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## Transformations of State Family Policy in Poland from 1989 to the Pandemic Period

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**Abstract:**

**Purpose:** The purpose of the article is to organize and comprehensively present the knowledge on the most important transformations of family policy in Poland and the political, economic, demographic and social conditions of these transformations. The core of the paper are transformations of family institutions seen as crucial for family-targeted policy.

**Design/Methodology/Approach:** The article contains a systematic review of previous research on family and family policies in Poland, published in Polish and international literature on the subject, the institutional-legal method (analysis of Polish legal regulations) and the historical method.

**Findings:** A significant increase in the intervention of the Polish state in family matters falls on the period of financial or economic crises (after 2008 and 2020). This situation provides arguments for the thesis that such crises do not have to hamper (pro)social activities of the state or be an obstacle to the continuation and implementation of important social programs. It also may indicate an attempt to move away from the increasingly criticized - since the global financial crisis of 2008 - neoliberal model, towards which Poland has been heading since 1989.

**Practical implications:** As one of the post-communist countries and an EU member state, Poland's case is special, as it shows that often in spite of difficult systemic or external conditions, the state may increase the scope of its intervention in social issues (including family-related ones) and thus diversify the scope of family policy instruments. Changes in the scope of financial (monetary) allowances should be particularly interesting, but also solutions concerning child care leaves or social services for families with young children. Due to the limited scope of this paper, the analyses are not exhaustive, but they should be an important starting point for comparisons of the presented changes in the international context or for future research on the model of family policy in Poland.

**Keywords:** Family policy instruments, pandemic, transformations.

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## **1. Introduction**

The ongoing changes of the family model require constant adjustments to the state family policy and systematic scientific research, which should constitute the basis for determining the directions, tasks and methods of reaction of the ruling elite to these changes and their consequences. The following article focuses on the family policy of the state understood as a specific type of intervention (Barr, 2020) in the face of family transformations, and at the same time the types of these interventions, i.e. the instruments of the discussed policy (e.g., money transfers, social services and government programs supporting the implementation and development of specific instruments). In her analyzes, the author also refers to the formal-legal and post-behavioral approach in political sciences (Herbut, 2004) and focuses on the purposeful and explicit government family policies.

The research to date on the family state policy understood in this way, both internationally and in Poland, is numerous, but scattered and take into account the family transformations and its economic, political, demographic and social conditions to a different extent and scope. At this point, it is worth mentioning research of governments' external and internal pressures to restructure or amend social policies, programs, and services designed for families with children in OECD countries. It acknowledges the increasing pressures on governments to restructure these policies, and questions which factors have the greatest impact, including new family patterns, globalizing labor markets, multi-country agreements, ideas about relationships, national politics, and existing structures for social provisions (Baker, 2006). An interesting and broad perspective, although referring to one country, is also shown in analyzes of family policy paradoxes, the aim of which was to understand the family political regulation, in particular gender equality and labor markets regulation in Sweden, in the years 1930-2010 (Lundqvist, 2011).

## **2. Literature Review**

Comprehensive and inspiring research, including Poland and other European Union countries, was also presented in the research report on the reactions of states within family policies to the conditions of family functioning during the economic crisis of 2008 (EUROFOUND, 2015<sup>2</sup>). Most often, in relation to family state policy, research was undertaken on: the importance that the state gave to the process of generational renewal, the economic conditions of family life, as well as changes in social norms relating to the family, especially the social roles played by women and men (e.g., Gauthier, 1996; Saraceno *et al.*, 2012; Kotowska, 2017), changes in the labor market and their impact on combining or reconciling family responsibilities with paid work (e.g., Saraceno *et al.*, 2012; Goldscheider *et al.*, 2015), efficiency and effectiveness of family policy in the face of low fertility and more broadly (Kalwij, 2010; Kurowska, 2012a; Luci-Greulich and Thévenon, 2013; Kurowska, 2012b;

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Cichowicz, 2021; Kacperska, 2021; Murkowski, 2021; Szczepaniak-Sienniak, 2021), changes in the instruments of family policy and their economic and social consequences (e.g., Javornik and Kurowska, 2017; Magda *et al.*, 2018; Yerkes *et al.*, 2019; Szczepaniak-Sienniak, 2020), institutional childcare and social services for families with children (e.g., Szczepaniak-Sienniak and Kośny, 2016; Szelewa, 2019), models of family policy, including care regimes or parental leave (e.g., Leitner, 2003; Saxonberg, 2013; Lohmann and Zagel, 2016; Kurowska, 2018; Kurowska, 2019).

The indicated research undoubtedly constitutes a significant contribution to the study of the family state policy in general, including Poland. For the aims of this article, particularly important are descriptive and explanatory historical analyzes concerning the transformations of the discussed policy, including economic, political, demographic and social changes valid for the present day.

The conditions observed recently in Poland, especially systemic and structural political changes, financial crises, the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic, and the consequences of all the above for families, increase the need for such analyzes, particularly those referring to historical, existing and anticipated trends, as they allow for a better understanding of the instruments used by the state in different periods, but with certain similarities in specific conditions.

### **3. Research Aim and Structure**

This article partially fills this gap. It mainly aims at broadening, systematizing and comprehensively presenting knowledge about ground-breaking and significant transformations in the family policies of the Polish state and the political, economic, demographic and social conditions of these transformations. Events and transformations related to the systemic transformation in Poland (in 1989) and subsequent breakthrough stages of economic and political changes, as well as their economic and social consequences, will be taken into account below.

The analyzes presented in the article are based on case studies (examples of family state policy in Poland), a systematic review of research and literature to date, institutional and legal method (Polish legal regulations) as well as the historical method.

The article consists of two main parts. The first one concerns family transformations after 1989, in order to more precisely illustrate key changes in the family state policy against this background. The second one refers directly to the title of the article and covers the most important political, economic, demographic and social transformations in Poland in the years 1989-2021, which in turn are the basis for defining key changes in the family policy of the Polish state and their instruments. These considerations end with cognitive and utilitarian conclusions.

#### **4. Main Trends in Family Transformations in Poland**

In the subject literature, the process of family transformations, dating back in Poland to the beginning of the 1990s, is explained as detraditionalization of the family. It is explained as changes in the patterns of marriage and fertility and refers to their multifaceted factors - socio-economic, cultural as well as political and systemic. It involves qualitative changes in marriage and family life, related to the mass access to higher education by women, the dissemination of contraceptives and changes in the system of norms and values, expressed in the growth of individualism and the pursuit of self-fulfillment.

The emergence and development of the democratic system created new conditions on the labor market, especially for middle-class women, it also extended the principles of stratification of the market society to women. As a result, gender relations based on the separation of production and reproduction were broken down, as well as the resulting family roles. Marriage and motherhood began to become more and more a matter of choice, resulting not only from personal preferences, but also from the social situation, described by researchers as institutionalized individualism (Socjologia, 2008).

In this sense, family detraditionalization is also a process of diminishing durability and value of a family in traditional sense, consisting of spouses and children, established as the basic social institution. In analytical terms, symptoms of this process include: a decrease in the share of the married population among the general public - mainly as a result of divorces and decisions to remain unmarried, postponement of marriage by both genders, growth or high level of marriage breakdowns, delaying the decision to give birth, a decrease in fertility to a level below the generational replacement, shifting the maximum fertility to older age groups, as well as complete resignation from marriage and/or children towards other forms of personal life organization (e.g., cohabitation). In Europe, this process had already began in the 1960s (Socjologia, 2008).

The above factors are taken into account in analyzes of changes in the demographic and economic family model. The most important are organized and explained by Kotowska (2021), who draws attention to the transformation of the living arrangements, i.e. household composition and structure. As a result of the decline in the fertility rate below the level guaranteeing the generational replacement, decline in mortality and the constant extension of human life, as well as the growing importance of international migrations, the number and share of multi-generation households is falling, and the number and share of households with elderly people is growing, especially one-person households made up mainly by older women. The significant role of foreign migrations in the process of generational replacement translates, on the one hand, into the increasing ethnic complexity of families and households, and, on the other, into many of them functioning in the conditions of prolonged absence of their members, which in turn affects family life organization.

The second significant factor in the transformation of the household composition and structure are profound changes in behavior related to relationships and procreation, i.e. family formation, development and decay. The aforementioned factors, such as, lower propensity to marry, increasing frequency of non-marital relationships (registered partnerships, cohabitation, LAT - Living-Apart-Together), delaying marriage, weakening the durability of relationships, reducing the desired number of children, postponing decisions about childbirth, as well as the increase in the share of extra-marital births in their total number or the increase in voluntary childlessness, are described as transformations in the pattern of transition to adulthood: the pattern referred to as 'early, contracted and simple' is replaced with the 'late, protracted and complex' (Billari and Liefbroer, 2010; Kotowska, 2021).

The above tendencies show changes in the family demographic model, which can be briefly described as, delay, decline in fertility, family deinstitutionalization manifested by the diminishing importance of marriage as an institution, and destabilization of relationships. Apart from families based on marriage, a declining but still dominant type of family, more and more families are created on the basis of a non-marital relationship or LAT. There are also more reconstituted families in which at least one of the spouses has a child from another relationship, and the number of single parents, mainly mothers, is growing (Kotowska and Józwiak, 2012; Olah *et al.*, 2018; Kotowska, 2021).

An equally important change pertains to the family form variability in the course of an individual's life. At different times, one may be a member of different families, and also practice alternately various family forms (e.g., cohabitation or LAT) in a certain phase of life. Additionally, the growing mobility means that more people have their own experience of being temporarily outside their family, as well as of functioning in a family whose members are temporarily absent. Thus, a significant number of families misses one of the spouses, not only as a result of divorce or separation, but also long-term absence due to migration. There are more and more families without the constant presence of one or both parents, as well as families whose members regularly spend several days a week/month away from home due to working outside their place of residence (the so-called commuters between families) (Kotowska and Józwiak, 2012; Kotowska, 2021).

Life changes related to family behavior also include the influence of later coming-of-age events on the duration of other life periods and on the demographic biography of one's relatives. Postponing the first childbirth means becoming a parent at a later age, which results in increased intergenerational gap. In consequence, such delay also pertains to becoming a grandparent later. Extending the time spent in the family home shifts the empty-nest phase experienced by parents. In general, we experience postponement of life course transitions, i.e., delayed demographic events which constitute a fundamental and irreversible change in the course of life. It is also related to prolonged performing various family roles, or the simultaneous performance of several family roles. This, in turn, is important for the parallel

occurrence of various family obligations, e.g., towards grandchildren and elderly parents (Kotowska, 2021).

The demographic changes described above relate to what is termed 'living as a family'. However, in parallel to this, the organization of family life, or 'doing a family', also changed, i.e. the division of commitments related to providing livelihood, caring commitments and domestic activities between men and women.

Such processes were mainly stimulated by the increase in women's education and professional activity, as well as changes in the gender social roles. In addition to the economic model of a male breadwinner (and female home carer), corresponding to Becker's concept of specializing the roles of a woman and a man in the family, the model of a family with a working mother was increasingly common, but the social norm still asked mothers to subordinate their professional work to family life, particularly raising children (modernized male breadwinner model - female part-time home carer) (e.g., Kotowska, 2017; Olah *et al.*, 2018; Kotowska, 2021).

Further increase in women (mothers) in the labor market, including those working full-time, along with the slowly changing perceptions of the gender-related social roles, was conducive to the growing social approval for working mothers. This meant a gradual departure from recognizing women's paid work as necessary to supplement family income and subordinating it to the phases of the family life course and caring responsibilities to treating women's paid work as an activity parallel to family activity. This popularized the model of a family with both working parents (dual earner model).

However, despite the increasing involvement of women in the labor market, the division of family responsibilities (care, housework) between women and men did not change, i.e. the dual earner - double burden of females model was practiced. At the same time, more and more attention was paid to the incompatibility of work and family, felt mainly by women, resulting from institutional (family policy), structural (labor market) and cultural maladjustments to the changing social role of women.

Moreover, the analyzes of Kotowska (2021) how how numerous empirical studies have confirmed the importance of difficulties in combining professional work with family responsibilities for the observed changes in fertility and destabilization of the family. As the above author rightly notices, gender inequalities in the public sphere and in the family have become an important element of theoretical and empirical research on the determinants of fertility and family transformations. Complementary concepts (Esping-Andersen and Billari, 2015; Goldscheider *et al.*, 2015) describe changes in fertility and family transformations from the perspective of the ongoing transformation of social gender roles.

The first one refers to the changes in the social role of women (female revolution) and the changes in the family model. The second one links changes in fertility with

the transformation of social roles of the sex (gender revolution), in which certain stages can be distinguished and associated with the decline and restoration of fertility. Both indicate the need to redistribute family responsibilities between partners in order to reduce the incompatibility of work and family, i.e., the transition to a partnership model of the family with both working parents, equally responsible for family obligations (dual breadwinner model - dual carer model) (Kotowska, 2021).

Research on trends and behaviors that determine the composition and structure of families, their formation, development and functioning should be continued (e.g., Kammerman, 2010; Saraceno *et al.*, 2012; Thevenon, 2011; OECD, 2011; Kotowska, 2021; Szczepaniak- Sienniak, 2021). Family transformations should be considered in particular in the following dimensions: (a) changes in the process of population reproduction and their effects both on the course of life of individuals and relations between generations, (b) changes in demographic behavior related to family formation, procreation and family breakdown, and (c) changes in the functioning of the family (organization of family life) related to the division of obligations between women and men regarding the provision of means of subsistence, caring commitments and time devoted to domestic activities (Kotowska, 2021).

The description of these changes concerning both the demographic and economic model of the family is the basis for further research on state family policy, as well as for the formulation of comments on the redefinition of such policy (e.g., Hantrais, 2006; Kotowska, 2021).

The Covid-19 pandemic crisis, which in a short time forced families to change the division of household responsibilities, combining them with professional work or the way of working in general, have particular implications for the study of the conditions of the formation, development and functioning of families. In economics, social policy, sociology and other sciences, this situation has revealed many research gaps that will be filled in the coming years, perhaps even decades. Such attempts are already being taken (e.g., Poradzisz 2021; Szczudlińska-Kanoś and Marzec 2021; Kent *et al.*, 2020; Prime *et al.*, 2020).

## **5. Main Changes in the Family Policy Instruments in Poland and their Determinants**

The year 1989 marked the beginning of a systemic change that caused many unexpected and unfavorable economic and social consequences. Despite the fact that social problems were one of the main causes and challenges of the political breakthrough, they were not taken into account in a satisfactory manner in the state's policy in the process of transformation and in subsequent years. Imprompt and selective actions of the authorities, particularly popular in the initial years of

political system transformation, as well as the reforms introduced in 1999<sup>3</sup>, did not hamper the growing social costs of marketization, restructuring and decentralization of the economy related to structural unemployment, pauperization or social exclusion. General slogans about the need for social protection for the weakest groups could not replace the new state policy, taking into account changes in politics and economy, as well as their social consequences (Pisz, 2001).

The aforementioned reforms, concerning the new administrative division of the state and the decentralization of public authority, social and health insurance and the education system, were solutions - as Zdzisław Pisz emphasizes - consolidating the fundamental direction of reforms adopted in the 1990s, which in the subject area of social policy means resigning from solutions typical of welfare state, enshrined in the programs of the socialist state, in favor of the rules and principles characteristic of the welfare state (Pisz, 2001).

One should agree with Lucyna Frąckiewicz (Frąckiewicz, 1999) that it was particularly disturbing that the state shifted the responsibility for one's own life and fate - health, financial situation, education, start in life and families - onto the citizens themselves. Polish society was not prepared for such a sudden change and was largely unaware of its consequences. However, it had to gradually adapt to these conditions, the more so as subsequent political and economic events, including the introduction of Poland into the structures of the European Union, strengthened them by consolidating the principle of subsidiarity in Polish social policy (Szczepaniak, 2010). In general, Poland's ascension to the EU was an important stage in the process of economic, political and social transformations. It also implied many new requirements and challenges for the society and social policy of the state.

In later years, most notable breakthroughs were denoted by financial crises, which most often did not favor the state social policy and, in a way, forced the authorities to increase their involvement in social matters. Currently, the most pressing task is to reduce the negative consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic.

In order to organize and better explain the key stages of changes in family policy in Poland, five characteristic periods can be distinguished, which constitute the basis of the analysis of the changes in question:

1) 1989-1997: limited activities of state institutions in relation to rapidly growing social problems, mainly to protective and selective solutions; institutional continuity in relation to the People's Republic of Poland (path dependance) (Sobociński, 2016)<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup>*The four reforms scheme - a program developed and introduced by Jerzy Buzek's government consisting of educational, pension, administrative and health reforms.*

<sup>4</sup>*The directions of changes in social policy are generally referred to as path departure (Sobociński, 2016).*



2) 1997-2004: constitution and introduction of some of the basic principles of the democratic system to social and family policy - decentralization of public administration and subsidiarity – as well as the guarantees of family protection and intensifying the process of social policy internationalization, mainly in connection with preparations for Poland's integration with the EU; birth of pronatalism.

3) 2004-2016: in-depth implementation of the subsidiarity principle and successive subordination of social policy to regulations and other international requirements, including the EU regulations, as well as the economic, demographic, social and political situation in our country; intensified pursuit of familialism, and from the end of this period - defamilialism.

4) 2016-2021: increasing the importance of state (national<sup>5</sup>) programs in relation to the EU ones; expanding financial subsidies for families (introducing and popularizing the "Family 500 Plus" program), and at the same time hampering the process of servicing the family policy, especially in the area of instruments for combining professional and family duties; an attempt to strengthen the value of the Catholic and traditional family as superior to other types of families that arose in the ongoing process of deinstitutionalization and detraditionalization of the family („Strategia Demograficzna 2040. Projekt”, 2021).

5) after 2021 (planned activities): further expansion of the state's participation in family policy by expanding monetary subsidies, changes in tax reliefs, as well as increasing expenditure on expanding the network of institutions for the care of the youngest children (up to three years of age) (Polski Ład dla rodzin 2021); increased defamilialism.

Certain ways of state intervention in the functioning of the family since 1989 are reflected in specific program activities undertaken in distinguished stages.

The first period (1989-1997) included rather indirect (implicit) and inept attempts by the state to absorb the shock related to the rapid growth of many social problems (including structural unemployment, social pauperization and exclusion) with unforeseeable and unfavorable consequences for the family institution, such as, for example, a decline in fertility as well as the value and number of marriages, deteriorating family income, increasing care and educational difficulties. With regard to the direct state family policy, significant limitation or even withdrawal of state institutions from social tasks, including those towards the family were observed.

This was manifested in limited access to family benefits (e.g. introducing an income criterion for family allowance), maintaining the length of maternity leave at the same

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<sup>5</sup>According to the nomenclature introduced by the currently ruling Law and Justice party.

level as during the Polish People's Republic (16 weeks - a radical change took place as late as in 2013, when it was extended to 26 weeks plus 26 weeks of parental leave), unfavorable measures in the functioning of children care institutions for up to 3 years of age and at preschool age (e.g., disbanding nurseries and company kindergartens). At that time, the most desirable forms of state support, such as monetary benefits, were primarily protective and selective in nature and were targeted at the weakest groups, including the poorest (Biuro Prasowe Rządu, 1997).

It is worth emphasizing that in the period of 1989-1997 between the then ruling coalitions of the post-Solidarity right (1989-1993) and the post-communist left (SLD in the coalition with PSL, 1993-1997) there were no particularly clear political or ideological differences in the field of family policy. As Maciej Sobociński rightly points out, family policy in those years was founded on the widely declared recognition of the central role of the family in society (often supported by references to the social teaching of the Catholic Church), which was not accompanied by any comprehensive programs aimed at significantly improving family functioning conditions (Sobociński, 2016).

The year 1997 can be considered a breakthrough due to the state's constitution of the meaning of the family. Those in the most difficult circumstances were guaranteed protection (in Articles 18 and 71 of the Constitution of the Republic of Poland). In the same year, the SLD-PSL coalition adopted the first family policy program since the political breakthrough (for the years 1997-2005) (Centrum Informacyjne Rządu, 1999), which was not implemented due to the assumption of power by the Solidarity Electoral Action (AWS) in coalition with Freedom Union (*Unia Wolności*).

Two years later, the same coalition presented another family-targeted government program, which was to be the basis for reforms in this area until 2010 (Centrum Informacyjne Rządu, 1999). Particularly important events of those years - especially from the point of view of family policy - were also the delegation of many social tasks to local governments, including the reform of the social welfare system (in 1999). The principle of subsidiarity was adopted as the basis for exercising public authority in a decentralized system (Szczepaniak, 2010).

It can be said that it is not only one of the key principles of the democratic system, but also the main determinant of new state-self-government-family relations, often used - though not always rightly, as also noted by Bożenna Balcerzak-Paradowska (2009) in justification of the limited activity of the state towards the family and its empowerment (increasing individual responsibility for one's own operating conditions).

In the years 2004-2016 one can notice a clear intensification of the state's family-targeted activities. Among the overall measures, the reform of family benefits (implemented in the same year) and three program initiatives related to family policy should be noted. The first was a project proposed by Joanna Kluzik-

Rostkowska's team (in 2007). The second is the "Good Climate for the Family" program developed by the Chancellery of Bronisław Komorowski in 2013. The third is the Law and Justice's "Family 500 Plus" program, launched in 2016.

In addition, family matters were the main priority of the deliberations and assumptions of the Second Demographic Congress in Poland (in 2012) and found their place in the *Assumptions of the Polish Population Policy 2013* (Założenia Polityki Ludnościowej w Polsce 2013). In the same years (2012-2014), the Supreme Audit Office (NIK) coordinated the family policy - for the first time since the political breakthrough (Najwyższa Izba Kontroli, 2014).

It is also worth noting a few specific changes in the field of family policy instruments during this period (since 2004), which showed a clear extension of the scope of state interference in family affairs, compared to the state's actions in this area undertaken after 1989.

Changes in family benefits are of key importance. Supplements to the family allowance and changes in the method of calculating family benefits (according to the age of children in the family, not their number) were introduced, as well as a slight increase in the amount of family allowances and an increase in income criteria (in 2012 - they were not changed since 2004), as well as the introduction of a one-time newborn allowance in 2006 (*becikowe*). The main goal of these changes was to increase financial support for families with children, especially those in a relatively weaker economic situation, including the poor.

A significant form of state financial support for families are child tax reliefs introduced on 1<sup>st</sup> January 2007 and amended in 2013. The changes were primarily aimed at increasing support for multi-children families and families with relatively lower income. A special instrument introduced in 2015 allows for obtaining a refund of the unused relief if parents earn enough to benefit from the tax allowance but pay low tax due to low earnings and cannot take full advantage of the relief. Higher financial support for large families was aimed at persuading families with two children to have another one, and thus counteracting unfavorable demographic trends (i.e., low fertility rate).

The parental allowance introduced in 2015 is also an important tool. It provides an opportunity for people who have given birth or adopted young children and who have not previously been entitled to leave and maternity benefit to receive income. These persons include the unemployed, students, farmers, those performing work under civil law contracts, those employed or running a non-agricultural business.

However, the most spectacular form of financial support for families since the turn of the political system has been the "Family 500 plus" program, i.e. parental benefit granted in 2016. Initially, it was given for the second and subsequent children, and for the first child after meeting the relevant income criterion. Since 2019 it is granted for each child regardless of family income.

Solutions in the field of child care leaves (maternity, paternity, parental and child care) implemented since 2013 should also be considered special. This is - on the one hand - the state's response to the challenges of low fertility rate, by aiming to improve the conditions of combining work and private/family life and to equalize the rights of women and men with respect to their opportunities in the labor market and treatment at work (and thus to equalize the rights of mothers/fathers to care for a small child). On the other hand, it takes into account the requirements of the EU Directive 2010/18/EU, which indicates a similar direction of changes in the leaves. The new solutions are still far from equalizing the rights of mothers and fathers in this respect, as proposed by the above-mentioned directive.

Due to the unfavorable demographic situation, as well as difficulties in reconciling professional and family life, changes in the area of childcare for children up to three years of age are of great importance, as they are to foster the development of institutional instruments (nurseries and children's clubs) and individual care (by regulating the functioning of babysitters and nannies). Regulations introduced in this area in 2011 have significantly increased the availability of forms of care for children under 3.

In this area, it is necessary to emphasize the introduction and then extension of the "Maluch" and "Maluch+" programs, especially to universities (since 2015). The idea to encourage young people not only to study, but also to have children in their early adult years is absolutely correct.

Important changes also took place in the field of preschool education, especially after 2008, when organizational and legal forms and funding sources of preschool institutions were diversified. A significant reduction of fees for children's stay in kindergarten (since 2013 it is 1 PLN for the sixth and each subsequent hour) or broadening access to it for children already 3 years old are not without significance for dissemination of pre-school education.

Multi-children families enjoy greater benefits in terms of family policy (facilitated access to family allowance, tax reliefs, childcare institutions or pre-school education). They were additionally supported by the introduction of the nationwide Large Family Card program (in operation since 2015, in addition to local government programs of this type, which have been developing since 2005) (Bebel, 2014). The purpose of introducing this instrument was to directly support families, as well as to create a positive image of having many children and to increase the development and life chances of children and young adults from these families. The card is supposed to improve the situation multi-children families, both by lowering the costs of accessing services and through stimulating their social activity (Uchwała Rady Ministrów, 2014).

The already mentioned spectacular program of financial support for families "Family 500 plus" - an upbringing allowance of 500 PLN for the second and subsequent

children after meeting the income criterion has been in place since February 2016, introduced on the initiative of the Law and Justice party, which won the parliamentary elections in June 2015. In 2019, the income criterion has been abolished and currently the allowance is granted for each child regardless of income (Ustawa o pomocy państwa, 2016).

According to government and media information, the program was supposed to result primarily in an increase in fertility and a decrease in poverty among families, which was achieved only slightly in the latter area and in terms of extreme poverty (Szarfenberg, 2018; Gajewicz, 2018; Myck *et al.*, 2020; Kaźmierczak-Kałużna, 2020). In fact, it is limited to fulfilling the statutory objective of partially covering the expenses related to raising a child, including child care and meeting the child's living needs (Ustawa o pomocy państwa, 2016).

It should be emphasized that the program was not curtailed during the Covid-19 pandemic and the deterioration of Polish state finances. It has been maintained, moreover, additional support for families was introduced in August 2020, namely the Tourist Voucher of 500 PLN for each child, also regardless of income. It was at the same time intended to support the tourism industry during the economic crisis caused by the pandemic. According to current assumptions, it can be used until the end of March 2022.

In response to the crisis, the Polish government introduced the New Deal (*Nowy Ład*) program on 15<sup>th</sup> November 2021. It includes many changes and new solutions in the state family policy, which will be implemented from 2022. The key ones include significantly increasing expenditures on the development of care institutions for children under 3 years of age within the "Maluch+" program; introducing the so-called "care capital", i.e. an allowance paid to cover the costs of caring for a second child between 12 and 36 months of age (a total of 12 000 PLN); introducing the "Apartment without own contribution" program, i.e. state co-financing own contribution (up to 40 percent/100,000 PLN of the apartment value), and additionally, for families with a guaranteed credit, the possibility to obtain additional non-refundable co-financing after the birth of subsequent children (second child - up to 20,000 PLN, third - up to 60,000 PLN, and fourth and subsequent up to 20,000 PLN) (Polski Ład dla rodzin 2021).

## 6. Conclusions

Significant transformations of the family and their complex determinants enforce various adjustments of the state policy and its instruments. This article concerns the changes in the family policy in Poland in the subject and object sphere, i.e., the most important solutions. It focuses on state activities, therefore excluding any self-government and other entities' activities. Although, as a result of the systemic principles of decentralization and subsidiarity after 1989, they also participate in the implementing family-targeted activities.

In this respect, the social policy of the state during the systemic transformation and until recently was assessed mainly critically. Excessive passivity of state institutions, inadequacy of undertaken actions in relation to the needs of families, lack of a long-term and comprehensive vision of the policy, lack of effective and efficient family policy instruments or lack of coordination of family policy were among the most emphasized factors (Najwyższa Izba Kontroli, 2014; Szczepaniak-Sienniak, 2021).

Numerous changes in family policy instruments, especially after 2004, indicate a clear increase in the scope of state intervention in the functioning of families. This is evidenced first of all by new solutions in financial support (mainly for families with children), intensified actions promoting extended and more flexible leaves related to parenthood (for both mothers and fathers) as well as diversified and supported development of institutional and individual forms of care for a young child (up to the age of 3 and in preschool education). Relatively larger and more diversified support from the state is provided to multi-children families<sup>6</sup>.

A significant increase in the intervention of the Polish state in family matters falls on the period of financial or economic crises (after 2008 and 2020). This situation provides arguments for the thesis that such crises do not have to hamper (pro)social activities of the state or be an obstacle to the continuation and implementation of important social programs (Książopolski 2009). If we also agree that the observed increase in state activity is the result of deliberate decisions made by the government authorities, resulting from the awareness of the growing negative consequences of the destabilization or deinstitutionalization of the family, it may indicate an attempt to move away from the increasingly criticized - since the global financial crisis of 2008 - neoliberal model, towards which Poland has been heading since 1989.

A significant expansion of the scope of state intervention in the functioning of the family, especially through a clear increase in expenditures on financial instruments, also means a certain halting of the familization of family policy and its gradual defamilization. This is a direction which, due to still unresolved social issues, such as low fertility rate, material difficulties of families or difficulties in combining childcare duties with paid employment, should be a basis for a long-term, stable and consistent vision of the state family policy in the future.

The challenge is to determine the real possibilities of pursuing such a path, regardless of changing economic, demographic, social, as well as political conditions. The most important task will be to maintain such discipline and structure of public finances as to be able to continue the most anticipated by families, but at the same time very costly social programs and instruments. Such solutions should be effective and efficient, which should be measured through systematic scientific

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<sup>6</sup> *Other types of families, such as families with a disabled person or single parents, are related to special circumstances. Instruments for these families were not discussed, as the limited scope of the article did not allow for that.*

research. It is also important to take into account the multiplicity and coexistence of various instruments aimed at specific goals of family policy and the actual consequences of a given type of solutions.

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