



Industrial relations and social dialogue
**Poland: Developments in
working life 2023**

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Introduction

In 2023, the parliamentary elections, the energy crisis and high inflation were the main topics of public discussion. The National Recovery and Resilience Plan (NRP), which was the subject of a political dispute between the Polish government and the European Commission, was also an important topic. In 2023, the government continued to implement measures and regulations to mitigate the rise in food and energy prices, introduced a further increase in the minimum wage (1 January 2023: PLN 3,490 (approx. EUR 811) and 1 July 2023: PLN 3,600 (approx. EUR 837)) and, for the first time since 2016, introduced a 60% increase in child benefit. It is worth noting that, despite the difficult situation in the economy and rising prices and company margins, the registered unemployment rate in Poland remained relatively low (in December 2023, it reached 5.1%). It is worth noting, however, that the country did not develop evenly in this respect - the lowest unemployment was in the Wielkopolskie Voivodeship (2.9%) and the highest (8.4%) in the Podkarpackie Voivodeship. In 2023, a record number of job advertisements were published - over 844,000, an increase of around 130% compared to 2022 (360,000).

High inflation, although gradually decreasing from February 2023, translated into increasing wage pressure, while, many businesses experienced problems related not only to rising prices, but also to difficult access to funds for investments or also difficulties in recruiting employees. An increase in remuneration to catch up with the dynamically rising prices was one of the most important challenges for entrepreneurs, as illustrated by the increase in average remuneration in the national economy by more than 12% compared to 2022, and which amounted at PLN 7155.48 (EUR 1664.1) in 2023.

Difficulties in recruiting employees is a persistent challenge on the Polish labour market and there is an observed trend of increased recruitment of foreigners. The Social Insurance Institution (PL: Zakład Ubezpieczeń Społecznych (ZUS)) reported that the number of foreigners registered in Poland at the end of 2023 was 1,127,744 (an increase of more than 6% compared to 2022).

In addition, there were significant policy changes due 2023 due to amendments to the Labour Code. These changes include the extension of parental leave, the introduction of carer's leave, the protection of employment rights for parents and the promotion of flexible working arrangements in line with EU directives on work-life balance. In addition, the amended Labour Code includes remote work, which can be carried out fully or partially at a location designated by the employee and agreed with the employer in each case.

However, the most important event in 2023 was the change of government and ruling parties as a result of the parliamentary elections held on 15 October. Although the political party in power at the time of the election, Law and Justice, won the election, it lost power and the government was formed by the existing opposition parties.

Political context

The problems of 2022 continued to be topical in 2023. 2023 was still characterised by a shaky economy, the war in Ukraine, high prices, problems with energy and money from the National Recovery Plan. As well as skyrocketing housing rental prices as a result of the influx of over 1 million Ukrainians caused by the humanitarian crisis. In addition to the impact on people's income, rapidly rising rents also drove up the inflation rate, although on an economy-wide basis, this was not clearly felt (Tygodnik Powszechny). Inflation peaked in February 2023 (18.4% y/y), and this was the highest level since December 1996. In the following months, inflation started to fall gradually, and with falling inflation, the Narodowy Bank Polski (Polish National Bank) decided to start a cycle of interest rate cuts (TVN24.pl b). In addition, as measures to curb the perception of price increases, the government maintained the provisions of the anti-inflation shield in 2023, which reduced VAT on energy and food

However, from the point of view of social, economic, and political life, the key event of 2023 was the October parliamentary elections. Another important event of 2023 was a protest against "high prices, thievery and lies" and support "for free elections and a democratic, European Poland" organised by the opposition party Platformy Obywatelskiej in June 2023. The protest took place in Warsaw and other major cities in Poland, and around the world where Polish communities exist: Berlin, Brussels, Chicago, Frankfurt am Main, Geneva, London, New York, Paris, Rome, Toronto (Forsal.pl). The date of the March was not coincidental, 4 June being the 34th anniversary of the first partially free parliamentary elections in Poland after the fall of communism. The event gathered, according to various estimates, between 300,000 and 500,000 people, with an estimated reach of around 300 million on Polish social media (Wirtualne Media).

The elections held on 15 October 2023 resulted in a change of power in Poland. Although the Law and Justice party, which was then in power for a second term, won the elections by winning 35.38% of the vote, the then Prime Minister from the Law and Justice party, Mateusz Morawiecki, failed to win a vote of confidence on 11 December 2023 and the Law and Justice party lost power (www.infor.pl). On the same day, the Sejm (Parliament) elected Donald Tusk as Prime Minister of the Republic of Poland, and his government consisted of four political formations: Civic Coalition, Polish People's Party, Poland 2050 and the Left (www.infor.pl).

A record percentage of eligible voters in Poland took part in the parliamentary elections. Voter turnout was 74.38%, which was a surprise (www.tvn24.pl). Post-election polls show that interest in going to the polls increased the most among young people aged 18 to 29. In this group the turnout increased from less than 50% in the previous election, to almost 70%, a record result for this age group (radioolsztyn.pl).

The change of power in parliament and government brought hope of absorbing all the funds under the National Reconstruction Plan. Under the Law and Justice government, it was difficult to obtain a consensus on the line between Poland and the European Commission, as, in the opinion of the EC, Poland did not meet several conditions, including the horizontal one concerning the independence of the judiciary (Forsal.pl).

The year 2023 has exacerbated the problems related to Ukrainian grain, as the European Union has temporarily liberalised trade with Ukraine (podatki.gov.pl). The surge in grain inflows from Ukraine

and the increase in its stocks, for which Poland was intended only as a transit country, caused problems for Polish agricultural producers and others to sell grain. Farmers pointed that they had no chance of competing on price with Ukrainian production on a fully free market basis, not least because of the much lower labour costs in Ukraine (Wiadomości Rolnicze Polska). There have been a number of protests in Poland, including weeks of blockades of border crossings on the Polish-Ukrainian border. Protesting farmers in Poland oppose the Green Deal guidelines and the opening of Poland's borders to agri-food products from Ukraine (money.pl). The protests are continuing in 2024.

Actors and institutions

Social partners

The Act of 24 July 2015 on Social Dialogue establishes the rules for social dialogue in Poland. In 2023 the list of representative social partner organisations remained unchanged. As of 2023, there are 9 representative social partners: 3 trade unions, including the Independent Self-Governing Trade Union "Solidarity" (NSZZ "Solidarity"), All-Poland Alliance of Trade Unions (OPZZ) and Trade Unions Forum (FZZ) and 6 employers organisations, including Employers of Poland, Confederation Lewiatan, Business Centre Club, Polish Craft Association, Union of Entrepreneurs and Employers (Rada Dialogu Społecznego).

This legislative institution of the Social Dialogue Council was created in 2015 in an atmosphere of consensus among all political and social forces. However, during the eight years of the Law and Justice government, its decision-making capacity, as perceived by the public media and experts, was reduced to zero. Law and Justice party cooperated with one of the unions, NSZZ Solidarnosc. However, the remaining social partners were treated marginally (Puls biznesu;2023). Awareness of what social dialogue is remains an area with considerable room for enhancement. In 2022, on behalf of the Lewiatan Confederation, CBM Indicator researched social dialogue in Poland on a representative sample of entrepreneurs, i.e. a group directly affected by social dialogue. One in three respondents (33%) understands the concept of social dialogue as the exchange of information in society, and one in six (17%) defines it as informative activities of the administration towards citizens. Most, 46%, of surveyed entrepreneurs associate social dialogue primarily with cooperation between employers, trade unions and administration" (prawo.pl;2023a). The research's conclusion is quite bitter, as only half of the respondents know what social dialogue is. This indirectly shows that the functioning of social dialogue in Poland still requires work in terms of raising knowledge and awareness. Unfortunately, the citizens themselves do not seem to be particularly concerned about it. There are many reasons for this state of affairs - weakness of social partners, an instrumental attitude of the state to dialogue or low level of civic activity of Poles (Instytut Spraw Obywatelskich). Given the change of government and the stepping down from power of Law and Justice, a revival of active social dialogue is observed in the public space. There is an intense public debate on the role of the Social Dialogue Council in Poland. It is postulated that it should be restored to its proper rank as an active and efficient body, as an active guarantor of the institution of social dialogue and collective bargaining, which would give an accurate opinion on all draft laws, i.e. also parliamentary, presidential and civic bills (Instytut Spraw Obywatelskich;2023).

Social dialogue bodies or frameworks

The Social Dialogue Council met five times in 2023. The meetings dealt with issues such as the preparedness of Polish economy for ESG reporting; debates on the state of the Polish economy, and the Multiannual Financial Plan of the State, discussions on the labour market in Poland, and working on a common position of the social partners on the implementation of information and promotion activities in the non-competitive formula from the Technical Assistance Programme for the European Funds 2021-2027 (Rada Dialogu Społecznego;2023).

An important debate and consultation on a draft law on collective bargaining took place in 2023. The legislative work that has started is a result of the EU directive on adequate minimum wages in EU

countries, which has to be implemented by 15 November 2024. Changes have to be introduced in countries where at least 80% of employees are not covered by such bargaining. Poland does not meet the required indicator, which is why the Ministry of Family and Social Policy has prepared a draft law on collective bargaining (Business Insider; 2023b). Once the changes to the Law come into force, collective agreements are to be signed for a maximum of five years. Currently, they are often concluded indefinitely in Poland. The change in legislation is expected to give an impetus to a more widespread conclusion of agreements. (pulshr.pl;2023). The proposed changes in the Law require clarification, as it is not entirely clear from the draft law's provision whether the new regulations will facilitate the loosening of the rigid provisions of the Labour Code, i.e. whether the agreement will be able to regulate employment rules differently from the statutory provisions (Business Insider; 2023b).

The changes to the Law have been subject to public consultation, and both sides representing businesses and trade unions were involved. The consultation process was carried out and, in principle, business and unions' representatives were satisfied with some of the provisions of the Act. On the other hand, they proposed amendments and verification of the provisions. The Law has not yet been adopted. Another draft law on collective bargaining and collective agreements has been published, and planned date for adoption of the draft by the Council of Ministers is the third quarter of 2024. In April 2021, the representative social partners issued a joint statement on democratising the National Recovery and Resilience Plan implementation, calling for establishing a National Recovery and Resilience Plan Monitoring Committee. The Monitoring Committee for the National Recovery Plan was established by Order of the Minister of Funds and Regional Policy dated 4 August 2022 (Portal Funduszy Europejskich 2024). The Ministry of Funding and Regional Policy announced that a National Reconstruction and Resilience Enhancement Plan Committee would be established to review the implementation of the Plan, with a total of 60 members, as proposed. Establishing the Monitoring Committee in 2022 is one of the so-called milestones on which the disbursement of National Recovery Plan funds depends. On 17 May 2023, the first meeting of the Monitoring Committee of the National Recovery Plan (NRP) took place (serwis Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej 2024). The main topics are the Committee's Rules of Procedure, the review of the implementation of the National Recovery Plan and individual reforms and investments from the point of view of progress towards indicators and milestones, and the Revision of the NRP - conclusions of the public consultation.

Developments in collective bargaining

Changes to the collective bargaining structures and frameworks

In 2023, there was a vivid debate on a new draft act on collective bargaining. The new draft, developed to better regulate collective bargaining issues in line with the Predictable Pay Directive, provided several ideas to reinvigorate collective bargaining, which has decreased for years. The draft aims to facilitate initiating and conducting collective bargaining processes. However, it received mixed opinions from social partners and experts. For example, the new draft anticipated expanding the scope of collective agreements. Currently, it is limited to issues related to: "working conditions, wages or social benefits, and trade union rights and freedoms of workers or other groups with the right to organise in trade unions". The new draft removes these limitations, allowing the start of collective bargaining on any working life issue- this solution was welcomed by trade unions but contested by employers' organisations which claim that it will enable the overuse of the collective bargaining procedure (Ministry of Family and Policy; 2023). The drafted has not been adopted at the time of publication of this report. The adoption is scheduled for second half of 2024.

One debated issue of the draft is introducing a new category of negotiating party eligible for collective bargaining on the employer side, the so-called 'dominant employer'. The law allows employers to name representatives for collective bargaining, regardless of whether they have the mandate to implement the negotiated changes or not. The trade unions and workers' side referred to cases where the actual entity with the power to make binding decisions was not the actual employer but a superior entity. This amendment intends to make it possible to conduct collective bargaining and dispute with an entity that has the power to make decisions regarding employees' rights and interests, shape the terms and conditions of employment, or decide on the funds for salaries of employed persons. Introducing a definition of a dominant employer is intended to allow the various stages of collective bargaining to be conducted with an entity that has the power to decide on the consideration of the demands made (prawo.pl). Thus, introducing a new "dominant employer" category shall facilitate negotiations for trade unions, obliging employers to name representation eligible to implement collective agreement provisions. While the idea was praised as a pro-trade union solution, it was also criticised as difficult to apply by trade unions. (Prawo.pl; 2023b). One of the challenges is the matter of the definition, as the definition of the term dominant employer is too general and, in many cases, does not give a clear answer as to which entity is the dominant employer. This will be decided by the trade union, which may not necessarily have actual knowledge of the matter. Secondly, it follows from the definition that the notion of employer also includes the notion of dominant employer, it is to be presumed that it will be the trade union that will have the right to decide against which employer it will direct its claims. By stipulating in the definition that the employer is also the dominant employer, the legislator implies that the addressees of the collective bargaining claims are both entities, which, however, are formally independent of each other (www.prawo.pl).

The draft is still being debated in early 2024, and given the vivid debate, it will likely be further changed. One of the criticisms to the draft pointed out that while collective bargaining and collective agreements are decreasing, other types of agreements (i.e. bilateral agreements) are more prevalent in labour relations. Therefore, some employers' representatives claim that these forms shall be developed instead of collective agreements. Indeed, Article 9 of the Labour Code allows the

formation of bilateral agreements between employers and employee representatives, which are kept and valid only at company level, not registered and not disclosed to any third parties. These differ from company-level collective bargaining since they do not have significant legal requirements. In the case of a company-level collective agreement, appropriate employee representation is provided by registered trade unions. The scope of the company-level collective agreement must be more favourable for employees than the already existing legal provision and the agreement needs to be verified and registered at the relevant Regional Labour Inspectorate. On the contrary, bilateral agreements can involve any employee representation (employee representative, employee councils), their scope is not restricted, and they do not need to be registered (Ministry of Family and Social Policy; 2023). Since these agreements are, it is unclear how often they are used and what is their scope. Further, aiming to incentivise company-level dialogue, it should be considered if "regular" agreements, not providing any labour protection provisions (such as dialogue-related lay-off), is the form providing sufficient power balance.

Data on collective bargaining

Data, access and information on collective bargaining are limited and mainly available to the parties directly involved or via press releases to the extent the involved parties are willing to share. Company-level CAs must be registered in the relevant Regional Labour Inspectorate, and multi-company CAs must be registered with the Ministry of Family and Social Policy. Registered CAs may be available to external parties during an in-person visit to the relevant institutions.

As indicated in a 2021 study analysing the company-level agreements from the 90s (where possible) until 2019, in general, collective bargaining is gradually deteriorating in Poland (Pisarczyk, & Wieczorek, 2021). Based on estimations for 2019, only about 12.5% of employees were covered (this does not include people in other employment relationships). Further, strong regional variations are visible, with the dominance of collective agreements in Mazowieckie and Śląskie provinces and other regions with minimal collective bargaining agreement activity. The structure of the employers covered by active agreements in force is specific. They dominate in the public sector, whilst within the private economy, they appear only in certain sectors, not covering important sectors of the economy, such as commerce, catering and the hotel industry, or catering and the hotel industry or culture, leisure and sport in the broadest sense culture, leisure and sport. Collective agreements usually cover relatively large entities, rarely covering medium and small enterprises. The author of the above-mentioned study summarised the state-of-play of the CB and CA in Poland in an interview for the press: **“There is a total collapse of collective bargaining.** Multi-company agreements are practically non-existent, and company agreements are few and far between, and their number is steadily declining. They currently cover around 1.6 million workers. This trend has continued since 1995, when the current collective bargaining legislation was enacted. As can be seen, they are not conducive to their development.” (Gazeta Prawna, 2022a)

Further, reports from the Activity of State Labour Inspection (Państwowa Inspekcja Pracy- PIP) provide some statistical insight into collective bargaining; the latest version covers [2022](#). In 2022, 528 collective bargaining procedures were initiated (compared with 712 in 2021 and 384 in 2020). In 2022, most collective bargaining procedures were initiated in the industrial processing sector - 100 collective bargaining procedures and the generation and supply of electricity, gas, steam, hot water and air conditioning systems with 92 CBs. In 2019, most collective bargaining procedures were initiated in health and social care - 192 collective bargaining procedures. The thematic scope of the

most prevalent areas along the years of the collective bargaining procedures initiated are working conditions (in 2020- 268, in 2021- 545, and 2022- 146) and paying conditions (in 2020-537, in 2021- 1129 and 2022- 870). Overall, the number of collective bargaining procedures ending in creating a new collective agreement is quite low- in 2022, there were 50 new collective agreements submitted. The number of renewals of collective agreements/ changing the scope is significantly higher, and in 2022, it accounted for 1,020. This may suggest that trade unions already covered within the collective agreements are more active in the collective bargaining procedures and that these unions that are not covered by existing collective agreements. (PIP; 2023)

Collectively agreed pay outcomes and wage-setting mechanism

No information aside from the one reported above.

Collective bargaining and inflation

No information aside from the one reported above.

Developments in governmental responses to inflation

In 2023, the government continued the initiatives introduced in 2021 to respond to the increasing inflation. These initiatives were related to food and energy prices.

The main instrument of the 2022 Anti-inflation Shield was the 0% VAT on essential food products such as meat, fish, dairy, bread, fruit, and vegetables (Serwis Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej, 2023a). This was prolonged by the Government Regulation from 9 December 2023 until the end of the first quarter of 2024 (Dziennik Ustaw Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej, 2023a). This action is forecasted to reduce the public budget revenues by PLN 2.7 billion.

Another initiative was an Energy Shield aimed at mitigating the high prices of energy sources, introduced as of 1 January 2023 (Serwis Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej, 2023b). Under this instrument, the maximum allowed increase in heating prices was 40% compared to prices as of 30 September 2022. This limitation covered both individual and institutional customers and was valid until the end of 2023. This instrument also included the maximum heating price the enterprises can ask the customers. Energy producers in return, were allowed to apply for compensation for lost revenues.

The next instrument was the natural gas price freeze. As of 1 January 2023, the maximum retail price of natural gas was PLN 200(46.50 EUR) net / 1 MWh for households and key institutional customers (Serwis Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej, 2023b). Additionally, low-income households can get VAT refunds for natural gas prices. The households using electric energy for heating could apply for an electricity allowance up to PLN 1,500 (349,00 EUR) - currently valid until the end of September 2024..

The next instrument was Solidarity Shield, which aimed to freeze electricity prices (Serwis Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej, 2023c). Depending on the annual consumption of the energy and household type, electricity price was maintained at the level as of September 2022, and in case the consumption exceeds the threshold, there was a maximum price of PLN 693(161,00 EUR) / MWh. This instrument targeted households, public utility entities, and micro and small enterprises and is valid until the end of June of 2024.

On the contrary to activities related to energy prices, the government reinstated previous VAT rates on fuel - 23% as of January 2023 versus 8% in December 2022. Additionally, the 13% increase in fuel surcharge was introduced at the beginning of 2023 (Gazeta Prawna, 2022b).

Besides the initiatives mitigating food and energy price increases, the government continued the minimum wage increase and introduced legislation to increase some social benefits.

As of 1 January 2023, the minimum wage increased to PLN 3,490 (EUR 811.60), which means PLN 480 (EUR 111.60), and 16% more compared to December 2022). The next increase (3%) was introduced on 1 July 2023. The government also confirmed a further increase from 1 January 2024 to PLN 4,242 (EUR 986.50), an 18% increase compared to December 2023 (Ministerstwo Rodziny, Pracy i Polityki Społecznej, 2023).

On 7 July 2023, the Law on the State Support in Children Care was amended to increase the child benefit from PLN 500 to PLN 800, (EUR 186.00) starting from 1 January 2024. The change did not require any actions from beneficiaries and is to be implemented automatically (Dziennik Ustaw Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej, 2023b).

Labour disputes and industrial action

Changes to the right to strike

During the discussion on the draft Collective Agreement Act, several changes to the practical side of exercising the right to strike were proposed. One of the changes would require several trade unions interested in collective bargaining within a single employer to select a single joint employee representation. This could be problematic as it is restricting the number of trade unions that represent different groups of employees, with different interests within one company. Currently, several trade unions can collectively bargain with one single employer. Further, to decide on the representation of trade unions, the employees shall organise a strike referendum, which would require a turnout of a minimum of 50% of their members. Trade union representatives pointed to the proposal and the need of court verification of strike legality as potential bottlenecks for collective bargaining functioning. Further, a proposed institution for mediating also raised concerns, especially from the employee representatives, as it is unclear what would be its scope since proper assurance for mediator impartiality is lacking (OKOpress; 2022, Gazeta Prawna: 2023)

Data on industrial action

No data available in Poland.

Collective labour disputes in 2023

In 2023, several vocal industrial actions, labour disputes and protests occurred. One of the most prominent was a country-wide protest of the public services staff, opposing stagnant and frozen pay and not keeping up with the increasing living costs further deepened by the inflation crisis. The main protest message, "Without us, there is no state", underlined the crucial role of public services staff and called upon a 30% pay increase.

Further, there were several company-level labour disputes:

- Started In 2022, a strike in Pyszne.pl, an internet platform for ordering food from different restaurants, continued; in February 2023, couriers protested in several cities, demanding additional pay for challenging weather conditions, a pay increase for weekends and public holidays, pay increase for experienced couriers and more training (Business Insider; 2023)
- PKP CARGO (one of the public railway carriers) protested in November after employers abandoned the collective bargaining process; employees demanded a pay increase (RynekKolejowy.pl; 2023);
- Trade Unions of Poczta Polska (national mail) also protested for pay increase; the company is currently in deficit and claims to be unable to finance the increase in pay; the Office of Electronic Communication should provide financing for the increase, however, they are withholding the pay claiming not sufficient legal basis for the payment (Rp.pl; 2023)
- After negotiations with the employer organisation, employees of PGE (public energy company) protested and demanded a pay increase rather than one-time bonuses, as suggested by the employer.

Developments in working time

Changes to legislation

In April 2023, the changes reported in last year's national report, entered into force:

- 1) Introduction of additional paid break: employees working more than nine hours will be entitled to an extra paid break of at least 15 minutes, and employees working more than 16 hours are entitled to another 15 minutes of paid break.
- 2) Introduction and amendments to different working systems: remote work, flexible working time schedules (flexitime, individual working schedule, weekend working time system, shortened working week system and intermittent working time), and part-time work.

No other changes to working time in 2023 were identified.

Bargaining outcomes

No information aside from the one reported above.

Debates on duration and organisation

During the electoral campaign in the autumn of 2023, the shortening of working hours was debated. Some ideas included introducing a 35-hour working week (without reduced pay) or a 4-day working week. While several voices have been in the debate, it is unclear what the new government's plan is. Most significantly, employee representatives favoured shortening working time but minding the need to keep wages at the same level. On the other hand, employer representatives were more sceptical, focusing on possible economic consequences of shortening worktime. Amid the formation of the new government, no action related to the shortening of working time has been submitted yet (Business Insider: 2023c).

Other important policy developments

Regulations on employment status and contracts

New regulations came into force, introducing remote work permanently into the Labour Code on 7 April 2023. The amendment introduced a definition of remote work, covering both full and hybrid remote work scenarios. It also includes the implementation rules. According to the new regulation:

- Employers can assign remote work in cases of emergency or when the workplace cannot provide safe conditions due to force majeure events;
- Rules for remote work must be established in agreement with company-level trade unions or employer regulations, with consultation with employee representatives if necessary;
- Employer obligations for remote work include providing materials and tools, covering related costs, offering training and support, and allowing on-site presence when needed.

Other changes to employment regulations in the amended Labour Code came into effect on 26 April 2023:

- Employers can't restrict employees from working elsewhere, except for specific cases;
- Employees with 6 months of employment seniority can request annual employment condition changes;
- New probationary employment rules: 1-3 months based on contract length;
- Fixed-term contract terminations require specifying reasons and notifying the union;
- Contracts must include the employer's office address and fixed-term contract duration. (Biznes.gov.pl;2023)

Policies to reduce the gender pay-gap

No significant developments addressing the gender pay gap were recorded in 2023. On 11 May, the Speaker of Sejm (Parliament) released a consolidated text of the Act on the implementation of specific provisions of the European Union on equal treatment (act in force since 2010). Still, it didn't address the gender pay gap in particular, providing more general gender equality stipulations.

Health and safety regulations and policies

Two regulations were introduced in 2023 to improve the accessibility and quality of public healthcare services.

Act on quality in health care and patient safety of 16 June 2023 focuses on healthcare quality, authorisation, and accreditation. Indicators define quality, while authorisation involves internal hospital system reviews overseen by the National Health Fund President. Accreditation is tied to specific agreements with the National Health Fund for particular services, as the Law outlines.

From 1 November 2023, primary healthcare changes include enhanced coordinated care for prediabetic and hyperthyroidism patients, expanded chronic kidney disease services, and increased allergy diagnostic tests. (Gov.pl;2023)

Work-life balance related policies

Polish Parliament adopted an amendment to the Labour Code on 8 February 2023. The amendment includes provisions for extended parental leave and introduces new caregiver leave. The amendment aims to implement two EU directives: Directive (EU) 2019/1158 and Directive (EU) 2019/1152. According to the amendment:

- Employees can take up to 5 days of unpaid leave per year for significant medical needs of a family or household member;
- Up to 2 days of unpaid leave are available for urgent family matters caused by illness or accidents;
- Parents with children under eight years old can request flexible work arrangements (reduced hours, remote work, weekend shifts);
- Employers cannot terminate or prepare to terminate an employee's contract during pregnancy, maternity leave, or related leaves;
- Parents have the option of taking up to 41 weeks (43 for multiple births) of parental leave, or up to 65 weeks (67 for multiple births) for children in need of special care. Each parent has exclusive right to 9 weeks of parental leave. Previously, employees could defer up to 16 weeks of parental leave. Following the amendment, this leave can be taken at once or in up to 5 parts but must be used by the child's 6th birthday;
- Parents can extend parental leave while working, up to 82 weeks for single-child births and 86 weeks for multiples. For children with severe disabilities or life-threatening conditions from pregnancy or birth, it can extend to 130 weeks for singles and 134 weeks for multiples.
- The timeframe to use paternity leave is reduced to 12 months from 24 months, with 2 weeks of leave upon the child's birth;
- Adopting parents can take parental leave for 41 to 43 weeks, which can be extended in cases of children with disabilities, older children or multiple adoptions;
- Returning employees from parental leave have the right to their previous or equivalent positions, including any improvements in working conditions they would have received;
- The rule prohibiting employment without consent during overtime, night shifts, split-shift systems, or work outside the regular workplace now applies to employees caring for children up to 8 years old. (Biznes.gov.pl;2023)

Additionally, with the inclusion of remote work in the Labour Code, certain groups, such as pregnant employees and those caring for family members with disabilities, have the right to request remote work, and employers must consider these requests.

Life-long learning and skills development

Minister of Education and Science announced a regulation on lifelong learning in non-formal educational institutions forms of 10 October 2023. The regulation defines types of public institutions for lifelong learning and their responsibilities, vocational training centres, and industry skill centres, conditions, organisation, and procedures for conducting lifelong learning in various non-school forms, including the requirements for curriculum, methods of confirming the outcomes of learning obtained through completing lifelong learning in specific non-school forms, document templates, multi-profession training, and fee exemptions and refunds for education in non-school forms.

Commentary and outlook

In 2023, legal provisions on remote working and the rights of parents and carers came into force by means of a Labour Code amendment in April, which implements two EU directives: Directive (EU) 2019/1158 on work–life balance for parents and carers and Directive (EU) 2019/1152 on transparent and predictable working conditions. The amendments increase leave days for carers and introduce new regulations on remote work and were implemented following consultations with the social partners. 2024 will clarify how these solutions function in practice.

The government extended existing anti-inflation measures, such as the Anti-inflation Shield and Energy Shield, to mitigate the increasing prices of energy and basic goods.

Working life will be affected by new government policies, especially related to unlocking the funds for the implementation of the national recovery and resilience plan (NRRP). The Monitoring Committee established to enhance social participation in implementing the NRRP held its first meeting in May 2023. It comprises stakeholders such as the social partners, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and local authority representatives. It will continue and develop its activities in 2024.

In 2024, critical work on implementing EU directives will advance; discussion has started on the role of collective bargaining and social dialogue and will be continued. In 2024, efforts will continue to address existing challenges, such as inflation and managing minimum pay policies.

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