



**Maria Skóra**

## **Gender equality in Poland**

*Working Paper*

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### **1. Gender equality: facts & figures**

Poland faces two basic trends seriously affecting women. The first refers to population policy as the statistics indicate depopulation processes, progressing from the beginning of transition. Secondly, the situation of women at the labour market is specific. Participation rates among Polish women are relatively low, as well as deactivation age is low, not necessarily depending on retirement age regulations. Seeking solutions to these problems brings us to structural characteristics of the Polish labour market, its institutional facilities, as well as culturally determined model of femininity and motherhood.

#### ***Labour market***

Economic activity of Poles is one of the lowest in Europe. In particular Polish women although they are better educated than men experience difficulties at the labour market. According to nationwide statistics, professional activity in population exceeds 55%, which means that the active population was 72% of the population of working age (women aged 15-59 years, men to 15-64). Taking gender into account, less than half of women aged 15 and more participates in the labour market (by working or seeking for work). Furthermore only 2/3 of all women of working age are employed. It's 10% less in comparison to men.

Transformation of 1989 caused massive unemployment. Women were often called "transition losers", since they were the first to lose their jobs in the restructured companies. However, unemployment affects people with relatively low or general education regardless of gender. The registered unemployment rate remains at a fairly high level. Accessing European Union was a good remedy, nevertheless it still exceeds 10% of the registered unemployment. In 2011 the registered unemployment rate was around 13%, which equaled about 66% of all unemployed. Women represent 51% of all registered unemployed, the rate is higher when considering all unemployed though. When asked for reasons for labour market exclusion, the Poles point at vocational education and improving their qualifications (about 1/4). Some give up professional career as a consequence of long-term unemployment (6%). Men are more often prone to health problems (31.7%). When it comes to women, they leave their jobs because of family responsibilities nearly seven times more often than men (ca. 1/5 of all inactive).

#### ***Gender pay gap***

Women around the world earn less than men doing similar work. According to Eurostat data, up to 2009 inequality of wages in Poland equaled 9.8%, sharply dropping in 2010 to 2%. On one hand, in comparison with the European Union it's a relatively good result, as the EU average exceeds 16%. On the other hand, it might be an aftermath of world economic crisis and this very low value reflecting differences between men and women might be a result of so called "race to the bottom" and lowering working standards. This trend is not that optimistic in Poland also when applying different methodology.

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A study by Sedlak&Sedlak published in 2011 reveals that there are several factors determining differences in earnings. Firstly it's the size of the city. In Polish cities median earnings differed by 33%. Secondly, it's the level of management. The lowest positions show minimal wage differences, rising with occupational experience. Inequality in the top positions reaches 25%. At the same time income inequality between women of the lowest and the highest wages was about nine times. Best-paid men earn 12 times more than those of lowest wages. Thirdly, it's the occupational segregation - the highest wages are in masculine occupations: construction manager, developer, IT specialist. The above analysis shows that female economic activity is less valuable than male. Hence, there is a risk of treating female labour as secondary and having a smaller contribution to the welfare of the household. Secondly, if one of the partners has to give up work, it seems reasonable to maintain higher income and sacrifice a career which is financially less attractive.

### **Gender Empowerment Measure**

Women participation in politics is negligible. Before 1989 emancipation of women assumed their presence in the structures of power. Their participation in the parliament has never been as high as in the years 1976-1989, when it stood at 20%. But these are years of the marginal role of the parliament. Typically, the proportion of women ranged around 13-16%. After 1989 proportion of women in parliament doubled, from 10% in the first term to 20% in 2008. The situation in the Senate is less favorable - the percentage of women hovers around 8%. Referring to the lower-level authorities, the situation is more diverse: participation of women in local authorities vary from 3% in the Podlasie region to even above 30% in Małopolska and Mazovia . Human Development Report 2011 locates Poland on the 39th place in the world. Women's participation in politics is diverse in the world and even within the European Union itself. Barriers may be institutional as a way of holding elections - proportional or majority. Participation of women in politics depends not only on the decision of voters, but the number on electoral lists and the order to enter parliament. Also cultural barriers, associated with the perception of women in society, their capacity and competence, confidence in the discharge of public functions, as well as moral evaluations take time career, not family play important role. Gender stereotypes also affect the perception of women themselves in these categories, the conviction of a man's politics, lack of willingness or ability to self-organize.

## **2. Hot issues in Poland**

### **•Unpaid labour and “double workday syndrome”**

Time budget studies indicate that women spend more time on household duties than men. The Eurostat study presented in 2006 showed that a woman on average spends 4:45 hours daily on unpaid domestic

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labour and 2.5 hours at paid work. Respectively men spend 4:15 hours gainfully working and 2:22 housekeeping. Also, men have one hour more spare time than women. Most of the work performed at home has market values as they can be bought as professional services such as babysitting, housekeeping, cleaning, catering, etc. There are various ways of estimating market value of unpaid domestic labour. In Poland evaluation of domestic work carried out in 2007 revealed estimated value of 600 Euros monthly, which would rise GDP by 23%. Statistical office based on a study of time budgets reported value in the range of 300 Euros. Key issue concerning unpaid labour is exclusion from labour market, as well as marginalization from social security system due to limited participation in redistribution.

### **•Lack of institutional care for children**

Exclusion from the labour market due to care work is often prolonged and continuous - few mothers choose mix parental leave and work. Labour Force Survey from 2006 confirmed that it's mostly women who perform care work, not only taking care for children under 14 but also the elderly over 60. Moreover, they also get involved in care for siblings, grandchildren, relatives or friends. Absence from the labour market results in losing social security and increased economic dependence on a partner or social transfers. Meanwhile, access to institutional care for children in Poland is insufficient. In the past 20 years, the number of places in day nurseries and nursery units decreased significantly: from almost 96 000 in 1990 to about 40 000 in 1995 and further 30 000 in 2009. A similar situation refers to kindergartens: at the turn of 1991-2 there were more than 12 300 kindergartens. By the year 2008 their number dramatically decreased to 7800 kindergartens. It mostly affected rural areas, where the number of kindergartens decreased by half. Due to compulsory preschooling 91.2% of children aged 6 years attended kindergartens. Children aged 3-5 years use institutional care to a much lesser extent - less than 60%. Cities and countryside vary significantly. In the countryside 1/5 of children of preschooling age stay at home. As an alternative to liquidated public institutions Act on care providers to children of less than 3 years of age was introduced in December 2010. It pushes the system towards commercialization or privatization of care services for children, making the access dependent on financial means.

### **•Precarious labour**

It seems that development of forms of employment in Poland heads in a wrong direction. Destandardized labour markets may be beneficial to businesses owners and employees, but it brings about precarious working conditions. The Polish legal system has not yet developed forms of safe and flexible employment. Instead, all forms of flexible employment based on Civic code, which is not subject to Labour Code, securing all workers laws such as right to maternity leave, holidays, limited working hours and partially or thoroughly excluded from social security. Moreover, they are not allowed to unite in Trade Unions. Direct consequences are insecure situations at the labour market: insecure earnings,

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insecure employment. Today, 1/3 of all working population in Poland is employed in form of civil contracts, not included in Labour Code.

### **•Pensions**

Since January 1999 the pension system in Poland has undergone significant reforms. It continues to be universal and obligatory, conditional on labour market participation, but the logic of calculation changed thoroughly. The reform was justified by the demographic trends (aging of the society) and an increasing economic dependency. The new three-pillar system was founded on the idea of an increased individual responsibility. In the previous PAYG system (based on solidarity principle and using current contributions to cover pension liabilities) life expectancy was never considered. The new system was said to enable conscious management over future benefits. It was also believed it would help to increase households and individual saving rates, equivalency and self-sufficiency of transfers. This type of solution, however, requires an appropriate income level and investment opportunities. Women in the pension system both before and after the reform are in a precarious situation - the consequences of gender adopt a clearly economic sense. Women are disfavoured in terms of retirement benefits. They earn less because of the absences, occupational segregation (feminization in the professions) and remain at lower positions ("glass ceiling" or "sticky floor" effects). More frequent absenteeism is primarily caused by reproductive functions and care duties. Periods of care leave are calculated on the basis of nursing allowance, which is very unfavourable in comparison to wages level. Despite equal rights, women bare higher costs of their gender: unpaid caring labour, lower returns to participation in the labour market and thus – risk of partial exclusion from pension system .Moreover, lately plans have been launched to extend retirement age to 67 for both sexes. It has brought about vivid reaction of Trade Unions, as well as women's lobby.

### **3. Current political situation**

#### **•Legal system**

Polish law does not provide a comprehensive guarantee of gender equality, nor provides for delegated authority to hear cases of violations. The Act on equal treatment, implemented in December 2011 due to the pressure the European Union is one element of the implementation of EU obligations. This Act, however, is a minimum - it does not apply to the sphere of private and family life, mass media and advertisements, access and delivery of goods and educational services, which are crucial for gender equality. Moreover, equality is granted by Constitution and Labour Code. The Constitution of the Polish Republic launched in 1997 ensures all freedoms and human and civil rights, while respecting universal international standards. In particular, it prohibits discrimination on any ground in the social, political and

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economic life and confirms equality of men and women in all areas. The Labour Code guarantees equal rights resulting from equal duties, particularly equal treatment of men and women in employment. Discrimination is considered unacceptable in any form and on any reason. Due to the requirement of post-accession alignment, the Labour Code has been supplemented by section 2a. "Equal treatment in employment" what prohibits discrimination and defines the importance of direct and indirect discrimination. The Labour Code also protects parenthood, particularly motherhood. To sum up, issues related to gender equality are scattered throughout polish law, making them invisible or overlooked in practice.

### **•Institutions**

In 2001, under pressure of European Union Government a Representative for Equal Status of Men and Women was launched by leftist Prime Minister Leszek Miller (SLD). Izabela Jaruga Nowacka was the first person to take this post, later on replaced by Professor Magdalena Środa, well known philosopher and feminist. In 2005 rightwing prime minister Kazimierz Marcinkowski (PiS) abolished the office. It has been partially restored in 2008 by current liberal prime minister, Donald Tusk (PO), but not given wider competences. Nowadays Government Representative for Equal Treatment covers wide aspect of all discrimination acts. In 2008 the office has been entrusted to Elzbieta Radziszewska, who proved to be conservative and gender-blind, causing widespread protests on her being in charge of the office, specially after her faux passes towards LGBT. Ever since for the elections in October 2011, Agnieszka Kozłowska-Rajewicz has taken over the office. Not much can be said as for now, but she seems to have a relatively good background to focus also on women issues.

### **•Politicians**

Progressive feminist politician, Izabela Jaruga-Nowacka associated with leftwing parties coalition SLD-UP died in April 2010 in an airplane crash. She was not only a Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Social Policy, but also a feminist activist. Her tragic death left empty space on institutional political scene in terms of gender related issues and equality policy. However, after the elections of 2011 a new female politician has emerged. Wanda Nowicka, representing liberal Palikot's Movement has been a leader of feminist NGO and activist very much engaged in protection of reproductive rights and health of women. She has been granted the office of Deputy Marshal of the lower house of Parliament. As for now, she actively tries to rise gender-related questions into mainstream discourse by organizing or patronizing various events, as well as publicly commenting on current issues from female point of interest.

### 4. Positions & strategies

#### •Parties

None of parliamentary parties is led by a woman. All of them however have “programs for women”, dedicated to gender issues. Most of them are baseline ideas, transformed neither into specific tools, nor actions. Latest right-wing liberal programs refer to quotas in executive boards in public sector, enhancing women in business, promoting work-life balance by flexible employment. The conservatives put stress on fighting domestic violence and including housewives/mothers in large families with male breadwinner into social security system. Social democrats address women with issues related to customs, such as abortion, as well as accessible social services and parent-friendly employment environment. Liberal Palikot’s Movement has lately launched a framework program “Women-friendly Parliament”, consisting of monthly debates with representatives of women lobby and movements on various current topics. The Women's Party and Greens 2004 have more interest and solutions referring to gender equality, but they are not represented in Parliament.

#### •Trade Unions

The biggest Trade Unions have special departments or at least officers dealing with gender issues. The All-Poland Alliance of Trade Unions (OPZZ) largest organization has launched Women’s Commission, delivering opinions, resolutions and other positions on matters concerning women’s rights and equal opportunities in all areas of professional, social and private life in cooperation with central and local authorities, NGOs, employers organizations. The second largest Trade Union NSZZ Solidarność has a coordinator dealing with gender issues. Women’s Section has regional and central dimensions. Its basic goal is to motivate female members to take actions and be active in Trade Union’s structures. On the opposite to OPZZ, this section has a rather endogenous character. Also anarchist “Workers Initiative” has an intercollegiate division named “Women with Initiative”.

#### •NGOs

Women movement in Poland is based on III sector activity. These are various grassroots organizations, dealing with protection of women’s rights, gender-based violence, respecting workers’ rights, sexual education and also academic research or cultural and artistic activity.

### Topics and networks of NGOs working at gender issues

Women movement in Poland gets more radical, what definitely is connected with the ongoing demolition of the welfare state, as well as worsening social conditions due to world economic crisis. Currently, main focal points for Polish feminists are:

- social dumping and worsening working conditions;
- gender pay gap;
- lack of childcare;
- violating reproductive rights;
- gender-based violence.

#### •*Networks*

In 2009 the Congress of Women has been launched as mainstream social movement, association and annual conference taking place in Warsaw. The purpose of the Congress is to diagnose the status of women in Poland in various areas from the moment of transition, as well as its improvement. Various questions emerge, as Congress members and participants come from various backgrounds: entrepreneurs, politicians, academics, celebrities, Trade Unions, NGOs. Congress of Women is criticized as an establishment-based movement basically representing liberal feminism perspective, which is not sensible for class representation and economic issues. It is, however, noticeable by authorities and government.

Referring to other gender-oriented NGOs, they become most vivid and visible during the celebration of 8th March. Each year demonstrations called “Manifa” are organized in various Polish cities. There is no general theme, each organizing committee chooses for themselves which key issues to be highlighted and stood for each year. Demonstrations take place on Sundays possibly closest to International Women's Day and march through city centers, they gather NGOs and Trade Unions. No political parties are allowed in the demonstrations. Networking takes place on a very basic level between activists supporting each other in organizing local actions.