

Dorota Szaban / Inetta Nowosad / Piotr Pochyły (eds.)

Designing and Implementing Public Policy of Contemporary Polish Society



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Selected Problems

With 6 figures

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Introduction

Public policy is perceived as a network of related decisions and actions taken by public authorities focused on achieving specific goals when market mechanisms lose their effectiveness. Public policy in Poland are deeply rooted in political processes, even if, for example, in the Anglo-Saxon tradition, the foundation of public action is a cooperation between various entities. The process of creating public policy is complex and multidimensional, based on a multifaceted analysis of the rationalized and systemic actions of the state and society around pressing public problems.

Defining public policy emphasize two understandings of politics – as policy and politics. Apart from detailed etymological findings, politics means a struggle for power in the state. Policy, on the other hand, is connected with using the acquired power to achieve other goals, such as increasing the welfare of society, satisfying its needs, economic growth, securing a high level of environmental protection or caring for safety. A policy also specifies the management of public affairs and activities in various spheres of social life, supporting achieving the Aristotelian common good. The final shape of a given public program depends on specific factors, characteristic for a particular country. To understand why different public policy emerge in different regions, it is important to understand the details that shape them. For us, in this monograph, it is crucial to indicate the determinants of the process of creating and implementing policy relating to selected aspects of socio-economic life (*de facto* sectoral policy) in Polish society.

We recognize that the specificity of a country's policy is primarily determined by cultural factors (e.g. separate historical and cultural traditions, also related to the preferred decision-making mechanisms), economic factors (related to the possibility of securing the implementation of specific solutions), political factors (determined by the existing political system and structure of interests) and institutional factors (including institutional potential, institutional relations between the executive and the legislature, and the functioning model of public administration). The links between different public policy have an immediate or indirect impact on the behaviour of social actors involved in both the process of

creating specific solutions and the recipients of these activities. The combined results of the implementation of policy with legal instruments relating to economic, social, political and environmental issues and their positive and negative effects balanced by social practice are crucial for the functioning of social entities. The public policy indicates tasks assigned to the public sphere, starting from their diagnosis, through implementation and execution, to monitoring, evaluation and analysis of its results.

The functioning and creation of public policy are possible due to the existence of public problems. By public policy, we can understand the process of analyzing and implementing solutions and assumptions in individual areas of public life, such for example, social welfare, health protection, safety policy, environmental protection or the economy. The designing instruments to change the situation in selected areas can be considered as a sectoral policy. In this monograph, we want to look at the conditions and examples of the implementation process of selected sectoral policy. We are particularly interested in urban, educational, social, religious, information, historical and youth policy.

The process of creating and implementing sectoral policy has been described in this book from two perspectives. On the one hand, the attention of the authors of the texts focuses mainly on the social actors of these policy – individuals and institutions on whose activity the process of implementing specific policy provisions depends. On the other hand, the complexity of sectoral policy forces the need to refer to many areas of social life around which specific solutions are created. The effectiveness of public policy, including sectoral policy, also requires indicating the context related to the socio-political conditions in Poland. Hence, the book ends with the third chapter, which includes three texts describing the conditions of the functioning of civil society in Poland, the principles of constructing electoral lists and elements related to the organizational culture conducive to care for safety.

I. Kaźmierczak-Kałużna and M. Pokrzyńska describe the family policy in Poland, taking into account its special instrument – the “*Family 500+*” program. The authors treat the program as a response to radical social changes in recent years, which resulted, among other things, in the emergence of new or the discovery of previously unnoticed social problems. The described activities within the pro-family policy take into account the changing patterns of the family and fertility as well as the processes of redefining the stereotypes of gender roles as well as family roles.

In the article by B. Springer the field of analyzes are the tasks of the local government administration in matters of religion as an element of public policy. It discusses the tasks of the provincial governor, as a representative of the government, who has limited powers in this area. Their realization results directly from the distraction of public administration, i. e. the model of administration

system introduced in Poland – transfer of tasks to the voivodeship level. The policy in this area (performance of tasks and relations) must be consistent with the perspective of those currently ruling, as it results from the role of the voivode. The text also contains a comparative analysis of the scope of tasks concerning religious denominations and national and ethnic minorities as well as the location of 16 voivodeship's offices in Poland in the administrative structure.

The youth policy was presented by M. Zielińska and B. Trzop as a series of activities and legal provisions dispersed in terms of competences, sometimes in isolation from social problems that affect young people. According to the authors, it is precisely the problems of young people indicated in social research that should constitute the foundation for the constructed political solutions.

In her text, M. Farnicka presents the importance of solutions at the institutional level as an example of creating an educational environment aimed at influencing the sphere of activity, system of values and personality of an individual. The idea of the socializing and emancipatory influence of upbringing at the institutional level was presented in the realities of educational institutions. The cooperation between organizations (non-governmental, local government) and formal educational institutions was treated not only as a manifestation of the socio-cultural changes taking place, but also as an example of accelerating the potential of various educational institutions and a factor modifying the network of existing social relationships. In the presented text, the institutional level of education is divided into two dimensions: cultural and operational. The cultural dimension (macro-level) concerns events in the social, historical and political dimension, and the operational dimension is related to the use of skills and tools enabling the implementation of the challenges posed.

M. Zapotoczna focuses on the implementation of Polish educational policy oriented towards supporting entrepreneurship. EU recommendations constitute an important point of reference in setting the priorities and directions for the development of education. For educational purposes, a European concept of entrepreneurship as a key competence shaped in lifelong education has been developed. This approach is reflected in the national provisions of the core curriculum. The main postulates emphasized in international documents are consistent with the reforms in the field of education for entrepreneurship implemented in Poland since 2002. The aim of the article is to present entrepreneurship as an important direction in the development of educational policy. The basic formal and legal documents as well as the methods of implementing international recommendations to the conditions of the Polish school were presented.

The article by A. Ilciów analyzes the Polish transport sector. Particular attention was paid to the importance of transport in the national economy, as well as national transport in the European Union. The author considers the model of

sustainable development as the most appropriate for transportation. The perspectives of development of the transport sector are connected with large infrastructural investments and the use of modern technologies. Both areas require the involvement of entities with large capital at their disposal, or with the possibility of obtaining it. The state and/or local authorities play a key role in planning the future and in legal regulations.

One of the important elements of creating urban policy is connecting local governments – usually by including rural areas into city areas. Three units – Zielona Góra, Rzeszów and Opole – have such experience. Each connection proceeded in a different way, creating a certain type of action strategy. The experiences of these local governments were characterized by D. Szaban and K. Lisowski.

An overview of the current trends in the educational policy of countries assessed by international bodies as highly effective, and the development of a conceptual framework for political interventions is the starting point for I. Nowosad's analyzes. The adopted approach shows the current paradigm shift in the development of education in achieving world-class status, in which the departure from a centralized model of political interventions results in the search for new solutions that meet the current needs. The text discusses the potential of educational policy in an integrated model of intervention at the micro, meso and macro levels.

A. Kinal and J. Leszkowicz-Baczyński emphasize the importance of modern urban policy as a comprehensive tool, constituting an instrument for a multifaceted analysis of urban realities by the widest possible group of actors in urban life. In this context, they locate the urban policy of the city of Zielona Góra along with elements of the wine tradition, which could constitute the basis for constructing new development assumptions for the city.

The proper functioning of the state depends on good quality of education. This thesis is formulated by E. Pasternak-Kobyłecka. In Poland, the education system is being reformed and adapted to the changing social needs. Conditions are created in schools that are conducive to the comprehensive development of children and youth. The article indicates the main priorities of contemporary educational policy and the possibilities of their implementation in educational institutions. The author focused on issues related to ensuring high-quality education in schools and shaping pro-social attitudes of students and educating them in the spirit of humanistic values.

A. Ratke-Majewska, in her text considers the question of what this kind of politics is, what it is for and what forms it may take. The author refers to theoretical issues, discussing at the same time trends resulting from the practice. In her text she proves that the politics of memory has an enormous resource of political abilities which give it the possibility to have a significant impact in

society. By defining the contents of memory and shaping its perception the present and the future are really created.

Ł. Młyńczyk analyzes Polish information policy in the era of the Covid-19 pandemic as a function of the deliberate activities of public authorities to achieve a desired social state. In this view, information policy is more a function of power rather than information itself. He tries to show in this text that the status of knowledge can be conferred not by the evidence of science, but by the communication itself, which is public and ultimately political. The state thus solves the problem at the level of information when it regulates the flow of content relevant to it.

P. Pochyły presents the influence and scope of activity of the members of the Polish Sejm on the creation of religious policy of the state on the example of the activity of the Foreign Affairs Committee in the period of the Third Republic. The author analyzes parliamentary resolutions prepared during the committee's sessions, published positions and desiderata. Since the beginning of democratization of the country Polish deputies have repeatedly referred to the defense of religious freedom, protection of human rights in the world.

In her article, L. Młodzik states that security and security management as sectoral policy are considered among other things in the categories of process and system. In the first case it consists, not only of preventing threats, but also of ensuring the existence and survival, state of possession and functioning and development of the entity (individuals and other organizational structures).

In turn, the whole of the authorities and administration responsible for the implementation of state protection tasks, linked by information and remaining in the legally established competence relations, together with the auxiliary apparatus (administrative, staff, organizational) and the necessary infrastructure constitutes a security management system. In both cases we should talk about a special type of public organizations. For the author the point of reference for security policy are feedback relations based on values and norms located in organizational culture, affecting the development of its participants in both functional and process sense, especially in today's VUCA world. The issue addressed in the article is a development of this issue.

Governmental strategies affect the degree of institutional openness, competition between individuals and organizations, as well as the level of civil liberties and the ability of citizens to influence the activities of authorities at various levels. The government is responsible for shaping various policy. It largely depends on the actions of political authorities whether the sectoral reforms will be efficient and effective. At the same time, it is the political authorities that are the source of human resources determining the shape and development of various sectoral policy. In this context, transparency and clarity of the mechanisms of selecting political authorities as the most important tool of social impact on the

political situation in the country, as well as a clear and unambiguous declaration of politicians as to their views and party affiliation becomes extremely important. J. Nyćkowiak and T. Kołodziej attempt to analyze the electoral lists in parliamentary elections in order to discover the rules which govern this process.

L. Szczegółła provokes reflection on the socio-cultural factors of the democratic transition. He asks whether there is a public policy that can effectively create a transformation of a post-communist society into a civil society. Polish experiences are interesting in this case, they show the nature of the problems in the installation of ideas that were formed in a different cultural and economic context.

By handing over this monograph to the Readers, we hope that the texts contained therein will help to understand the instruments and practices of shaping sectoral policy in Poland. We hope that the considerations contained in individual chapters will become an inspiration for further scientific exploration of contemporary policy problems in the indicated dimensions.

Dorota Szaban
Inetta Nowosad
Piotr Pochyły

I. Social categories perspective in sectoral policy

The program “Family 500+” as an instrument of changing family policy in Poland

Introduction

The last decade of the 20th century was a period of radical economic and socio-cultural changes in Poland, which resulted, among other things, in the emergence of new or the discovery of previously unnoticed social problems. Some of them still condition the life situation of some Polish families today, affecting their functioning and structures. This study addresses two issues – poverty and the deepening unfavorable demographic changes – which, initiated/visible at the threshold of the 1990s, have co-shaped three decades of Poland’s post-transformation history and continue to pose a threat to the country’s socio-economic development.

Both issues are within the scope of influence of the state family policy. Its main goal is the creation of conditions which are to favor the formation of families, their development and the comprehensive satisfaction of their needs, including living needs and needs connected with the rearing of offspring. Measures implemented within the framework of family policy can be divided into those aimed directly at the family (direct policy) and those of more comprehensive character and covering with their impact also other areas of social policy (indirect policy, pro-family policy)¹. Thus, within the framework of indirect family policy, initiatives are undertaken in which the family is placed in a broad institutional context, and the proposed influences on it are consistent with solutions within the framework of the labor market, housing policy, childcare system, education, health care, tax or pension system. The primary instrument of the direct family policy are social benefits (both monetary and nonmonetary) which, depending on the needs, perform the following functions: profitable, compensatory, egali-

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1 Cf. e.g. B. Balcerzak-Paradowska, *Family and family policy at the turn of the century – transformations, threats, need for action*, IPiSS, Warszawa 2004; A. Durasiewicz, *W kierunku rozwoju polityki rodzinnej w Polsce*, Dom Wydawniczy Elipsa, Warszawa 2017.

tarian and/or stimulating, particularly with respect to shaping pro-employment and procreation attitudes and thus can also be defined as a tool of the pro-natalist policy.

The state's family policy should be both stable and flexible, so that it can respond in a timely manner to emerging or deepening problems and changes in the demographic, economic and social situation. In the last decade Poland has undertaken a number of initiatives aimed at improving the material living conditions of families and increasing the fertility rate. Particularly in the area of pro-natalist actions, we can observe broadening of pro-family policy instruments and efforts to make employment more flexible and increase opportunities to reconcile work and family life. The implemented solutions, including for example: extension of paid parental leaves; introduction of the Large Family Card; parental benefits for women who gave birth and previously did not work or were insured in the Agricultural Social Insurance Fund (KRUS); development of institutional forms of childcare for the youngest children; tax reliefs for children; popularization of the "złoty for złoty" mechanism in the case of family benefits, etc.², initiated in times of economic prosperity, improved the material situation of families, but they did not translate into an increase in the birth rate.

On 1 April 2016, the "Family 500+" program was introduced in Poland under the Act on State Aid in Raising Children³. The benefits offered under it (PLN 500 per child until the age of 18) are universal. In the initial period of the program's functioning, families were entitled only to the benefit for the second and subsequent child (the first or only child was covered by support after meeting income criteria – income below 800 PLN net per person in the family or 1200 PLN in the case of families with children with disabilities). In July 2019, the program was extended to all children regardless of the financial status of families. When defining the new tool, emphasis was placed on equally treated social issues, i.e. reduction of poverty, especially among children, investment in human capital and pro-natalist goals, leading to a sustainable increase in the fertility rate⁴.

The program matched well with public expectations. It met with a very positive reception and was recognized as a qualitative turn in the state's family and pro-natal policy. Analyzing the results of CBOS surveys from the last quarter of a

2 Cf. e.g. M. Grabowska et al., *Jak przezwyciężyć kryzysy dzietności, czyli o programu Rodzina 500 plus i nie tylko*, [in:] *Rodzina PLUS. Sytuacja polskich rodzin i oceny polityki prorodzinnej*, ed. by M. Grabowska et al., CBOS, Warszawa 2017; A. Ruzik-Sierdzińska, *Krótkookresowe skutki programu Rodzina 500+*, "Studia z Polityki Społecznej", no. 1, 2018.

3 Journal of Laws. 2016 item 195.

4 Speech by E. Rafalska, Minister of Family, Labour and Social Policy during the first reading of the government bill on state aid in upbringing of children on 9 February 2016., <https://www.gov.pl/web/rodzina/wystapienie-elzbiety-rafalskiej-minister-rodziny-pracy-i-polityki-spoecznej-podczas-pierwszego-czytania-rzadowego-projektu-ustawy-o-pomocy-panstwa-w-wychowywaniu-dzieci> (access: 22.01.2021).

century, it is possible to notice the unquestionable influence of the program on the perception of state policy towards the family. In the years 1996–2013, the share of Poles assessing the state’s activities in this area well or very well ranged from 6 % in 2000 to 16 % in 2006. At the same time, in each of the surveyed years, those dissatisfied in this regard were several times higher (from 31 % in 2006 to 52 % in 2012). Between 2017 and 2019, a radical change can be observed. Not only did the number of respondents satisfied with the state’s family policy increase sharply – 52 % in 2017 and 62 % in 2019, but also the share of those rating it as inadequate dropped significantly (a maximum of 11 % in 2018). In the opinion of respondents, program benefits are one of the most effective tools for supporting families and fertility⁵. The analysis of their effectiveness is devoted to the next part of the study.

Economic effects of the “Family 500+” program

In Poland, poverty became the subject of systematic research only in the early 1990s. Before that, in order to maintain the ideological foundations of the socialist system, the category of “shortages” was used in public discourse. There was also a kind of embargo on researching and describing domestic poverty. After 1989, however, numerous empirical works on the subject quickly began to appear, and poverty and the poor were not so much present in the new post-transformation reality, as they were “rediscovered”⁶.

In the 1990s, income poverty rates in Poland grew steadily. In the year of accession to the European Union the extent of poverty and social exclusion amounted to 20.3 %, and among children – 48 % and was the highest among the member states⁷. In 2005–2015, along with an increase in average household income, the scope of poverty, measured using basket lines, i.e., the subsistence minimum and the social intervention threshold, gradually decreased. Systematic improvement was also observed in the area of poverty of living conditions and fiscal imbalances. Each of the thirty indicators of unmet needs and lack of

5 Program Family 500 plus as an element of the system supporting families and fertility, research announcement, no. 25/2016, CBOS; State policy towards families – assessments and expectations, research announcement, no. 83/2018, CBOS; Program Family 500 plus after three years of functioning, research announcement, no. 52/2019, CBOS; B. Roguska, Opinions on the program “Family 500 plus”, [in:]: Rodzina PLUS..., op. cit.

6 Cf. e.g. S. Golinowska S. (ed.), *Polska bieda. Kryteria, ocena, przeciwdziałanie*, IPiSS, Warszawa 1996; E. Tarkowska (ed.), *Zrozumieć biednego. O dawnej i obecnej biedzie w Polsce*, IFiS PAN, Warszawa 2000; W. Warzywoda-Kruszyńska, *Wielkomiejscy biedni – formująca się underclass? Przypadek klientów pomocy społecznej*, “Kultura i Społeczeństwo”, no. 2, 1998.

7 I. Mendryk et al., *Gospodarstwa domowe z 500+ w procesie rozwoju kapitału ludzkiego. Wybrane problemy ekonomiczne i socjologiczne*, Wydawnictwo C.H. Beck, Warszawa 2020.

resources taken into account by the CSO in 2015 was lower than in 2011 and 2013. Progress can be seen in particular in the area of sanitation, housing equipment, as well as disposing of funds for vacations, buying books, medicines, etc.⁸. In the second decade of the 21st century, Poland was among the countries that most effectively deal with poverty and exclusion among children. The continuing trend in this regard is confirmed by the results of Eurostat studies, according to which the percentage of children at risk of poverty in Poland is significantly lower than the EU average⁹.

Positive trends in the area of poverty reduction, especially child poverty, were significantly strengthened by the program introduced in 2016¹⁰. The social effects of its impact are reflected, among others, in current CSO surveys. Over the last few years (2015–2019), further improvement in the financial situation of households in Poland can be observed – both household income and expenditure are increasing¹¹. There is also a further gradual reduction in the incidence of poverty, both extreme poverty (decrease from 6.5 % in 2015 to 4.2 % in 2019), statutory poverty (decrease from 12.2 % in 2015 to 9 % in 2019), and relative poverty (decrease from 15.5 % in 2015 to 13 % in 2019) (Figure 1).

The improvement of material living conditions concerns especially the families most at risk of poverty – those living mainly on social benefits, with disabled people, with the head of the family with a low level of education, as well as single-parent families and families with at least 3 children under the age of 18. In families with many children, where the share of benefits from the program is the highest and reaches 20 % of disposable income, the decrease in the extent of poverty, especially extreme poverty, had the most significant character in the analyzed period (from 16.7 % in 2015 to 6.8 % in 2019). The real increase in income in this category of families directly translates into an increase in spending

8 S. Golinowska, *O polskiej biedzie w latach 1990–2015. Definicje, miary i wyniki*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe Scholar, Warszawa 2018.

9 Only the Netherlands, Germany, Finland, Denmark, Czech Republic, Iceland and Slovenia are currently performing better – Children at risk of poverty or social exclusion, Eurostat, 2019, https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Children_at_risk_of_poverty_or_social_exclusion (access: 26.01.2021); por. także I. Mendryk et al., op. cit.

10 Cf. e.g. D. Prokopowicz, *Sytuacja materialno-ekonomiczna gospodarstw domowych w Polsce oraz znaczenie wprowadzenia programu Rodzina 500 plus w ramach kompleksowej polityki społecznej*, Uniwersyteckie Czasopismo Socjologiczne, vol. 18, no. 1, 2018; I. Kaźmierczak-Kałużna, *W orbicie 500 plus. Funkcjonowanie ubogich rodzin wielodzietnych w warunkach zmiany polityki rodzinnej w Polsce*, Kultura i Społeczeństwo, no. 4; 2019; I. Mendryk et al., op. cit.

11 The level of average monthly disposable income was PLN 1819 per person in 2019. and was by PLN 433 higher than in 2015, while household expenditures increased in the analyzed period from PLN 1091 to PLN 1252 – cf. *Sytuacja gospodarstw domowych w 2019 r. w świetle wyników badania budżetów gospodarstw domowych*, informacje sygnałowe, 20.05.2020, GUS, Warszawa.

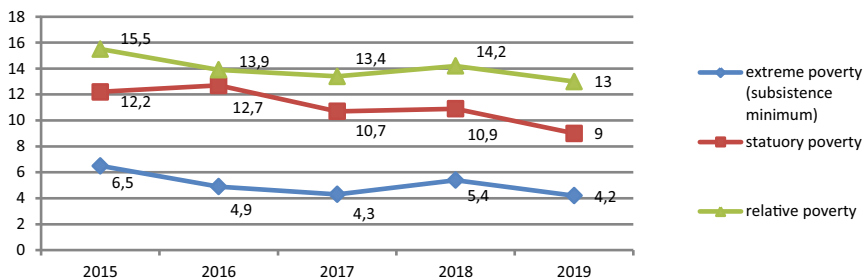


Figure 1. Poverty in Poland between 20015 and 2019 according to the poverty lines adopted in a given year (in % of persons in households). Source: own compilation based on: Range of economic poverty in Poland in 2019, signal information, 30.06.2020, GUS, Warszawa

on basic goods, as well as those that represent an investment in human capital (educational classes of children, spending on culture, tourism, health care, etc.)¹². The positive trend is also visible in the results of Eurostat surveys, indicating a successively decreasing scope of deep material deprivation in Poland¹³, as well as in CBOS surveys. In 2014–2019, the assessment of ways and possibilities of managing the household budget systematically improved. Year after year, the share of people living well and very well increased (from 19 % in 2014 to 33 % in 2019) and the share of people living modestly or very poorly decreased (from 23 % in 2014 to 15 % in 2019). In 2020, with the economic crisis associated with the SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus pandemic, this trend is less pronounced. While the downward trend continues for respondents rating their living conditions as unsatisfactory (14 % in March and 12.5 % in September 2020), the percentage of those living in complete financial comfort is also falling (32 % in March and 31 % in September 2020)¹⁴.

Good social moods in recent years (even despite the spectre of economic crisis) translate into a growing sense of financial security among Poles who are beneficiaries of the government program¹⁵. Beneficiaries definitely find it easier to balance their household budgets. In 2018, none of the surveyed people (program beneficiaries), when asked about their material living conditions, assessed them as very poor, making it impossible to meet the basic needs of the family. However, as the number of children in respondents' families increases, their

12 Zasięg ubóstwa ekonomicznego w Polsce w 2016 r., opracowanie sygnałne, 23.06.2017, GUS, Warszawa; Zasięg ubóstwa ekonomicznego w Polsce w 2019 r., informacje sygnałne, 30.06.2020, GUS, Warszawa.; I. Mendryk et al, op. cit.

13 Podstawowe dane dotyczące zasięgu ubóstwa w Polsce w 2016 r., notatka informacyjna, 25.09.2017, GUS, Warszawa.

14 Oceny sytuacji finansowej gospodarstw domowych, komunikat z badań, no. 123/2020, CBOS.

15 Por. np. Ocena programu “Rodzina 500 plus” po blisko roku od jego wprowadzenia, komunikat z badań, no. 36/2017, CBOS; Materialne warunki życia, komunikat z badań, no. 47/2018, CBOS; Program Rodzina 500 plus po trzech latach..., op. cit.

concerns about the future increase¹⁶. These fears may be greater in households whose present financial condition depends on the benefits received, and the fear of its deterioration is connected with the uncertainty about the continuity of the program or the inevitable loss of funds caused by successive children growing up. The program beneficiaries are also families whose adult members are permanently out of the labor market and are regular clients of assistance institutions. In the absence of gainful sources of income, the fear of a renewed breakdown of the living situation may be multiplied. The more so, as research shows that the program may have a negative impact on certain categories of people (e.g., mothers with a lower level of education), limiting their professional activity and petrifying their dependence on social benefits¹⁷.

After only five years of the program's operation, there is no clear answer to the question of whether and to what extent its social effects will be lasting. The consolidation of positive tendencies would probably be facilitated by modifying the program's assumptions so as to integrate it into a coherent whole with other family support systems operating alongside it – the system of family benefits and tax allowances for children. Additionally, building incentives for professional activity into the program would prevent the emergence of a new social problem in the form of successive generations dependent on attractive financial support from the state¹⁸.

“Family 500+” as a pro-natalist program

The social advantages of the program are not in doubt – there is a relative consensus in academic and journalistic discourse in this regard. However, it does not exist in relation to the widely promoted pronatalist goals. In this case, the effectiveness of the benefits, despite the short period of its implementation, raises a number of reservations and fosters strong polarization¹⁹. According to the assumptions of the authors, the program was supposed to “protect Poland from a

16 Sytuacja rodzin w Polsce dwa lata po wprowadzeniu programu Rodzina 500 plus, komunikat z badań, no. 54/2018, CBOS.

17 I. Kaźmierczak-Kałużna, *Work in the Lives of Women with Many Children Living in Poverty in the Context of Reforms in Poland's Family Policy – Continuation or Change?*, Przegląd Socjologiczny, no. 3, 2018; I. Magda et al., “The Family 500+” child allowance and female labour supply in Poland, IBS Working Paper, 1, 2018.

18 Cf. I. Magda et al., “Rodzina 500+” – ocena programu i propozycje zmian, 2019 <https://ibs.org.pl/publications/rodzina-500-ocena-programu-i-propozycje-zmian/> (access: 21.01.2021).

19 M. Rymsza, *Zrozumieć ten plus*, “Więź”, no. 3, 2017.

demographic disaster”²⁰. However, not only does it not bring the promised results, but its impact seems to be negligible.

Considering Poland’s long-standing demographic problems, which began in the 1990s, this situation should not come as a surprise. For the past three decades Poland has been experiencing the processes resulting from the so-called second demographic transition – the number of marriages is declining, the number of divorces is increasing and the fertility rate of women is significantly decreasing. The observed phenomena of deinstitutionalization of marriage and nuclearization of families are closely related to technological, economic and socio-cultural changes (including shifts in hierarchies of values and life goals) which create conditions for the ongoing transformation of the family, especially in the area of its structures and functions.

In 1990 the fertility rate in Poland stood at 1.991 and even then, on the threshold of political change, did not guarantee a simple replacement of generations. Subsequent years brought further declines. For the past two decades, the fertility rate has remained below 1.5 and has been defined as extremely low. The critical moment in this regard in Poland was 2003, when only slightly over 350,000 children were born, i.e., almost 200,000 fewer than in 1990, and the fertility rate stood at 1.222. The next few years saw a short-term reversal of this tendency and a slight increase in the number of births, echoing the baby boom of the early 1980s. The beginning of the second decade of the 21st century saw a renewed and deepening decline in births, lasting until 2015, when the fertility rate stood at 1.289, one of the lowest in both the EU and the world²¹ (Figure 2).

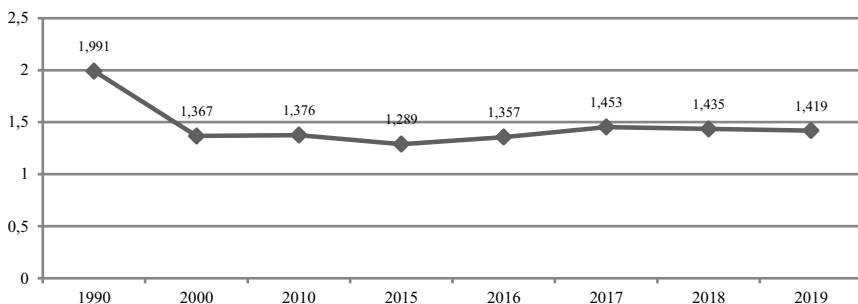


Figure 2. Fertility rate in Poland in 1990–2019. Source: own elaboration based on: Demographic Yearbook 2017, 2020, CSO, Warsaw.

20 Wystąpienie E. Rafalskiej... op. cit.; A. Gromada, *Rodzina 500+ jako polityka publiczna*, Seria Analizy – polityka społeczna, ekonomia, Instytut Studiów Zaawansowanych, Warszawa 2017, https://krytykapolityczna.pl/instytut/wp-content/uploads/sites/4/2017/09/Gromada_Rodzina-500.pdf (access: 21.01.2021).

21 A. Gromada, op. cit.; B. Balcerzak-Paradowska, op. cit.

The year 2015 was also the year before the introduction of the “Family 500+” program. The first two years of its functioning brought an increase in the fertility rate. In 2017, it reached its highest value in twenty years (1.453), and the number of children born exceeded 402,000. Importantly, however, the recorded increase concerned mainly children born second and subsequent. Still in 2010, half of all births were first births, while in 2017 – their share in the total number of births was already only 43 %. On the other hand, the proportion of second (40.1 %) and third and subsequent births (16.9 %) increased significantly²².

The decreasing share of first-time births in the total number of births is a worrying phenomenon. It may be an effect of the continuing trend of postponing the decision about having the first child or an indicator of the growing number of couples who intentionally do not want to have children. In the context of potentially halting the negative trends, both situations are unfavorable and, due to the decreasing biological fertility of women with age, constitute a serious obstacle to demographic development. It is the fertility and size of the female population of reproductive age (15–49 years), especially at the age of the highest birth rate (25–34 years), that is one of the decisive correlates of fertility. The decades-long demographic crisis in Poland, however, has caused deep distortions in the population structure, the most visible manifestations of which are the progressing depopulation and population ageing processes. The low birth rate, which has been sustained for many years, means that fewer and fewer people are entering childbearing age. Everything indicates that the process of demographic reconstruction will be long and arduous, and pro-natalist policy measures should be designed for decades rather than for years²³.

The conclusions formulated above are confirmed by the analysis of births in Poland in 2018–2020, in which again a progressive year-on-year decrease in the number of children born was recorded. In 2018, about 388 thousand children were born, in 2019 – about 375 thousand, and the preliminary estimates of the Central Statistical Office for 2020 indicate that the trend deepened (estimated number of births – about 360 thousand) and the year was the worst in terms of births for a decade and a half²⁴.

22 Urodzenia i dzietność, informacje sygnałne, 23.05.2018, GUS, Warszawa; I. Mendryk et al., op. cit.

23 I. Magda et al., “Rodzina 500+”..., op. cit.; Prognoza ludności na lata 2014–2050, GUS, Warszawa.

24 The demographic collapse is further exacerbated by the pandemic. 2020 was a record year in terms of the number of deaths in Poland. According to estimates, nearly 480,000 people died in 2020, about 70,000 more than the year before – cf. A. Ambroziak, 500 zero. Koniec fantazji o prodemograficznym 500+. Liczba urodzeń wróciła do poziomu z 2016 roku, 2020, <https://oko.press/spada-liczba-urodzen/> (access: 26.01.2021); M. Fidziński, *Olbrzymia wyrwa demograficzna w 2020 r. w Polsce. Liczba śmierci poszybowała, urodzenia lecą w*

The birth increase observed shortly after the program’s introduction can be interpreted either as a short-term “novelty effect”, or associated with the realization of deferred births. Although women aged 25–34 are still the most likely to give birth in Poland, the fertility rate of older women has increased considerably in recent years. In an environment of economic prosperity and labor market stability, a program offering attractive financial transfers may be an incentive for women to accelerate their decision to have children, resulting in a temporary increase in the number and intensity of births.

The low effectiveness of the program in achieving pro-natalist goals is emphasized not only by demographers. The narration of the program’s authors is also changing, as they more often emphasize its social effects, while admitting that the program has not translated, and probably will not translate into a radical increase of the fertility rate in Poland in the near future²⁵.

Conclusions

The changes introduced in Poland in the family and pro-family policy, including the launching of the program “Family 500+”, in relation to the two issues addressed in the article, should be analyzed in the broader context of economic and socio-cultural conditions.

The process of reducing the scope of poverty and social exclusion is a consequence of the continuing favorable economic situation in recent years, which can be illustrated by the high GDP growth rates and an extremely low unemployment rate. Pro-social activities of the state, including the newly introduced program, accelerated (and in certain categories of families significantly strengthened) the improvement in this area. From the perspective of the program’s assumptions, families with children became the main beneficiaries of the benefits. For some of them – previously suffering from multidimensional deprivation – a real chance for social and economic advancement has emerged. This is particularly visible in families with many children, for whom the benefits sometimes allow them to become independent and permanently free of dependency on welfare institutions. They also somewhat blur the boundaries between the world of affluence, represented by well-off consumers, and the world of the excluded, so far incapable of responding properly to the emerging offers. In the families of program beneficiaries, signals of social inclusion are appearing –

dół, 2021, <https://next.gazeta.pl/next/7,151003,26678048,olbrzymia-wyrwa-demograficzna-w-2020-r-w-polsce-liczba-smierci.html> (access: 26.01.2021).

25 Government admits for the first time: thanks to 500 plus, births have not increased and will not increase (2020), <https://businessinsider.com.pl/twoje-pieniadze/praca/rzad-przyznaje-ze-500-plus-nie-zwieksza-dzietnosci/p7de1pc> (access: 26.01.2021).