

Children in the family*

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* The author used chapters of two earlier editions of the *Children Count* report: Szredzińska (2017) and Wildner and Wojtasik (2011).

According to Anthony Giddens, one of the most prominent contemporary sociologists, there are no greater and more spectacular changes in today's world than those taking place in marriage, family, personal life, and family relationships. This is a global lifestyle revolution and its epicentre lies in the area of privacy and intimacy (Giddens, 2007, in: Iwańska-Siwek, 2020).

Family is a historical category, which changes over time and from one historical period to another. These changes do not occur spontaneously, caused only by internal transformations in family life. "The main driving force of change in marriage and family life is (mass) social processes taking place in wider structures, above the family level, as well as socioeconomic and cultural processes occurring within the society as a whole" (Iwańska-Siwek, 2020).

Since the mid-1960s sociologists and family researchers in Europe have observed change and destabilisation processes related to later marriages, more prevalent cohabiting and other alternative forms of family, such as living apart together (LAT), same-sex and blended families, more childless persons, more divorces, and an increased number of children born outside of marriage. In Poland these processes became visible in the 1980s, to gain momentum in the transformation period (Matysiak, 2014).

The family is the first and primary socialisation environment for children. If it works well, it offers development opportunities, satisfies children's needs, introduces them into the world of social norms and values, and shapes their personality.

The Preamble to the Convention on the Rights of the Child express a conviction that "the family, as the fundamental group of society and the natural environment for the growth and well-being of all its members and particularly children, should be afforded the necessary protection and assistance so that it can fully assume its responsibilities within the community", and that "the child, for the full and harmonious development of his or her personality, should grow up in a family environment, in an atmosphere of happiness, love and understanding" and "in the spirit of peace, dignity, tolerance, freedom, equality and solidarity".

Certain characteristics or dysfunctions of the family may pose a threat to children's healthy development, and sometimes safety. Child maltreatment literature identifies risk factors related to the child's caregivers and the family system, including the absence of one of biological parents, parental overload, teen parents' immaturity and unreadiness to take on the parental role, living in the same household with non-related persons, family breakdown and conflict, and a lack of social support (Izdebska and Lewandowska, 2012).

Therefore, the current chapter will take a look at Polish families in terms of the characteristics that may pose a threat to children's wellbeing.

Definitions of family

Sociological definition

There are many definitions of the family, because just like the family itself, its definitions change over time and vary depending on each researcher's paradigm.

Tyszka provides a clear definition that takes into account both structural and functional aspects of the family:

[The family is] a structured and functionally related set of individuals and specific substructures and microelements that constitute a microgroup and, at the same time, a social institution, internally linked with marital, kinship, affinity or adoption bonds, and performing (simultaneously) a range of important, integrated functions toward individuals and the society, based on regulators present in the behavioural culture. (Tyszka, 1998, in: Smyła, 2022)

Four essential, universal and common functions of the family were listed by Sirjamaki, who described the family as a social institution performing the following functions: sexual, economic, reproduction, and socialisation (Tyszka, 1990).

Some sociological definitions emphasise the nature of bonds within the family, i.e., intimacy, emotional bonding, and permanence (Szczepański, 1970). As an example, the family was defined as a "spiritual union of a small group of people, bound together in a shared home with acts of mutual help and care, based on their belief in actual or alleged biological connection, and on the family and societal tradition (Adamski, 2002, p. 31).

Other definitions focus on family structure and relationships among its members. Traditionally, there are two types of families: nuclear or elementary families, consisting of parents and their children, and extended families comprising parents, children and other relatives (Mikusińska, 2008).

Because of the broad variation and multiple forms of contemporary families, some definitions try to capture all social configurations considered to be families. One very broad definition describes the family as a group consisting of "at least one parent-child or partner-partner dyad" (Trost, 1993, in: Szlendak, 2012).

Another attempt to meet the challenges of the modern world is a definition which says that:

A family is any union of two or more persons, who are bound with relationships resulting from a mutual agreement, birth, or adoption, and who accept a shared responsibility for:

- ensuring survival and providing care for group members;
- new members who join the group via the performance of the reproductive function or adoption;
- socialisation of children;
- social control over group members;
- production, consumption, and distribution of goods and services;
- ensuring emotional bonding and intimacy (Slany, 2002, in: Szacka, 2008, p. 379).

One new perspective in studying family life and defining the family is the interpretive approach based on the assumption that the family – as a social institution – is not an objective being, but is instead constructed by individuals and deeply rooted in their individual biographies. As such, it is variable and fluid, and has no clear frame or boundaries (Taranowicz 2017). In the modern world, we should not talk about “being” a family that fits within a fixed definitional framework. Instead, families are in an ongoing process of constructing and reconstructing (“doing” a family) during their daily practices (Slany, 2013). According to Sikorska, adopting the definition proposed by Morgan, who describes the family as something people “do” and by doing it, they create and recreate the very idea of the family (Sikorska 2018, 2019), leads to widening the range of social behaviours regarded as family behaviours, including family forms beyond the nuclear family, in the reflection on the family, and ceasing to see the nuclear family as the reference point for defining other forms of family life. A British sociologist Janet Finch proposes the concept of the “displaying family” – understanding the family as an individual, dynamic project, which is expressed by displaying family practises to others. In this way individuals create what they understand as their own family (Sikorska, 2018; Taranowicz, 2017).

Legal definition

The Polish law does not have one binding definition of the family. However, the provisions of the Family and Guardianship Code, which uses the term “family” (Article 10, section 1, Articles 23 and 27, and Article 97, section 1) without defining it, suggest that by “family” the legislators meant a small formalised community created upon entering into a marriage. The concept of the family is based on marital, kinship, affinity, and adoption bonds (Walancik-Ryba, 2020). Children belong to the family, defined that way, as long as they live with their parents, unless they get married themselves and start their own family. According to these provisions, children of just one of the spouses do not belong to the family, even if they grow up in a newly formed patchwork or blended family. The same is true for children who are brought up, but not adopted by their caregivers, including children placed in alternative care.

Although the Act of the 9th of June 2011 on family support and the alternative care system acknowledges that “the family is the fundamental unit of the society and the natural environment for the growth and wellbeing of all its members, in particular children” (Dz.U. [Journal of Laws] 2011, 149, item 887), it does not offer a definition of the family, either. Its provisions imply, however, that the legislators meant not only biological parents and their children, but also other persons living in the same household, such as step parents, partners, and grandparents (Walancik-Ryba, 2020).

According to Article 3, section 16 of the Family Benefits Act, the family refers to the following family members: spouses, parents, the actual caregiver (whose relationship with the child is not necessarily one typically regarded as a family relationship), and dependent children under 25, as well as children over 25 with a certificate of substantial disability, if the disability is eligible for the nursing benefit, attendance allowance, or special carer’s allowance, as defined in the Act of the 4th of April 2014 on the determination and payment of carers’ benefits (Dz.U. of 2016, items 162 and 972). Family members do not include a child in the care of a legal guardian, a child who is married, and an adult child who has his or her own child (Zieliński, 2021).

A similar definition is provided in the Act on the State’s Assistance in Child-rearing (Dz.U. of 2016, item 195), whereas the Social Services Act (Dz.U. of 2004, No. 64, item 593) defines the family as follows: “The family – related or unrelated persons, remaining in an actual relationship, living together and running a shared household.” This definition stresses the idea of a shared life, expressed as living together and running the household together (Zieliński, 2021).

Importantly, the above definitions are operational and serve to set the criteria of granting family benefits and assistance services.

The legal definitions of the family do not fully capture the social change that has occurred in the past few decades. This includes the emergence of new types of families, e.g., cohabitation defined as living together without a formal relationship (including same-sex relationships,

referred to as “families of choice”; Slany, 2008), and living-apart-together (whereby two people being in a relationship decide to live separately). A family may also be formed by siblings living together, grandparents taking care of their grandchildren, permanently or temporarily (e.g., while their parents are working abroad), or a single parent with her or his child. With the growing number of divorces, there are also more and more reconstructed or blended (patchwork) families, whereby divorced partners run a shared household, living together with their children from former relationships, which creates a complex network of organisational, emotional, and legal relations. It is important to adapt the Polish law to those often complex arrangements, so that the rights and responsibilities of the former and current partners and their children are clearly defined (Matysiak and Młynarska, 2014).

New definitions based on an assumption that “starting a family is also an actual event, so it does not necessarily occur through an act of law, an administrative decision or a court order; therefore, the emphasis should be on actual close human relationships” (Zieliński, 2021), show that the law may be inclusive in its approach to alternative forms of family life, beyond the traditional nuclear model.

Families in Poland

According to the National Census, in 2011¹ there were 10,972,547 families in Poland². Half of them (50%) were families with dependent children under 24. There were 8,868,762 children and young people under 24 growing up in those families, including slightly more than 7 million children under 18. Children and dependent young adults under 24 were the most likely (76.8%) to live in families run by their married parents, followed by single mothers (18.3%), informal relationships (2.7%), and single fathers (2.1%).

In the previous edition of the report, we noted some tendencies emerging from the comparison of the 2011 data with the 2002 census: a decreased proportion of families with dependent children (from 76% to 50%) and a lower percentage of children raised by married couples (from 83% to 76.8%), as well as an increased proportion of children living in single-parent families. Moreover, there was an increase in the percentage of children raised in informal relationships (from 1.6% in 2002 to 2.7% in 2011).

The 2011 National Census showed that 74% of all families were married couples (50% with children and 24% without children). Single-parent families constituted 23% of all families. Among those, there were overwhelmingly more single mothers – over 2.1 million in 2011 (nearly 376 thousand more than in 2002) – and only 330 thousand single fathers (almost 100 thousand more than in 2002). There were 1.8 million dependent children under 24 in single-parent families. Another category was cohabiting couples: in 2011 there were 316.5 thousand such families, including more than 171 thousand couples with dependent children under 24, i.e. 1% of all families in Poland.

1 Data from the 2021 National Census was not taken into account, as it was not available at the time of writing this chapter (Statistics Poland plans to publish data on families in November 2022).

2 In the 2011 National Census a (marital or partnership) bond between a woman and a man or parent-child bonds were regarded as the basis of the family definition. The following types of families were identified: a married couple without children or with a child/children, a cohabiting couple without children or with a child/children, and a single parent with a child/children. A child (biological or adopted) was defined as a person living with a parent/parents, regardless of his or her age, unless the child has formed his or her own family with another person / other persons (a spouse and/or his/her own children).

The structure of family categories has been slowly changing over time. In 2011 the percentage of married couples with children showed a decreasing tendency, while single parents were on the rise. It was definitely related to a growing number of divorces. The 2011 census found a considerable increase in the percentage of single fathers with young children (under 2 years old): from 8% of all single fathers in 2002 to 21% in 2011.

Multi-child families

Polish families usually have one or two children. Only 5.7% of all families (and 11.5% of families with children) are multi-child families, i.e. families with three or more children. In 2011 there were 626.8 such families (more than 397 thousand fewer than in 2002). Families with four or more children constituted 25% of all multi-child families (30% in 2002) and most of them (59%) lived in rural areas. In 2011 there were more than 2 million children growing up in multi-child families (2,114,776, exactly). That was about one fourth of all dependent children under 24. The vast majority of multi-child families are married couples with children (83%); 14% are multi-child single-parent families, and the remaining 3% – cohabiting couples raising three or more children. In nearly one fourth of the households formed by multi-child families there were children from their parents' earlier relationships (Związek Dużych Rodzin "Trzy Plus", 2016).

Families in Poland compared to Europe

The percentage of families with children in Poland is relatively high in comparison to other developed countries.

Eurostat data confirms a general growth tendency for households without children, resulting from a decrease in birth rate and longer life expectancy, which means there are more and more married couple whose children have transitioned to independent life.

In 2021 the European Union reported a 14.5% increase in the number of households without children and a 3.4% decrease in the number of households with children, as compared to 2009 (Figure 1).

”

I am 15 years old and I feel that all the problems are because of me. I can't stand my parents anymore. I fear that one day I won't bear it any longer and I'll kill myself. I lack peace, love and support at home. My parents didn't care at all about my self-harm and suicide attempts.

15-year-old boy

A quote from phone calls and emails to 116 111 Helpline for Children and Young People

Table 1. Households in EU member states in 2021, by the number and age of children

State	Overall % of households with children	% of households with children			
		With one child	With two children	With three or more children	With children under 6
Ireland	33.49%	12.92%	12.93%	7.65%	13.08%
Slovakia	33.47%	17.11%	12.43%	3.93%	15.11%
Cyprus	31.19%	15.65%	12.05%	3.46%	13.47%
Portugal	30.56%	18.31%	10.66%	1.58%	12.29%
Romania	30.40%	17.21%	10.18%	3.04%	9.65%
Serbia	29.51%	13.89%	11.88%	3.74%	11.91%
Poland	27.62%	13.50%	11.14%	2.99%	11.25%
Spain	27.55%	14.67%	10.54%	2.34%	9.82%
Malta	27.22%	14.94%	9.58%	2.70%	11.15%
Luxembourg	26.87%	12.81%	10.97%	3.16%	11.39%
Croatia	26.60%	11.90%	10.30%	4.40%	8.91%
Czechia	26.24%	13.02%	10.82%	2.41%	11.55%
Greece	25.91%	12.25%	9.60%	4.08%	9.53%
Belgium	25.85%	11.22%	10.44%	4.19%	11.06%
Slovenia	25.75%	11.26%	10.92%	3.57%	10.87%
Latvia	25.60%	13.54%	9.02%	3.09%	11.42%
France	25.37%	11.26%	10.06%	4.10%	10.74%
Hungary	25.14%	13.46%	8.26%	3.41%	10.75%
EU (27 states)	24.33%	12.08%	9.41%	2.91%	9.81%
Denmark	24.16%	11.07%	10.03%	3.29%	9.40%
Estonia	23.95%	11.98%	8.62%	3.49%	10.52%
Bulgaria	23.50%	14.60%	7.72%	1.20%	6.55%
Italy	23.37%	12.81%	8.85%	1.71%	8.86%
Lithuania	22.88%	12.78%	7.98%	2.12%	10.53%
Austria	22.49%	10.74%	8.68%	3.08%	9.86%
Netherlands	21.78%	8.81%	9.59%	3.41%	8.89%
Sweden	21.24%	9.43%	9.99%	3.36%	9.10%
Germany	19.77%	9.84%	7.55%	2.40%	8.75%
Finland	18.67%	8.77%	7.07%	3.45%	7.89%

Source: Eurostat (Number of households by household composition, number of children and age of youngest child).

Table 2. Households in EU member states in 2021 by household type

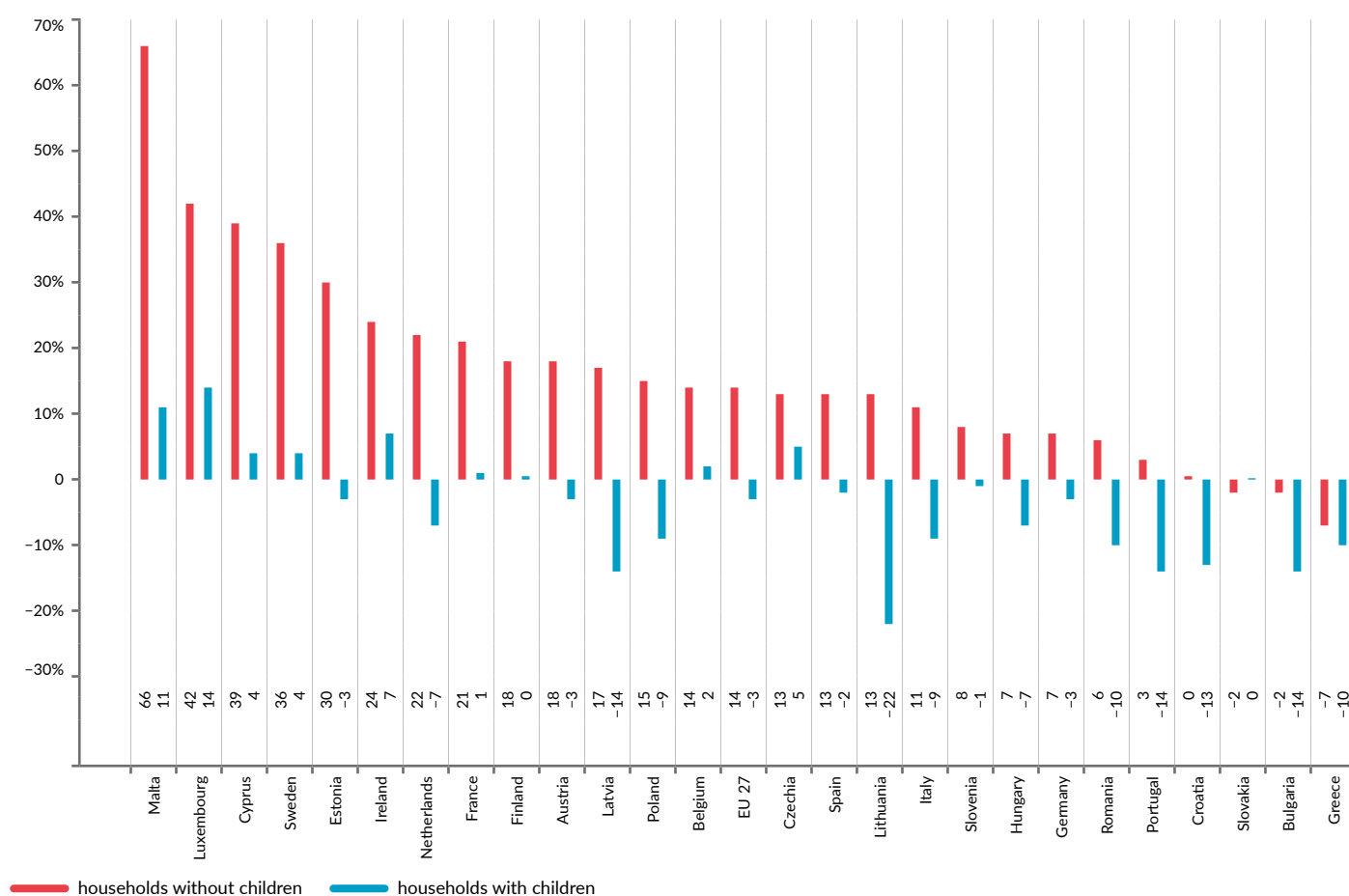
State	An adult with a child/children	A couple with a child/children	Another type of household with a child/children	A household without children
Ireland	4.80%	20.40%	8.20%	66.50%
Slovakia	1.60%	18.70%	13.10%	66.50%
Cyprus	3.10%	21.40%	6.70%	68.80%
Portugal	2.50%	17.40%	10.60%	69.40%
Romania	2.10%	16.00%	12.30%	69.60%
Serbia	1.30%	13.10%	15.10%	70.50%
Spain	2.50%	17.20%	7.80%	72.40%
Poland	2.10%	16.40%	9.10%	72.40%
Malta	2.20%	17.40%	7.70%	72.80%
Luxembourg	2.30%	18.50%	6.10%	73.10%
Croatia	0.90%	13.50%	12.20%	73.40%
Czechia	3.60%	17.80%	4.90%	73.70%
Belgium	3.90%	16.30%	5.60%	74.10%
Greece	0.90%	18.40%	6.60%	74.10%
Latvia	6.10%	11.40%	8.10%	74.30%
Slovenia	0.80%	18.00%	6.90%	74.30%
France	5.00%	15.80%	4.60%	74.60%
Hungary	2.40%	16.10%	6.70%	74.90%
EU (27 states)	3.10%	15.60%	5.70%	75.60%
Denmark	6.10%	14.90%	3.20%	75.60%
Estonia	7.00%	13.50%	3.40%	75.90%
Bulgaria	2.10%	11.20%	10.20%	76.50%
Italy	2.20%	15.50%	5.70%	76.60%
Lithuania	5.60%	12.10%	5.20%	77.10%
Sweden	3.90%	15.40%	2.00%	77.20%
Austria	2.10%	15.70%	4.70%	77.50%
Netherlands	2.80%	15.60%	3.40%	78.20%
Germany	2.90%	13.80%	3.00%	80.20%
Finland	2.50%	13.50%	2.70%	80.70%

Source: Eurostat (Number of households by household composition, number of children and age of youngest child).

Most countries (23 out of the 26 for which there is available data) reported an increase in the number of households without children between 2009 and 2021. The biggest growth was found in Malta (+65.7%), followed by Luxembourg (+41.8%), Cyprus (+39.4%) and Sweden (+35.8%). Only Slovakia (-1.6 %), Bulgaria (-1.9 %) and Greece (-7.4 %) had fewer households without children in 2021 than in 2009. In Poland the number of households without children grew by 20%.

When it comes to households with children, tendencies vary among EU member states. The number of households with children dropped in 16 of them, with Lithuania reporting the biggest decrease (-21.7%); it remained stable in Slovakia and increased in 9 EU countries, including Luxembourg and Malta, where the growth was more than 10% (13.7% and 11.5%). In Poland the number dropped by 9%.

Figure 1. Growth rate of households with and without children: change between 2009 and 2021 (in %)

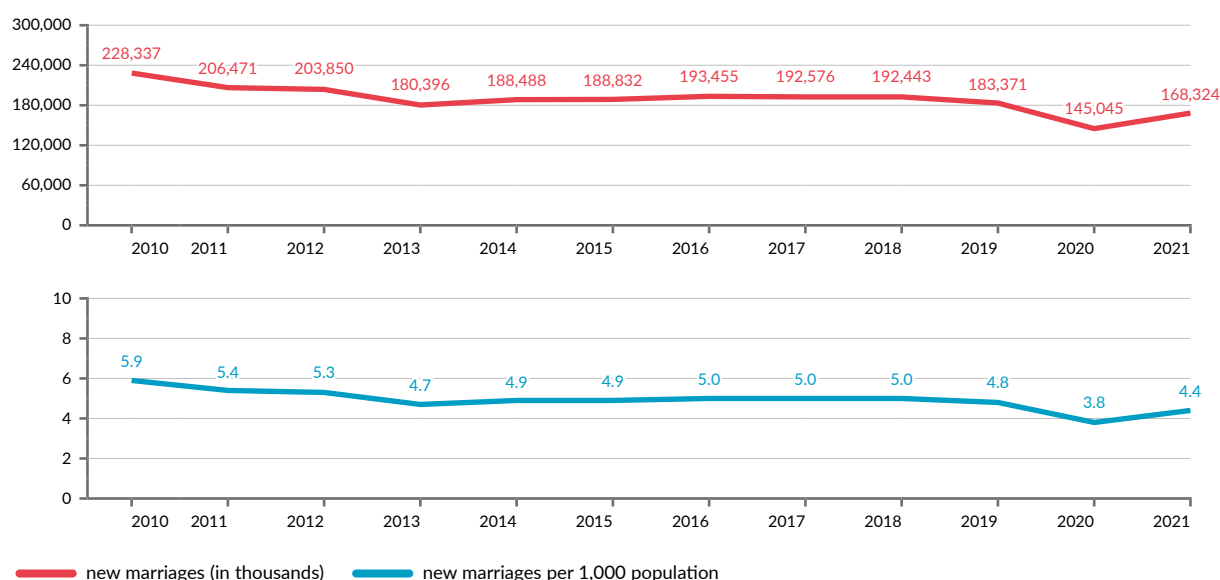


Source: Eurostat.

Married couples

In 2021 168,324 marriages were entered into in Poland (Główny Urząd Statystyczny / Statistics Poland [GUS], 2021a). In the past years, between 2009 and 2013 both the number of new marriages and the marriage rate per 1,000 people of the population decreased. Then, between 2014 and 2018 the number of new marriages grew, to drop again later, reaching a historically low rate of 3.8 new marriages per 1,000 people in 2020³.

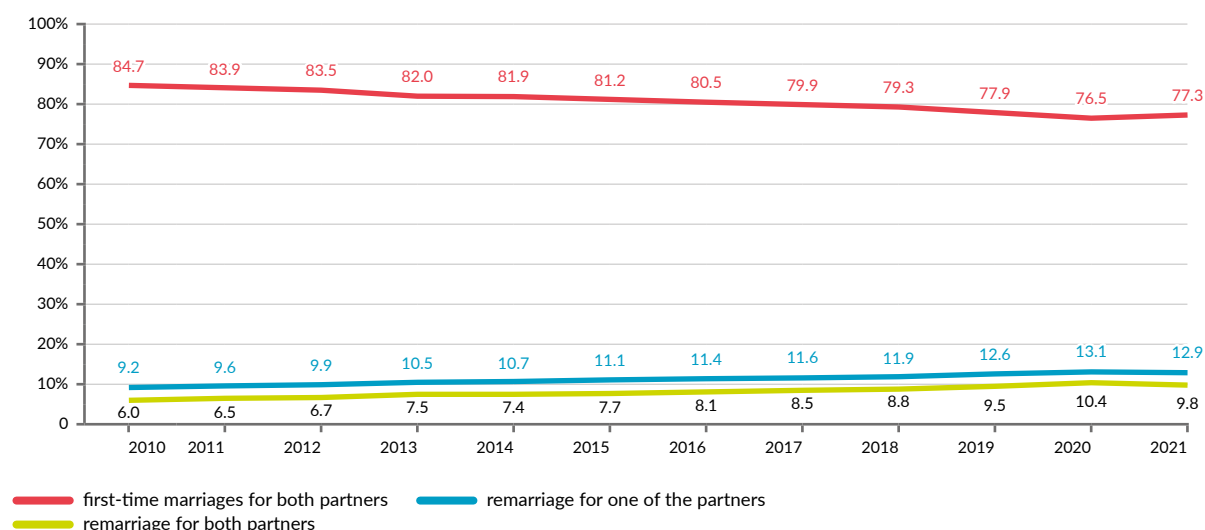
Figure 2. Marriages entered into in 2010–2021



Source: GUS (Dziedzina Baza Wiedzy Demografia / Domain Database: Demographics).

In 2021 about 77% of all new marriages were first-time marriages for both the bride and the groom. This percentage has been slowly decreasing in recent years (85% in 2010 and 81% in 2015).

3 According to Statistics Poland (GUS), the decrease in the number of new marriages, divorces, and formal separations in 2020 may be a result of the COVID-19 restrictions, including sanitary restrictions (such as those concerning the organisation of weddings) and temporary suspension of courts' work, which led to cancellation of divorce and separation hearings (GUS, 2021b).

Figure 3. The percentage of first-time marriages and remarriages in 2010–2021

Source: GUS (Dziedzina Baza Wiedzy Demografia / Domain Database: Demographics).

Since the 1980s the age of entering into the first marriage has been rising. In 1980 more than half of all grooms were aged 20–24 (54%; GUS, 2022a). Forty years later only 9% of all grooms belonged to that age group, 37% were 25–29 years old, and 34% were 30–34 years old.

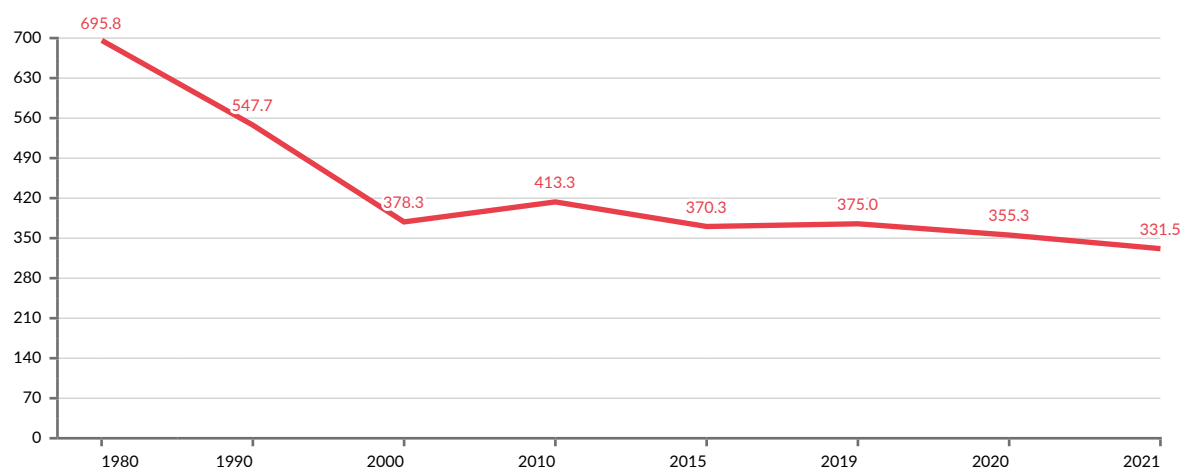
The age of entry into marriage has also been rising among women. In 1980 57% of all brides were 20–24 years old, and 15% were 25–29. In 2020 only 20% of all brides were in the 20–24 age group, 39% were 25–29 years old, and 18% were 30–34. The proportion of women getting married at the age of 35–39 is also growing: in 2020 they constituted 9% of all brides (compared to 1.5% in 1980).

In 2021 the median age of grooms was 30.7 years and for brides – 28.6 years. For first-time grooms and brides, it was 29.6 and 27.6, respectively.

Fertility rate

Poles' reproductive behaviour has changed profoundly since 1989. These change processes have resulted in a decreasing tendency in births (especially for the second and next children in the family), reduced fertility and its changed age-related pattern, and, consequently, an older average age of mothers at the first childbirth and an increased average age of mothers in general (Kotowska, 2021).

Figure 4. Live births in thousands in 1980–2021

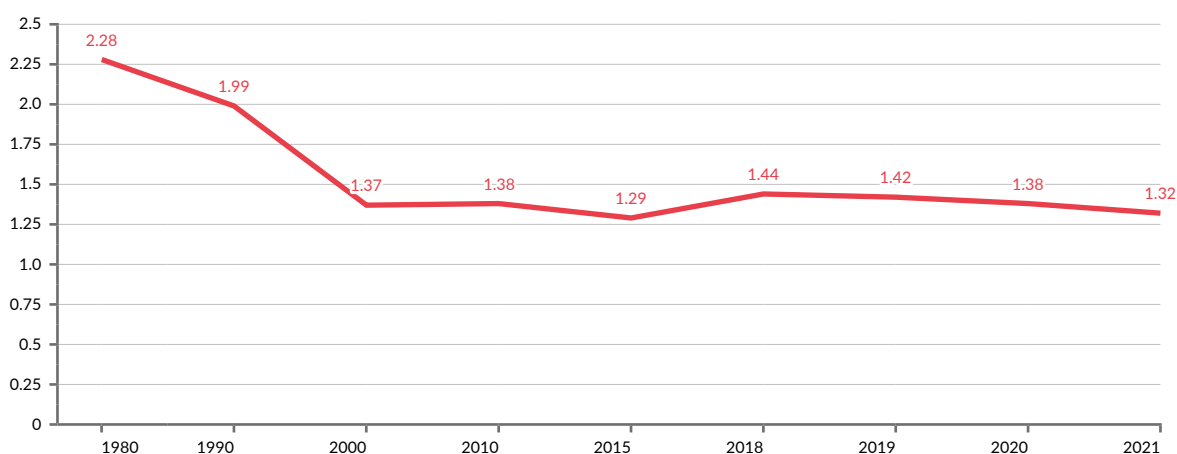


Source: GUS, 2021 (Dziedzinowa Baza Wiedzy Demografia / Domain Database: Demographics).

In 2021 331,511 children were born in Poland.

The fertility rate in 2015⁴ was 1.29. It grew slightly in 2016–2019, up to 1.4, but dropped again in 2021, when it was 1.32. It is way below the replacement rate, which is 2.1.

Figure 5. Fertility rate in Poland in 1980–2021



Source: GUS, 2021 (Dziedzinowa Baza Wiedzy Demografia / Domain Database: Demographics).

The demographic situation in Poland is not exceptional among other European countries (Table 3). Currently, fertility rates do not ensure generation replacement in any of them. In 2020 the highest rates were reported in Romania, France, and Georgia (1.80, 1.83, and 1.98, respectively), and the lowest rates were found in Malta, Spain, and Italy (1.13, 1.19 and 1.24, respectively).

4 Total fertility rate is the average number of children that would be born to a woman over her reproductive period (15–49) if she were to give births at the current age-specific fertility rates in each phase of the period, i.e., if the partial fertility rates remained stable throughout the period.

Table 3. Total fertility rate in selected countries in 2020

	2020
Georgia	1.98
France	1.83
Romania	1.80
Montenegro	1.75
Iceland	1.72
Czechia	1.71
Denmark	1.68
Sweden	1.67
Ireland	1.63
Hungary	1.59
Slovenia	1.59
Slovakia	1.59
Estonia	1.58
Bulgaria	1.56
Belgium	1.55
Latvia	1.55
Netherlands	1.54
Germany	1.53
EU (27 states)	1.50
Croatia	1.48
Lithuania	1.48
Norway	1.48
Serbia	1.48
Liechtenstein	1.46
Switzerland	1.46
Austria	1.44
Portugal	1.41
Greece	1.39
Poland	1.39
Finland	1.37
Cyprus	1.36
Luxembourg	1.36
Albania	1.34
Northern Macedonia	1.31
Italy	1.24
Spain	1.19
Malta	1.13

Source: Eurostat (Total fertility rate).

Importantly, calculated in that way, the total fertility rate does not take into account the continuously increasing age at the first and subsequent childbirths. The values of this fertility measure are biased and lead to underestimated fertility rates; even when adjusted and analysed for cohorts (the cohort fertility rate is the average number of children born by women in each birth cohort), they show that Poland has found itself in the “low fertility trap” (Kotowska, 2021).

Women's age at the first childbirth is also growing. The median age at the first childbirth was 26.6 in 2010, 27.6 in 2015, and 28.7 in 2021.

Fertility rates among women over 30 continue to grow, while the number of children born by very young mothers (under 20) is decreasing, even though in 2021 mothers in that age group gave birth to 5,906 children, including 3,084 children born by mothers under 18 (Table 4).

Table 4. Live births by mothers' age in 1990–2021 (%)

Year	Mother's age (in years)						
	19 and younger	20–24	25–29	30–34	35–39	40–44	45 and more
1990	8.0	36.4	29.3	17.4	7.3	1.5	0.1
2000	7.3	33.7	33.6	16.1	7.2	2.0	0.1
2010	4.5	19.3	36.9	27.4	10.0	1.7	0.1
2015	3.6	16.3	35.0	31.7	12.7	2.3	0.1
2020	2.0	12.0	32.5	33.1	16.9	3.4	0.1
2021	1.8	11.5	31.9	33.9	17.2	3.6	0.2

Source: GUS.

There is a significant median age difference between women living in rural and urban areas (27.4 and 29.2, respectively). Another important factor is education: the median age at the first childbirth was 29.9 years among women with college/university degree, 26.5 years among those with secondary education, and 19.4 among those who graduated from junior secondary school (GUS, 2021a; Table 5).

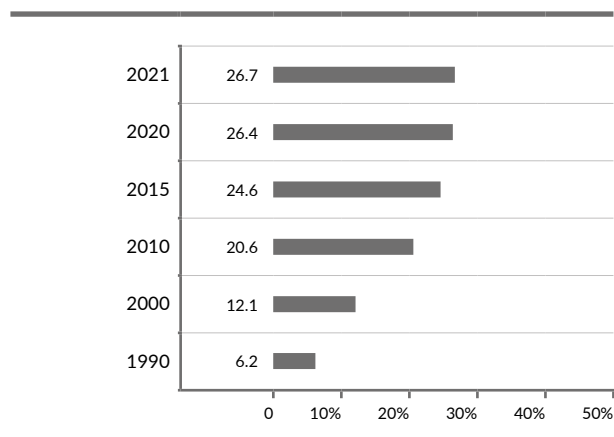
Table 5. Births by mothers' education in 1990–2020

Year	Mother's education				
	College/university	Secondary school	Vocational school	Junior secondary school	Primary school
1990	6.1	39.9	35.9	–	18.0
2000	13.1	39.8	32.7	–	14.2
2010	40.5	35.6	15.0	3.1	5.7
2015	51.0	31.9	10.2	3.4	3.4
2020	49.0	31.0	8.6	2.8	2.4

Source: GUS.

W 2020 49% of mothers had college/university education. When it comes to the number of children, women with college/university education constituted more than half of all women giving birth to their first and second child (51% and 53%, respectively) and 44% of those giving birth to their third child (GUS, 2021a).

Figure 6. Percentage of live births outside of marriage in 1990–2021

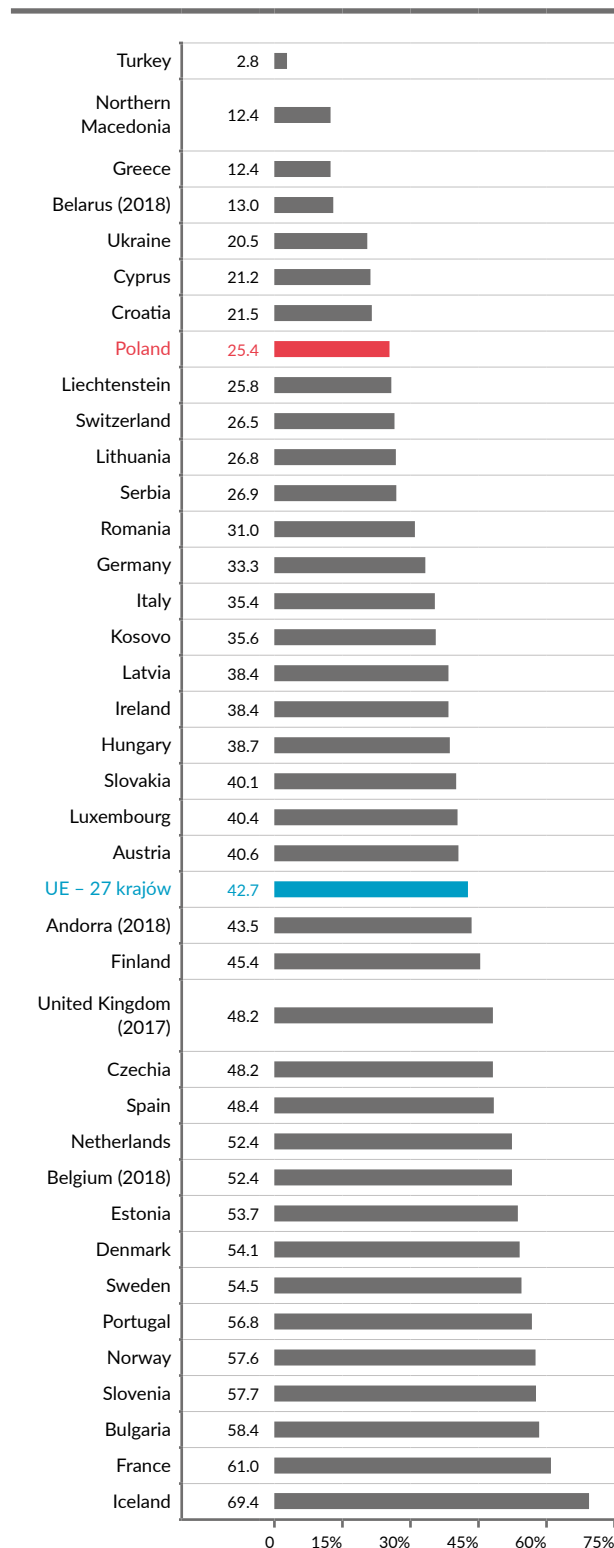


Source: GUS (Dziedzinowa Baza Wiedzy Demografia / Domain Database: Demographics).

Importantly, more and more children are born to non-married couples. In 2021 more than one fourth of all children (26.7%) were born outside of marriage. This occurs more often in urban than in rural areas: in 2020 the values were 65.8% and 34.2% of all out-of-marriage births, respectively (Figure 6). Compared to other European countries, the rate is not high, though (Figure 7).

In most European countries, just like in Poland, women have their first child at an older age. In the past ten years the largest increase in the mean age at the first childbirth has occurred in Portugal, and the smallest – in Slovakia (by 2 and 0.2 years, respectively).

Figure 7. Share of live births outside marriage in 2019 in selected European countries (in %)



Source: Eurostat (Fertility indicators).

Table 6. Mean age at the first childbirth in selected European countries in 2010–2020

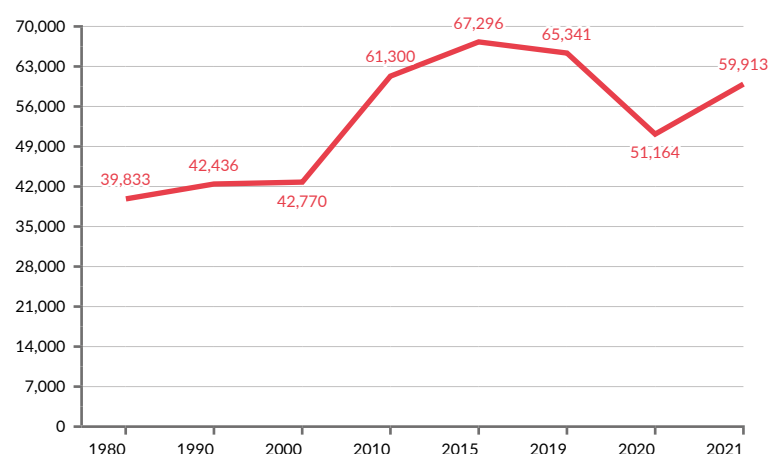
	2010	2020
EU (27 states)	n.d.	29.5
Albania	n.d.	26.6
Austria	28.2	29.7
Belgium	28.0	29.2
Bulgaria	25.6	26.4
Croatia	27.5	29.0
Cyprus	28.5	30.0
Czechia	27.6	28.5
Denmark	n.d.	29.8
Estonia	26.3	28.2
Finland	28.3	29.5
France	n.d.	28.9
Greece	29.1	30.7
Georgia	24.5	26.1
Spain	29.8	31.2
Netherlands	29.2	30.2
Ireland	29.2	30.9
Iceland	26.9	28.7
Lithuania	26.4	28.2
Latvia	26.0	27.3
Luxembourg	29.5	31.0
Northern Macedonia	26.0	26.9
Malta	27.4	29.3
Germany	28.9	29.9
Norway	28.0	29.8
Poland	26.5	27.9
Portugal	28.1	30.2
Romania	25.5	27.1
Serbia	26.9	28.2
Slovakia	27.0	27.2
Slovenia	28.4	29.0
Switzerland	30.0	31.1
Sweden	28.9	29.7
Turkey	n.d.	26.6
Ukraine	24.4	25.4 (2019)
Hungary	27.7	28.4
Italy	n.d.	31.4

Source: Eurostat.

Divorces

The number of divorces in Poland grew significantly between 2000 and 2015: it was 42,770 and increased by more than half in 2015 (Figure 8). The divorce rate has remained relatively stable in the past few years (about 1.7% per 1,000 people), except for 2020 when there was a record low number of divorces (51,164), resulting largely from the COVID-19 restrictions (GUS, 2021b). In 2021 the number of divorces increased, but was still lower than before the pandemic.

Figure 8. Divorces in Poland in 1980–2021

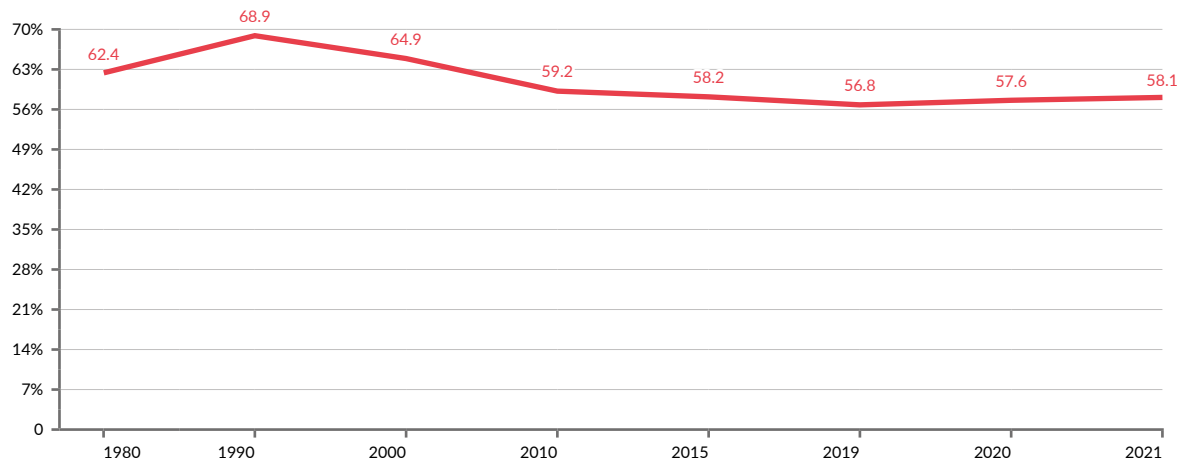


Source: GUS (Dziedzina Baza Wiedzy Demografia / Domain Database: Demographics).

Although in 2019 most Polish respondents had no doubt that when a married couple did not have children, it was better to get divorced than live in a poor relationship (62% of all responses), their opinions about getting divorced when there are children in the family, were more divided. There were almost as many people agreeing and disagreeing with the statement that “because of the havoc that divorce wrecks in children’s lives, even when the parents are unable to get on well with each other, they should stay together for the benefit of their children” (43% and 47%, respectively; Centrum Badań Opinii Społecznej [CBOS], 2019a).

In 2021 parents with minor children constituted 58.13% of all divorcing couples (Figure 9). There were 53,138 minor children growing up in those families. More than half of the children were aged 7–15 at the time of parental divorce (Figure 10).

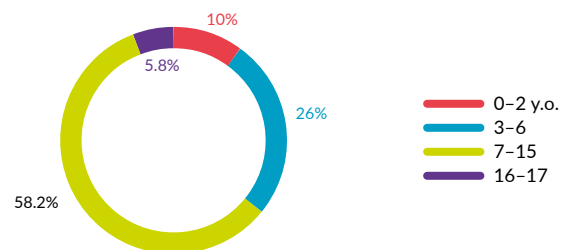
Figure 9. Percentage of divorced couples with minor children (under 18 y.o.) in 1980–2021



Source: GUS (Dziedzinowa Baza Wiedzy Demografia / Domain Database: Demographics).

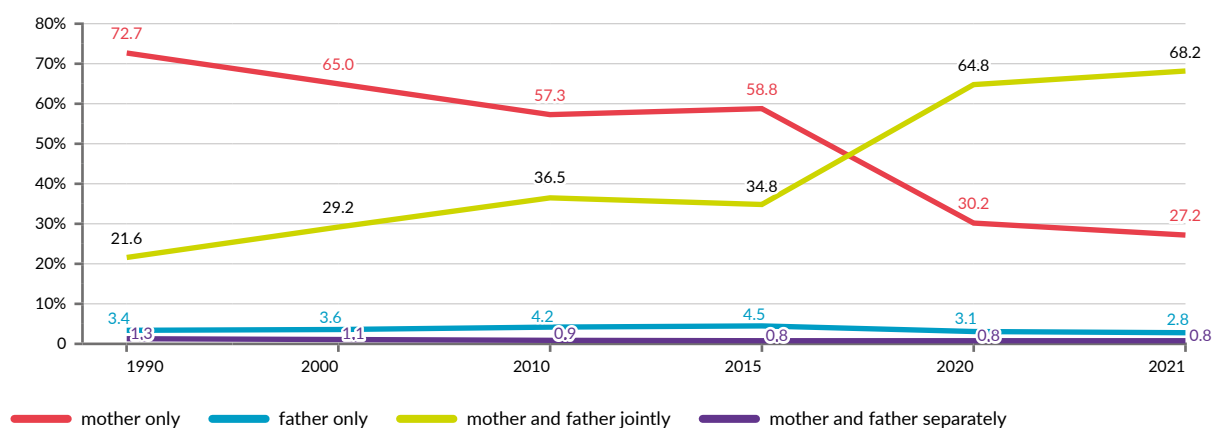
In 2021, courts usually awarded parental authority to both parents (68.2%). Parental authority was awarded to the mother only in 27.2% of cases, and to the father only in 2.8% of cases. A dramatic change can be seen over the past years toward granting joint custody to divorcing parents. As a comparison, in 2000 parental authority was awarded to mothers in 65% of cases, and to both parents in only 29% of cases (Figure 11).

Figure 10. Children of couples divorced in 2021, by age (%)



Source: demografia.stat.gov.pl.

Figure 11. Divorces by court decisions on parental authority and custody of minor children (under 18) in 1990–2021 (%)



Source: GUS, 2021a.

In the past several years the number of separations has systematically decreased: from 11.6 thousand in 2005 to 1,182 in 2019. In 2020 and 2021 there were 720 and 746 separations, respectively.

Despite the growing number of divorces, Poland has one of the lowest divorce rates in Europe, lower than the EU average (Table 7).

Table 7. Number of divorces per 1,000 people of the population in 2019 and 2020 in selected European countries

	2019	2020
Albania	1.8	1.6
Austria	2.0	1.8
Belgium	1.6	1.3
Bulgaria	2.3	2.0
Croatia	1.8	2.7
Montenegro	1.8	1.7
Czechia	2.1	1.9
Denmark	1.9	1.6
Estonia	1.5	1.3
Finland	1.4	1.1
Spain	3.1	2.7
Netherlands	3.1	2.7
Lithuania	3.1	2.3
Luxembourg	1.8	1.5
Latvia	0.7	0.5
Northern Macedonia	1.7	1.7
Malta	1.8	1.7
Germany	1.7	1.4
Norway	2.0	1.7
Poland	1.6	1.2
Portugal	1.2	0.8
Romania	1.7	1.5
Serbia	2.4	2.4
Slovakia	2.5	2.5
Slovenia	1.9	1.8
Switzerland	2.0	1.9
Sweden	1.4	1.3
Turkey	1.0	0.8
EU (27 states)	2.1	1.5
Ukraine	1.6	1.3
Hungary	1.9	1.6
Italy	3.3	2.9

Source: Eurostat (*Crude marriage rate and crude divorce rate*).

It should be emphasised, however, that in most OECD countries the divorce rate per 1,000 people has been decreasing in recent years, and it is a stable trend not related to the pandemic restrictions (OECD, 2022a).

In 2020 most divorcing couples with minor children in Poland made the decision to break up after 5–9 or 10–14 (27% and 28%, respectively) years of marriage.

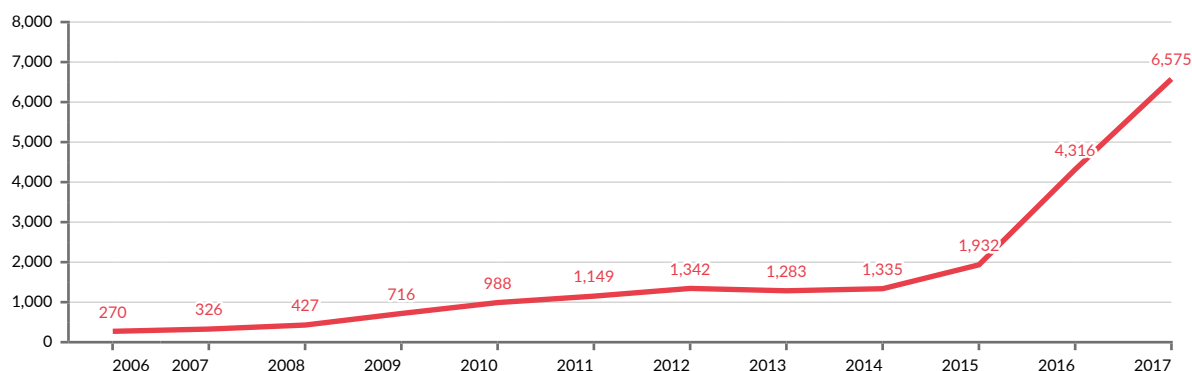
Among divorces granted by courts in 2020, in 66% of cases the divorce petition was filed by the woman. In slightly more than 3% of cases divorce was granted on the grounds of the wife's fault, in 13% – on the grounds of the husband's fault, and in nearly 80% of cases courts granted no-fault divorce (GUS, 2021a).

When asked about the cause of breaking up, divorcing couples were the most likely to report personality differences (46% of all divorces), followed by marital infidelity (20%) and alcohol abuse (14%; GUS, 2021a).

The length of court proceedings depends on whether the court considers the fault of one of the spouses (in such cases the proceedings take from 7 to 12 months) or both spouses (usually one year, but in more than 25% of cases it was over 2 years), or if it is a non-fault divorce (in 40% of such cases the court's final decision was taken within 2–6 months from the time of filing the divorce petition). Compared to 2015, court proceedings took longer in 2020 (GUS, 2021a).

Parental divorce is a painful experience for the couple's children, which may be exacerbated when the divorcing parents are fighting over custody (Izdebska, 2008). Under a 2009 amendment to the Code of Civil Procedure (CCP), judges may refer cases for mediation in order to resolve disputes about satisfying the family's needs, child maintenance, custody, and visitation rights (Article 445, section 2 of CCP).

Figure 12. Court proceedings in family cases resolved through mediation in 2006–2017



Source: Informator Statystyczny Wymiaru Sprawiedliwości (Ministry of Justice Statistical Database).

Data of the Ministry of Justice⁵ show that the number of mediation proceedings in family cases (excluding juvenile cases) in district courts has systematically increased (Figure 12, Table 8). In 2006 there were 270 cases resolved by mediation, including 127 settlements. In 2017 it was 6,575 and 3,887 cases, respectively. More than half of those settlements concerned the amount of child maintenance, one fourth concerned visitation arrangements, and a smaller proportion resolved disputes about the child's place of residence and parental authority.

Table 8. Mediation proceedings in family cases in districts courts in 2018–2021

Year	Judicial procedure					Non-judicial procedure				
	No. of cases referred for mediation by court decision (Art. 183 ³ , section 1 of CCP)	Total no. of mediation proceedings	No. of reports submitted by mediators (Art. 183 ¹³ section 2 of CCP)	Proceedings terminated upon approval of settlement negotiated in mediation process (Art. 183 ¹⁴ sections 1 and 2 of CCP)	Refusal to approve settlement under Art. 183 ¹⁴ section 3 of CCP	No. of reports submitted by mediators (art. 183 ¹³ section 1 of CCP)	No. of applications for settlement approval	Settlement approved		Refusal to approve settlement under Art. 183 ¹⁴ section 3 of CCP
								Total	Including by appending enforcement clause (Art. 183 ¹⁴ section 2 of CCP)	
2018	6,933	6,985	6,507	2,409	33	3,837	4,974	4,869	4,195	274
2019	7,869	7,993	6,617	2,736	37	2,741	3,469	3,208	2,550	131
2020	8,166	8,303	6,119	2,648	27	1,965	2,348	2,127	1,576	94
2021	8,699	8,860	6,758	3,188	32	2,363	2,648	2,364	1,654	125

Source: Informator Statystyczny Wymiaru Sprawiedliwości (Ministry of Justice Statistical Database).

Since 2018 courts with increased frequency have referred parties in family cases (under Article 183¹, section 2 of CCP) for mediation proceedings. In 2018, 6,933 cases were referred for mediation, and in 2021 it was 8,699 cases, out of which 3,188 (45%) were resolved by settlement. Moreover, parties are more likely to use non-judicial mediation proceedings, out of which more than 90% end in reaching a settlement, which becomes approved by the court.

⁵ In 2018 the Ministry of Justice Statistical Database changed the way of presenting data on mediation proceedings in family cases, so data until 2017 cannot be compared to data from 2018 and later. Therefore, these are presented separately in Figure 12 and Table 8.

Child maintenance

In 2021 regional courts issued 32,929 final and legally binding decisions in divorce cases, including 31,381 cases involving children. In the same year the average child maintenance was 1,079 PLN per child.

Table 9. Final and legally binding decisions concerning child maintenance (made in divorce cases) in 2021

Types of child maintenance cases	Total	No. of cases in which child maintenance claims were				Amount of child maintenance granted (total amount in PLN)	Average amount of child maintenance granted per case (amount in PLN)
		allowed in full, partially allowed, or allowed above statement		settlement was reached			
		first-time decision	change of amount	first-time decision	Change of amount		
Total	32,929	31,368	1,561	-	-	35,899,386	1,090.2
Granted for:							
Children (including minors)	31,381	29,922	1,459	x	x	33,861,225	1,079.0
Spouses	1,183	1,110	73	x	x	1,234,878	1,043.9
Spouses and their children	365	336	29	x	x	803,283	2,200.8

Source: Informator Statystyczny Wymiaru Sprawiedliwości (Ministry of Justice Statistical Database).

On the 31st of May 2017 Article 209 of the Penal Code (PC) was amended to more precisely define the criteria of criminal non-support. The previous wording of this article, describing “persistent evasion of an obligation to provide support” was so imprecise, that it was enough to pay small amounts for courts to decide that the persistence criterion was not met. Currently a person who fails to pay maintenance is liable to punishment when the total outstanding amount due equals at least 3 periodic payments. The amendment resulted in a dynamic increase in the number of proceedings initiated (Table 10) and persons convicted under Article 209 of PC. In 2015 courts convicted 10,756 persons of criminal non-support, whereas in 2019 the figure was 49,131 (Figure 13).

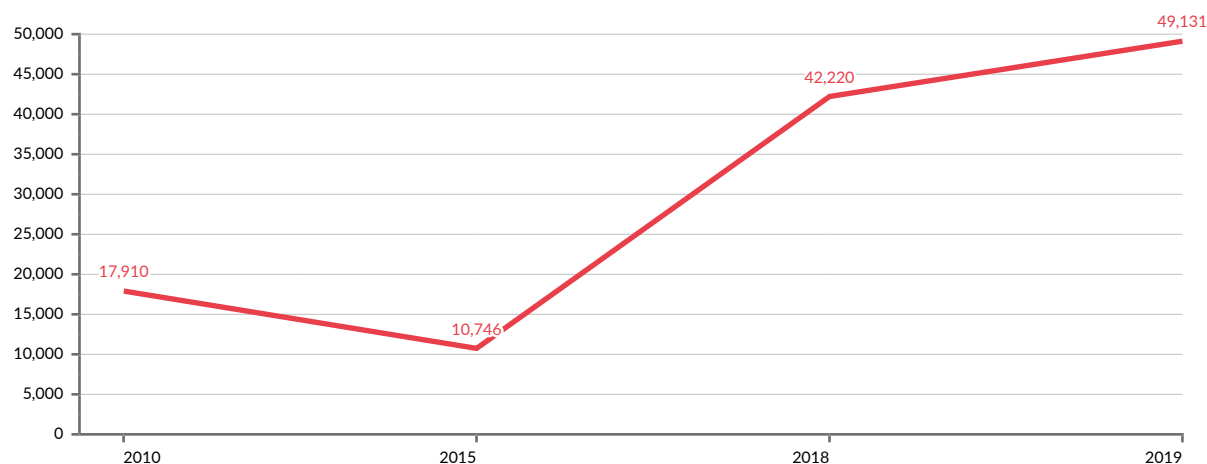
Table 10. Proceedings under Article 209 of PC in 2016–2020

Year	No. of proceedings initiated	No. of offences detected
2016	16,009	9,398
2017*	45,338	16,885
2018	122,156	70,412
2019	91,538	53,194
2020	71,656	41,135

* Article 209 of PC was amended on the 31st of May 2017.

Source: statystyka.policja.pl.

Figure 13. Final convictions of adults under Article 209 of PC in 2010–2019



Source: GUS, 2020, 2022.

At the same time, the National Debt Register (Krajowy Rejestr Długów; KRD, 2022) of the 23rd of June 2022, lists 286,693 maintenance debtors, whose total debt exceeds 12.5 billion PLN. Men constitute 95% of all maintenance debtors. According to the experts who in 2016–2020 worked in the Child Maintenance Team appointed by the Polish Commissioner for Human Rights, the amended Article 209 of PC did not lead to a decrease in parents' maintenance debt to their children (Dawidziuk, 2020).

Data on Alimony Fund benefits, granted when the enforcement of maintenance payments is ineffective and, at the same time, the family struggles financially, is discussed in another chapter of this report, *Child Poverty*.

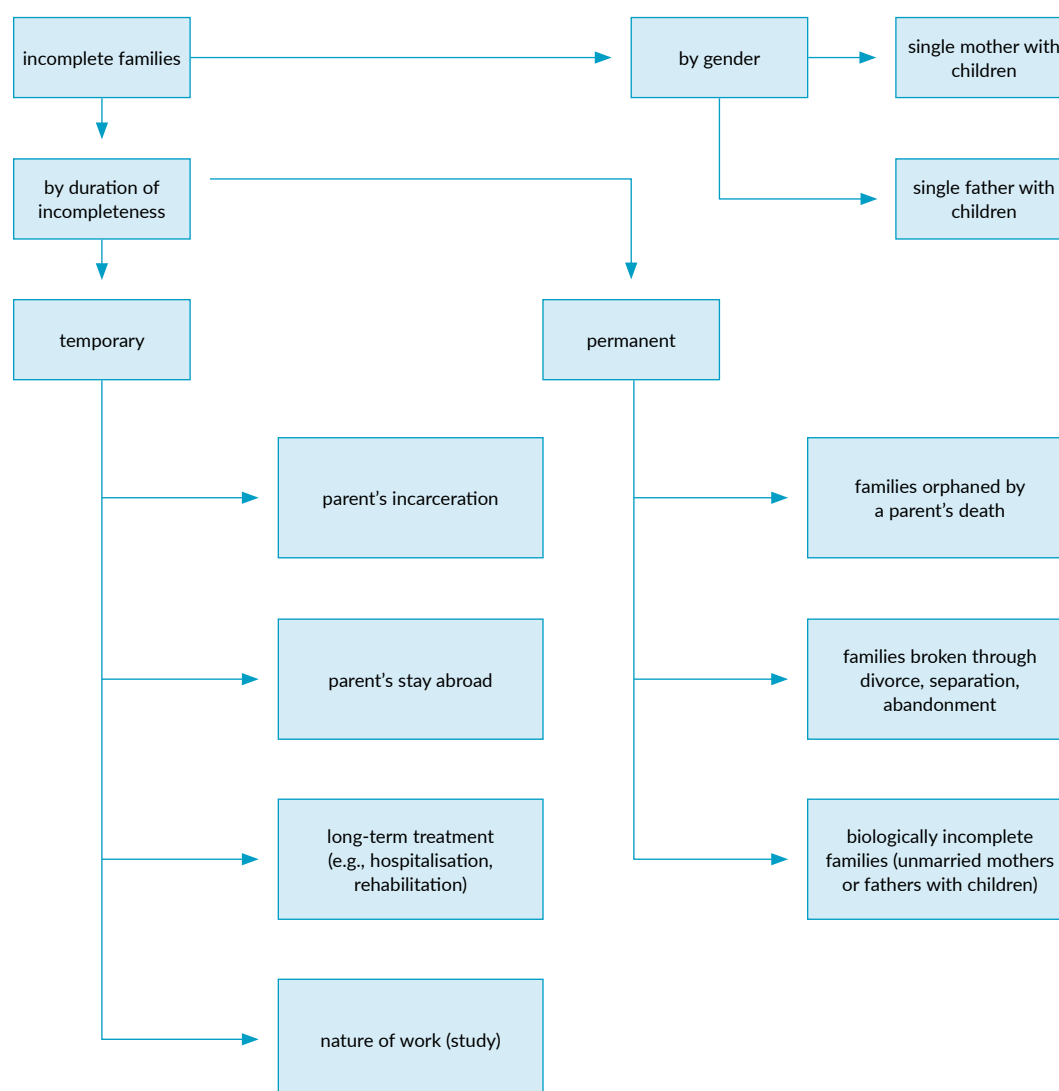
Selected family types

Single parent families

There are several types of incomplete families, categorised according to the parent's gender, the length of separation, or its causes (see the diagram below). There is much debate about the terminology concerning this type of families, in search of a term that would not imply that the incomplete structure of the family in itself generates its dysfunction and impairs the process of intrafamily socialisation (Włodarczyk, 2021). Today families in which one parent looks after his or her own children or the partner's children living in the same household, are most often referred to as *monoparental*, *one parent* or *single parent* families.

The available data on monoparental families is presented in the section "Families in Poland".

Diagram 1. Classification of incomplete families according to the causes and duration of one parent's absence, and the main caregiver's gender



Source: Raław, Twarkowska (2013).

Families separated by parental migration

International migration is not a new phenomenon in Poland, but in recent years, in particular after Poland joined the European Union, there has been a considerable growth in external migration, mostly in search of work and economic opportunities.

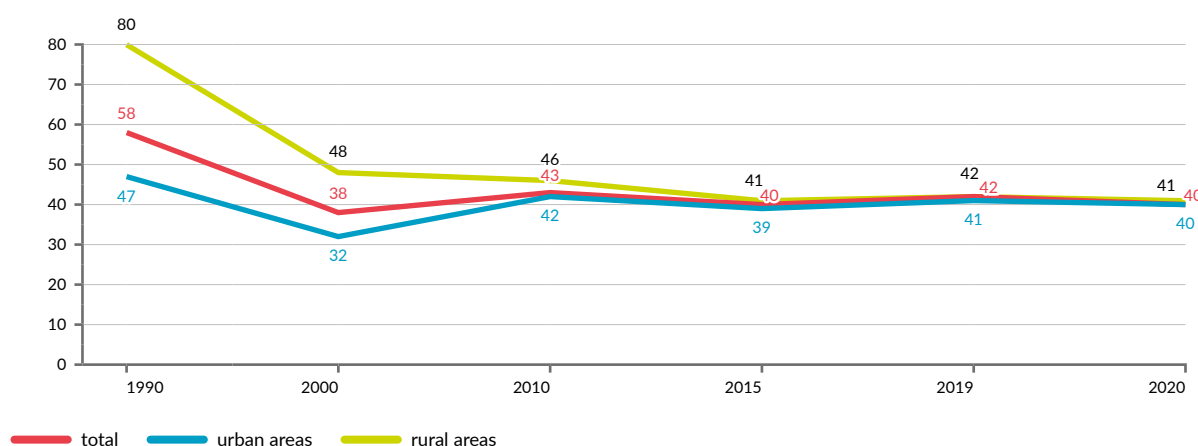
According to Statistics Poland (GUS, 2021d), in 2019 more than 2.4 million Poles were staying temporarily abroad. This data is limited to those who stayed abroad longer than 3 months, so it does not include cross-border seasonal workers who stay abroad for a shorter time. Among temporary emigrants, there are 13.5% of children and young people under 19.

Children who go abroad with both or one of their parents are also at risk of the negative effects of emigration, even if their financial, social welfare, and educational situation has objectively improved. They have to adapt to a new culture, they lose contact with their friends and family who stayed in Poland, they often do not speak the new country's language, and they have difficulty making new friends. Additionally, their hard-working parents do not give them enough time and attention. At the same time, staying abroad is an opportunity for children. For example, they can learn a foreign language, which may improve their position on the labour market in the future⁶. Still, many more families choose another arrangement: only one of the parents (rather than both) go abroad and the children stay in Poland. A survey conducted at the request of the Ombudsman for Children in 2014 (Walczak, 2014) found that temporary separation from at least one parent was experienced by one fifth of Polish primary and secondary school students aged 10–19. Out of this group, 68% experienced their fathers' emigration, 14.8% were separated from their mothers, and 17.2% had to cope with both parents going abroad. The average duration of fathers' stay abroad was nearly twice as long as mothers' emigration (7.6 and 3.9 months, respectively). All that results in a separate category of incomplete families, characterised by temporary absence of one or both parents. On the one hand, such families' living conditions may often improve, but on the other hand, their parents' absence may have a negative effect on children's functioning and their feeling of safety in such families and contribute to behaviour problems. It can also affect the relationship between the spouses and weaken their bonds with other family members (Tarka, 2014)⁷.

Teen parents

Teen or minor parents are those who were under 18 when their child was born. Since the 1990s there has been a general downward trend in the number of children born by very young mothers (except for a slight increase in 2008–2010), with the decline occurring faster in rural than in urban areas.

Figure 14. Fertility rate: live births per 1000 women in the 15–19 age group



Source: GUS, 2016, 2021a.

⁶ See also: Slany et al., 2014; Ślusarczyk, 2014.

⁷ See also: Sordyl-Lipnicka, 2020.

Table 11. Live births in 2020, by mother's age, women aged 15–18

Mother's age	No. of births
15 and younger	168
16	482
17	1,054
18	1,961

Source: GUS, 2021a.

In 2020 teen mothers gave birth to 3,665 children (Table 11); 741 men under 19 became fathers. The number of petitions to courts for permission to marry, filed by young women under the legal age of marriage, has been declining: in 2020 courts granted 144 such permissions and a year later 133 (Department of Statistics and Management Information, Ministry of Justice Department of Strategy and European Funds). In 2020, 122 women under the age of 18 entered into a marriage. This means that pregnant girls do not feel much pressure to get married, but also that they do not use the opportunity to obtain full legal capacity to perform acts in law and full parental authority over their children by entering into a marriage (Dziewanowska, 2019). Considering the best interest of a teen mother and her child, their complex legal situation and limitations (such as those resulting from immaturity) in providing appropriate care for the child, the problem of teen parents is a big public challenge.

Teen parenthood is associated with additional (not just parenting) stress experienced by young parents, caused by problems such as difficulty reconciling school with parenting, inability to provide for the family, and the lack of their own home. Teen parents are usually immature and unprepared – emotionally, socially, and economically – for the parental role. Because minor parents do not have full citizen rights and legal capacity, the court appoints a legal guardian for their child (for example, the teen mother's mother). Teen mothers living in institutional alternative care (residential facilities) or educational and correctional facilities (such as youth educational centres or juvenile detention centres) face a particularly complex situation (Dziewanowska, 2019; Skowrońska-Pućka, 2016).

Same-sex couples with children

It is difficult to determine the exact number of children raised by same-sex couples in Poland. There are several considerable obstacles to collecting such data. First, information about sexual orientation is regarded as sensitive data and as such, it is not collected in general surveys. Second, a lack of legal regulations concerning same-sex couples (and children raised by them) makes it impossible to analyse their situation based on official data. Furthermore, given strong prejudices against LGBTQ persons, many of them hide their orientation or disclose it only to their loved ones. According to estimates, there are 46.5 thousand same-sex couples raising children in Poland, although the figure is undoubtedly underestimated, given the above mentioned obstacles (Wycisk, 2014). These relationships are sometimes called “families of choice” or “rainbow families”, although those talking or writing about the LGBTQ community in the mainstream public discourse, often avoid the term “family”, and non-heterosexual relationships are presented as separate from the family or, at best, as aspiring to be seen as alternative families (Mizielińska and Stasińska, 2014).

Families in which parental roles are played by same-sex persons may be formed in a number of ways. Homosexual persons discover and disclose their sexual orientation at different stages of life. They may have a history of heterosexual relationships, in which they had children. When they form a relationship with a same-sex person, they continue to raise their children with support from the new partner. Other couples may become parents through adoption, fostering, insemination or in-vitro fertilisation (none of these forms is allowed by law in today's Poland; the Act of the 25th of June 2015 on treating infertility [Dz.U./Journal of Laws, item 1087] allows assisted reproductive procedures only for heterosexual married or cohabiting couples; if the partners are not married, a statement of cohabitation is required from the donor and the recipient).

A report published by the Polish Academy of Sciences (Polska Akademia Nauk, PAN; Mizielińska et al., 2014) shows there are about 2 million gays and lesbians in Poland. In a survey conducted by PAN among persons who lived

in non-heterosexual relationships for 6 months or longer, 9% of the respondents reported they had children, the majority of whom came from the respondents' earlier heterosexual relationships. Only 8% of non-heterosexual persons' children were born in their current same-sex relationships, mostly formed by two women.

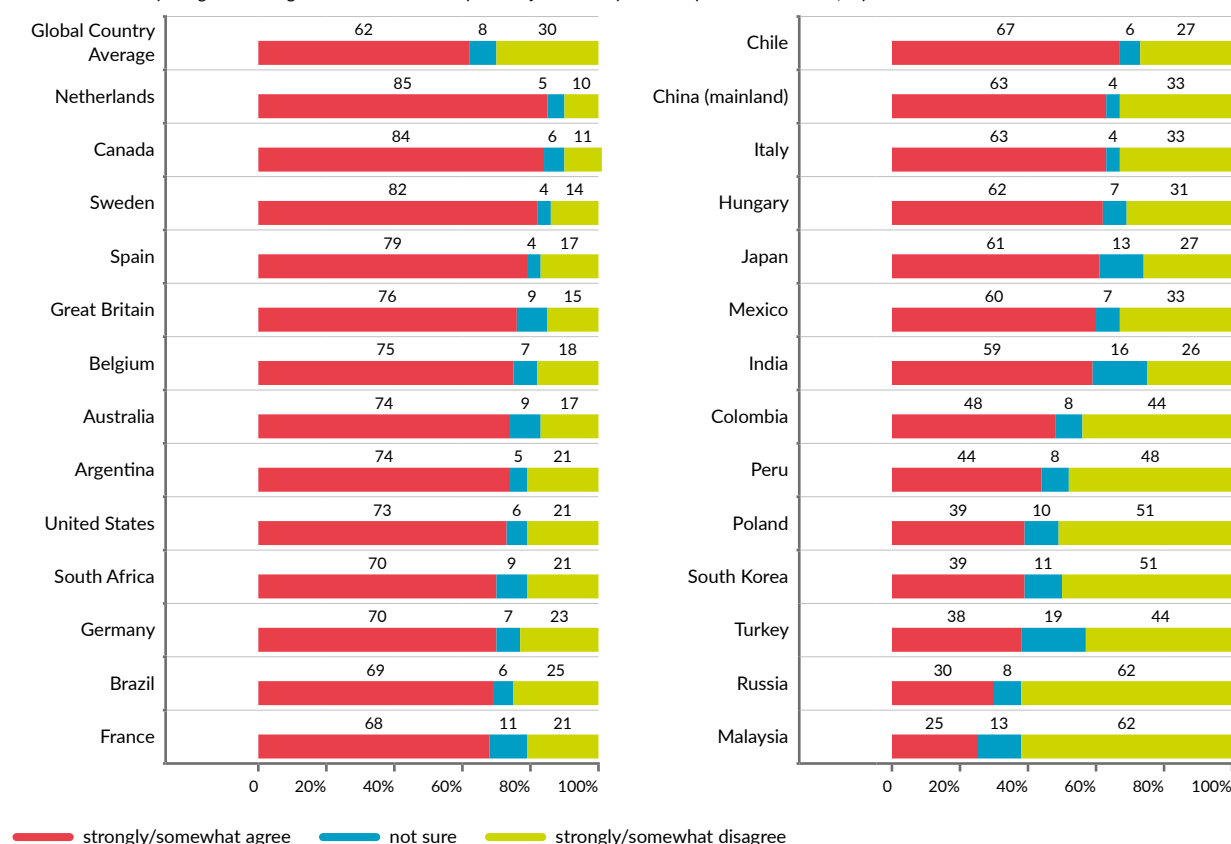
Among the LGBTQA respondents participating in a survey titled *The situation of LGBTQA persons in Poland*, 4% had children: 2.5% were biological parents, 0.5% were adoptive parents, and 0.9% were actual caregivers or social parents (i.e., parented their partner's children). 8.7% of the sample were planning to become parents in the next 5 years (Kampania Przeciw Homofobii and Stowarzyszenie Lambda Warszawa, 2021).

Children from non-heterosexual families are at a much higher risk of exclusion due to negative stereotypes and homophobic tendencies present in the Polish society.

A survey by the Public Opinion Research Centre (Centrum Badania Opinii Publicznej, CBOS; 2019b) shows that only one fourth of Poles regard same-sex couples raising children as families, and the percentage has not changed since 2013.

Figure 15. Opinions about same-sex parenting, by country

To what extent do you agree or disagree that same-sex couples are just as likely as other parents to successfully raise children?



Source: Ipsos, 2021.

In the 2021 *LGBT+ Pride 2021 Global Survey* 51% of the Polish respondents replied they *strongly* or *somewhat disagreed* with the statement that same-sex couples are just as likely as other parents to successfully raise children, which places Poland among countries with the lowest levels of acceptance for same-sex parenting (Ipsos, 2021).

The legal status of these families is complicated, too. According to the law, the non-biological parent has no relationship to the child, which means they cannot make decisions about significant matters concerning the child, have no right to care for the child if the biological parent dies, and have no child maintenance obligation after leaving the family. Moreover, the unclear legal status of the non-biological parent makes it difficult for them to cooperate with the school or health care services, as they are not seen as the child's rightful caregiver.

Incarcerated mothers of young children

Pregnancy is not considered a mitigating circumstance by the Polish law and – unlike in many European countries – does not lead to obligatory deferral of a prison sentence (Arczewska, 2020).

There are two mother and infant homes operating within prisons in Poland: at the Penal Institution No. 1 in Grudziądz and at the Penal Institution in Krzywaniec⁸. They were established to address the particular situation of incarcerated pregnant women and mothers with infants. They ensure medical care and good living conditions for pregnant women, mothers and their children, and allow incarcerated mothers to provide continuous and direct care for their infants. Upon the guardianship court's consent, mothers can stay there with their children until the age of 3. Prior to being placed in one of those two mother-infant homes, a woman is referred to the Penal Institution No.1 in Grudziądz, which runs the only prison maternity ward in Poland.

Table 12. Children staying in Mother and Infant Homes in Krzywaniec and Grudziądz in 2016–2021

	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
No. of children staying in MalHs at Penal Institutions in Krzywaniec and Grudziądz	101	115	130	120	114	144
No. of children born at PI in Grudziądz	33	52	63	64	49	71
No. of children who left MalHs, including children who left MalHs with mothers	43 children (38 children with mothers)	60 children (54 children with mothers)	68 children (59 children with mothers)	101 children (82 children with mothers)	64 children (58 children with mothers)	77 children (62 children with mothers)

Source: Centralny Zarząd Służby Więziennej (Central Board of Prison Service).

⁸ See also: Arczewska, 2020; Teleszewska, 2018

”

My parents don't care about my feelings. All they care about is whether I get good grades. When I am in a bad mood and have no power to do a thing, they make a scene. They resent me for sitting in my room. I'm very sad about this, but I don't let them know it.

17-year-old girl

A quote from phone calls and emails to 116 111 Helpline for Children and Young People

Children in refugee families

Between 2016 and 2021 more than 36 thousand persons requested international protection in Poland (compared to 78 thousand between 2008 and 2015), including over 19 thousand persons from Russia (including Chechnya), 3,331 from Ukraine, 2,810 from Belarus, 2,046 from Afghanistan, about 1.5 thousand from Iraq and Tajikistan. Thirty eight percent of them were children under 13.5% – adolescents aged 14–18, and 57% – adults. Girls and women constituted 89% of all foreigners asking for protection⁹.

Data on children from Ukraine seeking safety in Poland after fleeing the war, is discussed in chapter *Situation of Ukrainian children in Poland*.

Childcare

Division of household chores

The number of Poles who prefer more egalitarian division of household work has been increasing in recent years.

In 2020, 58% of all respondents (59% of females and 57% of males) supported a family model, in which the man and the woman share housework equally (12 percentage points more than in 2013). Interestingly, in 2013 the egalitarian arrangement was significantly more likely to be preferred by women (50%) than by men (43%). Today, the difference has disappeared: 20% of all respondents (20% of women and 19% of men) supported the arrangement in which both spouses work outside the home and the woman is additionally responsible for housework, childcare, etc., and 14% (17% of men and 11% of women) chose the traditional patriarchal model, in which only the husband works outside the home and the female does housework and looks after children. The arrangement in which the woman is the chief family supporter was less likely to be preferred. The percentage of respondents who chose the most patriarchal model dropped from 23% to 14% during 7 years, and the percentage of those preferring the arrangement with disproportionate female contribution dropped from 22% to 20% (CBOS, 2020a).

In the CBOS survey the respondents who live with their partner (including husband or wife) were also asked about the kind of family model actually implemented in their current relationships. Compared to 2013, more respondents reported the egalitarian division of work, while the proportion of those reporting the traditional and disproportionate (both female and male) models decreased (Table 14).

⁹ Data obtained in July 2022 from the Department of Analyses and Migration Statistics of the Office for Foreigners.

Table 13. Preferred family model in 1997–2020

	Percentages of responses by the year of the study						
	1997	2000	2004	2006	2012	2013	2020
Egalitarian: the husband (male partner) and the wife (female partner) spend similar amounts of time on paid work and make equal contributions to housework and childcare.	37	38	47	41	48	46	58
Traditional: only the husband (male partner) works outside the home and earns enough money to provide for the family; the wife (female partner) performs unpaid family work, i.e., housework, childcare, etc.	38	42	27	32	22	23	14
Disproportionate female: both the husband (male partner) and the wife (female partner) work outside the home, but the husband (male partner) spends more time on paid work, while the wife (female partner) combines paid work with domestic tasks, such as housework, childcare, etc.	23	19	23	24	27	22	20
Disproportionate male: both the husband (male partner) and the wife (female partner) work outside the home, but the wife (female partner) spends more time on paid work, while the husband (male partner) combines paid work with domestic tasks, such as housework, childcare, etc.	–*	–*	–*	–*	–*	6	5
Reversed: only the wife (female partner) works outside the home, earning enough money to provide for the family; the husband (male partner) performs unpaid family work, i.e., housework, childcare, etc.	1	0	1	1	1	1	1
It's hard to say	1	1	1	2	2	2	3

* In those studies the cafeteria did not include the disproportionate male model.

Source: CBOS (2020a).

Table 14. Actually implemented family models

Model	Percentages of responses by the year of the study*	
	2013	2020
Egalitarian: the husband (male partner) and the wife (female partner) spend similar amounts of time on paid work and make equal contributions to housework and childcare.	27	37
Traditional: only the husband (male partner) works outside the home and earns enough money to provide for the family; the wife (female partner) performs unpaid family work, i.e., housework, childcare, etc.	20	17
Disproportionate female: both the husband (male partner) and the wife (female partner) work outside the home, but the husband (male partner) spends more time on paid work, while the wife (female partner) combines paid work with domestic tasks, such as housework, childcare, etc.	23	21
Disproportionate male: both the husband (male partner) and the wife (female partner) work outside the home, but the wife (female partner) spends more time on paid work, while the husband (male partner) combines paid work with domestic tasks, such as housework, childcare, etc.	8	4
Reversed: only the wife (female partner) works outside the home, earning enough money to provide for the family; the husband (male partner) performs unpaid family work, i.e., housework, childcare, etc.	3	1
Neither the man nor the woman perform paid work	14	12
Other / Hard to say	5	7

* Percentages of respondents living in marriages and cohabiting relationships (n = 641).

Source: CBOS, 2020a.

It is also interesting to compare the respondents' reports about their preferred model and the one actually implemented in their own relationships (Table 15).

Table 15. Preferred vs. actually implemented family model, by respondents' choices (%)

Model	Percentages of responses	
	Preferred model	Implemented model
Egalitarian: the husband (male partner) and the wife (female partner) spend similar amounts of time on paid work and make equal contributions to housework and childcare.	58	37
Traditional: only the husband (male partner) works outside the home and earns enough money to provide for the family; the wife (female partner) performs unpaid family work, i.e., housework, childcare, etc.	14	17
Disproportionate female: both the husband (male partner) and the wife (female partner) work outside the home, but the husband (male partner) spends more time on paid work, while the wife (female partner) combines paid work with domestic tasks, such as housework, childcare, etc.	20	21
Disproportionate male: both the husband (male partner) and the wife (female partner) work outside the home, but the wife (female partner) spends more time on paid work, while the husband (male partner) combines paid work with domestic tasks, such as housework, childcare, etc.	5	4
Reversed: only the wife (female partner) works outside the home, earning enough money to provide for the family; the husband (male partner) performs unpaid family work, i.e., housework, childcare, etc.	1	1
Neither the man nor the woman perform paid work	–	12
Other / Hard to say	3	7

Source: CBOS, 2020a.

The egalitarian model, which was preferred by the largest proportion of respondents, turned out to be actually implemented by fewer than two fifths of the respondents living with a partner (37%). The traditional model was adopted by 17% of the respondents, i.e. more than chose it as their preferred model. The highest consistency (87%) between the preferred and actually implemented model was found among persons applying the egalitarian arrangement in their relationships.

Among those whose relationships were based on the traditional or disproportionate female models, almost half of the respondents were not satisfied with their status quo and would like to adopt the egalitarian model.

This data shows that considerable change occurred between 2013 and 2020, when it comes to the acceptance of the egalitarian model and its perception as beneficial for both women and men (*preferred*). However, changes in actual household practices are much slower and many of them are still based on women's bigger responsibility for housework.

The division of childcare tasks is also changing. According to some researchers, it is in parenting, or more precisely, in changes in the perception of the father's role and in fathers' contribution to childcare, where we can

see the consequences of wide-range social change in the past decades, such as women's activity in the labour market, women's rights and gender equality movements, and reshaping of the modern family. The emergence of new patterns of fatherhood is a process of redefining parenting and traditional parental roles, which generates a new quality based on an assumption that both women and men can be professionally active and share childcare tasks and housework (Bierca, 2019). It needs to be emphasised, though, that the pace of the process varies across social groups and depends on a number of factors. Findings from social surveys show that also in this respect respondents' declarations go further than their everyday family practises.

At the level of self-reported opinions, most respondents (86% of women and 80% of men) believe that both parents should equally share childcare responsibilities. Furthermore, 80% of women and 79% of men think that fathers are as good caregivers as mothers; 80% and 69%, respectively, believe that apart from biological limitations (such as breastfeeding) men and women can equally well take care of a child under the age of one, and 85% and 78%, respectively, think that an infant (a child under one) needs contact with the father as much as with the mother. When

it comes to practise, though, only 13% of fathers report they have a bigger share in caring for their children. At the same time, 60% of women see themselves as primary caregivers, and 22% of women and 30% of men agree with the statement that the man should provide for the family and the woman should do the housework and take care of the children (IQS, 2020).

In 16% of Polish households, the woman performs all childcare work, while in 32% of households "childcare is shared" (CBOS, 2018).

In 2022 the Empowering Children Foundation conducted a survey of Polish fathers (Włodarczyk, 2022). According to the vast majority of the respondents, the mother and the father should equally engage in talking to their child about his or her problems (85.0%) and making important decisions concerning the child (83.7%). When it comes to providing for the family, 63.1% of fathers believe both parents are equally responsible, while 29.7% think it is mainly the father's responsibility.

With respect to childcare, the fathers participating in the survey supported an equal division of tasks related to play and helping the child with schoolwork (81.6% and 78.2%, respectively). For other activities, most fathers supported shared responsibility, although comparing to the previous edition of the survey (in 2014), the percentages are lower, and more fathers believe it is a separate responsibility of the mother or the father (Table 16).

Table 16. Sharing childcare tasks: fathers' opinions in 2014 and 2022

Activity	Year	Mainly mother	Mainly father	Mother and father equally	Don't know / Hard to say
Baby care	2014	25.9%	1.8%	71.9%	0.4%
	2022	31.2%	6.3%	60.8%	1.7%
Playing with the child	2014	1.4%	2.0%	96.4%	0.2%
	2022	7.9%	8.6%	81.6%	1.9%
Sports	2014	0.2%	20.9%	78.3%	0.6%
	2022	4.5%	28.3%	64.8%	2.4%
Helping with schoolwork	2014	7.6%	2.0%	89.2%	1.2%
	2022	10.8%	8.3%	78.2%	2.6%
Communicating with teachers	2014	14.7%	2.0%	83.1%	0.2%
	2022	16.9%	6.4%	74.9%	1.8%
Preparing meals for the child	2014	34.1%	2.0%	63.2%	0.8%
	2022	28.2%	6.7%	63.6%	1.5%
Doctors' appointments, looking after the child when ill	2014	16.3%	1.0%	82.1%	0.6%
	2022	17.3%	6.4%	74.4%	1.9%

Source: Włodarczyk, 2022.

In 2022, asked about the division of responsibilities in their family's everyday life, the fathers were more likely than in 2014 to report their engagement in all areas of childcare. What seems particularly interesting is change in baby care or caring for children under the age of one. Comparing to 2014, more fathers not only believe that the father should be the primary caregiver (an increase from 1.8% in 2014 to 6.3% in 2022), but also actually were (or are) the main person looking after their baby (an increase from about 2.8% to about 6.6%, respectively; Table 16 and Table 17).

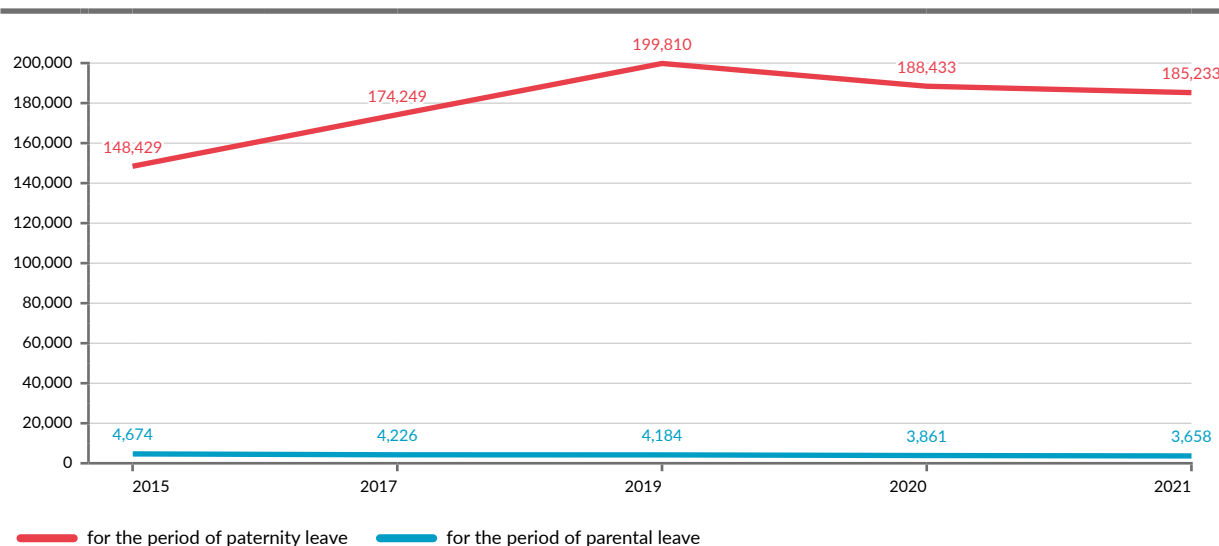
Table 17. Sharing childcare tasks: actual practises in 2014 and 2022

Activity	Year	Mainly mother	Mainly father	Mother and father equally	Don't know / Hard to say
Baby care	2014	39.0%	2.8%	52.6%	4.6%
	2022	32.4%	6.6%	57.2%	3.7%
Playing with the child	2014	8.0%	4.8%	85.9%	1.0%
	2022	8.5%	12.7%	75.2%	3.6%
Sports	2014	3.4%	30.7%	58.6%	6.2%
	2022	6.2%	33.0%	55.4%	5.4%
Helping with schoolwork	2014	15.3%	5.4%	67.3%	11.0%
	2022	17.0%	11.2%	65.3%	6.5%
Communicating with teachers	2014	26.5%	5.4%	57.8%	9.8%
	2022	24.9%	8.8%	63.5%	2.7%
Preparing meals for the child	2014	40.4%	3.8%	54.6%	0.4%
	2022	32.5%	8.7%	56.1%	2.7%
Doctors' appointments, looking after the child when ill	2014	29.5%	2.4%	67.7%	0
	2022	24.9%	8.8%	63.5%	2.7%

Source: Włodarczyk, 2022.

The number of fathers using short paternity leaves increased significantly between 2015 and 2021. They are now used by about 50% of all fathers of children born each year, but we should remember that not all fathers are eligible for the leave. The number of fathers who use some of the parental leave that can be taken by both employed parents, is very low relative to the number of mothers using it – fathers constitute about 1% of all those using the parental leave.

Figure 16. The number of fathers receiving childbirth benefits in 2015–2021 for the period of paternity leave^a and for the period of parental leave^b



^a Paternity leave – a 2-week leave to be used by the father within the first 24 months of the child's life (male employees are entitled to it regardless of the mother's entitlement).

^b Parental leave – a leave to be taken after the maternity leave, to which only the mother is entitled; to be used: entirely by one of the parents-employees, by both parents-employees at the same time, or by both parents-employees taking turns and using it in proportions (as of 28th July 2022).

Source: Portal Statystyczny ZUS (psz.zus.pl).

Men with children under 10 who used the parental leave, reported the following motivations to take it: wanting to help their child's mother, feeling equally responsible for the child, and wishing to take an active part in childcare. Fathers who did not use the parental leave, listed the following barriers: financial reasons (29%), opposition from the child's mother (21%), and the fear of losing their job (15%; IQS, 2020).

In the father survey of 2022 more than half (61.9%) of 920 fathers of children born in 2010 or later, used the paternity leave. Those who did not, reported the following reasons for not taking the leave: no such need at home (31.1%), inability to take the leave due to the nature of employment or responsibilities at work (22.99), and wanting to work (17.4%; Włodarczyk, 2022). This may reflect low social awareness of the importance of the father-child relationship early in life.

Numerous studies show that early paternal engagement in childcare allows fathers to build a secure attachment relationship with the child, which is a basis of the child's mental health. It also helps fathers to develop

better caregiving and parenting skills, and to get to know their child, his or her character, habits, and preferences, which makes the father a more attentive and mindful parent, able to ensure more emotional security at each stage of the child's life. The earlier the father becomes engaged in childcare, the stronger the positive effect of his care on the child's emotional, social (Sarkadi et al., 2008), and cognitive development. Furthermore, early paternal care improves the child's academic achievement, self-esteem, and social functioning, and is associated with fewer conflicts with the law, a lower risk of substance abuse in adolescence, and a reduced risk of developing mental disorders and engaging in self-harming behaviour, including suicide attempts (Kuramoto-Crawford et al., 2017). Additionally, sharing parenting responsibilities requires such skills as open communication, expressing and understanding needs, and cooperating for the best interest of the child. In families based on responsibility sharing, harmony in relationships and low levels of stress in both parents foster the development of secure attachment patterns in children, which become a template for valuable relationships later in

life. It is also a protective factor against perinatal depression and abusive relationships (Forston et al., 2016; Li et al., 2011), including corporal punishment. It may also prevent conflict in the family (Fundacja Share the Care, 2021).

Combining work and family life

Conditions that help to reconcile work with the parental role can be divided into three categories: institutional (family-supportive policies), structural (characteristics of the labour market: availability of employment, job retention, flexible work arrangements, etc.), and cultural (perceived roles of men and women). Analyses show that in terms of facilitating the reconciliation of professional and parental roles Poland for years was lagging behind many European countries.

Table 18. Examples of family-supportive policies implemented in Poland in the 21st century

Year	Action
2010	Introduction of parental leave (initially one-week long, since 2012 two-week long)
2011	Nurseries Act and "Maluch" (Toddler) programme (supporting local governments to increase the availability of institutional forms of care for children under 3)
2013	Introduction of parental leave (32 weeks after childbirth)
2013	"Kindergarten for a Zloty" programme
2013	"Treating Infertility with In Vitro Fertilisation" programme
2014	Big Family Card
2014	"Housing for the Young" programme (ended in 2018)
2015	"Kosiniakowe" – a 1000 PLN parental benefit paid during 12 months after childbirth; it can be applied for by mothers and fathers (the latter under certain conditions) who do not receive the maternity benefit
2015	"Zloty for zloty" principle: the family benefit will be paid even after the income threshold is exceeded (the amount of the benefit will then be reduced by the exceeding amount)
2016	"Family 500+" programme
2016	Stopping the government programme "Treating Infertility with In Vitro Fertilisation"
2016	"Comprehensive Protection of Reproductive Health" programme
2018	"Good Start" programme (one-time support in the amount of 300 PLN for all children starting a new year at school, regardless of the family's income)
2019	Modification of "Family 500+" programme (the benefit is now paid for every child, with no income threshold)
2019	"Mama 4+" programme (special retirement benefit for women who gave birth to and raised four or more children)

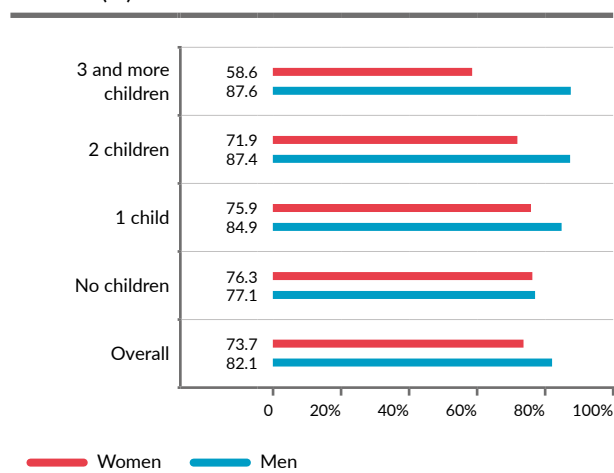
Source: Sikorska, 2021.

Although in recent years various family policy initiatives have been introduced, experts emphasise that many of them are inconsistent and ad hoc. While a systematic increase in the number of day care facilities for children under 3 supports parents in reconciling work with parenting, some other measures, for example the extended maternity leave and the introduction of the optional parental leave¹⁰ may exacerbate gender inequalities on the labour market and perpetuate the traditional division of housework and child-care responsibilities (Sikorska, 2021).

Poles are among nations with the most working hours per week – 40 or more for 91% of the nation's workforce. In contrast, in Denmark the figure is 20% of the nation's workforce. In the 25–45 age group, 30% of Danish men and 16% of Danish women work 40 or more hours weekly, whereas in Poland it is 96% of men and 89% of women (OECD, 2022b).

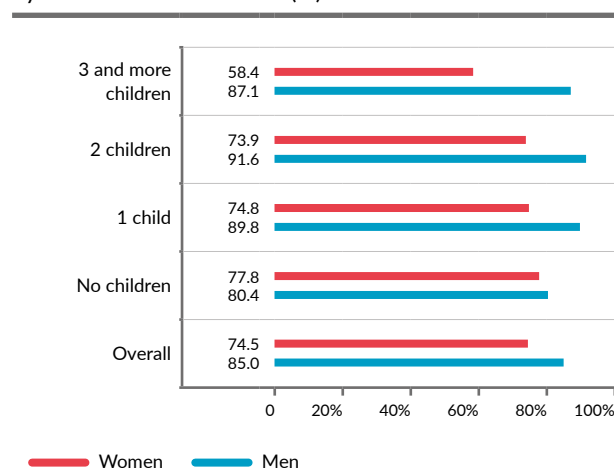
According to Eurostat, the employment rate in Poland in the 25–49 age group in 2021 was 82.1% for the general population of men and 73.7% for the general population of women (in 2015 it was 86.4% and 74.5%, respectively). The average EU rate in this age group is 85.0% for men and 74.5% for women (Figure 17 and Figure 18).

Figure 17. Professional activity rates among women and men aged 25–49 in Poland in 2021, by the number of children (%)



Source: Eurostat.

Figure 18. Average professional activity rates among women and men aged 25–49 in EU countries in 2021, by the number of children (%)

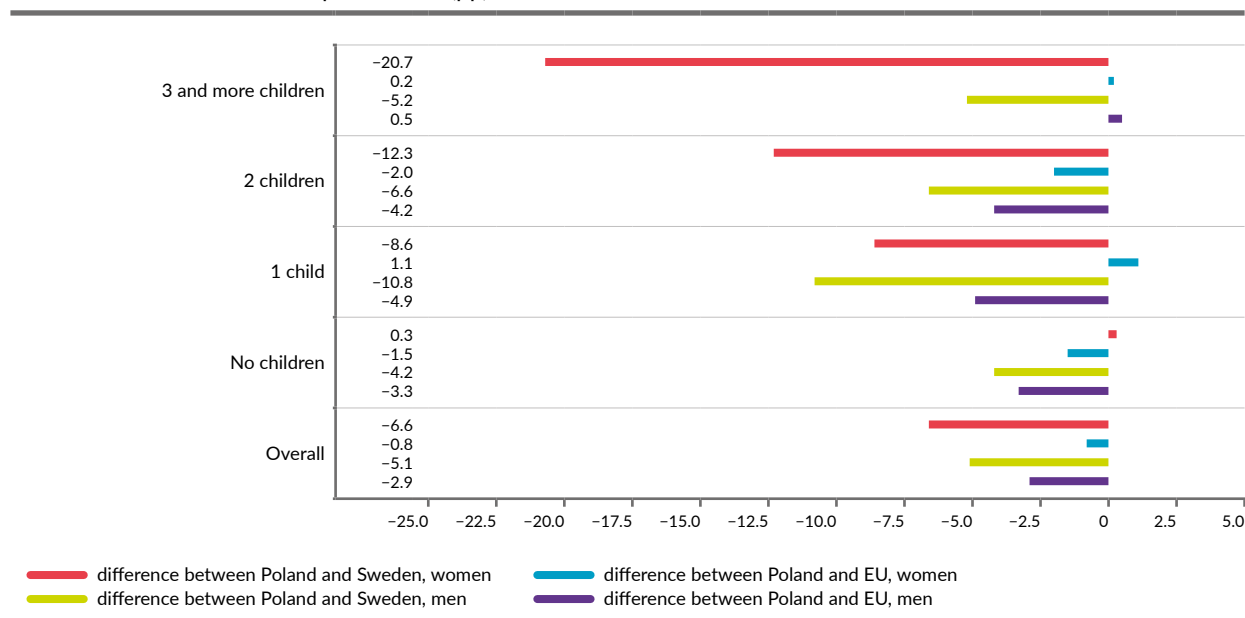


Source: Eurostat.

The gender difference in employment rates increases with the number of children. This pattern, although to varying degrees, is observed in the vast majority of EU countries, including Poland.

¹⁰ Regulations concerning the paternity leave are going to change, as by August 2022 Poland is obliged to introduce the provisions of the EU Work-Life Balance Directive to its legislation, to ensure successful reconciliation of work and family life.

Figure 19. Differences in professional activity rates of women and men aged 25–49 between Poland and Sweden and between Poland and the European Union (pp)



Source: Own analysis, based on: Eurostat [LFST_HHEREDCH__custom_3197936].

Polish women with three or more children are more likely to work outside the home than the EU average (compared to women with the same number of children). In contrast, Polish men – except for fathers with three or more children – have lower professional activity rate than the EU average. A comparison of professional activity rates in Poland and Sweden, a country with one of the highest activity rates in Europe and a range of systemic policies to support parents, shows how significant effects such solutions may have. Poles' professional activity, regardless of their family status, is lower than in Sweden, except for Polish women with no children who are more likely to be active on the labour market than childless women in Sweden, although the difference is only 3 pp. The more children women have, the more professionally passive Polish women are in comparison with their peers in Sweden. For mothers with three or more children the difference in professional activity between Poland and Sweden is more than 20 percentage points.

One important aspect of balancing work and family life is the possibility to work part-time. It is not evenly distributed between women and men: in 2020, 30% of all female employees in the EU had part-time jobs, compared to

just 8% of men. The figures varied across member states. The highest percentages of women working part-time were reported in the Netherlands (76%), Germany (48%), Austria (47%) and Belgium (40%), and the highest rates of part-time employment among men were found in the Netherlands (29%), Denmark (15%), and Sweden (14%). The lowest rates of part-time work, among both women and men, were reported in Bulgaria (2% for both genders). According to Eurostat, in Poland in 2020 the figures were 8.9% and 3.4%, respectively.

The COVID-19 pandemic had a huge effect on the labour market and on women's and men's professional activity. With respect to work-life balance, it is worth mentioning the sudden popularisation of remote working or working from home (especially in some types of work environments), and the challenges related to combining professional work with caring for children who learned remotely at home or had limited access to care and educational facilities. According to Statistics Poland (GUS), in the 4th quarter of 2020, 1,609 thousand Poles, i.e. 9.7% of the national workforce, worked from home, including more women than men (10.9% and 8.1%, respectively). A survey of parents with school-age children, conducted

for Librus (an educational platform), found that in 2021 41% of parents worked on site (at their employer's premises), while the others performed remote or hybrid work. Most respondents (67.2%) reported that the pandemic had reorganised their work, in terms of both working hours, and their job responsibilities. Only one third of working parents (27.9%) said the pandemic had not changed anything in their professional life (Szczudlińska-Kanoś and Marzec, 2021). A survey of women employed at different corporate positions found that 43% of the respondents worked remotely full-time, compared to only 4% before the pandemic (Deloitte, 2021).

In the context of the nature of women's and men's professional activity and the division of childcare and unpaid work at home, increased access to remote working does not necessarily contribute to gender equality. Studies have shown that depending on whose professional work moves home, this arrangement can exacerbate gender inequalities or contribute to more egalitarian division of work in the family (Binder, 2022).

Challenges related to balancing work and family life are not limited to childcare. They may often involve caring for the elderly and for other family members. With longer life expectancy and an older average age at childbirth, more and more persons bringing up their young children belong to the "sandwich" generation, i.e. a generation of adults who provide different forms of support for their younger and elderly relatives (Klimczuk, 2017).

Childcare or other family responsibilities are reported as the cause of professional passivity by more than 75% of all professionally inactive women (Magda, 2020).

A survey conducted by the Responsible Business Forum on a national sample found that 52% of adult Poles combined work with care, 26% looked after children under 7, 23% took care of children aged 8–14, 8% cared for an elderly person, and 4% looked after a relative with disability or chronic illness. The primary child caregiver role is played by 53% of women and 22% of men, with 22% of women and 12% of men shouldering it on their own. When it comes to caring for adults, the primary caregiver role is performed by 40% of women and 37% of men, with 37% of women and 26% of men performing it on their

own. In 2020 lost economic gains caused by professional inactivity resulting from caregiving responsibilities at home amounted to 252 billion zlotys (Forum Odpowiedzialnego Biznesu, 2022).

One possible explanation why reconciling work and parenting remains so difficult in Poland, despite systemic (macro) solutions that promote balance, is the concept of "social dissolution" or "the dissolving of the legal order imposed by the State in social matter" (Sarnowska et al., 2020). The authors of this theory argue that given the weakness of state institutions (macro-level conditions, such as inconsistent family policy and the privatisation of care services), it is mezzo-level factors: labour institutions and social networks in the workplace and outside of the workplace) that have the strongest influence on micro-level decisions, i.e. working parents' everyday choices. It depends on each labour institution how it will (or will not) implement the principles of work-life balance and equal treatment, how employees at working age are perceived depending on their gender, etc. Social networks, in turn, determine what choices are possible or acceptable and what kind of support from others is available.

Availability of day care and early education services for children under 3

Day care for children under 3 can be organised as a nursery or children's club, or provided by a day carer or a nanny. Providing care for children under 3 is a community own task¹¹.

At the end of 2020 day care institutions – nurseries, children's clubs, and day carers – operated in 1,131 communes, i.e. 47% of all communes in Poland (at the end of 2019 it was 1,039 communes, i.e. 42%, and in 2015 – 26%). Those institutions existed in 483 rural communes, i.e. 31% of all rural communes (at the end of 2019 it was 296 communes, i.e. 25% of all rural communes, and at the end of 2015 it was 189 communes, i.e. 12% of all rural communes).

11 It is regulated by the Act of the 4th of February 2011 on care services for children under 3 (Dz.U. 2011, No. 45, item 235).

In 2020 those institutions provided care for 25.6% of children aged 1–3, whereas in 2010 it was only 2.6% of children.

Table 19. Day care institutions and places of care for children under 3 in those institutions in 2011–2020

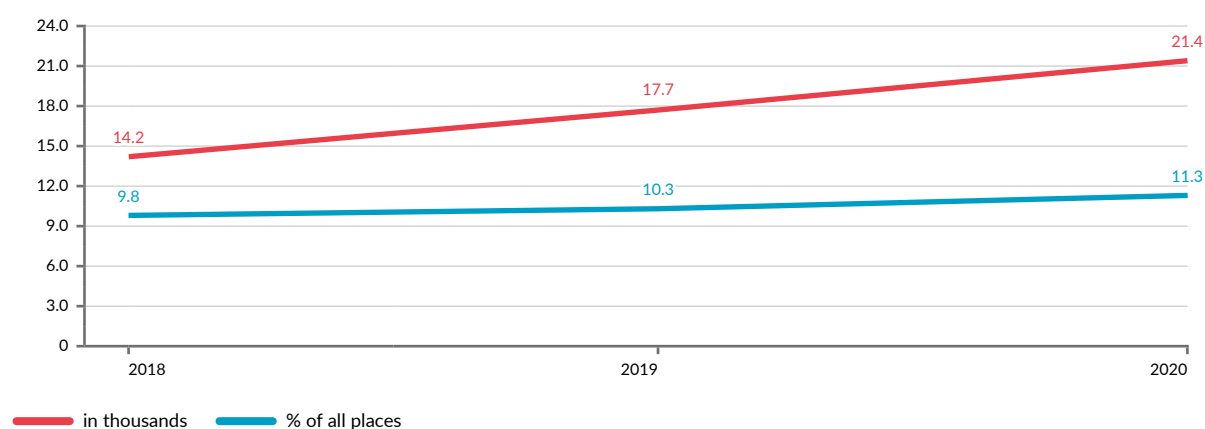
Year	No. of day care institutions				No. of places of care			
	Total	Nurseries	Children's clubs	Day carers	Total	Nurseries	Children's clubs	Day carers
2011	571	523	48	0	32,053	31,844	209	0
2012	926	791	105	30	39,967	39,236	652	79
2013	1,511	1,243	212	56	56,042	53,032	2,890	120
2014	2,493	1,667	384	442	71,386	65,081	5,764	541
2015	2,990	1,967	453	570	83,960	75,756	7,389	815
2016	3,451	2,272	515	664	95,419	86,185	8,332	902
2017	4,271	2,616	629	1,026	111,348	99,255	10,756	1,337
2018	5,080	3,155	676	1,249	144,922	126,592	11,871	6,459
2019	5,982	3,671	733	1,578	172,208	149,388	13,545	9,275
2020	6,356	3,985	795	1,576	189,269	164,843	14,982	9,444

Source: Reports from the performance of tasks related to care for children under 3 in 2011–2020. The 2011 and 2012 reports do not include places of care in private facilities.

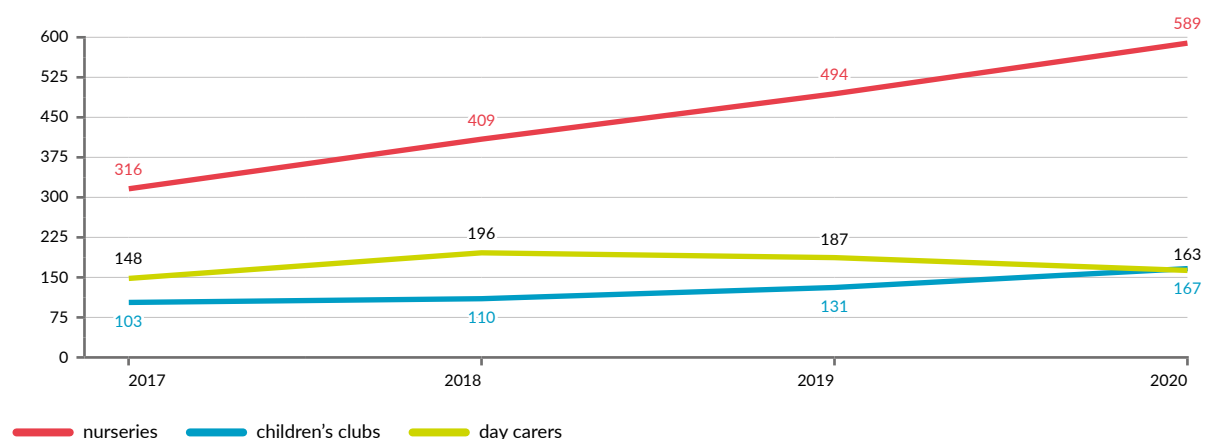
In 2020 the number of day care institutions for children under three increased by about 6%. At the end of 2020 there were 6,356 such institutions (compared to 5,982 at the end of 2019), including 3,671 nurseries (3,671), 795 children's clubs (733) and 1,576 day carers (1,578).

In 2020 day care institutions: nurseries, children's clubs and day carers, offered about 198.3 thousand places (in total), whereas in 2019 there were 172.2 thousand places. The biggest proportion of places of care, about 81.1%, were offered by nurseries (just like in preceding years).

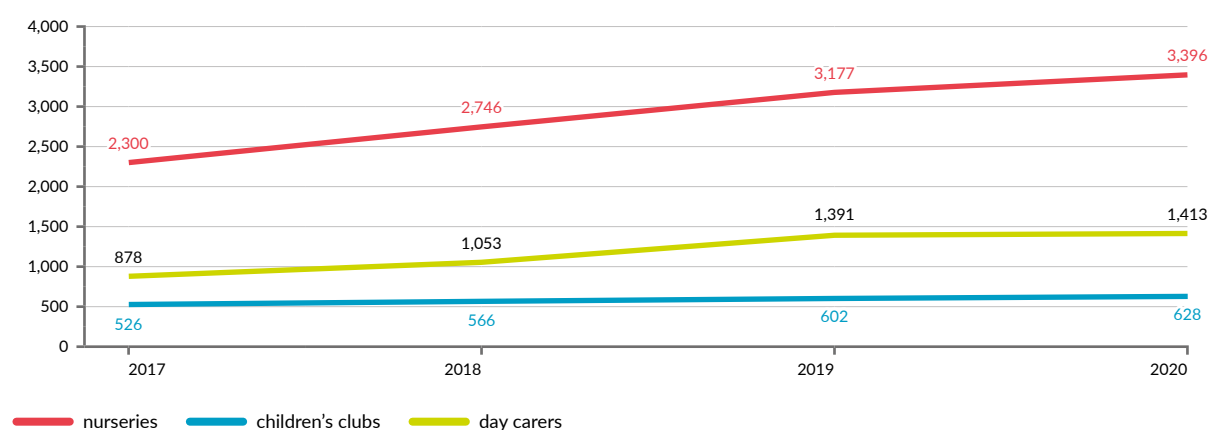
In rural communes there were 919 day care institutions in 2020, a 13.2% increase compared to 2019 (812), including 589 nurseries (494), 167 children's clubs (131) and 163 day carers (187). They offered about 24.5 thousand places for children under 3. Although in absolute terms the number of places of care in rural areas seems to increase dynamically, the growth is not that significant relative to the overall number of available places. Those available in villages constitute only 11% of all places of care for children under 3, whereas children born in rural areas constitute about 40% of all childbirths.

Figure 20. Places of care for children under three in rural communes

Source: Reports of the Council of Ministers from the enforcement of the Act of the 4th of February 2011 on care services for children under 3 in 2017–2020.

Wykres 21. Day care institutions for children under 3 in rural communes in 2017–2020

Source: Reports of the Council of Ministers from the enforcement of the Act of the 4th of February 2011 on care services for children under 3 in 2017–2020.

Wykres 22. Day care institutions for children under 3 in urban communes in 2017–2020

Source: Reports of the Council of Ministers from the enforcement of the Act of the 4th of February 2011 on care services for children under 3 in 2017–2020.

As shown in Figures 21 and 22, the development of institutional day care for children under 3 is based primarily on nurseries. The number of day carers has been decreasing, especially in rural areas. According to the Council of Ministers data, in 2020 (just like in the preceding years) both rural and urban communes reported the highest demand for nurseries. By the end of 2030 institutional care coverage for children under 3 is predicted to reach 33%. If no steps are taken to assess the specific needs of rural communes (such as population density or the problem of transport-related exclusion), the disproportion in the number and availability of places of care in rural areas may be compounded. The popularisation of the day carer role seems to be one possible solution to the problem. This form of care is flexible and easy to introduce without infrastructure expenditures – which is particularly important given the variable demand for care services for children under 3. Moreover, it makes it possible to organise care for a small number of children, foster their caregivers' activity in the labour market, and provide care for children in a home environment and a small, secure group (Moroń, 2016). The decrease in the number of day carers demonstrates, however, that this form of care requires systemic support.

Apart from children in rural areas, another group with a low level of day care provision is children with disabilities and special care needs. In 2020 they constituted only 0.9% (1.3 thousand) of all children using the services of nurseries and children's clubs.

Although the range of day care services for children under 3 has been growing, Poland is still lagging behind most European countries in terms of the availability of places of care.

Figure 23. Percentage of children under 3 using day care institutions for children under 3 in 2020



Source: Eurostat (Children in formal childcare or education by age group and duration).

Conclusion

Despite changes in the family structure and intrafamily relationships, the family – as it is understood by respondents – is invariably the first among Poles' most cherished values. In a survey conducted by CBOS in 2019, 80% of Poles pointed to a happy family as an important value in their lives (choosing from answer options provided) – a 2 pp increase compared to 2008 and 2013. The vast majority of respondents (87%) still believed humans needed a family to feel perfectly happy (compared to 85% in 2013). The figure was 5 pp lower than in a 2008 survey (CBOS, 2019). In another CBOS survey concerning Poles' most cherished values in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, conducted in early November 2020, the family came second (39% of answers), just behind health (47%). However, given other responses concerning the family and its members (such as children and family health – 3%, followed by the best interest of the family, family prosperity, and family / loved ones' happiness – 2% each), family values were listed as the most cherished ones by 47% of the respondents, i.e., the same as health (CBOS, 2020b).

According to Żurek (2017), placing the family at the top of the hierarchy of values is typical for most societies. It is difficult to say, though, whether seeing family as an important value has more to do with strong emotional bonds, the strength of the social script describing the family as a key environment which completes an individual's social identity, or with the fact that the family satisfies many of individuals' needs (Żurek, 2017). A question also arises about the exact meaning (or the designatum) of the family seen as a cherished value by Polish respondents. What exactly is the family regarded as a value? Research shows that it is increasingly broadly defined, so its "structural" understanding is expanding. An increasing number of Poles believe a cohabiting heterosexual couple with children is a family, too: in 2019 that opinion was expressed by 83% of the respondents (compared to 71% in 2008 and 78% in 2013). More than three fourths of the respondents (78%) regard a cohabiting couple raising children from their earlier relationships as a family (it was 67% in 2013). Compared to 2013, the percentage of respondents considering a same-sex couple raising a child/children did not change in 2019 (23%; CBOS, 2019).

”

*I'm 17 and I'm a transboy.
My parents don't accept it,
but that's not the worst part.
My dad constantly humili-
ates me and calls me names.
He threatens that he will
throw me out of the house.
I wish he would treat me
normally.*

17-year-old boy

*A quote from phone calls and
emails to 116 111 Helpline for
Children and Young People*

As proposed by Slany:

Those changes [in how people understand the family, how they act on this understanding, and how it is manifested in public space – author's note] do not mean that the family is not needed any more, but rather that people have found other ways of addressing their needs in the private sphere. The expansion of new families and new forms of establishing family bonds, demonstrates that people want to live and continue to live in families, but they should be understood in a broader and more inclusive way (2013).

The Convention on the Rights of the Child, cited in the Introduction to this chapter, does not define the structure of the family, but stresses its characteristics essential for the child's healthy development and wellbeing. Regardless of the diversity of the forms of family life and changes in family practices in today's Poland, the children's rights perspective means that apart from asking what the modern family is, we should also ask, whether and how it provides "an atmosphere of happiness, love and understanding" and "peace, dignity, tolerance, freedom, equality and solidarity".

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