

National curriculum mapping of GCE opportunities and challenges

Case study Poland

STUDIES

GCE
in curriculum



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Overview of the formal education system

1.1 Early childhood, primary and secondary

- Ages (from-to)
- The split or division between core (=everyone studies this)/non-core (optional) curriculum (where does GCE/DE/ESD sit?)
- National testing (e.g. standardised testing or state examinations)

In Poland, full-time education is mandatory for all students, covering primary school education. Children must attend school from ages 6 to 15, with a total of 9 years of compulsory education. The country follows a unified educational structure for primary and secondary education, ensuring that all students adhere to a common, national curriculum throughout this period.

Preschool year, also known as 'zero class', is compulsory and can be attended at kindergartens, pre-school and school facilities, as well as primary schools. Children start this stage of education at the age of six.

Primary education lasts 8 years, divided into two stages: grades 1-3, which focus on early integrated education, and grades 4-8, where subject-based learning begins. Primary school students are typically aged 7 to 15. A core curriculum governs this level, and students complete primary school with an obligatory state exam called eighth-grade exam, marking the end of primary education.





At the upper secondary level, there are four types of schools: general secondary schools, technical secondary schools, level I sectoral vocational schools, and level II sectoral vocational schools. These schools operate on a 4-year cycle for general secondary schools and a 5-year cycle for technical secondary schools. The education cycle at a vocational school consists of 2 stages: 3 years of education in a first-level vocational school and 2 years of optional education in a second-level vocational school. Education in Poland is compulsory until the age of 18.

Each type of school follows a specific curriculum based on its focus. Students in these schools are usually aged 15 to 19 or 20. Upon completion, students must take state examinations: the final exam (pol. *matura*) for graduates of general and technical upper secondary schools, and vocational qualification exams for those in vocational schools. For the final exams, students have two options: basic level and extended level exams. The extended level is usually (but not always) taken by students who followed subjects with an extended curriculum in upper secondary school. For example, if a student wishes to take the extended biology at final exam (e.g. required for medical university), they are more likely to attend classes that offer the extended biology curriculum. This decision is entirely up to the student but related to the class profile chosen. Decisions regarding the basic or advanced level are usually connected to a plan for higher education, which requires a certain level of selected subjects as a prerequisite for admission to a university. Usually, universities require specialised subjects to be taken at an advanced level.

Neither GCE, DE, nor ESD are officially recognized in the core curriculum. Neither as a subject nor as a module or core curriculum topic. Individual, scattered learning content deals with global problems, sustainable development or global interdependence. While there are certain objectives or learning outcomes that can be linked to these types of education, none are specifically mentioned or emphasised. The most visible references to GCE, DE, and ESD can be found in subject-specific curricula, particularly on upper secondary level, such as the extended geography curriculum with sustainable development content.

2. Curriculum review and redevelopment

2.1 What motivates curriculum change?

In recent years, changes to the core curriculum have been politically motivated. The last change to the core curriculum involved a reduction in content due to its overload (2024), while the previous one (2017) was related to the reform of education combining primary and secondary school. In addition, the content focused more on issues of tradition, respect for one's own nation (including patriotism, homeland, local and national



history), and a conservative worldview. The changes are closely related to party changes and the political group with a parliamentary majority at the national level.

2.2 How often does curriculum change occur?

Changes in Polish education and core curricula are determined by the electoral calendar and changes in the political majority in power. Therefore, major changes occur no less than once every 8-10 years (2008-2009, 2017-2018, 2024-2025), which is related to political changes (two parliamentary terms of 4 years each).

In 2024, a change in all primary and secondary core curriculum subjects was announced (core curriculum means all compulsory subjects at a given level of education). At the beginning of 2025, an open call was made to recruit experts to the teams developing the core curriculum. At the time of writing the composition of the teams is not yet known. For the first time, the process is being coordinated by the Educational Research Institute, a governmental research unit conducting development work in the field of education (in the last year, a graduate profile (of a primary school leaver) preparation process and public consultations on this issue were carried out). In the context of content in global education, more opportunities for their presence are provided by the profile of the secondary school graduate currently being developed. The Council for Monitoring the Implementation of the Education Reform (19 February 2025) suggests dividing the construction of the new core curriculum into three stages: grades 1-3, grades 4-6, grades 7-8. There will also be a new core curriculum format that is consistent across all subjects and stages.

2.3 Who is responsible for curriculum change? Provide a profile of the main actor(s) and their specific responsibilities.

- Constitutional/legal basis?

The Ministry of Education is responsible for introducing changes to the core curriculum at the central, national level. The changes are issued by regulation, for example the last one in 2024 concerning a 20% reduction in teaching content: [link in Polish] <https://www.gov.pl/web/edukacja/uszczuplone-podstawy-programowe--rozporzadzenia-podpisane>

The ministry appoints teams to prepare the changes and organises their work according to an internal schedule (there is a role for the team leader and team members). In the core curriculum reform planned for 2025, the entire process of both team formation and work on individual core curricula has been delegated to





the Educational Research Institute (IBE), a government research centre for education. Since the development of the graduate profile in 2024, the IBE has been continuously involved in the implementation of the reform. In addition, a Council for Monitoring the Implementation of the Education Reform has been established to advise on key decisions in this area, such as the division into educational stages or the format of the core curriculum.

2.4 How does curriculum change happen? What is the process? How long does it usually take?

There is no standardised model for implementing changes to the core curriculum in Poland. Usually, the change from its public announcement to implementation by regulation takes less than a year, while it takes up to two years to implement it in schools. The appointment of a team to prepare the curriculum (based on appointment or an open competition - there is no single procedure) is a recurring element. The changes are also consulted with the public, usually in writing, but online and face-to-face meetings are also organised to present and discuss the proposals (based on the latest example of citizenship education - new subject for upper secondary school).

2.5 Who has a voice in curriculum change processes? What, if any opportunities, are there for NGOs and GCE actors to influence curriculum change?

NGOs are not formally included as a sector in the preparation of the core curriculum. They participate in public consultations, like many other entities. Some NGO experts are invited to consultative and advisory teams or councils, but this is not stipulated (for example, that some places are reserved for organisations). In the previous year, a precedent was set when an expert from an NGO (in the field of citizenship education) was appointed as the chairperson of one of the teams.

NGOs try to influence the process of change through public consultations, organising meetings with ministries, looking for personal based relations with people appointed to teams preparing the curriculum, through teachers cooperating on GCE topics.

Due to the lack of a global education strategy, the Ministry of Education is not bound by any official agreements, indicators or interdepartmental arrangements to include GCE in the core curriculum.



2.6 Are there any current curriculum changes in train or planned? (especially those that will impact on GCE/DE/ESD teaching, learning and assessment)

In 2023, a significant political shift occurred with the rise of a new coalition (PO-PI2050-PSL-Nowa Lewica) to power in the Polish government. Among the most notable changes were a reduction in the national curriculum content, the banning of homework in primary schools and the introduction of health education and citizenship education as new subjects at upper secondary level. The last two changes — the introduction of two new subjects — only apply to secondary schools. A series of reforms had been planned for the next few years, including the development of an alumni profile, a change in the core curriculum (including the document format), and the introduction of two new subjects: citizenship education and health education.

The most relevant change from the GCE perspective is introducing citizenship education as a separate subject. This subject will replace “History and the Present”, which, under the previous government, was a symbol of the conservative, right-wing narrative of the world, as well as the one-sided interpretation of historical events for political purposes. The civic education programme is very progressive in its design and includes an entire module on global civic perspectives. It also assumes that students will carry out school projects and individual civic activities as essential elements of the learning process. While this report is being written, the citizenship education curriculum is still undergoing public consultations. The curriculum was consulted with a range of stakeholders, including schools, NGOs, academics, and other relevant groups. During consultation, it was already evident that certain elements of GCE are included, even though the term “GCE” itself does not explicitly appear. Some academics and Grupa Zagranica advocated for the inclusion of the term GCE in the curriculum. The subject of “citizenship education” will be introduced in schools starting from the 2025/2026 school year. In the beginning of March 2025, the final version of the citizenship education curriculum was officially announced. Supporting documents, like lesson plans but also supporting actions, like workshops for teachers on how to work within this new subject were still not published. As for now the NGO sector has already started supporting actions for teachers and the first announcements were made about workshops (including online activities) for teachers on how to work with students in lessons on the new subject.

Additionally, the Ministry of Climate and Environment is preparing a “Strategic Action Plan for Environmental and Climate Education”. The document will outline a framework for implementing activities in environmental education, including climate education, while incorporating the environmental, biodiversity and climate-related content from other governmental policies into core curriculum. The plan should be accepted after the consultation process in 2025.



From 2025, working groups will start the preparation process of new core curricula in cooperation with the Council for Monitoring the Implementation of the Education Reform. Experts were selected in an open competition. The entire process is coordinated by the Educational Research Institute on behalf of the Ministry of Education. This is likely to represent the most significant opportunity to integrate Global Citizenship Education (GCE) topics throughout the curriculum. However, at present, the timeline for this process remains uncertain, as do the details regarding the individuals or bodies responsible for developing the specific foundations, the structure of the consultation process, and other relevant aspects.

3. Curriculum: General section

As of the preparation of this report, work on the alumni profile for upper secondary school is currently underway. However, after public consultations, there is already an alumni profile for primary school, which in its age range also covers young people aged 11 to 14.

It is an important guideline document that will influence the shaping of the core curriculum of the upcoming reform, so even though it has not yet been formally adopted, it is worth referring to it here. However, it should be noted that it doesn't cover the entire age range indicated in the study.

As of February 2025, no general document on educational pathways has been adopted by regulation. Only subject-specific core curricula are in force, and the type of general document is defined by the preamble to the core curriculum, which will also be referred to in this section.

Alumni profile for preschool and primary school (including 11-14 year old students):

https://ibe.edu.pl/images/publikacje/Profil-Absolwenta/skrt%20profilu%20absolwenta%202.0_v.2.pdf [in Polish only]

3.1 Vision and purpose (aim and rationale or similar)

The aim of the primary level of education system in Poland stated in the document is expressed in the diagram, which is described as follows: *A graduate of a Polish school has the competence and agency which, together with knowledge of the world, allows him/her to fully develop his/her individual potential in personal, family, professional and civic life. They are human beings guided by values, caring for themselves and other people. They are able to build relationships and care for the common good, society and their homeland. They are ready for lifelong development.* (p. 6)



The core values are freedom, responsibility, community, respect, truth, goodness, beauty, justice and solidarity.

According to the document: *The alumni profile is a universal resource of complementary and interrelated components, in the development of which students should be supported during their education, from kindergarten through primary school to upper secondary school. The space for realising this defined educational policy goal should be both didactic activities conducted within the framework of individual areas of education, as well as educational and care activities of educational institutions.* (p. 5)

In the description of the values (justice and solidarity) there is reference to the climate crisis as an example where cooperation, sharing responsibilities and joint activities makes the change visible.

3.2 Key competencies/skills

The key competences are mathematic, linguistic, digital

Three main areas are: agency, learning areas, competencies (cognitive, social, personal)

- Are there any that link to GCE/DE/ESD?

There is no direct link to GCE. But on a level of transversal competencies: critical thinking, problem solving, creative thinking, cooperation and caring of others have been mentioned and described. The context is broader than national and is related with people and nature, so close to the definition of sustainable development.

What is interesting in the description of linguistic skills is that the context of an interdependent world appeared as a reason for learning foreign language (p. 15).

3.3 What is the core curriculum? (core = everyone studies it)

The graduate profile isn't related to the curriculum, so there are no exact points related.

To be more specific, the core curriculum is a description of all the knowledge a pupil is expected to acquire during lessons in a particular subject. And it is the basis for the development of the scope of the final examination (8th grade after primary school and the baccalaureate after secondary school). The graduate



profile is a description of the competences, learning areas and areas of proficiency of the student coming out of a particular stage of education.

What percentage of time is allocated to the core curriculum?

- What role do key competencies/skills have in core curriculum?

3.4 What does the non-core (optional) curriculum consist of?

The alumni profile isn't related to the curriculum, so there are no exact points related.

- What percentage of time is allocated to the non-core curriculum?
- What role do key competencies/skills have in the non-core curriculum?

3.5 Assessment

The alumni profile isn't related to the curriculum, so there are no exact points related.

- Formative & summative (classroom- or school-based)
- National testing (e.g. standardised tests or state examinations)

4. GCE/DE/ESD in the curriculum (11-16 years)

4.1 History of GCE/DE/ESD in the curriculum (timeline would be helpful)

- When was it first introduced? Why?
- What changes have been made and why?

As discussed in the previous section on GCE policies, there are no official documents on GCE or ESD in the Polish formal education system. The story of GCE in Poland starts in 2004 together with joining the European Union (EU). However, formal education is under Member States governance, the funding of GCE appeared and included an approach to the formal education sector. NGOs played a crucial role in Poland's education reform by advocating for GCE's inclusion in the new national curriculum introduced in 2009. As a result, GCE



became an integral part of subjects like civics, geography, biology, history, and entrepreneurship (Piszel et al., 2010). This was not the result of an official strategy or specific policies but rather the addition of GCE content to the national curriculum.

Despite positive developments for GCE, such as the government-endorsed Memorandum of Understanding (2011), the 2011 Development Cooperation Act assigning GCE leadership to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the formal recognition of key actors and activities, its impact in formal education was short-lived. Thanks to assigned funding the Centre of Education Development, national centre of teacher training and professional development established a national network of 16 leaders of GCE in Poland together with teachers locally supported GCE. Both leaders and teachers have been trained in GCE, ESD and didactic methods. This network integrated a group of teachers, but it also showed others that if teachers are trained in an innovative way at the national level with money from the national budget, with the consent of the Ministry of Education, it is worth taking part. Global Education Week, but also student projects or classes conducted as pedagogical innovations were quite popular, which contributed to the promotion of GCE content. It is worth noting that all these activities were more about a positive interpretation of the core curriculum, rather than the actual inclusion of GCE in the documents.

Following the 2015 political shift and the 2017/2018 education reform, support for GCE declined, and its presence in curricula diminished. According to research by M. Kuleta-Hulboj for Grupa Zagranica, global education was considered controversial and political during this period of education (Kuleta-Hulboj M., Polish Development Cooperation Report 2022).

Since 2023, after a political shift, curriculum changes have been minimal, primarily reducing subject content. However, the introduction of citizenship education offers some hope for GCE integration, with NGOs and other stakeholders advocating for stronger GCE and ESD inclusion.

4.2 Is GCE/DE/ESD currently core or non-core?

Both GCE and ESD are non-core at any of the educational levels.

4.3 Is GCE/DE/ESD currently a discrete timetabled subject, part of another subject(s) or curriculum area(s)?

Some GCE/DE/ESD content is integrated into subject curricula regarding specific topics or skills. Geography, particularly its extended level (upper secondary), is considered the most likely to include these topics.



Elements of GCE/DE/ESD can also be found in language subjects and civics, with the extended version being more likely to include GCE/DE/ESD content.

As citizenship education as a subject is under consultation process, more likely it will be the most relevant subject with one of its parts connected with a global perspective on citizenship.

4.4 How many hours is GCE/DE/ESD currently allocated per programme/subject/curriculum area/year?

None

4.5 What recommendations are there (if any) from the government about the teaching, learning and assessment of GCE/DE/ESD?

None

4.6 Who teaches GCE/DE/ESD? What are their qualifications? What other subjects do they usually teach?

There are no officially designated teachers for GCE/DE/ESD. Those who teach these topics are engaged, driven by their individual interest and decision and come from various disciplines. Their involvement is driven by a bottom-up approach, often beginning after participating in NGO-led projects, training and courses. No specific qualifications are required or verified.

4.7 How is GCE/DE/ESD assessed?

It is not officially implemented in any way. Some NGOs evaluate teachers' activities if they participate in annual programs and projects, but no assessments are conducted by formal educational institutions.

4.8 What supports are in place to assist with implementation of GCE/DE/ESD in schools?

In GCE, support is provided mainly by non-governmental organisations through projects aimed at formal education, mainly through cooperation with teachers (workshops, educational programmes) and the preparation of educational materials (lesson plans, courses). Both the training and the materials are free of charge for teachers and licensed under Open Access.

NGOs also advocate for GCE with institutions and ministries, and in the last decade they have also been active through Grupa Zagranica towards textbook publishers and experts. In 2014 and 2016 Grupa Zagranica



conducted two analyses of history, geography and civics textbooks (for the no longer existing educational phase - gymnasium, students of 13 - 16 years) for the presence of global education content. The results of both studies were used for advocacy work with textbook publishers (finally, cooperation was established with one of the main textbook publishers in Poland). In addition, between 2020 and 2022, Grupa Zagranica analysed and commented on all lessons on topics related to colonialism included in the e-book platform run by the Centre for the Development of Education.

4.9 Are there any government/public entity policy documents that are supported by GCE/DE/ESD teaching, learning and assessment for 11-16-year-olds? Please explain.

There are no direct strategic documents in this area.

4.10 What is the status of GCE/DE/ESD? That is, how is it regarded by stakeholders in schools and the wider education system? How can any status related challenges be addressed by the GET project and/or by other actors?

The status of GCE is marginal, but at the same time it is one out of the educational perspectives that has its own financial framework on national level and is included in the Development Cooperation Act adopted by the Polish Parliament in 2011. The financial framework for global education is based on the above-mentioned Act, of which global education is a part. The Act requires the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (responsible for implementing the Act) to prepare annual plans of action in the field of development cooperation. These plans also include a financial plan. Global education has its place in the annual plans.

At the operational level, global education has its own multistakeholder process, where designated persons from ministries, educational institutions and non-governmental organisations meet at least twice a year to exchange information about GCE. Poland takes part in GENE meetings, and at the Ministry of Education, it is included in one official's portfolio together with climate education.

An opportunity for GCE is the prospect of preparing a strategy that is part of the current Multi-Annual Programme for Development Cooperation. As a result of advocacy activities, the proposal for a strategic process has been delegated to NGOs, as ministry officials are reluctant to do so and argue that the limited possibilities are the reason for the lack of action in this area. In 2025, it should be possible to check the extent to which action in this area is possible. We hope that the results of the GET project study will help support advocacy efforts on this issue at the national level.



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Curriculum case studies

Civic Education :

A new subject at upper secondary level, which was introduced in the 2025/2026 school year. The main aim is to understand the most important social and political phenomena and processes, respect the values and principles of democracy and engage students in selected areas of socio-political reality. Designed as a practical subject encouraging civic engagement at the individual level and within student projects. One of the seven modules is the global dimension of citizenship. Civic education in general and technical upper secondary schools (age of students from 14 to 20) is taught 1-2 hours a week during second and third class (according to the type of school and the level of education).

Geography:

The main objective of geography as a subject in both types of secondary schools is to learn about the world in its entirety and complex structure, taking into account the interconnections between nature, society and human activity. The subject refers to selected global challenges, the idea of sustainable development, and issues related to ecology. Geography in general and technical upper secondary schools (age of students from 14 to 20) is taught at basic and advanced levels, with the number of hours from 2 to 4 (according to the type of school and the level of education).

History:

The aim of history education is to get to the truth about the past of Poland and the world. The school should ensure that students, without getting lost in details, learn about the most important events and processes, and on this basis try to explain the political, social, economic and cultural connections between them. This approach to the history lesson is intended to help students understand the present day. History in general and technical upper secondary schools (age of students from 14 to 20) is taught at basic and advanced levels, with the number of hours from 2 to 4 (according to the type of school and the level of education).

Main findings Climate Change

- **Civic education:** Climate change as global challenge is the only topic explicitly included in the compulsory part of the curriculum.
- **Geography:** Curriculum highlights anthropogenic roots and causes of climate change and names it as conflict between human and nature. The topic is described in a complex way.
- **History:** Absent in the core curriculum. The historical context of the climate crisis is not considered at all. There are thematic topics, such as the industrial revolution, which can be discussed from a climate perspective.

Main findings Gender inequality

- **Gender equality (GE)** in general is perceived as a controversial issue in Poland. The curriculum seems to be gender blind for both **civic education** and **geography**.
- **Civic education:** In section 7th devoted to global perspective there is no discussion in relation to gender issues, but there is a little hope, if the teachers or textbooks authors select gender equality as one of the global challenges.
- **History:** The only window of opportunity to address GE is a historical reference to the women's emancipation movements of the early 20th century and the development of popular culture.

Main findings International inequality

- **Civic education:** The core curriculum does not explicitly address the issue of global socio-economic inequalities. The topic may only appear in an open catalogue of global challenges or in the context of international trade.
- **Geography:** Although the term 'socio-economic inequalities' does not appear in the core curriculum for geography, the subject is mentioned in documents in a broader context, mostly connected with the dominant neoliberal and Eurocentric perspective on the division of the world, inequality and development understood primarily in economic terms, which only to a limited extent incorporates a critical approach to the process of globalisation.
- **History:** Topics connected to international inequalities are included in the core curriculum which makes it possible to address some of these issues, but mostly those concerning the historical situation of Poland, as the core curriculum for history focuses on the history of Poland.

Main findings Migration

- **Migration** in general is perceived as a controversial issue in Poland. The curriculum seems to avoid this topic for both civic education and geography.
- **Civic education:** Migration appears in the core curriculum as optional and can easily be dropped. On the other hand, it is one of the few topics that is explicitly mentioned rather than presented as an option in the section on the global perspective of citizenship.
- **Geography:** Even if including the migration theme, none of the points refer to values or attitudes such as social diversity, openness to difference or respect.
- **History:** The topic of migration is essentially absent from the history curriculum. What appears in the core curriculum on this subject is primarily Polish emigration to other countries in various historical periods.



Conclusion and recommendations for education stakeholders

1. The Polish core curriculum does not include a direct reference to the concept of Global Citizenship Education (GCE), which would enhance the chances of engaging teachers with the GET project materials. As a result, there is also no catalogue of global challenges—such as the four Big Ideas from the GET project—nor standards like a Code of Conduct on images and messages on the Global South.
2. With the exception of the civic education curriculum, content related to the global perspective remains fragmented and unsynchronised across different subjects. Consequently, the holistic learning outcomes described in the GET project's educational materials are not aligned with the objectives and content of the Polish core curriculum.
3. A key aspect of the Polish education system is the need to align the content and learning outcomes of the GET project not only with the core curriculum, but also with the content of the most widely used textbooks by subject teachers.
4. Since the Polish education system is once again undergoing a major curriculum reform, we propose that the education authorities treat these changes holistically, as a whole, rather than working on separate subjects, where too little attention is paid to synchronising topics between subjects, too little attention is paid to the currently important topic of global challenges, and too little use is made of the enormous resources of the non-governmental sector, which, as part of European projects, including the GET project, is building its expertise and creating resources that the formal education system could freely use.

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