Poles concerned about social mobility, want government to do more

The OECD’s new cross-national survey, Risks That Matter, examines people’s perceptions of social and economic risks and their views on how well government reacts to their concerns. The survey polled a representative sample of 22,000 adults in 21 OECD countries in 2018 in an effort to understand better what citizens want and need from social policy.

People in Poland are most worried, in the short run, about becoming ill or disabled. 64% of Poles list illness or disability as one of their top-three risks in the next couple of years. The second most common short-term worry is making ends meet (54%).

When looking beyond the next decade, 74% of Poles identify financial security in old age as one of their top-three risks. This is the most common result across countries (Fig. 1).

Poles are also concerned about social mobility, with nearly half (48%) reporting that they worry their children will not do as well in life as they have done. A similar share worry that they themselves will not do as well as their parents did.* This is an especially strong concern among young people: 69% of 18- to 28-year-old Poles list not doing as well as their parents’ (vis-a-vis income, job security, etc.) or as well as they envision for themselves as a top-three long-term risk (Fig. 2). This is the highest share for this age group across all the surveyed countries.

At the same time, many Poles feel disconnected from social programmes. 54% of Poles believe they would have trouble accessing public benefits easily if they needed them – a fairly large share of the population, but nevertheless lower than the cross-country average (56%).

When asked about their satisfaction with a range of public services, Poles are most pleased with education. 50% feel that they have access to good-quality and affordable education (and 30% disagree). However, a majority of Poles feel that they do not have access to good-quality and affordable public services in the areas of long-term care for the elderly, long-term care for people with disabilities, housing, and especially healthcare, where 71% of Poles feel they cannot access good-quality and affordable care.

Given these concerns, it is perhaps unsurprising that many Poles want government to help them more. Nearly three-quarters of Poles want the government to do more to ensure their economic and social security (Fig. 3).

*Values exceed 100% because respondents could select up to three answers.

Fig. 1. As in most countries, many Poles are concerned about financial security in old age

Fig. 2. Many young people in Poland worry about their future prospects

Fig. 3. Almost three out of four Poles want government to do more to safeguard their economic and social security

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