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## **FAMILY MODEL CHANGES IN POLAND - THREATS AND CHALLENGES**

**The main objective of the presentation is to present new perspectives of family policy in Poland and the possibility of rebuilding this policy, taking into consideration both the still unresolved problems and risks of family change, as well as new challenges resulting from this state of affairs in demographic as well as social and economic aspects. The background considerations are the selected experiences of other European countries in this field.**

### **Family model changes in Poland**

Like other European countries, Poland has also witnessed the transformation and disintegration of the family, manifesting in such phenomena as the decrease of the married population, mainly as a result of divorces or rejecting marriage, postponing marriage decisions of women and men, increasing or high rate of divorce, delaying the birth of the first child, fertility rate falling below replacement rate, shift of maximum fertility from younger to older age groups, total negation of marriage and/or parenthood and choosing other forms of personal life such as cohabitation (with or without children), single parenthood, living alone with no children (as a single), childless marriage (DINKS, i.e. Double Income No Kids). In the literature, these indicators are considered to be manifestations of the de-institutionalization (detraditionalization) of the family, standing for the devaluation of the traditional family consisting of spouses and children as a basic social unit<sup>1</sup>. The phenomena mentioned above that relate to the creation and functioning of the family, are the main factors of this processes. They significantly impact on fertility, as it is still marriage that remains the most favourable form of relationship when having children. Meanwhile, the number of such families is decreasing and matrimonial decisions (as well as reproductive ones) are delayed. In the developed countries this process is considered to have begun in the 1960s; in Poland, however, its origins reach back to the second half of the 1980s. It is also considered to have come along with all dimensions of transformation - systemic, economic, cultural, etc. Such changes have significantly altered the role of the family in society, as well as conditions for its forming and functioning, which influences contemporary challenges of family policy.

As shown above, the process of family change (de-institutionalization) in Poland is becoming clearer. This should be an important starting point in the search for effective solutions in family policy.

### **Main threats**

Among the threats implied by changes of the family in Poland, one should mention not only the expected demographic imbalances, but also the disruption of the principles of social

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<sup>1</sup> L. Hantrai, *Living as a family in Europe*, [in:] L. Hintrais, D. Philipov, F.C. Billari, *Policy Implications of Changing Family Formation*, "Population Studies" No. 49, Council of Europe Publishing, 2005; *Socjologia. Przewodnik encyklopedyczny*. PWN, Warszawa 2008, s. 168.

justice and the lack of equal access to institutions and social services (including education, health care, of children and the elderly), increasing social exclusion of the family, increasing claims of discrimination of some people, families and even children, and therefore growing conflicts within society or other related negative effects.

It should be noted that not only the demographic imbalance may have a negative impact on both social and economic development. Similar effects are caused by the lack of the already mentioned appropriate principles of social justice. The relevant definition of these and compliance with them, can become the foundation for the effective and efficient implementation of family policy. This policy should be of interest to both social and economic policies of the state.

### **Main challenges**

Contemporary changes of the family imply the need to seek new perspectives in family policy. Successive reforms and proposed changes in this area have not yielded the expected results, either in terms of demographic balance, the society or the economy of the country. They do not include in full many important aspects, among them the above-mentioned principles of social justice, transformation of the family as well as other aspects, such as the empowerment of families, economic changes (especially in the labor market) and the mutual implications of family policy and the economy.

At the same time, the following family policy dilemmas demand solutions:

1. Is the neo-liberal direction of changes adopted in Poland fully justified from the perspective of low fertility rates and the ongoing processes of the de-institutionalization of the family? Do Polish families – both poor or socially excluded for other reasons, as well as those in relatively favorable socio-economic condition - have adequate provisions to take over almost total responsibility for conditions of their existence without the vital support of local or central governments? If so, which of the liberal solutions should be priorities?
2. What should be the specific roles and responsibilities of the state, family and other stakeholders in organizing, financing and delivering social services?
3. Which criteria and rules of entitlement to social benefits should be chosen to prevent inequalities in the access to them?
4. How to improve the quality and level of social services (and other benefits) so that they contribute to the increased activity and integration of families?
5. What types of social services, and to what extent, should be developed in various sectors (public, market, social) and departments of social policy (social welfare, education, health, etc.)?
6. What should be the effects of family policy instruments, and how to obtain their optimal level taking into account the limited organizational, personnel, financial and infrastructural capacity and the almost unlimited, individualized and changing needs, tastes and attitudes of individuals and families?

This presentation is a part of my on-going research project.