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TEACHERS, CITIZENS, PRECARIOUS WORKERS? – THE SECURITY OF LABOUR RELATIONS IN THE TEACHING PROFESSION IN POLAND: BETWEEN EXPECTATIONS AND REALITY

INTRODUCTION

In 21st-century Polish society, there is a clear asymmetry in expectations surrounding the teaching profession. While teachers are respected for their authority and the valued social mission they fulfil, they also face unrealistic demands and compensation misaligned with market standards. On one hand, teachers are expected to be empathetic leaders, responsive to changes in a dynamic environment. On the other, actual teacher salaries in Poland rank among the lowest in OECD countries, only slightly exceeding the national minimum wage (Eurydice, 2024a, 2024b).

The aim of this article is to analyse the evolving perception of the teaching profession, whose role is increasingly difficult to define amidst continuous change and emerging challenges. The authors examine the contemporary role of the teacher through two major lenses: the concept of the Teacher-Citizen and the profession's high feminisation, with women comprising 84% of teachers in Poland (PAP, 2024) – factors crucial to understanding the realities of their professional environment, challenges for the security of labour relations and for public policies. The research hypothesis suggests that the profession is marked by considerable precarity regarding income and working hours, stemming from asymmetrical expectations.

In the first section, the authors outline the traditional model of the teacher, historically entrenched with an esteemed role, professional asymmetry, and dilemmas. They then introduce the concept of the Teacher-Citizen, inspired by the ideas of Grzegorz Mazurkie-

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wicz and Maria Ossowska. The second section analyses statements from female teachers and educational professionals on school-focused online forums, alongside research on the teaching profession and the authors' studies, to highlight the profession's realities and challenges. The analysis of online discussions was conducted through a review of content from educational groups on Facebook, including: *Szkoła Minimalna* (2025) – over 30 thousand followers, *Nie dla chaosu w szkole* (2025) – over 91 thousand followers, and *Budżca się szkoła* (2025) – over 205 thousand followers. Next section discusses issues concerning teachers' labour relations security, including wages and leisure time, as well as political narratives around the profession. It also presents interviews with female teachers, who constitute the vast majority of those practising this profession in Poland, representing 84% of all teachers (PAP, 2024). The final part of the article contains a critical analysis of political programmes of key political parties in Poland in the context of addressing challenges faced by teachers in Poland, drawing on a socio-cognitive approach (Van Dijk, 2015). The sources used in the article include monographs, research articles, news sources, party documents, and databases, with statistical insights from sources such as Eurostat and the Central Statistical Office.

In light of the ongoing policy changes and reforms, our primary aim was to shed light on the broader landscape of the most precarious aspects of teachers' employment in Poland – the issues whose resolution is essential to securing the future of the profession in this country.

AROUND THE TEACHING PROFESSION: LITERATURE REVIEW

The distinguished Polish educator and didactician Wincenty Okoń (1959) emphasised that education contributes to the formation of social bonds, and its quality depends on the excellence of the educator, who carries the mission of building society through culture and values, nurturing the mind, and “polishing the soul.” Stefan Banach (2004) defines a teacher as someone who imparts knowledge and values, supporting students in lifelong development and learning, thus playing a key role in a dynamically changing society. However, pedagogical literature frequently highlights the challenges of the teacher's role, which has become particularly complex today. The notion of teaching as a mission, an ethos of excellence, often contrasts starkly with reality – a point that Krzysztof Konarzewski (1998: 148) also noted in the 1990s:

“A teacher must teach effectively, but without causing stress; be demanding, yet not imposing; maintain discipline, yet avoid coercion; be fair, yet find something good in everyone; assist the weaker students without neglecting the gifted. Above all, they must work with dedication – continually developing their skills, caring for each student's in-school and out-of-school prospects, supporting the local community, and staying connected with innovative pedagogical approaches. And all this is to be done without watching the clock, counting their pay, or demanding better working conditions, for the nation's future rests in their hands, as “the Republic will be only as strong as the education of its youth...”

Highlighting certain unique aspects of the teaching profession – such as specific personality traits, the diversity of tasks, and the need for immediate competence

– teaching is often classified among the few “impossible professions,” where expectations vastly exceed feasible capacity. Bogusław Śliwerski (2009) attributes the disconnect between the expectations placed on teachers and their ability to meet them to society’s treatment of this inherently inclusive profession as if it were exclusive. Teachers, accessible as a group due to the open entry into the profession, form an inclusive group, yet this accessibility hinders the development of a strong professional identity both collectively and individually. Automatically categorising teachers as an exclusive group leads to reflexively assigning them tasks beyond their capability (Kwiatkowski, 2008).

In recent decades, marked by constant change, the need for a realistic reconciliation between the expectations of teachers and the realities they face has become inevitable. The traditional model of the teacher, as outlined above, is largely unattainable because expectations for the profession are often contradictory. The rapid pace of societal change further complicates the building of professional prestige, as noted by Henryka Kwiatkowska (2008: 27): “the faster the mechanisms of cultural change turn, the harder it is to find stable reference points to support the teacher’s role as a guide and advisor on issues crucial for young people.”

The rapidly evolving world presents unprecedented challenges for teachers, with schools increasingly expected to address complex social issues – often with unrealistic expectations of their capacity to do so. Expectations regarding the teacher’s role have also been evolving. Marianna Kłosińska (2023), Head of Bullerbyn primary school and President of the Dzieci mają głos foundation (Children have voice), suggests that teaching is becoming an “endangered profession”:

“The teacher. It’s a vanishing profession... This does not mean we will stop learning as a population... New professions emerge as old ones fade because we evolve, along with the conditions we live in. Until recently, the primary function of the school was teaching; today, it is creating conditions for development. Now, we want to attribute to teachers’ competencies belonging to other specialists: pedagogue, psychologist, sociologist, facilitator, coach, tutor, mentor, mediator, therapist, interior designer, dietician, economist, etc. Working in a school community demands exceptionally high social skills, including an understanding of interpersonal dynamics.”

The widespread perception of teaching as a predominantly female profession, characterised by attributes traditionally associated with women, fundamentally shapes the profession’s reality. This global trend toward feminisation is well-documented: women comprised 71% of the worldwide teaching workforce in 2005, increasing to 74% by 2017. In Poland, during the 2022/23 school year, 512.1 thousand teachers were employed, with women representing 82.3% of this workforce in 2022 (Education and Upbringing Report, 2022), a figure that rose to 84% by 2024 (PAP, 2024). This feminisation profoundly influences the profession’s perception, prestige, characteristics, and daily realities. Analysis of teachers’ statements reveals that their social participation is significantly shaped by their gendered experiences and community expectations. As one teacher articulated in one of the interviews conducted, “Today, a teacher is almost always a woman, a kind of ‘citizen plus,’ expected not only to teach well but also to connect with students, listen to their problems, and guide them in navigating the world. And everyone expects something from her” (own research, 2023).

Teacher–Citizen: Demands, Concerns, and Social Perceptions

Literature identifies three key components of the teaching profession: subject knowledge, pedagogical skills, and personality. In recent decades, knowledge has been emphasised, yet in the face of technological progress, personality is becoming increasingly crucial. Recent events – the COVID-19 pandemic, the war in Ukraine, geopolitical uncertainties, and shifting legal frameworks – contribute to a narrative of constant change in which teachers must adapt and problem-solve effectively. In this context, pedagogical work requires not only “reproduced” knowledge but also “created on the fly” knowledge (Kwiatkowska, 2008). Thus, teaching becomes a non-stereotypical, multifaceted practice. Education, following Dewey’s (2013) philosophy, operates within and for society.

Who, then, is the teacher in this new reality? In response to a changing and uncertain world, Grzegorz Mazurkiewicz (2014) proposes the Teacher as Citizen concept. Referring to thinkers such as Zygmunt Bauman, he suggests that we should abandon the notion of universal solutions to current issues and instead see the school’s primary role as supporting students in interpreting, understanding, and coping with reality. According to this concept, the teacher is responsible for social development, fosters critical thinking among students, engages with fellow citizens, and initiates change both within and outside the school. Additionally, the Teacher–Citizen is an expert in teaching and learning, facilitating teamwork, dialogue, and growth. Maria Ossowska’s (1992; Machowska, 2006) timeless yet still relevant model of thirteen civic virtues, created in 1946, includes perfectionist aspirations, open-mindedness, intellectual honesty, social engagement, and a sense of humour – these align with essential teacher competencies in a democratic society, which research has shown to be critical in teacher-student relationships nowadays (Barabasz, 2016). However, it is important to highlight that the teachers embracing the Teacher–Citizen model require substantial support in its implementation.

The Teacher–Citizen concept reshapes society’s perception of teachers, emphasizing their human element: empathy, a heavy sense of responsibility, and a duty to act and dissent when the school system operates unjustly. In a time of continuous challenges and change, teachers are increasingly tasked with responsibilities that should be shared by society. Often, these expectations overlook the practical limits, resources, and realities of the teaching profession, especially within the Polish context.

In 2013, teaching was ranked among the seven most respected professions in Poland, and by 2018, it held a high level of public trust at 78% (prawo.pl, 2018). However, according to SW Research (2024), it had dropped to 11th place, behind roles such as firefighter, paramedic, doctor, and even cobbler. The COVID-19 pandemic contributed to a decline in public perception, with 45% of parents and 62% of teachers expressing dissatisfaction with the education system (Buchner, Fereniec-Błońska, Wierzbicka, 2021). Teachers’ statements clearly indicate their awareness of the evolving and challenging nature of their role (Sokolińska, 2023; Fabisiak, Kim, Pezda, 2023).

Analysis of discussions among educators and parents on social media groups dedicated to schooling reveals a lack of clear, consistent expectations for teachers, often resulting in contradictory demands. This ambivalence stems from personal interpreta-

tions shaped by individual experiences and roles (e.g., early-career teacher, retired teacher, parent of a child with special needs, or demanding parent). As H. Kwiatkowska notes, the teaching profession is marked by significant variability in quality of practice, likely influenced by teachers' unique biographical backgrounds (Kwiatkowska, 2008). Joanna Sokolińska (2023: 13), after interviews with Polish teachers, remarks, "Poland is not Finland. Here, there is no single path to becoming a teacher. Here, each person's journey is profoundly distinct."

TEACHER AS PRECARIOUS WORKER: THE SECURITY OF LABOUR RELATIONS OF POLISH TEACHERS – THE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The concept of labour precarisation encompasses, among other issues, rising economic inequalities, the erosion of the traditional working class, an increase in insecure employment forms (such as temporary contracts, part-time work, zero-hour contracts, and gig economy jobs), insufficient security of labour relations, limited social benefits, and often the automation of work, privatisation of public goods, and services. These processes intensified after the 2008 economic crisis, leading to higher unemployment, increased poverty, a housing crisis, and the implementation of austerity policies, which sparked mass social protests and broadened the recognition of the "precarariat" as a social category (Kania, 2020). The academic discussion on labour precarisation and the precariat has gone through several key phases, addressed by scholars such as André Gorz (Granter, Aroles, 2023), Pierre Bourdieu (1998), Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt (2012), Judith Butler (2011), Isabell Lorey (2011), Zygmunt Bauman (2011; Kania, 2013), and Guy Standing, a major proponent of this category (2011).

In our recent publication (Andruszkiewicz, Kania, Łebkowska, 2024), we examined how Polish political parties address the issue of security in labour relations within their political manifestos, drawing on theoretical frameworks concerning the precarisation of labour. Our analytical methodology was partly based on Guy Standing's classification (which we slightly modified) of factors contributing to labour security (Standing, 2011: 10) and included additional factors. In the following section, we focus specifically about teachers in relation to labour security.

Table 1

Factors contributing to security of labour relations

Factor	Description
1	2
Labour Market Security (B1)	Macro-level job market conditions (including jobs availability, as well as labour supply) aiming to keep unemployment low.
Employment Security (B2)	Transparent regulations for employment commencement and termination that ensure basic job security for employees (employment contracts, notice periods, etc.).
Job Security (B3)	Opportunities to create or retain employment niches, enter or return to the workforce, and pursue career development. Adaptability to new forms of work.
Work Security (B4)	Regulations and policies that facilitate work whilst protecting employee wellbeing through, amongst other things, work-life balance, health and safety standards, reasonable working hours, and prevention of overwork.

1	2
Access to Employment Security (B5)	Security of access to employment outside business centres, reducing disparities and obstacles in employment access.
Income Security (B6)	Guarantee of sufficient, stable income protected by mechanisms such as minimum wage, raises, progressive taxation, and subsidies to reduce inequality.
Representation Security (B7)	Collective workers’ voice, including through independent unions and the right to strike.

Source: G. Standing (2011), *The Precariat: The New Dangerous Class*, Bloomsbury Academic, London.

After careful analysis we assessed that primary issues negatively impacting the labour security of female teachers are low-income security (B6), low workplace security (B4) (linked to the undervaluation of work done outside formal “in-class” hours), and systemic labour market security concerns related to potential employment gaps (B1). Below, we will analyse in more detail the most critical factors with low labour security levels (B6: Income Security, B4: Work Security, B1: Labor Market Security), in order that reflects the most pressing challenges.

Table 2

Assessment of factors contributing to security of labour relations for Polish teachers

Factor	Labour Market Security (B1)	Employment Security (B2)	Job Security (B3)	Work Security (B4)	Access to Employment Security (B5)	Income Security (B6)	Representation Security (B7)
Level	<u>Moderate++</u> (teachers’ perspective) <u>Low +</u> (labour market perspective)	<u>High +++</u>	<u>Moderate ++</u>	<u>Low +</u>	<u>High +++</u>	<u>Low +</u>	<u>Moderate ++</u>

Source: G. Standing (2011), *The Precariat: The New Dangerous Class*, Bloomsbury Academic, London.

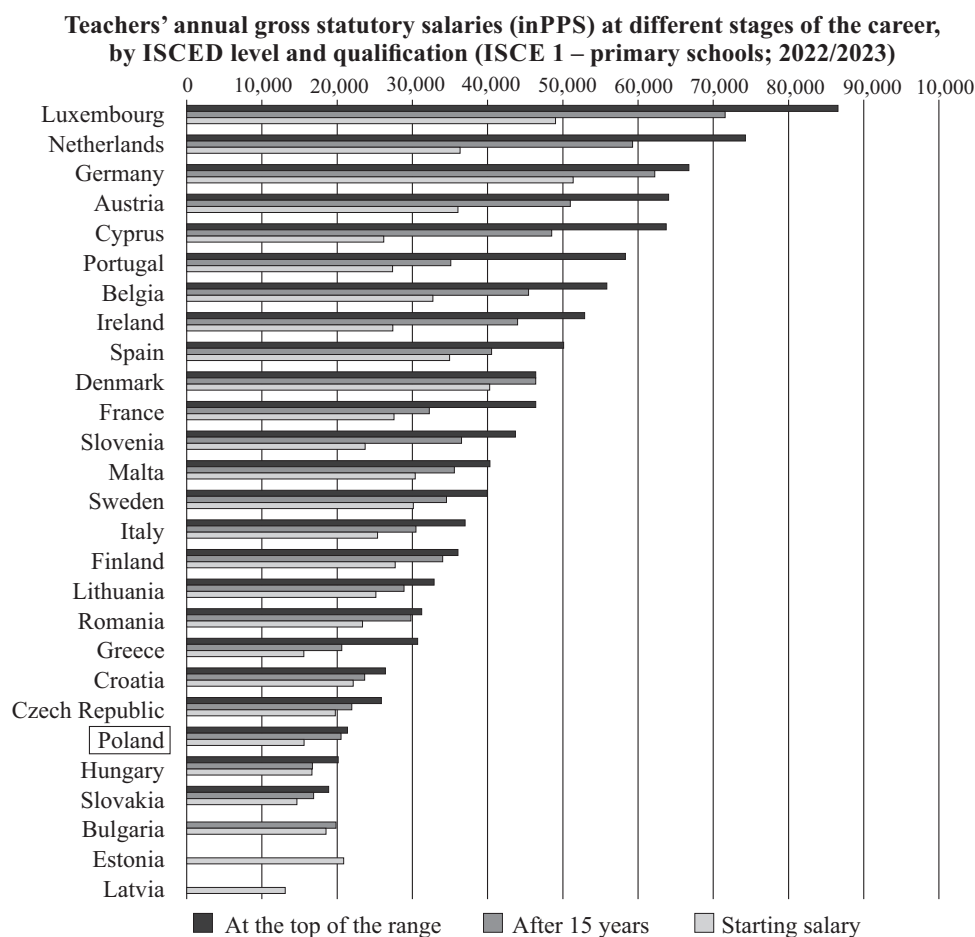
Work and Pay – Income Security (B6)

In Poland, the societal expectations and prestige hierarchy of the teaching profession have for years been starkly misaligned with its earnings hierarchy (Domański, 2013). Teachers in Poland are amongst the lowest paid in the European Union (Eurydice, 2024). As of 2024, the minimum gross salary for an entry-level teacher was 4,908 PLN per month (1,139 euros gross, as of 20 October 2024). For a fully qualified teacher (the highest professional rank in Poland), this figure stood at 5,915 PLN gross per month (1,373 euros gross, as of 20 October 2024) (Statista, 2024). To contextualise these figures, the national minimum gross salary from 1 July 2024 was 4,300 PLN (998 euros gross), meaning entry-level teachers earn merely 608 PLN (141 euros) more than minimum wage workers. This disparity becomes even more pronounced when viewed internationally: the average annual salary for a primary school teacher in Poland is approximately 16,000 euros, compared to 66,000 euros in Denmark, 64,000

in Germany, 31,000 in Portugal, and 22,000 in the Czech Republic. A similar pattern holds for secondary and early years teaching (Yanatma, 2023).

In July 2022, the European Commission compiled data on teacher salaries across European countries, adjusting for cost of living to enable more precise comparisons of purchasing power across regions. This analysis used purchasing power parity (PPP), which adjusts statutory salaries based on living costs in different countries for a given period (ZNP, 2022). The latest update of this dataset covers the years 2022/2023, with a breakdown by pre-school, primary, middle school, and secondary school teachers. The report revealed that both entry-level and more experienced teachers in Poland earn some of the lowest salaries amongst EU countries. Primary school teachers in countries like Spain, the Netherlands, Austria, Belgium, Denmark, and Germany begin their careers with salaries more than twice as high as their Polish counterparts when adjusted for purchasing power parity.

Figure 1. Teachers' annual gross statutory salaries (in PPP) at different stages of the career (primary schools; 2022/2023)



Source: Analysis based on Eurydice, 2023 data.

A major issue is the limited salary growth over the longer term of a teacher's career (ZNP, 2022). In 2023, the salary of an experienced teacher in Poland ranked fifth from the bottom amongst EU countries. The career-long salary increase in Poland stands at only 37%. By comparison, this rate is 77.7% in Austria, 68.2% in France, and 84.2% in Slovenia. In Germany, statutory pay growth is just under 30%, but with a much higher starting salary than in Poland (Eurydice, 2023). Interviewed female teachers in Poland also highlight the lack of support, including financial assistance, from the school administration in providing teaching materials, often forcing them to cover these costs (own research, 2023).

A report by the Central Statistical Office (Education and Upbringing Report, 2022) shows that Polish teachers earned less than other professionals with higher education degrees in both the private and public sectors, with wage disparities widening since 2012 as wages in the broader economy have risen ("GOFIN", 2023). In 2018, changing professions could increase a teacher's monthly salary by 1,200–1,400 PLN gross (278–325 euros) (ZNP, 2022).

From a strategic policy standpoint, the sustainability of educational quality is challenged when teachers in one of the world's wealthiest countries (OECD, 2024) face salaries that inadequately cover basic needs, compelling them to seek supplementary income or make considerable personal compromises (Interia.pl, 2024; Szpunar, 2023). As an analysis in *The Lancet Public Health* suggests, higher incomes have a positive impact on mental health and overall well-being, making the financial precariousness of teachers even more concerning (Shields-Zeeman, Smit, 2022).

Female-dominated professions are underpaid worldwide, making the low salaries particularly significant issue for teachers in Poland, where women represent 84% of the profession in (data for the 2023/24 school year; PAP, 2024). This is problematic not only from a broader equality perspective, but more specifically because women financially dependent on their partners are at greater risk of various forms of abuse, including economic violence. Improving women's economic status could potentially reduce their vulnerability to economic abuse and other forms of mistreatment, whilst increasing their level of independence (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2023; Nelson, Baumann, Husain-Talero, 2023).

It is important to note that in 2024, the Ministry of National Education, led by Barbara Nowacka, introduced salary increases of 30 percent for most teachers and 33 percent for beginners (European Commission, 2024). These rises, funded in the 2024 budget and covering kindergarten to university staff, were paid retrospectively from September (Gov.pl, 2023).

In 2025, a further 5 percent increase followed (Rozporządzenie Ministra Edukacji, 2025), raising minimum base salaries to between 5,027 and 6,211 PLN gross (1,175–1,452 euros gross) per month, depending on qualifications. That same year, the national minimum wage was 4,666 PLN gross (1,091 euros gross), just 361 PLN (84 euros) below the salary for teachers without pedagogical training, and 487 PLN (114 euros) above that of a newly qualified teacher with a master's degree and pedagogical preparation (Rzeczpospolita, 2023; Rozporządzenie Ministra Edukacji, 2025). In 2026, the minimum salary for a beginner teacher is expected to be only 502 PLN higher than the national minimum wage, and 1,405 PLN higher for a fully qualified teacher. These are base figures, excluding additional allowances (Dziennik.

pl, 2025). The gap between teacher pay and the national minimum wage is therefore narrowing.

In response, Związek Nauczycielstwa Polskiego, Poland's largest and oldest teachers' union, expressed mixed views. While recognising the scale of the increases, ZNP noted that the 30–33 percent rise still fell short of the promised 1,500 PLN boost to base salaries (ZNP, 2024b).

Income Security and Interest in the Profession

ZNP leader Sławomir Broniarz argued that planned pay increases lag behind those in the private sector, and that such small differences between teacher salaries and the national minimum wage fail to attract graduates to the profession – and may even discourage them from pursuing a teaching career (Dziennik, 2025).

Research confirms that low wages directly undermine the appeal of the teaching profession and complicate efforts to recruit new staff. Findings from the *Young Teachers Leaving the School* report show that nearly half (49.2%) of surveyed young teachers are considering a career change. This trend is most pronounced among those under 36, with key demotivating factors including low pay (75%), difficulties working with parents (49%), poor working conditions (29%), and organisational issues in schools and preschools (22%) (Dobkowska, Zielińska, Żytko, 2024).

Concerns about teacher pay are also shared by the wider public: 41% of parents and 59% of students believe teachers are underpaid (Buchner, Fereniec-Błńska, Wierzbicka, 2021). Amid ongoing staffing shortages, those who remain in the profession often work beyond full-time hours, affecting both the quality of their teaching and their personal well-being.

High Demands – Work Security (B4)

Work security (B4) is a significant challenge for teachers in Poland, encompassing heavy workloads, long hours on non-teaching tasks, and increasing responsibilities that drive burnout and reduce the profession's appeal to newcomers (Teach for Poland, 2024). As H. Kwiatkowska observes (2008: 201), teaching resists rationalisation and formalisation. While Teacher–Citizens recognise the conflicting role expectations, they see these as challenges they feel unprepared for, rather than tests of competence.

A key aspect of the Teacher–Citizen role is individualised attention, but Polish teachers are primarily trained to manage whole classes. Many students now require individual attention – an approach the system does not support (Buchner, 2021:12). Online education forums highlight frustrations when students need individualised support, often due to behavioural issues, amid group teaching.

Although the Teacher–Citizen concept (Mazurczak, 2014) suggests focusing on students' needs over curriculum requirements, teachers are often assessed on syllabus coverage. One teacher described her dilemma: “When the war in Ukraine started, my students were anxious and wanted to discuss it, but due to illness, we were already behind on material” (own research, history teacher, 2023). Another noted, “In theory,

I have complete flexibility; in practice – very little,” explaining how she prioritises exam content but struggles to balance other topics that engage students, leading to a constant “race” to cover material (Sokolińska, 2023: 81).

Time pressure – from loaded curricula and the rigid “bell-to-bell” schedule – compounds stress. Teachers lack time to reinforce learning, and many report anxiety arising from unclear expectations and broadly formulated responsibilities (see Prawo oświatowe, 2016, Art. 55). Legally, teachers cannot leave children unsupervised yet are also held accountable if a child is humiliated by needing assistance. As Sokolińska (2023: 78) notes, “There is no perfect solution; each person must weigh which choice is safest for both the child and the adult.”

This issue extends to teachers’ own needs. “We often can’t even take a bathroom break during lessons, as we can’t leave the children alone. During breaks, we’re on duty, constantly monitoring them. I’m responsible if anything happens,” one teacher explained (own research, 2025).

The teachers we interviewed also expressed frustration with the blurring of boundaries between work and personal time. According to the teachers we interviewed (own research, 2024), the time-consuming work done outside of classroom hours is often undervalued. This issue is significant, as discussions and media narratives frequently confuse a teacher’s total working hours with their “teaching load” (the hours spent actively teaching in class). As noted by the Institute for Education Development, “in practice, the teaching load is only a portion of a teacher’s responsibilities. Additionally, teachers undertake many other tasks, such as lesson preparation, grading, attending meetings and training, and organising or participating in various school events” (Instytut Rozwoju Edukacji, 2024). Research by the Educational Research Institute shows that the average teacher works 47 hours per week, covering up to 54 different tasks within that time (Instytut Rozwoju Edukacji, 2024).

Other factors mentioned by female teachers that reduce work comfort in schools include large class sizes and a heavy administrative workload (own research, 2024). In this context, it is encouraging that the Polish Supreme Court, in its groundbreaking ruling of 26 February 2025, confirmed teachers’ right to remuneration for overtime work, establishing clear distinctions between additional teaching hours within regular schedules and overtime work exceeding the standard 40-hour working week for activities such as organising school trips or supervising students during holidays (Infor, 2025). In May 2025, Education Minister Barbara Nowacka announced that a remuneration model for teachers’ overtime hours would be developed by the teachers’ professional practice team (Bankier.pl, 2025).

Teachers also report feeling overwhelmed by the societal expectations that exceed their physical and mental capacity (Kwiatkowska, 2008). Findings from the *Rozmawiaj z klasą* (Talk with the Class) project confirm this and highlight an urgent need for systemic support for teachers, who often serve as the primary source of support for students (Buchner, et al., 2020: 67). While only 19% of teachers rated their mental well-being as average or low (1–5 on a 10-point scale), the emotional comments accompanying these ratings were deeply moving. Teachers’ poor mental health often stems from feelings of isolation, overwork, underappreciation, and burnout (Buchner, et al., 2020). One teacher’s words illustrate this: “I feel overworked, underappreciated, and overly burdened with others’ problems, without help for my own” (own research, 2023).

Teachers emphasise the need for the public to understand that, for many, their profession is a key part of their identity (Smak, Walczak, 2015). As one teacher stated, “I always wanted to be a teacher, to work with young people. I can’t imagine doing anything else” (self-research, 2023). The authors of *Między pasją a zawodem* (Between Passion and Profession) report state that 78% of teachers express job satisfaction despite the challenges. They value that the unique nature of teaching protects them from monotony, as each day brings new joys and challenges, requiring creative responses (Buchner, Ferenc-Błońska, Wierzbicka, 2021).

Employment Gaps – Labour Market Security (B1)

Although those seeking a teaching position in Poland should not struggle to find work, the education sector faces significant staffing shortages. “In the next 20 years, the Polish education system could face a severe staffing crisis – currently, only 5% of Polish teachers are under 30,” note the authors of the Teach for Poland project (2024b). In 2023, school vacancies increased, and principals struggled to hire new staff (“Rzeczpospolita”, 2024).

In the 2023/2024 school year, Polish educational institutions employed 525,000 teachers, part of a workforce of about 736,000. The 2024 *Barometr Zawodow* (Occupational Barometer) highlights critical shortages in areas such as vocational teachers (271 counties), vocational subject teachers (279 counties), as well as general education, preschool, special needs, and integrative teachers (Barometr zawodów, 2024; “Głos Nauczycielski”, 2024). As of May 2024, there were 16,166 teaching vacancies, with the largest gaps for math teachers, English teachers, psychologists, preschool teachers, and Polish language teachers. In certain regions, such as Mazowieckie and Małopolskie, the shortage exceeds 3% of the teaching workforce (“Głos Nauczycielski”, 2024b). In Warsaw alone, over 2,000 teachers are needed due to low salaries and challenging working conditions (Głogowski, 2024).

Additionally, the percentage of teachers over 50 has risen to 36%, while only 5% are under 30, placing Poland at the lower end of European statistics. Experts predict that if current trends continue, by 2040, 73% of early education teachers will be over 50 (Teach for Poland, 2024).

Other Factors: Relative Level of Security

Teacher employment regulations in Poland are primarily governed by the *Teacher’s Charter* and the *Labour Code*, with professional advancement since 2022 comprising two levels: *appointed* and *chartered* teacher. Teachers are entitled to school breaks and health leave and are required to pursue professional development through postgraduate studies and courses. They are also subject to general retirement rules, with the option for early retirement under certain conditions.

To encourage teachers to work in smaller communities, teachers employed in towns with up to 5,000 residents or rural areas are eligible for a rural allowance, amounting

to 10% of the base salary (Infor, 2024; Portal Oświatowy, 2023). Additionally, there is ongoing discussion about introducing an urban allowance to make teaching more attractive in cities with higher living costs.

The *Polish Teachers' Union* (ZNP), the largest organisation representing teachers, educational staff, and higher education employees, reports representing approximately 200,000 individuals (ZNP, 2024b). Other unions, such as the Education Section of NSZZ “Solidarność,” may further increase unionisation levels within this professional group. It is estimated that the unionisation rate among teachers is around 20–25%, higher than the average unionisation rate in Poland (approximately 10% among salaried employees) and the EU average (23%) (Worker Participation, 2024; CBOS, 2021).

POLITICAL HOOKS AND PROMISES: THE TEACHING PROFESSION IN POLITICAL PROGRAMMES

Drawing on an in-depth analysis of the manifestos and electoral programmes of Polish political parties for the 15 October 2023 parliamentary elections, we observed that the teaching profession – along with its associated challenges – carries notable political weight, one that politicians tend to acknowledge in public declarations. Teachers, who represent a sizeable share of the electorate, were among only a few professional groups explicitly addressed through tailored messaging and policy commitments by political parties in Poland.

The analysis drew on documents available on the websites of selected Polish political parties, coalitions, and electoral committees, including programs, manifestos, policy declarations, and occasionally statutes. The political groups and parties included represent, in our view, the most influential political actors in Poland, addressing the main electorate groups through both economic and social perspectives (Andruszkiewicz, Kania, Łebkowska, 2024).

Across 757 analysed segments of content, teachers were one of the few professional groups targeted with personalised messages by political groups (alongside medical professionals, public sector employees, academics, artists, and hunters). Most parties advocated for salary increases for teachers. KO/PO (2023) expressed intentions to raise teachers' salaries by at least 30% (“no less than 1500 PLN gross per teacher”), while Konfederacja highlighted the impact of low salaries on negative recruitment to the profession. KW Nowa Lewica (2023) proposed a “minimum 20% increase within the first year of the new parliamentary term,” and Lewica Razem (2023) aimed to link teachers' salaries to the average national wage. Razem also uniquely addressed the wage situation of administrative staff in education. More broadly, parties including Trzecia Droga (2023), Zieloni (2023), and PiS (2023) advocated for teacher salary increases, with PiS tying this to other public sector roles and highlighting previous initiatives, such as increased education funding and the need to reduce bureaucracy in the profession. KO/PO, Zieloni (2023), PSL (2023), Nowoczesna (2023), and Konfederacja (2023) also linked salary increases to restoring or enhancing the prestige of the teaching profession.

This analysis indicates that many leading political parties recognise both the pressing challenges faced by the teaching profession and its value as political capital.

SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The teaching profession faces a marked asymmetry in societal expectations and remains highly precarious in two key areas: low income and work–life balance. This includes a broad, yet often vaguely defined, scope of responsibilities, long working hours, and persistent time pressure. A review of data and expert perspectives aligns with the findings of the Young Teachers report, which states that “the social and economic status of teachers requires radical change. Decisions in this area must be made at the central level” (Mazurkiewicz, 2015).

As illustrated in this article, the teaching profession also holds political potential – a fact recognised by political parties, as teachers constitute a significant electoral group. As our analysis has shown, political parties are keen to address the challenges facing the profession in their programmes, manifestos, and public statements. However, to genuinely and effectively enhance the appeal of the teaching profession, bold and targeted strategies remain essential – particularly in relation to pay competitiveness and workload.

Teachers’ salaries in Poland rank among the lowest in the European Union, making the profession less attractive to new entrants and contributing to an ageing workforce. Research indicates that “79% of young people believe teachers should earn more, and nearly half feel they are overworked.” Low pay and excessive workloads are major deterrents for young professionals considering a career in teaching (Mazurkiewicz, 2015).

The lack of income security in this highly feminised profession has broader consequences, including negative effects on mental health and increased vulnerability to economic abuse.

Improving job security and promoting a healthier work–life balance are therefore critical to supporting the well-being and long-term retention of teaching staff. We therefore recommend prioritising these two areas to ensure a stable supply of qualified educators, which is vital for delivering high-quality, inclusive, and universally accessible education.

Most teachers in Poland also report a need for support in managing behavioural challenges, reducing administrative burdens, and enhancing the profession’s social standing. Ensuring that teachers are not only fairly compensated but also feel valued, supported, and empowered is not merely a matter of workforce policy – it is also critical for nurturing the next generation of learners.

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ABSTRACT

In 21st-century Poland, the teaching profession faces a profound contradiction: whilst teachers are socially respected for their authority and mission, they experience significant labour precarity characterised by inadequate compensation and often challenging working conditions. This study examines the position of Polish teachers through two major angles: the Teacher-Citizen concept and the profession's pronounced feminisation, with women comprising 84% of the teaching workforce.

The study then applies Guy Standing's labour security classification and employs mixed methods including analysis of online forums, policy documents, and interviews with female teachers, revealing acute challenges in three key areas: income security (with salaries among the EU's lowest), work security (unpaid overtime and blurred work-life boundaries), and labour market security (critical staffing shortages). Analysis of 2023 parliamentary election manifestos reveal a significant gap between political promises and policy implementation regarding teacher welfare. Despite widespread rhetoric about salary increases, substantive improvements remain limited. The research concludes that addressing teacher precarity requires comprehensive national policy intervention, including substantial salary increases and recognition of the gendered dimensions of educational labour, with broader implications for understanding labour precarity in feminised public sector professions across Europe.

Keywords: social policy, demographic policy, social development, teacher's education, the security of labour relations, the process of precarisation of labour

NAUCZYCIELE, OBYWATELE, PRACOWNICY PREKARYJNI? – BEZPIECZEŃSTWO STOSUNKÓW PRACY W ZAWODZIE NAUCZYCIELA W POLSCE: MIĘDZY OCZEKIWANIAM I RZECZYWISTOŚCIĄ

STRESZCZENIE

W Polsce profesja nauczycielska stoi w obliczu głębokiej sprzeczności: podczas gdy nauczycielki i nauczyciele cieszą się społecznym szacunkiem ze względu na swój autorytet i misję, doświadczają znaczącej prekaryzacji pracy charakteryzującej się nieodpowiednim wynagrodzeniem i nierzadko trudnymi warunkami pracy. Niniejsze badanie analizuje sytuację polskiej kadry nauczycielskiej z dwóch głównych perspektyw: koncepcji Nauczyciela-Obywatela oraz wyraźnej feminizacji zawodu (kobiety stanowią 84%).

Badanie następnie stosuje klasyfikację bezpieczeństwa pracy Guy Standinga i wykorzystuje metody mieszane, w tym analizę forów internetowych, dokumentów programowych oraz wywiady pogłębione z nauczycielkami, ujawniając poważne wyzwania w trzech kluczowych obszarach: bezpieczeństwo dochodowe (z pensjami należącymi do najniższych w UE), bezpieczeństwo pracy (niepłatne nadgodziny i zatarte granice między pracą a życiem prywatnym) oraz bezpieczeństwo rynku pracy (krytyczne niedobory kadrowe). Analiza manifestów wyborczych z wyborów parlamentarnych 2023 roku ujawnia znaczącą lukę między obietnicami politycznymi

mi a wdrażaniem polityki dotyczącej dobrostanu nauczycieli. Pomimo szerokiej retoryki o podwyżkach wynagrodzeń, rzeczywiste ulepszenia pozostają ograniczone. Autorki konkludują, że rozwiązanie problemu prekaryzacji nauczycieli wymaga kompleksowej interwencji politycznej na poziomie krajowym, w tym znaczących podwyżek wynagrodzeń i uznania wymiarów pracy edukacyjnej warunkowanych płcią, co ma szersze implikacje dla zrozumienia prekaryzacji pracy w sfeminizowanych zawodach sektora publicznego w całej Europie.

Słowa kluczowe: polityka społeczna, polityka demograficzna, rozwój społeczny, proces prekaryzacji pracy, nauczyciel, edukacja, bezpieczeństwo zawodowe

