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# Women with basic vocational education in the labour market: situation in Poland

## Introduction

Recently Polish market has seen an increased demand for skilled workers, both in traditional and new professions associated with the development of computer technology and changing lifestyles of the society. An insufficient number of such persons has triggered a discussion on the development of basic vocational education and restoration of its importance in the educational policy.

In Q1 2015, the number of people with basic vocational education was 7,583,000 in total, including 2,958,000 women. Women constituted 39% of the total number of persons with basic vocational education (for comparison: women constitute 58% among persons with higher education) [Central Statistical Office (GUS) 2015].

Basic vocational schools are dominated by men – in the school year 2013/2014 they accounted for 71% of students; while women for 29% [Oświata i wychowanie... (Education and Upbringing in the school year ...) 2014:72]. Men are educated mostly in engineering and technical professions, as well as those associated with architecture and construction, which are in high demand in the labour market, while women in economic and administrative professions, as well as public services, which are less in demand. The results of existing research show lack of synchronisation between educational offer and the needs of the labour market in the case of vocational schools for girls, thus in their present form, the schools seem unattractive to women [Rekomendacje... (Recommendations), 2010:9]. Hence, vocational schools are much less popular with female rather than male graduates of lower secondary schools.

The paper aims at analysing the situation of women with basic vocational education in the Polish labour market, in comparison with the situation of men with the same level of education.

The analysis is based on secondary data from the quarterly survey on the professional activity of the population of Poland (for the years 2010–2015) and the research on pay conducted by the Central Statistical Office (GUS) every two years, based on a representative sample of enterprises employing no less than 10 staff members (for the years 2006, 2008, 2010 and 2012). The results of the quantitative research will be supplemented and illustrated with the opinions of professionally active and unemployed women with basic vocational education, taken from the qualitative research (individual and group interviews) carried out in several selected Polish cities in May 2015.

## Literature review

Professional activity of women is relatively low in Poland – lower than the professional activity of men and also lower than the EU28 average. This is indicated as a serious social problem in the context of demographic changes that are taking place: low fertility rate and ageing society [Haponiuk 2013; Kotowska and Sztanderska 2007]. Gender is a factor strongly influencing the professional activity of the population [Sztanderska and Grotowska 2007:156]. Women find it more difficult to get a job, which applies in particular to women with a lower level of education. In the case of men, it is enough to have vocational skills, while in the case of women, the field in which those skills are gained is important as well. Accord-

ing to Sztanderska and Grotowska [2007:159], the relationship between the level of education and professional activity is stronger for the female population, while in the case of men “having (even basic) vocational education is more important” [Sztanderska and Grotowska 2007:168].

Huge differences between men and women’s pay have been for a long time another labour market problem. Many studies analyse these differences and reasons thereof [Cichomski 2006; Goraus and Tyrowicz 2014; Grajek 2003; Lisowska 2012b; Magda and Potoczna 2014; Matuszewska-Janica and Witkowska 2010; Ślarczyński 2012; Zajkowska 2013]. They show that women earn less than men, regardless of education, age, sector of the economy, industry or company size. Jobs and professions where average women’s pay is equal or higher than this of men are an exception. The gender pay gap can be only partially accounted for by such factors as the level of education, period of service, experience, interruptions in employment due to childcare. The human capital theory does not fully explain the gender pay gap, as it does not take into the consideration the cultural factor. Stereotypical perceptions of the roles of women and men in the labour market and in the society affect both the types of professions to be chosen by women and men, as well as how they are perceived by employers as job candidates [Cichomski 2006; Lisowska 2013; Mandal 2004]. Due to cultural considerations, professions perceived as male basically pay higher than those perceived as female. Even if women enter the work spheres for men, they still earn less than men. Differences in pay are especially apparent in the group of persons with basic vocational education.

So far there has been no research that would focus on women with basic vocational education, in particular young women with this level of education, and their status in the labour market. This study relates to this group of women and, in addition to generally available statistical data, it also presents the results of the qualitative research.

## **Professional activity of persons with basic vocational education**

Over the years 2010–2015, professional activity rates pertaining to men and women with basic vocational education in Poland have fallen by a few percentage points, while a slight increase has been

noted therein for the total population. A similar trend has been observed in the case of employment rates. The employment rate among people with basic vocational education has decreased as well – to a greater extent among women than men, but in each of the analysed years, it was higher for women than men. For example, in 2013 the employment rate was nearly 16% among women and 13% among men, and in Q1 of 2015, 11.1% and 10.7% respectively [Central Statistical Office (GUS) 2013 and 2015].

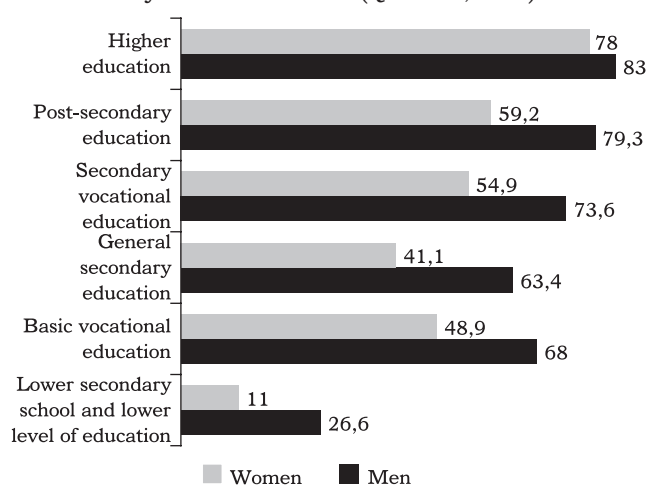
Nevertheless, data for the years 2010–2015 show that professional activity of persons with basic vocational education is higher than average for the total population aged 15 and older. This is especially apparent in the male population (professional activity rates are by 4–8 percentage points higher in the subsequent years) than in the female population (higher by 1–5 percentage points).

The situation is similar when it comes to employment rates for men – which are higher than for the total male population aged 15 and older, while for women – they are slightly lower. There are 43 working women per one hundred women with basic vocational education (compared to 44 in the total population); there are nearly 61 working men per one hundred men with basic vocational education (compared to 59 in the total population).

The highest professional activity is noted among persons with higher education (both women and men), as well as men with education at the post-secondary and secondary vocational level. The lowest, on the other hand, among persons with no particular occupation, i.e., among graduates of lower-secondary schools or those with secondary general education at most (Figure 1). The unemployment rate among men and women with basic vocational education is higher than in the total population (Figure 2). At each level of education, unemployment rates for women are higher than those for men.

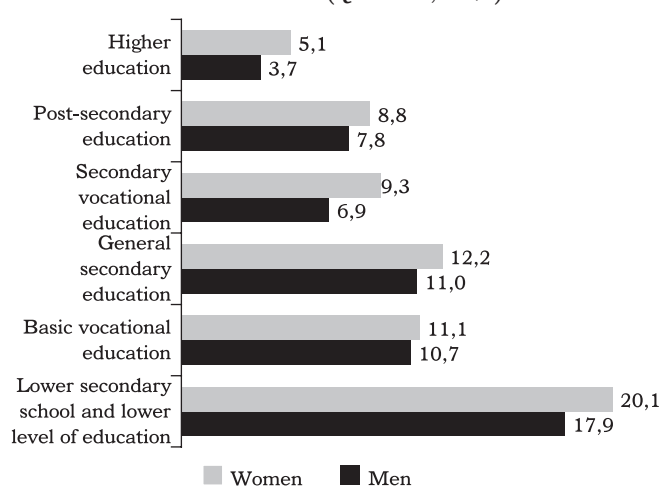
School graduates, i.e., persons aged 15–30, find it the hardest in the labour market. According to data from the Central Statistical Office, in the first quarter of 2015 only half of basic vocational school graduates aged 15–30 are gainfully employed (compared to 61.8% for the total population of graduates), and the unemployment rate is as high as 41.9% (compared to 30.7% for the total population of graduates)<sup>1</sup>. Research carried out by the Polish Agency of Enterprise Development within the framework of the 5<sup>th</sup> edition of the Human Capital Balance show that unemployment rate amongst female graduates

**Figure 1.** Professional activity rates for women and men by level of education (Q1 2015; in %)



Source: own work on the basis of: Central Statistical Office (GUS) 2015: Aktywność ekonomiczna ludności Polski, I kwartał 2015 [Economic activity of the population of Poland, 1st quarter of 2015] "Informacje i Opracowania Statystyczne" (Statistical Information and Studies), Warsaw, p. 71.

**Figure 2.** Unemployment rate for women and men by level of education (Q1 2015; in %)



Source: the same as for figure 1.

of basic vocational schools is at 44% and amongst male graduates at 30%. The unemployment rate amongst the total population of graduates is clearly lower and reaches 28% for women and 26% for men [Czarnik and Turek 2015:70].

Women with basic vocational education pursue gainful employment less often than men with this level of education. Among working women, the majority have higher education (41.5%), while among working men, the majority (32.2%) is constituted by those with basic vocational education (Table 1).

Men clearly dominate the total working population with basic vocational education (68.6% compared to 31.4% for women). Women dominate the working population with higher and general secondary education (Table 2).

Young women (up to 35 years of age) constitute the smallest group (15.3%) among working women with basic vocational education. To compare, in a group of women with higher education this percentage is 43.4%. Similarly, among working men with basic vocational education, those at the age of 35 account for 22%, which is only slightly more than for women, and in the case of higher education it is 40.8% (Table 3).

How to account for such huge differences? In the case of both, men and women, the reason lies in the high unemployment rate among graduates – people with basic vocational education find it much more difficult to get their first job than those with higher education. When it comes to women, another reason is that women with basic vocational education give birth to their first child earlier than women with higher education. The median age for women at first child's birth is 23 and 29 years respectively [Rocznik Demograficzny 2014 (The Demographic Yearbook of 2014):328]. Early motherhood leads to postponement of a decision to take up professional activity until the child reaches pre-school age. Another reason is the attitude of employers, who are unwilling to hire young women in fear that they may give birth to a child, and women having children – in fear of a lack of availability.

**Women and men with basic vocational education mostly work in the private sector.** This is especially apparent in the case of women – women employed in the public sector account for approx. a third of the total population of working women, while women with basic vocational education – for nearly 15% [Central Statistical Office (GUS) 2015:87].

Most women and men with basic vocational education work as an employed person, **whereby women are more often than men employed under fixed-term contracts** (35.5% compared to 30.3% of men), and less often under contracts for an indefinite period (64.5% compared to 69.7% of men) [Central Statistical Office (GUS) 2015:92]. Simultaneously, the percentage of those employed under fixed-term contracts is higher in the group of women and men with basic vocational education, than in the total working population. The youngest persons (aged 18–24) are quite often employed under fixed-term or civil law contracts. The study carried out

by the Polish Agency for Enterprise Development (PARP) shows that the relevant figures among men are as follows: 36% work under a fixed-term contract and 19% under a civil law contract, and amongst women: 31% and 30% respectively [Czarnik and

Turek 2015:35]. In the group of persons aged 25-34, these employment forms are less popular: fixed-term employment contract 24% of men and 23% of women; civil law contract 8% of men and 9% of women [Ibidem].

**Table 1.** Structure of the employed by levels of education (Q1 2015, %)

Specification	In total	Higher education	Post-secondary and secondary vocational education	General secondary education	Basic vocational education	Lower secondary school or lower level of education
In total	100.0	32.9	27.0	8.5	25.8	5.8
Men	100.0	26.0	27.7	7.2	32.2	6.9
Women	100.0	41.5	26.2	10.0	18.0	4.3

Source: own work on the basis of: Central Statistical Office (GUS) 2015: Aktywność ekonomiczna ludności Polski, I kwartał 2015 [Economic activity of the population of Poland, 1st quarter of 2015] "Informacje i Opracowania Statystyczne" (Statistical Information and Studies), Warsaw, p. 87.

**Table 2.** Professional activity rates for women and men by level of education (Q1 2015, %)

Specification	In total	Higher education	Post-secondary and secondary vocational education	General secondary education	Basic vocational education	Lower secondary school or lower level of education
In total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Men	55.0	43.4	56.4	47.1	68.6	65.9
Women	45.0	56.6	43.6	52.9	31.4	34.1

Source: the same as for Table 3.

**Table 3.** Employees with basic vocational and higher education by gender and age (Q1 2015; in %)

Age in years	In total	With basic vocational education	With higher education
Women			
15-24	5.9	3.8	3.9
25-34	26.9	11.5	39.5
35-44	28.1	29.8	30.5
45-54	23.8	37.1	16.5
55-64	13.8	16.5	8.4
65 and older	1.4	1.1	1.2
Working age (18-59)	95.2	95.6	96.3
Men			
15-24	7.2	5.7	2.4
25-34	27.4	16.3	38.4
35-44	27.2	28.4	31.4
45-54	20.5	27.8	14.5
55-64	15.6	20.5	10.5
65 and older	2.0	1.2	2.8
Working age (18-64)	97.9	98.8	97.3

Source: own work on the basis of: Central Statistical Office (GUS) 2015: Aktywność ekonomiczna ludności Polski, I kwartał 2015 [Economic activity of the population of Poland, 1st quarter of 2015] "Informacje i Opracowania Statystyczne" (Statistical Information and Studies), Warsaw, p. 104.

## Persons running a sole proprietorship

On the one hand, in the case of persons with basic vocational education, own business seems to be a good choice provided that they pursue professions associated with public services (seller, hairdresser, beautician, fitter, car mechanic, etc.). It is more beneficial to run one's own business than to work for the benefit of others as it provides a chance for higher earnings than those offered by employers to their employees. On the other hand, however, running one's own business entails greater risks and lower social security benefits than under an employment contract, which is especially important for women.

**Among women and men with basic vocational education there are more sole proprietors than among the total male and female population**, more people have a registered business [Central Statistical Office (GUS) 2015:87]. The studies carried out in Poland show that in the case of women with a lower level of education, push factors more often decide about self-employment than in the case of women with higher education, among whom the pull factors are more significant [Lisowska 2012a:94; Sarata 2011:278]. Among working women with basic vocational education, persons running a sole proprietorship accounted for 18.2% compared to 13.3% in the total population of working women (data for Q1 2015). In the case of men, the figures were: 23.8% and 22% respectively (significantly smaller differences than for women).

Both persons registered as those individually operating a business, in other words self-employed persons, as well as persons who hire employees and function as employers fall into the category of "persons running a sole proprietorship". Self-employed persons constitute a majority in the group of persons running a sole proprietorship (87% in case of men and 90.6% in case of women), employers, on the other hand, constitute a minority (13% and 9.4% respectively). Both women and men with basic vocational education seldom perform the function of employers (less often than in the total working population).

At the same time, there occur greater gender disparities when it comes to those running a sole proprietorship. Women account for 33.1% and men for 66.9% among the total population of persons running a sole proprietorship. In the population of persons with basic vocational education running a sole proprietorship, women account for only 25.9% and men for 74.1%. Among employers, women account

for 30.2% and 20.2% respectively [Central Statistical Office (GUS) 2015:87]. **Women with basic vocational education less often run their own business than men with the same level of education or the total population of working women.** Similarly, women less often perform the function of employers.

Mostly women provide assistance to the family members, whereby women with basic vocational education, more often than the total working population of women, perform unpaid work for the family [Central Statistical Office (GUS) 2015:87].

## Pay of women and men with basic vocational education

According to the research on pay conducted by the Central Statistical Office (GUS)<sup>2</sup> in the years 2006, 2008, 2010 and 2012, average monthly gross pay of working women in each year accounted for 82%, 81%, 85% and 83% of average monthly gross pay of men [GUS 2007, 2009, 2012, 2014]. If the pay of women is taken as basis, average monthly earnings of men were by 22% higher than those of women in 2006, by 23% higher in 2008, by 18% higher in 2010 and by 20% higher in 2012. These data indicate that over the years 2006-2012 the gender pay gap decreased only slightly. It was comparatively the lowest in 2010, and comparatively the highest in 2008. Against the background of the pay gap for the total working population, particularly unfavourable for women is the pay gap for basic vocational education (Figure 3). **Comparatively the largest gender pay gap has been observed in the group of people with basic vocational education.**

**Figure 3.** A female-to-male average pay ratio for persons with basic vocational education in 2006, 2008, 2010 and 2012 (%)



Source: own calculations on the basis of pay research data from the Central Statistical Office (GUS) in the years 2006, 2008 and 2010 [GUS 2007, 2009, 2012, 2014].

It can be concluded on the basis of average monthly pay in companies having 10 or more employees, that women with basic vocational education earned 69% of what their male counterparts with the same level of education earned, with the exception of 2008, when their average monthly pay accounted for only 67% of the monthly pay of their male counterparts.

**Men with basic vocational education earned by 45% more than women** in 2006 and the same situation occurred in 2012 – average gross monthly pay of men with basic vocational education amounted to 3,103 zloty and of women to 2,145 zloty. Thus, men earned by nearly a thousand zloty more per month than women with the same level of education.

**In the public sector, the pay gap was bigger than in the private sector:** women earned 57% of men's earnings in the public sector (2,221 zloty and 3,870 zloty respectively) and 72% in the private sector (2,120 zloty and 2,930 zloty respectively).

When it comes to the distribution of average pay by age, the differences between women and men with basic vocational education are comparatively the largest in the youngest group aged 14–17 – women earn only 60% of men's earnings, then in the group aged 40–44 (63%) and aged 35–39 (67%), and comparatively the smallest in groups aged 18–19 (83%) and aged 20–24 (79%), which is shown in Figure 4.

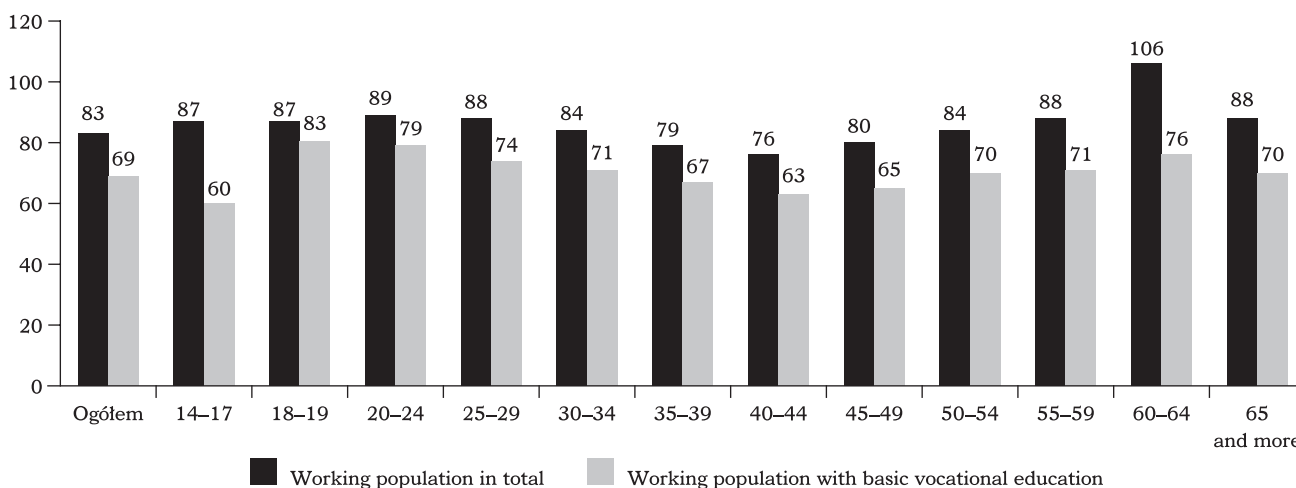
On the onset of their professional activity (with the exception of minors whose work is most often reduced to paid apprenticeship), differences in pay are smaller than at a later time, when women experience career interruptions due to childcare.

Pay differences are also noticeable when average hourly rates are analysed. For an hour of work, women get paid less than men, **which mostly relates to the public than the private sector** (Figure 5). In other words, there were greater differences between rates per hour in the public sector offered to women and men with basic vocational education than those offered in the private sector in each of the years covered by the research. **In 2012, in the public sector the hourly rate for men was by 70% higher than the hourly rate for women**, and in the private sector – by 37% higher. Over the years 2006–2012, the hourly rate in the case of persons with basic vocational education increased, whereby the smallest increase occurred between 2010 and 2012. In 2012, it was 15.61 zloty for men and 11.42 zloty for women in the private sector, and 20.58 zloty and 12.11 zloty in the public sector.

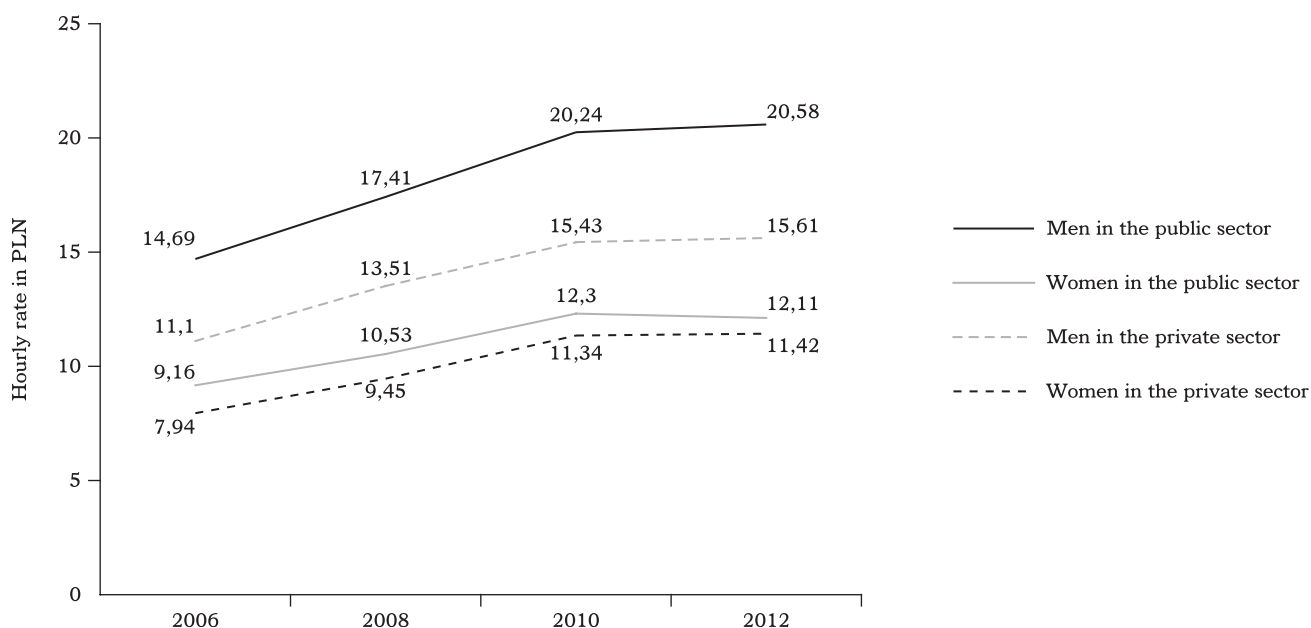
Table 4 shows average gross monthly pay of women and men with basic vocational education for selected professions including the number of employees per profession. The analysis is based on professions in which the number of women and men employed is relatively high, as well as – for the purpose of illustration – those in which women earn more than men.

As regards chefs, the profession dominated by women, they earn slightly more than men – average monthly pay of female chefs accounts for 105% of the pay of male chefs with basic vocational education. In the group of vehicle drivers and operators, a highly masculinised profession, women earn more than men. In particular, a clear difference in favour

**Figure 4.** A female-to-male average pay ratio by age in 2012 (%)



Source: own calculations on the basis of data from the pay research carried out in 2012 [Central Statistical Office (GUS) 2014].

**Figure 5.** Gross hourly pay of women and men with basic vocational education in 2006, 2008, 2010 and 2012 (in PLN)

Source: own calculations on the basis of data from the pay research [Central Statistical Office (GUS) 2007, 2009, 2012, 2014].

**Table 4.** Number of employees and pay of women and men with basic vocational education in selected professions in 2012

Selected jobs and professions	Number of employees		Average gross monthly pay in PLN		Female-to-men pay ratio %
	men	women	men	women	
Property landlords	18 776	12 181	2 228	1 983	89
Waiters, bartenders	1 139	4 929	1 958	1 857	95
Vehicle drivers and operators	208 631	4 148	2 918	3 056	105
Lorry and bus drivers	110 731	489	2 769	3 439	124
Blacksmiths, locksmiths	104 062	4 130	3 296	2 577	78
Cooks	4 720	20 478	2 000	2 099	105
Refuse collectors	39 880	22 805	2 616	2 131	81
Mechanics/fitters	27 086	20 686	3 422	2 407	70
Machine and equipment operators	372 062	56 667	3 329	2 551	77
Workers fulfilling simple tasks	135 437	183 152	2 517	2 032	81
Site operatives	138 108	1 806	2 819	2 530	90
Printing workers	6 357	3 559	3 090	2 095	68
Labourers in mining, construction and transport	83 118	34 333	2 680	2 325	87
Garment workers	9 921	52 975	2 773	2 002	72
Food processing workers	40 846	25 491	2 381	2 214	93
Shop assistants	12 560	100 057	2 359	1 980	84

Source: own work on the basis of unpublished data from the research on pay carried out by the Central Statistical Office (GUS) in 2012 [GUS 2014].

of women is observed in the group of lorry and bus drivers – average monthly pay of women accounts for 124% of the pay of men. Women in this profession are still few and far between, but they can expect high pay.

In masculinised professions, monthly pay of women is usually lower than those of men, but not so clearly as on average for the whole group with basic vocational education. Thus, in the group of site operatives, women earn 90% of what men do, in the blacksmith, locksmith profession – 78%, in the refuse collector profession – 81%. Monthly pay of women employed as workers in the food industry accounts for 93% of the male workers' pay. In the group of shop assistants (highly masculinised profession) women earn 84% of what their male counterparts earn.

In masculinised industries, opportunities open to women comprise not only higher pay than in the feminised professions, but most of all pay nearly equal to the pay of men. This is due to the fact that male professions are in greater demand in the market and they are better-paid than female professions, while a low number of women pursuing these professions does not lead to any pay reductions.

## Opinions of women with basic vocational education on their situation in the labour market

Explaining the reasons for the existence among women with basic vocational education, in particular graduates, of high unemployment rates, while skilled workers are generally in high demand in the labour market and the reasons why women find it difficult to get a job after graduating from vocational school was possible thanks to the qualitative research – interviews in focus groups and individual interviews carried out in 2015<sup>3</sup> with women aged 20–34 having basic vocational education.

Interview instructions covered such issues as reasons for choosing a given (masculine or feminine) vocational school and profession – was this choice influenced by the family (family traditions), friends or career counsellor; the importance of stereotypes for choosing a profession; the way young women perceive work in masculine professions; learned profession and chances in the labour market – finding a full time job, establishing a business; pay level degree of satisfaction achieved; situation of women

with basic vocational education in the labour market contrasted with the situation of male graduates of vocational schools.

This qualitative research served multiple purposes. First of all, the aim of the research was to identify factors that determine the women's choice of basic vocational school (family considerations, school influences, the influence of peers, cultural aspects) and obtain opinions of women with basic vocational education on the quality of vocational education in the context of the preparation of students for a specific profession and how to function in the labour market. Secondly, the research aimed at obtaining information whether it is easy or difficult for female graduates of vocational schools to find a job, what attitudes of the employers they have encountered while looking for a job.

Women that took part in the research confirmed, that in their opinions there are many job offers for persons with basic vocational education, but it is difficult to find a decent-paying job so that they could support themselves and the family:

*Even if the job is available, the pay ain't enough to maintain the flat, children, not to mention the food.* [Siedlce, FGI]

Interviews carried out in the Warmian-Masurian province show that rates offered by Polish employers are perceived as grossly low by returned women economic emigrants. They have both practical knowledge and professional experience gained abroad, thus they expect the pay that would allow them to maintain themselves, whereas in the local market they encounter offers which do not come up to their expectations.

In addition, it is difficult for women to find the first job in the learned profession:

*I graduated from vocational school as a chief. I have never worked in my profession. Right now I work for a second hand clothes sorting store. I have a year-old son (...) I worked illegally, so I was not eligible for maternity allowance.* [Siedlce, FGI]

Many a time, women that took part in the research encountered offers without any contract or offers with fixed-term or civil-law contract. Contracts of this type are perceived as unfavourable for women because they do not give rights to maternity leave, although they were accepted as a means to gain professional experience, without which – ac-



ording to women – it is impossible to find a better job. For this very reason, i.e., to get at least some experience in the labour market, they took up employment in a profession other than their learned profession.

It is possible to conclude on the basis of opinions expressed by women who took part in the research, that because of the limited availability of employment contracts, upon signing the contract women soon decide to have a child. Such behaviour strengthens the approach adopted by employers to avoid offering employment contracts to young women. Employers who hire under civil law contracts mitigate the risk of hiring women who will become unavailable when she becomes a mother. Questions pertaining to procreative plans and having children are therefore a standard element of job interviews in this professional group. Here is an example of replies provided:

*As soon as I went to my first job, a lady immediately asked me if I had a boyfriend. (...) Perhaps because when a girl has a guy she can get pregnant. [Siedlce, FGI]*

*My friend immediately warned me that whenever I go I should never tell them I have a child. [Kielce, FGI]*

According to women who took part in the research, job offers for men are associated with higher pay. Therefore, women with basic vocational education perceive sex-based wage discrimination: employers offer lower wages to women than to men although both sexes pursue the same profession and work equally hard. Here is a selection of sample replies:

*It is easier for a guy to find a job. No matter whether he is a vocational or technical school graduate. It is easier for him and he surely earns more than a woman. In this respect I think this is a kind of discrimination. Women often work in the same profession, work harder but earn less. [Kielce, IDI]*

*My boyfriend works as an electrician and earns 13–14 zloty per hour. And I haven't heard of a single woman who would earn that much. [Siedlce, FGI]*

*I worked in a hair salon, normally, 6 days a week 8 hours a day. With a bad grace, she paid me 600 zloty for the month. So I made 20 zloty for an 8-hour workday. I simply gave up. [Kielce, FGI]*

Opinions expressed by the women reveal the influence of gender stereotypes on the choices and situation of women in vocational education and the labour market. Some women indiscriminately accept the distinction between masculine and feminine jobs and provide arguments that stem from gender stereotypes (*women are unsuitable for certain professions; male and female brains work differently*) in order to justify the traditional choices of vocational schools. Some hold an opinion that women should choose masculine schools, although this is a brave choice because it is likely to cause discomfort resulting from differences (only a few girls in a class of male students) and to unfavourable attitudes in the local environment (*tomboy; people would keep saying that she chose technical school to find a husband*). Only a few of them stated that it is necessary to fight the stereotypes that women are only suitable for housework chores, are weak and unable to achieve professional success.

*I wouldn't dare then to attend a typical class of male students. (...) I think that [this is] a kind of pigeonholing of women, claiming that they are unsuitable for certain professions. (...) If I wanted to build a house and a female bricklayer would come, my reaction would be quite similar... I would be afraid. [Olsztyn, IDI]*

*I don't know, I have never thought about it [attending a technical class]. I don't know, in my opinion this is for men and that's it. Just as the dressmaking, hairdressing and confectionery was for girls. That is what I thought at the age of 15. [Kielce, FGI]*

*There were several [in technical classes], but rather tomboys. I don't know, some of them did not even look like girls. [Kielce, FGI]*

*Women should choose such [typically masculine] professions. (...) I think they are afraid. They fear of what people will say. [Siedlce, FGI]*

*It is necessary to change the stereotypes that women are supposed to do the cooking. That women are weak, that they can't do this or that. The stereotype that women are poor creatures and can do nothing. This is not true. [Kielce, IDI]*

Some women think that an employer would never hire a woman to do “male jobs” because he does not believe in her competences. Individual interviews with women pursuing masculine professions

confirm the fears pertaining to doubts of the employers – they usually worked as assistants and earned significantly less than their male counterparts in the same profession.

Results of the qualitative research explain that lower professional activity among women with basic vocational education has its origins in the stereotypical perception of women by employers – through the prism of their motherly and care-taking functions. Because of this stereotypical perception, it is difficult for young women with basic vocational education to find a full-time job. On the other hand, low pay offered to women and awareness that men with the same level of education earn more, coupled with experience gained abroad, where people are generally paid more, do not encourage them to take up employment at all.

## Summary and conclusions

Over the years 2010-2015, employment rates for women with basic vocational education decreased from 44.6% to 43.4%, while the same rates for the total population of women increased from 42.2% to 44.1%. Improvement in the labour market does not, therefore, apply to women with basic vocational education. Finding a job is easier for male rather than female graduates of vocational schools, which is reflected in lower unemployment rates for men.

In comparison with the total population of women aged 15 and over and men with basic vocational education, women with basic vocational education less often take up gainful employment. On the one hand, professions in which women are usually educated are in lesser demand in the labour market (hairdresser, chief, shop assistant), because the market is highly saturated with such employees (a respondent of the qualitative research points out: *in a small town there are several hair salons located along the same street*). On the other hand, however, the vocational education offer for girls is not very diverse, and no actions are taken to encourage girls to attend vocational schools for boys.

Employers more often offer to young women with basic vocational education fixed-term or civil law contracts, thus forms of employment which are less favourable for women than for men. When women do not have an employment contract, it affects both their private and family lives – if they get pregnant and give birth to a child, they will be left destitute. In this situation planning children is not possible.

Hourly rates offered to women with basic vocational education, both in the private and public sectors, are much lower than those offered to men, thus some women do not agree to such low pay and do not take up employment or take more time to find a job. It is worthwhile to emphasise that the gender pay gap in the public sector is clearly larger than in the private sector – the women's rate of pay accounts for 59% and 73% respectively of the average hourly rate of pay for men.

Women are aware of pay discrimination and hold an opinion that employers offer them hourly rates which are twice lower than those offered to men. Some of them justify it with the fact that men work harder, and still some think that their work is equally hard and is worth to be paid the same.

Women employed in so-called masculine professions sometimes earn more than those employed in feminine professions. It may be concluded from the opinions expressed by women, that employers are unwilling to employ women in professions typically regarded as “masculine”. The impact of stereotypes is very strong, not only on the part of employers, but also on the part of girls, who do not choose male classes in fear of “what people will say” or because they are convinced of their lesser technical capabilities.

Therefore, actions need to be taken in order to overcome the barriers preventing women from choosing schools that educate in other than traditional professions and looking for jobs in professions dominated by men or professions involving modern technologies. On the one hand, actions must be taken at the vocational education level and girls should be encouraged to choose schools offering education in other than traditional professions, but on the other hand – employers must be made aware that women are capable of doing well in many professions currently dominated by men. In addition, it is necessary to address to girls a message that would overcome the barriers associated with traditionally perceived femininity and masculinity.

<sup>1</sup> Although data published by the Central Statistical Office (GUS) cover only figures relating to unemployment rate amongst the total population of female (27.9%) and male (32.7%) graduates and do not provide any figures broken down by gender in particular education level categories (cf. Central Statistical Office (GUS) 2015:81].

- <sup>2</sup> In its representative research on pay carried out every two years, the Central Statistical Office (GUS) takes into account entities of national economy employing at least 10 persons. The data relate to full- and part-time paid employees who have worked the entire month of October. Pay information is presented as gross average individual monthly pay and as average hourly pay. More on the methodology see [Central Statistical Office (GUS) 2014:10–13].
- <sup>3</sup> Six in-depth individual interviews were carried out with women working in masculine professions and six interviews were carried out within the focus groups with working and unemployed women aged 20–34 having basic vocational education. The research, commissioned by the Karat Coalition (Koalicja Karat), was carried out in Kielce (2 focus groups and 2 individual interviews), Olsztyn (2 focus groups and 1 individual interview), Siedlce (2 focus groups and 1 individual interview) and Warsaw (2 individual interviews) in May 2015 by Millward Brown research agency. Currently a research report is being worked on.

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