



# Education and Training Monitor 2015

# Poland

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*Manuscript completed in September 2015*

*Additional contextual data can be found online ([ec.europa.eu/education/monitor](http://ec.europa.eu/education/monitor))*

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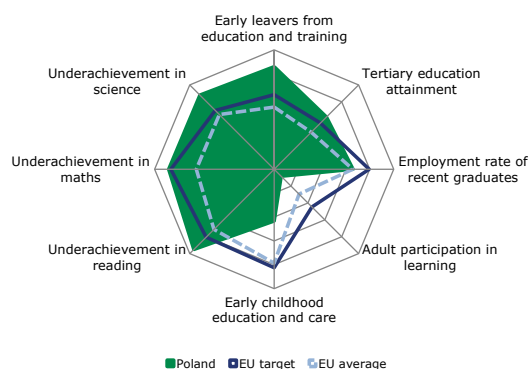
# POLAND

## 1. Key Indicators and Benchmarks

		Poland		EU average		
		2011	2014	2011	2014	
<b>Educational poverty and spending cuts: challenges for the education sector</b>						
Share of 15 year-olds with underachievement in:	Reading	•	10.6% <sup>12</sup>	:	17.8% <sup>12</sup>	
	Maths	•	14.4% <sup>12</sup>	:	22.1% <sup>12</sup>	
	Science	•	9.0% <sup>12</sup>	:	16.6% <sup>12</sup>	
Education investment	Public expenditure on education as a percentage of GDP		5.5%	5.3% <sup>13</sup>	5.1%	5.0% <sup>13</sup>
	Public expenditure on education as a share of total public expenditure		12.5%	12.5% <sup>13</sup>	10.5%	10.3% <sup>13</sup>
<b>Education attainment levels of young people across Europe</b>						
Early leavers from education and training (age 18-24)	Men		7.4%	7.3%	15.2%	12.7%
	Women		3.7%	3.3%	11.5%	9.5%
	Total	•	5.6%	5.4%	13.4%	11.1%
Tertiary education attainment (age 30-34)	Men		30.0%	34.2%	31.0%	33.6%
	Women		43.2%	50.2%	38.7%	42.3%
	Total	•	36.5%	42.1%	34.8%	37.9%
<b>Policy levers for inclusiveness, quality and relevance</b>						
Early childhood education and care (participation from age 4 to starting age of compulsory education)		•	78.4%	83.8% <sup>13</sup>	93.2%	93.9% <sup>13</sup>
Teachers' participation in training	Any topic (total)		:	93.7% <sup>13</sup>	:	84.6% <sup>13</sup>
	Special needs education		:	57.6% <sup>13</sup>	:	32.4% <sup>13</sup>
	Multicultural settings		:	4.9% <sup>13</sup>	:	13.2% <sup>13</sup>
	ICT skills for teaching		:	51.5% <sup>13</sup>	:	51.0% <sup>13</sup>
Foreign language learning	Share of ISCED 2 students learning two or more foreign languages		79.0%	93.4% <sup>12</sup>	63.0%	:
Share of ISCED 3 students in vocational education and training (VET)			48.3%	48.7% <sup>13</sup>	50.4%	48.9% <sup>13</sup>
Employment rate of recent graduates by education attainment (age 20-34 having left education 1-3 years before reference year)	ISCED 3-4		65.8%	65.6%	71.3%	70.8%
	ISCED 5-8		82.6%	83.7%	82.5%	80.5%
	ISCED 3-8 (total)	•	75.3%	75.6%	77.1%	76.1%
Learning mobility	Inbound graduates mobility (bachelor)		:	:	:	:
	Inbound graduates mobility (master)		:	:	:	:
Adult participation in lifelong learning (age 25-64)	ISCED 0-8 (total)	•	4.4%	4.0%	8.9%	10.7%

Sources: Eurostat (LFS, UOE, GFS); OECD (PISA, TALIS). Notes: • ET 2020 benchmark; data refer to weighted EU average, covering a different number of Member States depending on the source; b= break in time series, d= definition differs, p= provisional, u= low reliability, <sup>12</sup>= 2012, <sup>13</sup>= 2013. Further information is found in the respective section of Volume 1 ([ec.europa.eu/education/monitor](http://ec.europa.eu/education/monitor)).

**Figure 1. Position in relation to highest (outer ring) and lowest performers (centre)**



Source: DG Education and Culture calculations, based on data from Eurostat (LFS 2014 and UOE 2013) and OECD (PISA 2012, TALIS 2013). Note: all scores are set between a maximum (the highest performers visualised by the outer ring) and a minimum (the lowest performers visualised by the centre of the figure).

## 2. Main strengths and challenges

Poland has one of the EU's lowest proportions of early school leavers and of students with underachievement in basic skills. There has also been rapid progress on tertiary education attainment and increased participation in early childhood education and care (ECEC). The Polish education and training system has undergone profound changes in terms of its structure, organisation, management and core curricula in the face of the population's increasingly high educational aspirations.

However, a significant number of challenges remain. These include issues relating to access to quality early childhood education and care, particularly for children under the age of three, the teaching of transversal skills, the attractiveness of vocational education and training (VET), and the relevance of higher education to the labour market. In addition, the low level of adult participation in lifelong learning and poor skills levels among adults, particularly in ICT, remain a source of concern for the future.

## 3. Investing in education and training

General government expenditure on education as a proportion of GDP has remained relatively stable since 2000 and is close to the EU average (5.3% compared with the EU average of 5% in 2013).<sup>1</sup> There was no significant fall in education expenditure as a result of the economic and financial crisis, which has affected the Polish economy only marginally on the whole. The proportion of spending allocated to education is above the EU average (12.5%, compared with 10.3%). Education projects receive a significant amount of funding from the European Structural and Investment Funds, and in particular from the 2014-20 national operational programme, 'Knowledge, Education and Development' (*Wiedza-Edukacja-Rozwój* — PO WER), and, to some extent, from the 16 regional operational programmes.

In 2013, expenditure on pre-primary, primary and secondary school education amounted to 3.2% of GDP, with both the national and regional authorities' budgets taken into account, in comparison with 3.5% in the EU as a whole. Poland clearly prioritises certain types of education expenditure, e.g. ECEC and pre-school education (Box 1). Public expenditure on higher education in Poland amounted to 1.4% of GDP in 2013 compared with an EU average of 0.8%. Poland has one of the highest proportions of private spending on education in the EU (along with the UK and Cyprus) and a still significant share of students enrolled in privately-owned higher education institutions.

## 4. Tackling inequalities

Poland is one of the best performers in the EU when it comes to early school leaving, with a rate of 5.4% compared with an EU average of 11.1% in 2014. The Europe 2020 national target is 4.5% and appears to be achievable. Boys are more likely to leave school early (7.3%) than girls (3.3%). However, in the last decade, the early school leaving rate has remained largely unchanged (having already reached 5.4% in 2010). The rate is higher in less-developed parts of the country. In Warmińsko-Mazurskie, for example, the rate has been rising steadily for the last two years, and was double the national average in 2013.

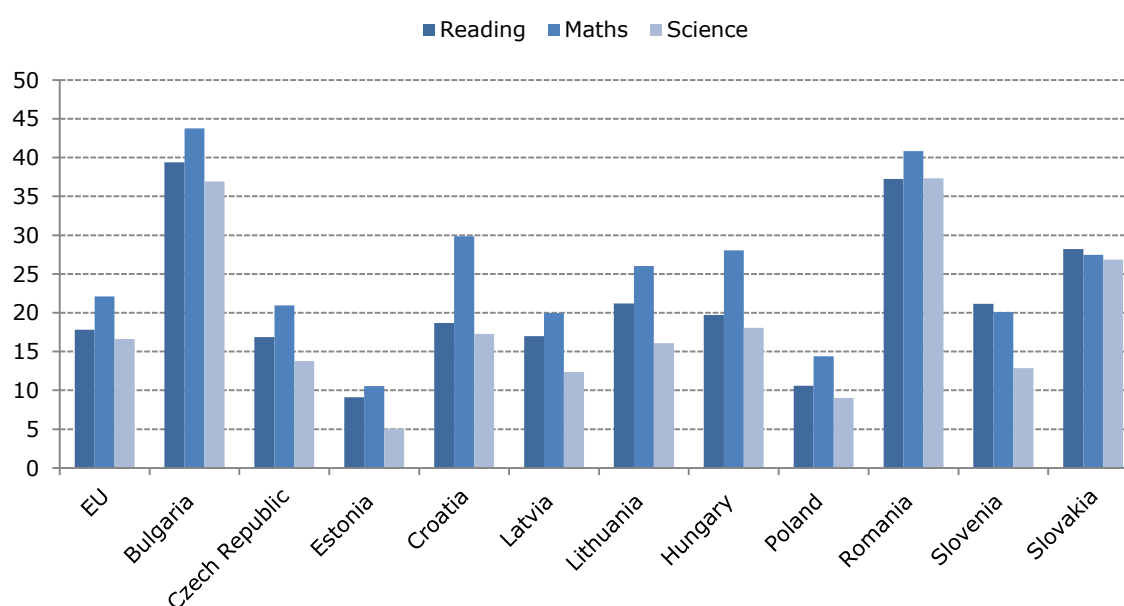
Poland has made very significant progress in terms of the provision of ECEC, in particular pre-primary education, but many issues remain in this area (Box 1).

With regard to basic skills, the rate of low achievement among 15 year-olds in OECD PISA 2012 (OECD 2013c) is significantly lower than the EU average in all three tested fields (Figure 2): 10.6% for reading (compared with an EU average of 17.8%), 14.4% for maths (compared with an EU average of 22.1%) and 9.0% for science (compared with an EU average of 16.6%).

<sup>1</sup> Source: Eurostat, General government expenditure by function (COFOG) database.

However, students' socioeconomic background still has a significant impact on performance. There are also substantial differences in achievement between different types of upper secondary schools (general schools as compared with vocational schools). For example, in 2012 over 46% of students in basic vocational schools were low achievers in literacy. The assessment of the level of basic skills of Polish students should also, however, take into account average performance in both TIMSS (Trends in International Mathematics and Science) and PIRLS (Progress in International Reading Literacy Study) from 2011, particularly for maths. Finally, the level of digital skills of 15-year-olds as measured by ICILS (the International Computer and Information Literacy Study) in 2013 were also remarkably good, with Poland scoring better than e.g. Norway, or neighbouring countries such as Germany and Slovakia (IEA 2014).

**Figure 2. Percentage of low-achievers in basic skills for selected Central European countries**



Source: OECD (2013c) and European Commission calculations

Poland does not have a specific strategy for tackling early school leaving, but it does have a series of dedicated measures, including monitoring tools, and prevention, guidance and re-integration measures. For instance, the school entry age was gradually lowered from seven to six years. Before 2014 admission of 6 year-olds to grade 1 of primary school was left to parents' discretion. In 2014 education in primary schools was made compulsory for 6-year-old children born before the end of June 2008. Starting in 2015 all 6 year-olds commence compulsory schooling.

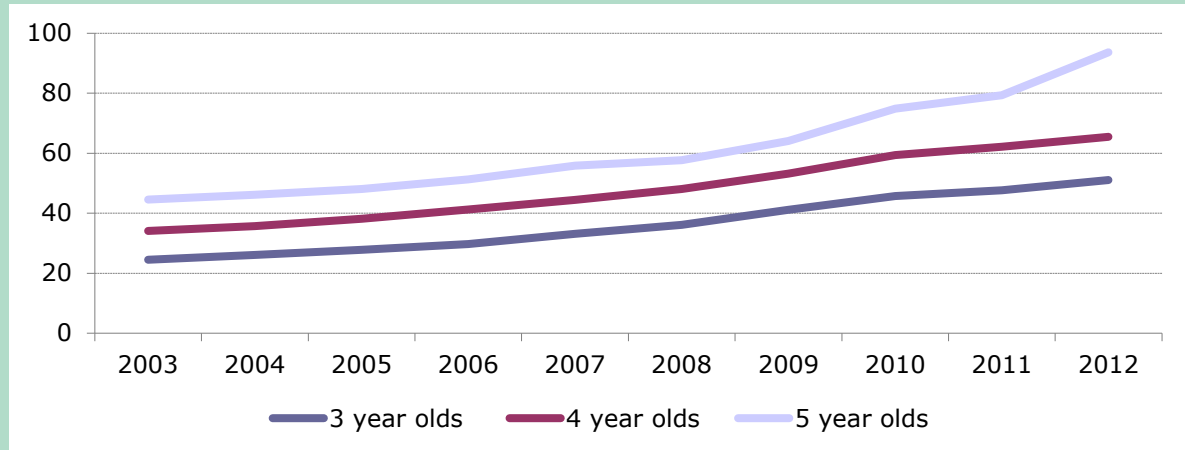
In order to encourage equality of opportunity, the provision of free schoolbooks is introduced gradually across Poland. In the first grade of primary school this scheme has been in place since 2014. In 2015, free schoolbooks will be introduced in the second and fourth grade of primary school and first year of lower secondary school. In 2017, all primary and lower secondary schools' students should be receiving free schoolbooks. In addition, a general reform of the upper secondary school curriculum is being carried out, placing, for example, more emphasis on teaching non-cognitive (transversal) skills.

Finally, the government recently launched the *Bezpieczna i przyjazna szkoła* ('Safe and friendly school') programme for the period 2014-20. It is based on a similar initiative implemented between 2008 and 2013. The new programme, which has a rather limited budget of PLN 6 million a year, aims to create a safe and friendly environment in Polish schools by: increasing

the effectiveness of the education process; strengthening cooperation between students, parents and teachers; creating a supportive atmosphere based on mutual respect and trust; and preventing truancy.

### Box 1. Early-childhood education and care (ECEC) in Poland

Participants for ISCED level 0: at 3, 4 and 5 years of age, as a % of population in a cohort



Source: Główny Urząd Statystyczny (GUS)

The national rate of participation in education for 4-6 year-olds in Poland is rising rapidly. It increased from 76.3% in 2010 to 83.8% in 2013, compared with an EU average of 93.1%. Poland reported a rate of 89.2% in 2014 in the National Reform Programme for 2015 (Polish Government 2015). Expenditure from public sources on pre-school education in Poland amounts to around 0.6% of GDP, and from private ones to around 0.1%. Both figures are above the respective OECD and EU averages. However, strong regional disparities remain and there are also significant differences between the level of provision in urban and rural areas. Finally, there is much lower participation among children under three than among older children.

Poland has a dedicated core curriculum for pre-school education. Pre-primary education became compulsory for all 5 year-olds in 2011. From September 2015, ECEC places became a legal entitlement for 4 year-olds. This will be extended to 3 year-olds from September 2017. From September 2015, foreign languages will be compulsory for 5 year-olds and this will be extended to all children in pre-school education from September 2017.

Amendments to the School Education Act (2013) introduced a capping mechanism for school fees, with earmarked grants from the state to local governments to compensate for any differences in costs. To increase the availability of early-childhood education, the state allocates PLN 1.5 billion per year to local governments and guarantees the level of allocation per pupil. The national authorities announced in the autumn of 2014 that investment in new nurseries and pre-school educational infrastructure will double from PLN 50 million to PLN 100 million a year. Poland will also invest PLN 2 billion in the period 2015-20 in building nurseries and other pre-school facilities at companies and higher education institutions. The government also decided to continue the *Maluch* (toddler) programme for children under 3. This programme has a budget of PLN 151 million in 2015 and has created 36 000 new ECEC places (it should be noted, however, that around 372 000 children were born in 2013). Poland has also made a concerted effort to channel investment from the European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) 2014-20 into ECEC infrastructure. However, the level of new provision is still quite imbalanced, and often depends on regional authorities' priorities for the ESIF.

In the future Poland will have to address the issue of participation of children under 3 years and the insufficient provision in rural areas. As the number of public and private providers (e.g. kids clubs, day carers) increases, it will also have to ensure that quality and affordability are monitored. Finally, the long-term sustainability of investments co-funded through ESIF will have to be ensured, especially after EU co-financing ends in 2023.

## 5. Modernising school education

According to the 2013 OECD Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS), the percentage of teachers who reported having participated in professional development activities in the previous 12 months is above the EU average (93.7% compared with 84.7%). The proportion of teachers assigning different work to students based on their individual needs is also above the EU average (55.5% for Poland compared with 46% in the EU as whole). The proportion of teachers using ICT for student projects or class work (36.4%) and participating in ICT training (51.5%) is around the EU average. The rate of teachers' participation in special needs education training in Poland was 57.6% 2013, well above the OECD average of 31.7%. Lastly, only 13.6% of teachers participated in training on careers guidance, as opposed to the OECD average of 23.6% (OECD 2014).

Polish teachers' statutory base salaries (measured in purchasing power standard) are still significantly below the OECD average and are among the lowest in EU countries. However, bonuses and allowances considerably increase their level, making them around 30% higher than base statutory salaries, according to Polish authorities. Despite efforts to gradually increase teachers' salaries, teachers' salaries remain modest when compared to earnings of full-time, full-year employees with tertiary education (ranging from 0.71 of such salary in pre-primary to 0.82 in upper secondary education in 2012).

In Poland, the need to encourage more innovative and creative approaches to learning, instead of traditional academic methods, is broadly accepted. Certain experts argue that an excessive focus on preparing students for testing could be a problem when trying to encourage more innovative approaches. One of the key challenges is to improve teacher training on the teaching of transversal skills, such as teamwork, problem-solving, analytical skills, and creativity.

Measures are also being taken to improve training on teaching methods, including the use of ICT in the classroom. Under the Digital School programme, open educational resources (e-textbooks) are made publicly available. Poland will also invest heavily in ICT infrastructure and on online teacher and student support materials to encourage the use of ICT, especially via the ESIF 2014-20. Finally, the Ministry of National Education introduced in 2014 a regulation in which compulsory careers guidance is provided from lower secondary level onwards.

## 6. Modernising higher education

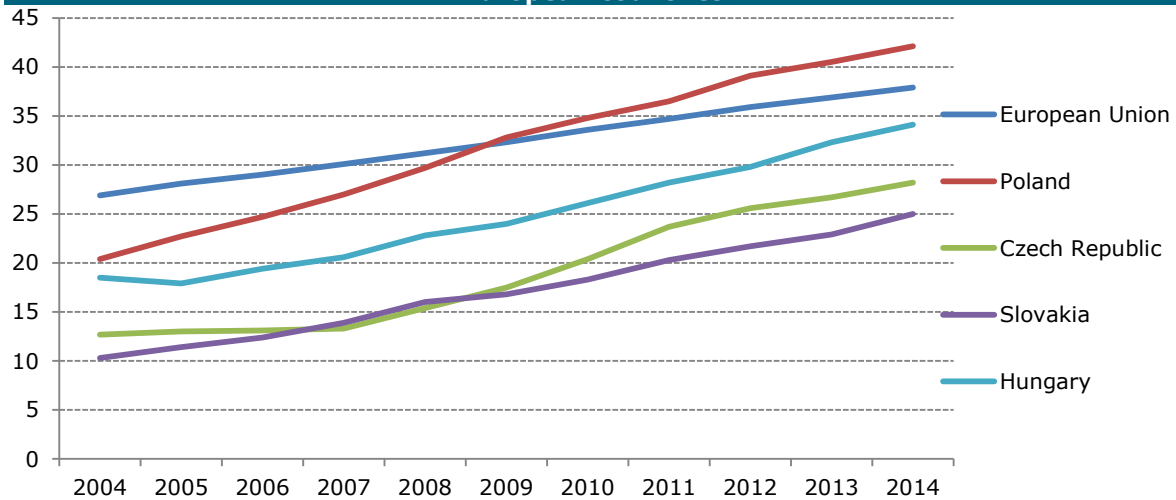
The Polish tertiary education attainment rate of 30-34 year-olds (Figure 3) rose sharply from 12.5% in 2000 to 42.1% in 2014, surpassing the EU average of 37.9%. The expansion of the private higher education sector was an important factor explaining this development. The Europe 2020 national target is to reach 45%, which appears to be achievable. More women (50.2%) than men (34.2%) have successfully completed tertiary education. The employment rate of recent tertiary graduates<sup>2</sup> was 83.7% in 2014, which is still above the EU average of 80.5%, but has fallen from 87% in 2008. The completion rate (OECD 2013a) in Poland (students who have completed at least an ISCED 1997 level 5B or 5A programme) is below the OECD average (62% compared with 68% in 2011), and features considerable gender gap (the completion rate among women is 74% compared with 48% for men). Student mobility flows are relatively low, with only 1.3% of all students coming from outside Poland in 2012.

Very few students complete doctoral studies, and cooperation with the business sector remains insufficient. For instance, doctorate students of science and technology in 2012 represented only 0.2% of the population aged 20-29 years, as opposed to 0.7% in Sweden and 0.5% in the EU as a whole. The number of researchers in Poland (1 753 per million inhabitants) is also very low in comparison with other EU Member States and there is a clear issue in terms of the degree of internationalisation of Polish science and research.

<sup>2</sup> People aged 20-34 who left education between one and three years before the reference year.



**Figure 3. Tertiary education attainment levels (30-34 year-olds) for selected Central European countries**



Source: Eurostat

At present, graduates of tertiary education have difficulty finding suitable employment after graduation and the percentage of people employed in positions below their level of qualifications rose from 11% to 19% between 2002 and 2012, which is one of the most marked increases in the EU. At the same time, employers' organisations often complain that recent graduates lack transversal skills, such as teamwork, problem-solving and critical thinking. To address this issue, an amended higher education law entered into force on 1 October 2014. The main objectives of the amendment are to improve the quality of higher education by establishing a system of monitoring of graduates' pathways to better adjust the future educational offer to changes in the demands of the labour market. The government also announced that students will be offered the opportunity to take part in a special traineeship programme in public sector institutions.

Finally, to promote excellence, the government has announced that it will launch a grant programme for the top students to study at leading foreign universities as from 2016. However, to prevent 'brain-drain' (the emigration of highly qualified people), this opportunity will be granted on condition that beneficiaries spend five years working in Poland upon graduation or do a PhD there. Work is also being done to increase the internationalisation of higher education establishments through the newly adopted programme for the internationalisation of Polish higher education institutions, as well through information campaigns, such as 'Ready, Study, Go! Poland'. An important number of those initiatives are also supported by ESF financing.

## 7. Modernising vocational education and training and promoting adult learning

In 2013, the share of ISCED 3 students in vocational education and training (VET) was 48.7% compared with an EU average of 48.9%. In the 2013/14 school year, initial vocational education and training (IVET) students (*zasadnicze szkoły zawodowe* and *technika*) accounted for 55.3% of all upper secondary students (GUS 2015). The employment rate of recent upper secondary graduates<sup>3</sup> (65.6% in 2014) is below the EU average. In the fourth quarter of 2014, the unemployment rate for graduates of technical upper secondary schools and post-secondary schools (*technika* and *szkoły policealne*) stood at 30.2% (12.6 percentage points lower than in the fourth quarter of 2013) and at 37.3% for basic vocational schools (*zasadnicze szkoły zawodowe*), 11 percentage points lower than in the fourth quarter of 2013. Although the unemployment rate among IVET graduates is falling (GUS 2014), they still have more difficulty

<sup>3</sup> People aged 20-34 who left education between one and three years before the reference year.

finding work than higher education graduates (the unemployment rate among higher education graduates was at 21.1%).

The rate of adult participation in lifelong learning in Poland decreased to 4% in 2014. At the same time, the percentage of adults (aged 18-59/64) in Poland who, in 2014, reported having participated in any kind of training or education (training, non-formal and informal education, formal education) in the previous 12 months remained almost unchanged at 37%. Participation tends to be lowest among people with basic levels of education, those over 50 and people who are inactive on the labour market. Adult education and training in Poland is mostly job-related. In 2014, 62% of all training and education in which adults in Poland participated was financed by their employers. At the same time, 60% of those who participated in education and training in 2014 cited employers' needs for specific skills as the main reason for participating (PARP 2015). Nevertheless, no in-depth analysis has been carried out to examine the low rate of adult participation in lifelong learning.

The level of basic skills of adults, in particular as regards ICT, is a source of serious concern. There is a generational gap in ICT skills. While 15-year-olds have very good ICT skills, skills levels among older groups are well below the OECD average, as shown by PIAAC (Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies) results (OECD 2013b). There is also a clear age threshold as people under 34 have a much higher level of basic skills compared with other age groups. The proportion of people refusing or not able to solve problems using a computer was one of the highest in the PIAAC survey, which also indicates a problem in relation to the accessibility and availability of digital equipment in Poland. The low scores on basic skills, general skills and participation in education or training are mirrored by the labour market. In 2014, 80% of recruiters found it difficult to attract employees with the required skills (PARP 2015), compared to 39 % in the EU as a whole (Eurofund 2013). Moreover, since 2010 this rate has been rising steadily (PARP 2015). At the same time, in 2014 43% of employers said that their employees needed upskilling and 3% were not satisfied with the level of their employees' skills (PARP 2015).

With regard to changes in IVET, the implementation of the VET reforms that Poland launched in 2012/13 is ongoing and will be completed by 2016/17. The Minister of National Education declared the 2014/15 school year as the '*Year of VET professionals*' and presented a set of initiatives and measures financed both by the state budget and ESIF. The measures included establishing a VET advisory committee (comprised of business representatives to advise on the challenges in the VET system); creating and launching the Map of Vocational Schools, launching an internet portal devoted to guidance, and a four-party agreement between the Ministers of Education, Economy, Labour and Treasury aiming at cooperation for VET development. More measures are planned within the financial perspectives 2014-20, such as establishing sector skills councils contributing to a revision of curricula and greater cooperation with employers; improving career guidance services and the use of ICT; funding for equipment and teacher training; the development of non-formal and informal training sessions; promoting VET among key stakeholders; monitoring graduates' pathways, and the inclusion of business representatives in examination boards.

Moreover, in June 2014, the second 'Employer of Tomorrow' competition was launched. It aims to showcase employers who successfully implement educational projects targeted at young people to help them prepare to enter the world of work. The competition will run again in 2015. Although these measures are a step in the right direction, the improvement of VET needs to be a continuous process in to secure more quality apprenticeships and increase the proportion of work-based learning. Specific challenges remain, including, in particular, encouraging more employers to cooperate with VET schools, updating the skills of VET teachers and their teaching methods, and providing good quality careers guidance.

Lifelong learning provision is being developed on the basis of two general strategic documents ('Strategy for the Development of Human Capital 2020' and 'Lifelong Learning Perspective'). New measures, co-financed by the European Social Fund, the 'Knowledge, Education and Development' programme (PO WER), and the 16 regional operational programmes, have been introduced in line with these strategies to tackle the issue of low adult participation in lifelong learning. The shift towards demand-driven systems of support for continuing vocational training co-financed by the European Social Fund, and the focus on the quality of support under the ESF are the main principles guiding efforts to improve the situation. The measures also emphasise the important role the social partners and employers' organisations have to play in raising employers' awareness of the benefits of education, identifying labour market needs and encouraging employers to invest in their employees.

At the same time, the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy presented an amendment to the Act on the Promotion of Employment and Labour Market Institutions (*Ustawa o promocji zatrudnienia i insyтуcjach rynku pracy*) in 2013. From 2014, companies have been able to co-finance training for their employees using the National Training Fund (*Krajowy Fundusz Szkoleniowy*). Moreover, the recent VET reform introduced the possibility of validating full qualifications acquired outside of the formal education system. The amendment to the higher education law of October 2014 also introduced the possibility of validating such qualifications at tertiary level. In addition, Poland has committed itself to adopting the legislative act on the integrated qualifications system, covering formal, informal and non-formal education by the end of 2015, and ensuring the whole qualifications system (for full and partial qualifications) is operational by the end of 2016. This is a very ambitious objective, especially given the current political and electoral calendar in Poland. Most of the above-mentioned measures and initiatives are at an early stage of implementation and it is not yet possible to fully evaluate their effects.

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