INSTYTUT BADAŃ EDUKACYJNYCH
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Vocational education and training system in Poland

Background

- **Poland's Context:** Poland is the fifth most populous EU member state. Its VET system is shaped by a rich educational history and aims to create an active and future-ready workforce
- **Importance of VET:** Strong VET systems are crucial for fostering competitiveness, economic growth, and social cohesion. Poland's VET system is aligned with EU policies, including the Council Recommendation of 24 November 2020 and the Osnabrück Declaration
- **Recent Reforms**: Significant reforms since 2017 have made the Polish VET system more attractive, diverse, and flexible, catering to both young people and adults

External factors influencing VET

- **Demographics**
  - An aging population is a key factor, with the old-age dependency ratio expected to increase significantly by 2070
  - This will lead to a decrease in the proportion of the population aged 20-44 and an increase in those aged 45-59 and 65+
  - The influx of Ukrainian refugees, many of them under 20, also impacts the education system
- **Economy and Labour Market**
  - Poland's economy has shown resilience and was one of the fastest-growing in the EU after the COVID-19 pandemic
  - The labour market is strong, with a record-low unemployment rate of 2.2% in 2023, the lowest in the EU-27
  - However, challenges remain, including a high proportion of temporary contracts and significant skill mismatches reported by businesses

VET pathways

- **Upper Secondary**
  - Five-year vocational upper secondary programmes (technikum) - the most popular VET option
  - Three-year first-stage sectoral programmes (szkoła branżowa I stopnia)
  - Two-year second-stage sectoral programmes (szkoła branżowa II stopnia)
- **Post-Secondary**
  - Post-secondary non-tertiary programmes: 1-2.5 year vocational programs
  - Higher VET: bachelor, master, three-year college programmes in social work
- **Outside school system**
  - Vocational qualification courses

Work-Based Learning (WBL) and apprenticeships

- **WBL is a key component of VET in Poland**
- **Mandatory Practical Training: l**earners in technikum and second-stage sectoral programmes must complete practical training at an employer's premises (4-12 weeks)
- **Apprenticeship Schemes**
  - Juvenile employment: for young people (15-18) who have completed primary education, combining practical and theoretical training
  - Student apprenticeship (staż uczniowski): for students in upper secondary vocational programmes who are not juvenile employees
  - Dual training: involves structured alternation between learning in a school setting and working at a workplace

Assessment and certification

- **Assessment**
  - internal assessment
  - maturity exam
  - vocational examinations
- **Certification**
  - school leaving certificate
  - maturity certificate
  - vocational qualification certificates
  - vocational diploma

Governance, financing, and quality assurance

- **Governance**
  - A three-tiered system: national (ministries), regional (school inspectorates), and county (schools administration)
  - The **Ministry of National Education** is the main governing body for VET policy
  - Sector skills councils play a role in anticipating industry needs and involve social partners
- **Financing**
  - Mainly financed by public funds, including the state budget and local government subsidies
  - The National Training Fund (NTF) supports employers who invest in employee training
- **Quality assurance**
  - **External examinations**: All IVET learners must take a state vocational examination or a journeyman's examination to graduate
  - **Integrated Qualifications System (IQS):** A framework that describes and records qualifications, including those obtained outside formal education

Promoting VET and key supporting initiatives

- **Incentives for learners**
  - Financial benefits for families, scholarships, and support for at-risk youth through the Voluntary Labour Corps (Ochotnicze Hufce Pracy)
  - International mobility through Erasmus+, with over 15,000 VET learners benefiting from mobility projects by mid-2024
- **Initiatives**
  - Sectoral Skills Centers: A network of 120 state-of-the-art facilities for education, training, and examination is being established.
  - Badge+ Application: A pilot program to popularize digital micro-credentials.
  - VET Graduate Tracking System: To monitor the career paths of graduates and provide feedback for improving VET provision

Challenges and development opportunities

- **Challenges**
  - Ageing population and its impact on the labour force
  - Low digital literacy compared to the EU-27 average
  - The need to absorb a large influx of Ukrainian students following the armed conflict
  - Relatively poor performance of sectoral school students in international assessments
- **Development opportunities**
  - Focus on making VET more attractive and increasing student enrolment
  - Expanding Work-Based Learning (WBL) in all VET programs
  - Developing flexible learning pathways and adapting qualifications to labour market needs
  - Aligning with the green and digital transitions by updating curricula

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