

Polish world record fundraising stream highlights Tusk's broken promises on health



Influencer Patryk 'Łatwogang' Garkowski (C), ran a charity fundraiser for children with cancer, The fundraiser, which started on April 17th, was conducted for the Cancer Fighters Foundation on the YouTube platform in the form of a long stream - an uninterrupted live broadcast lasting 9 days. The nine-day campaign raised a record amount of over 60 million EUR. EPA/LESZEK SZYMANSKI

Poland's influencer Patryk "Łatwogang" Garkowski emerged after a nine-day fundraiser for the Cancer Fighters foundation as the most successful charity streamer in global online history raising 60 million Euro.

According to the Guinness World Records the most ever raised in a live stream was 16.6 million Euros by French streamers Adrien Nougaret and Alexandre Dachary in September last year. What began as a modest campaign with a 120,000 Euro target, a figure it eclipsed within hours, quickly snowballed into a national phenomenon, drawing millions of viewers and donations from across Poland and abroad for treating cancer.

At its peak, around 1.5 million people were watching the stream as it became the most-watched live broadcast globally, with the total surging past successive milestones in quick succession – 150 million, 200 million and ultimately breaking through the 60 million EUR mark seconds after the weekend's deadline expired.

Garkowski streamed continuously for nine days from an apartment, looping a single track around the clock of a song recorded by Polish rapper Bedoes with 11-year-old cancer patient Maja Mekan, whose story inspired the campaign.

Cancer Fighters, the foundation which will receive the funds, said the money would support treatment, rehabilitation and daily care for patients and their families and that its allocation would be carried out by a board made up of Polish oncologists.

Garkowski's event attracted millions of viewers and an array of high-profile donors including Chris Martin, the lead singer of Coldplay, Poland's greatest every football player Robert Lewandowski and the country's best ever tennis star Iga Świątek. But it has also led to a political debate about how the country funds its healthcare system.

The influencer himself was anxious to steer clear of politics.

"There is no hidden agenda. All the money goes to the kids," Garkowski said during the broadcast, as organizers repeatedly appealed to keep the event "apolitical" and foster a reconciliatory tone.

This contrasted starkly with the fundraising efforts by Poland's largest charity fundraiser, Jerzy Owskiak and his WOSP which also raises money for the health service, but which has openly engaged in support of the current centre-left government led by Prime Minister Donald Tusk.

The remarkable internet fundraiser took place against the backdrop of a heated dispute about public healthcare in Poland the temperature of which has only been increased by this fundraising effort.

The Tusk government on coming into office in late 2023 promised that it would divert resources away from spending on public media towards oncological care and that it would end the annual limits on treatments being funded through the insurance system.

Neither of these promises has been kept. Public media continues to receive over 700 million Euros in government funding and the limits on treatments which may be funded have been tightened leading to longer waits for patients.

Moreover, Polish independent media have been reporting scandals involving government politicians securing privileged access for their friends and families and some oncological departments extracting contributions to their foundations to secure operations and treatment in advance of other patients.

There have also been reports of hospitals in provincial and remote areas being forced to close maternity wards. Such developments only accentuate the inequalities in the Polish health system between metropolitan and smaller urban and rural areas.

Inequalities which, argue some commentators, are reinforced by the fact that the present government draws most of its votes from metropolitan urban areas and is therefore being accused of favouring funding health care in those areas.

Adrian Zandberg, the leader of a left-wing opposition *Together* party, said the fundraiser was "a great success, but also proof that the health care system is broken" and urged tax reform.

"Today the richest pay effectively lower rates than hard-working Poles. We need progressive taxation," he said adding that taxes need to be fair and enforceable.

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