

Analysis of the policy context addressing 25+ NEETs

COUNTRY REPORT – POLAND

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**IN THE FRAMEWORK OF THE PROJECT ‘LOST
MILLENNIALS – TRANSNATIONAL RESEARCH
NETWORK FOR THE EVALUATION OF INITIATIVES
TARGETING 25+ NEETS’**

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Project summary:

The project ‘Lost Millennials’ focuses on a regularly neglected group of the generation of Millennials: young people aged 25-29 neither in employment or education and training (25+ NEETs). This generation started their working life shortly after the economic crisis of 2008, perceiving uncertainty and lack of security for work and well-being, they are more likely to be inactive or in precarious jobs The main objective of the project is to contribute to the successful integration of 25+ NEETs to the labour market through increasing knowledge on the effects of employment initiatives on 25+ NEETs, building capacity of stakeholders to perform impact studies and thus improving the quality of labour market interventions. This objective will be achieved through the creation of the transnational research network which will share know-how and good practices, the evaluations of governmental and community-based initiatives targeting 25+ NEETs, as well as the engagement of stakeholders to increase the policy-relevance of project results.

For more information, please visit our [website](#), contact us on lm.leadpartner@hetfa.hu and follow our [social media](#).

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Implemented by:



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1. Overall policy context

The main legal framework underlying the strategies and policy guidelines to tackle the situation of NEETs in Poland is the **Act of April 20, 2004, on employment promotion and labour market institutions**. Although it does not introduce a definition of NEETs, it distinguishes policy instruments dedicated exclusively to people up to 30 years of age, from which the NEETs can benefit. The act specifies the tasks of the State in the field of employment promotion, mitigating the effects of unemployment, and professional activation. Moreover, the document is the basis for the preparation of the **National Action Plan for Employment**, considered by voivodeship governments when preparing the annual **Regional Action Plans for Employment**, which defines priority groups among the unemployed and other people who require special support and activities which voivodeship and poviast level Employment Offices implement. The plans define goals and activities aimed also at young people, including NEETs.

The current National Action Plan for Employment 2022, under the objective 'Effective and fair use of Poland's personnel capital' recommends continuing activities for the employment of young people, including NEETs, through the implementation of the Decent Work for Youth programme, consisting of:

- the new edition of the Youth Guarantee, in line with the updated Guarantee Implementation Plan for young people in Poland;
- programmes aimed at young people, including internship programmes in the public sector;
- new institutional and legal solutions in forms of support, as part of the package of laws modernising the labour market.

In order to introduce the aforementioned Youth Guarantee, the Youth Guarantee Implementation Plan was created. The initiatives proposed under the Plan are targeted at people aged 15-29. At the regional/local level, Youth Guarantees are implemented by: Voivodeship Labour Offices, Poviast Labour Offices, Organisational structures of the Voluntary Labour Corps, Bank Gospodarstwa Krajowego (BGK) through selected Financial Intermediaries, Labour market partners, including social partners, employment agencies, non-governmental organisations, social economy entities, training institutions, social dialogue institutions, municipalities and employers selected for the implementation of the Youth Guarantee.

Activities aimed at a wider group of people, not only NEETs, are also included in the implementation of Poland's development policy including: the long-term national development strategy (Long-term National Development Strategy - Poland 2030. Third wave of modernity), defining the main trends, challenges and the concept of the country's development in the long-term perspective, medium-term national development strategy (National Development Strategy 2020, Strategy for Responsible Development until 2020) - the most important document in the medium-term, defining the strategic goals of the country's development until 2020, key for defining development activities, including those

that can be financed under the future EU financial perspective for 2014-2020 and 9 integrated strategies, serving the implementation of the assumed development goals, including the Human Capital Development Strategy. In August 2022 the Vocational Education and Training Action Plan for 2022-2025 was also adopted. It focuses on development of vocational education and lifelong learning.

Support for the employment of young people, including NEETs, is provided with funds from the national funds and European funds such as European Social Fund, which are used on two levels: the national - Knowledge Education Development Program functioning until 2020 (addressing people aged 15-29) and the **regional** - Regional Operational Programs. The successor of the Knowledge Education Development Program 2014-2020 (POWER) is the European Funds for Social Development 2021-2027 (FERS) program. FERS covers the general population and aims to improve access to employment and activation measures for all job seekers, especially young people, primarily through the implementation of the Youth Guarantee, but also the long-term unemployed and inactive persons. **There is no legal framework exclusively to the NEETs who are more than 25 years old.**

Supporting entrepreneurship is also one of the elements of the Long-term National Development Strategy - Poland 2030. Third wave of modernity and related medium and short-term strategies. In Poland, entrepreneurship is supported mainly by shaping entrepreneurial attitudes by introducing classes in the field of entrepreneurship at all stages and fields of study. Moreover, there are programmes offering grants for starting or developing a business. The funds are awarded by poviats labour offices from the Labour Fund resources, under the Polish Agency for Enterprise Development programmes or entities selected through open competitions. In addition, young people (up to 29 years old) can also apply for a 'starting a business activity' grant from the European Social Fund, Knowledge Education Development.

Among the key institutions implementing activities supporting young people entering or re-entering the labour market are the public employment services - Voivodeship Labour Offices (VLO) and Poviats Labour Offices (PLO). The Voivodeship Labour Office, acting on behalf of the voivodeship government, defines and coordinates the regional labour market and human resources development policy in relation to the national labour market policy, by preparing and implementing a regional action plan for employment. Moreover, it distributes the resources of the Labour Fund and conducts analyses of the local labour market. The VLO also operates the Vocational Career Information and Planning Centre (VCiPC), a specialised unit that provides vocational guidance and information services for the unemployed and jobseekers. As part of VCiPC, professional information is developed, collected, updated, and disseminated in cooperation with Poviats Employment Offices and academic career offices. Poviats Labour Offices provide labour market services and offer instruments, including job placement and career counselling. They are available both for people registered in the PLO and, to a lesser extent, for unregistered people.

In addition to public employment services, there are **Voluntary Labour Corps** supervised by the Minister of Family and Social Policy. These are a state institution supporting young people, particularly those at risk of social exclusion or the unemployed, with the richest set of instruments to support young people under 25 years of age.

The European Employment Strategy (EES) is implemented in Poland through initiatives regarding long-term unemployment, social inclusion, public employment services or undeclared work. The strategy, undertaken by the Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Policy, is carried out through the National Action Plans for Employment, which constitute the basis for the implementation of the state's tasks in the field of employment promotion, mitigating the effects of unemployment and professional activation. Furthermore, in order to implement the EU economic strategy 'Europe 2020', in which two key factors for the labour market policy were 'Youth on the Move' and 'Programme for new skills and jobs', National Reform Programmes were adopted as the primary instrument for the implementation of the strategy Europe 2020 by the EU Member States). The programmes organised as part of implementing these plans are aimed at people **under 30 years of age**.

The development and implementation of regulations and instruments addressing NEETs in Poland depends strongly on the European level. This can be seen in the application of the Youth Guarantee Initiative via the European Social Fund, which is included in the European Funds for Social Development 2021-2027 (FERS) programme and the National Action Plan. In Poland, EU strategies addressing NEETs (such as Youth Employment Initiative or Youth Guarantee) are mainly implemented under Youth Guarantee Implementation Plan and cover people up to 29 years of age. In addition, there are long- and medium-term strategies as well, such as Long-term National Development Strategy - Poland 2030. Third wave of modernity and National Development Strategy 2020 or Plan for sustainable development constitute the basis for legislative changes.

2. Institutional framework

The situation of young people in the labour market is strongly conditioned by the system of institutional factors determining the parameters of the functioning of the labour market and the education system. **In Poland, the general labour market policy is established at the national (government) level, but labour offices, both in poviats and voivodeships, define and coordinate the local and regional labour market policy in accordance with the needs of a given market.** In addition, labour offices are responsible for implementing the strategies and the ALMPs, and report to voivodeship and poviats governments, respectively. The offices are managed by the heads of voivodeship and poviats labour offices appointed by voivodeship marshals and starosts.

The situation is similar in the case of the **education system: although established centrally, the responsibility for the administration of kindergartens and schools is delegated to local authorities.** Administrative and organisational matters and decisions on the use of funds by schools are subject to consultations between the school and the school's governing body, which is the commune in the case of public kindergartens and primary schools, and the poviát in the case of public secondary schools. Universities remain autonomous in regulating internal affairs and matters related to science.

There is no unit responsible for implementing public policy addressed exclusively to 25+ NEETs, neither at the central level nor at the regional/local level.

3. Supply-side policies

3.1. Education and qualification

The Polish education system is based on kindergartens, primary schools, secondary schools, technical schools, first-degree vocational schools and second-degree vocational schools. Such structure was formed after the reform in 2017, which restored the pre-1999 structure, having an 8-year primary school, a 4-year general secondary school and a 5-year technical secondary school. In addition, the reform introduced 3-year vocational training, enabling the acquisition of further qualifications and preparation for the secondary school-leaving examination in a 2-year second-cycle vocational school. Moreover, a one-year preschool preparation for 6-year-olds has become compulsory. The current generation of 25+ NEETs mostly graduated from the previous school system, covering 6-year primary school, 3-year general secondary school, a 4-year technical secondary school, and a 2-year vocational school.

Graduates of a general secondary school, a technical secondary school and a second-degree vocational school may take matriculation exams, considered in the university admission process. Students of technical and vocational schools additionally take exams confirming their professional qualifications. Secondary school graduates may continue their education in universities or post-secondary schools, where education lasts from 1 to 2.5 years and ends with vocational exams.

Educational services are also targeted at adults for whom separate primary and secondary schools are intended, and allow them to complete primary and secondary school education, acquiring skills and supplementing qualifications for professional and personal purposes. Education takes place:

- in practical education institutions,
- in training and vocational training centres,
- as part of postgraduate studies at universities.

With regard to special education, it is organised based on a decision issued by a public psychological and pedagogical counselling centre. The starost competent for the place of residence of a child is obliged to provide such child with an appropriate form of education, considering the type of disability. **The education system provides people with disabilities with the opportunity to study in all types of schools, according to their individual development and educational needs and predispositions, and with the care for students by enabling the implementation of an individualised education process, forms, curricula and revalidation classes.** Disabled students have the right to an extended education process: until they reach 18 years of age in the case of primary school, 21 years of age in the case of lower secondary school, and 24 years of age in the case of upper secondary school.

3.1.1. Compulsory education

In Poland, compulsory schooling is separated from compulsory education. Currently, compulsory schooling lasts nine years and covers the last year of preschool education and an 8-year primary school (7-15 years), but not longer than until the age of 18, which is one year shorter than before the 2017 reform (when compulsory schooling covered the last year of preschool education, a 6-year primary school and a 3-year lower secondary school). Compulsory education applies to young people aged 15-18 and may be implemented either in school (by attending secondary school), or out of school (by carrying out vocational preparation with the employer).

The network of public primary schools should enable all children to fulfil their schooling obligation. Spatial access is guaranteed by regulations defining the acceptable distance from a student's home to school (3 km for students in grades 1-4 of primary schools, and 4 km for students in grades V-VIII of primary schools). If the distance is exceeded, the municipality is obliged to provide free transport and care during child transport or reimbursement of public transport costs if the parents provide transport. Moreover, until the child reaches 7 years of age, also a reimbursement of the travel costs of the child's guardian are also covered. Municipalities are also obliged to provide disabled pupils with free transport and care during the travel to the nearest primary school. Providing transport to primary and secondary schools and the age to which the child is entitled to transport depends on the child's degree of disability. Foreign students up to 18 years of age are subject to compulsory schooling under the same conditions as Polish students. They are admitted to public schools based on foreign documents confirming the attendance of school abroad and the completion of the corresponding stage of education. The exceptions are public second-degree vocational schools, where the admission condition is a certified vocational education; and public post-secondary schools, where the admission condition is a first-degree vocational education or secondary education. Education in public schools for adults, public post-secondary schools, public art schools, public institutions and public colleges for social service employees and lifelong learning in the form of qualifying vocational courses on the terms applicable to Polish citizens is available to persons indicated in art. 165 sec. 5 of the Act - Education Law; other foreigners are required to pay for education. Foreigners subject to compulsory schooling or compulsory education,

who do not know the Polish language or know it at a level insufficient to benefit from education, have the right to additional, free Polish language lessons organised by the municipality or poviát competent for their place of residence. They also have the right to assistance, provided by a person who speaks the language of the country of origin, employed as a teacher's assistant by the school head for no longer than 12 months. They may also take additional remedial classes in a given subject for 12 months. However, the total number of additional Polish language lessons and compensatory classes may not exceed 5 hours a week. Furthermore, in agreement with the school's principal and with the governing body's consent, it is possible to organise classes in the language and culture of the student's country of origin.

Polish citizens belonging to national and ethnic minorities have the right to establish their own educational, cultural and religious identity institutions. Kindergartens, schools, and public institutions enable students belonging to national and ethnic minorities to learn the language of the national or ethnic minority, the regional language, and their history and culture. The principal organises these classes at the request of the student's parents or an adult student. Public schools may also teach the state's geography which the national minority identifies with, and organise other classes according to the regulations issued based on the Education Law.

In Poland, at each stage of education, students are guaranteed support in recognising their interests and professional predispositions and making informed educational decisions. Schools are required to carry out systematic career guidance activities during 1) educational classes in preschool education; 2) compulsory educational classes in the field of general education or vocational training; 3) classes in the field of career counselling; 4) classes related to the choice of the field of education and profession conducted as part of psychological and pedagogical assistance; 5) classes with the tutor. Moreover, **a programme for career counselling implementation is developed for each school year, taking into account the intra-school system of career counselling.** The programme is developed by a career counsellor (or other teacher or teachers responsible for implementing career counselling at school) appointed by the school's principal. The manner of carrying out individual tasks in educational and vocational counselling is adjusted to a specific stage of education and is defined by a regulation of the minister of education. Counselling classes do not apply to schools for adults.

Besides supporting students in making their educational and professional choices, career counselling also plays a preventive role for early school leaving. Following national priorities and the goals of the Europe 2020 strategy, Poland has developed and adopted the Human Capital Development Strategy , as well as the document 'Perspective of lifelong learning ¹ , which constitute the basis for the implementation of actions of a preventive, interventional and compensatory nature. The leading implementers of the strategy at the national level are the Ministry of National Education, whose tasks

¹ In accordance with the Plan of organising the development strategy adopted by the Council of Ministers, this document has the status of an additional strategic document resulting from international obligations.

include determining the directions of the state's educational policy, and the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy.

The main problems and factors that may cause early school leaving in Poland are the insufficient popularisation of early care and education services, their low diversity and little orientation towards parental support, and the difficult situation of large families. Thus, **promoting early childhood care and education can also be considered as preventive measures**. It is one of the initiatives under the objective *'Improving the availability and quality of education at all stages and increasing the competitiveness of science'* of the Long-term National Development Strategy - Poland 2030 - The third wave of modernity.

Furthermore, adult schools enabling to combine work and study (as in justified cases, a person under 16 years of age may enrol in them), adult lifelong learning institutions, special schools that prepare students (with disabilities and young people exposed to social maladjustment) for employment, vocational training and institutions such as Voluntary Labour Corps (allowing people aged 15-17 to continue general education and gain professional qualifications) can also compensate for early school leaving.

3.1.2. Vocational Education Training

In order to adapt education to the needs of the labour market, including the growing demand for VET jobs, and to promote vocational training, the system of vocational and continuing education was modernised. The established vocational schools, which are first-cycle, second-cycle vocational schools, technical schools and post-secondary schools, are based primarily on cooperation with employers. Before introducing a new profession to school education, the school principal must cooperate with the employer competent for such profession or industry. Practical vocational training in technical secondary schools, industry secondary schools and post-secondary schools are organised during practical classes and apprenticeships. The school or the employer organises practical learning.

The number of hours of practical classes held with employers based on the dual education system may not be lower than 1) in the case of a first-cycle industry school (which is the minimum total number of hours of practical classes specified for the first-cycle industry school); 2) in the case of a second-degree industry school, technical secondary school and post-secondary school (which is 30%); the number of hours of practical classes should also not be higher than 100% of the minimum total number of hours of practical classes specified for the second-degree industry school, technical secondary school or post-secondary school, respectively.

Improving the quality and efficiency of vocational education and training at all levels, combined with increasing its attractiveness through a stronger link with the labour market is included in the objective *'Improving the availability and quality of education at all stages and increasing the competitiveness of science'* of Long-term National Development Strategy - Poland 2030 - Third wave of modernity. Under

another objective called *'Raising the level of competences and qualifications of citizens'*, the same strategy assumes, inter alia, raising the level and adapting the model of vocational education to the expectations of employers and developing educational and vocational guidance to facilitate navigation among personalised education and training offers.

Furthermore, the careers of graduates are monitored, in order to provide information on the careers of secondary school graduates to conduct state educational policy at the national, regional and local levels, including adapting the directions and content of education to the requirements of the labour market and preparing students to choose a profession and direction of education.

After the adoption of the Law on School Education, which has increased the range of available learning paths for students, in 2019, the reform of vocational education has begun. The reform allows vocational schools to become vocational and continuing education centres, in order to increase the offer of available courses and the cooperation with employers. Vocational qualification courses offered to adults enable them to take exams leading to qualifications for a given occupation. Among the aims of the reform was to improve the link between vocational training and the labour market and increasing the role of employers in vocational training.

The follow-up to the vocational training reform is adopted in 2022 Vocational Education and Training Action Plan 2022-2025. It assumes the development of professional skills, including those related to green and digital transformation, provision and development of human resources for vocational training, development of career counselling and promotion of vocational education, strengthening cooperation with employers and social partners in the development of vocational education and development of vocational education and lifelong learning.

3.1.3. Higher education

There are public and private universities in Poland, and education in the former is generally free (though public schools may offer paid evening and extramural studies). Moreover, amendments to the Act on Higher Education in 2014 abolished fees for the second course of study, facilitating further education. The amendments also introduced the possibility of conducting inter-university studies, dual studies with employers, and changes in the commercialisation of scientific research results. The component of practical education within the studies was significantly strengthened, as students are obliged to complete three-month internships.

Students in a difficult financial situation can apply for a social scholarship, and they can also receive scholarships for high academic performance or apply for a student loan and a loan for medical studies.

The careers of university graduates are monitored. To this aim the ELA Graduates Economic Career Monitoring System, commissioned by the Ministry of Science and Higher Education at the Information

Processing Centre, has been in operation since 2016, providing up-to-date, exhaustive information about the situation of graduates in the labour market. Furthermore, **to adapt the study programme to the needs of the labour market, universities may conduct their own monitoring of the professional careers of their graduates.**

While OECD data shows that 50% of graduates are overqualified for their job, the figure is increasing over time showing that there is room for improvements in the balance between the demand and the supply of knowledge for workers.

Higher education initiatives are included in the Long-term National Development Strategy - Poland 2030 - Third wave of modernity and National Action Plans for Employment.

3.2. Labour market policies

Although there is no direct governmental policy supporting the school to work transition, some secondary schools provide students with the opportunity to participate in dedicated workshops preparing for their occupations and internships. The internships are obligatory for technical schools and basic vocational schools, as well as for university students. Only graduates of general secondary schools who do not continue education at universities are not faced with an apprenticeship requirement.

As for student internships, their formula is usually not specified, yet the research underlines their low quality and the lack of connection with the learned profession. Another form of promotion of student employment is workshops organised by universities or student organizations in cooperation with various companies. Most universities have career offices that mediate in providing job offers and internships for students and graduates. Another dimension of the operation of schools and universities is job fairs, which are usually organised in cooperation with student organisations or employment offices.

Outside the education system, young people continue their education on professional training courses organised by labour offices that may equip them with the skills and competencies required in the first job, or foster their employability. Labour offices offer training and training vouchers by granting persons with disabilities with funding for participation in training conducted by the Labour Offices themselves. The support accounts for up to 100% of the total costs of the requalification or training, but at the same time it cannot exceed the value of ten average monthly salaries (which, as of 2021, equals 56,625.3 PLN). The funding for training also includes accommodation, transport, services of the sign language translator (if applicable), and the provision of the necessary medical documentation (if applicable).

When it comes to policies regarding salaries, there is a minimum wage set by the Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Policy for all the labour force. The preliminary proposed minimum wage is determined based on the price increase forecast for the next year and, if the minimum wage is lower than half the

national average, also by two-thirds of real economic growth². There are no additional policies targeting young people and 25+ NEETs.

There are no policies in Poland promoting the shift of informal workers (undeclared work) into formal employment. However, the State Labour Office (SLO) controls informal work and the legality of employment of Polish citizens. In the years 2017-2019, SLO run the nationwide information and education campaign 'I work legally', in order to raise the awareness of employers and employees in the field of employment according to applicable labour law provisions. In addition, undeclared work is to be limited by new regulations introduced by the Polish Order, which establish that the consequences of illegal employment will be borne only by the employer and not by the employee. The employer will pay the tax on the undeclared work and be assigned additional income in the minimum remuneration for work for each month of illegal employment, regardless of whether he paid the remuneration and in what amount. Dishonest employers will also be required to pay social security and health insurance contributions for undeclared wages, without them being recognised as tax-deductible costs. The provisions are intended to encourage employees to disclose undeclared work, and to discourage employers from using unfair practices.

As for ALMPs, employment offices offer career counselling in the field of choosing or changing a profession, planning a professional career, supplementing professional qualifications, determining one's competences and interests, and planning professional development. Employment offices also offer instruments aimed at improving the qualifications of the unemployed. These include training aimed at obtaining, supplementing or improving professional or general skills and qualifications needed to perform work, financing exams and licenses enabling obtaining certificates, diplomas, and specific professional qualifications, and covering the costs for obtaining a license necessary to practise a given profession. In addition, ALMPs include intervention jobs, socially useful work, public work, and financing for starting a business activity. Some of the instruments offered by the Labour Offices are aimed exclusively at people up to 30 years of age, including internships, a training voucher (which guarantees referral of the unemployed person to the indicated training and the payment of costs that will be incurred in connection with starting the training), an internship voucher (guaranteeing a referral to an internship with an employer indicated by the unemployed for 6 months, provided that the employer undertakes to employ the person after the end of the internship for 6 months), an employment voucher (which guarantees the employer reimbursement of part of the costs of remuneration and social security contributions in connection with the employment of an unemployed voucher holder), and a settlement

² In 2022, the minimum monthly salary was increased from 2800 to 3010 PLN, while the minimum wage per hour increased from 18.30 to 19.70 PLN. According to government estimates, the minimum salary accounts for 50.8% of the forecasted average salary in 2022 (5922 PLN per month).²

voucher addressed to people registered as unemployed taking up employment outside place of residence in Poland.

Passive labour market policies are also in place. Unemployed individuals are entitled to receive an unemployment benefit after their registration in the regional Labour Office as unemployed, although the benefit is provided only if there are no available internships, training, intervention or public works. Moreover, the person must have been employed for 365 days within the last 18 months before applying for the benefit. Unemployment benefits are granted for 180 or 365 days, with the length depending on the unemployment rate in the poviats where the unemployed person lives, the registered jobseeker's age and length of service, the reason for unemployment and whether the unemployed brings up children (up to 15 years of age) alone. For one year, an unemployed person whose spouse is also registered at the employment office without unemployment benefit may also receive a benefit. The amount of the unemployment benefit depends on the length of service. The benefit may be granted in the amount of:

- 80% of the amount of the allowance (up to 5 years of seniority), which corresponds to 992.64 PLN (gross) for the first 90 days of being entitled to unemployment benefit and 779.52 (gross) after 3 months of receiving the benefit
- 100% (5-20 years of seniority), which corresponds to 1240.80 PLN (gross) for the first 90 days of being entitled to unemployment benefit and 974.40 (gross) after 3 months
- 120% (over 20 years of seniority), which corresponds to 1488.96 PLN (gross) for the first 90 days of being entitled to unemployment benefit and 1169.28 (gross) after 3 months.

There are no age criteria concerning the number of unemployment benefits. Although the unemployment benefits do not target NEETs directly, individuals employed on the internship agreements who do not receive a salary are still entitled to them.

The services of the employment office and instruments financed from PFRON funds are also provided to people with disabilities who have the status of 'jobseekers'. These instruments are addressed directly to disabled people, as well as to their employers. Employers can get:

- Reimbursement of the costs of adjusting the workplace.
- Workplace equipment reimbursement.
- Reimbursement of employee training costs.
- Reimbursement of employment costs of an employee assisting a disabled employee at work.
- Exemption from contributions to PFRON.

Poland has ratified most of the international legal acts supporting gender equality (which include the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, and the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action), nonetheless there is no specific governmental agency that is responsible for

the implementation of policies regarding gender equality. While the labour market policies do not discriminate based on gender, they do not specifically tackle the issue of gender inequality either.

In 2021, the first Polish 'Strategy for People with Disabilities 2021-2030' was introduced. It was announced in the Strategy for Responsible Development (SRD) until 2021 (with a perspective until 2030). Due to its cross-sectoral nature, the strategy is complementary to integrated development strategies, including the Human Capital Development Strategy 2030. The 'Strategy for People with Disabilities 2021-2030' includes directions for the development of social policy towards people with disabilities. The strategy also responds to the challenges described in the National Strategy of Regional Development 2030), inter alia, in terms of ensuring accessibility and increasing employment of people with disabilities. The goals and areas of support include independent living, accessibility, education, work, living conditions and social protection, health, awareness-building and coordination. The main goal of the Strategy is the social and professional inclusion of people with disabilities.

3.3. Entrepreneurship

Initiatives aimed at the development of entrepreneurship, such as: implementation of educational programmes in the field of strategic planning in small and medium-sized enterprises, involvement of local governments at the provincial level to support entrepreneurship and economic promotion of the region, conducting trainings for entrepreneurs and administration employees in the field of state aid and the principles of its granting and use are included in the Long-term National Development Strategy - Poland 2030 - Third wave of modernity and **medium-term national development strategies** (National Development Strategy 2020, Strategy for Responsible Development until 2020).

There are also various programmes supporting entrepreneurship, including subsidies, grants and loans on privileged terms. However, these policies differ in regards of target group³:

- The targets of the Labour Office Grants are the Unemployed, Caretakers of Persons with disabilities, and Graduates of Social Integration Centres.
- The targets of 'First business – support in the beginning' are students, higher education graduates, unemployed, and caretakers of children with disabilities.
- EU grants are aimed at individuals with a difficult situation in the labour market or who are endangered to social exclusion. These policies strongly differ between regions: the search engine indicated around 862 possible policies in Poland, among which 598 cases were available for individuals younger than 30 years. The problems of NEETs, the consequences of COVID-19, and the low participation in the labour market of women and disabled people are often addressed by these policies.

³ Access 23/05/2022: <https://www.biznes.gov.pl/en>

- The policy of the agency for restructuring and modernisation of agriculture provides grants for young farmers up to the age of 40 years, with appropriate qualifications.
- In 5 out of 16 voivodships, there are available loans from the Joint European Resources for Micro-to-Medium Enterprises initiative. These policies are targeted at individuals with no credit history.

The Polish Agency for Enterprise Development also offers some programmes supporting Entrepreneurship⁴, offering support in finding financing sources for starting operating in capital markets, innovations, international operations, and personal development. Their offer is not fixed and is not aimed at any particular group with vulnerabilities.

3.4. Work-life reconciliation policies

Currently, there are no policies concerning work arrangements apart from those targeting motherhood. A mother who is breastfeeding and works at least 6 hours a day may be given up to two additional 30-minute ‘breastfeeding breaks’ that can be combined into one. No regulations normalise the age of the child or require a medical certificate that the mother is breastfeeding.

Currently, women and men can share the period of maternal and paternal leave, as one parent can increase the period of leave by reducing the time of the other. However, women must spend at least 14 weeks on maternity leave, while the remaining six weeks can be used by the child's father. In addition, the father can use another two weeks of paternity leave until the child is 24 months old.

Children are eligible for attending kindergarten between the age of 3 and 7, and are obliged to attend at least one year of compulsory kindergarten education⁵. The cost of childcare and care services varies by region and the type of institution (public, private). Households are entitled to receive up to 400 PLN per month to cover the costs of pre-primary education⁶.

3.5. Health/ Social Insurance policies

Compulsory health insurance covers almost all social groups: i.e., employees, persons conducting non-agricultural business activity or persons cooperating with them, persons employed on the basis of a mandate contract, retirees and pensioners, as well as some other groups of people, such as children attending schools and students (if they cannot be registered for health insurance as family members of the insured parents or grandparents). A compulsorily or voluntarily insured person is required to register family members for insurance, including children under 18 years of age (up to the age of 26 if they continue their education, and without age limit if they have a certificate of severe disability or are

⁴ Access 23/05/2022: <https://www.parp.gov.pl/component/grants/grantss?category=5>

⁵ Legal Basis: Dz.U.2021 pos.1082

⁶ Access 24/05/2022: <https://www.gov.pl/web/rodzina/dofinansowanie-do-pobytu-w-zlobku-juz-od-dzisiaj-rodzicu-zlozwniosek>

otherwise treated equally) the spouse, and relatives of ascendants remaining in the same household with the insured person. Social security is compulsory for employees.

In the case of an employment contract, employees are covered by compulsory health insurance and social insurance. Similarly, the social and health contributions are paid by the employer, and the employee may join the sickness insurance on a voluntary basis. An exception is a mandate contract concluded with a person up to 26 years of age, since in this case the employees are not covered by health insurance or old-age and disability pension insurance. The contract for specific work does not constitute an entitlement to social insurance and is the least favourable from the point of view of the employee.

As for the employment of a disabled person, the working time may not exceed 8 hours a day and 40 hours a week, and if the degree of disability is severe or moderate, the working time may not exceed 7 hours a day and 35 hours a week. A disabled person cannot be employed at night and overtime. These restrictions do not apply to persons employed to supervise and if there is the agreement for this (at the request of the employed person) by the doctor who carries out preventive examinations of the employees or, in the absence of such, the doctor caring for this person. These rules apply only to persons employed under an employment relationship, which means that the working time of a disabled person with a moderate degree of disability employed under a contract of mandate may also be longer than 7 hours a day and 35 hours a week.

The application of the above-mentioned working time standards does not reduce the amount of remuneration paid in a fixed monthly amount. The hourly rates of basic remuneration, corresponding to the personal grade or grade for the work performed, are increased in relation to the current working time to these norms when switching to the working time norms mentioned above.

A person with a significant or moderate degree of disability has the right to be released from work while retaining the right to remuneration up to 21 working days in order to participate in a rehabilitation camp (though not more often than once a year, and in order to perform specialist examinations, therapeutic or improvement procedures, as well as to obtain orthopaedic supplies or to repair them, if these activities cannot be performed outside working hours. Moreover, the person is entitled to an additional annual leave of 10 working days in a calendar year, and has the right to an additional 15-minute break at work to be used for rehabilitation exercises or rest.

Employers hiring disabled persons are entitled to a monthly subsidy for the remuneration of a disabled employee from the funds of the State Fund for Rehabilitation of Disabled Persons (PFRON). The amount of the monthly grant depends on the degree of the employee's disability (1,950 PLN for a severe disability, 1,200 PLN for a moderate disability, and 450 PLN for a mild disability, with possible increases for certain disabilities), the working time of a disabled employee, and the type of employer with which

the disabled person is employed and the amount of payroll costs. The employer may also receive reimbursement of the costs of training a disabled person and software for the use of disabled employees.

3.6. Other supply-side policies

Those who have problems finding employment in rural areas can apply for the Settlement voucher at the labour office. In order to receive support, one has to find an employment location at a distance of at least 80 km from the current place of residence. The amount of support cannot exceed the two average monthly salaries. To be eligible for participation, one must stay in employment for at least six months.⁷

4. Demand-side policies

4.1. Incentives

To increase the employability of young persons in the labour market, Regional Labour Offices offer a financial support for employers who want to hire a young person up to the age of 29. These policies have mutual benefits for both the employer, who can decrease the cost of hiring, and the unemployed, who can gain work experience and strengthen his position on the labour market. Contrary to the majority of the policies, this programme is specifically designed for tackling the problem of NEETs. At the same time, since the employer is likely to put effort for training of the new hire, the unemployed might be granted a full-time employment after the initial period is over.

The Labour Offices provide incentives for employers for providing work placements. This programme enables the employer to hire a young person up to 25 years of age without work experience. The employer does not bear any cost from hiring the employee, as the salary and other costs are paid by the Labour Office, but has an opportunity to train an employee and hire her after traineeship is finished. In particular, the most beneficial option for the employer in terms of cost reduction and support from the Labour Office is hiring an employee in a poor life situation (such as with disabilities or single parents).

The employer can receive up to 30,000 PLN for the organisation of the workplace, which includes, for instance, providing technical equipment such as computers and printers. This policy is focused on persons with disabilities, as they are considered first for the employment. In this case, the employer can receive additional support concerning providing proper working conditions for employees with disabilities.

The policies mentioned above are organised at the national level, and in the further period conducted by the regional labour market offices. In addition, national-level incentives may also be joined with

⁷ Access 24/05/2022: <https://warszawa.praca.gov.pl/dla-bezrobotnych-i-poszukujacych-pracy/formy-wsparcia/bon-na-zasiedlenie>

regional-level ones. On the poviát level, the local governments can apply for financial support from the POWER (the Operational Program Knowledge, Education, Development) programme initiative and allocate the funds to support a group of interest in the labour market. In consequence, there is a variety in targeting different vulnerable groups. For instance, in Wrocław in 2016 the main group that could apply for support through counselling, traineeships and subsidies were women (around 58% of all positions), while in Łódź the same programme focused more on the population above the age of 50 and the long-term unemployed.

It is also worth to mention that the Russian aggression of Ukraine resulted in mass migration of Ukrainian refugees to Poland, which resulted in the increase of the NEET (mainly female) population in the country. So far, the incentives of the labour market offices to tackle the problem of professional activation have been modest. Nevertheless, the websites of the labour offices were modernised in terms of the language accessibility, with the offers becoming available in English, Ukrainian and Russian. In some regions in Poland, special meetings were organized for the employers interested in hiring Ukrainian refugees.

4.2. Social security policies

If an employer decides to hire a young person that was previously unemployed and is below the age of 30, he may be exempted from the labour funds contributions for the following 12 months. Even though employees below the age of 26 years who did not earn more than 85,528.00 PLN in a year are exempted from the personal tax income, this does not mean that the costs of employment are lower for the employers. At the same time, the employers do not have to cover the social insurance contributions of students below the age of 26 years. In this sense, students might be more 'attractive' for the employers in comparison to NEETs.

4.3. Taxes

The reductions in personal income taxation are for employees up to the age of 26 years. As part of the 'Without PIT for Young People' programme, people who are under 26 years of age and receive income from work (such as from an employment relationship, a cooperative employment relationship, an employment relationship or an employment relationship), mandate contracts or graduate internship and student internship, are exempt from income taxation provided that their annual income was not higher than 85,528 PLN. People who gain financial benefits from a contract for a specific task or running their own business are not exempt from paying income tax even if they meet the age and income criteria. There are no tax reductions for the employers for employing young people.

5. Orientation

Individuals can participate in career counselling in the regional labour offices. This counselling concerns choosing an occupational path, planning career, defining competences and interests, and planning professional development. While this policy is designed for individuals registered in the labour office, unregistered people can also apply for counselling to a lesser extent. Though participation in the counselling is accessible regardless of gender, age, disability, race, ethnic origin, nationality, sexual orientation, political beliefs, religion or trade union membership, this policy is targeted neither at vulnerable NEETs nor at NEETs in general. However, it should be noted that before graduation from the educational system, students can participate in counselling at school.

Regional Labour Offices organise the counselling programmes on the demand of the participant, thus the offer might differ between regions. There are also some external institutions offering counselling or career guidance.

6. Conclusions

Poland presents many policies which target the labour market at the central level, and the variety is also increased when accounting for the regional differences both in the situation of the labour market and the implementation of the policies themselves. These policies aim at reducing the impact of unemployment both on the labour market itself and on the individuals affected by it, thanks to financial and practical support offered to employers and employees. Moreover, disadvantaged groups and individuals are further taken care of in order to offer them equal opportunities in the labour market and during unemployment spells.

When it comes to NEETs, Poland receives funding from the European Union's programmes that target these people. The policy that is addressed to young people is the Youth Guarantee Implementation Plan, covering people from 15 to 29 years of age. Strategies such as Long-term National Development Strategy - Poland 2030- Third wave of modernity, National Development Strategy 2020, Strategy for Responsible Development until 2020, although they include young people as part of their planned initiatives, are usually addressed to a wider group.

The policies developed by the Polish authorities (government, Labour Office, local authorities) are developing and evolving over time, yet they do not manage to fully address the needs of the actors in the current labour market. This is again visible in particular when it comes to NEETs, who are not considered by any regulation or policy specifically. The orientation of the labour market is a process that is not adequately supported by the existing programs and can deeply affect both the aggregate and the

individual welfare. The support for the young unemployed may be improved by taking advantage of the general development observed in the quality of public services, easing the situation for individuals who are not participating in the labour market.

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