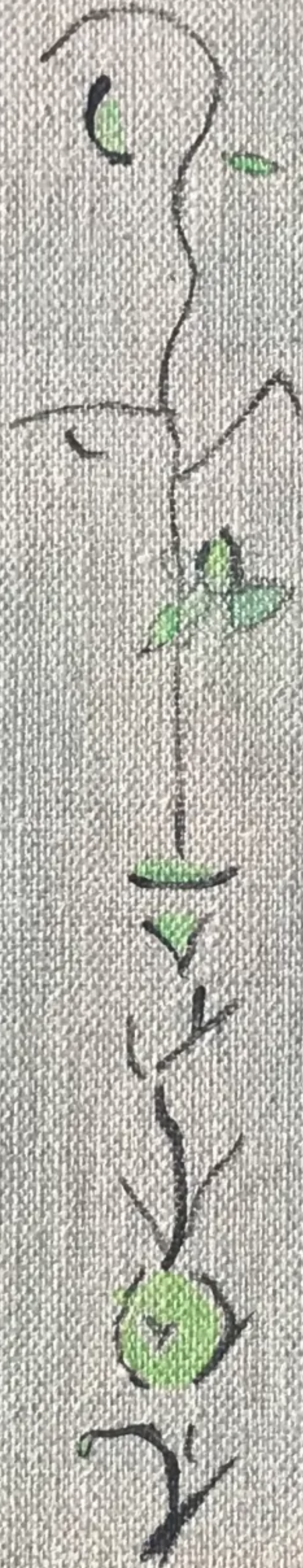


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National Policies of Adult and Lifelong Learning and Education

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Poland



Author

Agnieszka Uflewski

Series Editors

Michael Osborne and Shalini Singh

Introduction

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Author

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Series Editors

Michael Osborne and Shalini Singh

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NATIONAL POLICIES OF ADULT AND LIFELONG LEARNING AND EDUCATION: POLAND

Author: Agnieszka Uflewski¹

Series Editors: Michael Osborne, University of Glasgow, UK and Shalini Singh, Helmut Schmidt University/ University of the Federal Armed Forces, Germany

General Historical Background of ALE and LLL

Adult learning and education (ALE) and lifelong learning (LLL) in Poland should be situated within a far longer historical trajectory than contemporary policy vocabularies alone imply. While current understandings of ALE and LLL are shaped by UNESCO, OECD, and European Union frameworks, the educational heritage of the Polish lands predates the state itself. Their deeper antecedents lie in pre-state communities, where knowledge was transmitted informally across generations through agriculture, craft, environmental adaptation, and communal life. Archaeological evidence from Biskupin, dating to the eighth century BC and often described as the ‘Polish Pompeii’, suggests that such learning was experiential and embedded in everyday egalitarian social practice (Kępa, 2021). Similarly, evidence from the Świętokrzyskie region (Holy Rood Mountains), one of the principal iron-smelting centres of non-Roman Europe in antiquity, with its renowned *dymiarki* (bloomeries), points to highly developed traditions of technical knowledge and specialised craft transmission long before the emergence of Poland (Regional Tourist Organisation, 2026).

With the consolidation of the Polish state in the tenth century, learning developed through multiple, coexisting knowledge traditions rooted in distinct social spheres: vernacular ecological knowledge tied to forests, fields, meadows, and seasonal agriculture; craft and technical skills transmitted through urban guilds and apprenticeship; ecclesiastical, legal, and administrative literacies associated with Christianisation and state formation; and minority traditions of religious and scholarly transmission. This plural learning environment was further reinforced by legal protections for differentiated coexistence, most notably the

¹ *University of Glasgow, Scotland.*

Statute of Kalisz (1264), while the foundation of the University of Kraków (later known as the Jagiellonian University) in 1364 further institutionalised advanced scholarly learning within the kingdom (Pognowski, 1993; Zamoyski, 1987). Rather than creating a single, uniform educational tradition, the early Polish state consolidated a layered and plural learning order in which ecological, vocational, religious, legal, and communal forms of knowledge transmission coexisted and developed side by side.

This plurality did not, however, yield equitable participation. By the time of the Commonwealth period (1569-1795), also referred as the First Republic, social order had become sharply stratified, with the nobility constituting around 10 percent of the population, townspeople roughly 20 percent, and peasants forming the clear majority (Ihnatowicz et al., 1996). The consolidation of elective monarchy after 1573 fostered an elite cosmopolitan political culture that prized legal, rhetorical, diplomatic, and multilingual competences, while the *Warsaw Confederation* of the same year enshrined religious tolerance, enabling diverse religious and scholarly traditions to coexist. Within the noble estate itself, power and wealth became increasingly concentrated in the hands of a narrow magnate elite, whose education combined Jesuit humanism, Latin rhetoric, and *peregrinatio academica* (academic pilgrimage) at foreign universities. Meanwhile, the expansion of the *folwark* (estate) economy and the tightening of serfdom (Pol. *poddaństwo*) and compulsory labour (Pol. *pańszczyzna*) in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries made access to learning increasingly estate bound (Zamoyski, 1987). Civic, legal, and parliamentary literacies remained concentrated largely among the nobility; towns sustained guild-based vocational learning, commercial knowledge, and municipal cultures of literacy; peasants, by contrast, were increasingly confined to informal and intergenerational learning rooted in land, custom, and vernacular ecological knowledge. For the history of ALE and LLL, the Commonwealth is therefore significant not because it diminished the plurality of learning traditions, but because it reorganised them within an increasingly unequal social order: multiple forms of knowledge endured, yet access to literate, institutionalised, and politically consequential learning became ever more sharply stratified.

The late eighteenth century saw a deliberate effort to reframe learning as a public good rather than an estate privilege. The *Commission of National Education*, established in 1773 as Europe's first central state education authority, secularised schooling, introduced a unified curriculum centred on the Polish language, history, science, and civic values, and advanced the professionalisation of teacher training. Although directed primarily at the young, its emphasis on practical knowledge, moral formation, and self-improvement laid important conceptual foundations for understanding education as a continuing civic process. The *1791 Constitution* reinforced this trajectory: Europe's first modern written constitution,

it embedded the *Commission* within a broader programme of political and moral renewal, advancing ideals of citizenship and public responsibility that widened the civic horizon of learning (Davies, 2005a). Taken together, these reforms marked a pivotal transition in the history of ALE and LLL in Poland: from stratified, estate-based traditions of learning toward a model of civic formation oriented to the public good (Rousseau, 1772 [1985]). This momentum, however, was halted by the partitions of the Commonwealth at the end of the eighteenth century and subjected the development of learning to the divergent political, linguistic, and administrative priorities of the partitioning powers.

In the nineteenth century, especially in the Russian and Prussian partitions, Russification and Germanisation policies, intensified through the *Kulturkampf* and underpinned by anti-Polonism, sought to suppress Polish language, culture and identity by subordinating schooling to imperial administrative, linguistic and political priorities. The teaching of Polish-related subjects was restricted, while self-education societies and clandestine classes exposed teachers and learners to imprisonment and wider forms of administrative and social sanction. At the same time, the Polish lands were drawn unevenly into industrial capitalism shaped by foreign rule, external capital and the economic interests of the partitioning powers, intensifying class stratification, labour exploitation and social dislocation (Ihnatowicz et al., 1996). In the aftermath of major failed independence uprisings, ALE and LLL emerged within this landscape as both a practical adaptation to economic disruption and cultural, moral and civic resistance under statelessness. This resistance was sustained through organised underground higher education, including the Flying University, alongside family transmission, religious and philanthropic activity, self-education, clandestine teaching, the Great Emigration, and a wider cultural-pedagogical ecology of literature, visual art, music and science (Davies, 2005b; Zamoyski, 1987). Works associated with Henryk Sienkiewicz and Jan Matejko were received in the spirit of *ku pokrzepieniu serc* (sustaining hope under dispossession), while émigré figures, such as Fryderyk Chopin and Maria Skłodowska-Curie, carried Polish memory into global cultural and scientific fields, with *polonium* symbolically inscribing non-sovereign Poland into modern science. In this sense, ALE and LLL became infrastructures for keeping the Polish language, solidarity, and civic consciousness teachable outside sovereign state institutions.

In the twentieth century, ALE and LLL in Poland were shaped by successive political and institutional ruptures, beginning with the immense task of reconstructing a state after more than a century of partitions. The interwar Second Republic (1918-1939) inherited three formerly divided territories with divergent legal, educational, administrative and economic systems, yet pursued imaginative and future-oriented projects of restoration, modernisation and knowledge-building. These developments included cultural diplomacy, strategic

economic infrastructure, as well as aviation and technical education from the 1920s that reached beyond inherited class boundaries (Olson & Cloud, 2003). They also included original economic research, most notably Michał Kalecki's work anticipating central elements later associated with Keynesian economics; Maria Skłodowska-Curie's support for nuclear research through the establishment of the Radium Institute in Warsaw; a world-leading mathematical culture associated with figures of Stefan Banach, Hugo Steinhaus and Stanisław Ulam; and Warsaw cryptological expertise, through which Polish mathematicians broke the Enigma cipher in the early 1930s and shared their research with the UK and France in July 1939 (Turing & Gawłowski, 2023; GCHQ, 2021). Importantly, this knowledge culture was not confined to formal institutions: Banach's trajectory from self-taught mathematician to founder of modern functional analysis and central figure in the *Scottish Café's* open problem-solving culture, together with Józef Rotblat's movement from electrician to nuclear physicist, moral critic of nuclear weapons and later Nobel Peace Prize laureate for nuclear disarmament, points to a wider ecology of open, public, peer-based, ethically engaged and passion-driven learning (Ulam, 1969 [2024]; Rotblat, 1995 [2007]).

The Second World War (1939-1945) extinguished much of this nascent civic and intellectual capital through the invasion and partitioning of Poland by the German Reich and the Soviet Union, and the subsequent death of around six million of its citizens, approximately one fifth of the pre-war population, under systems of direct murder, forced labour, deportation, starvation, disease and occupation violence, and the systematic execution, imprisonment, deportation or exile of much of its academic, professional, political and cultural elites (Davies, 2005b; Zamoyski, 1987). Despite such terror and cultural decapitation, learning and teaching persisted as practices of resistance and civic agency, sustaining hope through clandestine knowledge networks and, after 1945, the reconstruction of professional and institutional life. In particular, after Warsaw's deliberate near-total destruction by German forces, its post-war rebuilding, drawing partly on eighteenth-century city views, became an act of historical recovery, healing, technical reconstruction and civic learning across the nation.

After 1945, ALE and LLL in Poland were reconstituted within a Soviet-aligned state that combined reconstruction, social modernisation and ideological control. Many members of the former Polish Armed Forces and wider intellectual and professional communities in exile, including in the UK and France, were unable to return because of repression under the newly established authorities (Davies, 2006). Within Poland's radically redrawn borders, society itself was remade through mass wartime losses, forced displacement, population transfers and a predominantly rural social base. In this context, state socialism expanded adult learning through the introduction of workers' education, vocational training, evening

and correspondence study, professional upgrading, scientific-technical institutions, educational broadcasting and popular science programming. These developments widened access for rural, working-class and first-generation learners, supporting movement into administrative, professional and technical roles in a rapidly industrialising state. Alongside official provision, underground forms of adult learning preserved suppressed historical memory and sustained active political debate beyond official state narratives (Ilnatowicz et al., 1996). At another level, post-Second World War projects in plasma and controlled thermonuclear research sought to rebuild an interrupted Polish scientific tradition and carve out distinctive research pathways within the strategic sciences of the Cold War, linking high-level research capacity to wider infrastructures of technical education, professional upgrading and specialised adult training within a politically constrained state system (Curli, 2024). The crisis of late state socialism, marked by social unrest and the imposition of martial law in 1981, unsettled this model and preceded the post-1989 shock of capitalist market transition, when ALE and LLL were heavily decentralised and privatised, shifting towards a dual public-private model increasingly centred on labour-market adjustment, unemployment management, commercial provision and, later, digital skills within Europeanised policy frameworks.

Current Relevant National Legislation Pertaining to ALE and LLL

Contemporary legislation on ALE and LLL in Poland is best understood against its last two centuries of highly fragmented educational provision and repeated external reconfiguration of domestic institutions. In the post-1989 Third Republic, this pattern has been refracted through new forms of asymmetric transnational policy steering, including European, Anglo-Atlantic and OECD-style agendas centred on digital and green economy transformation, labour-market flexibilization, precarity management, demographic governance, identity-oriented re-ideologization, and the intensification of education as a security domain, while shifting the meaning of learning as a public good away from civic, ethical and emancipatory formation towards adaptation to morally disembedded and precarious labour markets, social management and security preparedness. This wider policy environment does not replace Poland's constitutional commitment to education, but it reshapes the conditions under which that commitment is interpreted, legalised and implemented. Indeed, the *Polish Constitution* (1997, Part II, Art. 70) guarantees education as a universal right, yet the post-1989 system has become increasingly stratified, not least through the expansion of non-public provision and the persistence of socio-economic inequalities in access and outcomes. This tension between formal universality and uneven educational realities is reflected particularly clearly in the legal configuration of ALE and LLL, which is dispersed across a

composite of acts and strategic policy documents. Among the most significant are the *Act on the Education System* (1991), the *Act on Promotion of Employment and Labour Market Institutions* (2004), the *Perspective on Lifelong Learning* (Polish Government, 2013), the *Act of School Education* (2016, implemented in 2017), and the *Law on Higher Education and Science* (2018). While the education acts establish the statutory foundations for adult learning, continuing education, and professional development, the labour-market act and the *Perspective* (Polish Government, 2013) position ALE and LLL more directly within the logics of employability, economic adaptation, and lifelong skills governance.

Beyond structuring governance, these legislative foundations also define the conceptual scope of ALE and LLL in Poland, including the terms through which participation, employability, and development are organised across the life course. Within this framework, *continuing education* refers broadly to post-compulsory learning undertaken during adulthood in response to changing professional and social demands. *Adult learning and education* focus on diverse and often decentralised forms of provision, including formal instruction, workplace training, and community-based initiatives. *Lifelong learning*, by contrast, functions as the broader organising principle, encompassing formal, non-formal, and informal learning throughout the life course and positioning adult and continuing education within a wider system of personal, social, and professional development (Eurydice, 2026a; 2025b; Kolanowska & Górowska-Fells, 2024; Petelewicz et al., 2023)

Since 2016, ALE and LLL in Poland have been additionally embedded within the country's broader 2030 development agenda, as articulated in the *Responsible Development Plan* (Polish Government, 2016), the *Strategy for Responsible Development* (Polish Government, 2017), the *Human Capital Development Strategy 2030* (Polish Government, 2020b), and the *Integrated Skills Strategy 2030*, adopted in its general and detailed parts (Polish Government, 2020a; 2019). Within this framework, the *Responsible Development* agenda (Polish Government, 2017; 2016) links education and skills to productivity growth, innovation, and the reduction of regional disparities; the *Human Capital Development Strategy* (Polish Government, 2020b) emphasises skills formation, labour-market participation, and social cohesion; and the *Integrated Skills Strategy 2030* (Polish Government, 2020a; 2019) provides the most direct framework for ALE and LLL by promoting skills development, recognition of learning across variety of settings, as well as guidance and support for groups at risk of exclusion. Together, these documents reposition adult and lifelong learning as a strategic policy instrument within a wider transnational convergence around labour market flexibilization.

This strategic orientation is reflected in the growing integration of ALE and LLL into Poland's broader digital transformation agenda. Initiatives, such as *Digital Poland* (Polish

Government, 2014), the expansion of *mObywatel* (mCitizen) digital ID, the *Integrated Education Platform*, and the *Global e-Learning Platform* co-developed with Microsoft and UNICEF for teachers working with refugee children (UNICEF, 2023), illustrate how the state has increasingly strengthened the digital infrastructure around education (ZPE, 2026; European Commission, 2025b; CEDEFOP & IBE, 2023; Dębkowska et al., 2022). This infrastructural turn is reinforced by national *AI policy* and broader *2030 strategies*, which position adult and lifelong learning as instruments of technological adaptation, socio-economic competitiveness and the formation of digitally capable, administratively legible and economically adaptable individuals within an increasingly datafied governance environment (Polish Government, 2020c; see also: OECD, 2025a; Eurydice, 2024). The SARS-CoV-2 pandemic further accelerated this transition, intensifying the shift towards online and blended forms of adult and lifelong learning, while exposing the unequal and morally charged conditions under which digital participation takes place: access depended not only on infrastructure and opportunity, but also on wellbeing, care responsibilities, economic insecurity and whether education was experienced as meaningful support or as another demand for adaptation under conditions of distress (Michalcewicz-Kaniowska et al., 2024; Górniak & Jelonek, 2023; Adamowicz, 2022; Górniak et al., 2022).

Another expression of this strategic orientation is the use of ALE and LLL to manage demographic change and migration into EU labour-market structures. Following large-scale emigration and more recent immigration, particularly from Ukraine, Polish policy increasingly frames adult learning as an adaptation tool through language training, reskilling, upskilling and recognition of foreign qualifications (Sorgho, 2026; Kozicki, 2025; Ciobanu & Wielinski, 2023; Frączyk, 2020; see also: Chrostowska, 2024; Szalańska & Sobczak-Szelc, 2021). Notably, this framing risks obscuring how newcomers and local workers are differently positioned within the same, often precarious, labour markets, so that adult learning becomes a mechanism for managing and redistributing precarity, rather than addressing its structural causes.

Extent of Devolution of Powers in ALE and LLL to Regions and Cities, and to Social Partners

Poland's education system was radically reshaped by the post-1989 decentralisation reforms, which transferred substantial administrative responsibilities to subnational authorities as part of the wider political and socioeconomic transformation of the period (Herczyński, 2012). As Herczyński (2012) notes, this process unfolded through deconcentration, delegation and devolution, indicating that decentralisation in Poland was layered, rather than uniform. This distinction is especially important for ALE and LLL, where

implementation is widely dispersed, but strategic authority remains only partially devolved: national-level authorities continue to shape legislative and strategic frameworks, while regional and local actors are primarily responsible for delivery, coordination and adaptation across an increasingly mixed public-private landscape. Decentralisation therefore extends implementation outward, without fully devolving strategic power, redistributing responsibility across institutions with unequal resources, capacities and authority while wider European governance agendas continue to shape policy direction.

Within this structure, the *województwo* (voivodeship), is the main decentralised tier. Here, regional governments hold the broadest subnational role in coordinating labour-market policy, vocational provision, adult education and funding, including national and EU-supported streams (OECD, 2025b). Their role has been strengthened through the *Regional Coordination Teams for Skills Policy* (Pol. *Wojewódzkie Zespoły Koordynacji*), established under regional government to support implementation of the *Integrated Skills Strategy 2030* (Polish Government, 2020a; 2019; see also: Eurydice, 2026b; OECD, 2025b). These bodies advise on regional development directions, training needs and cooperation between institutions, but remain subject to central oversight. *Powiat* (county) and *gmina* (municipality) occupy narrower positions: counties provide much of the practical infrastructure for vocational and adult provision, including local employment services, while municipalities focus more on access, outreach and local programmes (OECD, 2025b). The result is a tiered system in which regions coordinate, counties deliver and municipalities connect provision to local communities, while final strategic direction remains largely outside the local level.

Social partners, private providers and sectoral actors operate within the same layered structure. Employers' organisations, trade unions, NGOs, training providers and other stakeholders participate in consultative, advisory and coordinating bodies that shape training priorities, identify labour-market needs and connect education to employment; their influence is meaningful, but exercised within wider policy and funding frameworks (Eurydice, 2026b; OECD, 2025b). Recent initiatives supporting Ukrainian refugees, including EPALE-supported digital vocational training projects, illustrate how European adult-learning platforms and national partnerships are used to support local language development, vocational adaptation and access to employment pathways in a country hosting over one million Ukrainian citizens (EPALE, 2025). In this sense, Poland's ALE and LLL system operates as a multi-level structure in which domestic actors implement and adapt provision, while agenda-setting remains closely tied to supranational priorities, funding streams and policy frameworks around skills, mobility and labour-market integration (Eurydice, 2026b; OECD, 2025b; CEDEFOP & IBE, 2023).

Influence and/or Policy Linkages to Supranational Organisations

Poland's ALE and LLL policies are explicitly aligned with the *European Union* (EU), a supranational political and economic bloc, which frames adult learning and skills formation as central to socioeconomic transformation (Kalenda, 2024). These linkages are articulated through the *New European Agenda for Adult Learning 2021-2030* (Council of the European Union, 2021), the *Union of Skills* framework (European Commission, 2025a), the *European Pillar of Social Rights* (European Parliament et al., 2017) and its *Action Plan* (European Commission, 2021), the *Digital Education Action Plan 2021-2027* (European Commission, 2025b), the broader *European Green Deal* agenda (European Commission, 2019), and the *AI Act* (Regulation EU 2024/1689, 2024). The *European Pillar of Social Rights* is especially notable, since *Principle 1* affirms the right to quality education and lifelong learning (European Commission, 2017), while its *Action Plan* (European Commission, 2021, online) sets a 2030 target that at least 60 per cent of adult Europeans should participate in 'training' every year. At the same time, the *European Green Deal* (European Commission, 2019) and the *Union of Skills* (European Commission, 2025a) position competences development as essential to the green transition, stressing the need for reskilling and upskilling to support sustainable competitiveness (see also: ProAkademia, 2023).

Alongside this rights-based and competitiveness-oriented agenda, EU policy increasingly links ALE and LLL to cybersecurity, digital disruption, and crisis management through the *Digital Education Action Plan* (European Commission, 2020), the *Cybersecurity Skills Academy* (European Commission, 2023), the *NIS2 Directive* (European Parliament et al., 2022), and the *EU AI Pact* (European Commission, 2026). In Poland, this is visible in the expansion of institutional support for digital skills and cybersecurity, including the *AGH Cybersecurity Centre* in Kraków and the *CYBER SCIENCE Silesian Centre for Legal Engineering, Technology and Digital Competence* complex in southwest Poland. These developments translate digital security and crisis agendas into educational infrastructure, positioning ALE and LLL not only as instruments of economic management, but also as mechanisms of societal regulation within an EU policy landscape increasingly shaped by security as a governing principle (European Commission, 2025a; 2025b).

The *Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development* (OECD) influences Poland's ALE and LLL policy less through formal obligation than through benchmarking, peer review and policy recommendation. Its role is particularly evident in *Skills Strategy Poland* (OECD, 2019), which informed the development of the *Integrated Skills Strategy 2030* (Polish Government, 2020a; 2019) and strengthened a policy logic centred on lifelong learning,

adult participation, skills use and labour-market alignment. This influence is reinforced through the *Survey of Adult Skills* (PIAAC), whose comparative findings shape debate on skills development in Poland. Notably, the 2022-23 cycle suggested a decline in basic skills proficiency relative to 2011-12, although the OECD advises caution in interpreting these results because data anomalies affected a substantial share of respondents (OECD, 2024). In this respect, the OECD complements the EU's strategic agenda by providing the comparative evidence through which Poland's skills-centred reforms are assessed and adjusted, while these recent data anomalies also show that such evidence is not neutral infrastructure, but an interpretive policy instrument with its own methodological limits.

UNESCO and the wider *United Nations* system shape Poland's ALE and LLL field primarily through normative frameworks. Since joining UNESCO in 1946, Poland has participated in a global policy environment that frames adult learning through inclusion, equity, sustainability and the right to lifelong learning. Particularly relevant is UNESCO's *Recommendation on Adult Learning and Education* (RALE), adopted in 2015, which sets out principles and guidelines for improving the status, accessibility and quality of adult learning and education at national, regional and international levels (UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning, 2016). These orientations are reinforced through UNESCO's Global Report on Adult Learning and Education (GRALE) and the CONFINTEA process, which support international comparison while highlighting concerns around participation, financing and recognition of non-formal and informal learning (UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning, 2025). In Poland, UNESCO and wider UN agendas intersect with commitments to sustainable development, particularly SDG 4 on quality education and SDG 13 on climate action, reflected in the growing prominence of climate education, environmental transition and lifelong learning within policy discourse and related initiatives (UN GCNP, 2025; Wyszowski et al., 2021). At the community level, UNESCO's influence is also visible in city-based learning frameworks. For example, Gdynia, which joined the UNESCO Global Network of Learning Cities in 2019, has promoted lifelong learning in response to technological, demographic, cultural and environmental change. During the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic, these frameworks also supported digitally mediated educational, cultural and community activities designed to sustain wellbeing and civic solidarity (UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning, 2021).

The North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) is an intergovernmental military alliance, and its influence on Poland's ALE and LLL field remains more indirect than that of the EU, OECD or UNESCO. It has, however, become increasingly relevant in relation to cybersecurity, civil preparedness for military and non-military threats, and the wider securitisation of learning. Since joining NATO in 1999, Poland has operated within a security environment in which education, training and skills are increasingly linked to cyber defence, technological

vulnerability, civil resilience and crisis readiness. In 2025, NATO launched its *Resilience Reference Curriculum*, presenting *resilience education* as a structured field for developing knowledge, skills and strategies relevant to national and collective security across military and civilian settings (NATO, 2025; 2024). This tendency is further reflected in NATO's *Science and Technology Macro Trends 2025-2045*, which, although formally advisory rather than an official NATO position, identifies technological, informational and societal trends considered significant for future defence and security planning. Notably, this framework recasts education as a strategic security capability: a means of developing technological talent, protecting militarily relevant research, and managing public preparedness, while subordinating its critical and moral purposes to military governance and technological competition (NATO Science & Technology Organization, 2025). In the Polish context, this supranational security logic resonates with recent domestic developments, including the *Act on Civil Protection and Civil Defence* (2024) and the *#wGotowości* (*#onStandby*) defence-training programme introduced in 2025. By presenting learning as part of national security systems, including through the *Odporność* (Resistance) track, *#wGotowości* illustrates a wider policy shift in which Polish education is recast less as civic formation than as a mechanism for keeping society *w gotowości* under conditions of perceived military threat (Polish Government News, 2025; 2024b).

Beyond the European Union, OECD, UNESCO and NATO, Poland's ALE and LLL have also been influenced by a wider set of international organisations, foreign agencies, NGOs, policy institutes, and thinktanks. The *Council of Europe* (2023) has shaped ALE and LLL policy discourse on language education, citizenship, and minority-language provision, as well as it also contributed to emerging debates on the human-rights implications of AI (Holmes et al., 2022); the *World Bank* has contributed to reform debates on system restructuring, skills development, and performance (Mahfooz & Hovde, 2010; see also: Dalvit et al., 2023); while *UNICEF* has had a more direct role in multicultural education and teacher training (Marcus et al., 2023; UNICEF, 2023). The influence of the *United States Agency for International Development* (USAID) has been more indirect, operating through cultural capacity-building and the broader civic sphere (Lutkiewicz et al., 2025; TVN24.pl, 2025; Mularczyk, 2025). Through a different channel, the UK's *Royal Institute of International Affairs*, also known as *Chatham House*, shapes the Polish policy environment through elite capacity-building, leadership training and agenda alignment, as reflected in the *Belvedere Forum*, the *Polish-British Science Forum*, and the participation of senior Polish officials in Chatham House programmes (Polish Institute of International Affairs, 2025; Chatham House, 2022). Such dynamics are part of a wider ecology of foreign-funded and privately funded thinktanks that participate in policy agenda-setting, raising questions about the autonomy, transparency

and local accountability of education-policy decision-making (Jezierska & Sörbom, 2020; Bretan, 2020).

Alongside thinktanks and policy institutes, foreign private companies increasingly shape the wider policy environment within which Polish ALE and LLL are framed. A key example is *Palantir*, a U.S. technology company focused on data integration, analysis, and AI-enabled operational systems. In 2024-2025, Poland's Ministry of National Defence formalised cooperation with Palantir in AI, information technologies, and cybersecurity, presenting the partnership as part of the digital transformation of Polish defence structures. Yet, Palantir's public-facing activity in Poland extends beyond the strictly military domain, including reported involvement in data projects connected to migration governance (Palczewski, 2026), as well as recent recruitment campaigns across Polish universities, framed through the explicit geopolitical ramification 'Defend the West. Shape the Future' (Palantir, 2026, online). In relation to ALE and LLL, Palantir exemplifies a wider shift in which learning is actively redefined as a source of operational capacity within proprietary, AI-enabled systems of datafied governance. Read alongside NATO's securitised understanding of learning and the EU's growing emphasis on security across physical and digital spaces, this development is significant not only technically, but also conceptually: it illustrates a wider redefinition of ALE and LLL, in which learning is displaced from civic freedom, moral judgement and independent thought towards operational usefulness within proprietary AI-enabled bureaucratic and military systems.

Financing of LLL

Poland does not have a single, unified model or dedicated national budget line for LLL: funding remains highly fragmented, varying according to the type of provision, target group, and delivery mode (Eurydice, 2025a). Public sources, both European and national, dominate, while private contributions, although growing, play a secondary role (OECD, 2019). Since Poland's accession to the European Union in 2004, EU funds have become the single most important financial lever for scaling adult learning provision, particularly through project-based initiatives aligned with the *Integrated Skills Strategy 2030* (Polish Government, 2020a; 2019). European funding operates then as a key structuring force, particularly through the *European Social Fund Plus* (ESF+) and related national implementation programmes. These funds have supported the expansion of non-formal provision, skills initiatives and projects tied to employability. In this respect, EU funding does not merely supplement national provision; it increasingly shapes the priorities, language and delivery

models scaled and aligned with broader European Union agendas (Eurydice, 2026b; Polish Government News, 2024a; Polish Government, 2020a; 2019).

In formal adult education, funding follows the broader logic of the school system. Public schools for adults and related post-secondary institutions are financed through the general education funding framework, with resources channelled via local government units. In this respect, adult learning provision within formal schooling is treated less as a separate lifelong-learning field than as an extension of mainstream education administration (Eurydice, 2025a). In non-formal and vocationally oriented adult learning, the funding system is more mixed and more closely shaped by labour-market policies. A central role is played by the *Labour Fund*, which supports training for unemployed adults and job-seekers through local labour offices. Within this framework, the *National Training Fund* (Pol. *Krajowy Fundusz Szkoleniowy*) has become one of the principal national instruments for continuing training among employed adults, particularly where upskilling is linked to labour-market demands, digitalisation and green-transition priorities (Eurydice, 2025a). Additional support is available through *PFRON* (State Fund for the Rehabilitation of People with Disabilities), as well as through targeted ministerial funding for specific professions or sectors (Eurydice, 2025a). In summary, adult and lifelong learning financing in Poland is publicly supported, but strategically selective: stable funding is concentrated in EU-funded skills initiatives, formal schooling and labour-market measures, while planning and coordination remain fragmented across institutions and governance levels, limiting coherence and long-term development (EAEA, 2023). The result is a dispersed and often project-based funding landscape that privileges supranational agendas over a broader understanding of lifelong learning as a local, public, civic and socially transformative good rooted in community needs and democratic self-determination.

The Role of Sectors and Involvement of Community Stakeholders

ALE and LLL in Poland involve a wide range of actors, including public institutions, educational providers, economic sectors, social partners and community-based organisations. Yet, this multi-actor landscape should not be mistaken for shared governance: strategic direction remains concentrated in central authorities and EU-linked frameworks, while other actors participate unevenly, primarily as intermediaries for funding, delivery and implementation agendas defined elsewhere (Eurydice, 2026a, 2025b; Kolanowska & Górowska-Fells, 2024; Czarnik et al., 2019). Participation does occur, but it is structured through uneven forms of consultation, delivery partnership and locally mediated implementation, rather than co-equal agenda-setting. At the municipal level, initiatives

such as Gdańsk's *Council of Immigrants* create consultative spaces for stakeholder involvement in areas linked to integration and social inclusion. Composed entirely of non-Polish citizens, the Council contributes to local integration policy by addressing access to education and language learning, illustrating how local actors can create participatory spaces within an otherwise centrally and externally shaped policy environment (Gdańsk.pl, 2023; European Commission, 2016).

Alongside municipal and community-based participation, employers and private companies are important, but selective actors in Polish ALE and LLL. Their role is most visible where adult learning serves work-related training, technological adaptation and business needs, especially through workplace courses, partnerships and sponsored programmes (Kolanowska & Górowska-Fells, 2024). Particularly, in digital and AI-related training, large multinational corporations increasingly influence what kinds of learning are prioritised, as illustrated by *Microsoft's* AI training programme in Poland, linked to its wider investment in the *Polish Digital Valley* and cloud culture (Microsoft, 2024; see also: Polish Government News, 2022a). Notably, this involvement remains uneven: it is strongest where private companies can see clear organisational or financial benefit, and weaker where lifelong learning is meant to support civic life, local communities and public goods.

Taxpayer-funded educational and cultural institutions also play an important role in translating ALE and LLL priorities into practice in Poland. Schools for adults and continuing education centres support adults seeking professional advancement and wider forms of learning, while higher education institutions increasingly extend their activity beyond degree provision into more flexible lifelong-learning formats. The *University of Warsaw's Open University*, for example, combines professional upskilling with wider public engagement, cultural participation and accessible adult learning through micro-open-access lectures and discussion forums (UOUW, 2025).

ALE and LLL also extend beyond conventional academic provision into institutionally organised cultural, civic and place-based learning. The *National Institute of Country Culture and Heritage* supports the transmission of locally grounded knowledge through open-access workshops and programmes, such as *Encounters with Folk Culture in Agricultural Schools*, bringing rural heritage, ecological knowledge and sustainable cultural practices into vocational and agricultural education (NIKIDW, 2026). In a different but related way, *Kielce's Instytut Dizajnu* shows how historically burdened urban spaces can be reused for educational and civic purposes. Situated in a former prison, now a museum associated with repression and torture, the Institute preserves the memory of the site while transforming it into a space for artistic learning, visual communication, collaboration and community

participation, linking remembrance with renewal and local regeneration (Instytut Dizajnu, 2026).

Local community stakeholders make their most distinctive contribution where adult learning intersects with community participation, intergenerational exchange and social cohesion. Grassroots associations and local initiatives often reach groups less visible in mainstream policy frameworks, including older adults, rural communities and others at risk of educational exclusion (Chrzczonowicz, 2021; see also Gontarska et al., 2022). They also introduce flexible, place-based and socially embedded forms of learning that respond more directly to local lived realities. The *BohaterON* (2026) initiative illustrates this role by combining historical and civic education with direct intergenerational exchange between young people and participants in the 1944 Warsaw Uprising - the 63-day insurrection led by the Polish Underground Home Army and the people of Warsaw against German occupation during the Second World War. Here, intergenerational contact becomes a vehicle for peace education, historical memory, civic formation and social recognition. Similarly, the *Polish Red Cross's* (2026) senior projects, together with initiatives, such as *Archipelag Pokoleń* (Archipelago of Generations, 2026) and *Pokolenia w Akcji* (Generations in Action, 2026), frame intergenerational learning as a reciprocal practice of care: addressing ageing and loneliness, while supporting younger generations' search for authenticity, meaningful relationships, and sustainability-oriented learning (see also: Polish Radio, 2024; Polish Government News, 2022b).

Beyond intergenerational care, such initiatives also reactivate local historical, ecological and civic memory through shared contemporary practice. This role has gained renewed significance amid growing interest, especially among younger generations, in locality, sustainability and more grounded ways of living. Here, knowledge is not treated as static inheritance, but as something continually reproduced, reinterpreted and revalued through use, participation and communal engagement. This is visible in the revival of craftsmanship and guild traditions, customary and musical practices, and contemporary spaces, such as *Warsaw's House of Polish Folk Art* (*Dom Sztuki Ludowej*, 2026), a family-run, ethnographer-led institution active since 1953, alongside plethora of online channels documenting and promoting local artists and makers working with local wood, wool, linen, ceramics, food traditions, handmade shoemaking, millinery and upcycled fashion.

This approach is also visible in the renewal of humane and ecological education. Continuing a tradition associated with figures such as Simona Kossak (Kamińska, 2015), contemporary wildlife-rescue initiatives communicate knowledge about vulnerable wild animals, interspecies care and responsible human intervention through rescue, rehabilitation, advisory work and community education (Jelonki, 2026; Primum, 2026; Puchaczówka, 2026).

This ethic of attentiveness is also reflected in urban design across Poland, where animal bridges, crossings and tunnels point to a locally embedded sensitivity to human-animal relations in public infrastructure (Brodziewska, 2005; see also Koschalka, 2021). From an ALE and LLL perspective, such measures embed humane and ecological learning in the built environment, making care for other species visible as an integral part of everyday public life.

A vibrant ecology of learning is also expressed in seasonal and community-based cultural life, where open-air exhibitions, concerts and festivals of poetry, theatre, food, dance and music bring different generations together in shared public spaces, turning cultural participation into a form of informal learning. Free and open-access events, such as *Jazz at the Warsaw Old Town* (Fundacja Jazz Art, 2025), the *Chopin Concerts* in the Royal Łazienki Gardens (2026), museum nights and numerous classical, religious, folk and multi-ethnic festivals across Poland, illustrate how public cultural life can support intergenerational encounter, cultural continuity and civic participation. Participatory artistic initiatives further extend this community-learning environment, as in Kalinowski's art across urban spaces, where artistic practice transforms public space into a site of sensory engagement, collective interaction and shared experience (Kalinowski, 2026).

This cultural dimension of lifelong learning became especially visible during the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic, when low-threshold infrastructures of care, culture and informal learning were placed under strain. Adam Sztaba's online arrangement of *Co mi Panie dasz? (What can you offer me, Lord, in these uncertain times?)* and the 1980s rock anthem by Beata Kozidrak & Bajm became a nationally resonant act of artistic digital collaboration, bringing together more than 700 musicians online and making the performance freely accessible to the public (Sztaba, 2021). At the same time, local artists working across theatre, opera, philharmonic, pop, rock, jazz, ethnic and traditional music transformed balconies, courtyards and neighbourhood spaces into sites of community support, cultural participation and informal learning during the pandemic lockdowns (Jabłońska, 2024).

Beyond the pandemic, similar forms of low-threshold participation and everyday civic learning remain visible in public sharing practices across Poland. Often carefully maintained rather than informal or neglected, book-exchange points and open-air libraries in railway stations, parks and squares extend reading into everyday public space through trust-based book sharing (Uwalniamy Książki, 2026). Initiatives, such as *Weź Pomóż (Join in, Help Out!)*, apply the same civic logic to food redistribution through community 'educational fridges', where sharing, care, environmental responsibility and informal learning become everyday public practices (Weź Pomóż, 2026; DW News, 2026). Workshops on free goods exchange, zero-waste practices and mutual help further reinforce this educational dimension. Yet,

these initiatives often remain outside stable funding frameworks, as legal complexities, particularly around food redistribution, limit their formal institutionalisation.

Taken together, these examples show that community-based lifelong learning in Poland often depends on fragile, but socially significant civic infrastructures that sustain cultural participation, reciprocity and everyday learning. Under conditions of crisis or institutional insufficiency, such initiatives become especially important in maintaining social connection, intergenerational participation, local memory and practices of care. Indeed, they give ALE and LLL in Poland much of its social depth, cultural continuity and ethical substance, even as they remain structurally peripheral to dominant systems of funding, authority and policy design.

The Tracking of the Effective Implementation of Policies

The implementation of ALE and LLL policies in Poland is monitored through a broad but dispersed architecture that includes ministerial oversight, national statistics, administrative registers, EU reporting systems and international benchmarking. Because ALE and LLL cut across education, labour-market, regional-development and social-policy agendas, monitoring is distributed across multiple policy sites. Within this dispersed system, the *Integrated Skills Strategy 2030* provides the main strategic reference point, linking skills development to economic growth while assigning responsibilities across ministries, regional authorities and other stakeholders (Eurydice, 2026b; Polish Government, 2020a; 2019).

At the national level, monitoring relies heavily on recurring statistical, diagnostic and administrative instruments. These include data collected by *Statistics Poland*, adult education surveys, labour-market and skills analyses, and tools connected to qualifications and validation (Statistics Poland, 2024; 2022). The *Integrated Qualifications System* and related validation arrangements help capture selected forms of non-formal and informal learning, while wider analysis is supported by institutions concerned with skills development, employment and human capital monitoring (Eurydice, 2026a, 2026b; Statistics Poland, 2026). The *Human Capital Study* (Pol. *Bilans Kapitału Ludzkiego*) is especially important in this regard. It has developed into a cyclical mechanism for examining so-called ‘human capital resources’, employer needs and changing skills demands in the Polish labour market (Kolanowska & Górowska-Fells, 2024; Górniak & Jelonek, 2023; Górniak et al., 2022; Czarnik et al., 2019).

More recently, the strengthening of *Regional Coordination Teams for Skills Policy* (Pol. *Wojewódzkie Zespoły Koordynacji*) has sought to stabilise implementation monitoring at the regional level and improve alignment between central strategy and regional labour-market

conditions (Eurydice, 2026a; 2026b). However, while institutionally significant, this development does not overcome the wider dispersion of the monitoring landscape; rather, it adds another coordinating layer to an already complex system.

Notably, EU-level reporting plays a central role because ALE and LLL development in Poland is closely shaped by European frameworks and funding streams. Comparative instruments such as the *Education and Training Monitor* and *Eurostat*-based adult-learning indicators, together with related labour-market and skills reporting, improve visibility and comparability across systems (European Commission, 2025a; 2025b; Eurostat, 2025; EURES, 2023; Eurofound, 2023; CEDEFOP & IBE, 2023; CEDEFOP, 2020). At the same time, they privilege what can be readily counted: participation, training rates, qualifications and programme delivery. Monitoring, therefore, captures outputs more easily than longer-term outcomes, such as sustained skills use, civic agency and the reduction of structural inequalities.

Other forms of international benchmarking reinforce this tendency. OECD evidence on adult skills continues to shape debates on skills shortages, workforce adaptation and participation in learning, even where its findings require critical interpretation (OECD, 2024). This points to the continuing authority of international comparison in ALE and LLL policy debate, even when the evidence base is qualified. Supplementary analyses produced by local public and private research institutions, thinktanks and NGOs also inform policy recalibration, but require scrutiny in relation to their assumptions, institutional positioning, funding sources, methodological choices, and the epistemological and axiological frameworks through which learning is defined, measured and valued. More broadly, Poland's monitoring architecture tends to foreground the dimensions of ALE and LLL most closely linked to skills formation, labour-market responsiveness, economic adaptation and strategic preparedness. It is increasingly evidence-rich, but normatively narrow: learning is measured mainly through productivity, employability, policy performance and adaptive capacity, while community-based learning, civic responsibility and social repair remain less visible.

In conclusion, contemporary ALE and LLL in Poland mark a significant departure from a longer civic and moral tradition that understood education as a public good oriented towards civic virtue, social solidarity and the reduction of disparities. Over the past two centuries, education in Poland has repeatedly been reorganised in response to forces beyond the state; today, this pattern is visible in a transnational policy assemblage shaped by digital and green transitions, population change within the European single labour market, and the growing securitisation of education through proprietary AI-enabled agendas of military readiness and civil defence. The public-good ideal remains present, but increasingly as a residual language, rather than the field's organising logic. Contemporary ALE and LLL in Poland

therefore emerge as an uneven and contested formation: actors closest to governance, funding, technological infrastructure and policy-setting hold the greatest influence, while community-based practices of care, culture, intergenerational exchange and local learning remain peripheral to formal policy design. Yet, it is precisely these practices that continue to carry much of the field's cultural memory, ethical texture and civic depth, preserving ecological, humane and sustainable skills, knowledge, traditions, and forms of moral connectedness that remain essential to the flourishing of future generations and the planet.

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