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**Reconciling family and professional life in Poland - preferences vs. practices**

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In Poland, as in many other European countries, family policy is expected to be shaped as a tool that helps to solve the problems such as low fertility, difficulties to reconcile family life and work as well as to support families with low income. Taking into consideration the persisting low fertility despite its increase since 2004 (TFR increased from 1,22 in 2003 to 1,39 in 2008) and relatively low women's labor force participation (in 2008 the employment rate of women aged 15-64 was 52,4% while those aged 25-54 - 71%), well-designed family policy could stimulate both fertility and women's employment.

**The aim of the article**

The aim of the article is to present people's perception of maternity and parental leaves as main measures used to reconcile family and professional life along with employers' opinions about these measures. In parallel, a detailed description of recent family policy changes in Poland is provided, which focuses on leave regulations. The main aim of that approach is to compare preferences of employees and employers and the legal changes made by the government.

Due to the two-direction-analysis the paper is divided into two main sections – the first dealing with the issue of preferred family policy model (based on sample surveys of women and employers), whereas the latter describes the family policy changes.

**Data and methods**

The analyses are based on the data from the sample survey "Mothers' returns to the labor market after work breaks related to child care" and the sample survey of employers, both carried in 2006. Employers were asked about an assessment of

contemporary family policy issues and their preferred future development. Results of the surveys in the field carried by the Polish Confederation of Private Employers "Lewiatan" are taken into account as well.

Due to the character of the considered issue and the limitations of available data it is not possible to provide very advanced statistical analyzes. In the article basic descriptive statistics and correlations will be presented to support the conclusions from qualitative analysis.

### **Preliminary results**

According to the results of survey of mothers of 2006 in Poland a majority of women opt for substantial changes in the regulations concerning maternity and parental leaves. Almost three quarters of mothers would prefer the maternity leave to be longer with no changes in the length of parental leave, which as the mothers declare should be paid irrespective to family income. These views of women are fully shared by employers, who would also welcome longer maternity breaks as long as the maternity leave consists of the obligatory (preferably very short) and the voluntary part. Stronger oppositions between mothers and employers arise in case of flexibility at work. Whereas the mothers would like to be given the chance to work part time, telework or work from home, the employers declare that all the forms of flexibility should not be extended as they pose significant organizational and financial problems. Among the most difficult changes to introduce the employers point working from home, teleworking, job-sharing as well as flexible working time. The opposite ideas relate also to childcare facilities to be provided by the employers, which seems to be too complicated from the organizational point of view and costly. On the other hand it gives the employer the opportunity to design care in the way to guarantee the most effective work of mothers.

In the current decade the government introduced some substantial changes in family policy. The recent amendments passed to the parliament at the end of 2008 concerned primarily leave arrangements. The obligatory maternity is being gradually extended from 16 weeks in 2006 to 26 weeks in 2014 weeks, the mothers won the right to voluntary maternity break and two additional weeks of paternity leave were introduced. The parents were also given a chance to replace

parental leave with part-time work and the protection against dismissing for parents deciding to take advantage from that option was incorporated.

Nevertheless, despite these regulations supporting parents in their reconciliation efforts the mothers still declare a lack of real chance to shape their work the way that allows them to reconcile family and professional duties. The variety of privileges, incentives and options for working mothers although quite impressive is still only a legal possibility rarely incorporated in everyday life. The article tries also therefore to answer the question how far the law influences the personal choice of an individual working mother and to what extent it is the matter of pressure of the environment, beliefs or stereotypes.

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