

# **RAPORT ON REGULATIONS AND GUIDELINES CONCERNING ADULT EDUCATION IN POLAND**

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## Introduction

The field of adult education is of particular interest at both the national and community levels. Learning, acquiring new skills, broadening horizons and the social and relational development of a person are becoming increasingly important in the context of dynamic economic, technological, organisational, IT and ecological changes. More and more often one can hear the view that the modern economy is based on knowledge. And since the dynamics of change is very high, it is necessary for the human mind to constantly develop and explore new areas. This in turn is related to the education process. However, not only in school, which at some point ends, but with a whole process, aimed at the continuous development of the person. The field of adult education is becoming increasingly important.

This paper presents the situation in Poland. The description concerns the current legal conditions in the field of regulations concerning adult education, historical references, statistics illustrating the current situation and future directions of development of this area.

## Non-existing definitions

In Poland there is no one universally accepted definition of adult *education/learning*. The systematisation of issues and concepts in line with European definitions is set out in the 2013 document titled "The perspective of life long learning" (Annex to Resolution No 160/2013 of the Council of Ministers of 10 September 2013). According to the provisions of this document, the concept defined in Polish legislation is **continuing education**, which is significantly different from the understanding of the concept of *adult education/learning* in EU legislation. The main difference concerns the *subject* of the definition, that is, the persons concerned. In line with the EU approach, presented in the European Commission Communication of 23 October 2007 titled "Adult learning. It is never too late to learn", *adult education* refers to people who have "completed training to enter the labour market, regardless of how long it takes, i.e. including higher education"<sup>1</sup>. In this sense, the *subject* is all adults at the age of professional activity. However, the lower age limit is 25 years old (the most common age at which formal education at the higher level may end). According to the Polish definition, contained in the *Act on the Education System* (Journal of laws No. 2004 No. 256, item 2572, as amended), the group of persons to whom the concept of continuing education refers has been narrowed down to those persons who "have fulfilled the school obligation and are studying in continuing, practical education and vocational training centres or attend adult schools"<sup>2</sup>. In this sense, the *subject* of the definition are people attending educational institutions, usually up to 24 years of age. Unfortunately, such an approach practically excludes from this definition adults at the age of professional activity who do not attend the indicated forms of education.

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<sup>1</sup> "The perspective of life long learning." Annex to resolution No 160/2013 of the Council of Ministers of 10 September 2013 p. 17.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 17.

## Between theory and practice

Despite the lack of adequate definitions and legal and formal solutions, the adult education process itself is developing dynamically in Poland. Its driving force is the changes taking place very quickly in the modern world. The document cited above outlines a very important postulate, connected with the necessity of disseminating so-called *life long education*. It is included in the words: "rapid economic development, technical and technological progress on the one hand, and the extension of life expectancy on the other, and the need to increase mobility, make it necessary to refocus the passive career model and fundamentally change the approach to the need for learning from the first to the last years of life"<sup>3</sup>. This sentence expresses the understanding of the processes taking place in the modern economy and society and the associated need for adaptation. This approach is in opposition to the so-called traditional model of educational and professional career that is widespread in Poland, which in this document has been characterised as follows: "the traditional model of educational and professional career consists in intensive learning in the school environment in the years of youth, deepening knowledge, skills and competences in the higher education system, acquiring professional qualifications and maintaining employment in the learned profession for as long as possible"<sup>4</sup>.

The clash of both educational models is currently very well visible in the Polish labour market. Currently, there are representatives of generations of employees with the so-called traditional approach to education and career path, as well as employees of the so-called "world of change". The watershed, which set a different direction of changes in the Polish economy, and thus a different shape of the labour market and social structure, was the so-called *political transformation*, i.e. the process of Poland entering the path of democratic change after the fall of communism, initiated in 1989. The second key date for these processes was Poland's entry into the structure of the European Union, on 1 May 2024. Since then, there has been a significant acceleration of changes in all aspects of socio-economic life, taking advantage of the opportunities offered by membership in the Community.

The presence of Poland in the European Union has opened the possibility for Poles to have a multidimensional presence in the European market. Access to the open labour market and education and contact with so-called Western social, technological and educational solutions have changed the perspective of thinking about education and professional development among the young generations.

Over the last several years, the subject of adult education has become particularly important. The phenomenon of universal adult education is described by researchers as *a phenomenon of the postmodern era*. The perception of education itself has changed in social awareness. Currently, the so-called highly developed societies have departed from the understanding of education in a *linear* manner, i.e. in an orderly, uniform and continuous manner, within a specified time frame. Another way of expressing thinking about education has been noticed, i.e. as a *non-linear process*. However, this is not a denial of order, but as a development of its continuity and unlimited in time and space. According to this approach, *education* is a continuous and unlimited process *in time*. At every stage of life, a person can participate many times in various forms - institutional, non-institutional and

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 7.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 7.

informal<sup>5</sup>. An important aspect in this approach to adult education is to recognise that the learning process covers not only the sphere of qualifications and competences (i.e. new knowledge and skills; so-called hard competences, necessary to perform, for example, work or activities related to the operation of machines, tools, devices, modern technologies), but also the relational and social area, which determines the proper functioning of the person in the socio-professional environment.

Observing the Polish educational reality shows that we are only at the beginning of the road in the area of adult education. The lack of a precise definition of the concept of *adult education* confirms the disorder that exists in this area, despite the passage of 10 years from the development of strategic documents (including the "The Perspective of Life long Learning" cited above).

Also, public awareness of life long education is not sufficiently developed. In particular, this applies to representatives of the so-called middle and older generations. The idea of *Life long Learning* proposed and postulated by the EU, in Polish conditions, is still not the dominant educational concept. LLL activities are much more likely to be implemented by individual companies for their employees (including large transnational companies) or the NGO sector through various social and local initiatives, for the benefit of selected target groups. However, there are still no effective and coordinated systemic solutions in the field of adult education in Poland. And the idea itself is still not sufficiently promoted and propagated in the public space.

## Historical traditions

This situation is incomprehensible insofar as there have historically been very strong Polish traditions in the field of adult education, and they were almost pioneering. For the first time, the idea of *life long learning* emerged in the first Polish pedagogical treatise from the 16th century, i.e. from the period of the Renaissance, titled „O szkołach, czyli akademiach ksiąg dwoje” (On schools, or academies of two tomes). The author, Szymon Marycjusz from Pilzno (1516 – 1574), held that “human learning lasts a lifetime”, and “education is a prerequisite for the success of the nation and every citizen”<sup>6</sup>.

This idea was used by the creators of the National Education Commission (NEC), established in 1773, i.e. in the 18th century, the first secular educational authority in Poland, and also in Central Europe. The NEC was a specific and unique experiment, before which an ambitious goal was set, i.e. “the education of a generation of Poles to be aware of their civic duties, equipped with useful knowledge, based on the contemporary achievements of science”<sup>7</sup>. The task of this institution was to develop a uniform education system at three levels (primary – parish schools, secondary – provincial schools, higher – universities in Krakow and Vilnius)<sup>8</sup>. In the documents prepared by the NEC, a view was expressed on the need for secondary education after finishing school, based on self-education. Mainly referring to teachers, the "Act of the Commission of National Education for academic status and for schools in the countries of the Commonwealth", issued in 1783, teachers were recommended to constantly self-educate and improve their own personality.

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<sup>5</sup> Stopińska-Pająk A. “The roots of Polish adult education – andragogical historical narratives” in “Spaces and places of adult education in Poland”, ed. sc. Monika Gromadzka, Scientific Series, Vol. 4, Publishing House of the Foundation for the Development of the Education System, Warsaw 2020.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 23.

<sup>7</sup> <https://encyklopedia.pwn.pl/haslo/Komisja-Edukacji-Narodowej;3924342.html> (accessed: 03.2023)

<sup>8</sup> [https://agad.gov.pl/?page\\_id=946](https://agad.gov.pl/?page_id=946) (accessed: 03.2023)

This provision is regarded as the first legal document in Europe (if not the world), codifying the need for life long learning, combining continuing and life long learning with vocational education<sup>9</sup>.

The tradition of disseminating the idea of life long education continued in the Polish lands in the following centuries. Its particular flowering dates back to the 19th century. In 1865, in his works "On the reform of national schools" and "Ideas for educating the people", the author Józef Dietl (1804-1878) wrote that "the education of man begins with birth and ends with death", pointing to factors affecting the development of mature man, including: *family, social life (participation in it) and own activity* understood as *work on oneself*<sup>10</sup>. Today, we associate these factors mainly with person's acquisition of social competences.

The development of the idea of continuing, life long education in its practical dimension in the Polish lands continued in specific conditions. The so-called *great history* had an impact on this process, i.e. at the end of the 18th century Poland, as a state, disappeared from the map of Europe for over 120 years. However, the nation which, thanks to education, tried to build its identity, did not disappear. Due to the fact that the education of children and young people took place within the educational systems of the partitioning powers, i.e. those that absorbed the territories of Poland within their borders, it was necessary to develop other solutions. In the research works in this area, there is even a view that the emergence of adult education institutions resulted from the lack of a Polish state and Polish schools, and adult education was largely a space for national education, opposing the partitioning schools in its programs and educational objectives. Among the tasks it undertook were some that would normally be implemented by schools. Education was intended to cover those environments that remained beyond access to it, and thus was perceived as essential for all social strata<sup>11</sup>.

A special role in the field of adult education during this period was played by the so-called *Flying University*. Its name is also unique because it referred to the form of its functioning. It was a secret institution, which did not operate within the applicable legal framework, and did not have a registered office. Classes were held in various places, which were constantly changed – hence the name *flying*. The Flying University was founded in 1885 in Warsaw, on the basis of previously operating self-education circles. It was colloquially known as *women's*, because women dominated among its attendees. The popularity of this university was due to, among other things, the enormous educational needs of women who had no means of meeting them. Classes at the University were open. Anyone who wanted to learn could sign up. The organisation of the University's work deserves attention, because it was a university in the full sense of the word. Students were required to systematically prepare, prepare papers, prepare for exercises and discussions, take active part in them, pass colloquia or exams. In addition to the strictly educational dimension, the university was supposed to stimulate students to social activity, to further work on themselves, to learn by doing, and it was to form the mentality of students. Interestingly, the Flying University issued certificates of completion of the course. However, this document was not honoured anywhere – it did not confer any formal powers. Despite this, it enjoyed great popularity, and the level of education was described as higher than at the legally operating University of Warsaw, which was then under Russian control. Thousands of women took part in courses organised by the Flying University. The high level of education at this specific university confirms the success of its attendees. Suffice it to mention that among the students of the Flying University there were the Skłodowska sisters – Maria,

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<sup>9</sup>"The roots of Polish adult education – andragogical historical narratives", op. cit., p. 23.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 23.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 24-25.

later a double Nobel Prize winner (in physics and chemistry) and Bronisława, one of the first doctors in Poland. Interestingly, the Flying University survived for decades and, under its changed name, as a full-fledged higher education institution, Wolna Wszechnica<sup>12</sup> Polska (Free University of Poland), continued its educational activities for adults also after Poland regained independence (1918)<sup>13</sup>.

Another interesting initiative, presented as a pioneering example of the development of the idea of adult learning in Polish lands, was the publication "A handbook for the self-taught". It was a kind of journal – a textbook, published from the end of the 19th century, initially addressed to the students of the Flying University. Over time, its application grew much wider and supported all self-learning movements, being invaluable academic assistance. This handbook is given as an example of an institution of continuing, life long education, providing opportunities for independent learning of adults, i.e. learning under the guidance of outstanding people who are significant in their fields of science<sup>14</sup>.

In the opinions of researchers on the subject, the handbook was described as "one of the first [i.e. on Polish lands] attempts to manage non-school education, giving the self-taught student the opportunity to orientate himself in the entire area of knowledge and coming with competent help and information in place of the living word"<sup>15</sup>. This publishing house was continued for years to come. The publishing house itself and the whole community of people around it were considered an extraordinary initiative – an institution of continuing education at that time, supporting and inspiring people who undertook learning efforts (although *learning* was understood in a slightly different way than today)<sup>16</sup>.

This initiative was part of an enormous number of educational activities aimed at adults undertaken at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries on Polish lands. Particular attention was paid to reaching people who had difficult access to education, i.e. people with low educational and cultural status, social groups that today are described as *disadvantaged, socially and culturally excluded*. Of course, it should be remembered that the educational needs of adults at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries were completely different than today. It was a time of enormous educational backwardness, which resulted in illiteracy and lack of elementary knowledge. And attempts were made to meet these educational needs first<sup>17</sup>. However, this does not change the fact that at the beginning of the 20th century the pioneering theses concerning adult education was published, in the form of a work in 1902 by Polish economist, sociologist and pedagogue, Ludwik Krzywicki (1859 – 1941). They have lost nothing in importance, despite the passage of more than a century since their announcement. Among them, two thoughts deserve special attention. The first one is the objective of adult education that Krzywicki proposed. According to him, the goal of education is not to get practical, useful knowledge, even at the highest level, but general education, giving the individual a view of the world. The second one speaks of the power of knowledge and its impact on man, in the words: "general education will not bring millions to those who have millions

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<sup>12</sup> The word *wszechnica* is an archaism. In the past, it was used to describe a university, but also as the name of popular science lectures. This word is very rare in modern Polish, most often as part of the name of educational entities with a long tradition of operation or related to education in rural areas (e.g. on YouTube there is a channel with this name, run by NGOs, which directs its activities to the inhabitants of the countryside). [footer auto.]

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 26.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 27.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 27.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 28.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 30, 34.

and work to multiply them, it will even expose them even to “unnecessary” expenses, but will enable individuals to attain the highest wealth on earth, and this wealth is the vast mental horizon at the end of which there is man, the master of nature, wielding his physical and mental strength, aware of his position in the universe and society<sup>18</sup>.”

These thoughts, which were articulated at the beginning of the last century, are consistent with the modern approach postulated by the European Union in the area of adult education. The theoretical justification for the need for life long learning, adopted by the Council of the European Union in its resolution of 2021, states that: “Education and training have a vital role to play when it comes to shaping the future of Europe, at a time when it is imperative that its society and economy become more cohesive, inclusive, digital, sustainable, green and resilient, and for citizens to find personal fulfilment and well-being, to be prepared to adapt and perform on a changing labour market and to engage in active and responsible citizenship”<sup>19</sup>.

Both of these positions, despite the fact that they are separated by almost a century, are consistent with each other, pointing to the huge role of education in shaping the situation of an individual as a part of society. They draw attention to the need for non-linear, continuous and systematic education, for which there should be no restrictions (e.g. gender, age, etc.).

The historical analysis of the subject of adult education shows that Poland has developed traditions in this area, dating back to the 17th century. Some of the historical Polish solutions were pioneering on a European scale. The continuation and development of the concept of learning and self-education of adults were interrupted by the outbreak of World War II (1939) and its consequences for Central and Eastern Europe. Moving on from the historical context, one should ask the question of what *the sphere of adult education in Poland looks like today*.

## The contemporary situation

As already mentioned, in Poland, detailed legislative regulations concern only the area of continuing education implemented in the form of formal education.

In the programming documents adopted in Poland as part of the participation in the EU structures, the following terms exist<sup>20</sup>:

1. “Adult Education (AE)”, identified with the term *Adult Education and Training (AET)*. The scope of adult education and training goes far beyond education and higher education and traditional training courses and training aimed at obtaining qualifications. AET is also organised in the working environment as practical learning, as well as in organised forms of action of citizens’ communities. In Poland there is no full definition of AET, which on the one hand may result from a very wide conceptual scope of this education, and on the other hand, from the inability to assign education and training understood in this way, or a significant part of it, to one administrative structure.
2. “Adult learning”, understood as learning during the adult stage of life, is a phase of life long learning in different forms and places (in formal, non-formal and informal contexts). In this context, adult learning is part of a series of educational activities that accompany the

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 33-34.

<sup>19</sup> Council Resolution on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training towards the European Education Area and beyond (2021-2030). Official Journal of the European Union (2021/C 66/01).

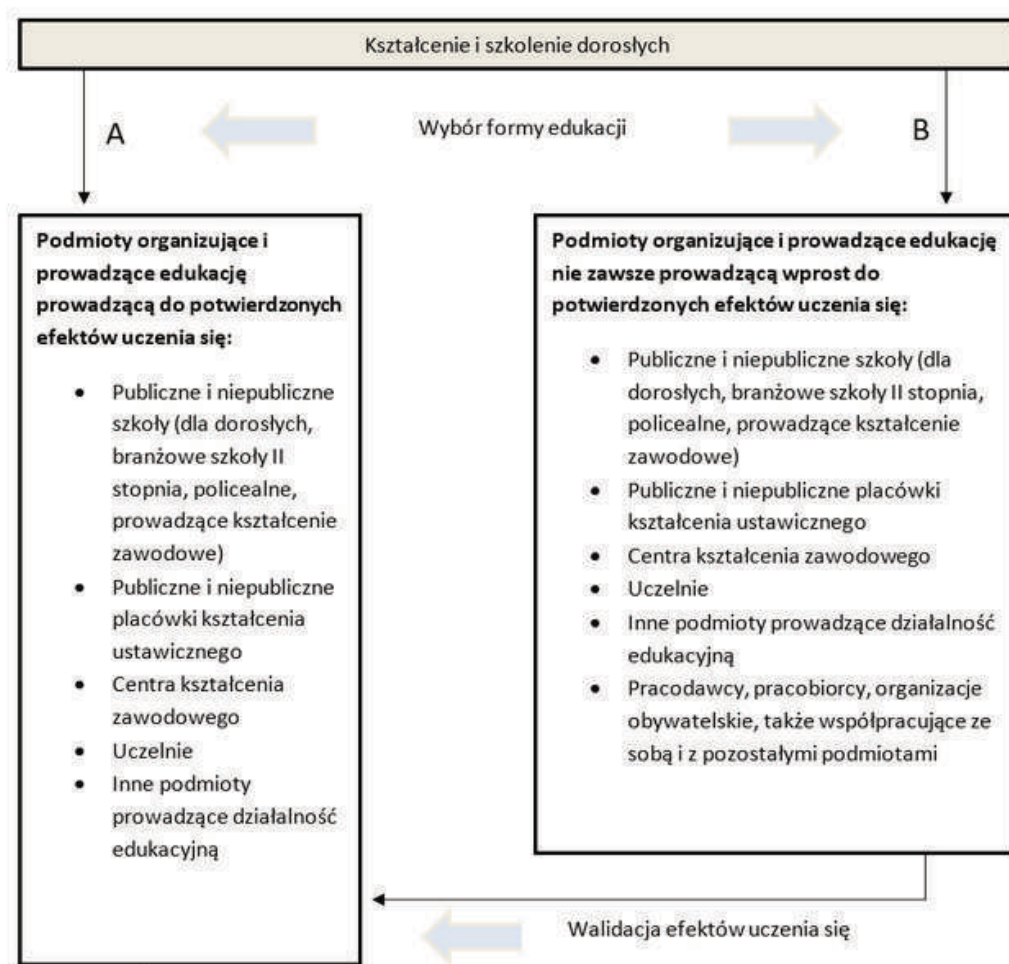
<sup>20</sup> <https://eurydice.eacea.ec.europa.eu/pl/national-education-systems/poland/ksztalcenie-doroslych-i-szkolenia> (accessed: 03.2023)

entire life of a person from early years to late old age. In adult learning so understood, skills are held, developed and acquired. In the strategic documents, which was particularly emphasised in the "Integrated Skills Strategy 2030", the development of skills (basic, sectoral, professional) is closely related to life long learning and in its various contexts (personal, family, social, professional).

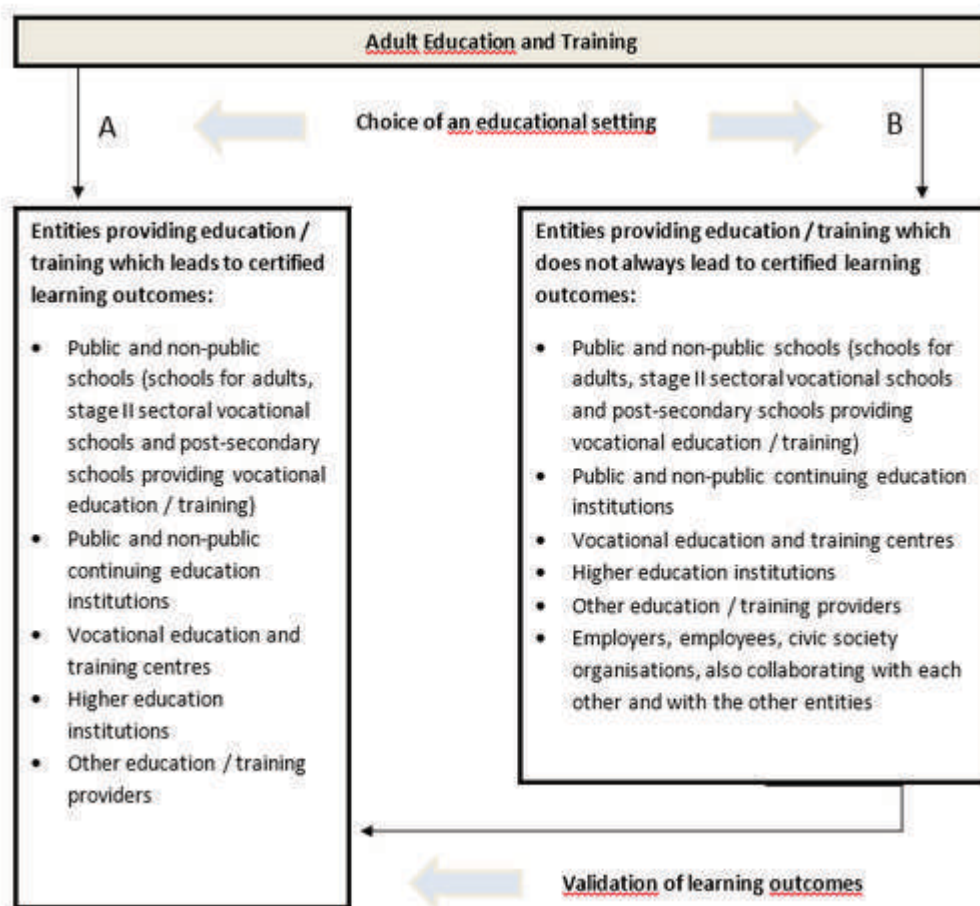
On the basis of data collected by *the network of information exchange and analysis on education systems in Europe – Eurydice*, it was found that the area of adult education and training is the most diverse area of education in Poland. And this is true in many respects. That is, both because of the recipients, their age and socio-professional status, as well as the forms of education, the way in which learning outcomes are validated, especially non-formal and informal, as well as the institutions that carry out educational activities.

In order to more easily present the educational opportunities of adults in Poland, a diagram was prepared illustrating the area of adult education in Poland (not including informal education), available on the *Eurydice* website. The diagram is shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1: The organisation of adult education in Poland



English version:



Source: <https://eurydice.eacea.ec.europa.eu/pl/national-education-systems/poland/ksztalcenie-doroslych-i-szkolenia>

The lack of systematisation and precise regulation of the area of adult education in Poland, and the inconsistency in its definition, poses difficulties in collecting figures on the number of adult learners, and thus in a reliable statistical description of the phenomenon.

The data for the purposes of aggregated, European sets are obtained in Poland from the following sources<sup>21</sup>:

- The *Survey of the economic activity of the EU population* (known in the European system of public statistics as the Labour Force Survey - LFS),
- the *Adult Education Survey (AES)*, in Poland, part of this survey is the "Adult Education" survey conducted by the Central Statistical Office (CSO) concerning, among others, participation of adults in formal, non-formal and informal learning. The study has been periodical since 2006, the previous editions were conducted in 2012 and 2006. The last edition of the survey, representative of the population of Poles aged 18-69, was carried out in 2016 and the first quarter of 2017,
- the survey *Continuing Vocational Training in Enterprises (CVTE)* carried out every five years (last published in December 2017) by the Central Statistical Office. The CVTE survey is a comparative study and is carried out in most EU countries,

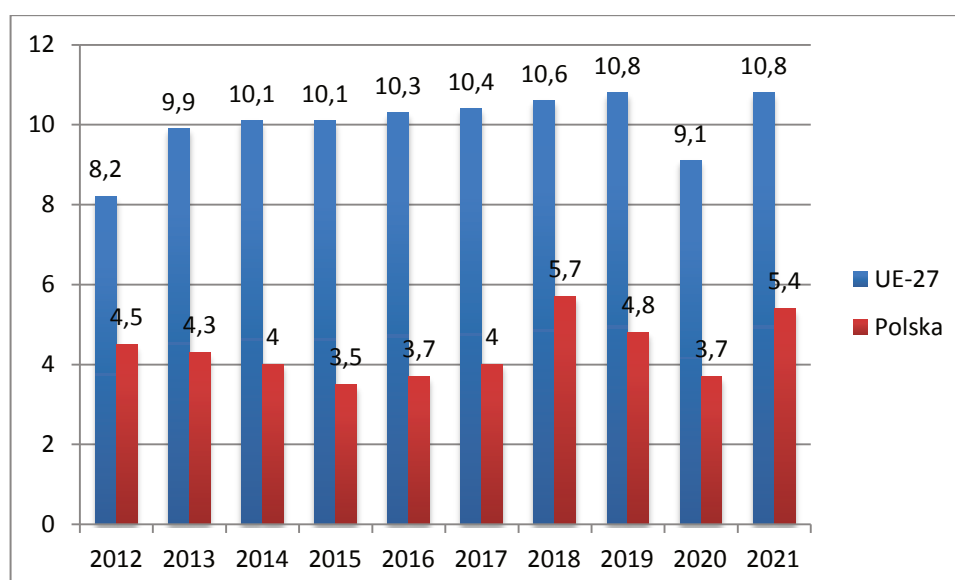
<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

- the survey *Human Capital Balance (HCB)*, one of the largest European research projects in the area of competence, employment and the labour market, has been carried out on a periodical basis since 2010. In Poland it is implemented in cooperation between the Polish Agency for Enterprise Development and the Jagiellonian University in Krakow.

## Some statistics

According to EUROSTAT data, the participation of adult Poles in education and training is relatively small and constantly remains at a lower level than the average for European Union countries. According to data presented by EUROSTAT for the last 10 years, the percentage of adult Poles aged 25-64 participating in education and training did not exceed 6%. The highest value, 5.7% was achieved in 2018. These results are rather unsatisfactory against the background of the EU average, which is around 10%. A graphical presentation of the data for the years 2012 – 2021 is presented in Figure 2.

**Figure 2: Graph showing the percentage of adults in life long learning in Poland against the background of the European Union**



Source: Own development based on data from: <https://eurydice.eacea.ec.europa.eu/pl/national-education-systems/poland/ksztalcenie-doroslych-i-szkolenia>

A slightly different picture of adult education than from the EUROSTAT data emerges from the conclusions of the periodic survey of the Central Statistical Office “Adult Education”, conducted according to different methodology. From this, it follows that<sup>22</sup>:

- in 2016, among Poles aged 18-69, 54.1% were not participating in any form of self-education (among rural inhabitants this percentage was 60%). It was mostly professionally active people who were not receiving education - the lack of need for (further) education/training was indicated as a reason,

<sup>22</sup> “Adult education 2016”, substantive study under the direction of Jerzy Auksztol, Małgorzata Buńko, Central Statistical Office, Statistical Office in Gdańsk, Gdańsk 2018, p. 14-16.

- in 2016, the percentage of adults participating in any form of education was 45.9%. Of this about 43% of Poles aged over 25 were taking part in any form of education in 2016, with towns and cities accounting for almost 50% (49% in 2011) and villages accounting for about 36%. The proportion of adults who are participating in any form of education was still falling sharply with age – around half of the 30-34-year-olds, around 41% of the 45-49-year-olds and only 34% of the 55-59-year-olds. It was mainly working people who were raising their qualifications (52%). The unemployed (30%) were the least likely to be receiving education,
- self-education or informal learning applied to 31.4% of adult Poles in 2016 (5 years earlier this percentage was 30%), i.e. about 8.5 million inhabitants of Poland. Self-education was being undertaken mainly by young and better educated people. This was more often the case for women and city dwellers. Among the most popular methods of self-education were the use of Internet/computer programs (84.5% of respondents; among people aged 18-24 this percentage was almost 95%, it was also significantly higher among people with higher education), the use of books, industry journals (80% - women and city dwellers used this method more often; respondents with higher education reached for books – 87% far more often than those with vocational education – 66%) and with the help of family members, friends and co-workers (47.2%),
- the percentage of adult Poles participating in *formal education* decreased slightly – from 13.6% in 2011 to 11.3% in 2016. Formal education was mainly for the youngest adults – in schools or universities, almost 68% of people aged 18-24 and 16.3% of people aged 25-29 were studying. Formal education was most often associated with the continuation of higher education or the undertaking of postgraduate studies (1/4 of people with higher education),
- in the case of *non-formal education*, there was a slight increase in the level of participation – from 20.9% in 2011 to 21.4% in 2016. The highest activity in the field of non-formal education was shown by people aged 25-44 – over 25% of respondents indicated such forms of improvement of qualifications. The largest group participating in non-formal education were people aged 35-39 (almost 30%). Non-formal education was undertaken a little more often by men, residents of cities, people with higher education and, above all, people working in specialist positions. At the same time, according to the survey, non-formal education was most often associated with the work performed (77.4%) and was aimed at improving the quality of work performed (the goal indicated by 56.6% of respondents). The respondents most often indicated better performance of their duties as the main benefit of the efforts undertaken (51.3%). Therefore, a particularly high level of participation has been achieved by the respondents representing professions that, due to formal requirements or rapid technological progress, especially require continuous improvement of qualifications: teachers (almost 44% of people with pedagogical education were receiving education in this form), representatives of medical and IT professions (for both groups – about 40%). Almost half (49%) of the participants in formal education benefited from its financing by their employer, and only slightly over 1/5 had to finance their training independently. Out of the participants in non-formal education, 45% received a document required by their employer, professional organisation or legal regulations as confirmation of their qualifications, but almost 1/3 did not receive any confirmation of their skills.

In the summary of the results of the 2016 edition survey, it was noted that employed people were receiving education in various forms definitely more frequently than the unemployed and professionally inactive. As a reason for this, it was pointed out that employees had the opportunity to

improve their qualifications in vocational training in workplaces, which was often also associated with the participation of employers in the costs of employee education. The second important reason is the requirements of the modern economy, which force employees to constantly supplement their knowledge and adapt to the rapidly changing requirements of the labour market. Working people most frequently participated in informal and non-formal education, while the professionally inactive took part in formal education. Among the professionally inactive people in the age group 18-69 years, as many as 20.8% were participating in formal education. This was due to the fact that young people are very often considered professionally inactive due to their continuation of education at school or at university. In 2016 the unemployed were less likely to participate in education than professionally inactive people and this phenomenon was characteristic of all forms of education<sup>23</sup>.

In the presented study, 1 research area was introduced, which was not monitored in previous editions. It is an aspect of searching for information about the possibilities of further education, both in the field of formal and non-formal education. This is an important issue because access to information is the basis for decision-making and choices. During the interview, respondents at the age of 18-69 were asked whether they had searched for or been directed towards information on learning opportunities within the 12 months prior to the survey.

Of the respondents aged 18-69, 15.5% independently sought information on learning or educational opportunities. Most of the respondents looking for information on educational opportunities represented groups aged 18-24, 25-29 and 30-34 years, which constituted 25.8%, 14.5% and 14.8% of these groups, respectively. The lowest number of people searching for information on this subject was in the oldest age group, i.e. 65-69 years (1.6%). Among all of the respondents looking for such information, 11.9% were men aged 18-24 years. 70.9% of the respondents seeking further education came from towns and cities, of which 40.8% had a university diploma, and 11.3% had general secondary education<sup>24</sup>.

When analysing data on adult education, it is worth paying attention to the use by adults of various forms of education.

#### 1. Formal education<sup>25</sup>

Among the respondents to the study aged 18-69, 11.3% declared participation in the formal education system during the 12 months prior to the study. The highest activity in formal education was recorded among the younger age groups – 67.8% of people aged 18-24 and 16.3% of people aged 25-29 were studying at school or at university. The proportion of respondents over 50 years of age in formal education was insignificant – 0.5%.

The areas in which people were being educated were as follows: the majority of participants in formal education were being educated in the fields of: technology, industry, construction (18.3%) and business, administration and law (17.5%). Among those studying at the higher level, 12.9% were being educated in postgraduate studies, where the students most often chose teacher education and pedagogy. 2.9% of people who have a higher level of education had decided to study for a PhD. Both in the countryside and in the city, the majority of women attending postgraduate studies chose the field of teacher education or pedagogy. The most numerous groups of men chose technology, industry or construction.

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p. 20

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p. 21-22.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p. 24

## 2. Non-formal education<sup>26</sup>

The cited report emphasises the importance of informal education, due to the need to constantly improve the level of qualifications and skills due to the dynamic changes taking place in the economy and the world, and thus the changing requirements of the labour market and the development of modern technologies. The report takes the view that life long learning, in particular in non-formal forms, is a key factor in improving the quality of human capital, which is now a major prerequisite for socio-economic development.

Of the 18-69-year-olds, 21.4% declared in January or February 2017 that they had participated in some form of non-formal education within the 12 months prior to the interview. Respondents aged 25 to 44 showed the greatest educational activity, where more than a quarter of them reported participation in education. Various forms of knowledge or skills were particularly popular in people aged 35 to 39 years (29.6% of them had participated in non-formal education). Among the youngest respondents (at the age of 18-24 years), the level of participation in this form of education was 22.3%. There is a trend toward a systematic decrease in educational activity with the age of respondents – from 22.6% of participants at the age of 45-49 to about 5% at the age of 65-69 years.

The results of the study on adult education also allowed us to analyse the level of participation in the education of working people, taking into account their profession. The most numerous general professional group taking part in non-formal education were various kinds of specialists and they also most often declared participation in this form of education (54.8%). However, farmers, gardeners, foresters and fishermen (10.4%) and workers in simple jobs (12.2%) were being educated to a lesser extent. Women achieved a slightly higher level of participation in non-formal education than men among representatives of public authorities, senior officials and managers (by 2.4%), technicians and other middle-ranking personnel (by 0.2%) and workers in simple work (by 0.6%). Men representing other large groups of professions were more active in the field of education than women. In particular, this concerned men working as office workers (their level of participation in education was higher than women by about 8%) and as industrial workers and craftsmen (the share in non-formal education was higher by about 5%). Differences in the scale of participation in non-formal education in favour of town and city dwellers compared to rural residents were visible among all groups of respondents, regardless of their profession. The exception was those employed in simple jobs, where the level of educational activity of the inhabitants of villages was close or slightly higher than those living in cities.

## 3. Non-formal education<sup>27</sup>

According to the Adult education study, in 2016, 8.5 million inhabitants of Poland aged 18-69 were participating in informal education, which constituted 31.4% of the total population. Among people participating in various forms of informal education, the activity of women was slightly higher than men. Over the period considered, 4.4 million women (51.5% of the total self-education population aged 18-69) and 4.1 million men (48.5%) were being educated in this form. A feature that significantly differentiates the group of self-educated people was the place of residence. The share of people aged 18-69 residing in towns and

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p. 35

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p. 54–56.

cities and participating in non-formal education was 66.4%, and the population of people being self-educated in the countryside accounted for 33.6% of the total number of people participating in non-formal education. This means that compared to the results of the survey from previous editions there was a further reduction in the disparities between cities and villages (in 2006 the share of city residents was 74.3%, and the inhabitants of villages 25.7%, and in 2011 respectively: 70.3% and 29.7%).

The highest educational activity in the informal system was shown by young people. Among those aged 18-24 who participated in the adult education study, 42.5% had participated in various types of informal education in 2016. The older the age group, the smaller the percentage of participants in informal education. It is worth noting that in the age range of 25-54 years self-education was used by one person in three, in the group of people aged 60-64 years the number of participants of education in the informal system was almost one person in four, and among the respondents aged 65-69 years it was one person in five. This trend was recorded among both women and men. A greater share of inhabitants of cities than villages participating in this form of education was observed in each age group.

People declaring their participation in non-formal education were acquiring knowledge in a variety of ways. The study highlighted the following groups of methods of learning:

- with the help of family members, friends, co-workers,
- use of books, industry journals and other printed materials,
- use of computer programs, Internet,
- use of TV or radio,
- guided tours to museums, historical, industrial or natural sites,
- visits to educational centres (including libraries).

For the vast majority of respondents, regardless of gender and place of residence, the most frequently chosen method of self-education was the use of computer programs or the Internet (84.5%). The second most popular source of knowledge was books, industry journals and other printed materials, which were being used by 80.1% of learners. Women (82.4%) preferred this method to men (77.6%) and residents of towns and cities (81.4%) rather than the countryside (77.5%).

Nearly half of the people were gaining knowledge from family members, friends and co-workers, and 38.3% were using TV and radio programs for this purpose, while 45.0% of self-educated residents of villages, and 34.9% of towns and cities, treated the media as a source of knowledge. One person in three was learning during visits to educational centres. This method was more preferred by women. For 22.0% of respondents, the source of knowledge was guided tours to museums and other types of facilities. In cities, these institutions were visited by one person in four declaring self-education, and in the countryside one in five.

A feature that clearly determined the choice of self-education method was the age of the respondents. It can be noted that young people were much more willing to learn from computer programs and the Internet. The percentage of people using this method amounted to 94.6% for people aged 18-24 and for subsequent age groups reached lower and lower values, the lowest for people aged 65-69 – 50.2%. The use of books, journals and other printed materials as a source of knowledge was equally popular regardless of the age of the subjects. More than half of the youngest self-learning respondents visited educational centres (including libraries). In turn, older people were using mass media – TV and radio –

much more often for educational purposes. The percentage of people aged 65-69 who prefer this method was 57.5%, and people aged 18-24 – 30.3%.

Conclusions from the conducted study show that the area of adult education in Poland is developing quite dynamically. The fact that more than 45% of adults were participating in some form of education confirms that there is a great potential in the adult population. As the authors rightly point out, the main driving force behind adult education is the need to improve skills and develop qualifications in connection with the work performed. This trend is in line with the pan-European and even global trend related to dynamic development of the economy and social capital following the digitalisation and computerisation of socio-economic life.

## The future

Adult education is becoming increasingly important, in particular in view of the dynamic development of the knowledge economy and ICT. The need for continuous improvement, whether formal or informal, or as self-improvement, has become a permanent part of the profile of a modern employee. In Polish conditions, institutional solutions concerning the sphere of adult education are at the stage of development. EU membership forces Polish decision-makers to make legislative and organisational solutions compatible in the area of adult education.

Currently, Poland is at the stage of developing and implementing the strategy document – “Integrated Skills Strategy 2030”. This document was developed in a long process involving all stakeholders (from ministries and educational institutions to NGOs), supported, among others, by cooperation with the *Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development* (OECD). At the stage of preparation for the development of this strategy, comprehensive state-of-the-art studies were carried out with the support of the OECD. The report titled “OECD Skills Strategy: Poland” presents a sectoral, synthetic diagnosis of the state of solutions concerning mechanisms supporting the development of skills. A number of recommendations based on good practices in other countries were also presented. The key part of the report are recommendations tailored to the specific needs of Poland, taking into account the international perspective and based on indicators used by the OECD<sup>28</sup>. The report, in cooperation with the Polish government, identifies the main areas related to the improvement of Poland’s skills achievements, which include<sup>29</sup>:

1. Improvement of the responsiveness of the education system to the needs of the labour market.
2. Promotion of greater participation in all forms of adult learning.
3. Strengthening of the use of skills in Polish enterprises.
4. Strengthening of the management of the skills system in Poland.

Adult education has a clearly articulated place among them. On the basis of cooperation and data contained in the report, the said strategic document “Integrated Skills Strategy 2030” was created. Its main objective is to create opportunities and conditions for the development of skills

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<sup>28</sup> <https://www.ibe.edu.pl/pl/38-aktualnosci/1090-poznalismy-strategie-umiejetnosci-oecd-polska> (accessed: 03.2023)

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

necessary to strengthen social capital, social inclusion, economic growth and the achievement of high quality of life. This objective is to be pursued in the following priority areas<sup>30</sup>:

- ☐ raising the level of key skills in children, young people and adults;
- ☐ developing and disseminating a culture of learning geared to active and continuous skills development;
- ☐ increasing the participation of employers in development and improving the use of skills;
- ☐ building an effective system for diagnosing and communicating the current state and needs of skills;
- ☐ developing effective and sustainable mechanisms for inter-ministerial and cross-sectoral cooperation and coordination in the field of skills development;
- ☐ equal opportunities in access to development and the ability to use skills.

It also identifies the main areas of skills that are identified as essential for modern society.

And these are, in line with the direction set by the EU<sup>31</sup>:

a) basic skills:

- ☐ understanding and creating information,
- ☐ multilingualism,
- ☐ mathematical,
- ☐ in the field of natural sciences, technology and engineering,

b) sectoral skills:

- ☐ digital,
- ☐ personal, social and learning,
- ☐ civil,
- ☐ in the field of entrepreneurship,
- ☐ in the field of cultural awareness and expression,
- ☐ in the field of critical thinking and comprehensive problem-solving,
- ☐ in the field of teamwork,
- ☐ ability to adapt to new conditions,
- ☐ leadership,
- ☐ related to multiculturalism,
- ☐ related to creativity and innovation.

This document highlights that "the idea of life long learning is one of the main priorities of public action<sup>32</sup>". It was also declared that the Polish education system is opened to non-formal and informal education. These changes are needed as much as possible, especially in the context of the aforementioned general changes and strengthening the competitiveness of human capital. However, this document clearly states that "Poland's experience in using models of supporting adult learning, based on the analysis of the educational and training needs of participants, is still quite modest," and "the offer of adult education taking into account the specificity of learning of this age group remains limited<sup>33</sup>". Attention was also drawn to the profile of adults undertaking educational efforts, i.e. that

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<sup>30</sup> "Integrated Skills Strategy 2030", Ministry of National Education, Warsaw 2019, p. 11.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., p. 17-18.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p. 47.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p. 47.

"target groups of actions are most often lacking a large group of economically inactive people and workers, especially in small and micro-enterprises, with low qualifications"<sup>34</sup>.

These conclusions confirm the position presented at the beginning of this study, namely that Poland is only at the beginning of the road in the field of the development of adult education.

## Summary

The study "Adult Education in Poland – legal conditions" synthetically presents information about the condition of the field of adult education in Poland. The subsequent sections present the current definitions and meaning of terms used in this field, a brief historical outline of Polish adult education, statistical data on persons participating in the education process in various forms and dimensions and development strategies in this area.

Currently, the field of adult education has been particularly included in two strategic documents, which set the directions of future activities in the field of adapting Polish society to changes, which are: *The perspective of life long learning* and *the Integrated Skills Strategy 2030*.

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 47.

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