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# Gender diversity in the workplace

## Introduction

In Poland, women constitute 45% of the total number of the employed. A similar situation is observed in most European Union countries. Therefore, it may be said that the contemporary place of work is diversified by gender. Economic activity of women has been permanently embedded into the public sphere, and it is difficult to believe that only 50 years ago the situation was different, i.e. much fewer women were employed. Despite the fact that most employers prefer men, and the workplace is still oriented on white, fit (not disabled) and young males, increasingly more companies takes on the challenges aimed at diversity and equality, and therefore establishing equal chances for members of both sexes.

Is the Polish labour market a place of fully implemented equality or are there still observed cases of discrimination against women? Why is diversity, including gender diversity, so important for a company? The answers for these questions comprise the subject of this study analysis. The presented below reflections constitute a voice in the debate concerning managing diversity, which was initiated in Poland by the project Gender Index carried out within the framework of the Community Initiative EQUAL in the years 2004–2008. Its objective was elaboration of the innovative indicator of equal treatment of women and men in the workplace. The results of the studies carried out within the framework of the Gender Index project are presented in this paper in order to illustrate the observance of equal treatment of women and men in the enterprises operating on the Polish market.

The presented comments concentrate on gender diversity. However, we should remember that staff diversity must not be analysed only in the gender context. Other socio-demographic determinants should be also taken into account. Moreover, managing diversity is not only limited to provision of equal chances for all employed persons, but – which is much more difficult

– it consists in such motivation of labour resources that appreciates differences and acknowledges similarities and brings out the new quality determining the company's competitive advantage from both of them.

## Gender lies at the core of diversity, but ...

Women comprise a half of the population in almost all societies – 52% in Poland (the Central Statistical Office – CSO data). Women more often than men participate in education on various levels. The CSO data indicate that in the years 1990–2005, the number of women participating in tertiary education increased five times, while the number of men increased four times<sup>1</sup>. In the academic year 2005/2006 women constituted 57% among tertiary students and 65% among graduates, 68% among the post-graduate students and almost a half among the students of doctorate studies. Employed women are better educated than working men, which means that women more often than men have secondary or tertiary education. Nevertheless, on decision-making positions both: in business and politics, the number of women is decidedly lower than the number of men. For example, in Sejm in the present term of office (2007–2011), women constitute 20%; in the Senat – 8%; there are 5 women per 18 ministers, i.e. 28% in government. The share of women holding managerial positions comprised 36%, however, among directors and presidents of the companies women constituted only 3%.

**Women constitute the majority of people employed in public sector – 58% as compared to 42% of men, while men dominate (60%) in private sector. Among the self-employed, women comprise 35%, while in the category of unpaid family workers women are dominant constituting 62%<sup>2</sup>.**

The significant changes have taken place within the space of the last few years in the number of the employed in particular divisions (sections) of economy



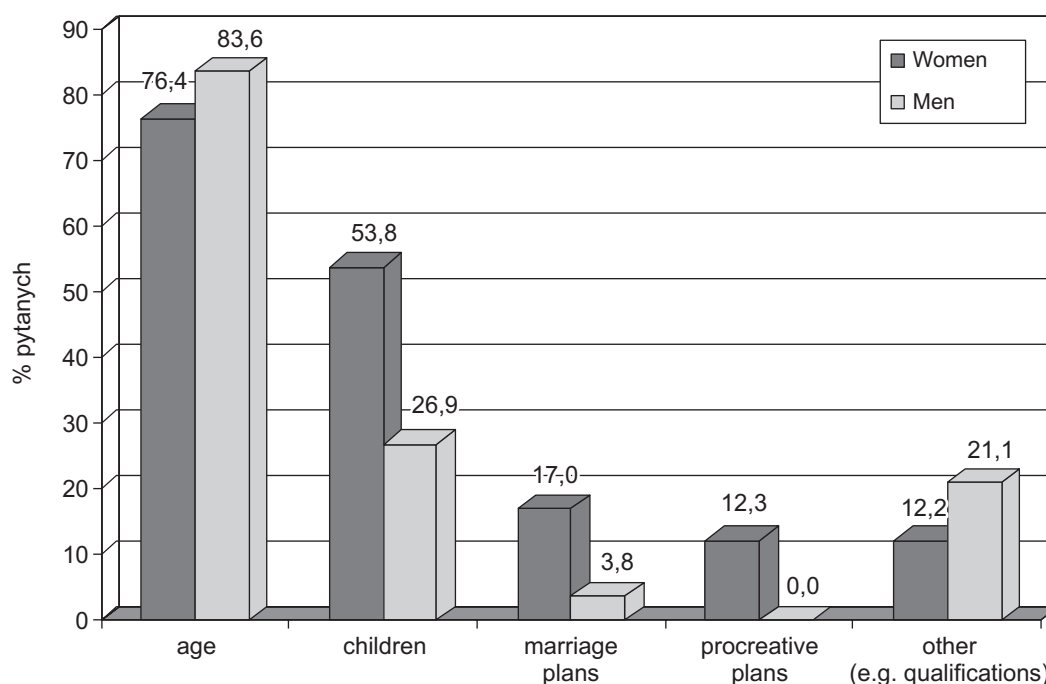
– the share of women employed in the financial sector and in hotels and catering has increased, while it has decreased in trade sector – the section dominated by women at the beginning of the nineties (their percentage share decreased from 70% in 1990 to 53% in 2007). Simultaneously, there have been observed among women a growing interest in typically male jobs – in the police, transport - as bus or tram drivers, fishing and fisheries or construction. Nevertheless, **we still observe labour market segregation and division into feminised occupations and branches** (education, health care and social welfare, financial intermediation and hotels and restaurants) **and male dominant ones** (construction, mining, transport, energy). The studies indicate that it is easier for men to exist in female occupations than for women in male occupations<sup>3</sup>. The former receive acceptance and assistance from the female environment into which they came and they advance easily, the latter are treated as strangers, isolated and excluded from male social networks, their advance is hindered.

Following the Poland's accession into the European Union, the Polish law adopted the detailed provisions prohibiting gender related discrimination. Definitions of discrimination, sexual harassment and mobbing were included in the Labour Code, as well as the provision obliging each employer to develop discrimination-free working environment. Prohibition on discrimination includes access to employment, training, promotion and pay. Employers are obliged to prevent mobbing and sexual harassment in the

place of work. The law allows equalizing privileges, i.e. quotas or parities in appointing managerial positions (which should be in the first order applied by the public administration), or the positive discrimination in cases when the place of work is female- or male-dominated. **In practice, manifestations of discrimination against women are still observed.**

Discrimination against women is manifested even on the stage of recruitment when male candidates are preferred. In case of women better education and higher qualifications are required, women are asked additional questions about their family status (see Fig. 1) or pregnancy. Sometimes they are forced to make a statement that they will not decide to have a child within a determined period<sup>4</sup>. The smaller number of job offers addressed directly to women and the employers' tendency towards employing men are the reasons that women dominate among the long-term unemployed.

Another manifestation of discrimination against women are evident disproportions in earnings received by women and men, including also the pay on the same positions. According to Henryk Domański, lower remuneration of women is “a universally known phenomenon” and one of these sociological, which “surprise with their universalism”<sup>5</sup>. The differences between female and male remuneration are still observed in all European Union countries although they are currently lower than fifteen or twenty years ago<sup>6</sup>. The ratios of average female earnings to average earnings of men stayed in Poland on the level



**Figure 1. The matters that candidates to work are asked for (data for Poland)**

Source: The IPISS survey, 2000. See: B. Balcerzak-Paradowska (ed.), *Kobiety i mężczyźni na rynku pracy. Rzeczywistość lat 1990-1999 [Women and men on the labour market. The reality of the years 1990-1999]*, IPISS, Warsaw 2001, p.123.



of 79% in 1989, 76% in 1995, 80% in 1998 and 82% in 2001 and 2006<sup>7</sup>.

Pay disproportions are evident in each occupational group, including also managers (see tab. 1).

**Table 1. The ratio of the average female earnings to the average male earnings by occupational groups in Poland, 2006 (in %)**

Occupational group	The share of women in the total number of the employed	Percentage share of average women's earnings in men's earnings
Total	44.9	82.2
Legislators, senior officials and managers	35.4	69.6
Professionals (including teachers and doctors)	64.6	74.9
Technicians and associate professionals	55.6	79.8
Clerks	65.9	96.3
Service workers and shop and market sales workers	66.3	84.1
Skilled agricultural and fishery workers	45.3	87.0
Plant and machine operators and assemblers	14.4	79.3
Elementary occupations	55.9	84.9

Source: own calculations based on: *Structure of wages and salaries by occupations in October 2006*, op. cit., p. 17 and *Labour Force Survey in Poland, IV quarter 2008*, series: Information and Statistical Papers, CSO, Warsaw 2008, p. 153.

The share of women among managers (35%) in Poland is one of the highest in the European Union – similar rates are observed only for Great Britain, Lithuania, France and Hungary. It may be concluded that glass ceiling does not exist anymore in case of the lowest positions at work, it is relatively thin and easy to break in case of intermediate level, nevertheless the hindered access of women to the higher and top managerial positions still poses the problem to be solved – among the general directors and company presidents women are an exception.

### **Equality policy in the companies operating on the Polish market**

The situation in respect to equal treatment of women and men in the place of work was recognized following the research carried out in 2006 and

2007 within the framework of the Gender Index Project. In 2006, the research covered 52 companies that submitted their access to the competition *Equal Chances Company*, and in those companies - 101 female/male directors and 4108 female/male employees. In 2007, the number of the surveyed companies amounted to 100, while the number of the interviewed female/male workers was 7447.

The objective of the competition *Equal Chances Company* was finding companies conducting the best equal rights policy, i.e. companies that not only comply with the obligatory discrimination regulations, but also offer unique solutions facilitation gender diversity and professional development of women and men, ensure equal pay on the same or similar positions, facilitate combining occupational and family roles, make working environment a place free from sexual harassment and mobbing.

Results of the carried out surveys confirmed<sup>8</sup>, that the European standard regarding equal treatment of women and men in the workplace is still struggling to find its way to the Polish companies. The situation is already quite positive in some areas, e.g. companies usually comply with law in regard to protection of pregnant women and protection of persons on maternity leaves and (less often) child-care leaves against dismissal, but there is still a lot to do in other areas, e.g. in the area of access to promotion, reconciliation of professional and family responsibilities, job recruitment.

As regard recruitment, the general rule is application of male forms in job advertisements. For example the word “candidate” for a particular position is used, which considering the specifics of the Polish language suggest a man, instead of “male or female candidate” or “persons employed on this position”. The names of occupations usually have male forms, even when female forms are in general use (it concerns, i.a. a bookkeeper and sales assistant, which in Polish have both: male and female forms). Only 9 (7%) per 131 of the analysed advertisements could be accepted as exemplary. During job interviews, women much more often than men are asked about their family situation (the number of children, procreative plans or childcare arrangements), while men are more often than women asked about their availability and readiness to work overtime. It indicates the stereotypical perception of male and female candidates for work by the employers.

Remuneration of women was lower than remuneration of men; however, the pay gaps were lower than the country's averages both: in respect to managerial positions and the rank and file. The situation within this area was better in small and medium companies than in large corporations. Only 28% of the companies participating in the competition carry out moni-



toring of female and male earnings on particular positions. It is more often maintained by large companies (48% carries out monitoring) than small and medium ones (19%).

Women irrespective of their age, education, or the number of children, less often than men participate in training financed by their companies. Women are less often represented among the managerial positions of the higher and top executive level, even in the companies that characterise with a high level of feminisation (women work, while men rule). Only few companies adopted programmes targeted at promoting women for managerial positions, particularly the top executive ones.

The solutions facilitating reconciliation between family and work responsibilities were observed in 27% small and medium companies and in 72% of the large firms. The most often they were applied in a form of subsidising children's recreation (holiday) (applied in 21% small and medium companies and in 66% large ones). Neither of the enterprises participating in the research maintained company crèche or kindergarten, only few of them co-financed the costs of pre-school care or education of children (usually learning foreign languages). Solutions such as: extended paid maternity leave, paying for a childminder during the mother's business trip, special place/room for parents with children (for nursing), or the room where in case of emergency, a child may be left under the professional care are solutions adopted only sporadically. Whereas, quite popular practice in companies is financing recreation and sports activities: 72% large companies and 41% small and medium enterprises. The conclusion is that the companies take care of the good health condition of their female and male employees, as currently employers are aware that it translates into higher efficiency. However, they are as yet not aware that providing their female/male employees with the aid in combining work and family responsibilities has also an impact on the company financial results (if employed persons feel secure, they work better, they are loyal to his/her company and stay longer).

The significant conclusion drawn from the research is the fact that many enterprises still do not comply with the Article 94<sup>1</sup> of the Labour Code, which obliges employers to inform female and male employees that company obeys the rule of equal treatment, counteracts discrimination, sexual harassment and mobbing. Employers may choose the way of informing their employees: through carrying out internal training, including the information concerning prohibition on discrimination and procedures applied in case of its breaking in the company's code available to each employee or its publication in the Intranet. More often, these standards are fulfilled by large com-

panies (e.g. 69% among the companies participating in the competition had the adequate provision in the internal statute, while it was 36% small and medium ones). European standards also oblige companies to appointing a person (female/male specialist for equal rights) responsible for observance of the principle of equal treatment of the employed in respect to gender and combating discrimination. The ombudsman was appointed in 71% of small and medium ones and in 62% of large companies. However, most often, as it might be expected, it was a person representing HR section, instead of a separate organizational unit – this was indicated by 27% of small and medium companies and 55% of the large ones.

The analysis of the results of the studies carried out within the framework of the competition *Equal Chance Competition* leads to the conclusion that equal treatment of women and men in the workplace is rather a myth than a fact. The main obstacle hindering the way to respecting equality and diversity is a traditional approach of the employers towards perception of women and men as employees. It is also lack of knowledge and ignorance of the obligatory regulations within this area after accession of Poland to the European Union. Finally, it is the cost of implementation of some solutions, particularly significant in case of small and medium companies. However, considering a significant share of companies that can afford sponsoring recreational and sports activities for their rank and file, one may doubt whether in reality the financial factor does not play a secondary role to the cultural one.

*The Equal Chance Company* competition contributed to popularisation of the knowledge concerning the standards of equality in the place of work, as each company participating in the competition received individual report containing the analysis of its own situation. Learning about the standards facilitates their implementation, which is confirmed for example by the higher number of exemplary job advertisement presented for the analysis in the second issue of the competition than in the first one. Moreover, the awareness of the fact that diversity pays off, because it increases the possibility of staff recruitment (women are well educated and talented) decreases fluctuation and absenteeism, plays a significant role in improving the company's external image, increases creativity and innovativeness of the labour resources, it also enables better reaction to the customers' needs, is still only slightly popularised among the Polish employers.

## Conclusion

Gender diversity is the fact in employment. However, not all companies have introduced equal treat-





ment of women and men as a norm. The mechanisms of controlling and monitoring the situation in the workplace by the state bodies, e.g. Labour Inspectorate, the Office for Equality or the Ministry of Labour are not effective. As yet, the attempts at eliminating discrimination in the area of access to employment and in the place of work have not been successful – there are often cases when female candidates for a job are asked questions concerning their family status, including the number and age of children, as well as questions about organization of childcare when a woman is at work. Therefore, it is much more difficult for women to find their first job, they also find leaving unemployment much more difficult than men. There are too often observed cases of sexual harassment in the workplace, while the employers pay too little attention to prevention of this negative phenomenon – there is lack of internal training and procedures of action in situation when there are observed cases of sexual harassment. Employed women participate in training and are promoted much less often than men; there is a tendency towards professional segregation and lower pay for women even for work of the same value. For instance: in 2006, average monthly gross earnings of a female nurse in the public sector amounted to 2284 PLN, while the (male) driver's – 2521 PLN; in the public sector more than a nurse earned an (male) electrician (3064 PLN) and blacksmith (2649 PLN). The salary of a female teacher in lower-secondary and secondary school amounted to 2710 PLN, i.e. slightly more than earnings of a blacksmith and a driver, but less than the electrician's pay, not mentioning the miner's one (4606 PLN)<sup>9</sup>.

There are still many things that should be done regarding solutions facilitating reconciliation between professional responsibilities and private life. Neither the government's actions initiated within the scope of social policy, nor the employers' attempts in this area are sufficient. Particularly in rural areas, availability of institutional childcare is very low – barely 2% children below 3 years of age may go to crèche of kindergarten, while in Sweden, Belgium, the Netherlands the respective figure is 40%, whereas the target of the Lisbon Strategy is no less than 33% in each member State. Employers prefer male candidates for work, considering them to be more available (flexible), as they are not burdened with family responsibilities. Working environment ignores the fact that majority of the employed have families and children. Polish employers are only rarely aware of the fact that diversity translates into better financial effects.

Therefore, it may be agreed that “Women are the resource most often ignored and unappreciated in business; both as consumers and employees (...) This comprises the greatest weakness of the business model designed in the world dominated by men (...). Necessary is the revolution in the way of thinking”<sup>10</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Based on: *Women in Poland*, CSO, Warsaw 2007, p. 24.

<sup>2</sup> *Labour Force Survey in Poland, III quarter 2008*, series: Information and Statistical Papers, CSO Warsaw 2008.

<sup>3</sup> The phenomenon of tokenism consisting in stronger controlling with simultaneous marginalization of the employees who are in decided minority concerns women; while the phenomenon of glass escalator concerns men. See: C.I. Williams, *The glass escalator. Hidden advantages for men in the female professions*, “Social Problems” 1992, No 39; Rozmowa z prof. Małgorzatą Fuszara pt. *Rodzynki w świecie kobiet [Interview with Prof. Małgorzata Fuszara: Rare birds in the women's world, „Wysokie obcasy” 2.07.2005*.

<sup>4</sup> It is confirmed by the results of studies carried out in 2006 and 2007 within the framework of the Gender Index Project. See: M. Fuszara, *Równe traktowanie w procesie rekrutacji [Equal treatment in the recruitment process]*, in: *Gender Index. Monitorowanie równości kobiet i mężczyzn w miejscu pracy [Gender Index. Monitoring equality of women and men in the workplace]*, ed. E. Lisowska, EQUAL, UNDP, Warsaw 2007, p. 47-49, and *Firma równych szans 2007 II edition of the competition. Report on the research*, EQUAL, PKPP Lewiatan, Warsaw 2008, p. 15.

<sup>5</sup> H. Domański, *Zadowolony niewolnik? Studium o nierównościach między mężczyznami i kobietami w Polsce [A happy slave? The study of inequalities between men and women in Poland]*, IFiS PAN, Warsaw 2002, p. 37 and 39.

<sup>6</sup> *Report on Equality between Women and Men 2008*, European Commission, DG Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities, Luxembourg, January 2008, p. 29.

<sup>7</sup> Data for the previous years come from: Z. Jacukowicz, *Zróżnicowanie płac w Polsce, w krajach Unii Europejskiej i w USA [Diversification of earnings in Poland, European Union countries and the USA]* Institute of Labour and Social Affairs, Warsaw 2000, p. 83, and B. Cichomski, *Wynagrodzenia kobiet i mężczyzn w latach 1996-2002*, in: *Krajowy system monitorowania równego traktowania kobiet i mężczyzn [Women's and men's earnings in the years 1996-2002. in: The national system of equal treatment of women and men monitoring. Expert's reports*, volume 1, Wydawnictwo Naukowe Scholar, Warsaw 2006, p. 300. Data for 2006, of: *Structure of wages and salaries by occupations in October 2006*, CSO, Warsaw 2007.

<sup>8</sup> See: *Gender Index. Monitorowanie równości kobiet i mężczyzn w miejscu pracy [Monitoring of equality of women and men in the workplace]*, ed. E. Lisowska, EQUAL, UNDP, Warsaw 2007; *Equal Chances Company 2007 II edition of the competition. Report on the research*, EQUAL, PKPP Lewiatan, Warsaw 2008.

<sup>9</sup> *Structure of wages and salaries by occupations in October 2006*, op.cit., p. 122-123.

<sup>10</sup> Quotation from the “Financial Times”, February 2008