

# OCCUPATIONAL STATUS OF WOMEN IN THE LABOUR MARKET IN POLAND: ANALYSIS OF THE PHENOMENON

**Prof. Beata Ślusarczyk, Ph.D., Aneta Broniszewska**

Częstochowa University of Technology, Faculty of Management  
Armii Krajowej 19, 42-200 Częstochowa, Poland  
jagoda@zim.pcz.pl; aneta.broniszewska@op.pl

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**Abstract.** For many years, the phenomenon of entrepreneurship has been the focus of scientific discussions in the field of economic and social sciences in developed countries. Women represent a substantial potential from the standpoint of the economic growth. In the public domain, their presence in the labour markets seems to be one of the most important achievements of the 20th century. Despite equal legal opportunities in the labour market, significant differences continue to exist, especially between the salaries for women and men. The variety of factors that affect professional careers of women and their professional activity causes that the analysis of the phenomenon compared with other countries of the European Union necessitates distinct determination of the causes for development of particular structures and tendencies. The aim of this paper is to analyse the occupational status of women in the labour market in Poland based on a statistical survey.

**Keywords:** professional activity, entrepreneurship of women, labour market., occupational discrimination.

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## 1. THE CONCEPT OF ENTREPRENEURSHIP

There are a variety of definitions of entrepreneurship. Therefore, it is difficult to present a uniform and coherent theory of entrepreneurship, both in the field of the economy and other sciences since it represents a multi-dimensional category. Entrepreneurship is frequently related to economic activity and the person of entrepreneur. In the literature, the definition of this concept was first introduced by J.B. Say, who argued that an entrepreneur (owner) is a person who skilfully manages different factors of production through transfer of economic resources from the areas of smaller to greater performance and higher profits [9]. In the economic literature, the entrepreneurship is considered as a specific form of working or an independent factor of production. It determines the effectiveness of management through the choice of directions of the activity, using manufacturing techniques and adjusting them to the previously set goals of the enterprise under current conditions of business surroundings [4].

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### 1.1 Entrepreneurship of women in Poland

Entrepreneurship of women represents a multifaceted research area. It is the area of particular interest, which is conducive to development of statistical and survey-based methods. From the economic standpoint, economic growth necessitates promotion of entrepreneurship among women and the increase in their share among enterprise owners. Nowadays, the opportunities for finding resources for starting and development of business activity using state or EU's funds are easily available. There are a variety of institutions that support business and broadly understood entrepreneurship. Both commercial and non-commercial organizations help promote entrepreneurship. One of the organizations to support both present and newly created enterprises is Polish Agency for Enterprise Development (Polska Agencja Rozwoju Przedsiębiorczości, PARP) [11]. Since its beginnings, PARP has been committed to the activities aimed at development of entrepreneurship, innovativeness and implementation of structural policy of the European Union. The aim of PARP's activities is to implement programs for development of the economy that support innovation and research activities of small and medium-sized enterprises, regional development, export, development of human resources and the use of new technologies.

Similar to other European countries, occupational situation of women in the labour market differs from the status of men. Entrepreneurship of women and their professional activity has been analysed particularly from the standpoint of differences in education compared to men, qualifications, salary inequality, legal regulations and practices used during employment. When implementing legal laws that prevent sexual discrimination, the European Union obliged all the member states to use them. A substantial effect on the economic conditions in a country or a region is from the percentage of professionally active people. The diagram below presents a graphic interpretation of the economic activity rate in Poland and in the countries of the European Union in 2000-2012.

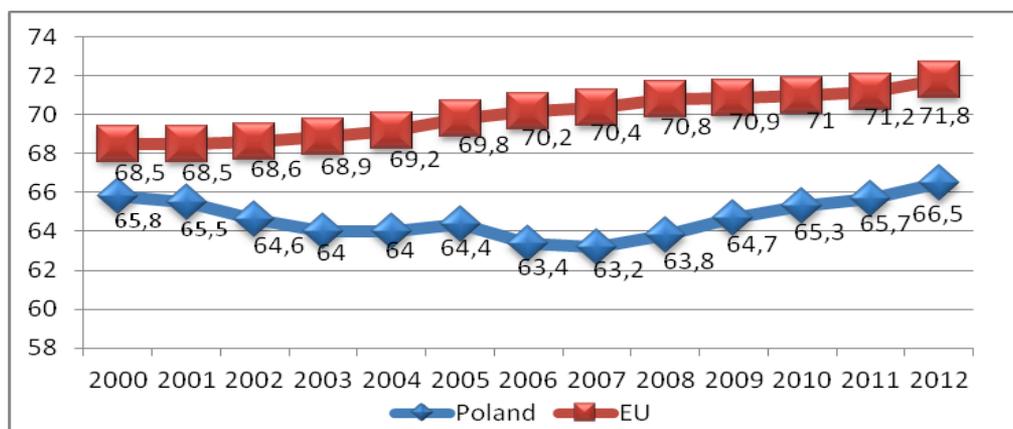


Diagram 1. Economic activity rate in Poland and the EU in 2000-2012 [%]

Source: author's own elaboration based on the data from Eurostat [10]

Economic activity rate is measured for the population who constitutes manpower supply. It demonstrates the percentage of professionally active people in the population. The people at the working age are women aged 18-59 years and men aged 8-64 years. It can be observed that the economic activity rate in the countries of the EU was increasing in the period studied, reaching the level of 71.8% in 2012. The country with the highest economic activity rate in the EU is Sweden, with its age range of 15-64 years including 80% of both employed and unemployed. In Poland, this rate is lower than the mean for the

European Union. Since 2007, the number of professionally active people has been rising continuously. However, the difference remains substantial.

Although it is possible to define the discrimination of women in the labour market, presentation of this phenomenon in quantitative terms is much more complex. Discrimination occurs if women who are educated, have sufficient knowledge, experience and working performance at the same level as men experience problems with being employed, receive lower salaries and their careers progress much slower than those observed in men [8]. Despite the sexual equality guaranteed by the Polish legislature, Polish women are facing challenges in the field of employment, whereas the rights they have are not always respected. Sexual stereotypes significantly affect occupational segregation in the Polish labour market. A feminization of a part of occupations and certain divisions of the economy can be observed. Table 1 presents the data concerning the share of the employed according to sex and selected divisions of the Polish Classification of Business Activities in 2013.

Specification	Total [in thousands]	Men [in thousands]	Women [in thousands]	Share of women in overall number of the employed [%]
Public administration and national defence; compulsory social security	1 056	517	539	51.0
Construction	1 220	1 127	93	7.6
Financial and insurance services	383	128	255	66.6
Professional, scientific and technological activities	511	222	289	56.6
Education	1 208	262	947	78.4
Mining and extraction	268	240	27	10.1
Hotels and food services	316	96	220	69.6
Information and communication services	334	227	107	32.0
Health and social care	952	187	765	80.4
Industrial processing	3 045	2 120	926	30.4
Agriculture, forestry, hunting and fishing	1 918	1 134	784	40.9
Transport and warehousing	926	734	192	20.7

Table 1 Employees according to sex and selected divisions of the Polish Classification of Business Activities in the 3rd quarter of 2013 in Poland

Source: author's own elaboration based on „Aktywność ekonomiczna ludności Polski III kwartał 2013“ GUS, Warsaw 2014 [1]

Analysis of the structure of employment in Poland reveals a partial feminization of certain industries and sectors. Women dominate health and social care, education, hotels, food services and financial agencies. In other sectors, such as construction, mining and extraction, women represent less than 20% employees. For comparison, recent 20 years have seen a decline in employment of women in public administration and national defence (from 58.8% in 1993 to 51% in 2013). Small increase in the percentage of the women employed was observed in education (73.1% in 1993). Women remain to choose working in education, health care and social assistance, even if these occupations are less profitable. Differentiation of the salaries results from the subjective choice of the university majors: women prefer humanities, which consequently leads to choosing different jobs [8].

An exception from the principle of equality of women and men in Poland is the prohibition of employing women in jobs that can be particularly burdensome to women's health. In 1996, there were 90 professions prohibited for women [2]. At present, this problem is regulated by the ordinance of the Council of Ministers as of September 10, 1996 [6]. According to this ordinance, women cannot start jobs connected with physical effort and transport of heavy goods, forced body position, working underground and working at heights and working under noise and vibration conditions.

An important factor in changing the role of women is their education. More women than men have now higher education [see Table 2].

Educational level	Total [in thousands]	Men [in thousands]	Women [in thousands]	Share of women in overall number of the employed [in %]
Total	15 738	8 748	6 990	44.4
Higher	4 882	2 118	2 764	56.6
Post-secondary and secondary vocational education	4 299	2 419	1 880	43.7
Comprehensive secondary education	1 394	655	739	53.0
Basic vocational education	4 164	2 903	1 260	30.3
Junior, primary and incomplete primary education	1 000	653	347	34.7

Table 2 Employees according to education in the 3rd quarter of 2013 in Poland

Source: author's own elaboration based on „Aktywność ekonomiczna ludności Polski III kwartał 2013“ GUS, Warsaw 2014 [1]

Analysis of the above data reveals that men choose basic vocational education more often than women. More specifically, the group of the people employed with higher education level is dominated by women. Increasing education level among women offers opportunities for better vocational position. Although women represent almost half of the employed, none country have similar female representation among managers. Low share of women on high managerial positions does not result from the fact that women's education or skills necessary to perform these functions is insufficient. On the contrary, women dominate among students in universities and post-graduate courses. More and more women decide to participate in MBA (Masters of Business Administration) courses.

However, analysis of the status of the women employed should not be based only on the employment range. The status of women in the labour market is also characterized by the inequalities with respect to men and discrimination towards them concerning promotion and, consequently, their access to higher salaries. One of the most serious problems is direct discrimination in terms of salaries. Women often earn salaries much lower than men while performing the same duties and having the same level of education and vocational competencies. Table 3 compares mean gross salaries according to groups of professions as of October 2012 (in Polish zlotys).

Analysis of the data contained in Table 3 reveals that female salaries are lower than those earned by men in all the groups of professions analysed. Proportions of salaries vary from group to group. In general, the higher salaries the higher disproportions in salaries earned by women and men. The highest percentage of women are employed in the group of high-skilled jobs (35% of women employed in general) [7]. This group includes typically female groups of professions, such as nurses or midwives. The difference in salaries between women and men in this group is one of the highest (27%). Another numerous female group of professions is employees in the service-providing sector and salespersons.

These women account for 14.1% of women employed in general [7]. The highest difference between salaries was observed among industrial workers and craftsmen (34%). This group is dominated by men, with 23.5% of all men and only 4.8% of women employed in general. The lowest difference between the salaries (2%) was recorded among office workers. However, it should be emphasized that the differences in salaries earned by women and men are gradually fading. It was in the mid-nineties of the 20th century when statistical female Pole earned 75% of the statistical male Pole [5]. The differences in the salaries are gradually reducing due to the fact that employers are more willing to employ well-educated and competent women and due to changing awareness among women. Women know their vocational competencies and skills and show sufficient knowledge of the rights they have [3].

<b>Group of professions</b>	<b>Men [in Polish zlotys]</b>	<b>Women [in Polish zlotys]</b>	<b>Salary earned by women as a percentage of those earned by men [%]</b>
Representatives of public authorities, higher-level public servants and managers	9295.30	6748.69	73
High-skilled jobs	5677.13	4320.92	76
Technicians and junior staffs	4458.30	3436.85	77
Office workers	3236.68	3174.71	98
Service providers and salespersons	2482.36	2158.84	87
Farmers, gardeners, foresters and fishers	2659.36	2519.32	95
Industrial workers and craftsmen	3294.91	2185.36	66
machinery operators and engineers	3346.22	2611.44	78
Employees performing simple works	2568.69	2019.01	79

Table 3. Mean gross salaries according to groups of professions as of October 2012

Source: author's own elaboration based on „Struktura wynagrodzeń według zawodów w październiku 2012 r.“, GUS, Warsaw 2014 [7]

Both women and men in Poland are characterized by lower employment ratio than the average employees in the respective sexes in the countries of the European Union. Diagram 2 presents employment rate for men and women in Poland compared to selected countries of the European Union according to the situation in the labour market in Poland in 2011.

Poland is among the countries with one of the lowest female employment rates (53.1%). Compared to Poland, the countries with substantially higher employment ratios among women are Denmark (70.4%), Germany (67.7%), Finland (67.4%) and Austria (66.5%). It should also be stressed that Poland is the country with one of the lowest male employment ratio compared to the countries of the European Union, which was 66.3% in 2011. Lower ratios were recorded only in Hungary (61.2%), Romania (65%) and Latvia (62.9%).

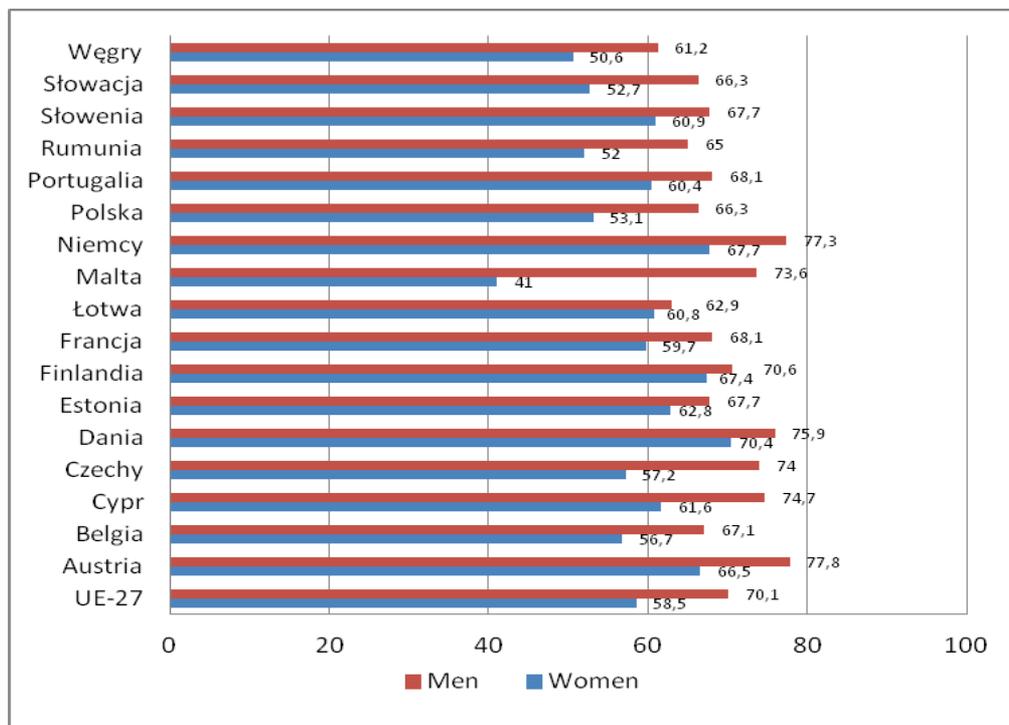


Diagram 2. Employment rate for both sexes in Poland and the countries of the European Union in 2011 (%)

Source: author's own elaboration based on the data from Eurostat [10]

## 2. CONCLUSIONS

Women's entrepreneurship necessitates a professional support from a variety of commercial institutions that are committed to promotion of professional activity and creation of conditions for popularization of modern technological solutions for the economy aimed to improve the quality of interpersonal opportunities through education, training and counselling. A wide range of services are offered by the European Social Fund aimed at preventing unemployment and development of human resources, which is one of the EU Structural Funds. The areas of support include [12] initiatives in the labour market through promotion of the solutions that equalize opportunities in the labour market, ensuring access to trainings and counselling and improving chances of women to find jobs and make professional careers. The resources of the Fund help finance trainings and vocational practices, vocational counselling and agencies as well as analyses and surveys in the labour market.

From the standpoint of the state institution, it is essential to implement activities aimed at levelling social barriers of the entrepreneurship. It is also essential to promote similar attitudes toward the roles performed in society by men and women, and to depart from stereotypical approach to typically male and female activities. Institutional support is necessary, especially for entrepreneurship of unemployed women who are graduates from secondary schools and universities or mothers who return to work after a maternity leave or child care leave.

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