### ATD Fourth World Poland

1. **What social protection systems are in place for children in your country? Please provide examples of specific laws and regulations, measures, policies, and programmes directed at ensuring children’s access to inclusive social protection.**

Polish social protection system for children is comprehensive and comprises standard social insurance benefits with maternity leave with options for fathers (*zasiłek macierzyński*) and care benefit (if the child is ill or there is no family member to care for the child, *zasiłek opiekuńczy*), two pillars of non-contributory cash benefits and free of charge health care for children.

Two pillars of non-contributory cash benefits are family benefits (*zasiłki rodzinne*) and several supplements with family income test (eligibility threshold) for children up to 18 years with exceptions for young adults in education up to 24 years (PLN 95 per child 0-5 years, PLN 124 per child 6-18 years), and universal child rearing allowance (*świadczenie wychowawcze*) for children up to 18 years (PLN 500 per child). Both cash benefits may be combined without any restriction. It means that families with children having disposable incomes below income threshold are entitled to family benefits and child rearing allowance. Families above family income threshold are only entitled to child rearing allowance.

Family benefits are lower for younger children (0-5 years), higher for older children (6-18) and the highest for young adults in education (18-24). Child rearing allowance is equal for all children.

There are several other cash benefits in the system of benefits for children outside social insurance benefits: one-off income-tested and conditional birth grant (*jednorazowa zapomoga z tytułu urodzenia dziecka*), 12 month benefit from birth for uninsured mothers (*świadczenie rodzicielskie*) without income test, universal Family Care Capital (RKO) for a child aged between 12 and 35 months.

In the education system there is a school stipend (*stypendium szkolne*) for children from families with incomes below the income test in social assistance system, which is lower than income threshold applied for eligibility to family benefits. Primary school stipend is for the total or partial reimbursement of the costs of participation in educational activities, including compensatory classes, beyond those provided at school, but it could be paid in cash in some cases. Another one-off cash benefit in the context of education is Good Start allowance for all children at the start of the school year.

Since 2022 there is an obligation of the primary school to provide one hot meal per day for pupils and provide an opportunity for them to eat it while at school. The use of this meal will be voluntary and chargeable. Funding for school meals is available to children and young people from low-income families and those growing up in a family that is currently in a difficult financial situation. From 2023 the income criteria are 200 per cent of standard income threshold in social assistance.

Legal acts

* Family benefits: Ustawa z dnia 28 listopada 2003 r. o świadczeniach rodzinnych <https://isap.sejm.gov.pl/isap.nsf/DocDetails.xsp?id=wdu20032282255>
* Child rearing allowance: Ustawa z dnia 11 lutego 2016 r. o pomocy państwa w wychowywaniu dzieci <https://isap.sejm.gov.pl/isap.nsf/DocDetails.xsp?id=wdu20160000195>

1. **What are the main gaps and challenges to children’s enjoyment of social protection in law, policy, and practice in your country and the impacts on children’s rights ? Please provide any relevant statistical or disaggregated data based on age, gender, disability, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation and gender identity, migration status, or other categories. Please consider the specific situation of marginalized children and those in vulnerable situations in your response.**

The main problem with above mentioned two pillar system of social protection for children is inadequate indexation procedure. Both pillars were not indexed in the period 2016-2023. Their real value is deteriorating quickly from the second half of 2021 with higher and higher inflation (figure 1).

Since family benefits and child rearing allowance are separate cash benefits systems their indexation procedures are also not coordinated. For both indexation is not automatic and within discretion of the government, but for family benefits it is more regulated. Every three years government with the social partners decide whether there should be indexation (weryfikacja) at all and what a level it should have. Last decision about indexation was taken in 2021.

Figure 1: Nominal and real value of the basic family benefits and child rearing allowance for family with two eligible children after 12 month inflation (in PLN)

Source: own calculation based on monthly data

1. **What are the good practices initiated by the Government to ensure that social protection benefits the rights of children in your country?**

Introduction of child rearing allowance in 2016 seems to be good decision as child poverty in Poland decreased markedly (figure 2). Decision to allow combination of family benefits with child rearing allowance established system similar to the idea of targeting within universalism. By 2019 child rearing allowance was partially income tested for the only or the first child. Since then It is fully universal, but expansion in 2019 benefited mainly to middle and higher income families.

Figure 2: Reduction in child at risk of poverty rate by social transfers excluding pensions (in percentage points)

Source: own elaboration based on Eurostat data

1. **Are there examples of how measures and responses to alleviate poverty through social protection systems in emergency situations or, for example, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, have positively affected children’s rights, particularly to social security?**

In the COVID-19 pandemic the main instrument within social protection related to children was contributory care benefit and its extension. Insured parents and carers of children up to the age of eight are entitled to it up to 60 days per year. During the pandemic COVID-19 it was extended several times beyond the 60 days of standard limit.

1. **How can States deliver more effectively to ensure the effective implementation of universal social protection for children, including through international cooperation?**

From Polish experience and international literature the most promising way to protect children against poverty is targeting within universalism i.e. family benefits for all children but substantially higher for children in families living in poverty. Income threshold for eligibility to targeted family benefits should be substantially higher than for general social assistance. The eligibility process should be less restrictive than in general social assistance. System of targeted universalism should have safeguards against inflation i.e. yearly automatic indexation process with at least Consumer Price Index as its base. It is important to predict exceptional procedure for the periods of high inflation which enables government to make more than one e.g. every half or every quarter indexation.

The international cooperation in child social protection should be organized with the main goal of eradication of child poverty. In the European Union there is The Child Guarantee and it is promising way to organize international cooperation in other international organizations.