

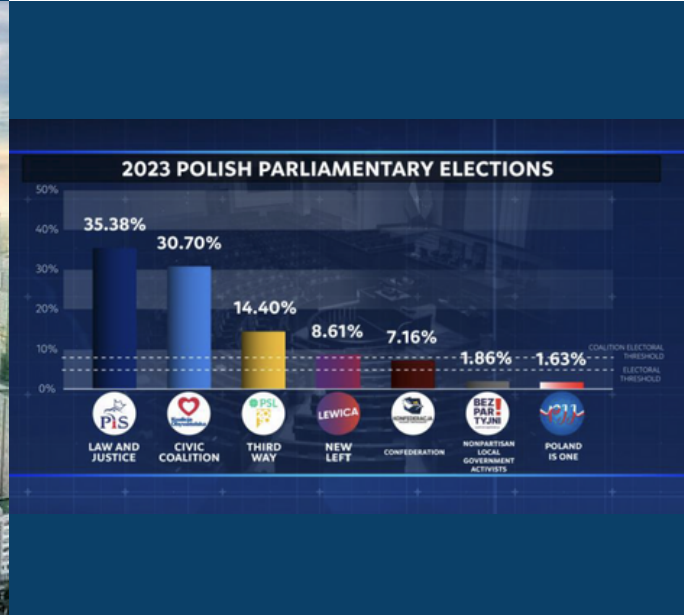
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Challenges of the healthcare sector in Poland after the 2023 elections

The recent parliamentary elections on October 15, 2023 have significantly altered the political scenario in Poland, giving rise to hope for positive changes.

However, the aftermath of the elections has been somehow marked with conflicting emotions, creating a sense of expected chaos until the formation of the new government following the fiasco of the former incumbent Law and Justice (PiS) party, which has been in power for the past eight years.

The long-awaited 15 October 2023 Parliamentary election results marked a historic moment with an unprecedented voter turnout of 74.4%, underscoring the profound divisions that have defined Poland in recent times. The election resulted in PiS emerging as the leading party. However, they fell short of securing a coalition majority in the 460-seat lower house of parliament. The Civic Coalition, headed by former and already current Prime Minister and European Council President Donald Tusk, along with the Third Way and the Left, have vowed to create a coalition government with a total of 248 seats to remove PiS from authority. Additionally, the opposition has strengthened its influence in the Senate, securing 66 seats compared to 34 of PiS.

The position of Minister of Health in Donald Tusk's government was taken by **Izabela Leszczyna**, who is a member of the Civic Coalition (KO) and the Vice-Chair of the Civic Platform? She has been associated with finance, despite being a Polish literature major in education and a teacher by profession. In the previous (PO-PSL) government from 2013-15, she served as the Deputy Minister of Finance.

She will join the not very numerous group of health ministers without a medical background. Since 1989, there have been only three such individuals. In the past, health ministers without medical education included economist Adam Niedzielski, and earlier, academic lecturer Franciszka Cegielska (in office 1999-2000), lawyer Wojciech Rudnicki (2004), and economist Marian Czeakański (also in 2004).

The lack of medical roots may expose Izabela Leszczyna to accusations of a lack of medical knowledge and understanding of the healthcare system. Expectations are very high for her, as for the new government as a whole, but she can probably also count on some initial credit and trust, especially at the beginning of her term. Due to being in office for six months already, a kind of "political honeymoon" is already passing.

Main challenges of healthcare sector in Poland (2024):

- improving access to medical services for patients
- digitization of health care
- introducing changes to the law on reproductive health
- improving the quality of medical education

The political challenges in Poland after the 15 October parliamentary elections highlight the **delicate balance** between getting back to the EU family and trying to solve the domestic issues that have been accumulating throughout recent years. As these developments unfold, it will be crucial for both Poland and the EU to find common ground in terms of determining Poland's ability to access and utilize the long-awaited EU funds effectively.

The **main challenge** facing the new government in Poland, i.e. **improving patients' access to public healthcare**, will be extremely difficult to address without increasing budget expenditure on healthcare. According to the OECD, health expenditure in Poland is 6.7% of GDP (the average in OECD countries is 9.2% of GDP), and public expenditure accounts for 5% of GDP (the OECD average is 7% of GDP). During the campaign, almost all groups called for an increase in public spending on health. Unfortunately, numerous other challenges, including the issue of defense and social security in the face of the war on Poland's eastern border, put increasing financing for the health service into question.



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