

ENSURING THAT POLLUTERS PAY

Poland

Poland's revenue from environmentally relevant taxes is slightly higher than the EU average. Environmental taxes stood at 2.64 % of GDP in 2019 (EU-27 average: 2.37 %). This is due to a relatively high proportion of energy taxes, at 2.31 % of GDP, against an EU average of 1.84 %. Transport taxes represented only 0.22 % of GDP (EU average being 0.45 %). However, taxes on pollution and resource represented 0.11 % which is slightly above the EU average of 0.08 %. In the same year, the environmental tax amounted to 7.33 % of total revenues from taxes and social security contributions (substantially above the EU average of 5.76%)¹

Further options

Taxing biomass fuels to improve air quality

Biomass used for home heating contributes strongly (over 80%) to emissions of particulate matter (PM) in Poland. The country could consider introducing a tax on solid fuels in the residential sector in order to reduce PM emissions. The tax would be based on the calorific value, the average emission per fuel category and the environmental cost of the emissions. When revenues are recycled (e.g. through income tax), this could lead to a modest increase of GDP of 0.02% for 2030, impacts on income are completely offset and there is no change to employment rates.

Water pricing for all users

Poland has experienced relatively moderate water scarcity at a national level in recent years. Water pricing is used in the municipal sector and includes industrial and agricultural self-abstraction among other users. Hydropower is exempt from pricing despite its recognised environmental impact, and some exemptions exist for agricultural irrigation and aquaculture. Some water basins have registered significant increases in extraction, such as the Water and Wieprz river basins, both of which are experiencing permanent water scarcity. Poland therefore might consider full cost-recovery pricing for all users in highly affected basins.

WASTEWATER (SEWAGE) SYSTEM AND FEES

Fees for the discharge of sewage to water or soil were introduced in Poland in 2002. This market-based instrument (MBI) was introduced to dissuade the pollution of waters and the soil, to internalise costs and to use the fee revenues collected to compensate environmental impacts caused by pollutants introduced to water or soil.

There is evidence for a correlation between the wastewater fee increase and the reduction of water pollution in Poland, however, this trend can also be partly attributed to major infrastructural investments. Nevertheless, Poland cannot demonstrate the full implementation of the EU sewage directive. Large agglomerations with more than 100,000 inhabitants have a significant share in the infringement. Correct planning of investments in the water and sewage sector for 2021-2027 in the National Program for Municipal Wastewater Treatment is a condition for granting Poland EU funding.

In Poland there are over 2,700 entities providing water and sewage services. Approximately 30% of the water / sewage price is affected by depreciation of the previously incurred costs for investments, and another 30% are handling costs. This means that 60% of business cost is beyond municipal control.

The sewage costs for the households differ depending the administration area of the country. The 2020 costs for some of the largest cities are as below:

Town	Cost PLN /1 m3 of the wastewater (1 E= 0.225 average for 2020)
Olsztyn	6,94
Poznan	6,51
Cracow	6,05
Katowice	8,29
Warsaw	5,96

The costs for industrial sewage discharge depend on the type of water pollutants..

Source: <https://sip.lex.pl/akty-prawne/dzu->

dziennik-ustaw/oplaty-za-korzystanie-ze-srodowiska-18238942

In general, wastewater treatment and water protection has been greatly improving over the last 40 years in Poland, this can be partly attributed to the implementation of fees but also other factors such as infrastructure improvements (discussed above). A key drawback is the relatively weak enforcement system. The Marshal's Offices and the Voivodeship Inspectorates of Environmental Protection have very limited resources to verify compliance related to wastewater discharges. Furthermore, only a limited number of economic operators in Poland report on their environmental uses.

Key Stakeholders

Key stakeholders are: operators of wastewater treatment plants, industrial sites, agricultural holdings and other similar activities, the wider civil society represented by environmental and consumer groups and state and local authorities involved in fee collection. Previous research suggests that the wastewater fees are applied in isolation from wide stakeholder engagement but that their design and level are influenced by lobby groups (IEEP 2017).

NGOs

Klub Przyrodników – NGO involved in criticising the lack of wider consultation in relation to the 2017 Water Law. <https://www.kp.org.pl/pl/>

Other - Examples of private firm stakeholders

Operator of wastewater treatment plants (one of many): Rybnik PWIK <https://pwik-rybnik.pl/kontakt.html>

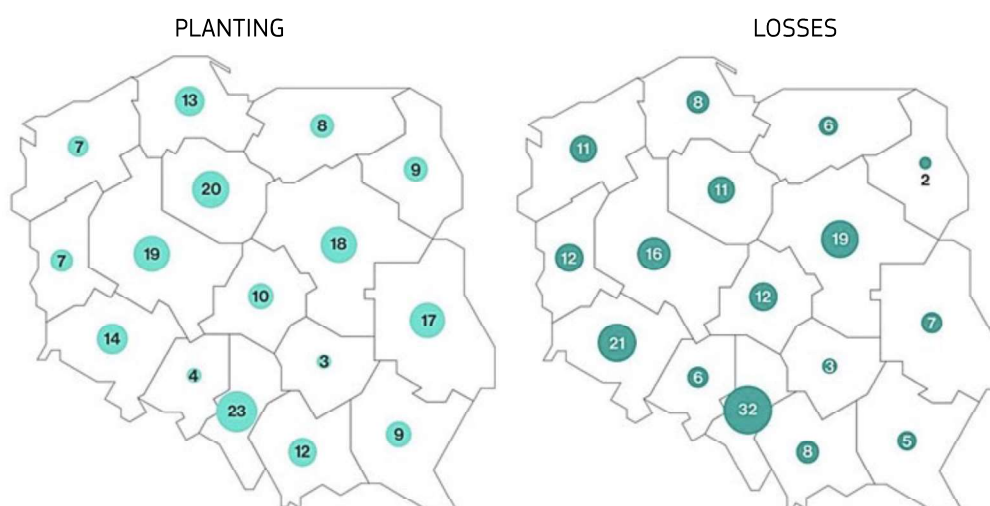
Ekologia – environmental consulting and services (including dealing with wastewater) for firms <https://ekologia.info.pl/firma.c.2>

TREE AND SHRUBS REMOVAL FEE

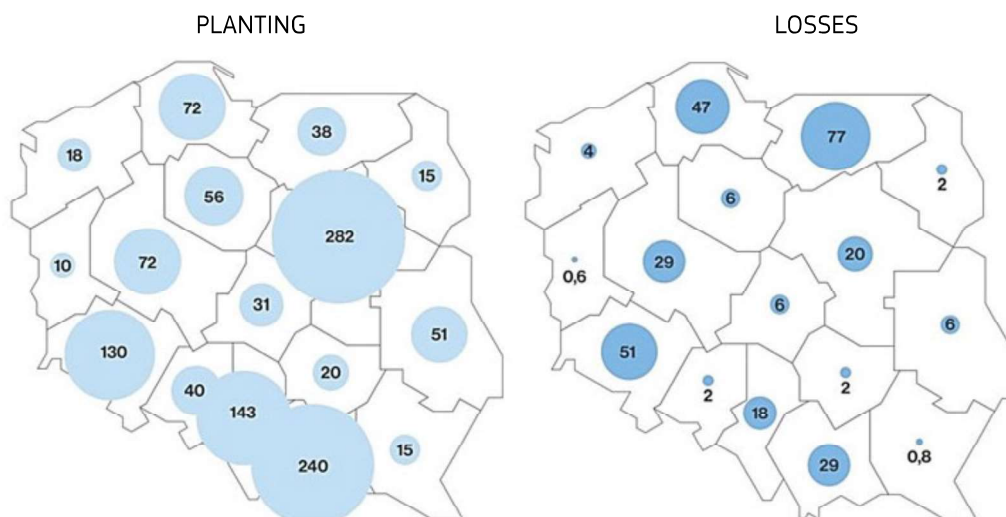
The fees for cutting down trees and shrubs have the purpose of preserving biodiversity and mitigating air pollution through the regulation of tree and shrub cutting and logging in Poland. The fees are stipulated under the most recent law amending the Nature Conservation Act which came into force in 2017. Prior to 2017, tree and shrub cutting even on private property was subject to filing for permission and the potential payment of fees. The amendment law, commonly known as "Szyszko's law", after Poland's environment minister, has been controversial as it removes the requirement for private landowners to apply for permission to cut down trees, pay compensation or plant new trees, or even to inform local authorities that trees have been or will be removed. The amendment from 2017 weakens the effectiveness of this instrument. The argument of the Government is that it protects private property rights and minimises bureaucratic costs, but the amendment has been heavily criticised.

The fee for the removal of trees and shrubs may be used only for the implementation of environmental tasks referred to in the Environmental Protection Law.

Tree planting and losses in 2017 (in thousands pieces):



Tree planting and losses in 2017 (in thousands pieces):



Source: <https://www.nik.gov.pl/aktualnosci/drzewa-w-gaszczu-przepisow.html>

Key Stakeholders

Civil society groups and NGOs, some of the key ones listed below, have been very vocal in their criticism of the amendments to the Nature Conservation Act and have organised several protest actions to draw attention to the issue. Other key stakeholder involved include government institutions, especially the Ministry of Environment, and private individuals and firms interested or involved in tree and shrub cutting.

Further information on the discussion around “Szyszko’s Law” can be found here:

<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2017/apr/07/polish-law-change-unleashes-massacre-of-trees>

<https://www.dw.com/en/widespread-tree-felling-sparks-outrage-in-poland/a-38774808>

<http://www.tf.llu.lv/conference/proceedings2019/Papers/N420.pdf>

NGOs

Gdzie jest Drzewo <https://www.facebook.com/gdziejestdrzewo/>

Greenpeace Poland: <https://www.greenpeace.org/poland/>

Client Earth – Poland – Forests - <https://www.pl.clientearth.org/lasy/>

Polish Mothers on Tree Stumps https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R09gdm1az_g



¹ https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/env_ac_tax/default/table?lang=en

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