

A COMPARISON OF THE EDUCATION SYSTEMS IN POLAND AND ICELAND



**AION
PROJECT**

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The aim of the project is to develop a comprehensive, systemic model of preparation for professional activity of people with deeper intellectual disabilities. Preparation of professional laboratories with training programs and methodology. Development of a coherent and systemic strategy for supporting the employment of people with intellectual disabilities on the labor market in cooperation with the District Labor Office in Sosnowiec. Working out a path of professional development and a strategy of inclusion in the open and / or protected labor market, taking into account the educational, legal, organizational housing for schools, people with disabilities, public institutions and entrepreneurs that can potentially employ people with disabilities.

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Admission

Education plays a key role in the development of societies, shaping future generations and preparing them for various roles in social and professional life. Each country, depending on its historical, cultural and social conditions, develops its own educational system that aims to meet the needs of its citizens. In this paper, we will look at two different educational systems — Polish and Icelandic — which, despite similar goals, differ in terms of structure, accessibility, and approach to inclusion.

The first chapter is devoted to the discussion of the education system in Poland. The basic features of this system, its structure, as well as actions taken to ensure equal access to education and support for students with disabilities will be presented. The second chapter focuses on the education system in Iceland, with particular emphasis on educational policy aimed at people with disabilities and the specific challenges related to the geographical conditions of this country. In the last chapter, a comparative analysis of both systems will be made, taking into account their strengths and areas requiring further development.

This comparison is intended not only to show the differences between the educational systems in Poland and Iceland, but also to indicate what elements of one system can be an inspiration for the other. In this way, this work aims to contribute to the discussion on the possible directions of development of educational systems in the context of global challenges, such as ensuring equality in access to education and the full integration of all students in the school system.

Chapter 1: The education system in Poland

General characteristics

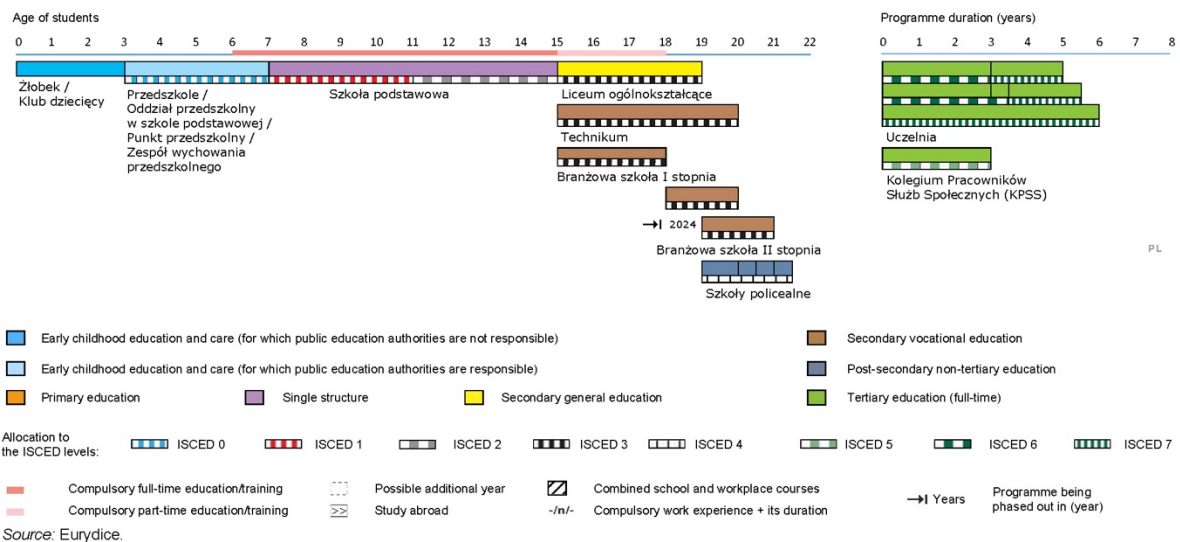
The educational system in Poland has undergone numerous changes over the past years, which were aimed at adapting it to the standards in force in the European Union. Education in Poland is compulsory until the age of 18 and includes primary and secondary education. The Polish educational system places great emphasis on wide access to education and on improving the quality of teaching. As a result of the reforms, this system has evolved towards a more integrated approach, taking into account the diversity of students' needs.

The educational system and its division

The Polish educational system is structurally organized at several levels, which allows the educational path to be adapted to the individual needs and abilities of students:

1. Pre-primary education (3-6 years): This is the first stage of formal education that prepares children for primary school. It includes both nursery schools and pre-school classes in primary schools.
2. Primary school (6-15 years):
 - Grades 1-3 (early childhood education): Focuses on developing basic literacy and numeracy skills and shaping social attitudes.
 - Grades 4-8: At this stage, students deepen their knowledge in a wide range of subjects as they prepare to choose their further educational path.
3. High School:
 - General secondary schools (3 years): They offer comprehensive general education, ending with the matriculation exam, which is a pass to further education at the higher level.

- Technical (4-5 years): Combine general education with vocational education, allowing you to obtain both a technician's diploma and a baccalaureate.
- Stage I sectoral vocational schools (3 years): Aimed at acquiring a specific occupation, after which pupils can continue their education in stage II sectoral vocational schools.
- Stage II sectoral vocational schools (2 years): Provide further vocational training and prepare students for the maturity exam.



Drawing1 https://eurydice.eacea.ec.europa.eu/sites/default/files/inline-images/PL_EN_2023_24.jpg

Accessibility of education

Education in Poland is financed from the state budget and remains free at all levels until the end of secondary school. The Polish government undertakes numerous initiatives to ensure equal educational opportunities for all citizens, especially for students from rural areas and national minorities. Access to education is recognised as a fundamental right, which is reflected in policies providing transport, textbooks and meals for pupils in need.

Adapting education for people with disabilities

Poland has introduced numerous solutions to support the education of students with disabilities, in line with the policy of integration and inclusion. This system provides an individual approach to the needs of each student, which includes:

- Adapting curricula and teaching methods: Teachers have the ability to modify the curriculum content to better suit the student's abilities.
- Support for an assistant of a disabled person: In schools, it is possible to employ assistants who help students with disabilities in their daily functioning at school.
- Specialized resources: Schools can be equipped with equipment and educational materials tailored to the needs of students with different types of disabilities.

These activities are aimed at the full integration of students with disabilities with their peers and better prepare them for independent life in society.

Chapter 2: The Education System in Iceland

General characteristics

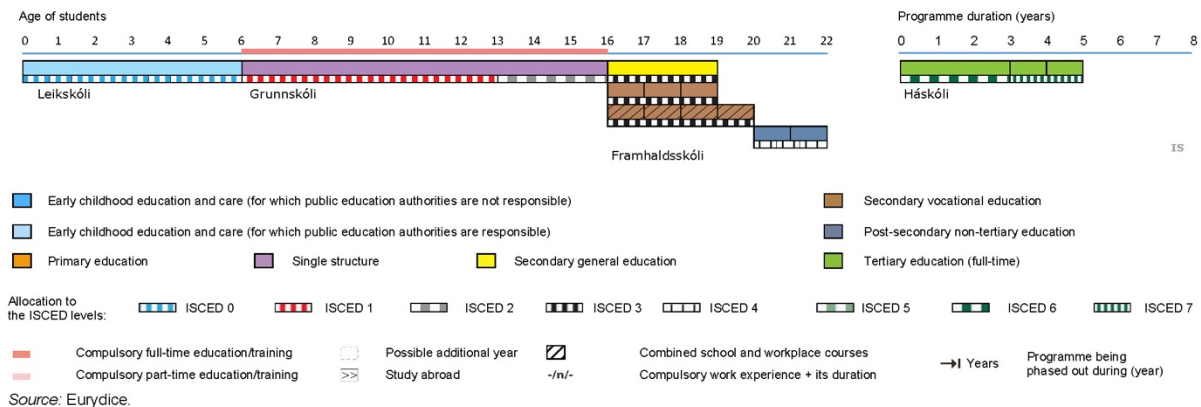
The education system in Iceland, considered one of the most inclusive in Europe, is based on the principles of equality, accessibility, and high quality of education. Education is treated as a fundamental civil right, and the Icelandic government takes numerous measures to ensure that every citizen has access to education, regardless of where they live, economic status, or other factors. Due to Iceland's specific geographical circumstances, the educational system must be flexible and adapted to the needs of dispersed communities throughout the country.

The education model in Iceland

The education system in Iceland is divided into four main stages:

1. **Leikskóli (Kindergarten):** Designed for children under the age of 6, kindergarten in Iceland plays a key role in the early development of children, preparing them for formal education. Although preschool education is voluntary, the government actively supports its accessibility, which enables children to develop social and cognitive skills through play.
2. **Grunnskóli (Compulsory School):** Includes primary education and lower secondary education, designed for children aged 6-16. This is a compulsory 10-year stage in which students acquire key competences such as reading, writing, mathematics and social skills. The curriculum is varied and flexible, tailored to the individual needs of students. Students are not subject to national final exams, which gives them more freedom to choose their further educational path.
3. **Framhaldsskóli (Secondary School):** Usually lasting 3 years, secondary school is available to young people over 16 years of age. At this stage, students have the opportunity to choose from a variety of educational paths that offer programs tailored to their interests and career plans. The Icelandic educational system is notable for not having a clear distinction between high school and technical school, which allows students to more easily change their major without having to interrupt their education.

4. Háskóli (Higher Education): Includes higher education for people over 18 years of age. The higher education system in Iceland is diverse, offering a wide range of academic and professional programs. Universities actively participate in research projects and cooperate internationally, promoting innovation and development.



Drawing 2 <https://eurydice.eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-education-systems/iceland/overview>

The main principle of the education system in Iceland is the equal right to education, regardless of gender, financial situation, place of residence, origin, religion or possible disability. Education in secondary schools and universities is free, although there is an annual, one-time administrative fee. Most schools are run by the public sector, but there are also private schools that are partly funded by the state.

Accessibility of education

Iceland attaches great importance to universal access to education. Education at all levels, up to and including secondary level, is free of charge and financed from the state budget. To ensure equal access to education, the Icelandic government invests in transportation and educational infrastructure, especially in remote and less populated regions of the country. These measures are aimed at ensuring that no student is deprived of educational opportunities due to geographical isolation.

Support also includes students from families with a lower economic status, which is aimed at equalizing educational and social opportunities. In addition, municipalities may award subsidies

for the participation of children and young people in sports and recreational activities, which is conducive to their comprehensive development.

Adapting education for people with disabilities

Iceland is a pioneer in the field of inclusive education. The country's education policy focuses on the full integration of students with disabilities into the regular school system. The main elements of this model include:

- Individual approach to the student: Each student with a disability has the right to an individual educational plan, tailored to his or her specific needs. These plans take into account both modifications of teaching content and teaching methods and support of specialists, such as special educators, psychologists and therapists.
- Specialist support in schools: Schools have support teams consisting of psychologists, special educators and therapists who work with pupils with disabilities. Additionally, students can benefit from the help of educational assistants who support them in their daily tasks.
- Adaptation of infrastructure: Icelandic schools are adapted to the needs of students with different types of disabilities. This applies both to infrastructure, such as ramps and lifts for people in wheelchairs, and to the adaptation of teaching aids for students with visual or hearing impairments.

The aim is to ensure that every student, regardless of their health situation, has full access to education, which increases their chances of social and professional integration in the future. The Icelandic educational system is an example of a model approach to inclusion, where eliminating educational barriers is a priority.

Levels and curriculum

The Icelandic compulsory education system consists of two levels: primary and lower secondary education, which are integrated into a single educational institution. Teaching in these schools is

based on tolerance, Christian values and democratic principles, which prepares students for life in modern society. After completing compulsory school, students can continue their education in secondary schools, which prepare them for both professional life and further higher education.

The Icelandic educational model emphasizes adapting teaching to the individual abilities and needs of students. Schools are required to provide appropriate conditions to enable pupils to fulfil their educational potential and personal development.

Innovation and differentiation of the system

The Icelandic educational system is characterized by flexibility and openness to innovation. The Ministry of Education of Iceland issues the National Curriculum, which defines the main educational objectives, the compulsory schedule of hours and the calendar of the school year. However, schools are free to adapt these guidelines to the specific needs of their students.

The Icelandic educational system is an example of a diverse and flexible approach to education, which puts accessibility, quality of teaching and individual approach to each student on an equal footing, which is especially important in the context of the challenges related to the geographical specificity of the country.

Chapter 3: Comparison of the Polish and Icelandic educational systems

General characteristics

The educational systems in Poland and Iceland, although they aim to ensure high quality of teaching and wide access to education, differ in many respects, resulting from different historical, cultural and geographical conditions.

The Polish educational system has undergone numerous reforms aimed at bringing it into line with European Union standards, with an emphasis on an integrated approach to education and equal access to teaching. Education in Poland is compulsory until the age of 18, which includes primary and secondary education. In Poland, there is a strong emphasis on the formal structure of the system, which is divided into several educational stages, from kindergarten to high school.

On the other hand, the educational system in Iceland, which is considered one of the most inclusive in Europe, is based on the principles of equality, accessibility, and high quality of education. Education in Iceland is compulsory from the age of 6 to 16 and is distinguished by its flexibility and adaptation to the needs of students, which is especially important due to the scattered settlements and specific geographical conditions of the country. Iceland focuses on social integration and full access to education, regardless of where you live or your economic status.

Structure of the educational system

In Poland, the educational system is organized in a more formalized and hierarchical way, with a clear division into educational stages. This system includes pre-school education (3-6 years), primary school (6-15 years) and secondary school (from the age of 15). Education at the secondary level is divided into general secondary schools, technical secondary schools and trade schools. Each of these educational stages has clearly defined objectives, curricula, and exam requirements, leading to a high degree of specialization at secondary school level.

The Icelandic educational system is more flexible and less hierarchical. It consists of four main stages: Leikskóli (kindergarten), Grunnskóli (compulsory school, which includes both primary and

lower secondary school), Framhaldsskóli (secondary school), and Háskóli (higher education). Unlike in Polish, Iceland does not have a clear division between different types of secondary schools, which promotes greater flexibility in the choice of educational paths and allows students to more easily adapt to changing interests and career plans.

Accessibility of education

Both Poland and Iceland attach great importance to universal access to education. In Poland, education is financed from the state budget and remains free at all levels until the end of secondary school. The Polish government undertakes numerous initiatives aimed at ensuring equal access to education, especially for students from rural environments and national minorities. Access to education is recognised as a fundamental right, which is reflected in policies providing transport, textbooks and meals for pupils in need.

Iceland also focuses on universal access to education, but this approach is tailored to the specific challenges of a geographically dispersed population. Education at all levels, up to and including secondary level, is free and financed from the state budget, with an annual, one-time administrative fee in secondary and higher education. To ensure equal access to education, the Icelandic government invests in transportation and educational infrastructure, especially in remote and less populated regions of the country. In addition, municipalities may award subsidies for the participation of children and young people in sports and recreational activities, which is conducive to their comprehensive development.

Adapting education for people with disabilities

Both educational systems, Polish and Icelandic, place great emphasis on the integration and support of students with disabilities, but their approach and implementation differ.

In Poland, the educational system has introduced numerous solutions to support the education of students with disabilities. Depending on their needs, pupils can attend mainstream, integration or special schools, as well as rehabilitation-and-education centres. A key tool to support students with disabilities is the Individual Educational-Therapeutic Programme (IPET), which is tailored to the specific needs of each student. Schools offer support from educational assistants,

customization of teaching content and methods, as well as specialized educational resources. However, access to adequate support can vary from region to region, and school infrastructure still needs to be improved to fully meet the needs of all students.

As a pioneer in inclusive education, Iceland is focusing on the full integration of students with disabilities through regular schools. The country's education policy focuses on eliminating barriers that could hinder students with disabilities from participating in school life on an equal footing with their peers. Every student with a disability is entitled to an individual educational plan, tailored to their specific needs, and schools offer support from professionals such as special educators, psychologists, and therapists. Adapting infrastructure is standard in Icelandic schools, which ensures that education is accessible to students with different types of disabilities. Iceland is an example of a model approach to inclusion, where eliminating educational barriers is a priority, and this system is characterized by high flexibility and availability of support throughout the country.

Innovation and differentiation of systems

The education system in Poland, although formalized and hierarchical, is undergoing transformations aimed at better adaptation to contemporary educational challenges. Polish schools are increasingly adopting innovative teaching methods, such as information and communication technologies, although the adaptation of these methods varies depending on the region and the availability of resources.

The Icelandic educational system, on the other hand, is distinguished by its flexibility and openness to innovation, which is particularly important in the context of the challenges related to the geographical specificity of the country. The Ministry of Education of Iceland issues a National Curriculum that defines the main educational objectives and the mandatory schedule of hours, but schools have a great deal of freedom to adapt these guidelines to the specific needs of their students. Iceland focuses on an individual approach to each student, and the educational system emphasizes the development of key competences, such as creativity, critical thinking and the ability to cooperate, which prepares students for life in modern society.

Summary

The educational systems of Poland and Iceland, although they aim to ensure high quality of teaching and wide access to education, differ significantly in their structures, approach to the organization of teaching and ways of supporting students with disabilities. Poland, with a more formalized and hierarchical system, emphasizes a clear division of education into stages and specialization at the secondary level. The pursuit of equal access to education is pursued through numerous government initiatives, but challenges related to the availability of support for students with disabilities and regional diversity remain.

Iceland, on the other hand, presents a flexible and diverse educational system that focuses on the full integration of students, especially those with disabilities, into the regular school system. The Icelandic model of education is less hierarchical, which allows students more freedom in choosing their educational paths and more easily adapting to changing interests and needs. This system is an example of an innovative approach, where the elimination of educational barriers and an individual approach to each student are priorities.

Both systems can draw mutual inspiration: Poland can benefit from greater flexibility and openness to innovation, while Iceland can be inspired by Polish solutions for specialization at the medium level. The common pursuit of equality in access to education and full integration of all students remains a key challenge that both countries are trying to implement in their own way, taking into account their unique circumstances and needs.

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