The Policy on Gender Equality in Poland - Update 2014

In-depth analysis for the FEMM Committee
The Policy on Gender Equality in Poland - Update

Abstract

Upon request of the FEMM committee, this in-depth analysis presents a review of the most important legislation, institutional arrangements and policy programs with regard to gender equality in Poland. In particular, the following policy fields are covered: women in political decision-making, reproductive rights, trafficking in human beings and domestic violence, access to different forms of employment, as well as the policies addressing the reconciliation of work and family life. The final section describes the problem of public attitudes towards gender and gives examples of programs aimed at counteracting gender stereotypes.
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<tr>
<td>EC</td>
<td>European Commission</td>
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<tr>
<td>NAP</td>
<td>National Action Plan (for Equal Treatment)</td>
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<tr>
<td>PIS</td>
<td>Prawo i Sprawiedliwość (Law and Justice)</td>
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<td>PO</td>
<td>Platforma Obywatelska (Civic Platform)</td>
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<tr>
<td>PSL</td>
<td>Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe (Polish People’s Party)</td>
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<tr>
<td>SLD</td>
<td>Sojusz Lewicy Demokratycznej (Alliance of the Democratic Left)</td>
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<tr>
<td>UP</td>
<td>Unia Pracy (Union of Labour)</td>
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<td>UW</td>
<td>Unia Wolności (Alliance of Freedom)</td>
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The main goal of this note is to present a review of the most important legislation, institutional arrangements and policy programs with regard to gender equality in Poland.

The first chapter presents the institutional and legal setting of gender equality policy in Poland, with the Plenipotentiary for Equal Treatment as the central government institution for monitoring and carrying out the policies aimed at combating discrimination. The second chapter outlines the most important developments in the following policy fields: women in political decision-making, reproductive rights, trafficking in human beings and domestic violence, access to different forms of employment, as well as the policies addressing the reconciliation of work and family life. The improvements that took place during the last five years include establishing an electoral gender quota system, extending the duration of (the basic) maternity leave to 20 weeks, introduction of paternity leave and increase in the accessibility of pre-school education. At the same time, low availability of childcare for children under three remains a problem for an effective work-life balance for women, and this is accompanied by a relatively small engagement of fathers in child care. Other challenges include: limited reproductive rights, low level of sex education at schools, or remaining gender stereotypes in the popular culture and in employment. Finally, even though the electoral gender quota has increased the number of women on electoral lists, it did not translate to a considerable increase of women’s participation in politics.
INTRODUCTION: CONTEXT FOR POLICY MAKING IN POLAND

The Republic of Poland has the largest population of all the post-communist countries which joined the European Union. With over 38 million inhabitants, it is the 6th most populous country in the whole of the EU.

Poland became an independent state in 1918 after 123 years of partition between Austria, Prussia and Russia, which led to huge regional disparities in terms of the economic and social development of the country. After the Second World War Poland was left under Soviet influence and consequently a state-socialist system was imposed. The next major upheaval was a result of the actions of the Solidarity movement and the so-called “Round Table” talks which led to the establishment of a democratic system in 1989. In 1998, the country joined the NATO, and in 2004, Poland became a member of the EU.

During the first years following the fall of state-socialism, Poland had to deal with a huge economic crisis, and so stabilisation of the economy (stopping hyperinflation) was the primary task of the first governments. The Polish population suffered severely from unemployment, which, in the early 2000s, exceeded 20% (for women, while for men it reached over 19%). Partially due to the opening of labour markets in some of the Western EU countries, many of the unemployed emigrated from Poland and found jobs outside the country.

Another trend after 1989 was the rise of “anti-feminism” which spread all over the post-communist part of Europe, mostly due to the aversion towards the gender equality policies that were part of the state-socialist policies and official propaganda. This was also true in Poland, where the traditional vision of the woman’s role within the family and society was very popular among the new political elites governing the country. Consequently, gender equality has not become a significant policy issue.

And yet Poland needed to introduce important amendments to legislation in the EU accession process. The national machinery for gender equality was changed several times together with the political composition of the governments, but it has remained in place. Outside of the government, many women’s organisations conduct a great deal of initiatives and actions aimed at the enhancement of gender equality in Poland and have become important actors in this field, promoting equal opportunities through awareness raising campaigns, monitoring, lobbying and in the preparation of policy proposals.

Importantly, Poland is often regarded as a “Catholic” country, as more than 90% of the population declare themselves Catholics. Additionally, the Catholic Church is often regarded as having been one of the key actors in the pursuit for democracy, when Poland was still under “communist” rule.

The current government was formed in 2007 and again after the elections of 2011 by the political coalition of two parties: the Civic Platform (Platforma Obywatelska-PO) and the Polish People’s Party (Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe-PSL).

During the recent economic crisis, Poland was the only country, where GDP still increased (by 1.6% in 2009 and 2013). At the same time, though, the Polish public debt (as a percentage of the GDP) has increased: from 45.0% in 2007 to 58.2% in 2013. However, this increase in public debt was one of the smallest ones when compared to other European countries.
1. GENERAL DISPOSITIONS

KEY FINDINGS

- The most important legal provisions with regard to equal treatment of women and men are included in the Act on Implementation of Several EU Regulations on Equal Treatment from 2010 that provides the legal ground for the Plenipotentiary for Equal Treatment, as well as delegates part of the responsibilities for monitoring the principle of equal treatment to the Human Rights Defender.

- There is no separate gender equality machinery, as discrimination on the basis of gender is one of several fields of discrimination covered by the activities of the Plenipotentiary.

- Another important key government-level document for gender equality is the National Action Plan for Equal Treatment 2013-2016.

1.1. Key legislation

According to the new Constitution adopted in 1997, Poland assures equal rights for women and men in all spheres of life. In particular, Article 33 of the Constitution states that “men and women shall have equal rights (...) regarding education, employment and promotion, and shall have the right to equal compensation for work of similar value, to social security, to hold office, and to receive public honours and decorations”. Additionally, Article 18 defines marriage as “being a union of a man and a woman” and guarantees the protection of “family, parenthood and motherhood”. Article 71 states that mothers before and after birth should receive assistance from the public authorities.

Poland has ratified most of the international legal acts (or signed non-binding documents, like declarations) supporting gender equality including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), and the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. The ratified international agreements are an especially important resource for the legal framework for gender equality in Poland as they are among the sources of universally binding law in the Polish Constitution (Art. 87).

Certainly, joining the EU contributed to a general enhancement of the legal framework for gender equality, including considerable amendments to the Labour Code in line with the acquis communautaire.

Subsequently, the Polish Parliament adopted the Act on implementation of several EU regulations on equal treatment\(^1\) in 2010, which was signed by the President in December that same year (as the last stage of the legislative process). The law implements several EU Directives including Directive 2006/54/EC on the implementation of the principle of equal opportunities and equal treatment of men and women in matters of employment and occupation as well as the Council Directive 2000/78/EC of 27 November 2000

\(^1\) Ustawa z dnia 3 grudnia o wdrożeniu niektórych przepisów Unii Europejskiej w zakresie równego traktowania, [Act of 3rd of December 2010 on the implementation of several European Union regulations in the field of equal treatment], Journal of Law 2010, no 254, item 1700.
establishing a general framework for equal treatment in employment and occupation. The new law provides a general framework for the policy of equal treatment in Poland and legally strengthens the office of the Plenipotentiary for Equal Treatment (previously this was handled by governmental executive acts). While the previous drafts included the establishment of a central institution for monitoring gender equality that would be politically independent, the final act that was adopted states that the Plenipotentiary is appointed and dismissed by the Prime Minister. Moreover, it also enumerates the “Human Rights Defender” (Ombuds person) as the second central institution responsible for carrying out policies of equal treatment, which is politically independent. The Ombudsman's tasks include examining facts described by a complainant, applying to another control body for examination of the case if he/she establishes that the principle of equal treatment has been violated or in cases, where only private entities are involved, the ombudsman can indicate legal measures to which a given person is entitled. As the Act lists a closed catalogue of grounds of possible discrimination, it was criticised by a considerable number of NGOs (Siedlecka 2010).

Finally, according to the assessment provided by the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) with regard to the implementation of the corresponding Convention, the Act “does not provide protection from sex and gender-based discrimination in areas such as education, health care and private and family life”, as well as intersecting forms of discrimination (UN 2014).

### 1.2. National machinery for gender equality

The office of the Plenipotentiary is not a new institution. In 1986, still within the old system, the Governmental Plenipotentiary for Women was established, the first of its kind in the communist bloc.

After several modifications to its title and mandate, Elżbieta Radziszewska became the new **Plenipotentiary for Equal Treatment** after PO and PSL formed a new government in 2008. She was appointed Secretary of State in the Chancellery of Prime Minister (so the

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2. See the Ombudsman's webpage, were the list of activities with regard to equal treatment are listed https://www.rpo.gov.pl/en/content/what-does-human-rights-defender-do, last time visited 27.01.2015.
3. It was designed to introduce gender equality policy in every sphere of life, and to shape policy towards family, youth and children. In 1991, the Council of Ministers introduced a similar post, however, the “and family” was added to its name. One of the well-known holders of the post - Anna Popowicz - was dismissed in 1992 by a new government. As the Alliance of the Democratic Left (Sojusz Lewicy Demokratycznej-SLD) together with PSL gained power in 1993, a new Plenipotentiary was appointed. However, in 1997 – after parliamentary elections and new coalition coming to power - the word “women” disappeared from the name of the office and policies towards the “family” as such became the priority of the post holders.
4. In 2001, when SLD was the biggest party in the Parliament and formed a government together with PSL, the Prime Minister established the Government Plenipotentiary for the Equal Status of Women and Men, in the rank of Secretary of State in the Chancellery of the Prime Minister. The position was held by Izabela Jaruga-Nowacka, the leader of the Union of Labour (Unia Pracy-UP). The office's actions were aimed at monitoring gender equality in different spheres of life, reflecting and referring to the idea of “gender mainstreaming”. After being appointed Deputy Prime Minister in 2004, Jaruga-Nowacka was replaced by Magdalena Środa, a Polish academic and intellectual.

In the following elections of 2005, two new parties (the League of Polish Families, Liga Polskich Rodzin - LPR, and Self-Defense - Samoobrona) had their representatives elected and formed the new government with the Law and Justice party (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość – PiS). The name and status of the office was changed again: Joanna Kluzik-Rostkowska was nominated the Plenipotentiary for Women, Family and Countering Discrimination. The administrative rank of the Plenipotentiary was changed from Secretary of State to Undersecretary of State, and the office was moved from the Chancellery of Prime Minister to the Ministry of Social Policy and Labour and functioned as a separate Ministerial Department. The Department was very active in organising several national campaigns mainly aimed at promoting women’s economic and professional activity.
office came back to the Chancellery from the Ministry of Labour). Her successors were Agnieszka Kozłowska-Rajewicz (2011) and Małgorzata Fuszara following the election of her predecessor to the European Parliament in May 2014. The main tasks of the Plenipotentiary are now described in the new aforementioned law from 2010 (on the implementation of several EU regulations relating to equal treatment) and include the preparation of policy drafts, monitoring of equal treatment in public institutions and public sphere, interventions in public debate or reactions to publicly displayed acts of discrimination (for example, in media), as well as cooperation with non-governmental organisations and social partners with the aim of enhancing equal treatment in different spheres of life. The Plenipotentiary is also obliged to prepare reports to international bodies on the implementation of international agreements and treaties on equal treatment and non-discrimination. Apart from addressing possible discrimination on the grounds of gender, the Plenipotentiary is responsible for counteracting discrimination with respect to race, ethnicity, nationality, religion or beliefs, political views, age, sexual orientation, and marital and family status.

It should be noted, thus, that there is no separate government office/central administration level agenda that would be solely responsible for the policy of gender equality in Poland. Additionally, the Plenipotentiary has no separate funds and only limited human resources, as the Office of the Plenipotentiary is an integral part of the Chancellery of the Prime Minister.

1.3. **Key government-level documents**

As a consequence of the Beijing Platform, a National Action Plan was adopted in 1997 in cooperation with civil society organisations. However, it was discontinued after the elections later in 1997. A new plan was developed for the years 2003-2005. Afterwards, during a period of eight years, there has been not one central comprehensive document that would guide government policy on equal treatment or gender equality in particular.

The National Action Plan for Equal Treatment 2013-2016 (NAP), adopted on 12th of December 2013, is based on the (abovementioned) Act on the implementation of several EU regulations on equal treatment dating from 2010. The Plenipotentiary for Equal Treatment is the main actor responsible for its implementation. The NAP contains the medium-term goals and instruments of the government's policy for equal treatment. The document is in line with the key government-level documents with regard to the labour market, education, human capital development, the policies against violence and the migration policy. Not only does the NAP refer to the European Strategy for Gender Equality 2010-2015 and to the European Pact for Gender Equality, but also to the overall EU gender equality policies, and to the Beijing Platform for Action. The NAP is a comprehensive document diagnosing the situation with regard to equal opportunities in various policy spheres, and discussing alternative trends in policies and research on equal opportunities, including an emphasis on gender equality.

The document consists of three parts, i.e.:

*Non-discrimination clause and the principle of equal treatment within the Polish legislation currently in force*

The NAP lists the national and international legal acts to which it refers, provides legal mechanisms for enforcing the effective implementation of the principle of equal opportunities, and lists the main institutions responsible.
The areas of intervention

According to the NAP, the Plenipotentiary should monitor and promote equal treatment of men and women in the following areas:

- anti-discrimination policy;
- equal treatment on the labour market and within the social security system;
- counteracting violence, including domestic violence and the protection of persons experiencing violence;
- equal treatment in the education system;
- equal treatment in healthcare;
- equal treatment with regard to the access of goods and services.

The main activities of the Plenipotentiary for the Equal Treatment in these fields are monitoring, the organisation of awareness raising campaigns, the promotion of gender equality and counteracting gender stereotypes, the dissemination of information on the legal provisions, delivering and issuing opinions on legal acts and drafts, as well as on the government’s reforms that might impact gender relations.

Further according to the NAP, the Plenipotentiary's office should also engage in research on gender equality. One of the office’s goals is to prepare the methodology for calculating the gender pay gap, to conduct research among migrant men and women on the Polish labour market, or the analysis of the family and guardianship law.

The actions are planned in cooperation with various ministries, local governments and in particular, with the involvement of non-governmental organizations.

Implementation and monitoring

While the Plenipotentiary for Equal Treatment is the central institution responsible for the implementation of the actions foreseen in the NAP, all major central administration institutions are involved and should be aware and actively implement the policy directions (including gender mainstreaming). At the same time, no separate funds were earmarked from the central budget for the implementation of the NAP from the side of the public administration; however, the document states that funds should be secured in order to effectuate the cooperation with the NGOs.

The programme's final evaluation report should be concluded in the first half of 2016, which should be followed by recommendations. Additionally, mid-term evaluation reports are to be issued. The basic monitoring body should be the inter-ministerial team for the implementation of the NAP that was to include both representatives of the central administration institutions, as well as experts and representatives of NGOs (the latter as observers).

Up to this point (January 2015), the Plenipotentiary has issued one report about the implementation of the NAP for the year 2013. However, the monitoring team has not been appointed yet.
The government was criticised for not providing adequate funding for the implementation of the NAP, as well as for not placing enough emphasis on the cooperation with the Polish NGOs dealing with the issues of gender equality (Karat 2014, UN 2014).
2. GENDER EQUALITY POLICY AREAS

2.1. Equal participation in politics and in economic decision-making

KEY FINDINGS

- Since 2011, an electoral gender quota system is in force. The new system leads to a considerable increase in female candidates, but female MPs still represent only one-fourth of all seats in the Parliament.
- The current government comprises 19 ministers, among which are five women.
- Women comprised 15% of the supervisory boards and 7% of CEOs in 2013, and these figures have not changed much since 2010.

2.1.1. Political decision-making

Poland was one of the first countries in Europe where women were granted the right to vote (1918). Currently (January 2015), women represent 24% of all MPs in the Sejm (the lower chamber of Parliament), and 13% of the Senate (the upper chamber of Parliament). The government (the executive) comprises 19 Ministers, including 5 women who are heads of the following ministries: 1) Interior, 2) National Education, 3) Science and Higher Education, 4) Culture and National Heritage, and 5) Infrastructure and Development.

Until 2011, no legislation aimed at increasing women's participation in politics had been adopted. In the absence of national regulations, some political parties introduced gender quotas for their candidate lists for national elections.\(^5\)

In January 2011, an electoral gender quota system was adopted for parliamentary and local elections as well as for the elections to the European Parliament. Candidate lists should include at least 35% of the representatives of one gender. The law does not relate to elections for the Senate, because of the majoritarian voting system. This new legislation had been initiated by a broad umbrella organisation called the “Congress of Women”, though in the initial proposal submitted by the Congress quotas were established at the level of 50%.

The first national elections that required all parties to place more women on the lists took place in October 2011. One of the possible effects of the new legislation was that the number of female candidates, which was 3064, amounted to twice as much as compared to 2007. In general, the percentage of women on the candidate lists varied from 40% to 48%, however, only 21% of all the candidate lists had women at the top (Druciarek and Niżyńska 2014). The result was, consequently, that the percentage of women elected to the Sejm

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\(^5\) For the 2001 elections, the following parties introduced 30% quotas: SLD with the Labour Union, and the Union of Freedom (Unia Wolności -UW). Furthermore, the SLD guaranteed a 40% electoral gender quota in the local elections of 2010.
increased only by four percentage points as compared with 2007 (from 20% to 24%). The percentage of female candidates on the lists for the elections to the European Parliament in May 2014 equalled 44% (N=557, twice as many as in 2009), however, only 12 women were elected (out of 51 Polish MEPs, one more woman compared to 2009).

New parliamentary elections are to take place in the autumn of 2015, preceded by the presidential elections (the actual date has not yet been decided). Among the political parties that are currently officially registered as political groups in the Parliament, only the SLD has decided to propose a female candidate for the President of the Republic of Poland.\textsuperscript{6} So far, all Polish Presidents were male.\textsuperscript{7}

2.1.2. Economic decision-making

The Ministry of Labour and Social Policy issued a report on women and men’s participation in economic decision-making in 2014 (MPiPS). Its findings included figures for women’s share in decision-making positions of listed companies in the period between 2010 and 2013. In general, women comprised 15% of the supervisory boards and 7% of CEOs for 2013 and these figures have not changed much since 2010. When all supervisory boards are taken into account (except for the central banks), the female share equals 10.3%, which is below the average EU level, which stands at 16.6% (EC 2013). Though the Plenipotentiary supports the “Directive on Women on Boards”\textsuperscript{8}, the Sejm (lower house of the Parliament) has voted against the proposal in January 2013, arguing that the proposal for the Directive is “incompatible with the principle of subsidiarity, as referred to in Article 5(3) of the Treaty of the European Union”\textsuperscript{9}. The NAP obliges the Ministry of Treasury to implement the principle of gender balance on boards of the state-owned companies, i.e. to have at least 30% of the underrepresented sex on state owned company boards.

\textsuperscript{6} Additionally, two female MPs that do not belong to any officially registered political group within the Parliament are currently collecting signatures necessary for being listing as a candidates, one representing the Green Party, and another one - Union of Labour, both parties outside of the Parliament.
\textsuperscript{7} Lech Wałęsa, Aleksander Kwaśniewski, Lech Kaczyński and Bronisław Komorowski.
\textsuperscript{9} Resolution of the Sejm of the Republic of Poland of 4 January on Declaring the proposal of a Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council on improving the gender balance among non-executive directors of companies listed on stock exchanges and related measures to be incompatible with the principle of subsidiarity, with annex.
2.2. Women in the labour market

**KEY FINDINGS**

- The Labour Code guarantees *equal treatment* and *non-discrimination* on the labour market. Many of these provisions were adopted in the process of transposition of the EU Directives.

- The *gender employment gap* exceeds 13 percentage points while there are only slightly more unemployed women than men (the difference equalling 1.2 percentage points).

- According to the official comparative statistics, Poland has **one of the smallest gender pay gaps in the EU** (6.4% for 2013). However, the results of the national research suggest that the gap might be as high as 20-25%.

- The level of average *women’s pensions* is about one third lower than the old-age pension benefit for men.

2.2.1. *Equal treatment provisions and anti-discrimination measures*

Before 1996 the Polish **Labour Code** did not include any reference to the principle of equal treatment of women and men. In 1996\(^{10}\) the first provision was introduced which stipulated that:

- Employees have equal rights resulting from the performance of identical duties; this applies in particular to the equal treatment of men and women in the area of work (Article 112), and

- Any direct or indirect discrimination in work relations, especially on the grounds of gender, age, disability, race, nationality, beliefs - especially political or religious - and trade union membership is prohibited.

The major changes in the Labour Code regarding gender equality were introduced in two waves: in 2001 (in force since 2002) and in 2004. The changes to the Labour Code in 2001\(^{11}\) were driven by the lack of precise **definitions** that could be used to assess the discriminatory behaviour of employers. Therefore, the amendments included:

- equal treatment of women and men in establishing and dissolving employment relations;

- relationships, employment conditions, promotion and access to training for raising professional qualifications (Article 183a Paragraph 1);


The prohibition of direct discrimination as violating the principle of equal treatment of women and men (Article 183a Paragraphs 2 and 3 and Article 183b);

the right to uniform remuneration for equal work or work of equal value regardless of gender (Article 183c Paragraphs 1-3);

the right to compensation of a person who faced violation of the equal treatment principle by his/her employer (Article 183d);

guarantees that employees must not face any negative consequences for claiming their rights due to violations of the principle of equal treatment in employment (Article 183e).

Due to the incorporation of the EU Directives in the Polish legal system, the following amendments dealing with anti-discrimination measures and equal treatment were included in the Labour Code in 2004:

- definition of direct discrimination (Article 183a Paragraph 3);
- definition of sexual harassment; treatment of sexual harassment as gender discrimination (Article 183a Paragraph 6).

Though not central to discrimination on the labour market (which is the case of labour contracts regulated by the abovementioned acts), the Act of 3 December 2010 on the implementation of several European Union regulations regarding equal treatment refers to atypical employment (Civil Code contracts) and has effect for male and female workers. Besides, this Act indicates the Human Rights Defender as an independent equality body along the Plenipotentiary for Equal Treatment. However, the implementation of these provisions is not seen as sufficient by some NGOs – especially in terms of monitoring and combating discrimination on the labour market.

### 2.2.2. Employment rate and temporary employment

With regard to the situation on the labour market, according to Eurostat in 2010, the employment rate for the whole population was equal to 59%, while it was 53% for women and 65.6% for men. While the overall employment rate (population 15-64) increased to 60% in 2013, the employment gap remained and even increased slightly with an employment rate of 66.6% for men and 53.4% for women. Moreover, it has been found that the employment rates are positively correlated with a higher level of education, while the gender gap in employment rates decreases with higher levels of education.

Poland has the highest rate of temporary employees of the whole EU – over 28% for both women and men (2014). At the same time, women use temporary contracts almost to the same extent as men do. While 29.3% of men worked on the basis of fixed-term contracts in the last quarter of 2014, the same indicator for women equalled 28.1% (Eurostat). Other forms of atypical employment include civil code contracts (2.3% of employees and 24.3% of persons looking for a job), and self-employment (7% of all employees) (Czapiński and

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The European Commission has repeatedly stressed the problem of labour market segmentation in Poland, a possible misuse of temporary employment contracts as well as relatively high incidence of civil-law contracts.\textsuperscript{13}

The Eurostat LFS data covering the period from the 3\textsuperscript{rd} quarter of 2011 to the 3rd quarter of 2014 shows that the unemployment rate declined from 9.7\% to 8.6\% (seasonally adjusted), with a gender gap of approximately 1.2 percentage points at the end of the analysed period. Women remain in the unemployment registries longer than men – the average duration of unemployment for men is 11 months while for women – 13 months (2013). Over 58\% of persons unemployed for more than 24 months were women (2013).\textsuperscript{14}

The gap was smaller than the EU28 average (which equals to 1.3 percentage points). Part-time employment is not particularly popular in Poland: in 2013, only 10.4\% of Polish women worked part-time, while the EU average is 32.3\%. For Polish men the figure is 4.5 \% (against the EU average of 8.7\%).

\subsection*{2.2.3. Gender pay gap}

When compared to the rest of the EU Member States concerning the size of gender pay gap, Poland demonstrates an improvement over the last decade: According to Eurostat the unadjusted (raw) gender pay gap in Poland decreased from 14.9\% in 2007 to 6.4\% in 2013, representing one of the lowest scores in the whole EU. However, Eurostat’s data for Poland show a broad range of values over the years and quite remarkable changes from one year to another (2006=7.5\% and 2007=14.9\%, 2009=8.0\% and 2009=4.5\%). At the same time, results of research conducted in Poland show higher figures, such as 20\%\textsuperscript{15} or even 25\%. Some researchers explore alternative methodologies to grasp an adequate result for Poland, a so-called “adjusted” value. The estimated adjusted gender wage gap equalled 20\% in 2012.\textsuperscript{16}

\subsection*{2.2.4. Gender pension gap}

Before 2013, the retirement age for women was 60 while the level was set at 65 for men. Since 2013 the retirement age of men was increased from 65 years to 67 years, to be effective, gradually, by 2020. As for \textbf{women, their retirement age is to be progressively increased from 60 to 67 years by 2040}. Apart from the necessity to equalize the retirement age of women and men, the argument of the reformers was that an increase in retirement age for women would contribute to closing the gender pension gap.

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{14} Report on the situation of women and men on the Polish labour market issued by the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, available at \url{https://psz.praca.gov.pl/documents/10828/153371/Sytuacja%20kobiet%20i%20m%C3%A4czyzn%20na%20rynkach%20%5B2013%5D?version=1.08t=1412999575568} last time visited 19.03.2015.
  \item \textsuperscript{15} Ogólnopolskie Badanie Wynagrodzeń [National Research on Wages], conducted by Sedlak&Sedlak, available at \url{www.wynagrodzenia.pl}
\end{itemize}
According to EU comparative statistics, the unadjusted gender pension gap in Poland (23%) is lower than the EU average (39%).\textsuperscript{17} Again, the national statistics, as reported by the Social Insurance Institution, demonstrate higher disparities between the levels of average pensions for men and women. Thus, while the average old age pension benefit for men equalled 2330 PLN (about 530 euro, data for 2013), female average pension benefit was one-third lower than men’s (162PLN=about 385 euro, data for 2013) (ZUS 2013).

### 2.3. Reconciliation of work and family life

**KEY FINDINGS**

- Poland has considerably reformed the **system of parental leave** during the last 8 years: (basic and additional) maternity leave was extended to 26 weeks, a new paid parental leave scheme was introduced (26 weeks) and finally, since 2014, there are two weeks of paternity leave (one week since 2012).
- Using the EU structural funds, the government issued a program in support of establishing **new childcare services for children under three**, but the progress still does not match the demand and needs of working parents.

#### 2.3.1. Parental leaves and financial support for families with children

**Maternity benefit** is paid on the condition of a previous employment of at least 6 months. Since 1974, its basic duration was 16 weeks and such solution remained in place for more than three decades. In 2006, the duration of the leave was extended to 18 weeks, with the plans to further lengthen it gradually. Introduced as family support and work-life reconciliation measures, the new policies included the further extension of maternity leave, accompanied by the option of part-time work (for 12 months), and the introduction of **paternity leave**.\textsuperscript{18}

In particular, the leave’s duration is now 20 weeks plus 6 weeks of the complimentary leave (so together 26 weeks) in the case of the 1\textsuperscript{st} child, 31 weeks plus 8 weeks of the complimentary leave in the case of twins, 33 (again, +8) weeks in the case of a triple birth, and with the number of weeks increasing by two with each next child. During the period of maternity leave the benefit amounts to 100% of the previous wage. Fourteen weeks are reserved for women, and are obligatory. A father can use the rest of this maternity leave, plus he is entitled to two weeks of paternity leave (from 2012) with an adequate benefit fully covering his wage.

In 2013, the government introduced **26 weeks of new parental leave**, which can be used either by the mother or the father. No special incentives (individual entitlements) for fathers were included, so altogether, the period of new parental leave is predominantly used by women, in addition to the maternity leave, while men constitute only 1,5% of all

\textsuperscript{17} Francesca Bettio, Platon Tinios and Gianni Betti, *The gender gap in pensions* in the EU, Brussels: European Commission 2013.

persons using the scheme. Basic maternity leave, complimentary maternity leave and parental leave must be taken consecutively. Current plans include granting a flat-rate monthly allowance for uninsured women. In its present form, the draft law does not contain any individual entitlement for men.

After the parental leave is finished, it can be followed by a longer childcare care leave and its basic duration is 36 months. The allowance attached to the leave is paid for 24 months, income-tested and both mothers and fathers are entitled to use the leave; however, 1.2% of the fathers exercised this right (GUS 2012). In order to comply with the Parental Leave Directive, the government reserved one of the 36 months of the childcare leave for the other parent (meaning the father), however, without attaching any payment to the leave. So far there is no information on the use of the childcare leave by fathers after the new provision was adopted.

Other forms of financial help for families with new-born children include an additional one-off birth grant (the so called becikowe), introduced in 2005 (in force since 2006). However, in 2013, it became conditional upon an income-test. Apart from that, there are also short-term leave and allowance for insured parents of a sick child as well as family allowances, but the latter are only paid to families that meet the income criteria. Thus, the income threshold is PLN574/€137 per capita in a family, while the monthly allowance per child amounts to PLN400/€95.

2.3.2. Childcare services

Poland has one of the lowest enrolment rates for children in pre-school facilities and crèches in Europe. Even during the period of state-socialism, the network of childcare centres in Poland was developing slowly and, in fact, the enrolment rate hardly ever reached 50% for children under 6 and 5% for crèche attendance. The most important changes for the functioning of childcare services came after 1989, and were connected with the decentralization of the financial responsibility for kindergartens. Faced with financial austerity and demographic decline, local authorities in financial difficulties decided to close many of the centres. Additionally, almost all crèches and two thirds of the company-owned kindergartens were closed.

After the fall in enrolment figures observed in the 1990s, rates have, however, increased recently. While about 40% of children aged 3-5 were enrolled in kindergartens in the school year 2005/2006, the rate has reached 74.1% in 2013/2014 (GUS 2014). The increase was possible mainly thanks to contributions from the EU structural funds and governmental programmes supporting the local communities in opening new kindergartens. Therefore between 2005 and 2008 the Ministry of Education ran the programme of co-financing the establishment and maintenance of pre-school units: “Alternative Forms of Pre-School Education”, another example is the program “Year of a Pre-school Child” (MEN 2008) that had more informative character, with the goal to promote establishing new pre-school units and pointing out possibilities of co-financing of the new pre-school units with the use of the EU structural funds.

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In 2013, for the first time since 1991, when financing early education was decentralised, the government introduced a new law on education that would provide a **permanent financial support to the municipalities in the form of state subsidy** (co-financing). This is an important step as, until 2013, the municipalities and the parents had to cover all the costs of early education facilities.

The responsibility for crèches (centres for the children under 3) has quite recently been moved to the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy (MLSP) (previously in the Ministry of Health). A new law was adopted in February 2011 establishing the forms of childcare centres for children under three: crèches, “children’s clubs”, and “daily carers” (or “nannies”). The regulation does not guarantee any permanent financial state support. Instead, the MLSP established the **Programme Maluch** [Toddler], with the main objective to offer co-financing for the new childcare centres. Thus, the programme gives the opportunity to apply for financial support for the municipalities that would like to establish one of the forms of childcare listed in the new law. The government increased the level of co-financing to 80% of the costs of starting the centre in 2013. Altogether, more than 1000 new childcare centres for children under the age of three have been established since the beginning of the programme. The enrolment rate of children under three in formal childcare increased from 3,1% in 2010 to 5,7% in 2013, which still represents one of the lowest figures in comparison to other countries within the EU.

2.4. **Eradication of gender based violence**

**KEY FINDINGS**

- A vast majority of the **victims of domestic violence** are women (67%) and children (22%).

- The **Act on Counteracting Family Violence** provides a definition of violence as well as the basic mechanisms of counteracting violence and assisting the victims of violence.

- Ratification of the **Istanbul Convention** was approved by the Parliament, as well as by the President, and the process of Ratification should be completed this year.

- In order to combat trafficking in human beings, the government sets up programs in cooperation with non-governmental organizations that trace the victims and that act within transnational networks.

2.4.1. **Domestic violence**

Gender segregated statistics on domestic violence demonstrate that women and children are mostly the **victims** of domestic violence in Poland (67% and 22% of all victims, respectively), while men predominate among the **perpetrators** (92% of all perpetrators). According to the survey commissioned by the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy which...

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21 Data provided by the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy.
22 Data provided by the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy.
was conducted at the end of 2010, 45% of respondents (40% of men and 49% of women) said to live or have lived in households where domestic violence took place. 22% of all respondents (26% of women and 16% of men) were reported to have been victims of domestic violence (TNS OBOP 2010). The legal basis for prosecution of domestic violence is outlined in Article 207, Paragraphs 1-3 of Penal Code, while marital rape can be prosecuted on basis of Article 197 of Penal Code.  

The main legal act dealing with combating domestic violence in Poland in a systematic way was introduced in 2005. Before this date, domestic violence was treated as any other form of assault or ill-treatment. The Act on Counteracting Family Violence defines domestic violence and indicates the public institutions responsible for counteracting this phenomenon. Importantly, a category of "economic" violence (failure to meet other’s basic material needs) has been included in the catalogue of acts that constitute domestic violence. The Act was subsequently changed: the amendments of 2010 included more effective measures for the isolation of the perpetrator of violence (such as eviction) as well as the more extensive involvement of public prosecutor’s offices and courts on behalf of the victim.  

An important part of this machinery is the National Action Plan on Counteracting Domestic Violence (the current Plan covers the years 2006-2016). The National Action Plan assumes 4 major areas of activities: preventive measures (such as monitoring the scale of this phenomenon), interventions, support actions, and corrective-educational measures. Importantly, both the legal framework and the National Action Plan on Counteracting Domestic Violence are targeted not only at spouses, but at all intimate partners.  

Poland signed the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention) in December 2012 and according to the plans outlined in the National Action Plan 2013-2016, the process of the Convention’s ratification was to be completed by the end of 2013, however, it took the Parliament two additional years to conclude the process. The attempts to effectuate the vote on the law ratifying the Convention first took place in 2014. PiS and the MPs from other conservative parties argued that the Convention was unconstitutional and requested an expert commission on the topic, which has further extended the proceedings of Parliament of the ratification. The principal argument of the right-wing parties and conservative NGOs is that the Convention defines the term “gender” as socially and culturally constructed roles for men and women and that the document links gender stereotypes with violence. The Catholic Church has officially declared itself against the ratification.  

Eventually, the Parliament has voted in favour of ratification of the Convention: The Sejm, the lower house, on the 6th of February 2015, and the Senate exactly one month later. Finally, the President has signed the document ratifying the Convention on the 13th of April 2015. According to a survey conducted by the Institute of Public Affairs in December 2014, only 13% of Poles were against the ratification of the Convention.  

2.4.2. **Trafficking in human beings and sexual exploitation including prostitution**

With the opening of the national borders, the phenomenon of human trafficking has become a much more severe problem in post-communist countries. Initially, Poland was mainly a source country of women forced into prostitution, mostly in Germany and in the Netherlands. With time, Poland became the transit and the destination country of the victims from other Eastern European countries (mostly Belarus and Ukraine, but also from Moldova, Romania and Bulgaria), as well as from Asia and Africa. Often, trafficking operates through international networks, frequently with the help of Polish organized crime groups.

The laws addressing the problem of human trafficking stem from the Polish Penal Code of 1969. The legislators based them on the Convention for the Suppression of the Traffic in Persons and of the Exploitation of the Prostitution of Others of 1950. It provided for at least 3 years of imprisonment for the trafficking of women and children. While the Penal Code of 1997 introduced changes, trafficking in *persons* (so not only “women” and “children”), also with their consent, was still subject to imprisonment not shorter than 3 years. Besides, it introduced imprisonment of 1 to 10 years for the abduction of a person into prostitution abroad.

In 2000, Poland signed the Convention against Transnational Organised Crime and the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children (Palermo Protocol). In September 2010, new regulations in the Penal Code were introduced explicitly defining human trafficking as a crime (Art. 115) and redefining the sanction (Art. 189a, Art. 211a and Art. 240). Consequently, trafficking in persons (including enticement or abduction of a person into prostitution abroad) is now subject to more than 3 years of imprisonment. In addition to the Palermo Protocol, the new regulations were based on the Council Framework Decision 2002/629/JHA of 19 July 2002 on combating trafficking in human beings, and the Council of Europe Convention on action against trafficking in human beings.24

The governmental actions aimed at fighting human trafficking include establishing several comprehensive programmes that involve both governmental and non-governmental actors. In 2003, a National Programme for Combating and Preventing Trafficking in Human Beings was adopted by the Council of Ministers and was extended in the following years. Since 2008, the program is called the **National Action Plan against Trafficking in Human Beings**. The subsequent plans covered the years 2011-12, and 2013-2015. An important part of the Action Plan concerns the awareness-raising of public officials dealing with trafficking – police, border guards, prosecutors and judges, as well as victims.

The most important non-governmental actor dealing with the issues of human trafficking is **La Strada Foundation against Trafficking in Human Beings and Slavery**, an organisation which currently runs the National Consulting and Intervention Centre for the Victims of Trafficking, established in 2009. One of the aims of the Foundation is a transnational network of cooperation, especially in the region of Eastern Europe. Since 2013, La Strada runs the Centre jointly with the Po Moc Association.

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24 Directive 2011/36/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 5 April 2011 on preventing and combating the trafficking in human beings and protecting its victims replaced the Council Framework Decision 2002/629/JHA and has been transposed to national legislation, including the Penal Code and the Act on Aliens (simplifying the temporary and permanent residence permit procedure).
The Polish police operates a Central Unit for Combating Human Trafficking, within the structure of Headquarter ordnances, as well as the relevant teams within the voivodship police departments. Also, in September 2013, a website dedicated to human trafficking was launched by the Police Headquarter (www.handelludzmi.pl).

Part of the abovementioned actions and documents is also directed against sexual offences and crimes, especially in cases facilitating or forcing sexual acts without the consent of the victim (Art. 203 of the Penal Code) or when the perpetrator profits from another person’s prostitution (Art. 204). In Poland, prostitution cannot be performed on the basis of any contract established between individuals. In reality, sexual services are offered by so called “social agencies” (agencje towarzyskie) or “massage salons”.

There were 750 such agencies registered in 2003 (Ozminkowski 2003). The number of persons working as prostitutes is estimated at 18,000–20,000 (US Department of State 2010). 15% of the Polish sex-workers are male, which is a relatively high share compared to other European countries; 33% are migrant workers, the biggest group comes from Ukraine (TAMPEP 2009). Moreover, Poland is mentioned as the 6th country of origin of migrant sex workers in the whole of Europe (ibid.).

2.5. Reproductive health and rights

### KEY FINDINGS

- **Poland has a very strict abortion law** that allows for termination of pregnancy only under three specific circumstances. Even though official statistics show 753 incidents of legal abortion, the number of all abortions per year might be even 190,000 due the so-called “abortion underground”.

- **Most of the contraceptives are not covered by the health insurance.** Recently, the government allowed the access to emergency contraceptives without a prescription for each person over 15 years old.

- **Poland is the only EU country without adequate legal framework regulating the issue of the in vitro fertilization treatment.** Such regulations are in preparation by the current government.

2.5.1. Abortion

Formalised by the law of 1956, abortion was legal during the period of state-socialism, when pregnancy termination was possible based on social grounds. In spite of the organised protests of many women’s organisations, a new legislation was adopted in 1993 that severely restricted the possibility of having a legal abortion. In particular, according to Article 4a of the new law, **termination of pregnancy is possible only in the case of three specific situations**:

25 Ustawa o planowaniu rodziny, ochronie płodu ludzkiego i warunkach dopuszczalności przerywania ciąży z dnia 7 stycznia 1993 r. [Family Planning, Protection of Human Embryo and Conditions of Termination of Pregnancy Act adopted on 7th January 1993], Journal of Laws 1993, no 17, item 78.
1. If the pregnancy constitutes a threat to the life or health of the mother,

2. If the pre-natal examination or other medical reasons point to a high probability of severe and irreversible damage to the foetus or on an incurable life-threatening disease of the child,

3. If there is a confirmed suspicion that the pregnancy is a result of a criminal act, the termination of pregnancy in this case is allowed, if the woman is less than 12 weeks pregnant.

These circumstances need to be confirmed by a doctor other than the one conducting the abortion, and by a prosecutor in cases where pregnancy is a result of a criminal act. In the case of the first two situations, abortion needs to be conducted in a public hospital. With regard to the last point pregnancy must last no longer than 12 weeks, afterwards termination is illegal. Performing an illegal abortion is a criminal offence subject to a fine and/or 10 years imprisonment.

In reality, even these restricted rights are often hard to execute. On the one hand, doctors are allowed to use the “clause of conscience” and refuse to conduct an abortion (although they are obliged to direct the woman to another doctor that is “available”), and where there is room for interpretation with regard to the woman’s or the foetus’ health. As emphasized in feminist circles and by NGOs in Poland, doctors are often performing terminations unofficially, becoming part of the so-called “abortion underground” (Nowicka 2007). The official statistics show a constantly increasing number of legal abortions performed each year, from 153 terminations in 2002 to 753 in 2012\textsuperscript{26}. At the same time the number of illegal surgeries or pharmacological interventions have been estimated at between 80,000-190,000 per year (Grzywacz et al. 2013). Due to high prices, illegal abortion in Poland or abroad (the latter phenomenon is often referred to as “abortion tourism”) is only accessible for women who can financially afford them.

Catholic circles and pro-life organizations in Poland periodically collect signatures supporting the draft law introducing an absolute ban on abortion or, at least, making the law even stricter. The last time Parliament held a vote on such a draft law took place in 2013. However, the majority of political parties in Parliament are so far not in support of changes to the existing legislation and so the initiative failed.

\textbf{2.5.2. Contraception}

Access to contraceptives in Poland is \textit{de facto quite restricted}, as in most cases no refunds are available from the National Health Fund and the costs of contraceptives need to be covered privately. Consequently, the use of contraceptives in Poland is one of the lowest in Europe. According to a recent survey, the condom is the most popular contraceptive among Poles (45\% of the respondents), while the second most popular method is the pill (24\%), and 16\% rely on coitus interruptus. These figures have been relatively stable as compared to the survey of 2007 (Izbebski 2007, 2012). At the same time, 12\% of the

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{26} Sprawozdanie Rady Ministrów z wykonywania oraz o skutkach stosowania w roku 2012 ustawy z dnia 7 stycznia 1993 r. o planowaniu rodziny, ochronie płodu ludzkiego i warunkach dopuszczalności przerywania ciąży. [Government Report on the implementation of family planning, protection of the human embryo and conditions of termination of pregnancy act of 7\textsuperscript{th} of January 1993, for the year 2012], available (in Polish) at http://orka.sejm.gov.pl/Druki7ka.nsf/0/C170D861FC5D4A3AC1257C6B0033A257/$File/2067.pdf}
survey respondents say using the “natural” method, the, so-called “marriage calendar”, which represents a decrease as compared to 2007, where 20% of the respondents declared the use of this method. It is important to note that both the “natural method” and the coitus interruptus might be popular because they do not require any financial expenditure or prescription.

Emergency contraception is only available with adequate prescription and not easily accessible. Answering to the European Commission’s recommendation to a change in the classification status from prescription to non-prescription for emergency contraceptive ellaOne, the Polish Ministry of Health has recently (January 2015) declared that the new EC recommendation will be incorporated into Polish legislation: each person that is at least 15 years old, should be free to purchase the pill in the pharmacy, without prescription.

2.5.3. Sexuality education

Although the abovementioned Act on Family Planning includes regulations on the introduction of sexuality education in schools, so far this issue has been neglected. In fact, many schools of different levels do not carry out regular sexuality education classes and approximately 14% of the pupils do not attend any classes in sexuality education (Ponton 2014), while, in 2008, this was almost one third of all students (Dzierzgowska 2008). Importantly, sexuality education is incorporated in the overall course named “Preparation for Family Life”. The existing research demonstrates that 86% of Poles accept the idea of sexuality education at schools (Izdebski 2012).

2.5.4. In vitro fertilization

Although in vitro fertilizations (IVF) have been available in private clinics in Poland, the debate on ethical, legal and financial aspects of the IVF continues for several years already, also due to the lack of adequate legal provisions. Consequently, Poland was the only EU Member State, where the issue was not regulated by law and in fact, Polish legislation is not in compliance with the EU Tissues and Cells Directive (EUTCD)27. The Catholic Church, backed by the right-wing parties, has for long argued against legalizing IVF, as the treatment might lead to destruction of fertilized embryos. At the same time, infertility is estimated to be a problem of about 1,5 million of couples in Poland. Considering various standpoints on the issue, the government agreed on a “compromise” version of a policy act regulating the IVF treatment on the 10th of March 2015. The new legal provisions would first of all set the rules of refunding the treatment that would be available both to married and unmarried couples, but it also sets the limits for the number of fertilized cells (no more than six under regular circumstances). Furthermore, the draft needs to be accepted by the Parliament and signed by the President.

2.6. Gender stereotypes and education

KEY FINDINGS

- Together with other post-communist Eastern-European countries, Poland is one of the most conservative societies in the EU, as far as gender equality is concerned.

- The government runs some programs counteracting gender stereotypes, however, the scale of these programs is quite limited.

According to international comparisons, Poles are not significantly more conservative with regard to gender roles than other nations in Eastern Europe. However, in comparison to other EU countries, gender stereotypes and a conservative view of the family seem to prevail: according to a recent Eurobarometer survey on the attitudes towards gender equality, as much as 87% of Poles disagree with the statement that gender equality is a fundamental right.

National survey results for Poles show relative stability over the years: 77% of the respondents support the idea of gender equality in public life (as compared to 76% in 2006) (CBOS 2013). Sex is the most important factor differentiating the responses: for example, 75% of men as compared to 58% of women think that there is gender equality in their family life (ibid.). At the same time, government policy towards gender equality is more often positively evaluated by men (41%) than by women (29%) (CBOS 2013).

The Plenipotentiary for Equal Treatment has engaged in several small-scale actions counteracting gender stereotypes, like, for example, the project “I am a boss” for schoolgirls aimed at overcoming gender stereotypes. Another example are two campaigns conducted by the Ministry of Education: “Girls as Engineers!” and “Girls as Scientists!”. Overcoming social roles for women and men in the media has become one of the goals of the National Broadcasting Regulatory Strategy 2014 – 2016 adopted in 2014 (KRRiT 2014).

Though NGOs have postulated this for many years, there has been little effort to introduce changes in school curricula that would include explicit education regarding different aspects of gender equality. More attention has been paid to the issues of gender equality at the workplace and overcoming stereotypes concerning economic power and family life.

Many NGOs are continually carrying out numerous actions aimed at overcoming gender stereotypes, and try to monitor the principle of equal treatment in the media and public institutions. To a great extent this is possible thanks to the financial support of the EU structural funds.

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28 See for example International Social Survey Programme: Family Database for the survey Role of Family and Gender: III.
30 One example is the campaign “Women without space” [Kobiety bez przestrzeni] inspired by the film “Miss Representation”, conducted by the Association WAGA. The foundation “Point of view” [Punkt Widzenia] issued a report on gender stereotypes present in compulsory readings for public schools (Punkt Widzenia 2014).
The Catholic Church initiated a campaign degrading the goals of gender equality policies in December 2013. The pastoral letter explicitly relating to the "gender ideology" was entitled: "Threats to the Family Stemming from the Ideology of Gender"\textsuperscript{31}, however, the government did not undertake any particular measures to counteract the campaign and its potentially harmful effects on the support for gender equality.\textsuperscript{32}

\textsuperscript{31} The (word, concept, category of) gender was explained as "deeply destructive" to "the person, inter-human relations and all social life". The letter was read on 28th of December 2013 at the churches, during the holy mass.

\textsuperscript{32} The UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women recommended that the government should "promote the equal rights of women and combat efforts made by any actors including the Catholic Church to downplay or degrade the pursuit of gender equality by labelling such measures as ideology" (UN 2014).
3. CONCLUSIONS

The implementation of policies aimed at the enhancement of gender equality in Poland still requires some improvements. On the one hand, the legal framework guarantees formally equal opportunities in all spheres of life, but on the other hand the national machinery for gender equality as a politically independent agency has not been established. Even though the office of Plenipotentiary for Equal Treatment and the Act of 3 December 2010 was recognised as complying with Directive 2006/54, NGOs are pointing to the fact that these provisions are still not sufficient (Karat 2013). After eight years without any comprehensive key government level document on gender equality, the National Action Plan was issued in December 2013. However, the document covers wide areas of non-discrimination measures and there is no separate document on the issue of gender equality.

At the same time, the guarantees of equal treatment for women and men, as well as solutions regarding mobbing and sexual harassment in the workplace that were included in the Labour Code are quite satisfactory. However, enforcement of these new regulations requires monitoring and additional mechanisms, including promotion and awareness actions that would make many victims of discrimination aware of the existing legal instruments.

Recent improvements in childcare policies, facilitating the development of new forms of childcare for the youngest children should contribute to enhanced chances for more continuous professional careers for women, although the lack of permanent financing from the state budget might debilitate the process to a great extent.

Moreover, persisting gender stereotypes and anti-gender equality discourses would require some more action on the side of the government. Importantly, the Parliament has adopted an act confirming the ratification of the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence, while the President has announced signing the act. The ratification process should be completed within this year (2015).

It is also worth mentioning that social attitudes towards gender in Poland tend to be very slowly shifting from the conservative towards more gender equality oriented views. One of the sources of such changes is the increasing number of contacts that young Poles have with people of other nationalities, even during their stay abroad as migrant workers. Therefore, societal changes and the pressure to improve the policy of equal opportunities might in the future be more bottom-up.
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**LINKS**

- [www.lastrada.org.pl](http://www.lastrada.org.pl)
- [www.handelludzmi.pl](http://www.handelludzmi.pl)
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