

Education system

Participation in formal education in Poland is compulsory for all children of age 6-18 (Eurydice, 2016). It starts in nursery schools, where children prepare for one year before attending the primary school. At parents' request, children may start compulsory education at age 5. Primary school is obligatory for all pupils as of age 7, and consists of six grades, which makes children leave primary schools at age 13. This stage of education ends with a compulsory external exam, which purpose is purely informational; in particular, it is not used as a selection device for lower secondary schools. Division into lower and upper secondary schools was introduced by the educational reform in 1999. Lower secondary school is also obligatory for all pupils, consists of three grades and ends with a compulsory exam, which is a basis for selection to upper secondary schools. Participation in upper secondary schooling is non-compulsory, however, because education in Poland is compulsory until the age of 18, and because the regular age for a pupil to leave lower education is 16, they are obliged to continue education usually for two more years. There are three types of upper secondary schools: 3-year general upper secondary school, 4-year technical upper secondary school, and 3-year basic vocational school. Students of vocational schools (the latter two) may take a voluntary external exam and, upon passing that exam, receive a diploma that confirms their vocational qualifications. Students of the general and technical upper secondary schools (the former two) may take the external upper secondary school leaving examination and, upon passing that exam, receive the maturity diploma that enables access to higher education.

Following the Bologna process higher education in Poland offers three cycles of programs: first-cycle Bachelor's degree program, second-cycle Master's degree programs, and third-cycle (doctoral) programs. In some cases, the first-cycle and the second-cycle programs are combined into long-cycle Master's degree programs. The first-cycle program lasts for 3-4 years or 3.5-4 years and grants, respectively, Bachelor's and Bachelor in Engineering's degree, conditional on passing the diploma examination. The Bachelor's degree allows to enter the second-cycle program, which lasts for 2 years and grants a Master's degree, upon passing a diploma examination. A Master's degree holder can enter third-cycle programs, which are organized by university-type and research and development

Private educational institutions

Private schools, especially private universities are popular in Poland since the 1990s. Its number used to grow dynamically and in the academic year 1995/1996 private universities outnumbered public universities. Studying at a private university is paid while studying at a public university may be either paid or unpaid (depending on the student's high school results and selected form of education).

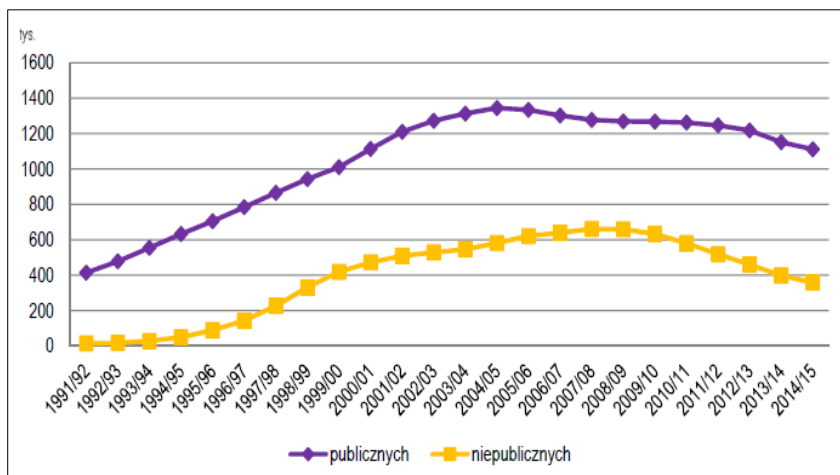
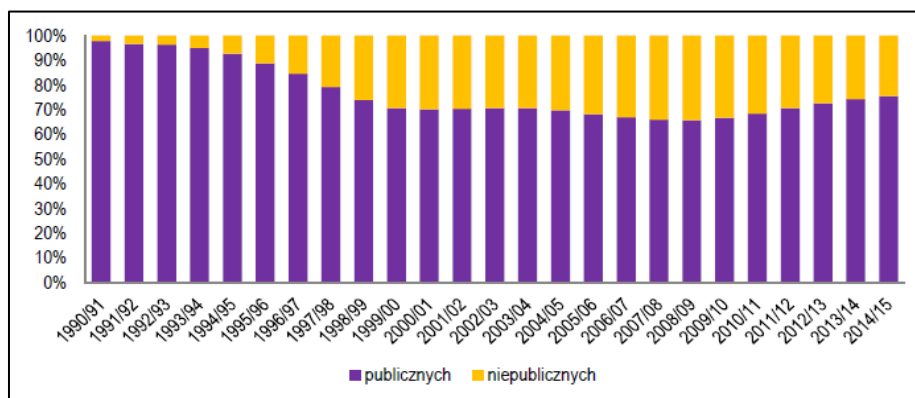


Figure 1 (top). Number of students (in thousands) in public (publicznych) and non-public (niepublicznych) higher education institutions.

Source: GUS (2015).

Figure 2 (right). Shares of students in public (publicznych) and non-public (niepublicznych) higher education institutions

Source: GUS (2015).



After many years of growth, since the academic year 2010/2011 there has been a decrease in the number of private universities. In 2014/2015, there were 434 universities, including 132 public (with 1.110.200 students, 75,6% of the whole student population (GUS, 2015, p. 30).

Financial support for university students²

Students in higher education may receive non-refundable and/or refundable financial support. Non-refundable means that financial support consists of a maintenance grant, a special grant for disabled persons, the Minister's scholarship for outstanding learning achievements, the Rector's scholarship for best students, and assistance grants. The maintenance grant does not apply to students who have completed a given cycle and continue their education in another field, yet in the same cycle. Students in the third-cycle programs are eligible to receive a doctoral scholarship. Students of all cycle programs are entitled to a 50 percent discount on public transport, until reaching age of 26 for students in first- and second-cycle programs, and 35 for students in third-cycle programs. Refundable financial support takes the form of students loans, the cost of which is partly financed by the state.

¹ Benefits available for families with children in school or pre-school age are described in detail in the separate study of childcare benefits. The following section will focus on support forms available for university students.

Expenditures on education

Most of the tasks related to the functioning of schools is delegated to local authorities, while the central authorities provide local authorities with the necessary funding (Eurydice, 2016)². Teaching responsibilities of the higher education institutions are funded by the state. The expenditures on higher education are set annually in the Budgetary Act. Figure 3 depicts public expenditures on education as percentage of the GDP in Poland in comparison to other EU countries and Turkey, and to the EU average. With public expenditures at 5.41 and 4.94 percent of the GDP at the beginning and at the end of the analyzed period, respectively, Poland outranked only Turkey at any given year.

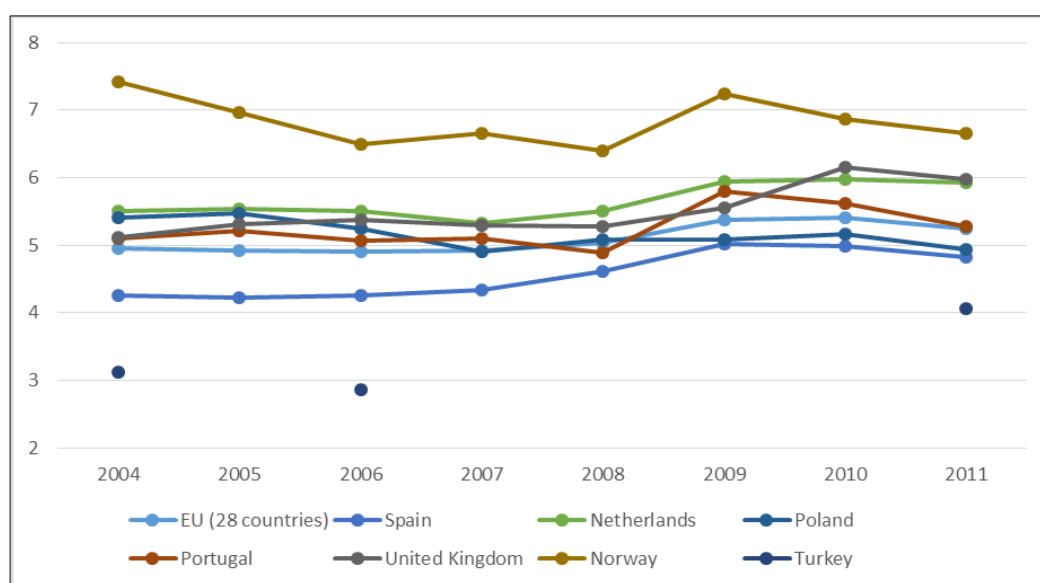


Figure 3. Total public expenditure on education as percentage of GDP.

Source: Eurostat.

Note: Data for Turkey were only available for 2004, 2006 and 2011.

Access of foreigners to education

All children of age 6-18 residing in Poland are obliged to participate in compulsory education, regardless of their citizenship and their legal status in Poland (Klaus, 2010). Foreigners are admitted to Polish educational institutions on non-discriminatory basis. Access of foreigners to higher education on the same rights as Polish citizens is limited to Polish Card holders, migrant workers who are EU and EFTA citizens and their families, EU and EFTA citizens and their families with the right of permanent stay in Poland, individuals with settlement or long-term resident permission, refugees, and individuals under complementary protection in Poland (MSHE, 2011).

² In the academic year 2013/2014, 88,1% of primary schools were public and 11,6% were private. In the same year 87,2% lower secondary schools were public while 12,3% were private (GUS 2014).

Other foreigners have access to Polish higher education on different rights than those which pertain to Polish citizens. Those individuals face tuition fees that are no less than 2000 EUR per year, plus a single recruitment fee of 200 EUR. The fees are not applicable to students who hold scholarships of the Polish government or the sending country's government, or in accordance to bilateral agreements between Poland and relevant countries. As shown in Figure 4, the number of foreign students in Polish higher education institutions has been gradually increasing over the last decade.

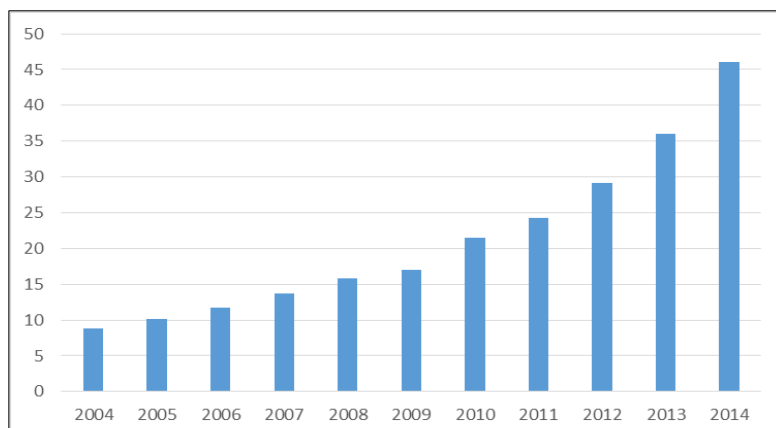
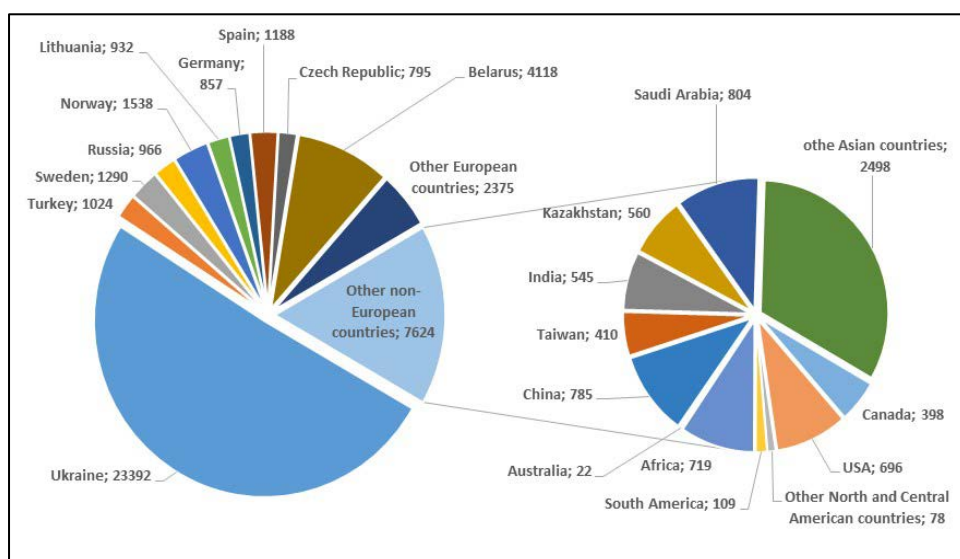


Figure 4 (top). Foreign students in higher education institutions in Poland (in thousands).

Source: Polish Central Statistical Office.

Figure 5 (left). Foreign students in higher education institutions in Poland by country of citizenship in 2014/15.

Source: GUS (2015)



References

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