

**Diagnosis of the Social  
and Professional Situation  
of Rural Women in Poland**

Edited by  
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Project co-financed by European Social Fund

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## Acknowledgments

In June 2006 the Department of Women, Family and Countering Discrimination at the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy decided to carry out a research project that would analyze the socio-professional situation of rural women in Poland. The reason for launching the project was a need for up-to-date information on the actual social situation of women residing in rural areas in view of their opportunities in the labour market and socio-professional advance. An inadequate number of studies and analyses that could present a comprehensive picture of the state of affairs and discuss the prospective activities aimed at improving rural women's professional situation was another decisive factor. The conclusions drawn from another project carried out within the framework of the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy – *Multifaceted diagnosis of the situation of women in the labour market* – confirmed our assumptions about the necessity of launching such a scientific project. An outline of the project was prepared in September 2006 and it was financed from the European Social Fund and the state budget within the framework of The Sectoral Operational Programme Human Resources Development.

The Polish Social Policy Association agreed to carry out the research under the supervision of prof. dr hab. Jerzy Krzyszkowski who cooperated with a team of experts in sociology and social policy. The partnership between the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy and the Polish Social Policy Association has produced fruitful results both in terms of organization and effectiveness. Hence, I would like to express my profound gratitude and acknowledgment for all members of PSSH – the scholars involved in the project.

I hope that the results and conclusions of the conducted research presented in the book will contribute to the implementation of system changes aimed at improving the quality of life of rural areas dwellers and their families and will offer better chances of socio-professional development for rural women. Social services workers and local activists who are responsible for creating social initiatives on a daily basis should also find this book inspiring.

*Dr Mirosław Grewiński  
Project Coordinator  
Ministry of Labour and Social Policy*

## CHAPTER 1

*Jacek Krzyżkowski*

### The Need for Diagnosis of Rural Women's Socio-Professional Situation

Since 1989 Poland, together with other countries of our region<sup>1</sup>, has undergone radical socio-economic transformations whose rate and range go beyond any attempts at synthesis. As it has been aptly shown by Mirosława Masoły<sup>2</sup>, such a situation results in a dispersion of knowledge about society and a rapid falsification of hitherto lawful statements accompanied by an inert maintenance of beliefs that have lost their explanatory power. Information chaos, we are surrounded by, proves to be harmful for all who want to make decisions based on rational assumptions substantiated by a profound knowledge of the phenomena and processes happening nowadays. It particularly concerns topics and areas traditionally remaining outside scientific research that have not generated an intense interest of academics and practitioners.

Issues connected with life in the countryside and its inhabitants remain undoubtedly within the range of research fields and social categories that have been slightly neglected. Apart from their internal diversification, it could be observed that rural regions are characterized by a unique demographic, economic and cultural distinctiveness, which often provokes arguments about the exclusion of the countryside. Maria Halamska<sup>3</sup> claims that the country is *ex definitione* related to social exclusion in its structural dimension. It is caused by a dwelling place and the level of education and income of Poles living in rural areas. The traditional civilizational backwardness of the countryside has

<sup>1</sup> The term „our region” refers to the post-communist countries of Central-Eastern Europe also called Eastern Europe or sometimes New Europe.

<sup>2</sup> M. Masoły (ed.), (2007), *Wymiar życia społecznego Polaka na przełomie XX i XXI wieku*.

<sup>3</sup> M. Halamska, (2007), *Agencje, ekonomizacja i społeczne wykluczenie wiejskie w Polsce* (ed. by D. Dąbrowski) *Dawne i nowe możliwości społeczne, a joint publication edited by A. Kasler, Wydawnictwa WRM PAN Komitet Socjologii*.

been enhanced by the processes of system transformation, as they led to several negative phenomena, including unemployment, and, consequently, to a significant impoverishment of rural communities<sup>4</sup>. The cause of such a state of affairs is to be sought, among others, in the rural economy, which is still to a large extent based on small farms producing food mainly for their own use. Rural enterprise is also dominated by small family companies whose earnings are determined by demand for goods and services, significantly limited by rural unemployment and poverty. As a result, the majority of farms and companies from outside the agricultural sector function as "social firms" whose profits are used solely to satisfy the consumption needs of the owners' family. The situation is additionally deteriorated by the fact that a large number of farms is run by elderly and lonely people whose main source of financial resources is social welfare aid. The process of ageing is becoming a severe problem for the country since the birthrate has declined and the percentage of inhabitants at the economically post-productive age is higher than in towns<sup>5</sup>.

The rural socio-economic problems especially concern women who inhabit the regions where modernization processes seem to take place more slowly. Malgorzata Paszara<sup>6</sup> argues that in Poland, and similarly in other post-communist countries, we witness a complex process of forming a new gender contract being a change in women-men relations. A traditional contract was based on the exclusion of women from the public sphere and limiting their activity to the private one, which was motivated by the biological difference between both sexes and a functional division of social roles based on it. The individualization of the post-industrial era, described for the first time over twenty years ago by Ulrich Beck<sup>7</sup>, together with such factors as prolongation of life, planned parenthood, levelling the chances of access to education, and technical rationalization of household duties helped women to abandon their traditionally ascribed roles. Movements growing in Western Europe and the U.S. in the 20th century and particularly the so-called second-wave feminism managed to reach Poland and other post-communist countries

only after the fall of the old system and grew in strength along with our accession to the European Community. The policy of equality between women and men has been pursued in the EU since the Treaty of Rome. Until 1970s it had been executed only in the application of the Treaty principle of equal pay for male and female workers for equal work or work of equal value, which did not have an important part in the economic life since the member states did not adopt it in terms of their legislation. Supporting activities for women were developed in the second half of the 1970s when monitoring of women's rights and their situation in the labour market was launched. Further development in this field was observed in the 1980s, when actions aimed at equal opportunities for women and men were undertaken. The implementation of the gender mainstreaming strategy assuring the promotion of equality between men and women in all EU and member states activities was a spectacular breakthrough<sup>8</sup>. Giving a critical assessment of EU policy towards women Grażyna Firlit-Fesniak<sup>9</sup> argues:

*The main criterion for a formal dimension of equality between the sexes, that is the criterion of equal treatment in all matters, did help to eliminate inequalities in the field of their formal rights, but it failed to alter cultural determinants and the symptoms of social inequalities based on sex (...) The analyses of the status of women and men in the European labour market show the permanence of vertical and horizontal labour market segmentation based on sex and the constant disparity in pay between women and men in several EU countries. The predominance of formal principles of equal treatment did not have an impact on the cultural context of women's discrimination in employment.*

Poland, member of the EU since 2004, fully adjusted its law to meet the norms of equal treatment of men and women as early as during the preparatory process. Wide empirical research showed substantial differences in the situation of women and men when compared with other member countries. Labour market research<sup>10</sup> draws attention to a significantly lower professional activity of women (48% whereas men account for 62%)<sup>11</sup> and a higher level of unemployment. The labour market segmentation based on sex is

<sup>4</sup> The deteriorating financial situation of rural dwellers resulting from the effects of system transformation is described by J. Wilkin [2001], S. Kłopot [2002], E. Pyka-Piotrowska [2004], E. Leśniak-Moczka [2005] et al.

<sup>5</sup> I. Fesniak, (2004), *Struktura demograficzna i społeczna ludności wiejskiej w świetle wyników spisu 2002*. IHWOR PAN.

<sup>6</sup> M. Paszara, (ed.), (2002), *Kobiety w Polsce na przełomie wieków. Nowy kształt płci?*, Instytut Spraw Publicznych.

<sup>7</sup> U. Beck, (2002), *Spoleczeństwo ryzyka*, Schöner.

<sup>8</sup> G. Firlit-Fesniak, (2005), *Współczesna polityka na rzecz równości kobiet i mężczyzn*, IPS UN.

<sup>9</sup> G. Firlit-Fesniak, *ibid.*, p. 242.

<sup>10</sup> CE *Skłany zgłt. Ankiety i organizacja Ankiety doboru*, (2003), [ed.] Anna Tinkov, ESP UN, and M. Gieropka, J. Waszkowiak, P. Zmoch, (2007), *Skłany zgłt i rachunek szkół – Ankiety na potrzeby CE i DoRAP*, Wydawnictwa Falckowskie.

<sup>11</sup> Firlit-Fesniak, *ibid.*

permanent as women form a vast majority (70%) of office workers. Health care, education, social welfare as well as gastronomic and tourist services are also highly feminised<sup>12</sup>. The segregation is accompanied by lower pays (about 20%), regardless of received education, and lower pensions (about 30%).<sup>13</sup> The phenomenon of glass ceiling – real barriers and restraints in the field of professional career – still exists and women have poorer chances for professional advance in business. Renata Sienińska<sup>14</sup>, who has been analysing institutional, economic and cultural barriers to participation in politics for years, claims that despite a certain improvement women are still under-represented in Poland's governing institutions of all levels. The percentage of Polish women officials representing our country in the European Parliament is the lowest in the EU (13%) and the percentage of women holding office in the Polish Parliament is also relatively small<sup>15</sup>.

A question arises: what is the situation of rural women against a general background of Polish women? Contrary to appearances, the answer is not simple. The reasons for the present state of affairs were stipulated by Renata Sienińska in 1990:

*„Most of Polish research analysing women's situation has focused on the inhabitants of towns who took up jobs, mainly in the fields of industry or provision of services. Significantly less consideration has been given to a professional situation of rural women despite the fact that at a certain stage of the country's industrialization these women formed an essential part of people raising autonomous farms”<sup>16</sup>.*

Looking at the problem from the perspective of past years, one must confirm the relevance of the opinion. Rural women are still seldom the focus of study of both the countryside researchers and gender studies specialists. Even the studies that are intended to be compendia of information about the country lack complex, multifaceted descriptions of that social category. It seems symptomatic that the 2000 report on the development of rural areas<sup>17</sup>

does not contain a separate chapter or even a subchapter devoted to the problems of rural women. By the same token, Krzysztof Gorlach, a renowned sociologist of the country and agriculture, in his publication *Sociologia obszarów wiejskich (Sociology of rural areas)*<sup>18</sup>, fails to comment on the issues of rural women. It should be mentioned, however, that there are naturally valuable studies and analyses on the problem conducted over the last few years in research centres such as the Institute of Rural and Agricultural Development of the Polish Academy of Sciences or the Department of Agricultural Policy and Marketing of the Warsaw University of Life Sciences<sup>19</sup>. Undoubtedly an aroused interest in the socio-professional situation of rural women by academics and practitioners was observed at the time of Poland's integration with the EU. Poland's membership required an implementation of activities steered onto economic and social cohesion and launching EU programmes aimed at ensuring equality of opportunities and development of rural areas, which brought on research projects undertaking an analysis of the countryside and its inhabitants, including rural women.

The fact that our country's membership in the EU affects the direction of social policy and the development of research is confirmed by in the project *Diagnosis of the social and professional situation of rural women in Poland* financed within the framework of *SPO RZL 1.6 (b)* (The Sectoral Operational Programme Human Resources Development) *Professional integration and reintegration of women*. Its realization was made possible owing to an agreement concluded in January 2007 between the Polish Society for Social Policy and the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy<sup>20</sup>. The project was connected with the prior research carried out by the Polish Society for Social Policy *Multifaceted diagnosis of the situation of women in the labour market*. It developed and expanded the research on the readiness to undertake economic activity among women residing in the areas characterised by a low

<sup>12</sup> M. Gwarycha, J. Wasilczak, P. Zwiak, *ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> *Plac i महिला/ ekonomia w Polsce: czy kobiety straciły na transformacji?* (2000), Biuro Banku Światowego w Polsce.

<sup>14</sup> CT. R. Sienińska, (ed.), (2005), *Plac i wybory władz*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe Scholar.

<sup>15</sup> R. Sienińska, (2007), *Przemiany plac i polityki. Między systemami wartości a wolnym społeczeństwem, (in:) Ojczyzna życia społecznego*, a joint publication edited by M. Mandys, Wydawnictwo Naukowe Scholar.

<sup>16</sup> R. Sienińska, (1990), *Plac i rozwój polityki Kobiety w życiu publicznym w Polsce*, Uniwersytet Warszawski, Instytut Socjologii, p. 122.

<sup>17</sup> A report on the social development Poland 2000: The development of rural areas, UNDP.

<sup>18</sup> K. Gorlach, (2004), *Sociologia obszarów wiejskich. Problemy i perspektywy*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe Scholar.

<sup>19</sup> Suffice to mention the State Committee for Scientific Research study on the professional activation of rural women whose results were included in *Aktivizacja zawodowa kobiet wiejskich poprzez rozwój obszarów przedsiębiorczości*, edited by Joanna Sawicka at the Warsaw University of Life Sciences (1998) or two works on the rural women's problems published after 2000: *Rezerwa aktywności wiejskich. Doświadczenia dzięki europejskim i Aktywność wiejskich kobiet: zmiany systemowe* by B. Trybka, A. Rosner and B. Piepek.

<sup>20</sup> The Polish Society for Social Policy was represented by its President prof. dr hab. Julian Arelajmowicz and dr hab. J. Krzyżakowski; the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy was represented by Undersecretary of State I. Kłerek-Bostowska.

degree of urbanization conducted in 2006 under the supervision of Jerzy Krzyżkowski<sup>21</sup>. According to the agreement,<sup>22</sup> empirical analyses were undertaken within four modules of research.

Module I concerned local authorities (of the district and commune level) and their social policy towards women. It focused on the description and analysis of the processes of establishing and functioning of the local social policy system and cooperation networks aimed at preventing rural women's problems. The analysis showed how local authorities perceive rural women's roles and tasks, how they identify their problems, what strategies they formulate and what activities aimed at solving rural women's problems are undertaken. The subject was investigated and discussed by the editor of this publication and the supervisor of the project acting on behalf of the Polish Society for Social Policy.

The working of social service units (social welfare and labour administration) in favour of professional activation of rural women was the research subject of module II supervised by Krzysztof Piątek. The aim of the research was to recognize and order the actions undertaken by labour administration and social welfare centres in favour of professional activation of rural women, to assess the usefulness and the effectiveness of the activating actions and to specify the major barriers, difficulties and potential outlooks that may occur in the examined area.

Elżbieta Pyk-Piotrowska, within the framework of module III, carried out an analysis of the determinants of rural women's economic activity and their prospects for the future in the labour market. The module attempted to produce a diagnosis of rural women's situation in the labour market, indicate the causes and determinants of the current state of affairs and to bring to light any circumstances thanks to which it would be possible to envisage the prospects for the future as regards the economic activity of rural women.

Module IV, supervised by Danuta Walczak-Duraj, analysed the determinants of actual and prospective participation of rural women in different aspects of the socio-political life. It also attempted to determine the measures which, according to rural women, need to be taken at the macro, meso- and micro structural level to enhance their participation in socio-political life.

The factual information compiled in the four modules have produced a cohesive whole which lays the foundations for research on the diagnosis of socio-professional situation of rural women in Poland. The structure of the publication is, so to speak, naturally based on the four research subjects analysed in the modules. The results of research are presented by the persons responsible for particular modules. The publication is supplemented with opening and closing chapters written by the supervisor of the project and the editor of the whole publication.

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<sup>21</sup> The results of the analyses were published in: J. Krzyżkowski, M. Marks, J. Lisak-Michałska, J. Przywojka, (2008) *Uwarunkowania aktywizacji ekonomicznej kobiet wiejskich*, Wydawnictwo Terceja and on PESP web site.

<sup>22</sup> The framework of the agreement comprised the following assignments: preparation of methodology and a package of research tools, carrying out nationwide analysis of the socio-professional situation of rural women in Poland representative of all regions of the country, finding researchers who would be responsible for four modules of research outlined in the project as well as preparation of proper instruments for the analysis of literature of the aforementioned subject.