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# THE SITUATION OF WOMEN IN THE POLISH LABOUR MARKET BETWEEN 2000 AND 2024

## By

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## Abstract

The situation of women in the Polish labour market has changed in recent years. Despite numerous actions taken to promote gender equality, women are still in a worse situation than men in the labour market. Women are still more exposed to long-term unemployment and receive lower wages for the work they do.

The article's goal is to look at how the employment situation of women and men changed from 2000 to 2024.

**Keywords**: labour market, unemployment rate, economic activity rate, average monthly gross earnings

## **Article History**

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#### Introduction

The changes in the labour market during the period of socioeconomic transformation have affected women and men differently. Compared to men, women are more vulnerable to unemployment, remain unemployed for longer periods of time, and find it more difficult to return to the labour market after a period of professional inactivity.

What is more, despite the formally favourable educational structure among women, they still earn less on average than men. However, when analysing European labour market data, it is worth noting that the increase in economic activity across the European Union over the last 13 years has been significantly stronger among women (4.3 percentage points) than men (0.9 percentage points) [Kowalik, Magda 2021, p. 7]. Similarly, in Poland, in the second quarter of 2024, it amounted to 51.5%, while for men it was 65.5% [GUS 2024a]. In turn, analysing GUS data, at the end of March 2025, compared to March 2024, the number of women in employment increased by 0.2%, while the number of men decreased by 0.4%. Overall, men accounted for 52.6% of the employed, and women for 47.4% [GUS 2025, p. 1]. This increase is visible, but the Polish rate is still below the European Union average, although it has been approaching it in recent years.

The main objective of the article is to analyse the situation of women in the labour market in comparison to that of men in the years 2000–2024.

The following specific objectives are related to the main objective:

- to characterise the situation of women in the labour market.
- to compare the situation of women and men in the labour market, taking into account the economic activity rate, the unemployment rate and the average monthly gross earnings,
- to identify the factors determining the situation of women in the labour market.

The work is theoretical and practical in nature, based on a review of the literature and analysis of secondary data presented by national statistical institutions such as the Central Statistical Office, the Polish Economic Institute and the Social Insurance Institution.

The first part of the study characterises the situation of women in the labour market in Poland. The demographic structure of Polish society was analysed in order to determine the share of women in Polish society. Next, the economic activity of Polish women is presented and data on the level of



unemployment among women is then cited. The analysis covers the period from 2000 to 2024.

The second part of the paper attempts to present the conditions affecting women in the labour market. The situation of women in the labour market is determined by many factors, including socio-cultural and legal ones. The impact of systemic solutions in the field of family policy, the importance of the family model in Poland and the situation of women in the labour market in relation to pay differences are presented.

The article emphasises the importance of women's economic empowerment as a key factor in addressing the challenges of an ageing population and labour shortages. Increasing women's participation in the labour market not only promotes economic growth, but also strengthens social equality and harnesses the full potential of human resources.

## 1. Women in the labour market in Poland in 2000-2024

This part of the study is devoted to the characteristics of women in the labour market in Poland in the years 2000-2024. Firstly, demographic processes were analysed, with particular emphasis on changes in population size, taking into account the distribution of the population by gender and age,

which illustrates the ageing of society and changes in the labour force potential, which are essential for assessing the situation of women in the labour market.

In 2000, the population of Poland was 38.2 million, while in 2024 it was 37.4 million. According to the data presented in Table 1, a significant decline in population has been noticeable since 2016. Comparing 2024 with 2022, the population decreased by 203 thous people, while compared to 2000, the population decreased by 691 thous.

The declining population of Poland has a significant impact on the labour market and is one of the country's key socioeconomic challenges. The population decline leads to a reduction in the supply of workers, resulting in difficulties in filling vacancies and staff shortages in many sectors of the economy [Podogrodzka (2015); Jakubowska (2018); Pawlak (2019)1.

Changes in Poland's demographic structure are the result of unfavourable trends in natural growth caused by low birth rates. Several factors contribute to low natural growth in Poland, including migration [Zalega (2016), p. 6], the growing importance of professional careers among women and men [Rekas (2017)], and the spread of the small family model [Zalega 2017b, p. 113].

Specifi 2000 2002 2004 2006 2008 2012 2016 2018 2019 2020 2021 2022 2024 cation **Total** 3821 popula 38254 38174 38125 38136 38533 38433 38411 38383 38089 37908 37766 37489 tion 1850 18537 18470 18427 18649 18593 18582 18567 18417 18323 18249 18107 Males 18415 7 **Femal** 1971 19717 19704 19698 19721 19884 19840 19829 19816 19671 19585 19517 19382 es Mediana age Males 33,4 33,9 34,4 35 35,6 37 38,6 39,3 39,7 40,3 40.7 41,7 **Femal** 37,4 38 38,6 39,1 39,6 40,5 41,9 42,6 43 43,2 43,5 44 44,9 es

Table 1. Population in Poland by sex in selected years (in thous.)

Source: GUS (2023), GUS (2024b), s. 14

In 2024, there were almost 1.2 million more women than men in Poland, i.e. 19.3 million women and 18.1 million men (Table 1). Practically the entire difference mentioned above concerned women of post-working age, i.e. 60 years and older. In this age group, there are 2.6 million more women than men, i.e. 5.7 million women vs. 3.1 million men (Chart 1). This is mainly due to the fact that women live longer than men. In contrast, in the 0-17 and 18-59 age groups, there were slightly more men than women.



Chart 1. Population by sex and age in 2024

Source: GUS (2024b), tabela 01.

Table 2 presents the economic activity rate by gender in the years 2000-2024. According to the data cited, women are still less economically active than men. In 2024, the percentage of economically active men was over 60%, while among women this level exceeded 50%. It can also be noted that over the years, fluctuations in the economic activity rate for both genders have been minor, and recently this indicator has been slowly increasing. The lower economic activity rate among Polish women is related to family responsibilities, which contribute to greater economic inactivity among women, and to traditionally entrenched gender roles in society, which often assign women a caring role.

Table 2. Economic activity rate of the population (total) by sex in 2000-2024

Sex III 2000-2024				
Year	Female	Male		
2000	48,9	61,2		
2003	47,9	62,4		
2004	47,9	62,7		
2005	48,1	62,9		
2006	46,7	62,3		
2007	46,7	62,2		
2008	47,1	63,1		
2009	47,5	63,5		
2010	47,5	63,9		
2011	48,0	64,2		
2012	48,3	64,4		
2013	48,5	64,4		
2014	48,5	64,6		
2015	48,6	65,0		
2016	48,3	65,1		
2017	48,0	65,1		
2018	48,0	64,9		
2019	47,6	65,2		
2020	48,4	65,4		
2021	50,5	66,1		
2022	51,1	65,9		
2023	51,8	66,1		
2024	51,8	65,7		

Source: GUS (2014), s. 3; Ministerstwo Rodziny, Pracy i Polityki Społecznej, Departament Rynku Pracy, Wydział Analiz i Statystyki (2020), s. 1; Eurostat; GUS, Oficjalne statystyki do monitorowania Celów Zrównoważonego Rozwoju, GUS, Współczynnik aktywności zawodowej w wieku 15-89 lat wg BEAL

The table below presents data on the unemployment rate in 2010–2024 by gender. In 2010–2024, Poland saw a marked decline in the unemployment rate measured according to the Labour Force Survey (LFS) methodology for both men and women. In the initial period between 2010 and 2012, the unemployment rate remained relatively high, at nearly 10% for men and over 10% for women. In 2013, unemployment among men stood at 10%, while among women it was already 11.4%. Since 2014, there has been a steady decline in both groups, culminating in low figures in 2022–2024, when the unemployment rate fell to 3%. This phenomenon can be linked both to the improvement in the economic situation and to structural changes in the labour market, including the increased participation of older people and women in employment.

Table 3. Unemployment rate by sex for persons aged 15-89 (BEAL) in 2010-2024 (in %)

Years	Males	Females
2010	9,7	10,3
2011	9,3	10,7
2012	9,7	11,2
2013	10,0	11,4
2014	8,7	9,8
2015	7,5	7,8
2016	6,2	6,3
2017	4,9	4,9
2018	3,9	3,9
2019	3,1	3,6
2020	3,1	3,3
2021	2,8	3,4
2022	2,8	2,9
2023	2,8	2,9
2024	2,7	3,1

Source: GUS, Oficjalne statystyki do monitorowania Celów Zrównoważonego Rozwoju, GUS, Stopa bezrobocia w wieku 15-89 lat (wg BEAL)

In the second quarter of 2024, the share of women who took up employment for the first time was 15.1%. Women who lost their jobs accounted for 37.9%, while women who left their jobs accounted for 13.2%. In turn, the share of women returning to work after a break was 33.8%. In the case of men who took up employment for the first time, their share was 12.6%. As many as 45.3% were men who lost their jobs,

while 18.9% were men who resigned from their jobs. Data on the above issues can be found in Chart 2.



**Chart 2.** Structure of unemployed persons by the source of unemployment in the second quarter of 2024 (in %)

Source: GUS (2024c), s. 19

In summary, the years 2000–2024 were characterised by a marked increase in women's activity and employment, but their employment rate remained lower than that of men, and women were also at higher risk of unemployment. These results point to the need for further political and institutional measures to enable women to realise their full professional potential and to reduce the structural barriers limiting their participation in the labour market.

# 2. Determinants of women's situation in the labour market

The first issue affecting the situation of women in the labour market is socio-cultural conditions, namely the traditional family model and division of roles.

Data on the use of parental leave among parents was cited to confirm this point. The length of maternity leave depends on the number of children born. In the case of one child, maternity leave is 20 weeks. The length of leave in the case of multiple births increases depending on the number of children born, from 31 to 37 weeks of maternity leave [Biznes.gov.pl]. Parents of premature babies and babies born at term but requiring hospitalisation are entitled to supplementary maternity leave. Maternity leave is compulsory and is available to both parents, but the first 14 weeks are reserved for the mother. The remaining 6 weeks can be shared between the parents. Importantly, leave is granted in full weeks. After using up the full amount of maternity leave, both parents (simultaneously or alternately) or, if they so agree, one of the parents is entitled to parental leave. It is granted once or in a maximum of four parts. Parents have until the end of the year in which the child turns 6 to use their parental leave. Men are entitled to an additional 2 weeks off work to care for their child as part of their paternity leave. Fathers can take it all at once or in two parts at any time they choose.

On 9 March 2023, the Sejm adopted a law implementing EU directives on work-life balance and pay transparency. The amendment extended parental leave. One of the objectives of the directive is to increase fathers' participation in childcare. For this reason, each parent is only entitled to 9 weeks of

parental leave. They cannot transfer it to the other parent. However, they can use it simultaneously.

Among the various forms of support available after the birth of a child, fathers most often choose paternity leave. In 2024, 64% of men took advantage of this leave. Although the rate of paternity leave utilisation is still the highest among other forms of leave available to fathers, for the first time since 2011, when it was introduced, a decline was recorded, as in 2023 it stood at 67%.

This phenomenon may be the result of shortening the period for taking paternity leave from when the child reaches the age of two to when the child reaches the age of one. In addition, fathers have gained the opportunity to take parental leave at the same time as the mother on maternity leave. However, it should be emphasised that the resignation from paternity leave is a worrying phenomenon, as it serves a different function than parental leave. Paternity leave is intended to allow fathers to take care of their newborns and mothers during the postnatal period.

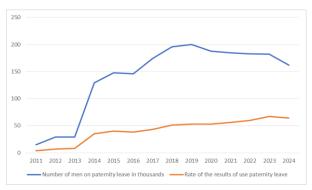


Chart 3. The number of men taking paternity leave in 2011–2024 and the results of its use

Source: Fundacja Share The Care, Zakład Ubezpieczeń Społecznych (2025), s. 20

In turn, according to statistics compiled by the Social Insurance Institution (ZUS) from January to April 2024, over 115,000 women and 2,400 men took maternity leave in Poland. According to the latest data from the Share The Care Foundation and the Social Insurance Institution (ZUS), in just one year, the number of fathers taking advantage of this benefit more than doubled – from 19,000 in 2023 to almost 42,000 in 2024. Importantly, this is eleven times more than in 2022 [Share The Care Foundation, Social Insurance Institution (2025)].

Another factor contributing to women's prolonged absence from the labour market is the low availability of childcare and early education facilities. In 2010, according to data from the Central Statistical Office (GUS), there were 0.4 thousand nurseries. In 2024, there were 4.8 nurseries in Poland, and in 2023 – 4.6 (Table 5). The largest number of nurseries operated in the Mazowieckie Province (826), and the smallest number in the Świętokrzyskie Province (99). These facilities were run by natural persons (2,245), municipalities (1,289), legal persons (857), entities without legal personality (381)

and public institutions (4). The number of places in nurseries increased by 4.9% compared to 2023 [GUS (2025a), p. 1].

Table 4. Number of nurseries and children's clubs in Poland in 2010-2024 (in thousands)

Years	Nurseries	Children's clubs
2010	0,4	Bd
2011	0,5	0,1
2012	0,6	0,1
2013	1,1	0,2
2014	1,6	0,3
2015	1,8	0,3
2016	2,1	0,4
2017	2,4	0,5
2018	3,1	0,6
2019	3,6	0,7
2020	3,8	0,7
2021	4,2	0,8
2022	4,4	0,9
2023	4,6	0,9
2024	4,8	0,9

Source: GUS (2025a), GUS (2023a), GUS (2021); Baza danych lokalnych

The SARS Cov-2 pandemic has also highlighted and confirmed that women are much more likely to be responsible for caring for children when they are unable to attend school due to illness or the need to stay at home. Since 2020, the number of childcare allowances granted by the Social Insurance Institution has increased for both sexes, but the scale is much greater for women. In 2020, women were forced to give up work 1/3 more often than in 2019, and the total number of care allowances approached 1 million [Zielonka (2021), p. 12].

In 2024, the share of days of absence taken by men to care for a sick child was only 21%, which represents only a slight increase (0.42 percentage points) compared to the previous year. In practice, women still account for almost 80% of care days. This indicator shows the actual distribution of daily care responsibilities within the family. Its slow change may indicate a still low level of social acceptance of involved fatherhood, both on the part of fathers themselves and on the part of their professional environment.

Table 5. Number of sickness absence days in Poland in 2020-2024 (in thousands)

		,		*
Years	Total	Women	Men	Percentage of
				fathers'
				absenteeism

				days
2020	8 091,2	6 458,6	1 632,4	20,18
2021	9 683,9	7 685,6	1 998,2	20,63
2022	11 788,3	9 367,4	2 420,5	20,53
2023	10 919,5	8 636,9	2 292,0	20,90
2024	10 902,7	8 577,9	2 324,3	21,32

Source: Fundacja Share The Care, Zakład Ubezpieczeń Społecznych, Mama i tata w domu, równość rodzicielska w Polsce w szerszym kontekście społeczno-gospodarczym, 2025, **s. 27** 

When analysing the situation of women in the labour market, it is worth examining the differences in pay between women and men. The gender pay gap increases with age, which may be due to women taking career breaks. The pay gap varies between countries, but also between sectors. In 2023, the pay gap was higher in the private sector than in the public sector in most EU countries. The gender pay gap means that women are more vulnerable to poverty in old age. In 2020, women in the EU aged over 65 received pensions that were on average 28.3% lower than those of men [European Parliament, www], which is also a result of women being entitled to retire earlier than men.

Table 6 shows the average monthly gross wages in Poland in 2004–2024, broken down by gender. The data indicate a systematic increase in wages in both groups during the period under review, with a visible wage gap. Women's wages are lower than men's, although this difference remains at a relatively similar level in subsequent years.

Table 6. Average monthly gross earnings (in PLN)

Years	Total	Women	Men
2024	8 003,79	7 575,48	8 415,70
2022	7 001,28	6430,06	7558,54
2020	5 748,24	5343,07	6 126,15
2018	5 003,78	4 543,36	5 447,24
2016	4 346,76	3 971,13	4 705,63
2014	4 107,22	3 717,57	4 481,75
2012	3 895,72	3 439,91	4 248,91
2010	3 543,50	3 256,06	3 831,73
2008	3 232,07	2 892,88	3 557,24
2006	2 654,13	2 385,68	2 903,68
2004	2 368,52	2 150,44	2 571,64

Source: GUS, Różnice w wynagrodzeniach kobiet i mężczyzn w gospodarce narodowej w Polsce w 2024 r.; GUS (2024d), s. 12; GUS (2020), s. 16; GUS (2017), s. 3; GUS (2016), s. 24; GUS (2014a), s. 25; GUS (2012), s. 25; GUS (2009), s. 25; GUS (2007), pp. 19; GUS (2004)

In summary, the situation of women in the labour market in Poland is still conditioned by many structural and social barriers. Less frequent use of paternity leave and the continuing traditional division of family roles mean that women are more often burdened with care responsibilities, which limits their professional activity. Despite an increase in the number of nurseries and children's clubs between 2010 and 2024, the availability of institutional care still does not always meet the needs of families. Data on sick leave indicate that women take more leave, which also affects their professional position. The pay gap, which continues to be to the disadvantage of women, remains a significant problem, showing that full equality in the labour market still requires further action.

### **Summary**

The main objective of the article was to analyse the situation of women in the labour market in comparison to that of men in the years 2000–2024. The analysis identified a number of factors that still significantly determine women's professional activity, development opportunities and economic position.

During the discussions, attention was drawn to the problem of the traditional division of family roles, which leads to an uneven distribution of care and domestic responsibilities. Women are more likely to take career breaks to raise children, while men rarely take paternity leave.

The article also addresses issues related to childcare infrastructure, based on the development of nurseries and children's clubs between 2010 and 2024. Although there has been clear progress in terms of the increasing number of facilities, the availability of these institutions is still not sufficient to really relieve women and increase their chances of full professional activity. In this context, the development of pro-family policies and investment in the childcare system should be seen as a key tool for promoting equality in the labour market.

Another important element of the analysis was the issue of sick leave, which affects women more often than men. The pay gap also remains a clear problem. Despite the systematic increase in average earnings in Poland, women still receive lower pay than men, which not only weakens their economic position, but also affects the amount of their future pension benefits and their sense of financial security.

The achievement of the research objectives made it possible to highlight both the positive changes that took place during the period analysed and the areas requiring further action. The ongoing development of care infrastructure, increased public awareness of the need for an equal division of responsibilities, and gradual changes in pro-family policies indicate that the direction of development is promising. However, comprehensive strategies are still needed to reduce the pay gap, increase fathers' participation in childcare, and create solutions that facilitate the reconciliation of professional and family roles.

It should be emphasised that although this paper focused on selected determinants of women's situation in the labour market, there are a number of issues that have not been addressed in the article and which certainly deserve attention in further research. Educational choices also remain an important aspect — women are more likely to choose humanities and social sciences, while men choose technical or IT studies, which in the long term affects their salaries and career opportunities. This is linked to the problem of sectoral and occupational segregation, which means that women are more likely to end up in lower-paid industries. It is also worth considering the challenges arising from the need to balance work with caring for children or elderly people, which is an additional burden and a barrier to the full activation of women in the labour market. All these issues can be an important point of reference for further analysis and contribute to a deeper reflection on gender equality in professional life.

In summary, the situation of women in the labour market remains a complex and multifaceted issue. Achieving full equality requires consistent action on the part of both the state and employers, as well as changes in public awareness regarding gender roles.

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