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Children – happiness and joy, but also a great responsibility for parents. Children are the hope and the duty of society. This is the most general way in which the sense and the aim of activities towards children can be described.

In the first case, children are considered the most fundamental value; a condition of a happy life and a source of joy and satisfaction. Their presence in the family shapes the roles of husband and wife as mother and father, it unifies the family around its most important aim in life. It is parents who are primarily responsible for providing favourable conditions for the development of a child that would ensure his or her readiness to enter into an adult life.

In the second case, we consider children with respect to their role in society. Children ensure continuity of society and nation. The future development of the State and society depends on them. It is in the interest of society to improve the quality of childhood.

On November 20, 1989 the Convention on Children’s rights was adopted, and entered into force in Poland in 1990. It highlights the importance of spiritual, moral and social upbringing. There is a detailed account of the scope of rights that children enjoy in the area of healthcare and rehabilitation (Article 24), the right to education and equal opportunities (Article 28), the right to recreational activities and participation in cultural life (Article 31), the right to be covered by social security scheme (Article 26). Basic responsibility in this respect lies on the shoulders of parents. The basic responsibility to support the family is on the part of the State, which should undertake actions by using the maximum of its resources to ensure that children can fully enjoy their rights.

It needs to be remembered that those rights have their consequences for the future of society, nation, State, but their realization is necessary today. As Gabriela Mistral, a winner of the Nobel Prize, points out: “We can wait for many things we think we need. But children cannot wait. It is right now that their bones are growing, their blood maturing, their mind developing. We cannot tell them “tomorrow”. The name of the child is “Today!”

The convention has been adopted in Poland at the time of the thorough political and economic transformation in Poland. One of the reasons for the reform was to ensure better living conditions for young generation. Regrettably, children are among the groups least favored by the changing conditions. There has been a number of threats for both orphaned children and children raised in full families.

It has been often said that radical political transformation was a reason for the poor situation of the children. Currently, however, children are still the most vulnerable group. What is more, within many environments the negative tendencies have ossified making any improvements almost impossible.

It has been recently emphasized that Poland is entering a new phase of socio-economic modernization, a post-modern, or a global, phase. This phase reshapes the threats and challenges for the youngest. The quality of today’s childhood will influence the quality of future progress and determine the success in the new stage of development.

The quote from Gabriela Mistral can thus be completed in the following way: It is the activities towards children Today that will shape our Tomorrow.

The following issue of “Social Policy” is an expression of concern with the conditions of life and development of children in Poland. It concentrates on the problems experienced by young generation to prove that in spite of the general progress and improvement in many areas of life children are still subject to many dangers. Social policy institutions are often insufficient or inept in preventing those threats and creating positive changes.

There are a number of questions and perspectives on children’s wellbeing presented in this issue. Starting with demographic changes, continuing through general living conditions, environmental and health-related factors and their consequences, we finish with an analysis of social policy, institutional framework of childcare and the participation of central and local governments in family policy and social assistance.

The general message of all the papers is not only to draw attention to the most important problems that involve children but also to underscore the necessity of a public debate and action on the part of all the institutions and organizations and with respect to individual initiatives in this area. All this should be aimed at improving the living conditions of children and at providing them with equal opportunities for future happiness and self-fulfillment, on which the future of the whole society depends.

BOŻENA BALCERZAK-PARADOWSKA
The Institute of Labour and Social Studies
THE DEMOGRAPHY OF CONTEMPORARY POLISH CHILDHOOD

INTRODUCTION

Demography leaves childhood understood as a period in human life at the margins of its interest. Leaving alone the fact of birth, during its first years of live – before starting a sexually active period of life and especially before the period of procreation – a child is taken no account of within the demographic perspective. The only exception is made for those children who have experienced some significant demographic events – death or migration. Such attitude is partly a result of the tradition, i.e. the continuation of the research within the already explored areas, partly a result of the lack of occurrence of events during this period of human life and partly a result of the lack of demographically relevant behaviors within the process of sexual reproduction within the duration of this period.

In the following paper I wish to concentrate not so much on the data on children (i.e. persons defined on the basis of the criterion of chronological age as being aged 0–14) as rather to go beyond the presentation of mere figures and concentrate on meta-data – measurements and demographic and epidemiological indicators that provide us with the indirect information on the quality of childhood in contemporary Poland. What I have in mind when applying the term ‘contemporary Poland’ is the situation within the last decade, i.e. the decade the information on which is available in statistical data bases, namely 1998–2007.

At the same time, I wish to try to articulate here those currently perceptible phenomena, which – though appearing as being of little importance in the light of statistical data hereby presented – will have an influence on adult lives of people who are now children.

The main obstacle on the path of realization of the aim thus proposed is the lack of sufficiently precise data. What I have in mind when talking about the precision and accuracy of the data is, first and foremost, the more disaggregated data in place of the homogeneous data with regard to the most important differentiating factor – age. It is within many statistical studies that children aged 0–14 are treated as one unified category. In some other statistics disaggregation applies to the 5-year age-scope groups and sometimes, additionally, within the 0 to 4 age group the infants (children during the first 12 months of life) and the toddlers are being distinguished as two separate categories. From the obvious reasons such a level of aggregation overshadows the clarity of the picture, often making a 12-year-old and a 2-year-old equals. Another factor that poses an impediment for the analysis of data is a shortage of a larger amount of data concentrated around a specific problem or situation in which children may find themselves.

CHILDREN AND CHILDHOOD IN THE LIGHT OF DEMOGRAPHY

When talking about the demography of childhood it seems necessary to adopt as a point of departure a trivial statement that the number of children in contemporary Poland is continuously decreasing though, during the last decade, the number of infants began to rise from 2003 onwards. This recent increase, however, does not change the overall tendency which is a simple consequence of the fact that the number of births despite the 2003–2008 increase is still lower than in the first half of the 90ties. Consequently, the 0–14 age group is being deserted by relatively numerous groups each year while the new members are still few in comparison.

A large portion of current children comprises of the only children (children with no brothers or sisters) since almost one-third of the first-born babies will not have brothers or sisters. For instance, within the conditions of the sustained fertility pattern of 2007, among the first-born 32.3% would not have siblings, 46.4% would have a brother or a sister, 8.7% would have two of them, 12.6% would have 3 of them or more. This would mean, however, that only 16.1% of all children would be raised within a family with one child only, 46.4% would be raised by families with two children, further 13% within the families with three children and 24.5% within the more numerous families (calculations based on RRL 2008, p. 91). This, in turn, means that families with three children or more would constitute 21.3% of all the families and would raise 37.5% of all the Polish children.

As a result of low fertility rates children born now in Poland have relatively bigger chances for receiving attention and good care from their parents much more so than two or three decades ago. There is now less competition for attention, time and resources between brothers and sisters and no such competition in case of an only-child. This is supported by what can be termed as the ‘child-centrism’ apparent especially with reference to the minimal susceptibility of child-related spending to changes in income level and with regard to the readiness on the part of parents to keep the child-related spending unharmed at the cost of reductions in other areas (Dobrodzicka 1998). The negative side of such a situation is the lack of opportunities to develop social skills and to learn mutual cooperation for children raised without brothers and sisters.

From the point of view of conditions in which children are being raised it is also important to note that the age of mothers has been on the increase during the last two decades (as has the age of fathers, though to a lesser degree). By this token children have older parents, more mature and better prepared emotionally for the parenting. It may be that the increased age of parents also means better material (economic) conditions in comparison with situation whereby parents are younger. This would be due to the more stable professional and financial situation of older parents. On the negative side, however, the increase in age of parents brings with itself, on the one hand, a greater risk of the occurrence of serious health problems that the older parents may experience, and, on the other hand, a greater demand for care on the part of grandparents in case of the so-called sandwich generation (though it should be noted, realistically speaking, that this usually becomes a considerable problem when children are already teenagers).

THE DEMOGRAPHIC DANGERS FOR CHILDHOOD

In this part I would like to have a look at the demographic processes which influence – if not decide upon altogether – the quality of childhood.

In comparison with their counter-parts born 10 or 20 years ago, contemporary children are much less threatened by the risk of death during the period of their childhood. The reduction in death rate during the period of childhood was present also in 1998–2007 when the likelihood of death in case of a child of male sex before reaching his 15th birthday lowered from 0.01381 to 0.00955, while the same indicator for female children lowered from 0.01150 to 0.00757, i.e. the reduction was by almost one-third. This took place thanks to the
reduction in mortality during the first year of life by approximately 40% of the initial value.

This positive tendency with regard to child mortality, however, is accompanied all over the world by the growth of population of children in demand of constant care. The reduction in death rate during the first days and weeks of life means the lack of natural selection and the appearance of children able to live only when their life functions are sustained in artificial conditions. However little data there is on this phenomenon, it is at a glance that we can notice the growing number of children and teenagers suffering from, to give some examples, brain damage, the Down disease and similarly serious conditions. This fact is usually left unmentioned in the majority of the analyses of the long-term changes and processes connected with childhood.

The contemporary new-born Polish children are much less often orphaned by their biological parents than their counterparts were in the past. As calculations based on statistics on mortality show (Szukalski 2009), the probability of becoming an orphan for the children aged 0–15 reduced by one-third in the period 1995–2005 with the probability of becoming fully orphaned being now half its value in 1995. Though it is true that the postponement of the decision to have children makes the portion of orphans larger the total number remains smaller due to the reduced death rates.

Reduced death-rates not only decrease the probability of becoming a child with no biological parents but also increases chances of staying in touch with the older family members, namely: grandparents and great-grandparents. This increases the chances of receiving care from grandparents, especially since the reduced birth-rates make the number of grandchildren smaller and thus the competition for grandparents’ support and attention is lessened. It is difficult, however, to point out the advantages for children from having a wider range of grandparents and great-grandparents present in their life since, in the Polish context, one needs to remember about the usually poor health of people above the age of 70. At the same time the scale of the process of becoming the so-called social orphans among the Polish children is on the increase.

A dynamic rise in the number of divorces in recent years and big-scale economic migrations are among the most crucial reasons for such a state of affairs.

During the 1998–2007 decade it was 475 thousand children aged 0–15 (this is the age spectrum used in most statistics on the subject) that experienced the divorce of their parents, of which 183.8 thousand were children aged 0–6 at the moment of court’s judgment and consequently too young to understand the reasons behind their parents’ decision to separate and to consciously and somehow skillfully adjust to the new circumstances.

Two problems seem to be of importance here:

1) the highest number of children going through their parents’ divorce occurred in 2005 (71.6 thousand) while the highest number of divorces was observed in 2006;

2) the number of children going through their parents’ divorce changed more dynamically in recent years than the actual number of divorces granted.

This seems to suggest that the impact of highly negative consequences of the legislation passed in 2003 on family benefits and civil status of parents was serious, as we need to keep in mind the fact that the group that was most prone to divorce at that time was made of families with bigger than average number of children1. The legislation in question (Act from November 28, 2003 on family benefits) stated that the limit of income introduced for the purposes of social assistance will be calculated in a manner more favourable to single-parents families. This, in turn, led to a situation whereby taking a divorce and raising children as a, de jure, single parent increased chances for being granted social assistance benefits and family allowances.

When discussing divorce it needs to be stated, however, that during the last decade there were some positive changes in case-law, namely: the custody was granted more often to both mother and father (a steady increase from 28.4% in 1998 to 37.1% in 2007), primarily as a direct result of a less frequent practice of granting exclusive custody rights to mothers (from 65.8% to 57.1% respectively). It should be emphasized that we are faced here with a tendency that should be regarded as very positive from the point of view of children’s well-being and which is, at the same time, a part of a long-term trend that could be observed already in late 1980-ties.

As far as the impact of migration is concerned, there is no reliable statistics. Estimations made by the Ministry of National Education on the basis of a survey conducted in 2008 by the headmasters of primary and secondary schools indicated that there might be as much as 52 thousand euro-orphans, including 8 thousand full orphans (both parents migrated abroad and stay in another country). The statistics by the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy say that in 2007 there were 1299 cases of children passed to Orphanages and for adoption due to their parents migrating abroad. It seems reasonable to suspect, however, that the actual scale of the problem is significantly larger than those estimations may suggest.

Another demographic danger for childhood can be found in the increase of alternative models of family life. These include primarily unspecified relations of partnership and grater risk of a break-up due to a less rigorous character of fulfilling their parenting roles, especially in case of fathers. Available statistics allow for a re-enactment of changes taking place by means of analysis of birth-rates outside the institution of marriage. During the decade in question the total amount of births outside marriage was 565.6 thousand, the increase being from 45.7 thousand in 1998 to 75.5 thousand in 2007. The number of children born outside marriage but becoming the so-called pre-marital offspring due to their parents legalizing their relationship is unknown. This does not change the fact that the number of children raised in a non-formal relationship is growing. Obviously, the scale of the deliberate single motherhood is unknown though information gathered and presented by the media suggests the number of mothers deciding to raise a child on their own is growing as well.

It is worth remembering, however, that, as the results of the analysis of recent population census suggest (Szukalski 2009a), the characteristics of mothers rising children on their own look much less favourable than similar data on mothers living within a marriage. This refers to age, sources of income, level of education, professional activity. Therefore, among children raised in non-legalized relationships the problems with proper diet, buying educational or recreational services and equipping for school might be more frequent in comparison to the traditional, marital unions.

Another factor directly influencing the quality of childhood, especially when referring to the range of parenting competence and access to material goods necessary for investment in children’s development, is becoming parents at an early age. In general, the number of children of teenage mothers born during the last decade equaled 238.5 thousand, including 15 thousand born to mothers aged 16 and under at the time of birth. The number of children born to teenage mothers decreased quickly from 30.4 thousand to 19.9 thousand, however the last three years saw certain stagnation in the process and even a small growth (Szukalski 2009b). Par-
particularly negative situation takes place in case when also a father is a very young person. However, in this case there is no complete data since, though in 2007 8.5% of teenage mothers declared the age of the father being under 20, 23.9% of mothers refused to inform about the age of the father of their child (one can suspect that it was due to the lack of contact with the biological father of the child). Among the teenage mothers that gave information about the age of the biological father of their child the percentage of those who declared the age to be under 20 was 12.1.

SOCIAL DANGERS FOR CHILDHOOD

In this part of my paper I wish to focus on a number of issues which are often left unmentioned by the social researchers and commentators. What I have in mind is to delineate various dimensions that have an impact on child’s chances to receive an apt investment in human capital – not only knowledge, qualifications, and skills but also health.

First of all, it should be remembered that the readiness on the part of Polish people to have children is diversified across social groups. For instance, estimates based on 2003 population census that refer to the total fertility rates across education levels show that women with basic education had 1.65 child while women with higher education only 0.95 (Strzelecki 2007, p. 31). Therefore – since education is a great factor marking the economic and material conditions that a child is provided with – the highest birth rates are observable among the groups that are less prepared to offer favourable material conditions for children’s development. Due to the concentration of births within the groups marked by lower material status the correlation between poverty and the big-size families is hardly a surprise for the researchers.

Secondly, as we already know, more than one-third of children are being raised in numerous families with a greater risk of poverty. If we add to this the greater propensity on the part of uneducated women to have children and growing significance of non-formal models of family we are left with a situation whereby a large number of children have unfavorable conditions for growth and development during the first years of their life and event before their birth. It needs to be remembered that, according to the Barker’s hypothesis (1996) there is a direct relationship between a woman’s diet during pregnancy and the health of a child and, later on, an adult person. According to this hypothesis, insufficient or unhealthy diets influence the prenatal development of the child. In case of lack of sufficient portions of proteins, vitamins, and microelements the organism of a child is forced to choose into which organs these elements should, so to speak, be invested. In such a case, the organs favoured are those of strategic importance (primarily the nervous system) at the cost of less important ones (e.g. liver, kidneys, some elements of the blood system). As a result, children of poorly nourished mothers are prone to have underdeveloped organs, inappropriate physiology and metabolism, which, in turn, makes them more inclined to develop health problems such as diabetics, blood-pressure problems, heart diseases and others.

Therefore, the awareness of the fact that, within the Polish context, poverty is correlated with the number of children in a family makes one conclude that the condition of health of children raised in poor families will by itself increase the risk of later diseases and serious health problems in the future and, by the same token, decrease the chances for significant improvement in quality of their lives and, to some extent, in their economic and social status. It may be that a partial solution is offered by the possibility of financing the purchase of vitamins and diet supplements by the authorities for all the pregnant women.

CONCLUSION

The reader of this paper might have been surprised by a very general character of most of the remarks put here. This is a result of the intention of an author faced with a lack of sufficient data to discuss important and socially urgent matters. Unfortunately, writing on the demography of Polish childhood – due to the limits just mentioned – means taking new and unexplored directions.

Regardless of all the shortcomings of the presented argumentation it is possible to make a synthesis of the discussed issues covering the area of the quality of childhood and its results, i.e. its effects on the human capital. Despite all the numerous negative tendencies it seems that the last decade, from the point of view of demographic analysis, should be evaluated as generally positive. From the obvious reasons, however, researchers should focus on the grimmer parts of the social reality presented here. The increase in the number and frequency of divorces, non-formal and continuously unstable relationships as well as appearance of the so-called euro-orphans and the negative disproportion between total fertility rates across educational and material divisions which leads to strengthened correlation between poverty and the size of a family and an increase in the number of children in demand of constant care are all processes that necessitate further study and greater expertise. The main conclusion of the paper is that the scale of our inipetude and ignorance when faced with social problems thus presented is too large, especially with relation to the mechanisms, causes and consequences of the processes discussed as well as with relation to their social and territorial diversification briefly described in this paper.

1 In 1993 there were 494,3 thousand children born in Poland, fifteen years later, i.e. in 2008 the number was 414 thousand, thus the number of children aged 0–14 decreased. There is, however, a lot of data that supports the prediction that this negative tendency may be overturned in 2010.

2 This, in turn, means that those children, being often the only-ones, will be faced with a greater burden of taking care of their old parents than people usually are today.

3 The term “sandwich generation” is used in the Anglophone literature to denote a group of people under the pressure to provide care for, at the same time, their adolescent children and their elderly parents. This usually takes place in the age of 50–60.

4 During the years 2004–2005 the increase in the number of married couples with children within the group of couples taking divorce (62% changed into 68%) while the change in fraction was getting bigger as the number of children raised increased.

5 It was 1,13 among women with secondary-school education and 1,45 among women with primary-school education. Other statistics were made by the Governmental Population Board (2003), which estimated that total fertility rates were as follows: 1.25 – among women with higher education, 1.11 – among women with secondary-school education, 1.58 – among women with apprenticeship education after primary school, 1.53 – among women with primary school education, 0.32 – among women without a full primary-school education (RRL 2004, p. 107). The differences between the two sources do not reduce the giant gap between fertility rates across educational division.

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CHILD POVERTY IN THE URBAN ENVIRONMENT (ON THE EXAMPLE OF THE CITY OF ŁÓDŹ)

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INTRODUCTION

Knowledge about the poverty among urban residents, including children, is limited and incomplete. National reports published on the basis of the EU Statistics on Income and Living Conditions and on surveys of the household budgets are insufficient to describe the situation in the smaller administrative units. That is the reason why the main source of our knowledge concerning poverty and its characteristics in local communities are scientific research projects conducted in particular cities or within particular communities. The results of those researches cannot, however, be generalized. Hence the annotation, in the title of the article, that the study concerns only one particular city.

Research on poverty in Łódź had been conducted systematically since the beginning of the 1990s by the Institute of Sociology, University of Łódź. Characteristic trait of the approach that was chosen by the Łódź research group is the conjugation of research with an analysis into the functioning of social welfare and the professional development of the social workers. Łódź’s research, commenced in 1993, transcends beyond the usual standards and has become an inspiration to other teams of researchers. The innovative approach characterized by a continuously increasing knowledge of the social phenomena and the process of falling into poverty by analyzing new dimensions and problem groups as well as the team who have taken this approach have gained recognition in the academia and is known as the Łódź school of research on poverty and social welfare.

Discovering that the risk of poverty is, contrary to popular opinion, bigger amongst children than adults has turned the attention of the research team to the phenomena of child poverty and the risk of intergenerational transmission of poverty. At the same time, identifying that in the poverty enclaves every second child was at risk of falling into poverty in contrast with every fifth child in the city (Warzywoda-Kruszyńska 1999), has prompted us to pay careful attention to the lives of the children from poor families during a longer time span.

Taking advantage of the opportunities provided by the Operational Program Human Capital, (Regulation 7.2.1), starting July 1st 2008 the research team has undertaken the project ‘WZLOT–Strengthening opportunities and weakening transmission of poverty among inhabitants of the towns in the Łódź Province (Voiwodship)’, the initial results of which, referring to the city of Łódź, shall be presented in this paper. The project consists of four interconnected conceptual researches that were to answer the following questions:

1. Are the places defined as ‘poverty enclaves’ still over-represented by poor people (receiving welfare benefits), and thus, has the poverty been ‘solidified’ in those urban areas?
2. Is there a process of poverty transmission in the ‘poverty enclaves’ to next generations? In other words, do children of poor parents, after reaching legal age, too become welfare beneficiaries?
3. Is there a risk of transferring poverty to another generation of the descendants of the previous (10 years ago) residents of the ‘enclaves’ and does teenage parenthood constitute its driving force?

4. Do current living conditions, school situation and social relations of children from schools located in the ‘poverty enclaves’ and students with disabilities from poor families, predict poverty in adulthood?

Groups surveyed for the WZLOT Project included:
1) students of schools located in the ‘poverty enclaves’;
2) teenage mothers and teenage fathers living in the ‘poverty enclaves’ who became parents in 2002 or later;
3) members of dispersed extended families living in Łódź’s ‘poverty enclaves’ 10 years ago, especially those who were still children in 1998;
4) teenagers with motor disability, their parents and teachers.

It is important to note, that this is first such research in Poland of children living in an urban setting that is degraded both physically and socially. Moreover, this is the first panel research of poor people living in ‘poverty enclaves’, conducted with the same people after a period of ten years.

In the WZLOT project, the researchers assumed that the experience of poverty in childhood, especially in a socially and spatially degraded social environment, poses a threat of poverty transmission in the life cycle of an individual and in an intergenerational perspective. Therefore, the theoretical inspiration for this project was based on two kinds of concepts: first – those that explain the significance of poverty in childhood for the future life of an individual (Shonkoff, Phillips ed., 2000), second, those that offer explanations of solidification of poverty in particular parts of urban setting (Sampson 2009; Wacquant 2008; Kazepov 2009).

Data presented below illustrates the dynamics of poverty in Łódź against the background of the Łódź province and against Poland on the basis of transformed data from the annual reports of social assistance agencies. Next, I indicate the permanence of poverty in the same parts of Łódź and present the preliminary results of the WZLOT project, with special attention given to those facts and mechanisms that might lead to the further ‘solidification’ of poverty in those regions and its intergenerational transmission.

THE DYNAMICS OF CHILD POVERTY IN POLAND, IN THE ŁÓDŹ PROVINCE AND IN THE CITY OF ŁÓDŹ

Diverse sources agree that the tendency of an increased percentage of people living in poor households, which is occurring in Poland since the beginning of the political transformation of 1989 and till 2004, has been reversed since 2005. Statistical data shows that the extent of poverty in Poland is systematically decreasing; regardless of the poverty line used. According to Eurostat, which sets the poverty line at 60% median of equivalent income, the rate of the ‘risk of poverty’ amongst the total population in Poland leveled in 2005 at 21% and was 5 points higher than the median in the European Union, in 2006 it was 19% and was 3 points higher than the median in the European Union, and in 2007 it was 17% (there is no data about the median poverty rate in the EU-27 states for this year (Warzywoda-Kruszyńska 2009)). Central Statistical Office of...
The number of people in Poland that lived:

a) below the relative poverty line (50% of median monthly household spending) the data for 2004 is 20.3%, in 2005 – 18.1%, w 2006 – 17.7%, w 2007 – 17.3%, a w 2008 – 17.6%;
b) below the administrative line (an income below which a person/a household is entitled to welfare benefits) was: 19.2%, 18.1%, 15.1%, 14.6%, 10.6%, respectively;
c) below the minimum of existence (the level of income set by the Institute of Labour and Social Studies (IPSS) necessary to fulfill only the basic needs) was: 11.9%, 12.3%, 7.8%, 6.6%, 5.6%, respectively.

The range of poverty amongst people living in the village is still greater than among people living in urban areas. From the perspective of child poverty, it is important to note the decrease in extreme poverty among marriages with four and more children and the increase in the number of poor families among single parents (ibid, p. 15).

As can be seen from the Eurostat data, since 2005 the range of child poverty has been systematically decreasing. In 2005, 29% of children (aged 0–17) lived in households with income lower than 60% of the median equivalent income in Poland, in 2006 – 26% of children was in such situation, and in 2007 – 24% (Warzywoda-Kruszyńska 2009).

The data quoted here is not very helpful for the local social policy. In order to conduct activities that are to increase social integration the authorities of the city/commune need to have information detailing the situation in their region, and not generalized information about Poland or even about a province. Their responsibility is to draft and enforce a strategy of solving social problems, but usually, they do this very intuitively.

This state of affairs is caused by lack of detailed statistical data on particular cities, which is indispensable for enforcing local social policy, and the fact that the municipal and communal authorities cannot or do not want to use the resources at the disposal of different municipal and communal departments. Łódź, for instance, does not have a centralized source of information regarding the number and the location of social housing. One can obtain information about how many people are waiting for social housing in the Municipal Office, but in order to find out how many units of housing are there available in the city one has to send an inquiry to the individual districts. There is no information on how many children inhabit them, nor how many children live in poor households, how many children have not been vaccinated, etc. There is no information on the concentration of poor people, the unemployed, people addicted to alcohol etc. within the territory of the city of Łódź.

In order to determine the extent of poverty and the concentration of poor people in Łódź, we are using the reports based on registers of social administration16. Therefore, members of households receiving welfare benefits are listed in the social welfare registers, which means that they are poor and their children experience poverty in childhood. We focus on elementary schools because they are easily identifiable in the urban setting of a city and the children usually attend regional schools. Thus, it is very likely that children attending the school live in its vicinity.

In 2007 in Łódź there were 4042 children receiving free meal in elementary schools against the total of 30 020 elementary school pupils (which constitutes 13% of the total of pupils) and in grammar schools out of the total of 17334 children, 1266 were receiving free meal (7% of the total number of pupils).

The situation in elementary schools is very diversified. The rate of children receiving free meal is between 1% and 54%. This means that there are elementary schools where one in every hundred students receives a free meal and schools where every second students does. In 19 schools (out of 84) in which no less then every fifth child receives a free meal the total number of those children constitutes 43% of all Łódź’s elementary school children receiving a subsidized meal.

Within the regions of these schools there are twelve ‘inner-city enclaves of poverty’ out of the seventeen ‘poverty enclaves’ identified in 199819.

One can say that in the broad city center zone spreading across the both sides of Łódź’s main street of Piotrkowska, poverty has undergone the process of ‘solidification’ and there is the next generation of children who live there in conditions threatening poverty transgression onto the next phase of life.

In eleven schools with the highest rate of subsidized school meals (26%<) we conducted a survey with all students from the 6th grade, whose parents agreed for the child to take part in the research. The total number of students was 548. Most of them, which is understandable, do not live in poor households (receiving welfare benefits) and live in conditions that do not seem to threaten the development of their potentials. However, as the initial research conducted by Marta Petelewicz suggests, it appears that:

- every one in ten of the surveyed students lives with his/her family in one room and does not have his/her own bed.

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Table 1. **People in households receiving welfare benefits and children in households receiving welfare benefits in % in Łódź, the Łódź province and in Poland**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>in the total population</th>
<th>in children (0–17 lat)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Łódź</td>
<td>Łódź province</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>no data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>10.2</td>
<td>9.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>9.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>8.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>7.8</td>
<td>7.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Author's own calculations based on the data from GUS (total population, total number of children) and statistical data on social assistance of the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy and the Social Affairs Department of the Łódź Voivodship Office.
— every fifteenth does not have a separate toilet or bathroom in the house;
— every fourth does not have their own desk and does not have Internet access at home;
— every fourth does not visit their friends from class, and every third is not visited by their school friends;
— every third student does not live with their father, every fifteenth does not live with their mother;
— the father of every fourth and the mother of every fifth student is unemployed;
— every tenth does not go to the dentist.

School pedagogues from these schools signal that some children have lice and have scabies. Withdrawal of medical care from schools makes them unable to prevent diseases and recognize whether a child who does not display visible symptoms should receive special treatment. The school does not have the information about the home situation of the pupil. If parents show no interest in the child’s achievements and behaviour and he or she has not committed an offence, the school cannot intervene.

That was probably the case with a seventeen-year-old student of vocational school who stabbed and killed her mother’s partner when he did not let her make a sandwich. As it later turned out, the girl was the sole breadwinner in the family and the actual caretaker of younger siblings, but no one in the school knew about her problems. She was attending school, her behavior did not raise concern of the school staff and she was promoted to the next grade. However, the mother never attended parent’s meetings. The family was not on social welfare because they did not accept the terms and conditions of the social contract so no institution had an insight into what was going on inside the family. The tragedy took place in an old tenement in the ‘poverty enclave’ two blocks away from the primary school she graduated from, a school where this present research was conducted.

THE RISK OF THE CONTINUATION OF POVERTY IN THE NEXT GENERATION

The stories of the lives of teenage mothers and fathers growing up in the ‘poverty enclaves’ are stories of neglected family homes, domestic violence that children experience, the lack of control and lack of expectations from parents. Clearly visible is the helplessness and inefficiency of social institutions against accumulated problems of such children. The risk that the teenage parents will act as ‘poverty transmitters’ to the next generation (of their children) is the result of early motherhood of women, and criminal experience of men.

Some of the women surveyed got pregnant when they were in childcare institution, some while still living in a dysfunctional family. Only few had a family fulfilling their child-raising tasks, but had serious financial problems. The youngest teenage mother gave birth at the age of 16. At present, some of them have few children. Those young women lack any knowledge about contraception but declare readiness to provide their children with all the necessities. However, those women live in very poor housing conditions with their children, usually, in social housing located in the ‘enclaves of poverty’. They did not graduate from grammar school or they merely attend weekend classes in low-quality private schools, which, as they admit themselves, ‘go along with them’, drastically lowering their academic standards.

The helplessness of schools towards pregnant students, and students-mothers is the result of the lack of procedures ensuring the realization of the Fetus Protection Act. These women will most likely remain dependent on welfare, and their children will not be able to optimize their potential. Those children are ‘sick from poverty’ (term coined by Adam Czerwiński, a journalist from “Gazeta Wyborcza’) because they live in cold and fungi-ridden homes they often develop lung diseases, allergies and asthma. The only way for providing the child with medications is hospitalization.

Among the children of the surveyed women are also children with disabilities. Their development is especially endangered as their mothers do not have the financial and transportation resources, and they are not motivated enough to ensure early rehabilitation for their children.

It comes as no surprise that these children were unplanned, the fathers are usually random men, often teenagers from their peer group, although in one case the father of the child was fifty years older than the mother! The striking fact is the criminal past and present of those fathers. While reading the stories of those young men Wacquant’s (2008) theory on penalization of poverty comes to mind. The author states that punishing poverty is a form of control over young men from marginalized social environments.

Although it sometimes happens that the parents of a child live together, it is almost a rule that the fathers are not interested in taking custody of their children. Men, who stay in informal relationships with the mothers of their babies and who have become fathers in their teens and have now a contact with their babies, if they are not currently in jail, usually work illegally as construction workers. Neither them, nor their employers pay social insurance or pension insurance. Those men are neither registered in the employment office nor the local welfare office. They earn too little to build up savings.

Both men and women comprise a category of the poor who represent the type of poverty described by Wacquant as the ‘advanced marginalization’. The author places this type of poverty in neighborhoods of relegation, stressing that characteristic trait of this type of poverty (created by neo-liberal capitalism) is the lack of sufficient connection with the mainstream economy. In fact, the livelihoods of the people experiencing advanced marginalization bear no correlation to the global economic situation, be it recession or growth. Standard instruments used by social assistance are not, and cannot, as Wacquant claims, be effective in this case.

CONCLUSIONS

In the light of the presented data solidification of poverty in ‘poverty enclaves’ in Łódź is unquestionable. The victims and ‘transmitters’ of poverty to the next phase of their own lives and to the next generation are children growing up in dysfunctional families located in physically degraded parts of city. The mediator in this process is the housing policy of the city, which results in locating poor families with small children in substandard social housing.

At present in Łódź in the area of the ‘poverty enclaves’ located near the more representative parts of the city (such as Manufaktura, located on the premises of the former industrial empire of L. Poznański) the authorities are planning to revitalize the city with a help of the private-public partnership co-financing. The inhabitants of the council houses are offered to move to flats built by the developer in other parts of the city (it is yet unknown where such flats are to be located) for a substantially lowered rent. This offer does not apply to people who live in houses provided by the Social Assistance services. It is not known what the city can offer to those people. One might expect that they will be resettled to less interesting places for the developers, and thus further raise the poverty rates there.

Wacquant (2008) points to government as bearing the responsibility for the existence of the concentrated advanced marginalization. It is the government that allows for creation of a social category that works in socially unsustainable jobs that do not guarantee an income high enough for the fulfillment of basic needs. The government reaction to the creating of advanced marginalization is creating new ways of social risk management based on two pillars: the system of welfare that disciplines and encourages the poor to take on low-paid and socially insecure work and the second pillar, namely: the outsized penitentiary system coupled with an over-active police forces.

Loic Wacquant looks at creating and functioning of the degraded districts and neighborhoods from the point of view of the social
class and within the macro-social perspective, whereas experts in child development concentrate more on the mechanisms causing poverty being inherited down through the generations. They maintain that the critical period of life is decisive for the future of an individual and the future of their progeny.

Recently published research referring to neurobiology (Farah and others, 2009) provides explicit evidence that poverty causes damage to the functioning of the brain of children who live in poverty resembling those occurring after brain stroke. This obviously has an effect on linguistic skills and remembering skills of children from poor families, conditioning, in turn, their future schooling performance. Differences in the brain development are the result of social conditions, in case of children from poor families lacking educational toys, poor communication with other children and the higher levels of stress experienced by the child raised in poor conditions. Notwithstanding, the authors of this research stress that the impact of the environment may neutralise those limitations and appeal for measures to combat and prevent child poverty and for early preventive intervention, especially in the form of the pre-school education.

2 Four features describe the approach applied by Łódź research team: (1) focusing on the local community where the ‘geography of poverty’ is researched (seeking ‘poverty enclaves’ – locations where poor people concentrate); (2) holistic approach: including different categories of people ‘involved’ in poverty and the process of improving/ preventing poverty (politicians, representatives of the social administration, social workers and the beneficiaries of the social help) (3) using varied techniques and research methods aimed at facilitating understanding of the poverty phenomenon through triangulation of data; (4) dynamic approach through analyzing poverty during the course of life of an individual and taking the intergenerational approach. The most important results to date of the Łódź research team are: (1) providing empirical data for the claim that poverty is most widespread amongst children and youth (aged 0–17); (2) Introducing the idea of ‘juvenalization’ and ‘ghettization’ of poverty into the discourse on poverty (3) Indicating the importance of the structural factors (de-industrialization, de-welfarization) as well as the socio-cultural (parental attitude, dysfunctions within the family) in falling into/recovering from poverty; (4) providing knowledge about different mechanisms of inheriting poverty amongst women and men; (5) indicating the need for the coordination of actions taken by social services as a pre-condition for increasing the efficiency of fighting poverty; (6) providing knowledge about different ways of perceiving and conceptualizing the poor by the social service workers; (7) drawing attention to diversification of the poor and the need to adjust the forms of help in individual cases; (8) providing empirical data for the existence of active positions of people living in poverty who use different strategies of coping with poverty; (9) introducing the idea of mutual learning, when people representing different social categories would learn from each other: the academics and the local people involved in the research (local authorities, social workers, residents).
3 In the Institute of Sociology of University of Łódź are provided full-time and part-time studies in Social Work. Since 1998 the Institute offers post-graduate studies in the Organization of Social Work. The Centre of Education of Social Services is an integral part of the Institute which offers training courses for social workers.
4 Two members of the team (J. Grotowska-Leder i J. Krzyszkowski) were awarded habilitation degree for this research; two other academics (A. Golczyńska-Grondas i M. Potoczna) received a PH.D degree.
5 In years 2004–2007 W. Warzywoda-Kruszyńska was the co-ordinator of the Project PROFIT (Policy Responses and Factors in the Intergenerational Transmission of Inequalities) in the 6th EU Framework Program, while the Łódź team was a crucial part of the team that coordinated the project.
6 Website: www.wzlot.uni.lodz.pl. The researches are conducted in Łódź, Belchatów, Pabianice, Piotrków Trybunalski, Radomsko, Tomaszów Mazowiecki and Zgierz.
7 The following researches are conducted under my supervision: (1) Residents of Łódź’s poverty enclaves 10 years later (qualitative research) – main author Bogdan Jankowski; (2) Early parenthood as a risk of poverty and social exclusion (qualitative research) – main author Paulina Bunio-Mroczek; (3) Poverty in childhood as a risk of solidifying poverty and social exclusion in the future (quantitative and qualitative research) – main authors Marta Petelewicz and Natalia Holets; (4) Disability in childhood as a risk of poverty and social exclusion in the future (qualitative research) – main author Joanna Biela-Dytrysz.
8 Research conducted amongst students of final years of elementary schools. The selection of schools was conducted on the basis of the number of students receiving free meal from school under the School Feeding Program. Schools, in which number of children receiving help was twice as high as Łódź’s average were selected for the research and these regions were classified as child poverty enclaves. However, it must be noted, that there is no data concerning whether these regions are also places with severe poverty amongst young children and teenagers.
9 In-depth interviews conducted with 73 women and 27 men as well as 20 experts meeting teenage parents on professional grounds.
10 Total of 90 biographical interviews have been conducted, including 78 with the same persons as 10 years before.
11 Total of 30 in-depth interviews have been conducted with teenagers (aged between 15–17) and 30 with their parents as well as 20 interviews with experts.
12 Jolanta Grotowska-Leder (2004) conducted panel research in the same households that were beneficiaries of welfare in Łódź during the periods of 5 years.
13 The number of children living in families receiving social assistance was estimated on the basis of data about the number of children with one, two, three, four and more children. Because in the last category we assumed there were more then four children, the actual number of children living in families benefiting from welfare might be larger.
14 Please note that due to much lower incomes in Poland then in other EU countries (especially countries of Western Europe) the incomes designating the ‘risk of poverty line’ are much lower then in, for instance, Luxemburg, Germany or Great Britain.
15 (…) the significant drop in the rate of extreme poverty can be attributed not only to the improvement of financial situation of some of the households, but also to lower level of existential minimum estimated by the Institute of Labour and Social Affairs in comparison to 2005. Had extreme poverty be measured using the amended indicator of the rise in goods and consumption services prices level of lines binding for 2005 – the extreme poverty rate would be 9,5% (GUS 2009, p. 14).
16 Notwithstanding it must be noted that those reports need a careful interpretation. Because the ‘administrative poverty line’ is estimated in nominal values and is not amended according to the rise in income, the number of those eligible for benefits is diminishing ‘automatically’ and does not denote an improvement in living conditions. Although it seems that there is less poor people, in relation to the rest of society their financial situation has deteriorated.
17 Individuals and households eligible for benefits are the ones whose income is below the administrative poverty line. However, the joint number of the members of households receiving financial aid is not entirely concordant with the number of people whose income is below the administrative poverty line, as the date provided by GUS in reports on the situation of households reveals. It is because in order to receive welfare benefit the household/individual must fulfill additional criteria mentioned in the Act on Social Assistance, additionally, in case of children receiving free meal at school the income criteria is increased by 50%. It means that in order to receive the financial aid, some of the beneficiaries (childless people, households which do not receive free meal at school) must have a lower income then families with children who receive free meal at school.
18 The research did not identify schools with the highest rate of school food support indicator in the five poverty enclaves located on the outskirts of the city. These school regions are very large and also encompass rural areas.

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INTRODUCTION

Social stratification and socio-economic inequalities take place in most of the countries in the world, including Poland, and have biological implications in terms of differences in the maturation rate of youth who belong to variously defined social strata. There also are differences in height and weight of both children and adults.

The height of the human body, which has begun to be registered in some European countries since 1750, has been ‘discovered’ by historians and economists. In recent years it has become a fashionable tool for describing countries’ economic growth (Floud et al. 1990; Komlos 1994). On the basis of both the increase and the decrease in body height of the population over the past 250 years, the authors analyze the economic fluctuations of the countries, as well as the nourishment level, health and economic situation of the social classes and groups. Some results and findings of this anthropological research bear a political undertone, since they present biological results (both positive or negative) of the socio-economic situation, which was created by the ruling elites.

Social inequalities amongst inhabitants of Polish villages, which have been thought to have existed ‘since time immemorial’, have undergone changes during the period examined in this research. These changes have been particularly radical after 1989.

The assessment of the social stratification in this research was based on the growth and maturation of girls who belong to variously defined groups of rural families. It is common knowledge that children living in good socio-economic-cultural conditions are characterized by better biological growth parameters in contrast to the children who live in poor conditions. The simplest measure of economic conditions of an individual is by the median income per household member. This largely determines the fulfillment of fundamental human needs. Regrettably, during the previous socio-political system in Poland this data was inaccessible, and has remained inaccessible to this date. One of the main reasons for this is the legal protection of personal data together with the existence of the large area of the unregistered ‘black market’ income. Thus, the socio-economic situation of the subjects is evaluated by using the median method, i.e. using the easily accessible and reliable environmental features, which are known to influence the biological condition of the subjects. Most often used are: the size of the urban agglomeration (big city, small town, village), number of children in the family, education of the subject and his or her parents, household equipment and the size of the farm.

There has been so far no satisfying correlation between the level of education and the amount of earnings; it is enough to enumerate such occupational groups as teachers or nurses. In spite of that, the higher the education of the parents, the fewer children in the family and the bigger inhabited agglomeration, the earlier the maturation of children, the greater the body height of children, and adults (Bielicki 1989; Bielicki et al. 1986, 1997, 2003; Charzewski 1981; Hulanicka 1996; Hulanicka et al. 1990, 1994; Laska-Mierzejewska et al. 1982; Laska-Mierzejewska, Olszewska 2003; Milicerowa 1968).

ANTHROPOLOGICAL RESEARCH INTO THE RURAL FAMILIES

The first researches of the biological consequences of social stratification of the rural population in Poland were initiated in 1967 and were repeated in 1977, 1987 and 2001 (Laska-Mierzejewska 1971, 1983; Laska-Mierzejewska, Luczak 1993; Laska-Mierzejewska, Olszewska 2003, 2007).

The main stratification criterion of the villagers, accepted in 1967, was the source of income of the family. Three socio-occupational groups have been identified:

1) farmer families: living solely off their own farm;
2) farmer-and-worker families: their income comes from two sources: the farm and the salary of one or both spouses working outside of the farm;

3) non-farmer families: rural residents who do not own land. Farm families are usually characterized by a lower level education represented by its members, larger number of children and worse household equipment in comparison with the rural families who do not own any land. In connection with the above-mentioned factors, additional stratification criteria have been introduced, namely:

- the number of children in the family;
- the education of parents (elementary, secondary, vocational or higher);
- the wealth of the family is evaluated on the basis of the household appliances and the number of durable goods: water supply, hot water, gas, refrigerators, deep freezers, color TV, video (only in 2001), automatic washing machines, and cars.

The main criterion for measuring biological conditions of the girls was the age of the first menstrual bleeding (age at menarche AM). This phenomenon is characterized by very high eco-sensitivity. Also, the height and body weight were measured. Rural girls aged 9–18, living in different regions of Poland were studied in 1967 (n = 7889), 1977 (n = 9827), 1987 (n = 13556) and 2001 (n = 9599).

**SOCIO-ECONOMIC STRATIFICATION OF RURAL FAMILIES**

**The source of income of the family**

The most important stratification factor in our research was the family source of income. The socio-economic diversification of the villagers is mirrored by the rate of maturation of their daughters. In 1967 the average age of first menstruation (the age at menarche AM) of the farmers’ daughters was by 0.53 years later and the body height was lower than in the girls from non-farming families. It means that families for whom the farm was the sole source of income achieved the lowest socio-economic status, while the highest status was achieved by the families who did not own land. In between consecutive researches the differences would decrease and in 1977 it was 0.44 years, in 1987 0.33 and in 2001 0.13 years. In 2001 the only children (children with no brothers/sisters) begun to menstruate at the age of 12.99 (average AM) and their peers from families with seven or more children at the age of 13.52. The AM difference between girls from extreme number of children in the family was 0.53 years, which is little over six months. In 1987 the difference was bigger – 0.66 years.

![Diagram 1. Age at menarche of the village girls in the consecutive years of the research](image1)

In comparison with the farm-worker and the non-farm families, the farmer families were often multi-child families with poorer educational status. Notwithstanding, in groups of the same parental education level and the same number of children girls from farmer families had latest menarche. (Laska-Mierzewska, Luczak 1993). Undoubtedly, this means that the living conditions of farmer families were worse in comparison with the other two groups of the villagers. One of the recorded results of this situation was the departure from farming, which constituted sole income for the family, because in each consecutive research it was more and more difficult to find the requisite number of girls from this category.

**Number of children in the family**

The social factor that strongly influences the livelihood situation of a family is the number of children in the family. Diagram 2 shows that the age at menarche has been increasing monotonically, so the maturation has been delayed as the number of children in the families of the surveyed girls enlarged with each additional child. In 2001 the only children (children with no brothers/sisters) began to menstruate at the age of 12.99 (average AM) and their peers from families with seven or more children at the age of 13.52. The AM difference between girls from extreme number of children in the family was 0.53 years, which is little over six months. In 1987 the difference was bigger – 0.66 years.

![Diagram 2. Age at menarche of the rural girls according to the number of children in the family in 1987 and 2001](image2)

Additionally, the height and the body weight of the subjects were lower, the higher the number of children in the family (diagram 3). The difference in height between only children and girls from multi-child families was 3 cm and difference in body weight amounted to 4 kg.

![Diagram 3. Standardized values of body height according to the number of children (1 to 7) in a family, 2001](image3)

**Families according to the level of education of the parents**

The age at menarche also presented high correlation with the education of each of the parents. The girls’ maturation was earlier and the body height greater in correspondence with the higher level of education of the mother and the father. The age of menarche indicated stronger correlation with the educational status of the father than of the mother. The role of this factor diminished between 1987 and 2001. In the latest research the AM difference between daughters of fathers who belong to extreme categories of education was 0.21 years, with respect to the mothers the difference was only 0.13 years.

The difference in height between girls from families of the extreme categories of father’s education equaled 0.27 SD (SD = stan-
The financial status of the family

The equipment in households and the farm is one of the indicators of the financial status of the family, and undoubtedly has an influence on the biological conditions of children in those families. Between 1987 and 2001 there was a significant increase in the percentage of families owning household goods.

The number of households with access to running water, warm water, gas and that household own refrigerator, color TV, wash machine was highest in non-farmer families, the lowest in farmer families, where freezer and car were more common.

In each of the socio-occupational groups girls from families that owned the above-mentioned goods menstruated earlier than their peers whose families did not own this equipment. In 1987 the equipment that determined the socio-economic status to the greatest extend was a color TV set. Girls from farmer families that own a TV set matured 0.34 years sooner than their peers from families that did not have this equipment. A color TV set was there in 25% of the non-farmer households, in 13% of the farm-worker households and in 15% of the farmer households. In 2001 color TV no longer determined the economic status of a family because approximately 94% to 98% of families owned the equipment.

Significant differences in the socio-economic status measured by the age of menarche could be observed with respect to girls whose families had several household appliances in contrast to families who had none back in 1987. The possession of household appliances or their lack most differentiated the farmer group. Girls from families that had all of the following goods: refrigerator, color TV, wash machine and a car matured 0.59 years sooner than the girls whose families did not own any of these appliances.

In 1987 the age at menarche of girls from farmer families occurred 0.33 years later than in the girls from non-farmer families. However, if the girls from farmer, farm-worker or non-farmer families owned all those four ‘goods’ this difference was minimized to only 0.08 years. Girls from the same socio-occupational groups, but from families that did not own any of these appliances continued to show significant differences in the age at menarche, and the difference between the farmer and non-farmer group increased to 0.40 years.

These results show that the wealth of the families is a basic factor of the equalization the rate of maturation and physical development of children and youth. In 2001 it was impossible to estimate the age at menarche in the socio-occupational groups depending on whether the family owned durable goods or not, because the number of families who did not own these appliances was too small. Among 9599 girls that took part in the survey, only 42 came from families that did not have any of these four goods, which constitutes only 0.4 per cent of all the cases.

In 2001 the household and farm equipment determined the socio-economic status of the family to a much lesser extent than in 1987, because the differences at the age at menarche between girls from the well-equipped and the non-equipped houses were smaller than 14 years ago. Earlier maturity was characteristic for girls from the ‘equipped’ families, with differences ranging between 0.04 to 0.27 years.

Rapid increase in equipage of all groups of rural families in durable goods in the years 1987–2001 may mean not only improvement in their economic situation of the families surveyed, but also their preferences in managing the family budget. Gulbicka (2000, p. 25) writes: More then the total consumption it were the expenses for non-food products that saw an increase (an increase of 8.1%). Non-food products have become competitive against food. Despite unfavorable income situation households have been purchasing durable goods, which range became larger.

Changes in the economic situation of rural families in the period between 1967 and 2001

In the years covered by our research, between 1967 and 2001, we can identify three distinctive periods in economic situation that determined the life conditions of citizens. The years in which the discussed research were repeated are quite representative of the economic ‘transition years’ in Poland:

– the decade 1967–1977 is the period of the ‘credit prosperity’ of Poles, the best economic times in the 45 years of the Polish People’s Republic;
– years 1978–1987 is the period of deep economic crisis with food rationing;
– years 1988–2001 is the period of political and economic change, the liquidation of many state-owned farms, dramatic increase of unemployment, especially in the rural areas, enormous increase of economic disparities between people in Poland.

The research results of the rural population conducted in 1967 and repeated in 1977 showed acceleration in the maturation process of girls and an intensive process of physical growth. Lowering of the age at menarche (earlier maturity) was 0.64 years for total sample, 0.66 years for girls from farm families, and 0.57 years in each of the other groups. The girls surveyed in 1977 were higher by 1.8 to 4.3 cm, depending on the age group in comparison to their peers surveyed in 1967. The process of physical growth was faster in girls from non-farmer families. Such big acceleration of maturation and such an intense process of growth had not been observed in any of the future decades.

Despite of such a great acceleration in menarcheal age in the rural areas during the decade 1967–1977, village girls would still start menstruating at the same age as girls from big cities would 22 years earlier (Waliszko et al. 1980; Bieliicki et al. 1981).

In the decade of the economic crisis (1977–1987) a phenomenon not present in Poland before was discovered – inhibition of the acceleration of the maturation process, and in some groups of girls a belated maturity, known as deceleration, was observed. Amongst the rural girls the retardation (deceleration) of the age of menarche was 0.11 years. The deceleration of maturation rate affected girls from families with parents of different educational backgrounds, families of varied number of children, different socio-occupational groups with the exception of farmer families with fewer children. The biggest deceleration was noted in girls from non-farmer families (0.14 years) because this group of village residents was affected by the food rationing. Belated maturation of girls from non-farmer families was 0.06 to 0.46 years depending on the region.

The process of physical growth drastically slowed down and in girls from non-farmer families almost disappeared. In the groups of the youngest girls, born during the crisis, in 1987 the body height was lower than of the girls of the same age born 10 years earlier (Łaska-Mierzejewska, Łuczak 1993).

The economic crisis affected the farmers’ daughters to a much lesser extend because these families were food producers, and thus not were affected by food rationing. The 1980s are considered to be a good period for farmers and farming, especially the individual farming. The income parity for agriculture against the non-agriculture income was 150% in 1989 and was the highest since the post-war period (Wilkin 2000; Łapińska-Tyszka, Perepeczko 2002).
The economic crisis affected various groups of rural inhabitants in different degree. The difference in menarcheal age between the daughters of farmers and non-farming workers decreased from 0.53 in 1967 to 0.33 in 1987. The reduction of this difference should be considered a positive effect, an evidence of a move towards living conditions of the surveyed groups being more equal. However, paradoxically, this decrease cannot be considered to be beneficial, since it happened by deceleration of the age at menarche of the group with the earliest maturation; thus, we observe ‘the weakest link alignment’. Despite this, the girls from non-farming families have remained the group distinguishable by earliest maturation, and they have kept this advantage also in relation to equal parental education level and the number of children in the family (Łaska-Mierzejewska, Łuczak 1993). Therefore, there must be a factor that causes the ‘worseness’ of living conditions of the farmers’ daughters.

Many other academic researchers spotted belated maturation and lowering of the secular trend in height in the years of crisis (a trend towards higher stature in recent generation in comparison to the previous one) (Hulanicka et al. 1990, 1996; Charzewski et al. 1991). Hulanicka’s research (1990) showed the decrease of the body height in boys aged 8 to 9 from small towns surveyed in 1988 in comparison to boys surveyed ten years earlier. Those boys have lived all their lives in the economic crisis, in conditions unfavorable for biological growth. Also girls, residents of those cities, were affected by the biggest deceleration of the age at menarche (0.25 years) in comparison to their peers from large urban areas (0.12 years); the deceleration of the maturation of girls from rural areas was only 0.06 years.

Research conducted in rural areas repeated after 14 years (in 2001) showed acceleration of the girl’s maturation. Amongst the group surveyed the age at menarche decreased by 0.34 years (0.24 in a decade), but the rate of acceleration in different groups varied greatly. In the farmer group, menstruation accelerated by 0.30 years, in the farm-worker group by 0.28 years and in the non-farmer group only by 0.16 years. It may be the result of a worse economic situation of the non-farmer families, especially those whose members lost their jobs after the liquidation of the state-owned farms. This resulted in a dramatic rise in unemployment in the villages. Despite this, the group characterized by the earliest maturation was that of girls from non-farmer families, and the farmers’ daughters represented the group with the latest maturation, but the difference in menarcheal age decreased again, from 0.33 years in 1987 to only 0.15 in 2001. Acceleration of maturation rate in the years 1988–2001 by girls from non-farmers’ families was only 0.15 years. Increase in maturation, which took place in the period between 1987 and 2001 merely ‘equalized’ the belated AM recorded during the decade of crisis. This means, that the AM of girls from non-farmer families in 2001 was the same as those surveyed in 1977.

Biological results of the unemployment in non-farmer families recorded in 2001 suggest that this group of rural residents is justified in feeling their livelihoods have worsened after the political and economic transformation. This feeling may be especially acute in regions of high concentration of state-owned farms before their liquidation in 1992.

Biological effects of unemployment in rural areas

In 2001 there appeared a new group of girls: daughters of unemployed fathers. In farmer-worker families it was 4.2% and in non-farmer families 12.8%. The age at menarche of daughters of non-working fathers of the non-farmer group was by 0.38 years (0.08 years = one month) later than AM of the daughters of working fathers from the same socio-occupational group and by 0.28 years later than the total sample of girls surveyed. Both differences are statistically significant. Also the body height of those girls was lower by 0.15 SD, and the body weight by 0.20 SD (more than 1 cm and about 2kg) than of the girls from families with working fathers.

Among working and non-working fathers from the non-farmer group vocational education was dominant, rating at 58%. Non-working fathers more frequently had only elementary education (27%), and less frequently had a high school or higher education (15%) in comparison to working fathers, who represented a reverse education pattern, 14% and 28%, respectively. Daughters of working fathers with high school or higher education were taller by 0.22 SD and 0.11 SD heavier than daughters of non-working fathers who had the same education.
Polish village in the European Union

Poland’s accession to the European Union has brought about measurable benefits to Polish agriculture and farming. EU funds allow for the modernization of agriculture and manufacturing. Opening the EU market for Polish food exporters, increase in the farmer’s income, also thanks to direct subsidies, and the stability of the agriculture policy are among the main benefits for the Polish countryside after joining the EU.

Access to the EU market resulted in an increase that tripled the quota of export of Polish products in 2008 as compared to 2003. The data collected by the Foundation of Assistance Programs for Agriculture (FAPA) indicate that both small and big farms increased their income, but the highest rise in income took place during the first year after the accession, when the production costs were still relatively low.

Biological results of the ‘EU umbrella’ over Polish agriculture may be visible after the 2010–2014 period. Aid provided by the EU is not directed towards landless villagers. We can predict further socio-economic advancement of the farmer and farmer-and-worker families and perhaps a different variant of social stratification in the Polish village, resulting in a differentiation in biological development of children and teenagers slightly different than the current one.

CONCLUSIONS

Changes in menarcheal age and body height, recorded during the period 1967–2001, reflect the changes of the economic situation in Poland.

Social gradients of AM throughout the period 1967–2001 had the same order: the earliest menarche was registered in girls from landless rural families, the latest in farmers’ daughters, but the differences between these groups of girls steadily decreased: from 0.53 years in 1967, 0.44 years in 1977, 0.33 years in 1987, to only 0.15 years in 2001. Landless rural families were more strongly affected by the economic crisis of the 1980s, and by high unemployment rate after the year 1999. As follows from AM data over the period 1967–2001, farmer families achieved the highest social advancement. In girls from these families, mean menarcheal age decreased by 0.98 years, and in those from farmer-worker and landless rural families by 0.85 and 0.60 years, respectively.

Each of social variables used in our research differentiate the living conditions of the rural families. The age at menarche was earlier when:

– the number of children in the family was lower;
– parents had higher level of education;
– the family was better equipped with household appliances.

Between 1967 and 2001 there was a decrease of the difference in the AM between rural girls and their peers from the capital: from 1.01 years in the 1960s to 0.46 years in 1997/2001. Also the differences in body height decreased. In 2001 rural girls were shorter than their peers in Warsaw (Palczewska, Niedźwiecka 2001) by around 0.5 to 2 cm depending on the age group.

Despite undoubted displays of rural poverty the biological indicators of the conditions of live show that the period of political and economic transformation was beneficial for development and maturation of rural girls in comparison to the preceding period, i.e. the period of economic crisis. This period was also more beneficial for the maturation of girls from farmer families in contrast to girls from landless rural families.

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CHILDREN FROM RURAL AREAS – THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC DETERMINANTS OF THE ACCESS TO EDUCATION

INTRODUCTION

The access to education for children and adolescents from rural areas has been a subject of thorough studies conducted by many researchers. What they pointed out was the amount of historically determined barriers affecting equal opportunities of access to educational services for children from rural areas, in comparison with children from the urban areas. The attention has been paid to barriers of an objective and subjective nature; the former ones being, among others, the level of competence of teachers working in village schools, the number of schools and their equipment, the physical access to schools, especially at the level of primary education. The objective barriers include also financial means that limit the scope of realization of educational ambitions. The latter ones (subjective barriers) include the lack of or the low level of educational aspirations among parents from rural areas. This is true, especially amongst uneducated, and consequently often poorer, inhabitants of rural areas and is connected with a well-known process of the ‘inheritance of poverty’.

EDUCATIONAL GAP: BETWEEN THE CITY AND THE COUNTRYSIDE. URGENT PROBLEMS WITH A LONG HISTORY

Opinions stating that the Polish countryside has had, for a really long time, if not always, worse education, both in terms of general education and professional training, are common, and the importance of this problem is emphasized in the results of the research and statistics as well as expressed in the objectives of the National Polish Village Development Programme, which reads as follows: a worse start and poorer educational perspectives for children from rural areas are an effect of the number of barriers contributing to the malfunctioning of the educational system in those areas, the most important barriers are: small number of pre-school facilities, poorly qualified teachers, poorer offer of secondary-education services, financial problems of families and low educational aspirations of parents (Domarski 2000).

The consequences of unequal educational opportunities for rural areas and cities are reflected in, among other things, the fact that the percentage of people with a university degree among the inhabitants of rural areas is many times lower than in cities, especially when compared with cities with more than 100 thousand inhabitants. In the countryside almost 70% of people have not reached the level of education above the basic vocational school (a 3-year preparatory school for a given profession attended after finishing the 2-stage primary school) after their primary-school education. The same group amounts to only 42.8% in big cities, i.e. slightly more than a half of the previous value. The worst situation can be observed among agricultural workers since it is only 2.7% of them that have a university, degree while 23.8% of them have only graduated from a primary-school or an incomplete primary-school level of education and 69.1% of them finished not more than basic vocational education (Table 1).

Such a poor educational structure, especially with reference to agricultural workers, is partly inherited from the past and is a result of the fact that, at the time of larger migration from villages to cities, most of children of agricultural workers choose, after finishing university, to stay in the city and never settle down in the countryside. This means that these are the less ambitious children who, having finished only the vocational school, populate the rural areas and inherit agricultural households. Consequently, the negative structure of education in rural areas has been repeated through generations.

Table 1. The Structure of population aged 16 and more in households according to the level of education and place of residence (%)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Level of Education</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Cities</th>
<th>Rural Areas</th>
<th>Agricultural Workers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No education</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1st stage Primary-school education</td>
<td>18.0</td>
<td>12.9</td>
<td>26.4</td>
<td>21.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd stage Primary-school (junior school) education</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>8.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basic vocational education</td>
<td>27.0</td>
<td>24.0</td>
<td>31.9</td>
<td>36.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary school (grammar school, technology college) education</td>
<td>33.9</td>
<td>39.1</td>
<td>25.3</td>
<td>28.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher Education (M.A.)</td>
<td>13.4</td>
<td>18.0</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: (GUS 2008a, Chart. 7, p. 62 and Chart. 8, p. 63).

In the last decades or, more precisely, after the political transformation in our country, the educational under-representation of people from rural areas is being continued, even though, formally speaking, the opportunities for learning are much better now than before. In reality, however, as the results of various studies suggest, mainly children of wealthy parents from big cities are provided with the diverse and rich offer of educational services (Szafraniec 1999).

The level of equality between cities and the countryside is influenced also by the limited number of schools offering secondary-school and higher education. Children who choose to educate themselves in other than agricultural professions, due to the fact that it is usually agricultural schools that are located within rural areas, encounter numerous difficulties connected with access to non-agricultural schools and institutions of higher education, which are scarce in rural areas. This can be supported by the statistical data proving that only a small percentage of grammar schools are located in the countryside (Table 2).
The problems of rural children with access to education after the primary-school are deepened by long distances between these schools and the place of residence. Poor transportation and infrastructure contribute to discomforts of commuting whose cost is one of the basic components of parents' educational expenses (Gutkowska 2002).

On the basis of data collected by GUS (Central Statistical Office of Poland) it can be concluded that even at the level of primary school the representation of rural children among those commuting to schools at a distance greater than 10 kilometers is four times higher than in case of children living in cities. The inconvenience of such a situation is experienced most frequently by children living in the Lubuskie province (Table 3).

Table 3. Attendants of primary and secondary schools living farther than 10 kilometers away from the school

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Voivodships</th>
<th>Primary Schools</th>
<th>Gymnasiums</th>
<th>Secondary Schools</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Rural areas</td>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poland</td>
<td>14 332</td>
<td>4 116</td>
<td>10 216</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dolnośląskie</td>
<td>1 305</td>
<td>479</td>
<td>826</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kujawsko-pomorskie</td>
<td>740</td>
<td>144</td>
<td>596</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lubelskie</td>
<td>817</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>758</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lubuskie</td>
<td>769</td>
<td>415</td>
<td>354</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Łódzkie</td>
<td>543</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>450</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Małopolskie</td>
<td>126</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mazowieckie</td>
<td>1 049</td>
<td>152</td>
<td>897</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opolskie</td>
<td>396</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>274</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Podkarpackie</td>
<td>302</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>259</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Podlaskie</td>
<td>1 402</td>
<td>307</td>
<td>1 095</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pomorskie</td>
<td>968</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>880</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Śląskie</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Świętokrzyskie</td>
<td>421</td>
<td>224</td>
<td>197</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Warminsko-mazurskie</td>
<td>1 870</td>
<td>612</td>
<td>1 258</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wielkopolskie</td>
<td>1 142</td>
<td>349</td>
<td>793</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zachodniopomorskie</td>
<td>2 382</td>
<td>969</td>
<td>1 413</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Change Indicator (%) | 69.99 | 100.63 | 65.19 | 37.61 | 62.21 | 46.83 |
| Minimum            | 100 | 17 | 57 | 1508 | 488 | 958 |
| Maximum            | 2382 | 969 | 1413 | 5023 | 2386 | 2636 |

Source: as in table 2.

As a consequence of various education access limits that children and teenagers from rural areas experience, it can be observed that the number children choosing to continue education above the primary-school level, in this segment of the Polish population, is lower in comparison with the population living in urban areas (Biczkowski, Falkowski 2002; Rudz 2002).

Such conclusions are confirmed by the data reflecting the social structure of the secondary-school attendants, according to which teenagers from rural areas, and especially children of agricultural workers, constitute a relatively small percentage, especially in prestigious schools and at a level high enough to provide them with possibilities of studying at more elitist university departments. Consequently, young people from rural areas more often than on the average choose to finish their education at the secondary-school level and this reflects also the level of aspirations of their parents with regard to the educational careers of their children.

Limited availability of general secondary schools (grammar school; junior schools), increasing costs of accommodation in dormitories coupled with limited possibilities for such accommodation and insufficient social assistance for learners, prevent rural children and adolescents from achieving an educational success at higher levels of the educational ladder. The lack of scholarships and accommodation for majority of young people from rural areas, especially in case of poor families, means the necessity to resign from continuing education at a higher level, which is indirectly indicated in Table 4.

Table 4. Population according to the educational status and the place of residence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Educational status</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>City</th>
<th>Rural Areas</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Children aged 0–6 making use of educational services</td>
<td>26.6</td>
<td>26.9</td>
<td>26.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children aged 7–15 attending schools</td>
<td>18.9</td>
<td>22.9</td>
<td>12.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adolescents aged 16–19 attending schools</td>
<td>96.4</td>
<td>96.0</td>
<td>95.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persons aged 20–24 making use of educational services within or outside the institutional framework</td>
<td>60.8</td>
<td>67.6</td>
<td>49.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: (Czapinski, Panek ed. 2007, p. 73).

The low level of interest in higher education is, first and foremost, a result of poverty in rural areas as well as of the lack of educational aspirations and patterns of educational support, available within rural areas. This reflects, the commonly shared among people from rural areas conviction, that it is rather acquaintances and social links, and not good qualifications, that determine the future career. It needs also to be mentioned that one of the reasons of ceasing to continue education at a higher level is to be found in a relatively low position of education within the hierarchy of values, shared by people from rural areas; at the scale of needs according to their importance, education appears on the third place, after nutritional needs and health, and after clothes and shoes (Gutkowska 2002).

**THE LEVEL OF EDUCATIONAL EXPENSES IN RURAL HOUSEHOLDS**

The analysis of the available data allows for noting that the under-representation of rural children among the users of educational services is also reflected in the level of educational expenses in rural households. Even though, in recent years there has been no decrease in the level of educational expenses in rural households due to the worsening economic situation, they were lower in rural households in comparison with urban households during the whole analyzed period (Table 5).

Large households have their greatest expenses located in buying school-books and commuting to schools, while the latter is more costly for the big-size families. Significantly smaller part, though still important, is played by expenses connected with paying tuition, which are, on average,
lower in rural households than in urban households. The highest values of expenses connected with paying the child’s tuition are reached in urban households with one child only, while the smallest are observed among households with single mothers, raising their children. Similarly, lower amounts are spent on after-school or non academic activities (cinema, theatre, school trips, etc.) in rural households.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>City</th>
<th>Villages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>0.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* The data is not directly comparable as during the 1994–1997 period the data includes pre-school education.
Source: Living conditions in Poland, Respective years, GUS, Warsaw.

It needs to be emphasized that rural households are burdened with greater expenses with relation to accommodation related to education carried out outside the area of residence.

Private lessons (tutoring) are another kind of educational expenses borne by rural households. The biggest amounts spent for the purposes of providing private lesson for children can be found in households with one child only, whereas the lowest amounts are spent for such purposes by households where there are three or more children and by households run by single-mothers.

The results of the studies prove that households with greater number of children (3 and more) bear higher expenses related to the so-called ‘fixed educational expenses’, such as commuting to school, buying school-books, participation in obligatory school activities. At the same time the additional expenses—expenses of a non academic nature — are higher in households with one child as well as in the more wealthy households and in households where the head of the household is better educated.

On the basis of the analysis of a given socio-demographic data at the level of educational expenses in rural households, the following conclusions can be formulated:

- in households with greater number of children the expenses on school equipment, commuting to school, buying school-books and accommodation rise while additional educational expenses are being limited, including private lessons, school trips, etc.;
- the level of educational expenses depends on the kind of household classified on the basis of the source of income: the educational expenses are higher when self-employment is the basic source of income;
- the income level of a household influences the level of expenses borne on education: the higher the income the higher the expenses on education are.

The growing tendency on the part of schools to expect co-financing from parents coupled with unfavorable economic situation of rural households determine their behavior in the area of their children’s education. The lack of money becomes more and more often the most important reason for reduction of accomplishment of educational plans and aspirations, and this is reflected by the percentage of households in which the expenses connected with some educational services have been reduced (Table 6).

The education barriers of rural children are highlighted in many publications and are confirmed by the results of the analysis of data collected within the project entitled Social Diagnosis and carried out in various years within the years 2000–2007. On the basis of the information gathered within this project it can be stated that the percentage of rural households in which at least one of the children finished basic vocational school and did not continue his or her education was higher than the percentage of such households in the urban areas. Similarly, the percentage of rural households in which at least one of the children did not continue education after finishing secondary school was higher. Thus, in 2005, the percentage of rural households in which one child finished secondary school and did not continue education amounted to 9,8%, whereas the same indicator for urban households equaled 7,9%.

It can be said that adolescent children in rural areas usually decide to choose vocational schools (either basic 3-year vocational schools or 5-year secondary school with technical profile) rather than general secondary schools (grammar schools) that are designed to prepare for university education. This tendency can be attributed both to the structure of educational system and to the educational aspirations of parents in rural areas. It is relatively more often that parents in rural areas declare that they would prefer their children to attend a basic vocational school, and one in four would say it is better for a child to choose a secondary school with a technical rather than general profile. Such a picture of parents’ aspirations is reflected in the fact that the majority of rural children attend vocational or technical schools.

The level of parents’ aspirations depends upon, both external and internal factors. Among the latter, i.e. factors pertaining to the microenvironment, understood as the household itself and the structure of family as well as the profile of family members, the most important one is the source of income. Subsequently, the level of aspirations is lower among pensioners and agricultural workers than among employed and self-employed persons. Among the first two groups it is the most popular solution to send a child to a basic vocational school or a secondary school with a technical/ technological profile while similar tendency is much less frequent among the second two categories. Aspirations aiming at higher education are most frequent among self-employed parents and employed parents and slightly less frequent among persons employed in agricultural enterprises.

The level of the declared educational aspirations with reference to one’s own children, differs according to the earnings-related divisions lines. Accordingly, more wealthy parents would more frequently expect their children to sign up for higher education courses and get a university degree whilst the less wealthy parents would rather see their children finish occupational or technical schools.
The level of the declared educational aspirations with reference to one’s own children is differentiated also according to the income levels. It is more wealthy parents who would more frequently expect their children to take up higher education courses and get a university degree while less wealthy parents usually want their children to finish vocational or technical schools.

Even more visible differences concerning educational aspirations can be found according to the level of education of parents themselves. Parents with a university degree only would hardly accept their children to end their education at the secondary-school level or any level lower than M.A. studies. Parents with primary-school education, on the contrary, definitely more often indicate vocational or secondary-school education as desirable for their children and would rarely recommend them going to university.

Apart from the internal factors the level of aspirations is also influenced by the external factors, reflected by, among others, the microeconomic situation of particular regions (provinces) where the households that took part in the Social Diagnosis project are located.

Educational aspirations at the level of basic vocational school was represented most frequently by parents form the kujawsko-pomorskie and warmińsko-mazurskie regions, where in 2007 such a declaration was made by one in ten of all the households surveyed. Educational aspirations at the level of secondary school with a technical profile or a secondary school with a vocational profile were most frequently declared also in the kujawsko-pomorskie, lubuskie and podkarpackie regions. Parents declared that their children should go to a university and obtain a M.A. degree most frequently if they were from the świętokrzyskie, podlaskie, lubuskie and mazowieckie provinces. It can be noted, therefore, that parents from the regions with an average level of the gross domestic product could be noticed (the Bachelor degree was desired for their children by 18.7% of parents from rural areas, 11.1% of parents from cities, and, on the average, 14.1% of the whole surveyed population declared this level of education as in accordance with their aspirations) (Diagram 1).

Diagram 1. Educational aspirations in households in general and in rural areas

Apart from the internal factors the level of aspirations is also influenced by the external factors, reflected by, among others, the microeconomic situation of particular regions (provinces) where the households that took part in the Social Diagnosis project are located.

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The level of educational aspirations has also been diversified, to some extent, with relation to the number of family members in a given household. Thus, in households with many family members, secondary-school education was named as the top level of aspirations for one’s own children, whereas higher education was mentioned as a target level of education for children more frequently in households where the number of members was lower.

In general, it should be emphasized that almost a half of the surveyed within the Social Diagnosis project in all the years, and more than 60% in 2007, wished their children to obtain an A.M. diploma. Also, greater popularity of the lower university degree in rural areas could be noticed (the Bachelor degree was desired for their children by 18.7% of parents from rural areas, 11.1% of parents from cities, and, on the average, 14.1% of the whole surveyed population declared this level of education as in accordance with their aspirations).

Skepticism with relation to educational opportunities for their children is also more characteristic for parents being agricultural workers, claiming benefit, or employed in the sector of agricultural activities. Parents working as self-employed persons or hired workers declare optimism more frequently.

**BARRIERS LIMITING SATISFACTION OF EDUCATIONAL NEEDS OF THE FAMILIES FROM RURAL AREAS**

According to the opinion of one-third of rural households in 2007 (and of more than a half in 2000 and 2003) the main problem to satisfy educational needs of rural children were financial difficulties while children from one in five households did not continue their education after the secondary school or basic vocational school because they took up a job or other economic activities. A relatively small portion indicated the lack of interest on the part of their child or fulfillment of their educational aspirations as a reason for not continuing his /her education. Furthermore, it was only in one-tenth of the rural households that parents stated that the reason for ceasing to continue to study was the lack of a next-level school located in the area of residence (Diagram 2).

The most frequent reason for abandoning school education by children from rural areas, as the analysis of data from the Social Diagnosis 2005 project suggests, were financial difficulties and the...
fact that a child started working. Similar reason was indicated by the 2003 study, though there was a significant decrease in proportion: from 59.2% of parents declaring financial problems as a reason for not sending a child to the next-level school in 2003, it dropped to 31.3% in 2005.

Even though only a small percentage of parents mentioned the lack of school in their places of living as the main problem, it seems worth noting that this percentage was much higher among rural households than among households located in urban areas. This is a result of the already discussed problem of the limited number of schools and educational facilities, located in the rural areas of Poland.

Financial difficulties, or, to put it straight, lack of money, poses a barrier to the fulfillment of educational needs of rural families, primarily among households with a greater number of children. The fact that many children from rural areas decide to start working just after finishing secondary school seems to be connected with the difficult financial situation in many rural households. Furthermore, also the fact that many adolescent children from rural areas do not want to continue their school education, the percentage of which is as high as of those who started to work, might be a consequence of the difficult financial situation in the households they live in.

Taking into account the sources of income of rural households it can also be pointed out that the source of income is a factor differentiating the declared reasons for not sending children to a next-level school.

It has been noted that the financial situation is given as a reason for abandoning school education, primarily among parents employed in agricultural sectors, while it is less often mentioned by parents being independent agricultural workers, who, in turn, more often mention the lack of interest in further study on the part of their children. What seems important is that independent agricultural workers often declare that their children have already attained a satisfactory level of education or started to work and, therefore, cannot continue their education.

It has also been noted that the worse the financial situation of the household is the more intense is a pressure to limit the expenses on education which, in turn, limits the possibilities for children to make further educational efforts. It is almost the most common of all reasons for not continuing school education in the poorest households. Only the lack of interest in further school learning on the part of a child and reasons connected with health problems were mentioned with the same frequency by parents from the poorest households and the better-off households, i.e. in all categories of households classified according to the level of income.

An important factor according to which the households can be classified according to the reasons for which children abandon the school education is the level of education of the head of a house-

Diagram 2. Reasons for abandoning school education by children from rural areas (%)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Rural areas</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The child has obtained sufficient education</td>
<td>12.2%</td>
<td>16.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of school in the place of living</td>
<td>10.3%</td>
<td>13.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The child took an exam but did not pass</td>
<td>7.0%</td>
<td>7.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The child has problems with studying, is not intelligent enough</td>
<td>7.5%</td>
<td>7.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health problems</td>
<td>6.5%</td>
<td>7.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic problems</td>
<td>5.5%</td>
<td>6.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The child took a job</td>
<td>2.3%</td>
<td>3.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The child is not interested in further studying</td>
<td>3.6%</td>
<td>3.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial difficulties</td>
<td>2.3%</td>
<td>3.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other reasons</td>
<td>7.4%</td>
<td>9.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: authors’ own calculations based on data from Social Diagnosis 2005 project.
ing the structure of the educational system and updating the curricula. The reform was thus aimed at equal opportunities for children from various backgrounds (Rydz 2002).

These objectives were not, unfortunately, reached while the results of surveys conducted among general public proved that the Polish society, and especially population from rural areas, is predominantly skeptical about the reform and does not appreciate the changes brought by it.

It seems worth adding that the inhabitants of rural areas frequently express opinions that educational institutions remain unable to prepare their children how to cope with the difficulties of an adult life, and that it is impossible for them to succeed in life solely on the basis of good education and without money and a range of social connections and acquaintances. It is often the sense of educational aspirations being unrealistic and a general apathy with regard to the future plans that make up a context for those pessimistic views.

Another possible explanation can be found in the fact that one in five parents inhabiting rural areas declares that their educational aspirations are threatened by the reform introduced. Furthermore, there are some views being expressed that the contact with schools is worsened due to the structural changes introduced by the reform.

Accordingly, the reform introduced has been received by the inhabitants of rural areas with skepticism, if not overt criticism, and is generally believed to further limit the opportunities for rural children.

When the level of education of persons surveyed is taken into account then it can be observed that persons with higher education would not see as much difference in the educational system after the reform as persons with a lower level of education usually do.

The biggest difference is felt by parents who gain their income from being employed in private companies but not by those working in their own enterprises. At the same time, differences being a result of the reform are unnoticed by self-employed parents and entrepreneurs.

It seems there is no gradation noticeable with respect to the opinions on educational reform when subjects are classified according to the level of income. Such a difference can, however, be observed when one takes into account the personal evaluation of one’s own material situation. Accordingly, it can be said that people who are satisfied with their economic situation see the differences introduced by the reform more often than those unhappy about their current material status.

RURAL FAMILIES AND THE USE OF ASSISTANCE IN THE FULFILLMENT OF THEIR EDUCATIONAL NEEDS

The sense of financial limitations in the area of educational needs fulfillment felt by many households located in rural areas is not easily tackled by an unsubstantial assistance provided by schools for some families with children attending school, either primary or secondary, while such assistance is provided usually for families with many children.

The source of income of the households surveyed constitutes another factor differentiating the population of rural areas as regards the use of social assistance provided in schools. Accordingly, children from families were the parents live on the non-income sources are the ones that most often make use of in-school social assistance, whereas children form families when the main source of income comes from self-employment do not make use of such assistance at all. It is also more often the case that children from families where parents work in the agricultural sector benefit more from social assistance in comparison with children of parents who work as employed persons or are farmers owning the land.

Furthermore, it has been observed that children of parents who have a primary-school level of education more often receive social assistance than children of the better-educated parents.

As can be stated on the basis of the research conducted within the project “Social assistance for families with problems living within economically disadvantaged areas” the most frequent form of the organization of social assistance is free meals, usually lunches, given out in school canteens, which, due to the fact that children from rural areas are often malnourished, has an important role to play.

Since the scope of the in-school social assistance is limited, if not marginal, it is hard to believe that it can satisfy the needs of rural children for access to education and educational opportunities. It is structural and systemic changes that are necessary for a substantial improvement in the area of education that would make accomplishment of educational aspirations a realistic possibility also in rural areas. This, in turn, would equalize the opportunities for both rural and urban children.

CONDITIONS FOR LEARNING IN THE SURVEYED FAMILIES

In the Social Diagnosis research project 2005 and 2007 the list of questions asked included also the one about conditions for in-home studying. It was noted that those are generally at a lower standard than the city standard; the fact is that in 2007, 7.6% of children from rural areas did not have their own place to study and do homework (in 2006 it was 6%), while this situation took place mostly in families of farmers, pensioners and unemployed persons. Better conditions for studying at home were found among children of employed workers and hired workers combined the hired work with running the agricultural household. Children from households where parents take their income from non-profit activity have the worst conditions for studying since it is one in five children who do not have his or her own place to do the homework (Diagram 3).

Diagram 3. The conditions for in-home study in rural households in comparison with the total number of households (%)

The conditions for studying deteriorate if the number of family members increases. In families with a big number of members, i.e. with at least three children, it was twice more often that parents declared that their children did not have their proper place where they could do their homework in comparison with families with two children and four times as often in comparison with families with one child.

The highest percentage of households declaring the lack of place for studying was observed in the warmińsko-mazurskie, kujawsko-pomorskie and świętokrzyskie regions, where the economic indicators are the weakest.

CONCLUSIONS

In order to sum up the information presented according to the socio-economic determinants of the access to education for children from rural areas it should be emphasized that, regardless of the overall increase in the participation levels offered by school
education, this group of young Poles still differs from their peers from urbanized areas. Those differences have their source not only in the historically conditioned shortcomings of the educational infrastructure but also in the socio-economic conditions of rural households functioning and in the level of economic development of the particular regions of our country.

Important reasons of the so-called educational gap are to be found in the mentality of the parents, who have low educational aspirations for their children, and in the relatively small importance attached to accomplishment of educational needs. Another reason is the lack of motivation on the part of talented teachers and pedagogues to undertake work in rural schools.

Despite the fact that the number of people living in rural areas and having a university degree has increased, the gap between the city and the countryside in the area of access to education is still enormous and calls for action. It is introduction of systemic changes and improvements within both the educational infrastructure and the socio-economic conditions of rural household functioning that appears to be indispensable if any real improvement is to be seen.

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Institutional forms of child and family protection

THE ACTIVITIES OF THE MINISTRY OF LABOUR AND SOCIAL POLICY FOR THE BENEFIT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

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In the debate on effective social policy solutions that could prevent low fertility rates it is frequently now that the significance of solutions enabling the combination of both professional work and raising a child is accentuated (McDonald 2002; Gauthier 2005; Balcerzak-Paradowska 2004; Kotowska 2005; Hantrais 2005). According to the authors, such solutions should take into account the preferences of the parents with regard to the organization of childcare and pay attention to the well-being of children themselves, especially their physical and mental health as well as opportunities for development and the reduction of the risk of poverty.

Children, alongside with the elderly, belong to the group most threatened by the risk of poverty in the EU Member States. This risk is the highest among families with children (the level of poverty within the Polish population is, in fact, the lowest among the elderly). At the same time, poverty and material deficiency constitute a negative factor impeding the future intellectual development of a child, limiting the chances for its educational success and professional career (OECD 2006). There are negative consequences for the development of the child that are caused by the processes leading to poverty and social exclusion. Such processes include: limited access to and infrequent use of public educational services and public health care, malnourishment, violence in the family. These factors have a destructive impact on children’s well-being, their learning skills and intellectual abilities and, consequently, they reduce the opportunities for an improvement in the quality of their lives. Malnourishment is also a negative factor for both mental and physical
health of the child and leads to a deficiency in the immunity system and an increased risk of a prolonged and serious disease requiring a costly treatment. Children who are neglected, malnourished and experience violence in their homes are rejected by their peers, which causes additional problems.

Children with disabilities constitute a special group. Disability, in case of a child, involves a significant financial burden caused by the necessity to provide a range of medicines, hygienic materials and rehabilitation. Since it is the family that is responsible for providing the full-time, part-time or periodical care, it is often at the cost of family members having limited possibilities for undertaking an economic activity, professional training and for being promoted that such a care is provided. This situation limits also the possibilities for continuing education, chances for improvement in the quality of life and realization of professional aspirations and, consequently, can mean an increased risk of poverty and social exclusion.

Due to the risks presented above it is among the objectives of the social policy of the State to implement policy that would benefit children and families with children and improve their material and social status whilst preventing poverty. The Ministry of Labour and Social Policy implements a number of tasks for the benefit of those people, including the following:

1) determining the rules for granting social security benefits to families with children within the framework of family benefits, parental benefits and family allowances;
2) creating the conditions for parents that would enable them to combine work with the family life;
3) determining the conditions for the functioning of step parenthood;
4) providing aid in case of children and families in the need of specific help, especially when standard schemes are not sufficient to prevent the poverty and social exclusion that a given family might be exposed to.

THE SCHEME FOR THE SUPPORT OF FAMILIES WITH CHILDREN

Benefits for families with children (MPPS 2009), which were in the past dispersed as the elements of various schemes, in 2004 were all included in one scheme with a set of unified rules applicable to all the persons entitled. As a consequence, the family benefits scheme was formed, which contains family benefits and additional allowances, childcare benefits and childbirth allowances.

The characteristic feature of this scheme is public financing and therefore it is based on the principle of subsidiarity, i.e. on the subsidiary character of the State. This means that parents are obliged to provide for their children and are the first party responsible for the well being of their children, whereas the state-provided aid is granted only to the families whose resources are insufficient.

Family benefits

The qualifying condition for granting the family benefits is, first and foremost, the means test, which involves advantages for the families with a disabled child.

The basic benefit provided for by the scheme is the family benefit for a dependent child, school-attending child or a child that continues education at a higher level. The amount of benefit is flexible and depends on the age of a child (the older the child the higher the amount of benefit). Additional allowances have more specialized functions and are aimed at supporting families at different stages of the development of a child. There are diverse forms of such allowances.

1. A one-time allowance granted after the birth of a child. It is not a sole benefit of this kind since there is also an allowance for the same occasion (with no means test), and also a local allowance which is granted arbitrarily by the local authorities.

2. An allowance for a parent remaining on a parental leave after the maternity leave. Contributions for such a person are paid to the social security pension scheme and to the health insurance fund.
3. An additional allowance for single parents in case when there is no person to provide alimony payments (there is an increased benefit for families with a disabled child).
4. An additional allowance for families with many children - this is in the form of financial support for the third child and the next children.
5. A school-support allowance connected with an event of the beginning of the school-year (for school equipment and the purchase of the books).
6. An allowance for children commuting to school outside the area of their residence or living in dormitories, which is aimed at reimbursing the cost of commuting and/or accommodation.

Families with a disabled child can also be granted an allowance for education and rehabilitation of such a child.

In 2008 the number of beneficiaries of the family benefits scheme equalled 2.6 million families, in which almost 3.8 million children are being raised, i.e. approximately 40% of the total number of families with dependent children (aged up to 24).

Approximately 2.4 million families were granted an allowance for the beginning of the school year, while about 400 thousand families received an allowance for children attending school outside their area of residence, mostly to reimburse the cost of commuting to school. Increased additional allowances were also granted to approximately 630 thousand children from extended families as well as to more than 200 thousand disabled children.

For 2009 the next round of valorization of the family benefits has been scheduled. The new amounts, being a result of the agreement reached within the Trilateral Commission for Social and Economic Affairs, will be made public on August 15, 2009. New regulations will enter into force on 1 November 2009.

Childcare benefits

Besides family benefits and family allowances there are within the framework of the family benefits scheme two kinds of childcare benefits:

1) childcare benefit, the entitlement to which is not based on means test and which is granted for the period of validity of the doctor’s certificate on child’s disability (aimed at children with disabilities);
2) childcare allowances granted to persons resigning from occupational activity for the purpose of providing care to a disabled child in need of special care.

The health insurance contributions and pension scheme contributions are also paid for the beneficiaries of the childcare allowances. In 2008 it was almost 340 thousand persons that received this allowance.

Alimony allowances

From October 1, 2008 the pre-paid alimony allowance was replaced by the benefit from the alimony fund. This benefit is granted to entitled persons up to the amount of 500 zlotys, on the condition that the family income for one family member does not exceed the level of 725 zlotys. In 2008 this benefit was granted to approximately 290 thousand beneficiaries.

The child tax relief

As a result of the initiative of the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy there is functioning in Poland a tax relief for the parents of a child. From 2007 onwards, one of the parents or both of them (up to the amount of this tax relief) have the right to reduce their income tax by the amount prescribed for each child under the condition that they pay their income tax within the framework of the
progressive scale. This relief functions as a reduction in tax, not as a tax credit. Consequently, persons who paid their tax in the amount lower than the relief cannot benefit from the full tax relief. Because of that this tax relief supports the families with higher level of income to a greater extent than families paying the lowest taxes, which were not affected by the introduction of this solution (Myck 2008). This tax relief can also play the role of an encouragement to undertake economic activity or to work full-time, or, to invest in one’s professional development. According to the data published by the Ministry of Finance on the income tax from individual persons, the child tax relief was used by approx. 4 million taxpayers, who represented approx. 6 million children (1,51 child per taxpayer, MF 2008). The total sum of the relief amounted in 2007 to 1060,16 zlotys, in 2008 – 1173,70 zlotys, and in 2009 – 1112,04 zlotys.

COMBINING WORK WITH FAMILY LIFE

Facilitations for young parents

Besides the activities aimed at providing material support for families with children the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy has been working on solutions facilitating the combining of work and family life and encouraging young people to decide to have a child. The result of this effort is the so-called “family act”, the provisions of which entered into force on January 1, 2009. New provisions introduce the following solutions:

1) the prolonged maternity leave – new rights connected with maternity leave include the obligatory part, increase from 18 to 20 weeks in case of one child born (31 weeks in case of twins, 33 weeks in case of 3 children, 35 weeks in case of 4 children, 37 weeks in case of 5 and more children born);

2) the introduction of additional maternity leave of a facultative nature – the extent of this leave is going to increase on regular basis from 2010 onwards, by 2 weeks (3 weeks in case of more than one child born). The final duration of this leave is going to be 6 weeks in case of one child born, and 8 weeks in case of greater number of children;

3) the possibility to combine additional maternity leave with work – from 2010 onwards, when the first stage of the implementation of the provisions on additional maternity leave will enter into force, workers will be allowed to combine work (at least half the amount of the full-time job) with maternity leave, having a right to earn their income and receive maternity benefit and benefits at a proportionate level;

4) the introduction of paternity leave – in 2010 fathers will, for the first time, be entitled to the paternal leave of the duration of one week, and from 2010 onwards, 2 weeks (irrespective of the maternity leave of the mother);

5) gradual increase in the basis for calculating the level of contributions for persons on paternal leave – the contribution for social security is paid from public sources and its basis was in the past equal to the amount of care allowance, currently the basis is equal to the minimum national salary and from 2010 onwards it will be calculated as the amount of income gained (up to the ceiling of 60% of the national average salary);

6) protection from losing job – persons undertaking part-time jobs during the period of paternal leave will, during the 12 months, be covered by the protection against being fired from their jobs. The importance of those provisions lays in making biological parents and adopting parents equal with reference to the entitlement to rights pursuant to parenthood.

Childcare provided for children aged 0–3

Another direction adopted by the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy refers to achieving improvement within the area of taking care of the youngest children. In other words, there is a number of policies aimed at providing institutional and extra-institutional childcare for children aged 0–3 so that parents obtain freedom to choose the model of their family life.

Within the framework of the “family act” the possibility of financing and subsidising, from the occupational benefits fund, childcare services for parents and pre-school facilities or other forms of childcare has been introduced.

Another step taken by the Ministry has been an initiative aimed at establishing legal basis for diversifying the available forms of childcare services for children aged 0–3. The solutions currently designed should fulfill social expectations in the area of diversity of available childcare services and provide a rich array of pre-school childcare institutions as well as give the possibility to employ caretakers and babysitters within the framework of legal provisions. Another aim of the solutions discussed is to limit the existing administrative barriers that often accompany the procedures of establishing new kindergartens, nursery schools and other childcare institutions. Furthermore, new solutions should improve the quality of the provided childcare services; introduce minimal requirements and standards that institutions will have to comply with.

Other solutions include the introduction of childcare services connected with educational services, i.e. the elements of education will be provided alongside childcare services for children aged 0–3 (or 0–5 in the regional units where there are no kindergartens or other pre-school facilities).

OTHER INITIATIVES UNDERTAKEN BY THE MINISTRY

Activities for the benefit of children with disabilities

Initiatives aimed at improving the educational opportunities for disabled children and adolescents, including specific educational needs connected with disability, are undertaken by the National Fund for the Rehabilitation of Disabled Persons in the form of specific programs.

Parents of the disabled children aged 0–7 and their legal custodians receive within the framework of the program Early support for a disabled child financial support aimed at helping in adapting to life conditions connected with raising a disabled child and supporting it already at an early stage of development. There are courses and trainings organized for those children, as well as support groups. Their rehabilitation is also supported (excluding medical rehabilitation).

Blind children and adolescents are provided with computer and electronic hardware designed for their needs, alongside with special equipment and accessories necessary for taking part in educational and professional processes that would enable them to live independently (the program A computer for Home).

Support connected with providing computer hardware and wheelchairs with electric drive and reimbursing the cost of service necessary for its proper functioning can be granted to children up to the age of 18 and having problems with locomotion abilities (lack of or disabled upper limbs) or with hearing deficiency from 90 decibels up, who attend schools or an obligatory pre-school education within preparatory courses (the program Pegaz 2003).

Specifically tailored assistance is addressed, within the framework of the Rural Students program, to children and adolescents with disabilities living in rural areas or in small towns and attending primary schools, second-stage primary schools or secondary schools. Financial subsidies are provided for purchasing equipment necessary for learning and attending school, access to the Internet (installation and monthly payments), training and workshops, language courses, school-trips.

The Pitagoras 2007 program is addressed to children with auditory deficiencies, mute children and deaf children with poor sight being attendants of the post-secondary-school courses, students at universities and attendants of the preparatory courses for the university entrance exams. Those children can benefit from free help provided by the sign-language translators or equipment supporting auditory functions during the classes and exams.
Another important initiative financed by the National Fund for the Rehabilitation of Disabled Persons is aimed at reducing the disparity between the disabled and the healthy in the range of opportunities available, especially in case of children and their local environment. Within the framework of the program Reducing differences between the regions the works are performed to liquidate architectural barriers in all educational institutions.

Schemes providing care for children and families

Every year the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy announces the competition for best projects prepared by local authorities in the area of providing care for children and families. In the subsequent editions of the contest the priority for the projects to be submitted changes; it can be, e.g., the development of childcare facilities, activities against the social exclusion of children and adolescents, development of the professional substitute (foster) families, reaching standards in providing full-time care within childcare facilities, etc. the intended effects of this program are the following:

a) limiting the increase in the number of children being taken care of outside the family structure;
b) providing care for children with specific needs, especially orphans;
c) improvement in the conditions of life in the full-time childcare facilities and institutions;
d) preventing social exclusion of the adolescents raised in childcare institutions and foster families.

The main objective of the program has been formulated as that of providing support for local authorities in establishing the local infrastructure of systematic support for the dysfunctional families. It has been directed especially to the local authorities tailoring the range of actions to the specificity of the territory, demographic situation, economic indicators and the social landscape made of by the inhabitants of the particular regional units. 322 villages were subsidized, including programs for childcare in the amount of 5615 thousand zlotys, projects under the heading of Preventing the social exclusion and crime among children and adolescents in the amount of 2069 thousand zlotys, awards for the best programs in the total amount of 116 thousand zlotys.

The Post-accession Support Program for Rural Areas

This initiative is financed from the loan made in the World Bank. In the component Social Integration Program there are 500 regional units from both rural areas (91.4%) and rural urban (mixed) areas (8%) participating, selected on the basis of the number of social problems, low income levels, low social and citizen activity. The program is aimed at people threatened by social exclusion, i.e. the elderly, children, adolescents, families with children. Till the end of 2008 regional units participating in the PSPRA program started 3096 programs, of which 1480 are already finalized, while others are still being carried out. With reference to children, the programs include, among others, educational workshops, dancing classes, sport activities, educational meetings, sightseeing trips, after-school activities and kindergarten clubs.

In 2008 it was 842 charity foundations and associations that received financial aid from the Citizen Initiative Fund and the total amount of this aid equaled 58 million zlotys for the projects aimed at local communities. Social assistance institutions make the special category of community work units. They include primarily:

- centers for the crisis intervention;
- centers for purpose-specific counseling, including family counseling;
- institutions for family support;
- institution for the support of single mothers and pregnant women.

Moreover, there has been a voivodship-based campaign for preventing family violence towards children by increasing the level of social activism in this sphere and the social awareness of the scale of the problem.

There was also a series of workshops for the ‘first contact’ social assistance employees. In the majority of voivodships there were posters, fliers, and brochures prepared for conferences and sent to local authorities. Some special events were organized, such as concerts, contests and others, during which psychologists and pedagogues offered free advice. The campaign was also led in TV and radio, with spots and information in the press. 2215 persons attended the workshops. They usually had the form of lectures and discussion groups and were mostly of an interdisciplinary character and were attended by the representatives of all the institutions responsible for preventing violence in families.

Family-based forms of custody

The Ministry of Labour and Social Policy develops actions aimed at increasing the level of childcare provided within the family structure, which will replace in the future the institutional forms of childcare. Currently binding legal provisions provide for solutions enabling the placement of a child outside the family in case it needs special care. This can be done after the judgment by Family court, which decides whether the child is to be placed in foster family or in childcare institution. After an entrance into the legal age (18 years-old) there are other forms of material support provided for an adolescent child.

Custody provided within the family structure includes foster families and family institutions. Currently, there are three types of foster families distinguished: related to a child; unrelated to a child and professional unrelated to a child, with more than 2 children, specialized or providing family emergency aid.

Becoming a foster parent related to a child is a possibility provided for: grandparents, siblings, aunts and uncles, and other relatives or in-laws. Foster family related to a child receives benefits in cash from the state budget through:

- financial aid subsidizing the expenses for child maintenance, the amount of which is based on age, health status and social problems of the child (obligatory benefits);
- one-time benefit granted at the event of accepting a foster child (optional);
- one-time or regular financial support due to an accident (optional).

Families unrelated to a child are the ones that agree to raise a child that is not related in any way to this family. Such a family is not a professional foster family and so it does not receive salary. It receives, analogically to the related foster family, benefits in cash and, additionally, 10% of the basis calculated for the entitlement to financial assistance for taking custody of a child and raising it.

Professional foster family with more than 2 children and unrelated to a child is a form of custody for numerous siblings, and for socially inept children. In such families not more than 3 foster children can be raised.

In the professional foster family unrelated to a child and providing family emergency services there are children placed in the critical and emergency situations till the situation is normalized. The maximum period of stay is 15 months. Such a family receives benefits in cash analogical to previous cases, and a salary. There is also a salary for the constant readiness to take care of a child. All the amounts of benefits granted are provided for in the provisions of the Act on social assistance, where the basic amount is specified, all other benefits being a percentage of this amount.

Family institution (previously referred to as a family orphanage) is run by a person or a married couple. It is made of a family containing 4–8 children in different age. It enables mutual aid and care in case of numerous siblings and raising children in conditions resembling the proper family home.

It is planned to introduce in 2010 new provisions that would help diversifying and developing the forms of custody. New solutions presuppose universalizing custody within a family structure, especially in its professional form, by, among others, supporting projects made within 2009 Family custody year project. Another changes include an increase in the number of children in family
institutions (up to 14), and placing children below 10 in the orphanages will be prohibited.

Those initiatives are accompanied by prophylactic actions and co-operation with biological families of children in the risk of social exclusion and dysfunction. There are plans to establish a family assistant position in the regional administrative units in order to monitor and support families threatened by social exclusion or experiencing difficulties. Interdisciplinary teams will work on policy in local communities.

GOVERNMENTAL PROGRAMS

State aid in the area of nourishment

On December 31 2005, the Act establishing the program State aid for the proper nourishment entered into force. The aim of the program is to assist regional administrative units in the tasks aimed at providing proper nourishment for children with a special emphasis on rural areas. The scope of the program covers children aged up to 7, school attendants and people in difficult financial situation, especially sick persons the elderly, the disabled). Persons entitled to this aid include those gaining an income up to the 150% of the level established in the Act on social assistance. In 2006 the number of the regional administrative units taking part in this program equaled 285, in 2007 – 306, in 2008 – 301.

The aid has a form of benefit in cash for specific purposes, which can be spent on food. Also benefits in kind are granted, in the form of food supplies and, most often, warm meals. There are some works undertaken to modernize and prepare the points where such meals are distributed.

Including regional units’ own resources, in 2008 there were 808 million zlotys spent for this purpose (345 million were spent within rural areas). The number of persons covered by the program amounted to 2 million, almost half of them from rural areas. Children aged 0–7 (273 thousand) and adolescents attending primary and secondary schools (902 thousand) constituted in sum almost 1.2 million of the participants of the program.

Within the framework of the program there were 22 thousand points distributing meals established (including 11 thousand in rural areas), which were situated in schools, kindergartens, nursery schools, canteens and specially prepared rooms. Approximately 10% of those points were established in 2008.

Common rooms, employment, apprenticeship – socio-therapy in rural areas

Common rooms, employment, apprenticeship – socio-therapy in rural areas is another program designed to promote and encourage the use of good practice in co-operation between the regional administrative units in the spirit of solidarity and mutual help in overcoming common social problems. This cooperation serves the purpose of helping children and adolescents from dysfunctional families and creating new jobs, mostly in regions with high unemployment rates. The launching of the program has been aimed at rescuing persons or families from the risk of permanent poverty and social exclusion characteristic of their environment. The task set for accomplishing this purpose is to organize common rooms or clubrooms, i.e. institutionally organized places for children and adolescents that would also be the new workplaces for the adults.

THE NATIONAL PLAN FOR SOCIAL PROTECTION AND SOCIAL INCLUSION 2008–2010

Adopted by the government on December 16, 2008 document entitled National Program for Social Protection and Social Inclusion 2008–2010 is a report on planned activities and initiatives in the area of social integration and social security. The program is a part of implementation of the task set by the European Commis-
Alongside the already mentioned initiatives and undertakings performed by the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy there are intensive works performed for the preparation of the Solidarity through generations. Activities for the benefit of children and families program, which constitutes an answer for two important concerns: a significant drop in fertility rates observed from the early 1990-ties in Poland and being a consequence of political and structural transformations, and the necessity to provide for children and adolescents the proper conditions for development while preventing child poverty. The program is to be adopted in the second half of 2009.

This program will indicate the most important issues in the area of policy for children and families, which are going to be priorities for the future social policy of the State. It is emphasized that initiatives in this area should be undertaken in agreement and co-operation with social partners, e.g. local authorities, non-governmental organizations and other bodies.

1 However, it should be noted that the level of poverty amongst the elderly decreased in the course of the last two decades whereas amongst adolescents and families with children it increased (OECD 2008).
2 E.g.: as parts of social insurance schemes provided for different socio-economic groups, or parts of the social assistance.
3 The Act from November 28, 2003 r., on family benefits (OJ 2006, no. 139, p. 992, with subsequent amendments).
4 The criterion in question here is the net income, i.e. the income after the tax, social security and health insurance contributions, etc. The limit here is 540 PLN per month per family member, or 583 PLN per family member in case of families with a disabled child or disabled children.
5 Up to the age of 26.
6 The amounts are as follows: 48 zlotys for a child up to the age of 5; 64 PLN for a child aged 5–18; 68 PLN for a child aged 18–24.
7 The regional administrative units grant those benefits independently and autonomously.
8 Therefore, the tax relief does not cover the parents paying their taxes within the flat-rate scheme and agricultural workers, who do not pay the income tax.

THE SOCIAL AND HEALTH-RELATED DETERMINANTS OF CHILDREN’S DEVELOPMENT

INTRODUCTION

Children belong to the category of population that is in demand of special attention and care. They are exceptionally susceptible to a number of threats that put in danger their proper development. This is due to the biological condition of human species, whose offspring, in contrast with the majority of mammals, is not ready to live independently for a relatively long period of time. Human children are in need of parental care and aid for a number of years before they become sufficiently developed to live independently. Social processes have further prolonged this maturation.

The category of the proper development of a child has not only its biological meaning but also a social one. Proper development is connected both with social norms and with a stage in the progress of civilization. The proper development is the one through which a child acquires skills enabling him or her to enter a self-sufficient adult life with its responsibilities of procreation and raising next generation. The possibilities for proper development are mitigated in case when there are no parents or when parents do not fulfill their roles while social institutions fail to sufficiently replace the parents in those roles.

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There are four basic spheres of life in which care and attention are necessary for the proper development of a child: physical growth and health, intellectual development, emotional maturation and social development.

Children’s health depends not only on the awareness of parents and their health habits but also on the institutions of health care, especially in case of pregnant women and small children. The institutional framework is particularly important when the health awareness on the part of parents is small and their behaviour fails to ensure the good health of the children. Such is the case mostly among families with low income levels and low educational status. In such situations the meaning of institutions in the area of the so-called reproductive health is essential for children’s health.

Taking care of a child’s intellectual development involves stimulating contact, the use of wisely adapted games, good patterns of speech, loud reading, creating habits of participation in cultural and spiritual life. When children are refused such practices and opportunities within their families it is up to nursery schools and kindergartens to compensate for any deficiencies. Without this, the delay in progress can be reduced only with special effort and with a number of difficulties in the period of school-education.
Kindergarten guarantees also a social development of children: they acquire the patterns of address, respect for norms and rules, time-management, eating habits and hygienic habits. The proper development of children in all the abovementioned spheres requires a “trigger”, or a “catalyst”, i.e. a loving family, which provides for a child’s needs and fulfills his emotional needs. Such a family involves the functions and roles of a mother, father, grandparents and other relatives. Children, who are abandoned, who experience violence or sexual abuse or are exploited for hard work, share the most tragic fate. It is both the lack of family and having a toxic, dysfunctional family that imperil a proper development of a child and jeopardize the future functioning in adult life both in the private and the social spheres of life, including professional life.

THE SCOPE AND METHOD OF ANALYSIS OF THE THREATS FOR THE PROPER DEVELOPMENT OF CHILDREN

Numerous and interdisciplinary researches and statistical monitoring of social phenomena allow for sketching a picture of the possible risks for the proper development of a child. The complete description, however, is still difficult to attain; the results of various researches usually refer to particular inter-dependencies and rarely to the whole population, while databases of statistical data are still too modest. Despite those difficulties, this paper attempts a description of the threats for the proper development of children in Poland by using the results of reports and researches from the fields of public health, education, and social policy.

Table 1. The domains of the development of children, areas and activities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The domains of the development</th>
<th>Areas, behaviors, activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT AND HEALTH</strong></td>
<td>Providing care for pregnant women and small children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Vaccinations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Statistical research on children</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Studying the risks for children’s health</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Providing care in the area of children’s health and hygiene during the pre-school education period</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Nourishment</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Financial support for the families</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Housing conditions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Natural environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Free-time activities and holiday trips</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>INTELLECTUAL DEVELOPMENT</strong></td>
<td>Participation in pre-school education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The educational status of the mother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reading aloud for children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Access to good-quality schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Participation in cultural life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Extra-curricular activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT</strong></td>
<td>Abandoned children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Single-parenting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Family relations- divorces and different models family models</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Addictions (alcoholism, drugs) in the family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Violence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Children’s aggression</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sexual abuse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Exploitation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Psychological abnormalities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT</strong></td>
<td>Life in big-size family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Siblings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Peers relations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Neighborhood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Institutional forms of child care</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Social activity participation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: author’s own compilation.

The analysis of the threats for the proper developments of a child involves the use of an approach applied in the works on social indicators, in which the first step is to identify the domains of analysis, i.e., in this case, the four spheres of the development of a child. The next step is to adopt the indicators that seem accurate for the description of each of the abovementioned spheres of life. The choice of indicators follows the purpose of the study and allows for proving the thesis that children’s lives have a multidimensional character. In the chart placed below the main areas of analysis are indicated with reference to each of the domains of the proper development of children.

It is assumed that children comprise population from the moment of birth (though the prenatal period is also a subject of consideration, e.g. in case of medical studies, though rarely covered by the statistics) till the period of adolescence, i.e. till the age of 12–14 years, when children are supposed to complete their primary-school education.

THE THREATS FOR CHILDREN’S HEALTH

Children’s health is the basic resource (and capital) that they carry to their future lives. The investment in children’s health starts early – already during the pregnancy. This is why a thorough medical examination of children that covers subsequent stages in their development should begin early in the prenatal period. The basis for the evaluation of children’s health is provided by statistical data from numerous researches and analyses presented in the form of different indicators. Such information, however, is dispersed and it is not always easy to collect and order it in a comprehensive way. It seems that would require a special research project that would combine data and analysis with previously combined researches. In the compilation of health indicators presented below the method used comes from public health statistics with assumptions made by WHO with respect to prevention and prophylactics in the area of children’s health. The information comes from both national and foreign sources, mostly from the results of children’s health monitoring programs, epidemiological statistics, health care statistics, sickness registration and mortality statistics.

Children’s health status, similarly to every other category of the population, depends on many factors, which can be grouped into four different kinds: (1) genetic, (2) connected with individual behaviour, (3) connected with natural and social environment, (4) connected with access to medical care and its quality. In case of children the last three kinds of factors have particular importance as they might be influenced. The results of researches and hypothesis on the scale of importance of each of those factors indicate that the biggest influence (more than 50%) is an effect of lifestyle and of physical environment (20%). As far as the health care is concerned, it is estimated at the level of only few percent, nonetheless still higher in case of children than in case of adults. Health care factors include the access to prenatal medical examination, care provided for pregnant women, vaccinations, and early recognition system.

The prenatal medical examination enables early recognition of defects in the fetus, e.g. cardiac defects or renal tubule defects and allows for effective treatment already during the prenatal period. Such examinations do not enjoy support in Poland due to the fear that they may be used as argument in undertaking the decision to have an abortion. Such fear is groundless, according to the doctors, since both Polish legal provisions and parents’ motivation are aimed at protecting children’s health (Zaremba 2006).

Providing care for a pregnant woman, mother and small child was, during the communist period in Poland, a task for a centralized and integrated health care system. There were counseling centers, known as points K, located in the territory-based health units (ZOZ). After their liquidation care is provided through units being under supervision of local authorities. Basic care provided in independent, locally managed units with a family doctor is a new phenomenon in Poland, and this new, inexperienced institution has difficulties with its budget and staff. One still needs to wait for a well-organized system to compose itself out of the current solutions (Humanity birth foundation 2009). The role of the pediatrician has not yet been defined (Kawalec 2008; Bodalski 2008), while the family doctor does not have a well-defined function within the system of the locally
Table 2. The threats for children’s health

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Areas where Health Threats Occur</th>
<th>The results of researches on health status and living conditions, indicators</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>CAUSED BY THE INEFFICIENCY OF PUBLIC HEALTH CARE SYSTEM WITH REGARD TO CHILDREN’S HEALTH</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The lack of prenatal medical examination Invasive/Non-invasive</td>
<td>Makes it difficult or impossible to recognize cardiac defects and urethra defects which would enable efficient treatment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Below 8 points in the Ager scale</td>
<td>Constant care and frequent rehabilitation are necessary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The lack of medical examination with respect to hypothyreosis, cystic fibrosis, hearing and speech deficiencies</td>
<td>Universally applied in many countries, in Poland the screening is done only for cystic fibrosis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The lack of universal vaccination against contagious diseases: BCG (tuberculosis), hepatitis WZW B, DTP (diphtheria, tetanus, whooping cough), WZW B, HIB</td>
<td>Universal vaccination programs in many countries, including Poland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chronic diseases, allergies, asthma, diabetes</td>
<td>Long-term treatment, decreased quality of life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychiatric disturbances, neurological disturbances, Asperger complex, dyslexia, dysgraphia, autism</td>
<td>Difficulties in school, problems with social integration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insufficient dental care</td>
<td>Fluoridation programs (provided for in the education act) are not fully realized (approx. 50% of schools), limited access to dentists for children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The lack of studies into the specific categories of children and integrated health monitoring programs</td>
<td>Early recognition of defects and sicknesses is made more difficult, which makes the treatment less efficient</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**CAUSED BY THE NEGLECT AND INEPTITUDE ON THE PART OF PARENTS**

| Low weight at birth                                                                                   | Increased risk of developing diseases in later life                                                                                      |
| Malnourishment (insufficient period of breast-feeding)                                               | Inappropriate development, obesity, low weight, chronic diseases                                                                        |
| Neglect in the area of hygiene                                                                       | Infections, the diseases caused by “dirty hands”                                                                                         |
| Neglect in the area of dental care                                                                  | Dental diseases, gums problems, oral cavity diseases and others                                                                        |
| Neglect in the area of medical examinations and failure to comply with doctor’s prescriptions       | Various sicknesses                                                                                                                       |
| Neglect in the area of physical development                                                          | Spinal defects, feet problems, wrong posture                                                                                             |
| Injuries, accidents, poisoning                                                                       | The main cause of children mortality, caused by insufficient care provided for at home, kindergartens, at the street, …                        |
| Violence and sexual abuse                                                                           | Physical and psychological damage                                                                                                        |

* This can be an effect of increased attention and care provided by parents in case of early-birth low weight level.

governed healthcare. As a result, care provided to mothers is limited, particularly with respect to its educational function addressed to parents and children’s health monitoring role.

Family doctor, as it turned out, did not overtake the responsibilities of the liquidated units specializing in providing healthcare to children. This refers also to children attending kindergartens and schools. Doctor’s offices in schools were liquidated and there was no replacement in the form of a well-established family doctor institution. All this made healthcare less accessible for children. At the same time, it can be said that local governments only partially fulfill the responsibilities that they had overaken from the central government.

Preferential programs and prophylactic programs with reference to children remained in the hands of the central government and are carried out within their classic medical scope and countrywide. Newborn children are being examined towards hypothyreosis, phenylketonuria and hearing deficiencies. Examinations aimed at recognizing cystic fibrosis were carried out at an introductory stage and will cover the whole population of the newborns (Instytut Matki i Dziecka (The Institute of Mother and Child), http://przesiew.imid.med.pl/p/badania).

The compulsory protective vaccination program is carried out systematically and universally (almost 95%) (GUS 2008), though some regional disparities can be observed (especially the Małopolska region). Analogically, there is a movement towards the opposite direction; parents participating in anti-vaccination movement promote the development of natural immunity in their children’s organisms.

Children’s health is also substantially influenced by parents’ behaviour and, during the pregnancy, the behaviour of the mother. Risk-inducing behaviour on the part of a mother (e.g. drinking, drug using, improper diet), which is often accompanied by the negative influence of the environment⁷, leads to a low weight of the child at birth. It takes long time to neutralize the consequences of the delay in development and this process can never be fully completed.

Also the neglect and ineptitude on the part of parents, as well as stressful atmosphere at home, can pose a threat for the proper development of a child. Accordingly, bad family can endanger the proper development of a child while good family can protect a child from the threats. As American studies show, even in case of children with genetically inherited psychosomatic disturbances good care provided by affectionate parents can significantly reduce those irregularities (Parens, Johnston 2008).

Table 3. Mortality rates among children in Poland and other countries

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Countries</th>
<th>Low weight at birth (below 2500 g) in %</th>
<th>Mortality indicators per 1000 alive births</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Newborns</td>
<td>Children aged up to 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EU countries</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poland</td>
<td>6,0</td>
<td>5,6 (2008)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central and Eastern Europe</td>
<td>6,4</td>
<td>20,0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EU 27</td>
<td>7,1</td>
<td>4,7 (2006)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>World</td>
<td>15,5</td>
<td>45,0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


When the balance studies of the subsequent portions of children are limited the general picture of the health status of children in Poland becomes distorted and ambiguous. On the basis of the evaluation made by pediatricians using the data on sickness and mortality among children it can be said that the situation in Poland is far different from the “old” European states. On the basis of mortality statistics it is estimated that the probability of death is 40% higher in case of Polish children than in case of children from Western-European countries (Bodalski 2008). Despite this gap, the
dynamics of improvement in Polish children’s health, measured by the synthetically adopted mortality indicators, is significant and, slowly but surely, Poland is catching up with the European level (though perhaps more slowly than should be expected and in a socially diversified manner). The indicators in question are presented in the Chart below.

The main cause of death among Polish children is to be found in the so-called external factors: injuries, accidents, poisoning and suicides. On average, approximately 40% of deaths of children aged 0–14 are a result of external factors, traffic accidents being the major of them. Similarly to many other European countries, though Poland is rated high (13.4 fatal traffic accidents per 100 thousand children aged 0–14) and is posited alongside with Western Europe and Portugal (UNICEF 2004, WHO 2008), deaths occur more frequently among boys than among girls, while the rates increase according to age: 29%, 46% and 49% among children aged 1–4, 5–9 and 10–14 respectively (Malinowska-Cieślik 2007, based on GUS 2000–2005).

Inborn deficiencies, cancer and nervous system diseases, including cerebral palsy, are usually a cause in the rest of cases, as mortality rates show.

The statistics on sickness indicate that among Polish children it is mostly the infections of the upper respiratory tract, asthma and allergies that they suffer from. Doctors point out also to the hygienic neglect that is a cause of many diseases, especially in the area of dental care. Studies carried out in different towns and regions of the country indicated that among 6-year-olds it is 80% that have dental caries and were not subject to any prophylactic procedures (The Ministry of Health – on the basis of an epidemiological research carried out in the period of 1997–2004).

On a larger scale there are numerous tendencies to be observed within the evaluation of health of Polish children. When a global perspective is adopted that it becomes visible that children in Poland are not under threat from the diseases that are the main cause of deaths at the age of 0–5, i.e., pneumonia and diarrhea (WHO 2004). On the background of the countries of the Central and Eastern Europe the situation in Poland with respect to children’s health also seems to allow for some optimism (The Unicef Innocenti Research Centre 2009). However, when contrasted with Western European Countries, Poland ranks low. Within the country, in turn, growing differences with respect to the living conditions can be observed. There are different influences of the environment; there are disparities in the access to medical care for mothers and children, health education for parents is not distributed evenly. There are also visible differences in the intensity of the health-promotion campaigns between different regions and administrative units. At the same time, there is the pressure to embrace unhealthy lifestyle and unrestrained consumption, produced by the dynamic changes and aggressive advertising, which is also aimed at children. The young market economy in Poland targets and reaches children in order to shape their future consumer choices.

### Table 4. The threats for the intellectual, emotional and social development of children

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The areas where threats occur</th>
<th>The results of studies and indicators for statistical description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>ON THE PART OF PARENTS</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early parenthood/single parenthood</td>
<td>Delays in development in case when single mothers and small children are left without proper care</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The low level of education and skills</td>
<td>Inheriting the social and intellectual status</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alcoholism</td>
<td>Emotional problems experienced by children of the alcoholics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sickness and disability</td>
<td>Negative impact on children, especially in case of mental diseases and intellectual deficiencies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Violence in the family</td>
<td>Children being the victims of violence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abandoning children for shorter and longer periods of time</td>
<td>Stress at home, social orphanhood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children raised on the streets</td>
<td>Acquiring antisocial behaviour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents with criminal record</td>
<td>Inheriting improper hierarchy of values and antisocial behaviour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ineptitude, recklessness</td>
<td>Child’s labour as a means for supplementing the resources and doing housework</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poverty</td>
<td>Children’s needs remain unfulfilled</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>ON THE PART OF THE SOCIAL SYSTEM</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limited access to child care and pre-school education</td>
<td>Low levels of attendance in kindergartens</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High cost of child care – no subsidies and support</td>
<td>High fees in comparison with the income levels of young families</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schools unprepared for educating small children</td>
<td>Negative image of school, lack of security in schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child-unfriendly neighborhood</td>
<td>Child being an intruder in the world of adults</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No infrastructure for children</td>
<td>Limited range of activities and social contacts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limited access to cultural events and institutions</td>
<td>Low cultural education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High prices of children’s books</td>
<td>Limited contact with the written word</td>
</tr>
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Source: author’s own compilation.
which does not allow for generalizations. Nonetheless, there are many interdependencies we can now talk about with some level of certainty.

All the basic threats for children’s development are connected with the problems experienced by their parents. Even though parents are considered the most important source of care and development and are not easily replaced by any social institution, they sometimes fail to provide proper care and fulfill their parenting roles. When they are immature (teenage mothers), ill or disabled, or simply inept, addicted to alcohol or drugs and aggressive, than the damage they can cause to child’s development can often be irrevocable. The fact that parents enjoy full rights with regard to taking custody of their children does not mean that they should be trusted irrespectively of their improper behaviour. When the threats for the proper development of a child appear, there are, in many social systems, programs for early intervention in the forms of educational or therapeutic support. The weakness on the part of such programs, however, means that more strict surveillance is necessary, though its bureaucratic character means it is not always socially accepted. Sometimes, however, it is necessary to “rescue” a child from a dysfunctional family and a threatening neighborhood.

The need to receive support from external institution in case of children does not fall only from the threats posed by parents from dysfunctional families but also from needs of women trying to reconcile work with family life. External help is essential for providing child care.

Women working in industry or state institutions used to receive help from enterprise-based or church-based child care institutions. Currently child care is provided by kindergartens alongside with preschool education, since early education is now considered important for the future successes of children. Furthermore, it has been proved that pre-school education helps to reduce social inequalities and disadvantages, which are in Europe a part of life experience of the children of immigrants, single-parents and parents having many children (Eurydice 2008).

Another factor connected with the pre-school education has to do with an early intellectual maturation of a child. Kindergartens now have to comply with educational standards, syllabuses and need to stimulate intellectually. This is a natural consequence of the development of the so-called knowledgeable society.

Under the influence of the factors presented above it has become a norm to expect that kindergartens employ well-qualified staff and state institutions monitor the syllabuses.

In Poland, however, pre-school education is underdeveloped. The percentage of children attending kindergartens in Poland is below the European average. This is due to the historical context (rural areas were left behind by the modernization plans of the former communist governments) but also lack of prioritization of the preschool education in the social and educational policy.

The access to early education is limited also due to the financial reasons. Only wealthy families can afford high fees, especially in the sector of private kindergartens (Balcerzak-Paradowska 2008).

**CHILD POVERTY**

One of the characteristics of the contemporary world is the relatively greater poverty among children in comparison with other age groups. In Europe, it is only in Scandinavian countries that the poverty rate is lower among children than in other groups. What is the reason behind the fact that poverty touches children more than other age groups?

The results of studies point out two features of the situation of poor children. Both are connected with the family. Children are born at the early moment in family’s life and professional career of the parents usually had only just started, often bringing modest profits. This is true also for the rich and developed countries. As EU-SILC studies suggest, parents aged below 30 are a factor increasing the risk of poverty (European Commission 2008). If there are many children the risk is automatically greater. Moreover, the tendency works in both ways, namely: not only families with many children are more prone to experience poverty but also there are more children born in poor families. As a consequence, families with 3 or more children are statistically poorer than families with one or two children (ibidem). In Europe, it is also observed that single-parent families are also more susceptible to the threat of poverty. What is more, if a single parent is young then the probability of poverty increases even further.

Similarly, educational status of the parents and their position on the job market influence the risk of child poverty. Low qualifications increase the risk of poverty. Accordingly, the fact that both parents work reduces such risk. High qualifications of the parents, in turn, increase chances for signing a lucrative job contract.

Are the patterns presented above not at work in Scandinavian countries? The main factor mitigating the consequences of those patterns in Sweden is a high level of employment and a wide array of instruments aimed at supporting parents and children within the Scandinavian welfare state.

Are the determinants of child poverty different in Poland than in other European countries? It should be noted that poverty indicators in Poland are among the highest within the EU (European Commission 2008). Already in early 1990’s some studies highlighted the fact of increased poverty among Polish children (World Bank 1994, 1995; Golinowska et al. 1996). The following decade did not bring any improvement in this matter. Child poverty is still strongly tied with the number of children in the family and with the employability of the parents (GUS 2007). The risk of poverty is minimal in case when both parents are well qualified and both have well-paid jobs. Social benefits for families and children and social assistance support are still modest in Poland in comparison with other European countries and their role in reducing the risk of poverty among children is to be considered rather limited and casual (Piętka 2008).

Poland has been classified into the fourth group (group D) in the report by the European Commission, i.e. as having the highest indicators of the risk of poverty, alongside with Spain, Italy, Greece, Lithuania and Latvia (European Commission 2008, p. 49). A low level of state intervention and support and low intensity of economic activity among parents are some of the characteristics of those countries.

The fact that the level of poverty is greater among children rather than among members of other social groups is a cause of embarrassment and great concern among politicians, experts and social workers in many countries. It is hardly a surprise, therefore, that the results of such statistics are treated with suspicion and their accuracy is often questioned. It seems worthwhile to have a closer look now at the methods that produced those results.

The indicators of poverty in European Union are based on data on household income collected within the framework of the EU-SILC study. The fact that they are based on income levels and not on consumption levels contributes to the situation whereby countries with a larger proportion of agricultural and black market labour (including Poland) are being posted at the end of the rating lists. Therefore, Poland is among the countries that are rated lower when it is primarily income levels that are taken into account (Topińska, Szuklejko-Bieńkulska 2008).

Another factor influencing the results of the comparative studies on poverty is related to the poverty line applied when determining poverty rates. In the European Commission report (2008) on child poverty it was 60% of the equivalent income. In countries with greater income disparities, including Poland, the measures of the relative poverty produce more negative results than other methods, e.g. absolute poverty measures.

Absolute, and not relative, poverty is difficult to measure within the comparative studies. Each country has its own specific measurements, which are variously constructed and differently determined. In the post-communist states, there is a tradition of applying the poverty measurement methods based on the household budget...
evaluations. Experts determine the values of household budgets that are sufficient for fulfilling the basic needs of the family. The World Bank, in turn, applies the poverty line based on some arbitrarily established minimum budgets per household member, e.g. 5 USD per day.

In the comparative study on child poverty in the post-communist states (CEE and CIS) the extreme poverty line has been established at the level of 2.5 USD per person per day. The results proved that child poverty is less spread in countries being new EU Member States than in other Western and Central European countries. Poland has been rated alongside with countries with the lowest poverty rates, i.e. Hungary, Estonia and Czech Republic.

Diagram 1. Child poverty in Central and Eastern Europe in the first decade of the XXI century

When looking at the wide-scope international comparative studies, it becomes visible that child poverty depends on three different factors simultaneously: the level of economic development of the country, the redistribution of income (and income inequalities) and the policy of social transfers aimed at supporting children. Poland achieved poor results in all of the three spheres, which resulted in its worse position in comparison with other EU countries. Some of the new EU Member States, especially Hungary and Czech Republic, have comparable level of economic growth but have better social policy towards children and more efficient redistribution of income than Poland. It seems those countries will eventually become a model for Poland with respect to taking care of children. The high dynamics of the process of ageing of society and deficit in labour supply will force politicians to introduce more children-friendly policies in the near future.

CONCLUSION

Changes in economic and political system in Poland led society into the world of different living conditions, values and behaviors. Freedom and welfare as basic triggers of development pushed aside the traditional family and community values. Having children is no longer the most obvious aim of life for people. In the context of heightened consumption demands, having a child can, and sometimes is, perceived as posing an obstacle to unrestricted consumption and to the full realization of all the ambitions connected with professional career and to the self-fulfillment in the other spheres of life.

The fact that many individuals no longer consider having children as priority influenced also political preferences and tactics. Social organizations and the state itself reduced their interest in children by using a neo-liberal and conservative rhetoric postulating that children are the responsibility of their parents, who always know best what is good for their offspring and can decide themselves how to raise their children. Furthermore, popular slogans advocated that it is parents who should provide for children, while the state should intervene only in cases of extreme deprivation and neglect. Public childcare institutions were largely privatized and commercialized and financial transfers within social assistance schemes were drastically reduced.

We can already observe the results of such a state of affairs. Birth rates dropped and reached an astonishingly low level of –1.3; at the beginning of the decade it was the lowest childbirth rate in Europe. Child poverty increased since children were usually born in poor families and poverty in those families increased due to the higher number of children (Poland has the highest child poverty rate in Europe). Parents focused on earning money and securing their professional position while neglecting children and there were no new institution that could support them in their parental duties. Access to childcare, pre-school education and recreation, even to healthcare, due to their increased commercialization and high prices, has been reserved for wealthy families while poor families rarely can afford them.

This tendency poses a serious threat for social development in Poland if it will continue. It seems now that the awareness of the importance of proper development of children cannot be highlighted enough. Children are the basic and most important resource of the state and society and taking proper care of children is an expression of the most basic and most primordial human wisdom. We should hope this wisdom has been ignored only for a short period of time.

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EQUAL, MORE EQUAL, THE LEAST EQUAL: ON SOCIAL BARRIERS IN THE ACCESS TO EDUCATION

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INTRODUCTION

The dream of the equal access to education regardless of social status and wealth and educational success being based only on talent and hard work laid at the basis of the creation of the systems of public education. Despite their remarkable development, especially during the second half of the 20th century, this dream has not yet been made come true. Obviously, in the majority of countries, all citizens can, or even have to, attend public schools for at least few years, if not for a longer period of time.

However, some people are more successful on this educational path and they are able to continue their education on a higher level, apply for well-paid jobs and have promising careers. Others, on the contrary, have serious difficulties with learning, finish their education after a short period of study and have reduced chances for a successful career.

The most significant determinant of the future school triumphs and defeats of a child is to be found in the social background it comes from. People who have talents, abilities and a high IQ, for instance, still enjoy much better prospects of being discovered and acclaimed if they come from a better social background. Those tendencies seem to be universal, though in some countries the social background is perhaps not so much a shaping factor and seems to determine future career to a lesser extent than in other countries (Dolata 2008).

There is a solid connection between the social background, i.e. the social status and economic situation of the parents, on the one hand, and the school achievements of the child on the other. Alongside with social status, other factors are taken into account with respect to the analysis of educational inequalities and disparities, namely: gender, religion, ethnic origin, and health status. In this paper I shall focus, however, solely on the social background of children as a determinant of their educational progress, while keeping in mind that other factors also deserve a serious analysis. Social inequalities with respect to education in every country depend on two basic factors: the shape of the educational system and the socio-economic disparities within the population.

Poland is a specific country, in which both factors – educational system and the shape of social structure – work in the opposite directions. On the one hand, we have an open and a “friendly” educational system, which does not pose any serious obstacles for children and admits almost 50% of the adolescents from a given year into the higher education institutions (Education at a Glance 2008). On the other hand, however, a growing material disparity can be observed in the Polish society. Poland can be characterized by a very high level of the Gini’s indicator; growing differences in the levels of income, emergence of the enclaves of poverty and wealth, difficult situation experienced by families with many children, etc.

It is necessary therefore to analyze the functioning of the educational system and answer the following question: does it really trigger the mechanisms that reduce the social disparities, or, on the contrary, rather contributes to the creation of two separate educational paths; for “the better ones” and “the worse ones”? Those paths might not be different in their formal aspects while decisively distinguishing between the different “categories” of school attendants.

The earliest stage of the educational process seems to be of greatest importance in this respect since it prepares a child for the future challenges posed by the obligatory school education. It is those two periods of education that will be at the center of my attention in this paper, in which I wish to discuss primarily the situation of children finding themselves in a difficult social and material situation.

KINDERGARTEN AND ITS IMPORTANCE FOR EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES

Kindergarten constitutes the point of departure for the institutionalized “educational career”. It fulfills two significant functions, i.e., it provides childcare services and prepares a child for the future school education. During the Communist period in Poland the “childcare provider” function of the kindergarten was dominant. Kindergartens were established mostly in cities, often next to the factories that employed women. In rural areas kindergartens were usually set up by the State Agricultural Companies (PGR).

During the period of political and economic transformation there were far-reaching changes introduced with respect to the access to kindergartens. Those were a result of liquidation of many kindergartens and an increase in the amount of fees for childcare services provided by the existing ones, which, in turn, posed a barrier for children from poorer families. Consequently, at the end of 1990’s it was only 30% of children aged 3–5 who attended kindergartens and...
they were mostly from urban areas. Relatively high number of children aged 6 (approx. 90%) attend the so-called “0” classes; even though it was not obligatory the attendance was at a very high level (Pilch 1999).

The indicators of “schorlarization” within the institutionalized pre-school stage of education in Poland were, and still are, among the lowest in Europe. On the average, it is approximately more than 60% of children in Europe who receive pre-school education in kindergartens, whereas in Poland the value is 40% and includes mostly children from the cities (GUS 2008).

The delay in the development of Polish kindergarten education has different causes that can be found in Polish history and, what is worse, in currently existing obstacles, including prevalent mentality (unawareness of the importance of pre-school education) and economic limitations. There are also other reasons for this situation, for instance the resistance on the part of teachers to establish the so-called “alternative” kindergartens.

The development of the early education has become one of the priorities for the current authorities. Gradually (till 2012) subsequent groups of the 6-year-olds will be included in the first class of the primary school, while kindergartens will be populated with the 5-year-olds attending preparatory courses. Legal provisions were also introduced to provide help in establishing privately run kindergartens. Changes in this respect seem necessary. The priority is not only to provide childcare for small children raised by working mothers but also to create good conditions for the development and training for the future educational career of a child.

There are, regrettably, two serious threats for the realization of this priority. The reform, like all the educational reforms in Poland, is introduced “in a hurry”1, and in opposition to the opinion shared this priority. The reform, like all the educational reforms in Poland, the development and training for the future educational career of 5-year-olds attending preparatory courses. Legal provisions were also introduced to provide help in establishing privately run kindergartens. Changes in this respect seem necessary. The priority is not only to provide childcare for small children raised by working mothers but also to create good conditions for the development and training for the future educational career of a child.

At the same time, one of the most important requirements that a kindergarten needs to fulfill is a high quality of pedagogical work. A kindergarten that is run inappropriately can do more harm than good. Classes should be interesting and developing, not stressful. They need to take into account the needs of child, its development according to gender and level of abilities.

Western countries, which often tried to fulfill the “quantity” plan for pre-school education and crowded kindergartens, now put an emphasis on quality. The great number of research projects and reports containing data on early-stage education 2 might allow us to avoid mistakes made in other countries and to introduce the elements that will ensure its high quality. The condition is to think about the pre-school education not only in terms of attendance but also in terms of quality. The quality of an early-stage education is not determined by the rooms or programs – though they are important – but, primarily, by the level of qualifications of the teachers who understand the meaning of their work and are able to have a good rapport with children as well as with their parents.

The next aspect is directly connected with equality in the access to educational opportunities. The latest report on school readiness here. Both reports made their authors conclude that the optimum period of time spent in kindergartens is 3–4 years. This is important especially in case of boys and children from families with lower cultural potential (Dąbowksi, Zytko 2008).

In the research projects mentioned above it was not the subject of analysis whether, and to what extent, kindergartens influenced children’s ability to coexist with their peers and what was the level of stress connected with the beginning of their school education. What was inspected was merely the level of achievement in two school subjects: Polish language and mathematics.

Not for all children kindergarten means the same. Children raised as an only child in the family where parents have time and resources to devote to children will not need kindergartens for their full intellectual development. More important for him or her will be the possibility to meet with other children and adults other than his/ her own parents. Children from poor families with many children, however, will rather benefit from the intellectual stimulation. In Poland, unfortunately, children from poor extended families rarely have a chance to attend kindergartens. Children of the parents with low level of education and small cultural capital usually join kindergartens as six-year-olds (Murawska 2006, p. 113).

The main aim of the research I have conducted for the last 10 years 3 was the degree of implementation of the educational reform, especially with reference to one of its objectives, namely: introducing equal opportunities. In the interviews with the teachers there was a problem with the adaptation of children from poor families with low cultural and educational standards to the school requirements.

Teachers from rural primary school situated between the three liquidated State Agricultural Companies commented on difficulties they have with children. Some children lacked whatever hygienic habits, were dirty, wearing old clothes and constantly hungry. They knew only few words, could not handle a pencil in their hands, and used swear words. The problem had been less serious when there were kindergartens operating that could prepare such children for the duties of school education. There are many such stories told in rural schools. Recently, however, a pedagogue from a school located in one of the Warsaw’s districts, Praga Północ, told similar stories to me.

There is a large group of children in Poland raised in extremely disadvantageous conditions. According to Warzywoda-Kruszyńska, poverty in Poland has a face of a child. Poland is among the countries with highest child poverty rates (Warzywoda-Kruszyńska 2007). Data from GUS proves that children aged 0–14 constitute 30% of poor people (GUS 2005). Children in poor families suffer from malnutrition, which has negative consequences on their physical and intellectual development 4.

In order to create opportunities for neglected children living in poverty it is necessary to introduce specific syllabuses. “Ordinary” kindergartens may not be sufficient. Unfortunately, there are no such projects 5.

### PRIMARY SCHOOLS AND GYMNASIUMS

**Compulsory and universal school education**

Due to the contemporary deficiency in universalizing the pre-school education through kindergartens, it is the obligatory school-education that is responsible for creating equal opportunities. Since the 1999 reform, the compulsory period of education lasts 9 years, to which one year of obligatory “0” class should be added (since 2004). In total, it is therefore 10 years ([the “0” class] + 6 [primary school] + 3 [gymnasium, i.e. lower secondary school]). Such is the duration of the period of obligatory education in the majority of the developed countries. Similarly, the starting age of 6 is a commonly applied rule. Compulsory education is also free of charge 6. Ten years of obligatory continuous education is a requirement pertaining to providing equal opportunities to all, and this requirement is fulfilled in Poland.
Compulsory Education

The Act on Education from June 27, 2003 distinguished between the three educational "obligations": pre-school, school and "the obligation to learn". The pre-school obligation is provided for in Article 14 (3) of the Act: Child aged 6 is obliged to complete a one-year preparatory course in a kindergarten or a kindergarten department provided in primary school. Next obligation – school obligation – is defined as the following: The school obligation starts with the beginning of a school year in the calendar year in which a child reaches the age of 7 and lasts till a child finishes the second stage of primary school, yet no longer than till the age of 18 (Article 15 (2)). The same article stipulates that School education is obligatory for persons till the age of 18 (Article 15 (1)). The act specifies also that after graduation from gymnasium this obligation can be fulfilled in different forms, not only through attending secondary schools but also through apprenticeship (Article 16 (5a) of the Act on Education).

We also know who is required to monitor the realization of these obligations. In case of kindergartens and primary schools it is the headmasters of the institutions covering the area of residence of the child, in case of higher levels (children aged 16–18) it is local authorities.

The statistics of the Polish Central Statistical Office (GUS) indicate that in spite of the pre-school obligation approximately 5% of the 6-year-olds do not attend kindergartens, mostly in rural areas. Data on primary schools are more optimistic. It is only 5 thousand children (out of 2,5 million) who do not attend the primary schools, and 3,4 thousand (out of 1,5 million) in case of the gymnasium (in both cases it is approx. 0,2%) (GUS 2008).

In comparison with other OECD Member States Poland has one of the lowest indicators of drop-out students. However, in contrast with the values just cited, Polish children more often play truant than their peers in other countries. Truancy is one of the most serious issues in Polish schools. Furthermore, absenteeism influences promotion to the next class and is one of the reasons for ceasing to continue education and delays in finishing schools.

Research conducted at the moment of introduction of the school reform in 1999 was much less optimistic than the GUS statistics. The inspectors of the Supreme Chamber of Control that their findings were often ten times higher than the information submitted by the schools (!) (NIK 2003, Kaczmarek 2003). Also the teams of the Helsinki Human Rights Foundation (Ciechanowski et al., (ed.) 2002) and the research teams led by Barbara Fatyga (Fatyga et al., 2001) found out that schools neglect to collect data on truancy and do not undertake sufficient actions that would stimulate children to return to schools.

As the report by the Helsinki Human Rights Foundation reads: In light of the data collected it can be concluded that there is no comprehensive control system of the fulfillment of the obligation partake in school education (…) Surveillance is not systematized, and in case when the information on a child being absent is not detected by the headmaster, it probably will never come to light (Ciechanowski et al., 2002, p. 34).

Currently, after the new school system is implemented, it seems necessary to repeat such a research in order to analyze the scale of truancy and permanent absence. Research conducted under K. Konarzewski monitoring the reform of the educational system during the first year of its implementation indicated that the number of children "falling out of the system" can be much higher, since 30% of headmaster did not keep track of any statistics in this respect (Konarzewski 2004). It should be remembered that the new system of subsidizing schools based on the number of attendants encouraged headmasters to submit full numbers, even if some children were, in reality, rarely or never present. The scale of the problem is thus unknown.

Some light on the motivation behind playing truant was shed by the research conducted by K. Wąsowska (Wąsowska 2007). For her M.A. thesis she compared Warsaw gymnasiums with the schools situated 50 kilometers away from the capital of Poland. In Warsaw school truancy was mainly practiced by boys, who preferred playing computer games and did not enjoy the classes, or, girls experimenting with alcohol and soft drugs. Those pupils had loving and caring parents, wealthy but fully absorbed by their work.

Fifty kilometers outside Warsaw, children live in a totally different world. There are mostly boys who play truant. For some of them, school coincides with the little free time they have after working in their parents’ agricultural households or performing other work. One of the interviewed boys had his face’s skin burnt. Some substances used during the night shift at an agricultural household where he worked were toxic. Attending classes was for those boys a waste of time; they prefer to drink a beer with their mates, or play computer games.

Also during the researches that I have conducted, numerous teachers in rural areas indicated seasonal and other work as a reason for children’s absenteeism, e.g. picking strawberries, digging potatoes, preparing meals and taking care of younger siblings. One of the teachers made her student give up playing truant by ensuring that he received social benefit. It is rarely, however, that children living in poverty can be spotted by their appearance: they have nice clothes and mobile phones, they already know how to take care of themselves – one of the teachers said.

Children are often used as a cheap workforce, often being a support for a tight family budget. Regrettably, the scale of this occurrence remains unknown. Since employing children below the legal age is forbidden, the procedure is difficult to reveal. Such a diagnosis, however, is undoubtedly necessary.

In the majority of the gymnasiums, teachers complained about the “outgrown” students. Schools rarely decide to tell a child to repeat a school year. This is due to the policy of the Ministry of National Education, which stipulates that such a step is not encouraging the development of the child. The Inspectorate scrutinizes every case of a child left in the same grade for another year and, consequently, schools prefer not to risk being subjected to such indignation. There is so much pressure from the above to limit the number of children left behind in the same class. I have to explain myself, especially in primary school, write many pages, full of justifications (…) (Headmaster/(G)/Pol).

Only in case when a child missed more than 50% of classes it is obligatory that he or she be refused promotion to the next grade. There are some children like this in schools. Efforts to make them complete education within Voluntary Work Schools (OHP) are not always effective. Some points of voluntary work were shut down, some have bad opinion, and children do not like having to commute far away.

I’ve suggested [that he went to OHP], but for nothing. Maybe if there was a point in Płońsk? But there is none. A child cannot commute by himself (Headmaster/(G)/Bab).

We had two such cases. They went to OHP and were beaten, their things stolen (…) He was so brave here, but then returned with such humility, begged, wrote applications. And promised not to cause any trouble. And, truly, there were no problems after signing the contract. With difficulties, but he managed to complete his 9 years of the compulsory education (Headmaster/(G)/Wg).

Headmasters try to help those outgrown “pupils”. The easiest way is to issue necessary certificates. In 2006/2007 there were 8% of children older than the class they completed (GUS 2008). Presumably, some of them were simply “pushed” forward.

Covering up absenteeism, “pushing” them to the next classes and issuing final certificates all produce the analphabets. They are not threatened by social exclusion- they already are excluded. During the interview, the head of the regional Social Assistance Office enumerated that there are 20 among her customers who finished gymnasium and do not continue their education, being permanently unemployed. They constituted 10% of the total number of children leaving gymnasium in this gmina^1.

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On the basis of data provided by GUS it can be estimated that approximately 64 thousand children do not continue their education after completing the gymnasium, i.e., approx. 12% of all the graduates. Some of them might continue their education later on, but, after the evaluation made during the first year of the secondary school, those who started at secondary schools but do not comply with the expectations are often moved to basic vocational schools or just excluded form whatsoever form of education.

CONCLUSION

The introduction, within the reform, of the external examination made it possible to analyze the differentiations in the results between the types of schools and their localization (urban/rural areas). The analysis by R. Dolata indicates that school education contributes to social inequality (!) between the city and the countryside. The introduction of the gymnasium only strengthens existing inequalities. Furthermore, in the cities, especially the large ones, there is an ongoing tendency of growing disparities between various gymnasia (Dolata 2008, p. 96).

A number of research projects indicate that there is in Poland a large group of children having poor marks and serious difficulties already at the level of primary school. It can be assumed that this is due to the lack of abilities. They have problems with reading, writing and counting. It is hard to estimate whether it is 10 or 20% of schoolchildren; nonetheless it is a group of a significant size.

Moreover, it is without difficulty that this group can be characterized in terms of social and territorial traits. Parents of such children usually represent a low level of education, low income levels, often are beneficiaries of social assistance. They are scattered all around the Polish territory, though there are concentrations of poverty, which coincide with the territories where children have poor results in school.

The greatest disparities result from social and economic differences within Poland. School system has problems with coping with those disparities. There is a lack of accurate diagnosis. The registration scheme, in its current shape, serves better the purpose of sweeping the problems under the rug rather than bringing it into light.

The right to education and its compulsory character were principles designed to reduce inequalities but are not fully implemented. Truancy can be blamed on both parents and ineffective school procedure but also on the unattractive and dull image of the school. The greatest disparities result from social and economic differences within Poland. School system has problems with coping with those disparities. There is a lack of accurate diagnosis. The registration scheme, in its current shape, serves better the purpose of sweeping the problems under the rug rather than bringing it into light.

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5 The Komeński Foundation has some achievements and a great experience in this field; alternative kindergartens were established by this foundation in rural areas within the framework of the Tam gdzie nie ma przedszkola [There were no kindergartens exist] project.

6 Since 1990 there is in Poland a sector of private schools. It covers a small proportion of children (approx. 4%), usually of wealthy and well-educated parents. It is a diversified sector with regard to its organization, scope, level of teaching, etc. Within the higher levels of education, however, especially in case of post-secondary-school education, majority of students attend private schools.

7 Official Journal no. 137, p. 1304. This year there were some changes introduced with respect to the lowering of the school age- researches discussed in this paper, however, were conducted under the provisions of the Act.

8 The marking means it is a part of an interview with a headmaster of the lower secondary school (G stands for gymnasium), in a town marked as „Pol”.

9 Research project was financed by KBN (Commission for Academic Research) and was conducted in 10 regions by the University of Warsaw staff (UW): J. Herczyński (head), M. Herbst, A. Kiersztyn, M. Twardowska and M. Zahorska. The aim was to investigate into the factors influencing the performance during the gymnasium exams.
INTRODUCTION

The aim of this paper is to discuss the problems of children and adolescents within the activities and programs carried out by Polish boroughs (gmina; the basic local self-government entity in Poland) in light of the opinions of the representatives of social assistance centers (OPS)*. The information from the survey is completed with the analysis of selected boroughs and their strategies for solving the social problems, which is aimed at demonstrating whether, and to what extent, those strategies cover in their scope both children and adolescents.

THE PROBLEMS OF CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS IN THE DOCUMENTS FOR THE BOROUGH PROGRAMS IN LIGHT OF THE OPINIONS BY THE OPS REPRESENTATIVES

The diagnosis and the priorities

The problems of children are covered in the documents and in the activities performed by the boroughs in the context of family policy. It is assumed that family, as such, is primarily responsible for the well-being of children. In the diagnosis of social and material situation of the families inhabiting the territory of the boroughs, which was carried out by the staff of the social assistance centers, the most important problems enumerated were, among others, alcoholism, unemployment, poverty and disability. Those problems certainly influence the situation of children raised in the families with the aforementioned dysfunctions.

The problems directly connected with children, in turn, usually are a result of ineptitude and neglect in the area of childcare and ensuring proper development of a child, of violence in the family, including violence towards children themselves. Unemployment and material shortages coupled with general ineptitude and neglect on the part of parents are the frequent syndromes of poverty. Also malnourishment is a frequent syndrome. Syndromes less frequently mentioned by the representatives of the boroughs include the lack of possibility to provide care for small children and school-age children and social orphanhood.

In the light of the opinions expressed by the representatives of social assistance centers, even though malnourishment and the lack of childcare are identified as serious social problems, they are not to be found among the priorities for the actions in particular boroughs (table 1).

Poverty and unemployment are identified as the most important problems directly influencing the situation of families with children inhabiting the territory of a particular borough. They are also considered priority for action in majority of those boroughs.

Other aspects directly connected with the situation of children and adolescents identified as important are not, however, reflected in the priorities for action (Table 1). In particular, social and economic ineptitude in the families with children and pedagogical difficulties experienced by parents are not targeted by a prioritized action. Presumably, they are treated as phenomena “accompanying” poverty in those families, and, probably, as its direct results.

* The opinions come from 347 different social assistance centers located in 4 different regions. The exact results of the survey are available in Situation of Families and Family Policy in Local Environment, by B. Balcerzak-Paradowska (ed.), Institute of Labour and Social Studies, 2009.

The disparities between the social problems identified and the priorities for action in the social assistance centers might be a result of the concentration of efforts on those aspects that are believed to be the reasons for a difficult situation in which a family and children being its members find themselves.

Table 1. Problems of children and adolescents as important social aspects in the research on boroughs and their priorities for action in light of the opinions of the OPS representatives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social aspects identified as problems</th>
<th>Identified as an important problem in a borough</th>
<th>Identified as a priority for action</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unemployment</td>
<td>99,7</td>
<td>87,3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poverty</td>
<td>94,5</td>
<td>64,5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alcoholism of a family member</td>
<td>92,2</td>
<td>48,4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disability</td>
<td>91,9</td>
<td>37,1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social and economic ineptitude of the family</td>
<td>77,8</td>
<td>28,2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ineptitude and neglect on the part of parents in providing proper childcare</td>
<td>67,7</td>
<td>15,2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Violence in the family</td>
<td>66,8</td>
<td>21,9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficult housing situation</td>
<td>63,1</td>
<td>8,3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malnourishment of children and adolescents</td>
<td>53,3</td>
<td>29,1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of care provided for the elderly (persons with disabilities)</td>
<td>51,8</td>
<td>10,6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homelessness</td>
<td>46,4</td>
<td>4,9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of care provided for small children</td>
<td>34,3</td>
<td>4,9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of care provided for school-age children</td>
<td>30,8</td>
<td>2,6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social orphanhood</td>
<td>24,8</td>
<td>0,6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notice: Social problems in bold are the ones that entitle persons to receive social assistance under the Act on Social Assistance.


The problems of children and adolescents in the social strategies of the boroughs according to OPS representatives

The family situation diagnosed and the social problems identified should constitute a basis for the preparation and realization of the borough strategies for solving its social problems as a part of its obligatory activities (Article 17(1)(1) of the Act on Social Assistance). In the group of social assistance centers surveyed, two-thirds of them prepared the strategies for actions to be performed by boroughs.

In the total number of boroughs claiming that there is a strategy, half adopted as a priority providing assistance to persons threatened by social exclusion and assistance in satisfying basic needs, while almost 40% named the creation of coherent system for the provision of assistance for families and for the implementation of family policy as a priority.

The problems experienced by children and adolescents were not directly reflected in the first-rank priorities and directions for action. Every one in ten actions was aimed at increasing the access to education, culture and sport for children and adolescents as a form of providing equal opportunities, especially in case of children from socially excluded families, from families with pathological problems, or, from families threatened by dysfunctions.
The problems of children and adolescents in the social programs of the boroughs according to OPS representatives

Among the tasks set for the boroughs under the Polish legislation there is a creation and implementation of the protection programs. Almost one-fourth of the boroughs had a program for the prevention and assistance for children and families. Most frequently those programs are aimed at supporting families (11%), less frequently at improving the living conditions of a child, including his or her school education (more than 3%), promoting psychological health (3%), providing psychological help (3%), promotion of healthy lifestyle and sport (3%), improving the security of families (2%), providing aid for children form dysfunctional families (2%), operating clubrooms and childcare institutions for children and adolescents (almost 2%), social work with families (almost 2%).

It was even less frequently (1 in 8) that the boroughs had a program prepared for providing assistance to families having problems with providing proper childcare and experiencing pedagogical difficulties, i.e. being unable to fulfill its child-rearing function independently. The aims adopted for such programs include, first and foremost, providing childcare services (13 boroughs), financial aid (9), psychological assistance (8) and increasing pedagogical activity of parents (7 boroughs).

Programs directed at families with many children had been devised with a similarly small frequency (44 boroughs, amounting to 12.4% of the total number of surveyed boroughs). The objectives of the both kinds of programs were not directly aimed at children, but rather on solving the material problems of the families. In case of programs addressed to families with many children the main objectives were the following: providing basic means for sustenance (14 boroughs), enabling proper existence at a sufficient level (9). Other objectives included: providing counseling and social work (8), benefits in kind (3) – though these can be counted in as other forms of support providing basic means for sustenance of the families. In the programs prepared by the boroughs and addressed to single-parent families the objectives adopted were: financial aid (15), counseling and social work (10), enabling proper existence (7), assistance in the field of the organization of free-time activities (2), benefits in kind (2).

OPS on families with children as beneficiaries of social assistance provided in boroughs

It is mostly families with many children that make use of social assistance. The next are single-parent families, mostly single mothers. Single fathers receive social assistance sporadically (Table 2). Those are, therefore, families in which material shortages and economic difficulties may appear as often as pedagogical problems due to the fact that there is a lot of children or that one parent is missing. This is proved also in statistical data used in reports on social assistance prepared by the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy (MPiPS).

Table 2. The frequency of the use of social assistance in different categories of families according to the OPS representatives in %

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Family category</th>
<th>The Frequency in which social assistance is provided</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Very often</td>
<td>Often</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Many children (3 and more children)</td>
<td>62.0</td>
<td>36.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single-mothers</td>
<td>38.0</td>
<td>50.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single-fathers</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>13.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One of two children</td>
<td>16.4</td>
<td>64.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child with disability</td>
<td>14.4</td>
<td>56.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Less frequently, though still quite often, social assistance is received by families with one or two children having difficulties necessitating social assistance (64.6%).

The self-reflecting evaluation of the assistance provided by the boroughs for the families indicated that this aid is most sufficient in satisfying the needs in the area of nourishment (90.5%) and providing social work (90.2%). Social work is cooperation between social workers and families while nourishment programs are carried out in schools and this requires cooperation between the schools, social assistance centers and local authorities.

Institutional cooperation for the sake of children

The activities performed by the boroughs for the benefit of local communities as represented by the social assistance centers require, both in case of obligatory tasks and boroughs’ own initiatives, cooperation with other institutions within a given OPS territory, e.g. a borough council, family centers, schools, neighbors, parishes, non-governmental organizations, etc. Almost 92% of the social assistance centers (OPS) surveyed admitted to having cooperated with borough council when coping with family matters, including problems experienced by the families with children. The scope of this cooperation covered, inter alia, the exchange of information on beneficiaries and persons in need of social assistance care providing, social assistance housing, nourishment programs for children and the homeless, and other paupers.

The examples of the cooperation between an OPS and a borough council

- Social clubrooms – project “Free time: effective management for children from dysfunctional families”. Objectives: systematic work with children, providing help and advice in solving children’s problems, nourishment programs, cultivating tradition and culture, building teams and networks, assertiveness training.
- Providing equal educational opportunities: through scholarship program for the secondary schools and university attendants, social scholarship, social assistance in case of accidents, one-time in-cash benefits.

Almost all surveyed centers cooperate with regional family centers and the scope of this cooperation covers, among others, the following areas: providing assistance to stepfamilies and biological families being dysfunctional families (24%) and placements in social housing and orphanages (approx. 14%). It is rarely that cooperation involves organizing trips and proving help for children coming out of childcare institutions and orphanages.

The majority (80%) of the centers cooperate with local authorities represented by a village administrator or a mayor. This cooperation covers social problems, answering the needs of local communities, helping children and adolescents attending schools, providing scholarships for children from poor families (almost 14%).

Cooperation between OPS and a village mayor

Good cooperation between a village mayor and OPS allows for securing financial resources for performing tasks in the area of social assistance and financing activities such as: creating clubrooms and organizing school trips and a variety of free-time activities during the summer and winter school breaks for children, especially in case of children from poor families.

One in every three centers has cooperated with a mayor, which equals the total amount of social assistance centers localized in ur-
Two-thirds of the OPS surveyed cooperated with non-governmental organizations operating within the territory of their borough. The range of this cooperation included, according to the representatives surveyed, mostly provided aid for those in need (31% of the responses), assistance provided for the disabled (11%), operating clubrooms and providing childcare services (9%), helping children (more than 6%), organizing school trips and free-time activities for children (approx. 9%).

77% of the OPS surveyed confirmed having cooperated with local parishes, usually in providing help: in kind for the poor (40%), for the sick and the elderly (23%), providing food (17%), organizing school breaks trips (15%), social work with children and families (5%). The forms of those activities were usually based on personal relations and meetings (53%) or transferring benefits in kind (34%).

The research on boroughs carried out through surveying the representatives of social assistance centers can be complemented by a detailed analysis of some of the borough strategies for solving social problems.

The strategies examined here are based on diagnosis of social problems in a given borough; indicate tasks to be completed with reference to specific groups of people, e.g. the unemployed, families threatened by social risks (addiction, violence, poverty, family with many children), the disabled, persons threatened with social exclusion (the unemployed, homeless people, people coming out of penitentiary institutions), the elderly, the young (especially right after finishing schools; borough programs aimed at providing help in entering the labour market, starting a company and promoting young people’s commitment to community life of the borough). Those categories are differentiated on the basis of Article 17 (1) of the Act from March 12, 2004 on social assistance (Official Journal 2004, no. 64, p. 593). This article states that the main aim of the borough strategy for solving social problems is the social inclusion of persons and families from different categories of people threatened by social risks.

In each of the strategies presented in the following sections of this paper those objectives that are connected with improving the quality of life of children and adolescents were selected and discussed.

Proper development of a child as an objective for a borough strategy

The Strategy for solving social problems in the borough of Chełmiec, 2007–2013 creates a system of integrated activities aimed at preventing the threats for the proper development of a child and ensuring its appropriate functioning. In particular, proper living conditions are to be provided, alongside with proper education, material security, children rights protection and proper organization of free-time activities. Also participation of families with children in cultural life is mentioned.

Those aims are to be realized by a network of institutions, including school and school pedagogues, health care institutions, NGO’s, courts, security services, police and other subjects.

Within the framework of prevention and childcare it is planned to set up a clubroom in Chełmiec. Its tasks will include nourishing child’s interests and providing proper place to study and spend free time. Furthermore, assistance in learning process and classes with a psychotherapist will be available there. It is supposed to curb the negative influence of improper living conditions and family problems, and to help parents in raising children. The clubroom will be addressed to the attendants of primary schools of both levels living within the territory of the borough.
Setting the clubroom is a way to cope with ineptitude and neglect on the part of the parents in raising their children and running their households. Malnourishment was identified as the biggest problem by the borough of Chelmiec. It is 947 children there that are covered by the free meal program (lunch and an after-lunch snack is provided). It is, however, only a small percentage of children who need additional nourishment.

Other problems include difficulties with school education and are solved by additional classes and help provided by pedagogues and psychological therapy. Another problem, which the strategy mentions, is children “inheriting” alcoholism of their parents. There are programs and social campaigns organized, such as Sober Mind, Look differently, The animator of sport for children and Adolescents, theatre plays, contests and quizzes connected with raising awareness of the problem.

Furthermore, activities promoting healthy lifestyle and intellectual development are a part of the strategy. There are Sport Clubs, summer camps, team sports and games organized that ensure proper growth and physical development of children and adolescents.

Organizing childcare and preventing antisocial behaviour among adolescents as objectives for a borough strategy

In the Strategy for solving social problems in the borough of Mirów, 2007–2013 the following problems pertaining to the quality of life of children and adolescents were identified: lack of proper childcare, alcoholism, juvenile delinquency, addictions, violence in schools.

Moreover, the document emphasizes the needs that are difficult to satisfy on a borough-scale level, such as: the necessity to cover 100% of children by the scope of the secondary-school education fit for contemporary labour market demands, the lack of proper place for playing sports, low standard of school equipment and schools in need of general refurbishment. It is necessary, according to the authors of this strategy, to motivate people and to offer a wider range of beneficial activities available to children and adolescents through clubrooms, sport clubs and facilities, and a wider range of cultural institutions and organizations.

It has also been highlighted in the strategy that the access to “social infrastructure” for children and adolescents is limited due to the low level of density in the topography of the borough. The cost of traveling to school further limits the resources of the parents and, as the authors report, it often forces children to resign from continuing their education.

Providing access to education as an objective for a borough strategy

On of the most important problems experienced by adolescents, according to the Strategy for solving social problems in the borough of Chlewiska, 2005–2013 is lack of perspectives for life and work within the territory of the borough. Another aspect has to do with a limited access to secondary school and higher education, the institutions of culture, clubs, and sport facilities. The transportation to primary schools is provided on the territory of the borough while higher education institutions are localized outside its territory. This difficulty is coupled with the problem of limited financial resources for education, professional training and equipment.

Another important matter is the fact that children start to smoke cigarettes, often at an early age. The borough tries to fight with retailers selling cigarettes to children by sending GKRPA guidelines. In every school there are also programs preventing drug use and alcoholism organized. There are a number of initiatives in the area of extra-curricular activities, including art classes, dancing clubs, music classes, IT workshops, etc. Sport facilities within the territory of the borough are not in a good condition and, as the authors point out, need modernization.

It seems worth noticing that the strategy for the borough of Chlewiska was prepared with the use of survey addressed to the attendants of local schools.

Cooperation for the benefit of children and adolescents as an objective for a borough strategy

According to the Strategy for solving social problems in the urban borough of Hajnówek, 2005–2013 the main aim is to create opportunities and conditions for the development of children, providing childcare and taking care of children with special needs as well as providing psychological counseling for children with problems (addictions, crime).

The authors of the strategy offer creating interdisciplinary teams for intervention in case of situations posing a threat to children and adolescents and dispersing information on institutions providing help and support to children and families. They also notice that there is a need for adapting school buildings and kindergartens for the disabled, employing well-educated teachers and promoting social cohesion through the creation of integration points in schools and kindergartens.

Further on, they write on importance of organizing family rest, integration events, festivals, cultural events.

Access to childcare and education as an objective for a borough strategy

The Strategy for solving social problems in the borough of Maciejowice, 2005–2013 indicates the problems of disparity between the school curricula and the demands of the contemporary labour market, low educational ambitions of the parents, negative tendencies with respect to juvenile delinquency, promotion of the consumption of alcohol and nicotine, lack of proper health care.

The authors of the strategy point to the insufficient subsidy for education and lack of resources for the investment in culture. It is also emphasized that they have well-qualified staff in schools and use modern technology (access to the Internet).

It should be underscored that this strategy does not notice the problem of kindergartens. Only 95 children aged 0–4 attend them in Maciejowice, while there are 416 children of this age and 573 children aged 5–9 in this borough. There are no comments on the limited access to the pre-school education in the report. There is also no information on children form dysfunctional families or children threatened by social exclusion.

The authors of the strategy postulate not only cooperation between different institutions but also an exchange of information and good practice with other boroughs.

CONCLUSION

In the programs and activities of the Polish boroughs children are perceived as a part of family and in the context of social situation of the family. Therefore, children problems are identified as important but also as a consequence of ineptitude and neglect on the part of parents and of social problems experienced by the families. The problems of children are thus connected with the inability to organize their free time, with pedagogical difficulties experienced by the parents and with the problems pertaining to the organization of family life.

Boroughs adapt it as a priority to prevent unemployment and poverty of the families since those incidents directly influence the well-being of the children. Other matters directly connected with children and adolescents, such as the lack of proper childcare or the lack of free-time activities are not a proportionate concern for the authorities and are not reflected in the strategies adequately to
their importance. Children and families are in the center of attention for social assistance institutions because of the obligatory nourishment programs provided for in the Act on social assistance. This is the reason why nourishment programs are indicated as the area where children’s needs are being fulfilled more accurately than in other areas.

In the borough strategies the basic aims are: to provide material support for poor families, to satisfy basic needs and to prevent social exclusion. Thusly, they are compliant with the priorities for actions.

Social assistance centers fulfill an intervention function, which is performed, first and foremost, in its material aspect. They also offer, however, support in a form of widely understood social work. The material support provided by the boroughs is received mostly by families with many children and also by the single-parent families, families threatened by poverty and social exclusion.

The realization of many tasks in the area of community welfare, both obligatory and being an initiative of the OPS’s themselves, requires cooperation between institutions operating within a particular territory. Most frequently, such cooperation involves borough councils, village mayors, schools, courts, NGO’s, local parishes.

The strategies prepared by the boroughs for solving social problems relatively rarely refer in a direct way to the problems of children. The borough strategies analyzed in this paper are a good example of efforts aimed at identifying social problems, liquidating barriers and protecting from threats while discovering full potential of the borough, both in terms of human resources and material capital. The basic aim of the five strategies discussed here, with reference to children and adolescents, would be to fulfill their basic needs and to provide them with appropriate living conditions for their optimum growth and proper emotional, intellectual and social development through, among others, development of the child care services scheme.

It is also indicated in the strategies that not only the obligatory intervention tasks set up by the legislation for the social assistance centers but also preventing measures and activities are necessary for the well being of children and adolescents. This is especially important in case of pathological and antisocial behaviour on the part of children and adolescents. Preventing measures should, therefore, provide activities and a good organization of free time in and outside the school.

The value of the strategies can be found in their vision of an integrated system of support provided for children and adolescents coupled with the promotion of social activism among parents and institutions operating within the territory of a borough.

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Content List and Abstracts are easy to find at the following web page: http://politykaspoleczna.ipiss.com.pl
The Institute of Labour and Social Studies - ILSS (Institute Pracy i Spraw Socjalnych) based in Warsaw, Poland, is a scientific research institute. The Institute has been operating for forty years serving not only government administration and policy makers, but also taking active part in academic research works, tutoring and supervising series of publications, especially those valuable in the teaching process. The Institute’s basic research works are accompanied by applied studies, and the requirements of current and strategic social and economic policies. The main forms of activities are: Research activities as: statutory research, State Committee for Scientific Research grants, international projects, seminars, conferences.

International co-operation as: international research projects, bilateral research projects, database development; Expert reports and consulting as: assignments commissioned by various institutions, activities of public services; Education as: post-graduate studies, PhD studies. The research activities of the Institute cover the labour and social policy questions in an interdisciplinary manner. The research directions are adjusted to the current needs of the national socio-economic policy, and comprise such areas as: economy, law, political sciences, sociology, pedagogic sciences. The research covers the topics crucial to currently pursued socio-economic policy and directions of change processes, such as:

- Labour problems (labour market policy, migration for work, human resources management, working time, remuneration and motivation systems, occupational science, labour law).
- Collective labour relations (social partners, collective disputes, employee participation, collective bargaining, collective agreements, collective labour law).
- Social policy (state social policy, social security, social institutions and instruments, family problems and family policy, poverty, social exclusion and counteracting measures).

Institute research findings are used by the central and local government administration as well as by business entities. The publishing house of the Institute prepares numerous publications (for Polish and international markets) that are useful in the teaching process. The seminars and conferences organized by ILSS are forums for exchanging experiences, ideas, expertise and knowledge on a national and international level. The researchers employed in the Institute are recognized scientists, both in Poland and abroad. Their expertise and experience encourage foreign partners to undertake international research projects with ILSS. As a leader of labour and social studies in Poland, ILSS took part in numerous EU funded research activities under 5th & 6th FP, PHARE, Leonardo da Vinci, etc.

The Institute has actively participated in the processes of accession and integration of Poland into the European Union. In the wake of the accession the research activities focused on:

- Problems of adaptation of Polish law to European legal regulations,
- Influence of EU integration on labour market situation and trends,
- Labour market and social policy and the challenges of integration,
- European and Polish standards of social security,
- Social exclusion and reintegration.

Poland’s accession into the European Union on 1st of May 2004 does not mark the end of the ILSS activities and struggles in these research areas. On the contrary, we expect new problems to appear and to be identified and dealt with.

If you have any questions regarding activities or research of ILSS, please feel free to contact us. We are eager to undertake any form of international cooperation with institutions and individuals.