

## NIK on kindergartens

**The number of children who are not admitted to kindergartens has been increasing. Kindergartens which do not have enough places try to solve the problem on their own and accept more children than it is provided in the regulations. However, overcrowded groups may hamper children's development and pose a threat to their safety.**

**Due to the lack of places, the number of children who are not accepted to kindergartens has been constantly growing.** In 2007, 6 percent of applications were rejected, while in 2010 this number increased to 13 percent, despite new groups established successively. In the communes covered by the NIK audit, the number of new kindergartens increased by a quarter in the years 2007 - 2010. Still, according to NIK auditors, it is not enough to satisfy the growing needs.

To solve the problem on their own, pre-schools apply the only measure available to their limited budgets: they admit more children than it is permitted by the regulations. The audit conducted by NIK revealed that **in two-thirds of kindergartens the maximum permitted number of children per group, which is 25, is exceeded.** There are groups that have even as many as 32 kids. NIK alarms that overcrowded groups can hamper the development of children and, in some cases, their safety can be threatened. **The 2011/2012 season, to start after the summer holidays, will be particularly difficult,** as both five- and six-year-olds will meet in the so called "zero classes" - the last classes attended by children before they start primary schools.

NIK auditors also indicate irregularities with regard to payments for kindergartens. **Eight out of ten audited pre-schools charged parents (up to PLN 100 a month) for the so called basic services, which are, according to the law, free of charge,** without informing what services exactly this sum covered. Instead, they use vague explanations, such as, for instance, "for maintenance of the kindergarten" or "for the stay in the kindergarten". Only one commune openly admitted that the money is spent on electricity and heating. The majority of kindergartens do not return money in the case of a child's absence. NIK also found that over two-thirds of pre-schools have incomplete statutes, which do not precisely set the rules for recruitment of children.

**The audit has also showed that almost half of Polish children at the age from 3 to 5 do not attend kindergartens.** In the Lisbon Strategy, the members states of the European Union declare that by 2013, 90 percent of kids will attend pre-schools. To meet this obligation, the government has provided for a possibility to open the so called 'kindergarten groups' and 'kindergarten centers'. However, this is far not enough to satisfy the needs. **Experts who cooperate with NIK observe that such a big number of kids deprived of pre-school education keeps Poland far behind other EU member states.**

According to NIK, it is necessary to constantly increase the number of places in kindergartens and to work out a more flexible system for their functioning. It will be also necessary to introduce new forms of education for small children that do not require establishment of new kindergartens and new organisational structures. Such solutions, for example wandering teachers and meetings for children, have already proved successful in other countries.