

# Who Pays for the Crisis in Eastern European “New Capitalism”?

## Case of Poland

Maria Skóra, Department of Sociology and Social Policy,  
Wroclaw University of Economics, Poland

**Abstract:** After abolishing communist system in Easter Europe Poland turned towards capitalist economy by implementing social and economical reforms, that deconstructed welfare state of realistic communism. In the first period of transformation structural unemployment arose, affecting various social groups. At that time, women were said to be “transformation losers”. They suffered not only because of labour market restructurisation as workers, but also because of social policy transition as traditional caregivers. When global economic crisis stroke liberal government proclaimed Poland to be an only winner among European countries. Unfortunately, that optimism was precocious. Growing crisis of public finances enforced reforms that have had a serious impact on society. The burden of regaining balance has once again been shifted to the most vulnerable groups, of which women seem to be the most numerous one.

**Key words:** global economic crisis, unpaid domestic labour, work-life balance, gender gap, Poland.

### Sinking “green island”

After socialist welfare-like-state was demolished, Poland faced a new era of free market economy and individual success. Adopted scenario was different from those in other post-socialist states, though. Shock doctrine caused a rapid growth of unemployment and social dumping to numbers of families. It is said that women where the losers of Polish transformation. Few years ago global economic crisis developed. However, in 2009 Poland was announced a survivor untouched by its consequences. Prime Minister Donald Tusk and Minister of Finance Jan Vincent-Rostowski proclaimed it to be a “green island” in the sea of crisis (see photo below). GDP growth in the second quarter of 2009 was 1,1%, which was the only positive number on the map of Europe. Government debt in December 2009 equaled approximately PLN 631,5 million (€153,7 million = \$221,5 million) and it was vowed not to

exceed constitutionally guaranteed level of 55% of GDP in future periods. Propaganda of success worked out really well. However, one year later, in November 2010 general government debt reached the level of PLN 709,3 million (€174,1 million = \$226,6 million)<sup>1</sup>, increasing by 12,3 %<sup>2</sup>. Second quarter of 2010 showed serious breakdown in GDP dynamics, reaching negative values. Prior optimistic financial results were later attributed to absorption of European Union transfers and growing debts, like those of entrepreneurs who by credits and loans tried to save their businesses from bankruptcy. There were fears expressed of Poland being next economic bubble. Nowadays, when other European countries seem to slowly recover from crisis, “the evergreen metaphor” has turned out irrelevant. Poland faces economic breakdown, which could not only be attributed to global trends but also to internal policy. Behind soothing perspectives and canvass for political support Polish neoliberal regime becomes especially oppressive for women exposed to chronic poverty and pauperization<sup>3</sup>. 30% of Poles suffers from material deprivation, which is twice as much as EU average<sup>4</sup>. Single-parent families deserve special attention, constantly representing nearly one fifth of all families. Most of them are single mothers<sup>5</sup>. Due to difficult situation of women on the labour market and lesser flexibility these families are mostly at risk of social exclusion. Precarious situation of working women has a direct influence on their families. Poland won the disgraceful first place in at-risk-of-poverty ranking for people under 17 years of age seriously exceeding European average. When having children, labour activity of only one of their caregivers is no longer sufficient to avoid poverty<sup>6</sup>. The most vulnerable households apart from those benefiting from social transfers are large families. Growing number of children increases the risk of poverty approximately twice<sup>7</sup>. There is also another aspect worth mentioning: poverty of households decreases their consumption potential, even when it comes to social services. Thus, feminization of poverty means overloading women with its consequences. Privatization of needs imply delivering certain goods or services by household production. Additional responsibilities limit time budget, reduce opportunities to enter the labour market, bring chronic poverty by the vicious circle of lack of time and money<sup>8</sup>. In

---

<sup>1</sup> Currency rates as on 30.11.2010: 1€ = 4,0734 PLN, 1\$ = 3,1308 PLN.

<sup>2</sup> „Zadłużenie Skarbu Państwa”, Ministerstwo Finansów, Departament Długu Publicznego, Biuletyn miesięczny 11/2010, Warszawa, 20.01.2011r.

<sup>3</sup> I. Desperak 2009 „Kobiety i praca. Wielkie przegrane polskiej transformacji” [in:] P. Szumlewicz, J. Majmurek (red.) „Stracone szanse? Bilans polskiej transformacji” Warszawa: Diffin; E. Tarkowska „Oblicza polskiej biedy”, *Analizy Laboratorium WIEZI* nr 2 kwiecień 2009.

<sup>4</sup> Eurostat 9/2010, p. 6.

<sup>5</sup> I. Desperak 2009 „Podwójnie samotne. O wykluczeniu rodzin niepełnych” [in:] I. Desperak (ed.) *Homofobia, mizoginia, ciemnogród. Burzliwe dzieje kontrowersyjnych ustaw*, Łódź: Omega Praxis, p. 162; GUS *Mały Rocznik Statystyczny 2010*, p. 120.

<sup>6</sup> Eurostat 9/2010, p. 2, 4.

<sup>7</sup> GUS „Sytuacja Gospodarstw Domowych 2008”, p. 12, 15.

<sup>8</sup> Zob. I. Hirway Integrating Unpaid Work into Development Policy”, Centre for Development Alternatives, Ahmedabad 3.12.2007 / “Unpaid work and the economy: Gender, Poverty and the Millenium Development Goals” Annadale-on-Hudson NY, 1-3.10.2005.

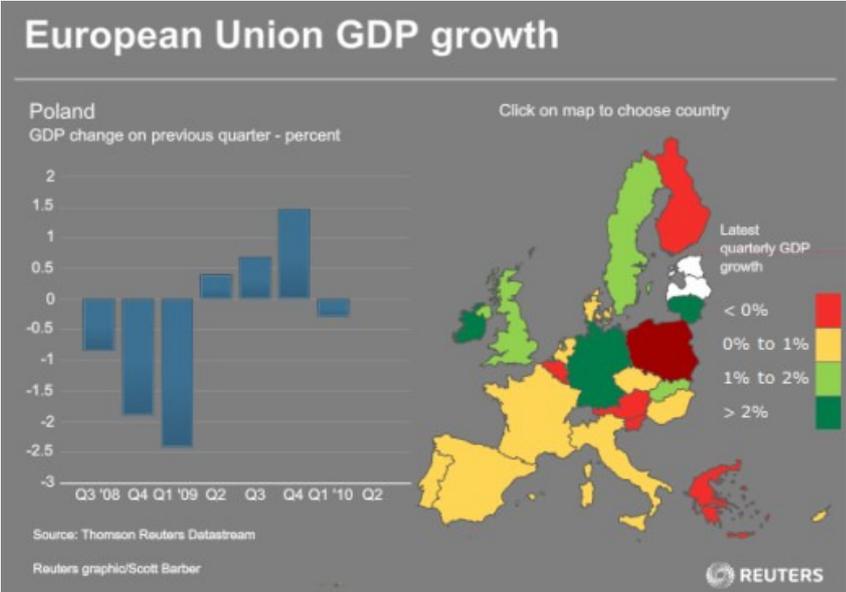
conclusion, due to higher rates of unemployment, lower income and the necessity to take breaks in their professional careers women as a group are still at particular risk of persistent poverty.

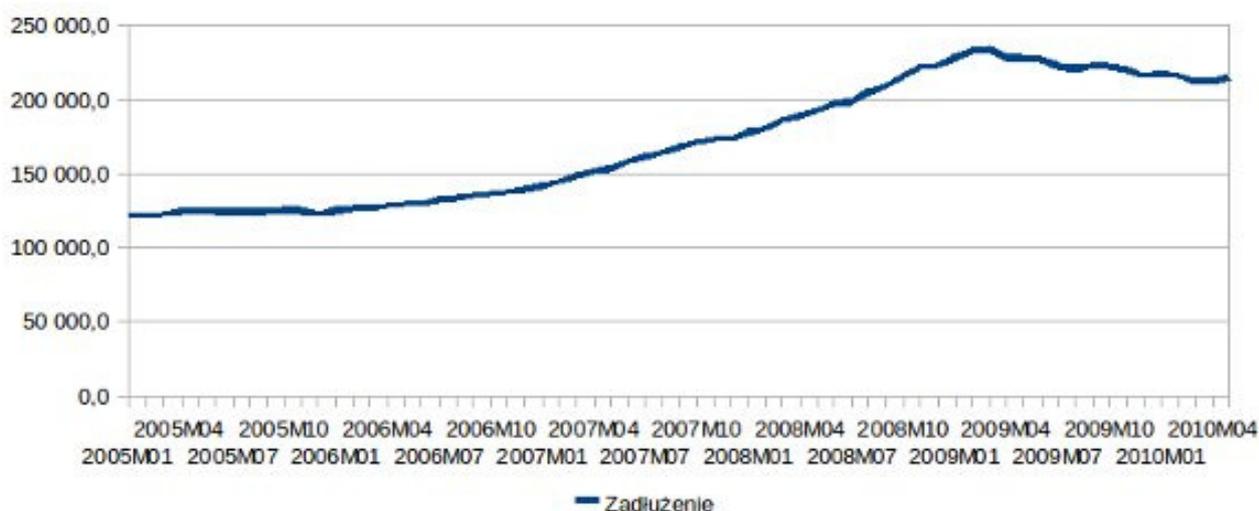
Unfortunately, experiences of transformation were not appealing enough for the governments to choose reorientation of their economic tools, policies, and institutions when facing economic crisis. Costs reduction is a prevailing strategy. Already progressing decomposition of welfare state and labour flexibilization have now been completed by other initiatives, aiming at complete privatization of social issues and diminishing the role of state to absolute minimum. Women are seriously endangered: once by double exploitation of their bodies as flexible working mothers, secondly by peculiar exposition to the risk of social exclusion because of being overloaded by privatized care duties and unpaid labour remaining beyond formal market.



**Pict. 1. Jan Vincent-Rostowski and Donald Tusk proclaiming Poland a “green island of stability in European sea of trouble” in 2009 / Source: AFP.**

**Pict. 2. European Union GDP growth the in second quarter of 2010 / Source: Reuters.**





**Pict.3. Entrepreneurs' debt 2005-2010 / Source: National Bank of Poland**

### Family in crisis

Models of family policy can be distinguished according to axiological orientation, role of the state and priorities. Both Northern and Southern Europe present contrasting strategies and traditions. Central Europe is more difficult to generalize, particularly because of former socialist countries, still struggling with consequences of transformation. Scandinavian model can be characterized by such features as significant role of the state in care-rearing, high participation of women and men in the public sphere, moving away from the traditional division of labour within the family<sup>9</sup>. On the contrary, Southern European model is based on traditional values and patriarchal family relations, extended care functions based on kinship networks and informal contacts. Participation of women in the labour market is still much lower and shorter than men's is. Regardless of represented orientation the state has a wide range of tools to support women and families by social transfers, allowances and subsidies, assistance grants, preferential loans, tax credits. Services include institutional facilities such as nurseries, kindergartens, nursing homes, specialized counselling, support networks, crisis intervention centres. Speaking of financial benefits there are two complementary systems designed to protect motherhood. Polish social insurance system covers the costs of maternity pay only for the employed, i.e. premiums payers. Social welfare system comes in play only when meeting income criterion (apart from nationality criterion). It means loss of income and

<sup>9</sup> B. Balcerzak-Paradowska 2004 *Rodzina i polityka rodzinna na przełomie wieków : przemiany, zagrożenia, potrzeba działań*, Warszawa: Instytut Pracy i Spraw Socjalnych, p. 174.

risk of poverty or inability to ensure optimal social conditions for the children. Social assistance has therefore primarily protective functions financed by public budget.

Evolution of legal systems leads to systemic changes resulting from redefinition of responsibilities and rights of the family. The period of transformation was very turbulent and contemporary dilemmas are significantly different from the past ones. Decomposition of the welfare state is coinciding with increasing demands for competitiveness, mobility and flexibility of workers. In Poland a family is a traditional relationship of parents with children, predominantly marriage, but 70% of Poles accepts cohabitation. Thus, recognizing family does not necessarily demand legalized relationship - having children is the essence<sup>10</sup>. It appears that family itself has undergone some kind of transformation: postponed age of newlyweds<sup>11</sup>, both men and women, increased number of divorces (from 1.1% o in 1990 to 1.7% o in 2009), even among married couples with young children (up to 4 years old)<sup>12</sup> and those remarried<sup>13</sup>. Since 1980 number of illegitimate births quadrupled<sup>14</sup>. Fertility rate decreases, parenting age rises. Already in the first decade of transformation in 1998 a decline of 15% in population of productive age was marked, while population of retirement age grew by 15%, most notably seniors over 85 years old<sup>15</sup>. Another demographic crisis occurred in 2001-2005 due to negative birth rates and international migration<sup>16</sup>. Fertility of Poles does not exceed 1.4 and comparing to 1980 and 1990 (respectively 2.27 and 1.99) it is a significant decrease. Differences between urban and rural areas are minimal<sup>17</sup>. In total, since 1980 the number of births decreased almost 1.7 times<sup>18</sup>, which is not enough replacement rate. Average life expectancy increased most dynamically after 1990. Currently, the average life expectancy is 71.5 for men, 80 for women, which is an increase of more than 5 years over the last 40 years<sup>19</sup>. Polish society is aging what brings about risks such as demographic and economic dependence, overloading pension system, labour force shortages. Therefore Poland also faces a challenge to prevent demographic collapse. Family patterns and expectations due to gender change. Demand for women participation in the labour market, however, does not seem to be supported by institutional arrangements proposed by the state. In 2005 in Poland approximately 1.14% of GDP was spent on family policy, which as in Malta, Greece and Bulgaria is least generous in Europe. In comparison to the "old EU" Polish expenses are even

---

<sup>10</sup> CBOS „Potrzeby prokreacyjne oraz preferowany i realizowany model rodziny”, Warszawa, marzec 2006, p. 13.

<sup>11</sup> GUS *Rocznik demograficzny 2010*, Warszawa 2011, p. 183-4.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 250.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 224.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 254.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 75.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 76.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 258.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 273.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 394.

3 times lower (France: 3.79% UK: 3.55% Denmark 3.38%, Belgium 3.12% Germany 3.04%) also some of the new EU members leave Poland behind (Czech Republic 2.18% 3.11% Hungary, Slovenia, 1.92%). Quality of family policy reflects in the number of births<sup>20</sup>. Declaratively Poles find family a priority. When analyzing value orientation family is mentioned as most important - for 92% it plays a fundamental role. Nuclear family consisting of parents and children is a dominant model and also a normative pattern. On the one hand number of multigenerational families decreases, but on the other single life and childlessness is a marginal preference<sup>21</sup>. Desire to have children is very strong among the Poles and declared ideal models are 2+2 or 2+3. One child is not enough<sup>22</sup>. However, demographic data indicate that *status quo* is far from the declared desires and cultural patterns. Young women, asked about the reasons for postponing and reducing reproductive decisions indicated mainly economic obstacles: fear of aggravating labour opportunities and impossibility of balancing family and professional life without choosing “double burden” or professional passivity. The Poles in general recognize women’s right to work, so the Southern European model of family policies fails to meet public expectations. Partnership model has the most adherents, followed by the traditional (male breadwinner) and mixed (“women double workday”). However, it appears that the latter is mostly implemented and the partnership model is the hardest to put into practice<sup>23</sup>. The Poles find reorganization of work for mothers, availability of care facilities and family support through financial instruments (tax, social transfers) the most effective incentives to have children. Secondly, solving housing problems particularly acute for young people would be a welcomed support<sup>24</sup>. Polish social policy for over 20 years has never been a coherent overall strategy, nor had any clearly articulated goals. Often decisions to set up or liquidate social policy instruments are of ideological or populist character.

### **Labour market in crisis**

Gender gap in terms of income disparity is a widely known phenomenon. When comparing data from 2009 and 2010, it turns out that median of female wages didn’t change, whereas male wages increased. In 2010 gender gap in Poland was as high as 33% and it had increased by 3% in comparison to 2009. The bigger the city, the higher the wages, but also the wider the gender gap. When it comes to the top quartiles, the wealthiest women earn at least

---

<sup>20</sup> B. Balcerzak-Paradowska „Współczesna polityka rodzinna wobec kryzysu dzieciństwa”, Biuro Analiz Sejmowych, nr 8 (78).

<sup>21</sup> Ibidem, p. 6.

<sup>22</sup> CBOS, „Nie ma jak rodzina”, Warszawa, marzec 2008; CBOS „Potrzeby prokreacyjne oraz preferowany i realizowany model rodziny”, Warszawa, marzec 2006.

<sup>23</sup> CBOS „Potrzeby prokreacyjne oraz preferowany i realizowany model rodziny”, Warszawa, marzec 2006, s. 5, 9.

<sup>24</sup> CBOS „Polityka państwa wobec rodziny oraz dyskryminacja w miejscu pracy kobiet w ciąży i matek małych dzieci”, Warszawa, marzec 2006.

2/3 of that the wealthiest men do. It mostly refers to management levels, where the wage difference reaches 25% in favour of men. Moreover, education level has a noticeable impact on wages and gender gap. This influence, however, is very uneven. Working as individual contributors (regular employees), the least educated women earn ca. 45% less than the least educated men, what significantly exceeds the average. This record is closely related to at-risk-of-poverty indicators. Most inequalities occur in following sectors: financial services, telecommunication, trade and healthcare<sup>25</sup>. All of them are highly privatized. Simultaneously, labour market structure undergoes significant changes. Destandardization rate is very high in Poland due to implementation of flexible employment strategy and replacing standard labour contracts with other legal forms such as civil law contracts. Atypical forms of employment do not ensure an adequate level of social security and generate precarious labour. Precarity itself features instability of employment such as limited rights to social benefits, job insecurity, low wages and health damage risks. It is mainly a consequence of unfavourable employment status, forms of employment (temporary, part-time) and localization in network of social relations (gender, race, social background)<sup>26</sup>. Moreover, the origin of that term refers not only to transience and uncertainty, but also to humiliation resulting from remaining at someone else's mercy<sup>27</sup>. Hence, alongside economic and social dimensions, also psychological aspect of the tension associated with job insecurity arises. Precarious labour significantly influences life standards. According to data collected in 2008, Poland was one of the leading countries in European Union regarding percentage of atypical employment. Among all employed 46% represent other forms than full-time contract for an indefinite period<sup>28</sup>. Unfortunately, it is reflected in financial and social insecurity, especially oppressive as a crisis aftermath.

Still, on the labour market women represent long term unemployment. Combination of professional and unpaid work constitute so-called double work day<sup>29</sup>. Women exit "public sphere" only to enter "private" one and continue on expending their energy, but free of charge. Housework fulfills basic social needs, contributing to the workforce welfare by consumption of both market and non-market goods. Despite technical advance, mechanization of daily life and fluctuations of demand for labor force women invariably spend time on housework. It seems like old duties were replaced by new ones. Even though men are

---

<sup>25</sup> Sedlak&Sedlak „Wynagrodzenie kobiet i mężczyzn w 2009 roku”, „Wynagrodzenie kobiet i mężczyzn w 2010 roku”.

<sup>26</sup> Leah F. Vosko 2006 "Precarious employment: towards an improved understanding of labour market insecurity" [in:] Leah F. Vosko *Precarious employment: understanding labour market insecurity in Canada*, McGill-Queen's Press – MQUP, p. 3-4.

<sup>27</sup> Precarius (latin) - inconstant, variable, instantaneous, but also: of compassion, scrounged up.

<sup>28</sup> A. Tangian „Not for bad weather – flexicurity challenged by the crisis”, ETUI Policy Brief European Economic and Employment Policy, issue 3/2010.

<sup>29</sup> B. Budrowska *Nieodpłatna praca kobiet i próby jej wyceny*,

[http://www.ekologiasztuka.pl/think.tank.feministyczny/readarticle.php?article\\_id=145](http://www.ekologiasztuka.pl/think.tank.feministyczny/readarticle.php?article_id=145), 2005, p..38; H. Hartmann "The Family as Locus of Gender, Class and Political Struggle. The Example of Housework", *Signs. Journal of Women In Culture and Society*. 1981. Vol 6. Nr 5.

increasingly taking part in household maintenance the level of unpaid work in women's daily time budgets remains high. Professional activity rate of women has been decreasing since the early 90's reaching about 50%. The employment rate shows a slight upward trend, fluctuating around the value of 40%. Both values represented by the male population are higher<sup>30</sup>. Similarly, unemployment shows higher rates among women – they are 58% of all registered unemployed<sup>31</sup>. Background is compound. Firstly, in any case of system collapse, either transformation or global economic crisis women lose their jobs in the first place. Privatization and rationalization of employment affect mainly feminized sectors of economy: public services, light industry, administration. Secondly, long-term unemployment significantly impedes job hunting. According to Polish Gender Equality Monitoring<sup>32</sup> data, average female pursuit for employment lasts about month longer. Stereotypes about female workers as less aggressive, less focused on work and sometimes even increasing labour costs due to carer's allowances are problematic. Registered unemployed women are predominantly aged 25-34, so it is possible that their difficulties are correlated with maternity<sup>33</sup>. On the other hand, average age when leaving the labor market is 62 years for men and 57.4 for women. It means early transition to non-labour income before reaching the statutory retirement age. Most pensioners are women (65%). More women also choose to retire early when reaching 55 years of age (58.1% of all female retirees). Men participate longer in the labor market for 5 years in average, even if choosing earlier retirement. More than half of working retirees are women (53%), mostly aged 55-59. Paradoxically, despite retiring earlier they remain active on the labour market. It may result from the fact that early retirement benefits are viable because they are guaranteed income, even if lower than regular wages. When asked for the reasons for remaining in employment the elderly report financial considerations and insufficient level of benefits to continue pre-retirement standards of living. Moreover, there is a number of people who, despite exceeding retirement age are not entitled to any benefits. These are primarily women (75%). The reasons is either continuing employment or consequences of economic inactivity – lifelong dependence on other household members. More than half of those cases are women<sup>34</sup>. This situation directly relates to a traditional gender division of labor and insensitivity of social security system to unpaid housework.

---

<sup>30</sup> GUS „Kobiety i mężczyźni na rynku pracy”, Warszawa 2009, p.2; GUS „Mały Rocznik Statystyczny 2010”, Warszawa 2010.

<sup>31</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>32</sup> [www.monitoring.rownystatus.gov.pl](http://www.monitoring.rownystatus.gov.pl)

<sup>33</sup> GUS „Mały Rocznik Statystyczny 2010”, Warszawa 2010.

<sup>34</sup> GUS „Kobiety w Polsce”, Warszawa 2007.

## Who pays for the crisis?

### *Tax increase*

In mid 2010 in order to avoid further growth of public debt Prime Minister Donald Tusk announced that of all possible solutions increasing value added tax (VAT) will be the best for public finances and the least harmful for the society. In December 2010 president Bronislaw Komorowski signed the act, agreeing that it entered into force as soon as 1<sup>st</sup> January 2011. Poland is subject to European Union law and recent reform was also presented as necessary to conform national law to it. According to the new act, basic rate of VAT was increased by 1% equaling 23% and there were plans of further increase until it reaches 25% in 2013 (EU maximum). Apart from that, 2 other rates were introduced. Rate of 5% applies to unprocessed food (previously 3%), books and specialist journals (previously 0%). This is the lowest rate allowed by EU what results from Directive 2006/112/EC. On the other hand, rate of 7% has been replaced by 8% in 2011, what among others refers to processed food, meat, hygiene products and services such as sanitary services, waste disposal, transport, recreation<sup>35</sup>. Those reduced rates would also grow in line with basic rate. Consequently, according to Central Statistical Office (GUS) price index of consumer goods and services for January 2011 increased by 1,2%<sup>36</sup>. It also means inflation growth of 3,8% in comparison to January 2010. Prices of food, housing, clothing and transport grew unexpectedly high, respectively 1,7%, 2,6%, 2,5% and 1,4%.<sup>37</sup> Such significant growth of maintenance costs hasn't been yet balanced by adequate wages growth. Thus, purchasing power falls. Increasing risk of poverty and social exclusion is a far more dangerous scenario. It is quite obvious that rising prices affect whole society. However, it is more than obvious it peculiarly refers to the poorest groups. Due to lower wages women are the first to sense those changes. Taking under consideration that 1/5 of all families are single mothers<sup>38</sup>, it is even more worrying. 1,3 million of children under 18 years old live in monoparental families<sup>39</sup>. VAT increase affects such crucial expenses like course books and children clothes. Already before VAT reform relative poverty rate was highest among families with 3 (27,9%) or 4 and more children (49,2%)<sup>40</sup>. Single parents hold the third position in this ranking<sup>41</sup>. It is difficult to understand how the reform would help their dynamics and productivity as prosumers. Not only everyday

---

<sup>35</sup> Ustawa z dnia 29 października 2010 roku o zmianie ustawy o podatku od towarów i usług.

<sup>36</sup> Obwieszczenie Prezesa Głównego Urzędu Statystycznego z dnia 15 lutego 2011 r. w sprawie wskaźnika cen towarów i usług konsumpcyjnych w styczniu 2011 r.

<sup>37</sup> Price indices of consumer goods and services in January 2011, GUS [http://www.stat.gov.pl/gus/5840\\_2665\\_ENG\\_HTML.htm](http://www.stat.gov.pl/gus/5840_2665_ENG_HTML.htm)

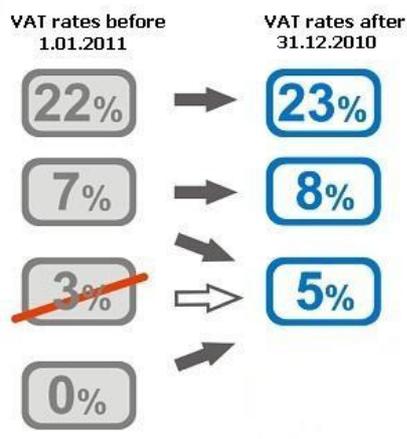
<sup>38</sup> GUS „Mały rocznik statystyczny 2010”, s. 119.

<sup>39</sup> GUS, „Dzieci – rodzina, zdrowie, wychowanie i edukacja”, 2009.

<sup>40</sup> GUS „Ubóstwo w Polsce. Zasięg ubóstwa w Polsce w 2009r. na podstawie wyników badań budżetów gospodarstw domowych”,

<sup>41</sup> GUS „Ubóstwo w Polsce. Zasięg ubóstwa w Polsce w 2009r. na podstawie wyników badań budżetów gospodarstw domowych”,

needs have been affected. Tax growth may also endanger construction industry and thus worsen housing situation, which is rather problematic in Poland. Dwelling stocks based on data collected in 2009 show that an average dwelling is inhabited by ca. 3 persons<sup>42</sup>. It is too soon to tell what are the hidden costs of tax-based budget reparation. However, it is more than sure that social damage will be noticeable. Government policy is prone to positively influence emerging category of “working poor”: 16,5% of all employed are at risk of poverty, which already in 2008 was the third highest result in Europe, outlining EU average<sup>43</sup>. Poverty is mostly common among physical workers: 8% of their families suffer from extreme poverty<sup>44</sup>. Income criteria entitling to social transfers due to poverty risk as well as their values are verified every 3 years<sup>45</sup>, what makes the situation even more problematic when facing rapidly increasing prices due to higher VAT rates. Clearly, in this case it’s the poorest who pay for the crisis.



**Pict. 4 VAT rates reform.**

**Pict. 5. Dynamics of price indices of consumer goods and services in January 2011 (XII 2010 = 100%) / Source: GUS, [http://www.stat.gov.pl/gus/5840\\_2665\\_EN](http://www.stat.gov.pl/gus/5840_2665_EN) G\_HTML.htm**



<sup>42</sup> GUS „Mały rocznik statystyczny 2010”, s. 226

<sup>43</sup> GUS „Ubóstwo w Polsce. Zasięg ubóstwa w Polsce w 2009r. na podstawie wyników badań budżetów gospodarstw domowych” 2009; GUS „Ubóstwo w Polsce na tle krajów Unii Europejskiej w świetle Europejskiego Badania Dochodów i Warunków Życia – EU-SILC 2008”.

<sup>44</sup> GUS „Ubóstwo w Polsce. Zasięg ubóstwa w Polsce w 2009r. na podstawie wyników badań budżetów gospodarstw domowych” 2009.

<sup>45</sup> Ustawa z dnia 12 marca 2004 roku o pomocy społecznej, art. 9.

### ***Pension System Reform***

Since January 1999 pension system in Poland had undergone significant reforms. It continues to be universal and obligatory, conditional on labour market participation, but the logic of calculation changed thoroughly. The reform was justified by demographic trends (aging of the society) and an increasing economic dependency, threatening equilibrium of public budget and implying systematic inducement of insurance premiums, which would also increase labour costs. Other goal was to continue redefinition of the state – not as a provider but as a intermediary of social services through development of capital markets and flexible self-regulatory system of social benefits<sup>46</sup>. The new three-pillar system was founded on the idea of increased individual responsibility. In the previous PAYG system (based on solidarity principle and using current contributions to cover pension liabilities) life expectancy was never considered. New system was said to enable conscious management over future benefits. It was also believed it'd help to increase households and individual saving rates, equivalency and self-sufficiency of transfers<sup>47</sup>. This type of solution, however, requires an appropriate income level and investment opportunities. Women in the pension system both before and after the reform are in a precarious situation - the consequences of gender adopt a clearly economic sense. Women are disfavoured in terms of retirement benefits. Lowering required seniority and unisex algorithm for calculating monthly pension is not enough. For women problems begin on the labour market. They earn less because of the absences, occupational segregation (feminization in the professions) and remain at lower positions (“glass ceiling” or “sticky floor” effects). More frequent absenteeism is primarily caused by reproductive functions and care duties. It's not only a case of young mothers, but also of cultural pressures on grandmothers. Periods of care leave are calculated on the basis of nursing allowance, which is very unfavourable in comparison to wages level<sup>48</sup>. Dependence of others on women transform into dependence of women's on others income. Despite equal rights, women bare higher costs of their gender: unpaid caring labour, lower returns to participation in the labour market and thus – risk of partial exclusion from pension system<sup>49</sup>.

Facing lower pension age women sooner become professionally inactive. However, raising it seems only an immediate solution. Majority of Poles agreed neither to extend it, nor to equate it for men and women. Although earlier retirement for women was considered fair, majority also believed that women should have a freedom of choice when to stop professional

---

<sup>46</sup> B. Kołosowska 2004 *Skutki finansowe reformy systemu emerytalnego w Polsce*, Toruń: Wydawnictwo UMK, p. 38-9.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 38-9

<sup>48</sup> I. Wóycicka 2009 „Sytuacja kobiet i mężczyzn w nowym systemie emerytalnym w Polsce”, Raport Social Watch, p. 71.

<sup>49</sup> K. Rake 1999 „Accumulated disadvantage? Welfare state provision and the incomes of older women and men in Britain, France and Germany” [in: J. Clasen (ed.), *Comparative Social Policy: Concepts, Theories and Methods*, Oxford: Blackwell, p. 224-5, 240.

activity<sup>50</sup>. Quality work, increasing employment opportunities for people over 50, motivational income, development of institutional care seem to be far more helpful. Irregular work and lower income also adversely affects forecasts for future benefits. Despite recent amendment to widen insurance obligation over atypical employment, it is worth remembering that civil-law contracts are not included in the overall length of seniority, influencing pensions and leaves requirements. It mostly affects women, who cannot participate full time in the labor market or are engaged in flexible forms of employment or self-employment due to economic coercion.

Pensioners both in the “old” and the “new” system are at risk of poverty. According to Eurostat, in 2007 the rate slightly exceeded the general value (19% vs. 16%). In Poland, however, it was children (population aged 0-17 years) who were at biggest risk - every fourth Polish child was prone to poverty. Contemporary situation of pensioners differs significantly from young people. This phenomenon can be explained by low but guaranteed monthly income<sup>51</sup>. Also pensions are annually valorized. However, in 2009 among elderly people 12% had an income below relative poverty threshold. Since 2007 at-poverty-risk increased by 4%<sup>52</sup>. Not only old age but also gender is a factor contributing to poverty, because the average life expectancy of women is higher than for men. Simulations of future benefits for those currently active in the labor market and who will become pensioners in 10, 20, 30 years are alarming. To achieve replacement rate equal to the “old pension system” contributors would have to work 10 years longer (up to 65 years old)<sup>53</sup>. In particular women are victims of this system, as commercial method of calculating pensions is gender oriented, whereas public Social Insurance Institution assumes unisex rates of life expectancy. What's more, it is assumed that the future pensions of younger women (born after 1975, not employed before 1999) will be much lower than those of older women (working and participating in social insurance system before 1999), due to the smaller proportion of the PAYG pension from the state Social Insurance Institution.

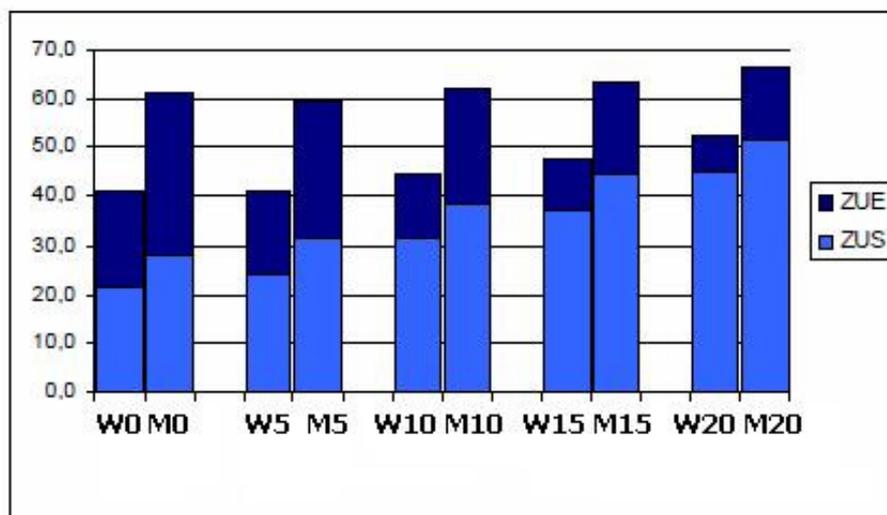
---

<sup>50</sup> CBOS „Wiek emerytalny kobiet i mężczyzn”, Warszawa 2007.

<sup>51</sup> Eurostat 46/2009 “Population and social conditions”, p. 3.

<sup>52</sup> GUS „Ubóstwo w Polsce na tle krajów Unii Europejskiej w świetle Europejskiego Badania Dochodów i Warunków Życia – EU-SILC 2008”, Warszawa 2010.

<sup>53</sup> I. Wóycicka, op.cit., p.70.



**Pict. 6. The replacement rates expected for women (W) and men (M) earning an average salary, female retirement age is 60 years old, male - 65 years. Estimated pensions are divided into the part from Social Security**

**Institution (ZUS) and commercial pensions funds (ZUE). Estimation refers to various length of seniority before 1999 (ie. 0 to 20 years before reform was implemented) / Office of Insurance and Pension Funds, Department of Analysis, Communication and Information "Pensions in the new social insurance system" Warsaw 2003.**

### *Privatization of care services*

Institutional childcare had also fallen victim to social cuts. Nurseries, kindergartens and other forms of daycare allow parents to participate in the labour market. Moreover, they have important educational and socializing functions for children. In years 2000-2007 due to demographic drop in birth rates and budget difficulties to maintain childcare facilities in small municipalities the number of nurseries decreased by 15%, with no changes of interest in services for the youngest children<sup>54</sup>. For children aged 3-6 year old participation in preschool education reaches 67%, mostly thanks to compulsory kindergarten education for 6-year-olds. In comparison, only 59% of children aged 3-5 years attend kindergartens<sup>55</sup>. This is one of the worst results in Europe, where gross enrolment ratio for early education reaches even 85%<sup>56</sup>. According to research conducted in 2006 almost 3/4 of children under 7 years old stays at home in custody by family member. Only one fifth attends nursery school or preschool on a regular basis<sup>57</sup>. Lately, since 2006 the number of pre-primary education establishments slightly grew<sup>58</sup>, however since 2006 there are no spare places in care institutions – per each

<sup>54</sup> GUS „Mały Rocznik Statystyczny 2008”, Warszawa 2008, p. 261.

<sup>55</sup> GUS „Mały rocznik statystyczny 2010”, Warszawa 2010 p. 254

<sup>56</sup> GUS, „Oświata i wychowanie w Polsce w roku szkolnym 2009-10”, Warszawa 2010, p. 56.

<sup>57</sup> CBOS „Potrzeby prokreacyjne oraz preferowany i realizowany model rodziny”, Warszawa, marzec 2006, p. 11.

<sup>58</sup> GUS „Mały rocznik statystyczny 2010”, Warszawa 2010, p.253.

100 places 100 children attend nursery schools<sup>59</sup>. The situation is still far from satisfying. It is worth hinting that localisation of childcare institutions and attendance are significantly geographically diversified, particularly negatively for rural areas. Before 1989 childcare system in Poland was encouraging for women to join the labour market. After the transformation, attitudes towards defamilialization changed. Childcare policy model developed in Poland was identified as *implicit familialism*<sup>60</sup>, based on poor values of 4 indicators adopted. Low enrolment rate of children in kindergartens, low child-to-staff ratio in kindergartens, poor generosity of maternity-related benefits and low level of universalism in parental benefits access<sup>61</sup> imply that family seems to be basic care provider. Such situation neither mobilizes women to participate in the labour market, nor helps them to return to professional activity. Economic crisis blew the whistle on public support in this sphere. Thus, lately market sector was introduced as a remedy for women professional deactivation. In 2009, 10% of all establishments of pre-elementary education for children aged 3-6 was private (led by foundations, associations, religious organizations, enterprises of natural persons, commercial companies)<sup>62</sup>. Reforms go further. Along with the law on care for children under 3 (commonly known as “the crèches act”) adopted in December 2010, establishing childcare institutions for the youngest children (up to 3 years old) should be simpler and less demanding (as yet nurseries were subject to specific sanitary requirements of Ministry of Health). Public sector is to be replaced by private entrepreneurship, following the logic of commoditisation of care economy. Increasing privatization of social services, however, raises questions not only about their availability, but also sustainability and standards control. It is also another illustration of declining quality of public care services simultaneously poorly replaced by underdeveloped private sector<sup>63</sup>.

---

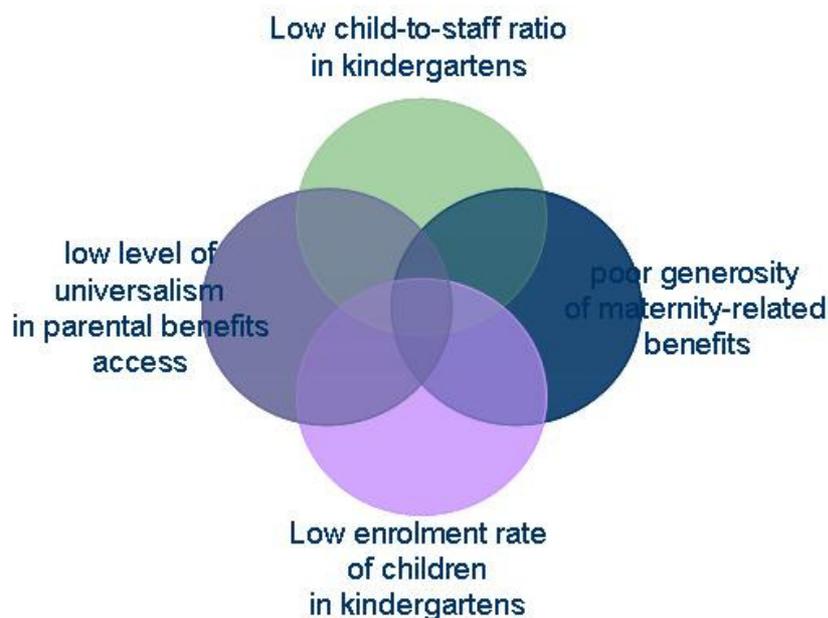
<sup>59</sup> Ibidem, p. 254

<sup>60</sup> D. Szelewa, M. Polakowski ‘Who cares? Changing patterns of childcare in Central and Eastern Europe’, *Journal of European Social Policy* May 2008 vol. 18 no. 2, p. 126.

<sup>61</sup> Ibidem, p. 122.

<sup>62</sup> GUS „Oświata i wychowanie w Polsce w roku szkolnym 2009/10”, p. 147.

<sup>63</sup> S. Golinowska 2000 „Polityka społeczna okresu transformacji” [in:] S. Golinowska (ed.) *Dekada polskiej polityki społecznej. Od przełomu do końca wieku*, Warszawa: IPiSS, p. 95.



**Pict. 7. Childcare policy model developed in Poland identified as *implicit familism*/**  
**Source: D. Szelewa, M. Polakowski ‘Who cares? Changing patterns of childcare in Central and Eastern Europe’, *Journal of European Social Policy* May 2008 vol. 18 no. 2, p. 126.**

### ***Neoliberal lobby in offensive***

Prolonging economic crisis has activated various political forces. Even though they are no governmental stands, those statements are worth noticing, as they show influential ideas of publicly recognized authorities, quoted in media and referred to as professionals. It also reflects atmosphere in the discussion on the future of welfare capitalism. Lately neoliberal lobby of Civic Development Forum (FOR), founded by Leszek Balcerowicz, famous author of Polish economic transformation program commonly known as “shock therapy” in the 1990s came up with ideas for activating young women on the labour market. As it is said in a published report, given the need to reduce public expenditure in Poland, basing on the research results and experiences of other countries they recommend deconstruction of existing family policy instruments. Modification of fiscal policy tools concern modifying family tax relief or even liquidating it, so that financial resources obtained in this way can be redistributed to direct childcare funding. However, the core of this idea is reserving the rights to joint income tax return and family tax relief only for married couples. Employment of both partners would be the only and necessary condition to exercise those rights. Another idea is to inhibit plans of extending maternity leave (nowadays maximum 22 weeks, final extension would reach 26 weeks in 2013) and shortening parental leave (child-rearing leave) to 52 weeks (now: 3 years). Social benefits during this time would be dependent from mother’s at least half-time professional activity for up to 24 weeks. Nowadays such benefit is only provided for the poorest families. Their poverty is usually caused by unemployment. Their poverty is also a reason for lack of access to institutional childcare and traditional gender-related unpaid care giving. Limiting social transfers with no

simultaneous support for career opportunities brings about risks of deepening poverty and social exclusion. Further reductions concern cutting pension benefits and extending retirement age for women. That issue has already been mentioned above, but just to summarize it is worth noticing that without increasing the quality of women labour in terms of wages and social security all other operations on pension system are pointless. Increasing the access to day care institutions for children would involve systematic governmental facilitation in setting up and operating care facilities for children under 3 years old and ensuring their functioning for at least 10 (in substantiated cases 11 hours a day) full calendar year. This means commoditization of care and selling such services on the competitive free market, usually aiming at revenue not charity work<sup>64</sup>. This program is very radical, but in a way it seems to be a quite probable scenario for ongoing changes.

\*\*\*

Resuming course of events described above, it seems that Polish “new capitalism” leaves no place for social and economic renewal after collapse of global financialization. The fundamental strategy of combating crisis seems to be progressing social and economic exclusion of the poor and increasing economic coercion on women to exploit their bodies as young mothers and competitive employees at the same time. All above mentioned recommendations address predominantly women, as if blaming them for unsatisfactory indicator values. Presented reforms are gender-blind, androcentric, insensitive to consequences of sex, particularly affecting women. Once again it seems that their oppression is a clue to competitive and dynamic economy. Thus, without reorienting economic theory, policies, and institutions the answer to the eponymous question leaves no doubts who will pay for crisis again and again.

---

<sup>64</sup> A. Kurowska, B. Marczuk „Matka Polka pracująca czyli jak zwiększyć aktywność zawodową młodych kobiet?”, FOR, Warszawa 2010.

## LITERATURE:

### Books:

1. Balcerzak-Paradowska B. 2004 Rodzina i polityka rodzinna na przełomie wieków : przemiany, zagrożenia, potrzeba działań, Warszawa: Instytut Pracy i Spraw Socjalnych.
2. Clasen J. (ed.) 1999 *Comparative Social Policy: Concepts, Theories and Methods*, Oxford: Blackwell.
3. Desperak I. 2009 (ed.) *Homofobia, mizoginia, ciemnogród. Burzliwe dzieje kontrowersyjnych ustaw*, Łódź: Omega Praxis.
4. Golinowska S. 2000 (ed.) *Dekada polskiej polityki społecznej. Od przełomu do końca wieku*, Warszawa: IPISS.
5. Kołosowska B. 2004 *Skutki finansowe reformy systemu emerytalnego w Polsce*, Toruń: Wydawnictwo UMK.
6. Szumlewicz P., Majmurek J. (ed.) 2009 *Stracone szanse? Bilans polskiej transformacji* Warszawa: Diffin.
7. Vosko Leah F. (ed.) 2006 *Precarious employment: understanding labour market insecurity in Canada*, McGill-Queen's Press – MQUP.

### Articles:

1. Balcerzak-Paradowska B. 2010 „Współczesna polityka rodzinna wobec kryzysu dzieciństwa”, Biuro Analiz Sejmowych, nr 8 (78).
2. Budrowska B. 2005 „Nieodpłatna praca kobiet i próby jej wyceny”, [http://www.ekologiasztuka.pl/think.tank.feministyczny/readarticle.php?article\\_id=145](http://www.ekologiasztuka.pl/think.tank.feministyczny/readarticle.php?article_id=145).
3. Hartmann H. 1981 “The Family as Locus of Gender, Class and Political Struggle. The Example of Housework”, in: *Signs. Journal of Women In Culture and Society*. 1981. Vol 6. Nr 5.
4. Hirway I. 2007 “Integrating Unpaid Work into Development Policy”, Centre for Development Alternatives, Ahmedabad 3.12.2007 / wystąpienie na konferencji “Unpaid work and the economy: Gender, Poverty and the Millenium Development Goals” Annadale-on-Hudson NY, 1-3.10.2005.
5. Kurowska A., Marczuk B. 2010 „Matka Polka pracująca czyli jak zwiększyć aktywność zawodową młodych kobiet?”, Warszawa: FOR.
6. Szelewa D., Polakowski M. 2008 “Who cares? Changing patterns of childcare in Central and Eastern Europe”, *Journal of European Social Policy* May 2008 vol. 18 no. 2.
7. Tangian A. 2010 „Not for bad weather – flexicurity challenged by the crisis”, ETUI Policy Brief European Economic and Employment Policy, issue 3/2010.
8. Tarkowska E. 2009 „Oblicza polskiej biedy”, *Analizy Laboratorium WIĘZI* nr 2 kwiecień 2009.
9. Wóycicka I. 2009 „Sytuacja kobiet i mężczyzn w nowym systemie emerytalnym w Polsce”, *Raport Social Watch* 2009.

### Reports:

1. „Zadłużenie Skarbu Państwa”, Ministerstwo Finansów, Departament Długu Publicznego, Biuletyn miesięczny 11/2010, Warszawa, 20.01.2011r.
2. CBOS „Polityka państwa wobec rodziny oraz dyskryminacja w miejscu pracy kobiet w ciąży i matek małych dzieci”, Warszawa, marzec 2006.
3. CBOS „Potrzeby prokreacyjne oraz preferowany i realizowany model rodziny”, Warszawa, marzec 2006

4. CBOS „Wiek emerytalny kobiet i mężczyzn”, Warszawa 2007.
5. CBOS, „Nie ma jak rodzina”, Warszawa, marzec 2008.
6. Eurostat Statistics in focus 46/2009 “Population and social conditions”.
7. Eurostat Statistics in focus 9/2010 “Population and social conditions”.
8. GUS 2008 „Sytuacja Gospodarstw Domowych 2008”, Warszawa.
9. GUS 2009 „Dzieci – rodzina, zdrowie, wychowanie i edukacja”, Warszawa.
10. GUS 2009 „Kobiety i mężczyźni na rynku pracy”, Warszawa.
11. GUS 2009 „Mały Rocznik Statystyczny 2008”, Warszawa.
12. GUS 2009 „Ubóstwo w Polsce. Zasięg ubóstwa w Polsce w 2009r. na podstawie wyników badań budżetów gospodarstw domowych”, Warszawa.
13. GUS 2010 „Rocznik demograficzny 2010”, Warszawa.
14. GUS 2010 „Ubóstwo w Polsce na tle krajów Unii Europejskiej w świetle Europejskiego Badania Dochodów i Warunków Życia – EU-SILC 2008”, Warszawa.
15. GUS 2011 „Mały Rocznik Statystyczny 2010”, Warszawa.
16. GUS Price indices of consumer goods and services in January 2011,  
[http://www.stat.gov.pl/gus/5840\\_2665\\_ENG\\_HTML.htm](http://www.stat.gov.pl/gus/5840_2665_ENG_HTML.htm)
17. Sedlak&Sedlak „Wynagrodzenie kobiet i mężczyzn w 2009 roku”, „Wynagrodzenie kobiet i mężczyzn w 2010 roku”. <http://www.wynagrodzenia.pl/>
18. [www.monitoring.rownystatus.gov.pl](http://www.monitoring.rownystatus.gov.pl)

**Legal Acta:**

1. Ustawa z dnia 12 marca 2004 r. o pomocy społecznej (Dz.U. Nr 64, poz. 593 ze zm.).
2. Ustawa z dnia 29 października 2010 r. o zmianie ustawy o podatku od towarów i usług. (Dz.U. 2010 nr 226 poz. 1476 ze zm.).