



Non  
Violent  
Education

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**Violence Prevention in the  
Educational Institution "Kindergarten" – Present  
Approaches and Development Possibilities**

Country Report on present situation in Poland

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# Report on the state of pre-school education in Poland

## 1. Education policy concerning pre-school education

For many years Polish education policy is not favourable to pre-school education. Poland has one of the lowest indicators of popularizing pre-school education in Europe. Even covering 6 year olds by compulsory one-year kindergarten preparation did not change much in this area. Drastic decrease in the network of kindergarten institutions, mainly their closing-down between 1990 and 1995, caused that together with the growth in the number of children in pre-school age, starting from 2006, there are no places in kindergartens in many regions of our country. That is why, once in a while there are different proposals on new systemic solution of pre-school education and the model of pre-school education is still an open question.

Still the problem of lowering the lower limit of school duty and increase in access to pre-school education of children below 6 years of age is still not settled. For many years there are postulates to lower the age by one year when children would start compulsory school education, i.e. covering 6 year olds by school duty. However, this solution may mean shortening a period of pre-school education to three years. But in comparison with young children there is still a debate going on covering 5 year olds with compulsory kindergarten preparation.

## 2. Legal conditions

In Poland according to the Act on education system of September 7, 1991 (with later changes), pre-school education is the first link in the school system.<sup>1</sup> On the basis of this Act the children between 3 and 6 years of age are taken into account. In comparison with children from 3 to 5 years of age pre-school education has an optional character because profiting from kindergarten tutelary and education institutions depends on parents' decision who, according to their wishes, can leave children at home or choose an appropriate kindergarten for them.

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<sup>1</sup> Act on education system from 1991, Chapter 2 *Pre-school education and school duty* (art.14). (O.J. from 2004, no. 256, pos. 2572; Dz. U. 2004 Nr 256, poz. 2572 integrated version).

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But with reference to 6 year olds pre-school education is compulsory. In 2004 there was an Act introduced which covers all 6 year olds by compulsory one-year kindergarten preparation.<sup>2</sup> Only the children who started school one year earlier can be excused from that duty.<sup>3</sup> It is possible to realize compulsory one-year kindergarten preparation by disabled children in the form of individual lessons or so-called extramural forms.<sup>4</sup> Individual compulsory one-year kindergarten preparation is organized for children whose health state does not allow or impedes attending kindergarten or kindergarten department in primary school.

Polish law also allows children younger than 3 years of age and children over 6 years of age to profit from kindergarten tutelary and education institutions.<sup>5</sup> In justified cases children who are 2,5 years of age can be accepted. Bearing them in mind, so-called crèche groups were formed in kindergarten institutions. But then children older than 6 can be covered by pre-school education if, as a result of a statement from psychological-pedagogical clinic, they were qualified for special education. Time of their stay in the kindergarten cannot exceed their 10 year of age.<sup>6</sup> Introduced in 2007 amendment to the Act on education system created a legal possibility to extend the network of kindergarten institutions for children between 3 and 5 by forming, so-called alternative forms of pre-school education.<sup>7</sup>

In Polish legal system there was a division into public and non-public kindergarten institutions made depending on the establishing organ and its legal status.<sup>8</sup> Public kindergartens (city or municipal) can be established by local governments and by selected public administration offices.<sup>9</sup> Public kindergarten provides free education in the scope of the program basis of pre-school education, recruits children according to the rule of general availability and employs teachers with appropriate qualifications. But the establishing organ of non-public institution can be not only natural person but also legal entity. In connection

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<sup>2</sup> Amendment from the Act on a change of the act on education system and on a change on some of other acts Chapter 2 *Pre-school education, school duty and learning duty* (art. 14). (O.J. from 2003 no.137, pos. 1304; Dz. U. 2003 Nr 137, poz.1304).

<sup>3</sup> The act on a change of the act on education system and on a change on some of other acts (art. 16 par. 2). (O.J. from 2003 no.137, pos.1304; Dz. U. 2003 Nr 137 poz.1304).

<sup>4</sup> The Act on changes of the act on education system and on a change on some of other acts (art. 16 par. 7). (O.J. from 2003 no.137, pos.1304; Dz. U. 2003 Nr 137 poz.1304).

<sup>5</sup> The Act on changes of the act on education system and on a change on some of other acts (art. 14, par. 1a and par. 1b). (O.J. from 2003 no.137, pos.1304; Dz. U. 2003 Nr 137 poz.1304).

<sup>6</sup> In case of 6 year olds and older children that have a statement on a need for specialist education compulsory one-year kindergarten preparation starts together with the beginning of a school year that precedes a year when a child starts its school duty.

<sup>7</sup> The act on changes of the act on education system from 2007 (O.J. from 2007 no.181, pos.1292; Dz. U. 2007 Nr 181, poz. 1292).

<sup>8</sup> The act on education system from 1991

<sup>9</sup> E.g. Ministry of National Defence, Ministry of Interior and Administration.

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with that there are private and religious kindergartens as well as the ones led by associations, social organizations (non-profit) as well as foundations.

Pre-school education, both in the scope of public education as well as non-public is realized in two organizational forms: in kindergarten departments in the kindergarten or in kindergarten departments in primary school. The kindergarten to which children between 3 and 6 can go is an independent institution supporting education in the family. However, in kindergarten departments in primary school is a simpler form of kindergarten nursery, from which profit mainly children at the age of 6, realizing compulsory one-year kindergarten preparation. In kindergarten departments in all education institutions (public and non-public) the program basis of pre-school education is in force.<sup>10</sup> In kindergarten practice its realization should support the development of a child according to its inborn potential and possibilities in relations with environment as well as direct pre-school education in the scope of four selected educational areas.<sup>11</sup> Time given for realization of program basis in public institutions as well as in non-public, but having public rights, cannot be shorter than 5 hours a day.

Since 2007 there is also a possibility of organizing pre-school education in other forms, so-called alternative, which can take on different forms: from educational classes – led outside education institutions – for children between 3 and 5 years of age, taking place every day to classes few times a week during which there is only a part of program basis in force realized.

Legal frames concerning organization and functioning of distinguished forms of pre-school education can be found in the statute. It is a basic document which specifies children's rights, detailed rules of children recruitment to kindergarten as well as conditions of their stay in the institution. It also includes aims and duties of kindergarten and competences of certain organs and their rules of cooperation.<sup>12</sup>

## **Children's rights**

Respecting children's rights in pre-school education, on one hand ensures ratification of Convention on the Rights of a Child by Poland, but on the other hand, records concerning

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<sup>10</sup> Regulation of Ministry of National Education (MEN). (O.J. from 2009 no.2, pos.18; Dz. U. 2000 Nr 2 poz. 18).

<sup>11</sup> - getting to know and understand oneself and the world,  
- getting new skills by actions,  
- finding one's place in peers' group and community,  
- building up a value system.

<sup>12</sup> Order of the Minister of National Education from 15 February 1999 (annex no. 3)

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children who have been given special importance in the Constitution including a right to learn. A state forms and keeps appropriate institutions enabling children at pre-school age to profit from the rights they have, among all to help their development by different forms of pre-school education.

Disabled children in the pre-school age, irrespectively of the degree of disability, can attend public kindergartens with integration departments, to integration kindergartens, to integration kindergarten departments organized at primary schools or to special kindergartens. At the same time 6 year olds (with special educational needs, e.g. because of their disability), have a right to individual compulsory one-year kindergarten preparation.

Children coming from national or ethnical minorities living in the regions with strong cultural and linguistic difference can attend bilingual kindergarten departments in the kindergartens or in primary schools where classes are bilingual (in Polish and in a selected minority language). For 6 year olds covered by compulsory one-year kindergarten preparation in the institutions of pre-school education, extra classes of Polish are introduced – 4 hours a week. What is more, the purchase of books that are necessary for children to keep their national, ethnical and linguistic identity can be financed by state budget.<sup>13</sup>

In 2004 Polish Government has introduced a perennial program for the Roma community in Poland. In regard to education program aims at providing equal educational opportunities on all school levels including pre-primary education as well as to spread knowledge about Roma people in the society. Among others two term studies are provided for teachers and administration clerks about culture, history and present situation of Roma people. Publications, media, expositions are financed in order to familiarize Polish society with Roma community. Special attention to be payed to local initiatives where school authorities and schools with Roma pupils are disseminating knowledge about Roma by providing educational multimedia packages and didactical material for teachers.

### **Parents' rights**

Parents have a right to choose kindergarten institution which their child will attend (6 year old child), realizing compulsory one-year kindergarten preparation, that is not only public but also non-public kindergarten or kindergarten department in public or non-public primary school. Similar choice can be made by parents of younger children below the age of

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<sup>13</sup> Order of Ministry of National Education and Sports (MENiS) (O.J. from 2002 no. 22, pos. 1853; Dz. U. 2002 Nr 22, poz. 1853).

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6, but additionally their children can also profit from, so-called other (alternative) forms of pre-school education.

The parents whose children attend public kindergartens or kindergarten departments organized in public primary schools get at the same time the right to participate in social groups appointed in these institutions, i.e. school board and parents' council.<sup>14</sup>

The parents of children that come from national minorities or ethnical groups living in the Republic of Poland have fixed rights, among others to learning their children a language different than Polish as well as history and culture, in order to keep up their sense of national, ethnical or linguistic identity, already in the phase of compulsory one-year pre-school preparation.

On parents' request public kindergartens and primary schools, in which there are kindergarten departments, also organize lessons of religious instruction for children in groups bigger than 7 of 6 year olds.<sup>15</sup>

### **3. Local government and its duties concerning pre-school education**

#### **District**

Administrative organs on the district level ensure education, upbringing and nursery, including social prevention on special public kindergartens and special public schools. Appropriate prefect, with regard to the place of residence of a child having a statement for special education, on their parents' request (or committee), should guarantee appropriate form of education taking into account the type of his or her disability, including a level of handicap. In the case when a district does not have special kindergarten or school with kindergarten departments or appropriate centre (rehabilitation and educational) that deals with certain kind of disability, then a prefect directs a child to the closest district, which has such activity or on the basis of agreement with community that has appropriate base, gives its rights, but at the same time bearing the costs of children education.<sup>16</sup>

#### **Community**

Organization and management of public kindergarten institutions

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<sup>14</sup> The act on education system from 1991 with later changes.

<sup>15</sup> The act on education system from 1991 with later changes (art. 12).

<sup>16</sup> The act on education system from 1991 with later changes (art. 71 b).

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In the scope of realization of its own tasks, the administration of community that keeps population records is obliged to keep the records of 3 year old children, including the preparation of a list of 6 year olds, living on the community territory and being covered by a duty of one-year pre-school preparation.

By organizing a network of public kindergartens and establishing kindergarten departments in public primary schools, the community authorities should ensure all children, whose parents showed desire so that their children profit from kindergarten education and have access to it. Establishing and managing public kindergartens, including those with integration department and kindergarten departments in public primary schools as well as other forms of pre-school education, belongs to community tasks.<sup>17</sup> However, creating other forms of pre-school education, so-called alternative, includes especially parishes that does not have very well developed educational infrastructure and that have little number of children in pre-school age.

Moreover, the community is obliged to create appropriate conditions to fulfil the duty of one-year pre-school preparation for all 6 year old children.<sup>18</sup> With reference to this fact community authorities should organize a transport (together with a carer); to educational institutions of these children whose road from home to the closest kindergarten or kindergarten department in primary school is more than 3 km long. In a situation when a child does not use free transport, the community authorities should reimburse the costs of transport to its parents. The same rule applies to disabled children.

But the supervision over the realization of compulsory one-year pre-school preparation of 6 year olds as well as control of its fulfilment lies directly within the competence of a headmaster of a public primary school in the area where certain child lives.

Educational duties of a community involve also assurance of education, upbringing and nursery, including social prevention covering the children at pre-school age and their parents not only in kindergartens but also in primary schools that have kindergarten departments.<sup>19</sup> On the basis of an Order of Ministry of National Education and Sports (MENiS), public kindergartens or schools offer free psychological and pedagogical help not only to a child in kindergarten age but also to his or her family. The proposers of a motion to help can be teachers and other representatives of teaching staff: educator, psychologist or a person that conducts special classes, e.g. corrective-compensation or therapeutic.

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<sup>17</sup> The act on education system from 2007 (O.J. from 2007 no. 181, pos. 1292; Dz. U. 2007 Nr 181, poz. 1292).

<sup>18</sup> Amendment included in the Act from 27 June 2003 on a change of the act on education system and on a change of other acts, Chapter 2 *Pre-school education, school duty and learning duty*.

<sup>19</sup> The act on education system from 1991, with later changes (art. 5 par. 5 and 7, art. 5a)

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#### **4. Financing public kindergartens and kindergarten departments in public primary schools and alternative forms of pre-school education conducted and controlled by community**

In Poland parents participate in costs of pre-school education when their children profit from public kindergartens, non-public kindergarten institutions as well as alternative forms of pre-school education conducted by communities. Public kindergarten conducts free education only in the scope of program basis of pre-school education. But the parents pay some of the allocations on account of functioning of an institution, including alimentation of children while they stay in the kindergarten. The sum is fixed by community council.<sup>20</sup> Similarly, in the case when a child uses alternative forms of pre-school education organized and conducted by local government. But in non-public kindergarten institutions the amount of money for using different services is fixed by the organ that manages the kindergarten. Non-public kindergartens, including special and non-public primary schools with kindergarten departments (having public schools rights), including integration department, get a subsidy from a community budget. Depending on the organizational form of pre-school education in non-public educational institutions the sum of subsidy cannot be lower than 75% of the amount taken for one child in the community budget in the case of non-public kindergarten, and no less than 40% - 50% from that sum with reference to so-called alternative forms of pre-school education.<sup>21</sup>

#### **5. Structure and functioning of kindergarten institutions**

For some time now, there is a large diversity of kindergarten institutions in Poland, because of their organizational structure and because of using different methodological solutions based on concepts of: Rudolf Steiner, Maria Montessori, Ovid and Decroly. What is more, more and more popular become kindergarten institutions with certain educational profile, e.g. language, music, artistic kindergartens and the ones realizing author programs of

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<sup>20</sup> In case of other public kindergartens conducting free education and upbringing in the scope of at least program basis of pre-school education, the fees are determined by organs managing the kindergartens.

<sup>21</sup> The act on the change of the act on education system from 2007 (art. 80 and art. 90) (O.J. 2007 no. 181, pos. 1292; Dz. U. 2007 Nr 181, poz. 1292).

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pre-school education of their workers, among others, extending the content of education from ecology. On one hand, it gives parents a possibility to choose appropriate kindergarten institutions for their child taking into account not only their needs but also their expectations in view of pre-school education, and on the other hand, it is a way to meet real local needs.

The basic organizational unit in the kindergarten is kindergarten department. The number of departments in certain institution depends on its room conditions – kindergarten can have one or more departments. More frequently, we leave behind the division of children into age groups. In departments the children at similar age are grouped, but a basis for their attribution to a certain group is child's needs, its interests and talents or the level of self-dependence or level of disability. The amount of children in kindergarten department should not exceed 25. However, in agreement with an organ managing kindergarten institution the amount of children in the department can be smaller, e.g. in integration departments where there are usually from 15 to 20 children, with regard to the presence of disabled children. Also other norms concerning the amount of children are in force in the kindergarten department in special kindergartens. Depending on the kind of disability, the amount of children in the department includes from 2 to 4 people, in case of autistic children. Very numerous are the departments which are attended by children with chronic diseases – 16 people.

Public kindergartens are open throughout whole school year with exception of periods determined by managing organ (a month of holidays). During that time in big cities there are so-called kindergartens on duty. Work organization of kindergarten is determined by framework schedule of the day. The time of additional classes in the kindergarten, including learning a foreign language, music or rehabilitation classes, with children at the age of 3 and 4 is 15 minutes long, and it should be adjusted to development possibilities of children. With reference to older children like 5 and 6 year olds, the time of one lesson should not be longer than 30 minutes. To ensure the continuity and efficacy of educational and didactic work, it is important that the teacher takes care of certain department during the period when the children attend this kindergarten (four years).

### **Teacher's staff**

The headmaster chooses one or two teachers who manage certain departments depending on the daily basis of working hours of kindergarten or different organizational solution, taking into account parents' expectations. All teachers working in the kindergarten should have appropriate qualifications certified by higher education institution diploma on

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bachelor or master's level and professional qualifications including teaching certificates. Teachers during their professional work can improve their skills at postgraduate studies. Each teacher must start from the position of a trainee-teacher and ending as an appointee teacher which are subsequent levels of professional career.

In this professional group teachers of pre-school education have the lowest status, even though they are not different, neither in level of education nor in qualifications. Unfortunately, they do not have so many privileges as teachers teaching at schools. They have more hours in workload and shorter holidays.

In kindergartens with integration departments or in integration kindergartens, there are additional teachers employed with specialist teaching preparation (teachers who graduated from appropriate faculty: special pedagogics), and specialists (rehabilitants) conducting rehabilitation classes.

Apart from basic school teacher's staff in the kindergarten, there can also be employed other specialists, e.g. psychologist, speech therapist, paediatrician. Moreover, there are other workers in the kindergarten, so-called ancillary personnel, including people occupied with feeding the children, caretakers and people assisting teachers in the youngest groups of children – 3 year olds.

Violence and counteracting the violence is very badly situated in Polish law. Only after the series of incidents of child abuse and ill-treatment by adults revealed by newspapers, we started to think about solutions to such problems. Disclosure to the public the phenomenon of violence in educational institutions resulted in forming in the Ministry of National Education, in the Department of Youth, Education and Safety at Schools, a national program „Zero tolerance to violence at school”.

The problem of violence is also dealt with by the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, Institute of Health Psychology and the State Agency for Prevention of Alcohol Related Problems as well as some non-governmental organizations, and also by associations and foundations, among others, „Nobody's Children” Foundation. However, most of the activities that are going on are aimed to help in critical situations, e.g. Polish Nationwide Emergency Service for Victims of Domestic Violence „Blue Line”. Still, there are no activities aimed at counteracting the violence. Prevention that is supposed to counteract the violence rarely appears in any programs, both at school and in kindergartens.

In some of the voivodeships the local authorities have developed long-term strategies of dealing with social problems. Such a strategy, until 2015 was created, among others, in Gdansk voivodeship. There were directions of social policy indicated, taking into account

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counteracting the violence and also frames for developing more detailed programs, e.g. having as an aim, on one hand help the victims of violence, and on the other hand, to educate the staff that could help in such situations. With reference to children, there were appropriate support groups created, including the offer extension of preventive and supporting services directed at dysfunctional families and also a system of helping children was modernized. What is more, the forms of parents' education were organized with the usage of existing school system. As a result, the cycle of trainings for teachers was created in the frames of improving professional skills as well as for trainers in the scope of parents' education.<sup>22</sup>

Very slowly the way to introduce educational programs content from intercultural education is paved as well as realization of educational programs concerning the formation of attitude of tolerance and acceptance of dissimilarities.

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<sup>22</sup> Strategy of finding solutions to social problems, Gdańsk 2004. Annex to Resolution No. XXVI/829/04 of City Council of Gdańsk from 8 July 2004.