer to maintain full-time employment for a minimum of 12 months. Critics of the scheme, however, point out that it is not suitable, for example, for employers whose market situation is uncertain (especially small private firms and those working in the creative industry on a project basis), and are concerned about the need to return the subsidy, while the untouchable position of young employees can be a hindrance to development of the company, give rise to demanding attitudes, and thus badly affect the atmosphere among employees. [Potential maladjustment](#) of such solutions to the expectations and attitudes of young people, who are frequently focusing on rapid effects and personal development, rather than employment stability, is also highlighted.

Following on from the recommendation of the European Council on the establishment of a youth guarantee, and as a result of the co-operation of the Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Policy and the Ministry of Development, the "[Updated Implementation Plan for the Youth Guarantee Initiative](#)" (*Zaktualizowany Plan Realizacji Gwarancji dla Młodzieży*) was created in Poland. It is a 'rolling document', updated on an ongoing basis, which is a significant asset on the dynamically changing labour market. Better alignment of the Plan to the actual needs makes it possible to implement it at both national and regional level – at the level of provinces (*województwo*), districts (*powiat*), and even communes (*gmina*), for example within the framework of local partnerships created on the regional and local labour markets by labour market institutions, schools, training institutions, local governments, non-governmental organisations, and companies. As a result of a competition held in 2017, reports and guidelines were prepared to ensure that the activities addressed to young unemployed people match their needs in each of the provinces.

Compared to other age groups, young people in Poland are in a difficult situation on the labour market – they are characterised by low professional activity and a low employment rate, with only slightly more than a quarter of those aged 15 to 24 working. It is also the most vulnerable group in terms of unemployment. However, in the last two years, the employment rate of young people has been increasing and, as a consequence, the percentage of young people under the age of 25 registered as unemployed at Employment Offices has been decreasing, which is mainly due to the significant revival of the entire labour market and the higher number of job offers submitted to the Employment Offices by employers. In Poland, implementation of the "Youth Guarantee" Initiative (*Gwarancje dla młodzieży*) is co-ordinated by the Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Policy, which co-operates with Polish and European partners involved in this initiative. Most of the activities undertaken within its scope are performed by Employment Offices. These include primarily job placement and career guidance.

Part of the package for young jobseekers adopted as a result of the reform of Employment Offices in May 2014 was the introduction of additional instruments, referred to as vouchers: (1) an internship voucher, which is the possibility of referring an unemployed person to a 6-month internship with an employer (who receives a bonus) of their choice, and financing a scholarship (120% of the benefit rate) and additional costs of travel, medical examinations, etc. After its completion, the employer is obliged to hire such person for another 6 months; (2) a training voucher, which guarantees referral to and financing of training chosen by the unemployed person, including the costs of medical examinations, travel and accommodation, and the right to a scholarship; (3) an employment voucher, which provides a guarantee of reimbursement of part of the cost of

remuneration and social security contributions to an employer willing to hire an unemployed person for a period of 18 months; upon completion of the reimbursement period, the employer is obliged to hire that person for another 6 months; (4) a housing voucher, which may be claimed by a person who intends to take up employment or business activity outside their previous place of residence and amounts to a maximum of 200% of average remuneration.

A separate mechanism is the “[First Business – Start-up Support scheme](#)” (*Pierwszy biznes – Wsparcie w starcie*), which is managed and implemented by Bank Gospodarstwa Krajowego (*The National Development Bank of Poland*) on the initiative of the Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Policy. Funds for the implementation of the scheme come from the Labour Fund on the basis of the Act on Promotion of Employment and Labour Market Institutions amended in 2014. The aim of the scheme is development of entrepreneurship and creation of new jobs, prevention of unemployment and promotion of employment. Low-interest loans are granted as part of the scheme for the purpose of starting a business and creating a job for an unemployed person. The scheme also offers free guidance and training services both during and after applying for the loan. Start-up loans are addressed to final year students in higher education institutions who remain unemployed and do not do any other paid work, graduates of a higher education institution within four years from the date of graduation or receiving a vocational qualification who remain unemployed and do not do any other paid work, as well as registered unemployed persons. Other forms of support include subsidising post-graduate studies, co-financing of exam fees and licensing costs, various training loans, continuing education scholarships, as well as intervention works and special programmes.

### Youth work providers in the field of social inclusion for young people

The State’s key partners in the area of youth inclusion are the Voluntary Labour Corps (*Ochotnicze Hufce Pracy* - OHP), whose core activities, in terms of their educational and training significance, are described in Section 4.7. In addition to the OHP Youth Employment Offices (*Młodzieżowe Biura Pracy OHP*), other important partners in the labour market include Mobile Career Information Centres (*Mobilne Centra Informacji Zawodowej*), Youth Career Centres (*Młodzieżowe Centra Kariery*), and Employment Agency Desks (*Punkty Pośrednictwa Pracy*). An important source of information for job seekers is the [Vortal of Public Employment Services](#).

The organisations, institutions and companies involved in the professional activation of young people and their social inclusion may obtain subsidies under the Knowledge Education Development Operational Programme (*Program Operacyjny Wiedza Edukacja Rozwój* (PO WER)) for the years 2014-2020. The subsidies are granted for activation projects selected in competitions organised by Provincial Employment Offices and the Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Policy. Projects financed in provinces under the Knowledge Education Development Operational Programme (PO WER) are addressed to all NEETs under the age of 30. In the case of projects selected in the central competitions, the beneficiaries are those in particularly vulnerable situations, including young people and young mothers leaving foster care, mothers living in single mothers’ homes, residents and leavers of youth care centres and socio-therapy centres, special care centres and educational and care centres, and young people leaving prison or detention centres.

NGOs, including volunteering centres, are also important partners of the State in its efforts aimed at professional activation and social inclusion. Their activity is described in Section 2.1. A separate sector of support are social economy entities – the [National Social Economy Development Programme](#) (*Krajowy Program Rozwoju Ekonomii Społecznej*) envisages “preparation and implementation of educational activities related to social entrepreneurship, including those aimed at children and young people in the field of preparation for entrepreneurship and supporting student co-operatives”. It further proposes the creation of “secure jobs”, including for young people, and “introduction of the possibility of creating social co-operatives by young job seekers”. Due to the fact that

in the Polish youth support system this problem is, unfortunately, generally very neglected, it is worth mentioning Measure V.4 entitled “A model of non-formal education for children and youth” (*Model edukacji pozaformalnej dzieci i młodzieży*), which, according to the authors of the document, is supposed to translate into “development of social competences, social and civic activity of children and young people – especially in environments at risk of social exclusion”.

### **Training and support for youth workers engaged in social inclusion programmes**

The State’s key partners in the field of educational activities for minors in the labour market are the Voluntary Labour Corps (*Ochotnicze Hufce Pracy*, OHP), which pursue training, care and education activities to enable simultaneous learning and work, or, in other words, completing one’s education while obtaining vocational training, for which pay is received and which takes place at OHP training workshops or at an external employer. These integrated activities potentially lead to being awarded a school-leaving certificate, sitting a vocational qualification exam, and, as a result, functioning on the labour market. Depending on the student’s place of residence, the activities are carried out within the framework of Labour Corps, Community Labour Corps, Training Centres, and Education Centres. Participants and graduates of OHP also have the opportunity to avail of the offer of courses and vocational training conducted by Vocational Training Centres (*Ośrodki Szkolenia Zawodowego*). In addition to their statutory activities, the Voluntary Labour Corps (OHP) carry out, under the Knowledge Education Development Operational Programme (PO WER), projects aimed at young people: “Action Activation” (*Akcja Aktywizacja*) for NEETs aged 15 to 24, and “Unlock Your Potential” (*Obudź swój potencjał*) for NEETs aged 18 to 24.

Poland has no uniform system for validating skills acquired through non-formal education (importantly, this also applies to youth volunteering, as described in Section 2.1). The [Act on the Integrated Qualification System](#) defines it as “education and training provided under programmes that do not lead to the award of a full qualification or any of the qualifications referred to in Clause 2”, i.e. a clause concerning formal education. In practice, this is reduced to automatic and unified recognition of only those qualifications that are validated through formal education, i.e. education provided by public and non-public schools and other actors in the education system, higher education institutions and other bodies in the higher education system through programmes that lead to obtaining a full qualification or a qualification awarded upon completion of post-graduate studies on the basis of regulations contained in the relevant legal acts.

### **Financial support**

In addition to the sources previously described, it is possible to obtain funding in the form of a subsidy from public funds; primarily local government funds. The provisions of the [Regulation of the Minister of Family, Labour and Social Policy](#) apply to subsidy granting procedures. As regards the actions in question, the basis for the award of a subsidy may be the public tasks referred to in Article 4 of the [Act on Public Benefit and Volunteer Work](#), and in particular “activities for the integration and re-integration of people at risk of exclusion”, “promotion of employment and activation of those not in employment and at risk of dismissal”, and “activities for the benefit of children and youth”. However, there is no integrated information system on the sources of funding available for activities aimed at integration of youth into the labour market.

### **Quality assurance**

As in the case of other youth inclusion actions, there is also no separate nationwide monitoring and quality assurance (evaluation) system for labour market measures. Similarly, only specific projects, especially those co-financed from European funds, are subject to evaluation. The “Updated Implementation Plan for the Youth Guarantee Initiative in Poland” (*Zaktualizowany Plan Realizacji Gwarancji dla Młodzieży w Polsce*) (described in Section 4.7.2) contains provisions indicating a division of responsibilities in this area between two ministries: the Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Policy, which

is to supervise its implementation in technical terms and supervise OHP as regards activities for young people, including their funding, while the Ministry of Development is to define the principles and monitor the correctness of spending funds allocated from the European Social Fund for the implementation of the Youth Guarantee Initiative and the Youth Employment Initiative, and to prepare reports on the use of the funding from the Youth Employment Initiative and the European Social Fund.

## 4.8 Current Debates and Reforms

As described in Section 4.4 (Inclusive Programmes for Young People), "[The National Programme for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion 2020](#)" (*Krajowy Program Przeciwdziałania Ubóstwu i Wykluczeniu Społecznemu 2020*) has been incorporated into the Long-Term National Development Strategy, but it is unclear what the status of this document is at the moment. The governmental strategy currently in operation is the "[Strategy for Responsible Development](#)" (*Strategia na rzecz Odpowiedzialnego Rozwoju*) prepared by the Ministry of Regional Development, also referred to, in official presentations, as the "[Plan for Responsible Development](#)" (*Plan na rzecz Odpowiedzialnego Rozwoju*). The document does not refer directly to the young generation, but the summaries made available by the Ministry of Regional Development show that the key goal for the government is to increase the prosperity of Poles and reduce the number of people at risk of poverty and social exclusion by 2020. The Strategy is controversial, especially the viability of its assumptions regarding revenues and, consequently, the spending allocated for its implementation. The key outcome is intended to be an increase in the average income of households to reach 76-80% of the EU average by 2020, and nearly equating it with the EU average by 2030, while striving to reduce income disparities between regions and to reduce the proportion of people at risk of poverty and social exclusion to 20% in 2020 (17% in 2030).

Furthermore, Poland is witnessing two major discussions about the situation of the young generation. One concerns the implementation and effects of the "Family 500 +" scheme (*Rodzina 500 +*) (described in Section 4.6 Access to Quality Services) – even the greatest sceptics do not undermine the evident positive effects of a substantial and rapid reduction in poverty, especially among children and adolescents, resulting in very high social support for the scheme. The major controversies are, however, about the actual and long-term impact of the scheme on improvement of the demographic situation, the unjust mechanisms affecting primarily single parents, the possibility of fraud, the financial security of the State in the face of such high social security expenditures and the associated doubts about the stability of the scheme ([critics](#) point to the lack of a sustainable source and mechanism of funding the scheme), and the selective nature of the scheme, which does not propose simultaneous development of any other forms of support, such as increasing the number of creches and kindergartens, extra pre-schools hours for a zloty, annual parental leave, education opportunities in nurseries aimed at equalising attainment for all children, or facilitating access to child minders. Critics of the scheme also underline the far-reaching negative effects of the scheme, which will result in women resigning from their job, which will make it harder to find employment at a later time and significantly reduce their pension benefits.

The second discussion concerns the impact of the [reform of the school system](#), which will be implemented in September 2017 and proposes the abolition of lower secondary schools (*gimnazjum*) (in the 2021/2022 school year they will have been completely phased out) and bringing back eight-grade primary schools, four-year high schools and five-year technical schools, as well as two-level trade schools to replace vocational schools. The debate over the role of lower secondary schools (*gimnazjum*) in the educational process seems to be crucial – the Ministry of National Education argues that lower secondary schools have not fulfilled the hopes of equalising the educational opportunities of children from different backgrounds, while some researchers point out that in the period from 2000 to 2012 the differences in results have decreased, which was primarily due to improvement of the results of the weakest pupils, the differences

between students with low and high socio-economic status have decreased, and the influence of social background on the choice of upper secondary school has decreased – and they [attribute these effects](#) to the role played by lower secondary schools, especially in rural areas and small towns.

## **5. Participation**

Polish young people's participation in representative democracy is currently being debated. Young people's membership of political parties, trade unions and other traditional organisations active on the political scene is low. As is the case in the rest of Europe, the lowest voter turnout for elections is among the 18-24 demographic. It is also in this group that support for extreme political solutions is relatively high. On the other hand, however, active development of alternative forms of young people's participation in social life is on the rise. These alternative forms are mainly initiated by non-governmental organisations. The common presence and relatively strong position of student governments do not always guarantee their real influence on the situation in schools. Citizenship education provided in schools enjoys extensive support in the form of programmes and projects offered by the government, EU and representatives of the Third Sector. All of the above circumstances give an ambiguous and not easily evaluable picture of active citizenship.

### **5.1 General context**

#### **Main concepts**

##### **Institutions of representative democracy**

Poland is a parliamentary democracy. Parliament is selected in a free democratic election process which adheres to the principles of universal suffrage. The term of office is four years. The Polish Parliament is composed of two houses elected in different ways and having different powers and competences. Active electoral (voting) rights are granted to citizens who have turned 18 years of age. The right to stand for election (passive suffrage) differs depending on the type of election. Poland is divided into 16 provinces (*Polish: województwo*), with districts and communes as local administrative units. The central government operates at national, provincial and district levels, whereas local governments operate at the level of provinces, districts and communes. Presidents are elected for five years in a separate presidential election process, which also adheres to the suffrage principle. The president is the head of the state.

Polish young people's participation in representative democracy is currently being debated. Young people's membership of political parties, trade unions and other traditional organisations active on the political scene is low. As is the case in the rest of Europe, the lowest voter turnout for elections is among the 18-24 demographic. It is also in this group that support for extreme political solutions is relatively high. On the other hand, however, active development of alternative forms of young people's participation in social life is on the rise. These alternative forms are mainly initiated by non-governmental organisations. The common presence and relatively strong position of student governments do not always guarantee their real influence on the situation in schools. Citizenship education provided in schools enjoys extensive support in the form of programmes and projects offered by the government, EU and representatives of the Third Sector. All of the above circumstances give an ambiguous and not easily evaluable picture of active citizenship.

## 5.2 Youth participation in representative democracy

### Young people as voters

In general, Polish age limits for participation in representative democracy seem to be moderately restrictive. However, the same voting age limit applies to all levels and types of democratic procedures, although there are some differences regarding the minimum age for candidates running for president or for the position of local level executives. Regardless of the type (presidential, parliamentary) and level (local, national and European) of elections, young people acquire voting rights having attained the age of 18 not later than on the day of voting.

Only Polish citizens have the right to vote and be elected in national elections. Since 2004, Polish national law has had to comply with the requirements of the European Union and therefore it guarantees voting rights to EU citizens permanently residing in the territory of a commune and the right to stand for election in communal elections. This excludes the right to stand for local election for executive posts.

The Constitution of the Republic of Poland defines the age at which citizens may enjoy voting rights. Article 62 states that on the day citizens attain the age of 18, they acquire the right to elect the President of the Republic of Poland as well as Parliamentary deputies, senators and local government representatives. The [initiative of lowering the voting age limit](#) applicable to the above types of election would require a Parliamentary majority being in favour of amending the Basic Law. The statutory lowering of the voting age limit is only possible in the case of European parliamentary elections.

Plans to lower the voting age limit resulted from initiatives undertaken by some political groups and in non-governmental circles. In 2003, the Freedom Union (*Unia Wolności*) proposed the participation of people aged 16-17 in the EU accession referendum. In 2010, the Civic Platform (*Platforma Obywatelska*) tried to [sound out the idea](#) of allowing junior youth to vote in local government elections. The [demand to lower the voting age limit for all types of elections](#) re-emerged in 2013 thanks to the party Your Move (*Twój Ruch*) (formerly the Palikot Movement) (*Ruch Palikota*).

The initiative to lower the voting age limit to 16 is not winning wide public support. Surveys show that not more than 15% of adult Poles are in favour (Waszak, Zbieranek 2011), however, youth organisations [are quite supportive](#).

There are no age-based legal regulations in Poland that would facilitate participation in democratic procedures (elections, referendums). Disabled young people or those in restricted access establishments ([hospitals, prisons and conscripted army units in the past](#)) may use the facilities to which they are entitled in the same way as representatives of all other age groups.

The turnout of the youngest age groups in Poland is significantly lower than the average overall population turnout. However, since the mid-1990s an upward trend has been observed. More and more young people participate in elections. Just like the whole population of Poland, young Poles mainly vote in presidential and parliamentary elections. The poorest turnout is for local government and European elections. The table below shows the turnout by selected age groups.

### Young people as political representatives

The Political Parties Act (*Ustawa o partiach politycznych*) states that anyone aged over 18 may be a member of a political party in Poland. Most political parties liaise with various youth organisations. The nature of those relationships is very diversified. Some of them are officially affiliated youth organisations within political parties, some have the status of associated organisations or those loosely cooperating.

The [latest data](#) provided by the Central Statistical Office shows, that political parties have a total of 298,000 members which is almost equal to 1% of the overall population aged

over 18. Surveys show, that in the period from 2013 to 2015 the percentage of active members of political parties fluctuated from 3.2 to 4.2%.

In 2014, 14 political parties (versus 9 in 2012) out of a total of 54 participating in the survey declared that they worked with youth organisations operating either within their party structures or acting as independent associations. In 2014 they had 16,500 members, which accounts for 5.5% of all members of political parties. 92% of them (15,400) were young people who were members of affiliated youth organisations within political parties represented in Polish Parliament. Under 18's accounted for slightly over 7% of all members of youth organisations within political parties. The percentage of female members of youth organisations operating within political parties was [34.4%](#). Data on the age structure of members of actual political parties is not easily available, so it can only undergo selective analysis. For example, in 2013 the Civic Platform (*PO - Platforma Obywatelska*) had 3,400 members aged 18-24 (8%) and 15,500 members aged 25-40 (36%). Age demographic structures can vary significantly from party to party.

#### Young people as candidates in elections

The Election Code is a document which contains all the regulations concerning the voting age limit and the age limit to stand for election in Poland (Journal of Laws 2011 No. 21 item 112). Among other things, it sets the minimum age of candidates participating in various categories of democratic elections. Art. 10 (1) of the Code states that voting rights can be exercised as follows:

- 1) In the case of parliamentary, Senate and presidential elections- Polish nationals who attain the age of 18 not later than on the day of voting can exercise their right to vote;
- 2) In the case of European Parliamentary elections in the Republic of Poland- Polish nationals who attain the age of 18 not later than on the day of voting and European Union nationals who are not citizens of Poland and who attain the age of 18 not later than on the day of voting and permanently reside in the territory of the Republic of Poland can exercise their right to vote.
- 3) in the case of local government elections:
  - a) commune councils - Polish nationals and European Union nationals who are not citizens of Poland and who attain the age of 18 not later than on the day of voting and permanently reside in the territory of the relevant commune can exercise their right to vote,
  - b) district councils and provincial parliaments - Polish nationals and who attain the age of 18 not later than on the day of voting and who permanently reside in the territory of the relevant district or province can exercise their right to vote;
- 4) in mayoral elections in a commune - people having the right to elect the council of that commune can exercise their right to vote.

Under Art. 11 (1), the right to stand for election in each category is as follows:

- 1) For Parliamentary Elections (*Sejm*) - Polish nationals who have the right to vote in parliamentary elections and attain the age of 21 not later than on the day of voting;
- 2) For Senate Elections - Polish nationals who have the right to vote in Senate elections and attain the age of 30 not later than on the day of voting;
- 3) For Presidential Elections- Polish nationals who have the right to vote in presidential elections and attain the age of 35 not later than on the day of voting while enjoying full voting rights in parliamentary elections;
- 4) For European Parliament Elections in Poland - people enjoying voting rights in European Parliament Elections in the Republic of Poland who attain the age of 21 not

later than on the day of voting and have permanently resided in the Republic of Poland or in the territory of other member state of the European Union for 5 years;

5) For Local Government Elections - people enjoying the right to vote in local government elections;

6) For Mayoral elections - Polish nationals enjoying voting rights in such elections who attain the age of 25 not later than on the day of voting; however, candidates do not have to permanently reside in the territory of the commune where they are a candidate (Journal of Laws 2011 No. 21 item 112).

Polish legislation does not mention any parities relating to the age of candidates on an electoral ticket.

In the autumn of 2015 there were 17 under-30s in the Polish Parliament. They accounted for 3.7% of all Members of Parliament, compared with 10 persons of that age in the previous term of Parliament. Consequently, Poland ranked 49<sup>th</sup> in [the global ranking of youth participation](#), where the global average was 1.9%, and the European - 3.1%.

Although there is some data concerning candidate age in the most recent election, it is not accurate. However, certain general theses can be advanced. It is the candidates' average age that is most frequently quoted in announcements. It is understandably higher in the case of elections where higher age limits apply. In 2015 [the average age of all Parliamentary](#) candidates was 42, for women - 42 and for men - 43. Compared with the 2011 elections, the average age of candidates had dropped by a year (44 years in 2011). In the 2014 local government elections, [the average age of candidates](#) was 46 (candidates for councillors) and in the 2014 European Parliamentary Election - 45. The average candidate age in elections of mayors and city presidents was 49, with the minimum age limit for standing for election being 25. The 2015 presidential election witnessed a generational change. The election was won by Andrzej Duda who was 43 years old at the moment of being sworn in as Poland's president. Therefore, he became the youngest president and head of state in Europe (except for Kosovo) and [one of the youngest in the world](#).

## **5.3 Youth representation bodies**

### **Youth parliament**

The Polish political system provides no comprehensive solution to the youth question. Although there are legislative pathways enabling dialogue between youth and policy makers at various levels of political authority, they do not form a coherent and effective system. At the moment, the nature and operating principles of Polish youth's representation are being debated. Two positions have emerged: The first view proposes to select a youth representation at grass-root level and, as a result of cooperation between organisations, bringing together young people. According to the second view, the composition of bodies representing Poland on the provincial and national level should be selected with increased or exclusive participation of government representatives (at central level) and representatives of Government administration (at provincial level)

Issues concerning the inclusion of all youth groups

There are forums bringing together youth with special needs, for example [organisations for disabled students](#) operating in higher education institutions, but there are no specific programmes encouraging young people with fewer opportunities or at risk of exclusion to increase their participation in representative bodies. In the case of the process of effective consultation and opinion seeking, the way in which children and youth representations are selected is more likely to attract elites, outstanding individuals with high social, economic or cultural capital than youth at risk of exclusion. For example, neither of the positions described above provides for mechanisms guaranteeing that disabled young people, those living in rural areas or those discriminated against in any way will have a sufficient representation at national level. Although the demand to

equalise opportunities is relatively well adopted at the level of programme beneficiaries, in Poland the concept of “those excluded” from being full members of groups “representing” young people and their interests before the authority is something rather “unthinkable” in Poland.

### Structure

There is no bona fide children and youth parliament in Poland operating as an institution elected by general election and thus possessing democratic legitimacy. [The Children and Youth Parliament](#) (*Sejm Dzieci i Młodzieży*) is a representative institution in name only. In reality, this is an educational project of the Polish Parliament Chancellery and is not an element of the legal system. Its nature is purely didactic, consultative and opinion-forming. In addition to the Polish Parliament Chancellery, the Ministry of National Education and several other entities, including non-governmental entities, participate in its organisation.

### Composition

In light of the absence of a democratically elected youth parliament, the Children and Youth Parliament sometimes plays the role of a forum bringing attention to issues considered important by young Poles. The Children and Youth Parliament brings together 460 students of lower and upper secondary schools who are selected on the basis of competitions. Young deputies are appointed for a term of one year and they meet once a year at a plenary session.

### Role and responsibilities

Each term of the Children and Youth Parliament focusses on a specific keynote topic. Apart from that, plenary sessions offer Parliament members an opportunity to present their viewpoints, opinions and proposals concerning the activities of authorities, especially those governing education, aimed at the improvement of children’s and young people’s situation. The Children and Youth Parliament adopts resolutions which are subsequently submitted to representatives of the legislature and the executive. Plenary sessions held by the Children and Youth Parliament include speakers and deputy speakers of the upper and lower houses as well as selected members of Parliament. Sessions of the Children and Youth Parliament which are traditionally held on 1 June (International Children’s Day) enjoy impressive media coverage which contributes to raising public awareness of children’s and young people’s problems. Keynote topics discussed in the Children and Youth Parliament in recent years include:

### Funding

The Children and Youth Parliament has no legal personality which is why it does not possess any financial resources nor does it make decisions on the distribution of public funds. It can only suggest certain activities in this field. The organisational costs of the Children and Youth Parliament are covered by the Chancellery of Polish Parliament and the other organisers.

## Youth councils and/or youth advisory boards

It is difficult to present a synthetic description of the whole system of youth organisations operating in Poland as there are significant differences between bodies representing young people. For example, Poland’s two basic organisations representing youth at central level have different origins, structures and missions, whereas regional and local bodies representing young people are better empowered by the legal system thanks to statutory provisions. However, a great extent of their scope of activity is not standardised which is why there are immense differences in the process of recruitment and the role, scope of responsibility and possibilities of tangible action.

### Structure

[The Children and Youth Council of the Republic of Poland](#) (*RDIM - Rada Dzieci i Młodzieży Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej*) was appointed as an advisory and consultative body operating

at national level by the Minister of National Education on the strength of an act in the first half of 2016. It is an advisory body operating under the authority of the Minister of National Education.

The Polish Council of Youth Organisations (*PROM - Polska Rada Organizacji Młodzieżowych*) was appointed as a union of associations in 2011. Although it operates under the auspices of the Ministry of National Education and receives targeted subsidies, it remains an independent non-governmental organisation from a legal viewpoint.

The activity of municipal youth councils and communal youth councils is regulated by the Local Government Act whose Article 5 (b) states that: following an application from the communities concerned, the commune council may give consent to the establishment of a communal youth council of a consultative nature (Journal of Laws 1990 No. 16 item 95 as amended). The role of the commune council is of paramount importance here as it determines the scope of tasks, prerogatives, formal statutes and the voting system of its youth council. Unfortunately, there are no similar provisions at the level of districts or provinces, which is why youth representations operating there often take the form of associations or bodies appointed as part of social consultation.

#### Composition

The Children and Youth Council of the Republic of Poland operating under the authority of the Minister of National Education is composed of 16 members and 16 deputy members representing all provinces. Membership is comprised of individuals selected by the Ministry of National Education from among young applicants taking part in open recruitment procedures. They are selected on the basis of competencies and experiences (activity, engagement, previous work for organisations). Lower- and upper secondary school students who are 13 or over may become members of the Council, as well as lower- and upper secondary school leavers until they turn 21. They are appointed for a term of one year. The Council elects its President and Vice-Presidents from within.

Membership of the Polish Council of Youth Organisations is open to any youth organisation who adhere to the following criteria: Any youth organisation operating in accordance with Polish law, co-administered by people under 35 and with at least 2/3 of members under 35, or those bringing together young people as an association or a legal person with organisational structures described in their statutes and with at least 2/3 of members under 35. The Polish Council of Youth Organisations is open to public, nationwide and regional organisations and to those which bring together particular groups of youth (e.g.: students). Each of those categories of organisations has its separate structure in the Council. Representatives of all full members (organisations) of the Polish Council of Youth Organisations elect a ten-strong management board from among themselves which takes a vote to elect the authorities of the association. Individuals sitting on the Council's management board are delegated by their own organisations but it is their duty to represent the interests of all young people in Poland.

The most common practice is that communal and municipal youth councils recruit their members by electing them. Usually, all lower- and upper secondary school students and - more rarely - primary school pupils from the relevant administrative area have the right to vote. Elections are usually organised in schools in close cooperation with the student government and teachers. This school-based electoral system has a certain disadvantage as it means excluding young people not in education who do not always possess the appropriate qualifications or competences to participate in the political or civic life of their local community (Sińczuch, 2012). Youth councillors are usually elected for one year or two years. Councils are usually autonomous in choosing their authorities and subcommittee members. About 200 communal and municipal youth councils are currently registered in Poland which means that youth councils operate within every 12th local government unit (8%).

## Role and responsibilities

The letter appointing the Children and Youth Council of the Republic of Poland operating under the authority of the Minister of National Education states that its tasks include expressing opinions and presenting proposals concerning children and young people in the scope of matters remaining within the remit of the education and upbringing area of the government administration. In particular they present opinions on planned changes, and include proposed solutions. There was some controversy surrounding the appointment of the Council. The Ministry was accused of having a lack of vision regarding the scope and scale of the Council's role within the system of legislation and social consultation.

The objectives of the Polish Council of Youth Organisations include: "the promotion of youth participation in public life, the provision of information to public opinion about the state of youth policy in Poland and the representation of member organisations". However, its [principal role](#) is to undertake activities aimed at the creation of a coherent and modern youth policy in Poland. The Council also represents its member organisations before the public sector and other circles; disseminates information and promotes the activity of youth organisations bringing together young people and acting on their behalf. In 2013-2015 the Polish Council of Youth Organisations was granted the status of an organisation officially authorised to represent Polish youth at EU youth conferences. It co-operates with entities such as the Public Benefit Activities Council (*Rada Działalności Pożytku Publicznego*), the Visegrad Group, and the European Youth Forum (*Europejskie Forum Młodzieży*), to name but a few.

The objectives of communal and municipal youth councils are not statutorily defined, they are usually of a consultative nature. [Communal and municipal youth councils](#) are most frequently consulted about youth issues such as education, culture, sport, safety, communication and others. Apart from their advisory and consultative activities for local governments, those councils are meant to promote active citizenship and democratic practices among young people as well as identify the local needs of young people in their community.

## Funding

Polish bodies representing young people seldom have a real opportunity to influence the distribution of funds. The costs of the activities undertaken by them and their day to day operational costs are usually covered by direct funding or targeted subsidies coming from the central budget or local government funds.

Communal and municipal youth councils cannot have their own budgets as they have no legal entity status. However, this situation is now changing due to the dissemination of the formula of participatory budgeting. [Some communes](#) are introducing separate participatory budgeting for youth.

## Higher education student union(s)

### Structure

[The Student Parliament of the Republic of Poland](#) (*PSRP - Parlament Studentów Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej*) is a nationwide representation of all student governments. Its objectives, tasks, structure and electoral procedures are determined in the Act on Higher Education (Journal of Laws 2005, No. 164, item 1365). It is an independent and self-organised body possessing the status of a legal entity.

### Composition

The Student Parliament of the Republic of Poland is an umbrella organisation for all student governments operating in Poland. Pursuant to the Act, all students of a higher education institution form its student government. Quoting the exact number of people holding positions in student government bodies across the country is difficult. However, assuming that 4-6 persons per faculty are members of student government authorities,

then, depending on the Higher Education Institution (HEI), about 0.3% to 1% of the total student population would be represented. 154 delegates participated in the most recent national assembly of the Student Parliament of the Republic of Poland. They represent various HEIs, regardless of their type of ownership and functioning. Each delegate representing a HEI educating between 1000 and 4000 students has one vote. Delegates representing HEI's with 4000-10,000 students have two votes and another vote is given for another 10,000 students above this number. Delegates elect their Chairperson and statutory organs - the Executive Council, Student Council and the Review Commission - [for a two-year term of office](#). Delegate assemblies take place at least once during each two-year term of office of the statutory organs of the Student Parliament of the Republic of Poland, whereas Executive Council sessions occur at least once a month. Student Council sessions are scheduled in separate regulations adopted at the beginning of a new term of office. The Executive Council is the Student Parliament's collegial executive body. The Executive Council is composed of the Chairperson of the Student Parliament of the Republic of Poland and of not fewer than 2, but not more than 6, Executive Council Members. Executive Council members are appointed and dismissed by the Chairperson of the Student Parliament of the Republic of Poland on the strength of a decree, which is subsequently ratified by the Assembly (or, when outside the period of Assembly deliberations – the decree is ratified by the Student Council). The decision of the Chairperson of the Student Parliament of the Republic of Poland specifies the tasks of Executive Council members. The Student Council is composed of the Chairperson of the Student Parliament of the Republic of Poland and 12 members appointed by the Assembly. [All main organs of the Student Parliament](#) of the Republic of Poland are appointed for a term of two years.

#### Role and responsibilities

The basic task of the Student Parliament of the Republic of Poland consists in representing student communities before state organs. Parliamentary representatives participate in the work of public administration bodies, Parliament and Senate Commissions. The Student Parliament of the Republic of Poland gives opinion on legislation concerning the Polish higher education system and students' privileges and rights. It is Poland's only representative body in the European Student Union. The specific objectives of the Student Parliament of the Republic of Poland are specified in its Statute as:

- "1) representing and promoting students' educational, social, economic and cultural needs;
- 2) protecting the rights and interests of all students in the country and Polish students abroad;
- 3) creating and promoting student attitudes oriented towards active cooperation in the development of civil society;
- 4) identifying and removing barriers to young people's academic, cultural and sports development;
- 5) supporting student governance;
- 6) improving young people's knowledge, skills and social competences through the provision of informative, scientific and cultural activities relating to higher education, education, upbringing and physical culture;
- 7) supporting student mobility".

The Student Parliament of the Republic of Poland also gives its opinion on draft legislation and selects 4 representatives to sit on the General Council for Science and Higher Education (*Rada Główna Nauki i Szkolnictwa Wyższego*). The Student Parliament of the Republic of Poland elects an [ombudsman for students](#) whose tasks include intervening when students' rights are endangered, especially in dealings with HEI authorities.

## Funding

The Student Parliament of the Republic of Poland receives budgetary funding from the Ministry of Science and Higher Education. As an institution with the status of a legal entity it is also in a position to accept donations and bequeathed inheritances. The Review Panel appointed by delegates at assemblies is responsible for auditing the Student Parliament of the Republic of Poland. The Chairperson and authorities of the Student Parliament of the Republic of Poland assume full responsibility resulting from their duties, on general principles applicable to entities being legal persons. The activities of student governments in HEIs and at faculties are funded by the relevant academic authorities.

## School student union(s)

The scope of responsibility of Polish school student governments is provided in Article 55 of the Education System Act of 7 September 1991. The most important responsibilities of Polish school student governments include electing class representatives, electing each school's student government, as well as ensuring school student participation in the School Council. Moreover, those who are members of school student governments have the right to submit motions and opinions regarding all school matters, - especially those relating to the observance of basic student rights - to school councils, teaching staff and heads of school. School student governments have the right to influence the organisation of school life in a way that ensures an appropriate balance between learning efforts and opportunities for developing and pursuing pupils'/students' own interests. Moreover, school student governments have the right to conduct cultural, educational, sport and leisure activities as well as information activities such as editing and publishing school newspapers, maintaining webpages, operating the school radio station etc. School students being members of school student governments have the right to choose teachers responsible for their governments and to be acquainted with curricula, their contents, objectives and requirements. The organisation and structure of school student governments depends on the students themselves. The only condition is that regulations governing the principles of electing school student governments and describing their activities should be adopted by the whole population of students in a school through a process of voting by equitable, secret and universal ballot. School student governments are an important element in school governance along with Heads of school and school councils. There is no body in Poland which would play the role of an official representation of school student governments. Issues relating to the observance of school students' rights are the responsibility of ombudsmen for school students operating under the authority of provincial school superintendents. The Children and Youth Council operating under the authority of the Minister of National Education is supposed to play the role of a nationwide representation of school students (but not school student governments).

## Other bodies

The powers of entities representing youth at national level are predominantly limited. Sometimes individual youth organisations speak in the name of their members, although it would be difficult to quote spectacular examples of the effectiveness of such activities. Representatives of authorities organise traditional meetings with young people. Such meetings are held both at national and local levels. Although they prove the authorities' interest in such issues, rarely do they bring durable results such as legislative initiatives or propositions of specific solutions. Therefore, it is difficult to perceive them as representational bodies. Youth representation at regional level is very diversified. Practically every province can boast of some example of a forum focussed on youth which claims to represent young people. Some of those bodies are elected by young people by direct ballot, others are more in the style of conventions or conferences of local youth organisations.

## **5.4 Young people's participation in policy-making**

### **Formal Mechanisms of Consultation**

Formal basis consultation where young people act as a group authorised to take a position and express their opinion is held at local (communal and municipal youth councils) and central levels ([The Children and Youth Council](#) operating under the authority of the Minister of National Education, [The Polish Council of Youth Organisations](#) (PROM), The Student Parliament of the Republic of Poland, The Children and Youth Parliament). Consultation at regional level is not formalised although there are, or were, youth representation structures in some provinces. [A government expert's opinion](#) issued in 2005 and concerning the possibility of youth organisations participating in the system of public consultation accurately evaluates its principles, albeit it is perhaps too optimistic as to their implementation. "Under the regulations which are currently in force, non-governmental organisations representing young people's interests may express opinions about proposed normative acts, governmental, regional and local programmes, they may initiate activities for youth, disseminate the idea of voluntary service and conduct informative activities".

Consultation exercises with the participation of young people mainly focus on issues relating to the situation of youth. They relate to education, especially higher education, school students' and students' rights, but also to activities shaping the principles of youth participation in public life, membership of organisations, supporting active participation, etc. Youth can be one of the groups that are involved in consultations concerning infrastructural investments, mainly in sport, recreation or culture.

At local level, the consultation process usually consists of the youth council or its internal commission adopting a particular stance, which is preceded by a debate aimed at familiarising themselves with the specifics of the subject matter. Sometimes on account of the initiative of young people, consultation exercises adopt a more interesting character. Public debates, plebiscites and surveys as well as happening-like activities are the most frequently organised events. At central level, consultation usually consists in the relevant body adopting a given stance on a particular matter. Most of the time stances are taken after debates which conclude in a round of voting. They are then publicly announced and submitted to the institutions concerned.

In Poland there is no special system of social consultation which would recognise young people as a particular group. Youth participation in the process of developing political governance follows the demarcation line determined by formal and legal statuses linked to the boundaries of youth. The first of them is age-related. As Polish young people come of age, they may access all legal forms of participation in public and social life. They can vote, participate in public consultation, join organisations and participate in all sorts of protests.

At the same time, there are no mechanisms which would facilitate the distinction of all young adults regardless of their socio-economic status or gender. On the other hand, being able to influence certain aspects of political reality is an attribute of certain youth groups - for example students whose representatives are statutorily included in the process of consultation concerning legal changes in higher education institutions. The effectiveness of informal political measures, such as protests or demonstrations initiated by youth which can be seen as a source of specific political decisions, is quite a separate matter. In this case there are two problems: how to objectively measure the youth percentage in particular protests, and - if the participation of young people is beyond doubt - how to prove their influence on politicians' particular reactions.

In the case of the only youth-specific form of political participation laid down in legislation; that is communal and municipal youth councils, the limits to youth participation in policy-making at local level are described only in general terms. At the same time, there are no government directives at national level which would oblige state institutions, government agencies or other entities to conduct consultation

exercises within youth communities as such. Any legislative initiatives put forward as government proposals must undergo public consultation. However, the legislator neither specifies its methods nor clearly defines which groups would have to participate. Young citizens may participate in consultation just like all others, providing they have attained 18 years of age.

## Actors

Young people's presence in the political process is particularly visible in two areas. The first of these areas is science and higher education with undoubtedly the highest youth participation in the process of developing politics and evaluating various solutions. The other area is youth policy. As mentioned in the previous paragraph the Student Parliament of the Republic of Poland plays a consultative role and gives its opinion on all changes to legal regulations affecting students. Adopted standpoints taken by the Student Parliament of the Republic of Poland are publicly accessible. Four members of the Student Parliament of the Republic of Poland, indicated by the Student Council of the Student Parliament of the Republic of Poland, form part of the [General Council for Higher Education](#) (*Rada Główna Szkolnictwa Wyższego*). They are members of the Education Commission and the Economic and Legal Commission. During their two-year term of office, student representatives have the same powers as the remaining Council members. The tasks of the Education Commission include, amongst others: giving judgements on documents concerning the National Qualifications Frameworks for education areas; presenting proposals of model descriptions of learning outcomes for individual fields of study; giving judgements on draft regulations on education standards applicable to fields of study mentioned in Article 9(b) and Article 9(c) of the Act on Higher Education; giving opinions on legislation concerning higher education and on international agreements related to higher education concluded by the Republic of Poland; giving judgements on applications to provide post-graduate programmes mentioned in Article 8(8) of the Act on Higher Education; giving judgements on draft legislation concerning upper secondary education and on other legislation presented by the Minister of National Education; analysing motions presented by the Ombudsman for Graduates and concerning a decrease in the number of barriers preventing access to jobs in line with graduates' fields of study, proposing areas of study-related initiatives resulting from analysis of the process of education and graduate employability; in the Economic and Legal Commission (*Komisja Ekonomiczno-Prawna*), student representatives and the remaining Commission members deal with: giving judgements on draft state budgets in the scope of the section for which responsibility is assumed by the minister responsible for higher education and the minister responsible for science; giving judgements on the principles of allocating budgetary subsidies to HEIs; giving judgements on matters concerning funds for science and higher education allocated in particular parts of the state budget which remain at the disposal of ministers indicated in Article 33(2) of the Act on Higher Education; giving opinion on the principles of awarding research grants and those for learning achievements under Article 21 (1) (39) of the Personal Income Tax Act; giving judgements on draft legislation relating to higher education and science; giving judgements on international agreements concluded by the Republic of Poland in the area of science and higher education: proposing initiatives focussing on economic and legislative matters pertaining to science and higher education (consolidated text Journal of Laws 2012, item 572 as amended).

[The Young Researchers' Council](#) (*Rada Młodych Naukowców*) is another body operating under the authority of the Minister of Science and Higher Education. It was appointed as a consultative body in October 2015 on the strength of a resolution and its members were indicated by the Minister. The Council performs the following tasks: identification of the existing and future barriers to the development of young researchers' careers; preparation of recommendations concerning instruments supporting young researchers' careers; presentation of science funding mechanisms to young researchers; provision of support to young researchers liaising with representatives of economic circles and institutions implementing innovative solutions in science; implementation of the

provisions of EURAXESS and the Code of Practice while recruiting research workers in research units. The Council has successfully: changed regulations in ministerial grant programmes, modified the definition of a young researcher, introduced changes to post-doctoral thesis requirements, exempted various young researcher grants from tax, and undertaken activities aimed at a better presentation of Polish young researchers' problems. The Council posts its adopted stances on its [website](#).

### Information on the extent of youth participation

#### Outcomes

Consultations in the realm of youth policy with the participation of national youth representations and youth organisations do not have a systematic nature. No wonder as consulting something which does not exist is rather difficult, and on the other hand youth organisations are too weak and lack the clout to make themselves heard.

#### Large-scale initiatives for dialogue or debate between public institutions and young people

Not applicable

## 5.5 National strategy to increase youth participation

### Existence of a national strategy to increase young people's political and civil society participation

Currently there is no governmental strategic document whose principal aim would be to increase youth participation in civic and political life. [The Youth Strategy for 2007-2013](#) (*Strategia na rzecz młodzieży na lata 2007-2013*), and the [Youth Programme: Active Youth](#) (*Program na rzecz młodzieży: aktywna młodzież*), have not been fully implemented or have remained at the draft stage. Both documents treat the issue of increasing youth participation in political and social life as one of their priorities (Zielińska, 2009). There is currently one ministerial document which contains provisions relating to the promotion of young people's active citizenship - the ["Sectoral Programme Youth Joined in Action for 2016-2019"](#) (*Resortowy Program Młodzież Solidarna w Działaniu na lata 2016-2019*).

#### Scope and contents

This document, prepared by the Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Policy, is entitled the ["Sectoral Programme Youth Joined in Action for 2016-2019"](#) (*Resortowy Program Młodzież Solidarna w Działaniu na lata 2016-2019*). The program described in the document is a strategy for ministerial funding provided for delegated tasks aimed at the achievement of specific goals. It develops activities related to the Social Capital Development Strategy and the Human Capital Development Strategy and "extends the scope of support provided by the programme Active Forms of Social Exclusion Prevention - the 2020 new dimension, competition 3: Active youth attitudes - raising competences, entrepreneurship and environmental responsibility."

The main objective of the programme is to facilitate the creation of a space in which to develop young people's engagement influencing their identity, family, social, cultural and professional life. With regards to the stimulation of youth in the realm of civic activity, the programme aims at increasing social engagement and active citizenship as well as youth participation in cultural life. Priority III - Young citizens - envisages funding provided to activities aimed at supporting:

- Citizenship education and global education;
- young people's participation in the life of local communities and in representative democracy;
- youth participation in decision-making by extending consultation and social agreements with youth,
- participative ways of designing places of integration and leisure,

- creating and supporting regional and local youth websites,
- encouraging participation in local and national elections;
- various bodies (councils) representing youth;
- taking up local initiatives such as happenings, social activism in various areas;
- activities aimed at young people organising themselves into informal and organised groups (ordinary associations, associations, etc.);
- animating partnerships and cooperation networks.

Funding projects with the participation of 6000 end beneficiaries by 2019 is the intended end objective of the programme. This programme mainly targets young people at risk of social exclusion; young people with disabilities are also quoted as a target group. Currently there is no available information related to the stage of progress in activities funded under the project.

### **Responsible authority for the implementation of the strategy**

The document has been prepared by [the Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Policy](#).

### **Revisions/Updates**

Not applicable

## **5.6 Supporting youth organisations**

### **Legal/policy framework for the functioning and development of youth organisations**

Polish youth organisations are funded on the strength of general principles which are governed by the Public Benefit Activities and Voluntary Service Act passed on 24 April 2003 (*ustawa z dnia 24 kwietnia 2003 r. o działalności pożytku publicznego i o wolontariacie*) and the Associations Act of 7 April 1989 (*Ustawa z dnia 7 kwietnia 1989 r. Prawo o stowarzyszeniach*) as well as some other laws: for example, the Social Cooperatives Act passed on 27 April 2006 (*Ustawa z dnia 27 kwietnia 2006 r. o spółdzielniach socjalnych*, Dz.U. 2006 nr 94 poz. 651 z późn. zm.); the activity of scouting organisations is regulated by the following acts: the Act on the Common Duty to Defend the Republic of Poland passed on 21 November 1967 (*Ustawa z dnia 21 listopada 1967r. o powszechnym obowiązku obrony Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej*), Teacher's Charter passed on 26 January 1982 (*Ustawa z dnia 26 stycznia 1982r. Karta Nauczyciela*), Upbringing in Sobriety and Alcoholism Prevention Act passed on 26 October 1982 (*Ustawa z dnia 26 października 1982r. o wychowaniu w trzeźwości i przeciwdziałaniu alkoholizmowi*), Act on the Education System of 7 September 1991 (*Ustawa z dnia 7 września 1991r. o systemie oświaty*), Forest Act of 28 September 1991 (*Ustawa z dnia 28 września 1991r. o lasach*), Act on the organisation and undertaking of cultural activity passed on 25 October 1991 (*Ustawa z dnia 25 października 1991r. o organizowaniu i prowadzeniu działalności kulturalnej*), Public Benefit Activity and Voluntary Service Act passed on 24 April 2003 (*Ustawa z dnia 24 kwietnia 2003r. o działalności pożytku publicznego i o wolontariacie*), Drug Abuse Prevention Act passed on 29 July 2005 (*Ustawa z dnia 29 lipca 2005r. o przeciwdziałaniu narkomanii*), Emergency Medical Services Act passed on 8 September 2006 (*Ustawa z dnia 8 września 2006r. o Państwowym Ratownictwie Medycznym*) and the Mass Event Safety Act passed on 20 March 2009 (*Ustawa z dnia 20 marca 2009r. o bezpieczeństwie imprez masowych*). There is no document equivalent to a law or regulation which, in general terms, would: a) clearly define a youth organisation or an organisation acting for youth b) specify the terms of operation and potential support for such organisations; which differ from those relating to non-government organisations in general. Therefore, it is difficult to talk about a separate support system for youth organisations. It should be emphasised that [attempts to develop that kind of system](#) or its elements have been undertaken but have not been successful.

## Public financial support

The sources of funding for youth organisations in Poland are [diversified and dispersed](#). Apart from EU funding for youth programmes, youth organisations can [obtain funds](#) for public tasks as part of such initiatives as Youth, Youth in Action or the Erasmus+ programme. Public tasks become contracted when they have been transferred to non-governmental organisations or other entities. Contracted tasks may be transferred to non-governmental organisations, including those for young people, at central level (e.g.; agreements between non-governmental organisations and ministries, government agencies) or at a lower level (e.g.: agreements between non-governmental organisations and communes). Entities mandating youth organisations to perform such tasks must ensure the financing of the task.

## Initiatives to increase the diversity of participants

The most important objectives of government and local government policies implemented by youth organisations as part of contracted tasks relate to the following areas: education and upbringing (especially issues of participation in social and civic life), youth and children international exchanges, cultural and sports activities, tourism and recreation for children and young people, environmental protection, prevention of addiction to psychoactive substances and behavioural addictions, safety and defence, historical education, sexual education and preparation for family life, equality education, European education, promotion of volunteering and the equalisation of opportunities in the labour market. A significant proportion of tasks delegated by the Ministry of National Education and the Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Policy are linked to the equalisation of children's and youth's opportunities and are aimed at safeguarding the needs of groups at risk of social exclusion in various forms.

Non-governmental organisations providing support are a significant source of support for youth organisations. The most important of these are: The Centre for Citizen Education, The Batory Foundation, The Civitas Polonus Foundation, The Polish-German Youth Cooperation, The Polish Children and Youth Foundation, The Orange Foundation, The Foundation for the Development of Local Democracy, The Stocznia Foundation, Norwegian Funds. They take advantage of various forms of foreign governmental assistance or obtain funds from private sponsors. Supporting organisations often focus on helping youth organisations operating locally, in communities where young people have fewer opportunities, and their priority is given to supporting grass-root activity and creativity. Improving youth workers' competencies is an important type of activity. Education and training programmes are intended for teachers, youth leaders, social workers, local politicians and many other groups.

Polish legislation offers provisions which are a good starting point for close cooperation and mutual support between student councils and public benefit organisations, including youth organisations. The Act on the Education System provides that formal education is supported by non-governmental organisations, including scout organisations, as well as legal entities whose statutory activity falls within the category of education and upbringing (J. of Laws 2004, No. 256, item 2572 as amended.). Moreover - in accordance with applicable legislation (J. of Laws 2004, No. 256, item 2572 as amended.) - heads of schools or educational institutions: "[shall, in particular, create in their school or institution](#) conditions to facilitate the activity of: volunteers, associations and other organisations, especially scouting organisations whose statutory aims are to engage in educational activities and to develop and enrich the forms of teaching, pedagogical and care activities of the school or institution."

## **5.7 “Learning to participate” through formal, non-formal and informal learning**

### **Policy Framework**

Citizenship education and the development of social and civic competence in Poland are enshrined in basic strategic documents such as: [The Long-term National Development Strategy](#) (*Długookresowa Strategia Rozwoju Kraju*) and [the Social Capital Development Strategy](#) (*Strategia Rozwoju Kapitału Społecznego*). The first of these mentions [two goals](#): the development and introduction of citizenship education programmes at all levels of education with regards to life-long learning, and the development and introduction of professional support programmes for teachers. The primary school core curriculum (2017) provides a list of expected pupil attitudes, which are perceived as the intended outcomes of citizenship education:

- 1) involvement in civic activities: students become engaged in social activities;
- 2) social sensitivity: students recognise symptoms of injustice and respond to them;
- 3) responsibility: students undertake activities in their community, behave constructively in conflict situations;
- 4) sense of belonging: students feel strong bonds with local, national, European and global communities;
- 5) tolerance: students respect others’ rights to a different opinion, behaviour, habits and convictions if they pose no risk to other people; [oppose discrimination](#).”

When providing citizenship education, schools should create the following conditions allowing their students to:

- 1) have access to various sources of information and various viewpoints;
- 2) participate in discussions in classroom and school;
- 3) have a real influence on selected aspects of school life, for example as part of their student government;
- 4) build their self-esteem and develop active participation in social life as well as trust in others”.

The solid foundations of citizenship education in Poland are reflected in the number of education-related programs and initiatives supported by the government.

### **Formal learning**

Citizenship education starts at the first stage of education as an integrated subject (one hour per week in the last year of primary education). Elements of citizenship education are present in the subject “History and Society” provided from the 4th year of primary education. In lower and upper secondary schools, it is a compulsory subject in all curricula and for all school types (one hour per week) - the situation before the change of the education system in 2017. The new model of citizenship education proposes significant changes – citizenship education as a separate subject will be provided only in the last year of primary education and several important issues will be removed from the syllabus. According to [the ICCS International report](#) citizenship education in Poland is compulsory and integrated into some subjects. It includes extracurricular initiatives, as well as team work and special initiatives, but lacks classroom experiences and cross-curricular approach. Civic knowledge in Poland is evaluated on the basis of cross-country tests, the results of which were quite impressive, whereas the results for civic involvement were only average. [The latest research](#) shows that in Poland the perception of democracy as the most valuable form of government is at a level comparable with those in France and Italy. There is a great deal of visible influence exerted by NGOs working in the field of Polish young people’s civic involvement and knowledge. Citizenship education is provided to all young people. It discusses issues relating to the rights of ethnic and religious minority groups. Issues regarding some areas of the LGBT community’s rights, such as in the realm of adoption and marriage, remains a controversial area of discussion. There are special citizenship education syllabuses which

have been adapted for students with mental disabilities to take account of their cognitive skills.

### Non-formal and informal learning

Education leading to a better civic participation is one of the main topics of non-governmental youth organisations or those supporting young people in Poland. There are several programmes at national level that support various forms of civic and democratic participation. In Poland, school governments are the basic place in which to gain the social skills necessary for civic participation. The compulsory presence of pupil/student representations in schools is required by parliamentary regulations (Journal of Laws 2017, item 610). The same legislation encourages heads of schools to cooperate with non-governmental organisations and promote voluntary activities among pupils/students. Regulations and official recommendations requiring the presence of student representatives in Polish school-governing bodies apply to all levels of education (ISCED 1,2,3). The Ministry of National Education organises nationwide programmes meant to support active membership in school governments. Some examples include: [A School of Democracy - a School of Governance](#) (*Szkoła demokracji – szkoła samorządności*) or [A Summer Academy - a democratic school model](#) (*Letnia Akademia – model szkoły demokratycznej*), coordinated by the [Centre for Education Development](#) (*Ośrodek Rozwoju Edukacji*). The main body among non-governmental organisations in the field of citizenship education, the [Centre for Citizen Education](#) (*Centrum Edukacji Obywatelskiej*), organises programmes oriented towards the strengthening of the competences of students, teachers and heads of school.

### Measures to encourage student participation in the local community and wider society

Presently there are no regulations in Poland obliging pupils or students to participate in activities serving their local community outside of school, however, there are solutions oriented towards prompting those groups to engage in voluntary activities. Participation in such activities which is mentioned in student CVs is taken into account and formally recognised during the upper secondary school recruitment process and could be decisive in the case of strong competition (Journal of Laws 2017, item 610). However, such a solution is being criticised for its instrumental treatment of voluntary work. [The core curriculum](#) (*podstawa programowa*), which is an official ministerial document applicable to citizenship education for all three ISCED levels, demands that teachers strive to encourage and prompt pupils and students to take part in the social and political life of local communities and in other forms of citizenship-related activities. National priorities for voluntary activities focus on the development of youth information rather than on an encouragement or a formal obligation to perform any form of voluntary work. The thinking behind this is that the lack of interest in voluntary service is caused by [insufficient awareness](#) of its benefits among young people.

### Partnerships between formal education providers, youth organisations and youth workers

In the context of Poland differentiating between partnership and long-term cooperation can be sometimes challenging. Legal regulations encouraging schools to open up to voluntary service and cooperation with non-governmental organisations (youth organisations in particular), to create favourable conditions to establish local partnerships and co-operation for citizenship education. In practice, youth organisations (most often the scouting association), are, alongside the student councils, the most important partners of schools in initiatives promoting active participation in social and civic life. An [agreement](#) which was signed in 2010 by the Polish Scouting Association (*ZHP - Związek Harcerstwa Polskiego*) and the Ministry of National Education allows Scouting Association units to conduct educational activities in schools for the benefit of students, and exchange youth work experiences and methods. The Ministry also agreed to act as patrons for initiatives put forward by the Polish Scouting Association aimed at children and youth education and to consult draft legislation regarding children and youth

education with the Association. Although the document does not explicitly mention cooperation in enhancing citizen participation, it is difficult to imagine the absence of this aspect in joint activities. Grass-root initiatives include the creation of tools helping to form local partnerships for citizenship education. A [guidebook](#) describing how to create local synergies and co-operation networks between various groups and communities at local level is one good example of such initiatives. The guide's proposals include making use of local non-school resources (libraries, community centres), and the experience of various ancillary groups (enhancing the activities of senior citizens, former members of the local government, experience exchange between various youth groups).

### **Supporting non-formal learning initiatives focusing on social and civic competences**

The biggest projects supporting youth participation in civic and political life are run by government agencies and focus on donations, education and - to a lesser extent - on operations. They frequently include formal and non-formal education borderline activities, although they tend to be more focussed on building teacher competences and a better exploitation of the school environment, mainly by giving ideas for interesting and non-standard forms of citizenship education. The Centre for Education Development (*ORE - Ośrodek Rozwoju Edukacji*) plays the main role in this type of governmental activity at central level.

EU programmes targeting youth are [a vital contribution](#) supporting and disseminating non-formal education in the field of social and civic competences. Since 2007, projects directly aimed at the promotion of young people's participation and civic competences have been funded under such programmes as [Youth, Youth in Action and Erasmus+](#). The aim of "Youth In Democracy" (Sub-Action 1.3) was to support young people's participation in the lives of local communities, familiarising them with the mechanisms of representative democracy and encouraging youth to consciously and fully participate in public life. In 2017, one of the priorities of Action 2 in the Erasmus+/Youth programme is the promotion of solutions and activities increasing youth participation in social and public life with particular emphasis on young people at risk of exclusion. For four years now, initiatives in the field of youth and formal education have been funded under Action 3. This action also supports dialogue and relations between young people and institutions as well as those responsible for youth policy. Meetings, debates, seminars, consultation exercises and workshops focussing on the policies and activities of EU institutions targeting youth serve the implementation of project objectives.

The programme [Citizens for Democracy](#) (*Obywatele dla demokracji*) is one of the biggest programmes implemented by non-governmental institutions. From 2013 to 2017, as part of the objective "Increase of civic participation in public life", support was provided to activities aimed at involving citizens and civic organisations in public life, shaping public policies and making decisions affecting city areas, communes, cities or the whole country. The objective resulted in the implementation of 133 projects (51 of those targeted children and youth) with 56,000 participants (including children and youth). [Those projects focussed on different issues](#) and their scale varied - from projects run at central level to those run locally to address small community problems. At present, the [Batory Foundation](#) is implementing a similar project entitled "[You have a say, you have a choice](#)" (*Masz głos, masz wybór*). The Centre for Citizen Education is another organisation providing a number of educational and stimulating activities for young people. The campaign "Young people have a say" (*Młodzi mają głos*) consists in the organisation of voting in secondary schools on the eve of elections and is its most spectacular and best-known initiative. Since the project's inception in 1997, up to 200,000 young people across the whole country have participated in the project each time an election has been held. Apart from this campaign, the Centre for Citizen Education creates programmes and educational projects in the following categories: school development and improvement, citizenship education syllabuses, educational and civic projects in the field of culture, heritage and media, student government, volunteering, global responsibility, etc. Some examples of projects implemented by the

Centre for Citizen Education include: Citizenship Education in Autonomous Schools, Young Citizen, Student Government.

Examples of long-term cooperation between non-governmental organisations and the Ministry of National Education can occasionally be found, however, they usually refer to one project or groups of projects receiving ministerial support. Non-governmental synergies formed to conduct joint activities aimed at participation are quasi-partnerships. [The coalition of non-governmental organisations for the European Year of Citizens 2013](#) is an example of that kind of activity. Cross-sectoral cooperation with the participation of non-governmental organisations and assistance funding bodies is another example of such cooperation. [The initiative of legal education in upper secondary schools](#) is implemented in line with this model. The Ministry of Justice coordinates those activities and its partners are: The Ministry of National Education, the General Public Prosecutor's Office, the Supreme Bar Council, the National Notary Council, the National Bailiff Council and the Courts of Appeal. Within the framework of a school level legal education programme, schools implemented the following projects: "School education against legal exclusion" (*Edukacja szkolna przeciwko wykluczeniu prawnemu*) (in 2012-2015, financed from Norwegian and national funds), "[Pro bono Education or Mediation in youth life](#)" (*Edukacja pro bono czy Mediacja w życiu młodzieży*).

### **Quality assurance/quality guidelines for non-formal learning**

The general quality of Polish citizenship education and its results can be evaluated on the basis of comparative international studies. Expert supervision is the most commonly applied method in the case of non-formal education. All major nationwide programmes typically contain an evaluation component. However, there is no generally accepted codified quality assurance system.

### **Educators' support**

Support offered to those active in the field of citizenship education is provided under a number of programmes. Most of them offer participation in training sessions and webinars. They also provide teaching aids such as textbooks and scenarios. Larger programmes such as [Erasmus+/Youth](#) or "[Citizens for Democracy](#)" have local resident networks helping in the field as well as mobile trainer teams. "Training Trainers" is a widespread practice.

## **5.8 Raising political awareness among young people**

### **Information providers / counselling structures**

In general young Poles are not interested in political issues. Media information on participation in social and political life is formatted for middle aged recipients. The Internet is an exception to the rule. It is there that attempts of alternative forms of communication relating to politics and participation are made.

### **Youth-targeted information campaigns about democratic rights and democratic values**

Awareness campaigns are one of the most common forms of citizenship education in Europe, however, the percentage of Polish students who have participated in such activities is extremely high and reaches [92%](#). Most citizenship education programmes contain information modules. The school is the main place where that kind of information is provided, which is why these campaigns take advantage of such tools as posters, leaflets, face-to-face meetings, and frequently use multimedia. Campaigns promoting participation in elections (to ensure high turnout) are the most common form of information campaigns. Some of them are targeted mostly at young people with voting rights. The following information campaigns are examples of such activities: "[This is where I live, this is where I elect](#)" (*Tutaj mieszkam, tutaj wybieram*)[\[2\]](#), organised by the association "Cooperative of Initiatives" (*Spółdzielnia Inicjatyw*) and run online through

social media and during events and concerts organised specially to encourage young people to join the electorate roll and exercise the right to vote, targeting mainly students studying far from their place of permanent residence, the campaign [“Wherever you are, you have a say/so vote”](#) (*Gdziekolwiek będziesz, masz głos/zagłosuj*) started by the coalition “You have a say, you have a choice” in 2010 and continued until now.

The campaign [“Change the country, vote in elections”](#) (*Zmień kraj idź na wybory*) is an example of activities enjoying nationwide success and targeting mainly young people. The campaign involved over 100 non-governmental organisations. TV/radio spots and announcements in the press were provided free of charge by the almost all of the mainstream media networks, resulting in wide coverage. The campaign was recognisable by over 94% Poles and 14% of the youngest voters (18-19 years of age) said that the campaign “Change your country...” [had had a decisive influence on their participation in elections](#) (another 36% said the campaign had encouraged them to vote).

### **Promoting the intercultural dialogue among young people**

Polish youth’s attitude towards people of different religion and culture, especially of those coming from Muslim countries, is rather reluctant. Such attitudes stem from stereotypes present in media coverage and public debates [rather than from personal experience](#). Therefore, the Ombudsman suggests that more emphasis should be put on activities promoting inter-cultural dialogue and tolerance. The project [“Young Assisi. Youth for tolerance and peace”](#) (*Młody Asyż. Młodzież na rzecz tolerancji i pokoju*) is an example of activities promoting tolerance and multiculturalism, organised for over five years by the [Intercultural Dialogue Institute of John Paul II in Cracow](#). As part of the project, students search for publications relating to the main theme and collect them, maintain a website, and participate in exhibitions, conferences, workshops and shows promoting multiculturalism. They are also tasked with organising at least three events for students of their own school. It is also possible to take advantage of the workshop offer proposed by the organiser. During the [project](#), 67 schools in the whole country obtained certificates of cultural openness and tolerance. The promotion of inter-cultural dialogue and tolerance is one of the main themes of most international youth exchanges implemented in Poland as part of EU projects. In total, tens of thousands of Polish young people have participated in the programmes [Youth, Youth in Action](#) and [Erasmus+/Youth](#) within 2005-2017.

### **Promoting transparent and youth-tailored public communication**

## **5.9 E-participation**

Young people’s e-participation is now being analysed by government agencies. It is present in two fields. The first field is about counteracting the e-exclusion of certain groups of youth, mainly those from rural areas and/or socially degraded. The other field means to ensure the e-participation of government institutions and local governments and adapting their communication methods to the young generation’s communication practices. Preventing e-exclusion is an element of government strategies and sectoral documents are prepared mainly in the following ministries: [Digitalisation](#), [National Education](#), and [Family, Labour and Social Policy](#). [IT education](#) beginning in the first year of primary school is compulsory. It is provided during all years of compulsory education (till the age of 18). The improvement of IT education quality at all education levels and its usefulness is being widely discussed.

The aforementioned e-participation of government institutions involves activities aimed at increasing the social communication of governmental and non-governmental institutions by using social media. All of the main government institutions have their own websites. There is one common web system for all government institutions which is called the [Bulletin of Public Information](#) (*BIP -Biuletyn Informacji Publicznej*). It consists of unified public records online, collected in a system of standardised pages created with the general public in mind. Institutions whose participation in the BIP is compulsory are: public authorities, local government units, self-regulatory organisations (SRO –

profession or industry based), courts and tribunals, trade unions, political parties and all institutions performing public tasks financed from public funds.

Data made available on the BIP is regulated by the [Polish Law on Access to Public Information passed](#) on 6 September 2001. It is based on Article 61 of the Constitution of Poland which provides for the right to information and authorises the Polish Parliament to enact laws enshrining this right. The Law became effective in January 2002. BIP gives access to public information, public data and public assets held by public bodies, private bodies exercising public tasks, trade unions and political parties. Requests regarding specific items can be made either orally or in writing. Requests must be replied to within 14 days. Information regarding all vacancies in public administration must be announced in the BIP system; which is important from the viewpoint of young people. The introduction of e-administration in Poland is quite an advanced process, however, there are still some coverage gaps.

[Regulations](#) adopted in 2012 obligate all public administration units and all entities performing public tasks to the full adaptation of their websites to the needs of people with disabilities. The adaptation process should be performed in accordance with the rules of the WCAG 2.0 standard. A [report](#) by the Supreme Audit Office shows that the majority of audited websites partly fulfil accessibility requirements, however, only about 10% pass all of the specified parameters. [Other sources](#) state that a high level of accessibility is evident only on the websites of central institutions.

Issues of preventing e-exclusion are also dealt with by non-governmental organisations. Their aim is to ensure free access to online resources to all citizens regardless of their age, disability, affluence, equipment and software. [The Foundation "Visible" \(Widzialni\)](#) monitors the measurement of access to the networks of various social groups and implements projects aimed at those who are potentially at the biggest risk of e-exclusion - the project ["Accessible to you!" \(Dostępni dla ciebie!\)](#) may be considered an example of such activities. Its aim was to provide motivation to disabled youth as part of the [Digital Competences Centre \(Centrum Cyfrowych Kompetencji\)](#).

## **5.10 Current debates and reforms**

Currently, the establishment of a national system of youth representation is being debated. [The Children and Youth Council](#) operating under the authority of the Minister of National Education have prepared a bill regarding youth representation. Other proposals of how to solve the issue have been put forward by non-governmental organisations included in the [Polish Council of Youth Organisations](#), as well as other groups of young activists. The way in which a system of youth representation is to be appointed and its competences are a moot point. The organisations that are involved in the dialogue are trying to provide answers to the following questions: should the representation be composed of organisations or youth councils or maybe just student governments? Should the council be independent or operate under the auspices of a government agency? who should finance it and how? etc. The debate also includes the council's competences and tasks, especially going beyond the consultative form, and obtaining authorisation to initiate legislative procedures concerning youth. Increasing the competences of youth councils affiliated with local government units and the legalisation of the activity of youth representation bodies at regional (i.e. provincial) levels is another matter on the agenda. [The Parliamentary Group Supporting Youth Councils](#) Operating within Local Government Units (*Parlamentarny Zespół ds. Wspierania Młodzieżowych Rad przy Jednostkach Samorządu Terytorialnego*) is also involved in the debate.

## **6. Education and Training**

### **6.1 General context**

Main trends in young people's participation in education and training

Organisation of the education and training system

Main concepts

### **6.2 Administration and governance**

Cross-sectorial cooperation

Governance

### **6.3 Preventing early leaving from education and training (ELET)**

National strategy

Formal education: main policy measures on ELET

Addressing ELET through non-formal and informal learning and quality youth work

Cross-sector coordination and monitoring of ELET interventions

### **6.4 Validation of non-formal and informal learning**

Arrangements for the validation of non-formal and informal learning

Information and guidance

Quality assurance

### **6.5 Cross-border learning mobility**

Policy framework

Main cross-border mobility programmes for students in formal education

Promoting mobility in the context of non-formal learning, and of youth work

Quality assurance

### **6.6 Social inclusion through education and training**

Educational support

Social cohesion and equal opportunities

### **6.7 Skills for innovation**

Innovation in formal education

Fostering innovation through non-formal and informal learning and youth work

### **6.8 Media literacy and safe use of new media**

National strategy

Media literacy and online safety through formal education

**Promoting media literacy and online safety through non-formal and informal learning**

**Raising awareness about the risks posed by new media**

## **6.9 Awareness-raising about non-formal and informal learning and quality youth work**

**Information providers / counselling structures**

**Awareness raising initiatives**

## **6.10 Current debates and reforms**

# **7. Health and Well-Being**

## **7.1 General context**

**Main trends in the health conditions of young people**

**Main concepts**

## **7.2 Administration and governance**

**Governance**

**Cross-sectorial cooperation**

## **7.3 Sport, youth fitness and physical activity**

**National strategy(ies)**

**Promoting and supporting sport and physical activity among young people**

**Physical education in schools**

**Collaboration and partnerships**

## **7.4 Healthy lifestyles and healthy nutrition**

**National strategy(ies)**

**Encouraging healthy lifestyles and healthy nutrition for young people**

**Health education and healthy lifestyles education in schools**

**Peer-to-peer education approaches**

**Collaboration and partnerships**

**Raising awareness on healthy lifestyles and on factors affecting the health and well-being of young people**

## **7.5 Mental health**

**National strategy(ies)**

**Improving the mental health of young people**

## **7.6 Mechanisms of early detection and signposting of young people facing health risks**

Policy framework

Stakeholders

Guidance to stakeholders

Target groups

Funding

## **7.7 Making health facilities more youth friendly**

## **7.8 Current debates and reforms**

# **8. Creativity and Culture**

## **8.1 General context**

Main trends in young people's creativity and cultural participation

Main concepts

## **8.2 Administration and governance**

Governance

Cross-sectorial cooperation

## **8.3 National strategy on creativity and culture for young people**

Existence of a national strategy

Scope and contents

Responsible authority for the implementation of the strategy

Revisions/updates

## **8.4 Promoting culture and cultural participation**

Reducing obstacles to young people's access to culture

Disseminating information on cultural opportunities

Knowledge of cultural heritage amongst young people

## **8.5 Developing cultural and creative competences**

Acquiring cultural and creative competences through education and training

Specialised training for professionals in the education, culture and youth fields

Providing quality access to creative environments

## **8.6 Developing entrepreneurial skills through culture**

Developing entrepreneurial skills through cultural activities

Support young entrepreneurs in the cultural and creative sectors

## **8.7 Fostering the creative use of new technologies**

New technologies in support of creativity and innovation

Facilitating access to culture through new technologies

## **8.8 Synergies and partnerships**

Synergies between public policies and programmes

Partnerships between the culture and creative sectors, youth organisations and youth workers

## **8.9 Enhancing social inclusion through culture**

Fostering equality and young people involvement through cultural activities

Combating discrimination and poverty through cultural activities

## **8.10 Current debates and reforms**

# **9. Youth and the World**

## **9.1 General context**

Main concepts

Youth interest in global issues

## **9.2 Administration and governance**

Governance

Cross-sectorial cooperation

## **9.3 Exchanges between young people and policy-makers on global issues**

Global issues exchanges with policy-makers at the domestic level

Global issues exchanges with policy-makers at the international level

## **9.4 Raising awareness about global issues**

Formal, non-formal and informal learning

Youth-targeted information campaigns on global issues

Information providers

Key initiatives

## **9.5 Green volunteering, production and consumption**

Green volunteering

Green production and consumption

## **9.6 Intercontinental youth work and development cooperation**

Intercontinental youth work cooperation

## Development cooperation activities

### 9.7 Current debates and reforms

## Glossary

**Youth** - depending on the definition and context, in Poland there are several definitions of youth: it is a notion that initially included people aged 15-25. However, as a result of the implementation of new youth programmes, the upper age limit has now been raised from 25 to 29. Social policy programmes consider youth as people aged from 13 to 30. The lower age limit coincides with the time when children become "active participants shaping their environment by their own actions" and finish a certain stage of education when "they make important choices regarding their further education". The upper age limit is defined as the stage of becoming self-sufficient and setting up a household. However, under the Ombudsman for Children Act (Ustawa o Rzeczniku Praw Dziecka), "any human being is a child from conception to the age of majority", but "reaching the age of majority is regulated by separate provisions". In accordance with the above Act, the notion of "youth" could refer to people who have reached the age of majority and therefore, have turned 18 or 16. It is also accepted that "young people" are those under 34 years old as it is difficult to pinpoint the age of passing from youth to maturity. The report "Youth 2011" describing young people's situation in Poland applied the term "youth" to the age group of 15-29. It is this age range that is most frequently indicated when defining the notion of "youth".

**National Youth Law** - Polish youth policy has no systemic solutions, nor is it operated and coordinated in a consistent way. Therefore, it is impossible to indicate one official document focussing on the needs and rights of young people and regulating issues relating to them ("Youth Law"). However, this does not mean that Polish legislation does not cover young people's lives, rights and duties. Youth-related regulations are provided in various legal acts, such as the Constitution of the Republic of Poland, Family and Guardianship Code, Labour Code, Juvenile Proceedings Act, Education Law, Act on Higher Education, Post-graduate Placements Act or the Associations Act. For more information please see the chapter 1 Youth Policy Governance.

**National Youth Strategy** - the "State Strategy for Youth for 2003-2012" (Strategia Państwa dla Młodzieży na lata 2003-2012) (Strategy) prepared before Poland's accession to the EU remains the only document determining the development and directions of Polish youth policy. Currently, there is no strategy in Poland directly relating to young people. The Strategy emphasises the links that exist between youth policy and legal regulations concerning education, social welfare, national defence, employment and combating unemployment, children's living conditions in families, healthcare, as well as prevention of crime, drug addiction and alcohol abuse.

**Volunteering** - deliberate, voluntary activity that goes beyond the ties of family, friends and colleagues" and, as a consequence, a **volunteer** is "any natural person who out of their own free will, voluntarily and for no fee provides services to organisations, institutions or individuals that go beyond the ties of family and friends"

**Career guidance at Voluntary Labour Corps (*Ochotnicze Hufce Pracy*)** - Voluntary Labour Corps (OHP) are government-financed entities supervised by the Minister of Family, Labour and Social Policy. The target audience of the actions undertaken by OHP are:

- Minors (aged 15 to 17) from educationally malfunctioning backgrounds who are not fulfilling their schooling and educational obligations, have problems with graduating, and need to acquire vocational qualifications.
- Persons aged 18 to 25, including those who are looking for a job or want to be retrained, unemployed, school graduates, and students.

OHP, as labour market institutions, provide free services to young people, including job placement and career guidance and information services; conduct workshops on active job searching; organise training; and implement labour market schemes (e.g. under the Youth Guarantee Initiative).

**Student Career Centres (*Akademickie Biura Karier*)** - Student Career Centres are entities whose mission is the professional activation of students and graduates of higher education, run by a higher education institution or a student organisation, whose duties include:

- providing students and graduates with information on the labour market and opportunities for improving professional qualifications,
- collection, classification and dissemination of job, internship and work placement offers,
- maintaining a database of students and higher education institution graduates interested in finding a job,
- assisting employers in obtaining suitable candidates for job vacancies and internships,
- helping with active job seeking.

In 2014, it was estimated that 346 Student Career Centres were in operation at 442 Polish higher education institutions. However, it should be emphasised that this is an indicative figure only.

**Youth Parliament** - There is no bona fide children and youth parliament in Poland operating as an institution elected by general election and thus possessing democratic legitimacy. The Children and Youth Parliament (*Sejm Dzieci i Młodzieży*) is a representative institution in name only. In reality, this is an educational project of the Polish Parliament Chancellery and is not an element of the legal system. Its nature is purely didactic, consultative and opinion-forming. In addition to the Polish Parliament Chancellery, the Ministry of National Education and several other entities, including non-governmental entities, participate in its organisation.

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