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Family Support Program in the View of Young Poles: Condition and Perspectives

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Abstract:

Purpose: *Demographic changes taking place in Poland (low fertility, population aging, migration) are increasingly impacting the functioning of society and economic development. The low fertility rate, persistent for three decades, has become one of the most frequently discussed demographic issues and the subject of scientific research. The "Family 500+" program, which has become a pillar of family policy, has failed to increase the fertility rate despite significant financial support for families. The aim of this article was to explore the opinions of young people regarding family support programs in Poland based on the presentation of the results of the author's own survey research.*
Design/Methodology/Approach: *The structure of the paper is guided by this stated objective. The first part of the article provides a brief literature review, explaining the essence of family policy, followed by a discussion of the research objective and method. The main body of the paper contains an analysis of the survey results.*
Findings: *The research conducted in this study led to conclusions indicating threats to the economy stemming from demographic forecasts. The demographic situation has been deteriorating for several years, despite existing family-friendly programs. These programs include financial assistance for those raising children, but also broader access to institutional care and favorable changes to parental leave. To mitigate the undoubted negative consequences of the demographic crisis, family-friendly policies should be implemented across multiple avenues, and efforts to influence potential parenting decisions should be directed at those already entering adulthood.*
Practical Implications: *The results can be used in the development of social policy, including pro-family policy, in order to improve the situation on the labor market.*
Originality Value: *This article presents the results of the author's own survey research and induction methods. This topic is crucial in an era of dynamic demographic changes and alarming forecasts in this area.*

Keywords: *Demographic changes, fertility rate, the "Family Plus" program, depopulation, social benefits.*

JEL classification: *J10, J13, J18.*
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1. Introduction

Demographic changes constitute one of the most significant long-term challenges facing Poland and the majority of developed countries worldwide. In many of these nations, the need to implement a coherent, comprehensive, and systemic family policy has become a top priority due to declining fertility rates.

In Poland, this area of state activity had long been neglected, and the measures undertaken in practice proved ineffective, as they failed to address the real needs of families. A major initiative in the field of family policy in recent years was the introduction of the Family Plus program.

Despite the remarkable increase in the scale of financial support for Polish families, this program together with other initiatives has not resulted in a substantial rise in fertility. In 2024, the fertility rate in Poland dropped to a record low of 1.099, one of the lowest figures in Europe, particularly when compared with other Central and Eastern European countries. The fact that the fertility rate remains well below the replacement level of 2.1 further exacerbates demographic problems such as population aging and overall population decline.

Research on low fertility in Poland points to a combination of economic, social, and cultural factors, among which economic uncertainty is often identified as the most significant. For this reason, a survey was conducted to examine the opinions of young people regarding family support programs in Poland.

The main research questions concerned the evaluation of existing measures introduced under the aforementioned program, as well as the identification of desired changes.

The analysis of the survey results was preceded by an overview of family policy models, focusing on the family as the fundamental social unit essential not only for maintaining generational continuity in the demographic sense but also for preserving the cultural and organizational fabric of society.

2. Family Policy in Poland in the Context of Selected Models

In order to explain the essence of family policy, it is important to note that this area of state and institutional activity remains, to a large extent, conceptually undefined (Skevik, 2010). Moreover, as Gauthier (1999) points out, there is no consensus regarding the definition of family policy, which he describes as a “broad umbrella of policies”.

Initially, the term family policy was associated with “government actions directed toward children and their families, particularly those aimed at influencing the situation of families with children or individuals in their family roles” (Kamerman, 1994).

The literature on family policy is extensive and encompasses a wide range of perspectives from theoretical analyses to practical frameworks and models of family policy (Nieuwenhuis and Van Lancker, 2020; Berger and Carson, 2020; Daly, 2020).

A review of the literature indicates that, on the one hand, family policy is often defined as a specific branch of social policy and, in this sense, treated as synonymous with social policy toward families. Consequently, it is implemented alongside other areas of social policy, such as policies for seniors or persons with disabilities (Golinowska, 1994). From this perspective, family policy constitutes an element of the broader social policy framework aimed at maintaining social order that includes all social strata and groups.

On the other hand, family policy is increasingly understood as a horizontal policy, whose implementation involves coordinating various sectoral policies distinguished not by their target groups but by their distinct instruments of influence (Rymsza, 2016).

According to A. Kurzynowski, family policy encompasses the entirety of legal norms, measures, and actions undertaken by the state to create adequate living conditions for families, facilitate their formation and proper functioning, and enable them to fulfill their socially significant roles (Kurzynowski, 1991). Similarly, Błędowski (2004) emphasizes that activities undertaken within family policy commonly associated with benefits for families with children should address families at all stages of their development.

The scope of family policy covers a wide range of regulations and measures aimed at achieving goals such as reducing poverty, compensating for the economic costs of childbearing, supporting employment, promoting gender equality, facilitating early childhood development, and increasing fertility rates (Thévenon, 2011).

Depending on how state interventions directed toward families are implemented, a distinction is made between explicit (direct) and implicit (indirect) family policies. Explicit family policy includes actions directly targeted at families, whereas implicit policy consists of norms and measures that are not primarily aimed at families but, due to their broad scope and implications, also affect families with children. These activities thus fall within other domains of social policy (Balcerzak-Paradowska, 2004).

In other words, direct family policy specifies concrete measures (e.g., programs) that are consciously designed to achieve particular objectives concerning the family as a whole or the roles of individual family members. Consequently, direct family policy includes, among others, population policy, social benefits related to childcare and upbringing, parental employment support, and maternal and child healthcare. In countries pursuing an explicit family policy, specialized governmental institutions are often established to coordinate family-related initiatives.

In contrast, implicit family policy consists of measures undertaken within other areas of public policy that, while not directly aimed at families, have significant implications for family functioning for example, tax policy.

As Balcerzak-Paradowska notes, national family policies being an integral part of broader social policies fit within the welfare state model characteristic of each country, which is shaped by its political, economic, and social context. The formation of family policy is influenced by demographic trends and cultural factors, particularly those related to the axiological perception of the family (Balcerzak-Paradowska, 2014).

Considering the distribution of responsibility among the three main actors namely, the state, the market, and the family it is possible to distinguish several models of family policy. Table 1 presents an illustrative comparison of instruments commonly employed within family policy frameworks.

Table 1. *Models of Family Policy*

Liberal Model	**Conservative Model**	**Social Democratic Model**	**Southern European Model**
Family structure			
One breadwinner	One breadwinner	Two breadwinners	One breadwinner
Scope of support – benefits			
- Universal family benefits - Additional/targeted programs	- Universal family benefits (for insured persons)–	- Universal family benefits (citizens' right) - Additional benefits for at-risk families	- Selective benefits
Tax system			
- No family-related elements	- Tax allowances (objective and subjective)	- No family-related elements	- Tax allowances
Childcare services			
- Priority for family-based care for youngest children - Kindergartens = care + education	- Preference for family-based care - Kindergartens = part of the education system	- Diversity of institutional care forms - Childcare institutions = part of the education and socialization system	- Priority for intra-family care - Kindergartens = part of the education system

Source: *Author's compilation based on G. Esping-Andersen's models: Esping-Andersen, G. (1990). The Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism. Princeton University Press, New Jersey, as cited in Balcerzak-Paradowska (2014).*

In the liberal model of family policy, state intervention in family life is minimal, with the primary emphasis placed on individual responsibility and freedom of choice. The individual and the family are responsible for their own situation, while the state supports family (or individual) actions through an appropriate tax system or benefits although the level of such support remains relatively low.

In other words, the state provides limited financial and social assistance, encouraging families to address their problems independently. Within this model, family policy often relies on a welfare system that offers help in cases of specific need but does not engage in everyday family support.

The conservative model, which combines family responsibility with state regulation, is oriented toward maintaining traditional social roles and family structures. The state provides financial support and social services but places the main emphasis on the family as the primary caregiving unit.

Within this model, social security is based on the principle of individual prudence and participation in the insurance system. Insurance-based benefits are supplemented by universal benefits such as child allowances and social services. Social assistance, on the other hand, is means-tested and directed at those excluded from the labor market.

The social democratic model represents a fundamentally different approach regarding the state's involvement in family policy. Here, the state plays a decisive role by providing a broad range of social services and benefits, such as universal healthcare, high-quality educational and childcare services, and financial support for parents.

Family policy within this model aims to ensure equal opportunities for all children, regardless of their family's socioeconomic status, and to support the reconciliation of professional and family responsibilities. Consequently, it is a costly model, dependent on maintaining high tax rates and a high level of employment.

The Southern European model combines elements of both the conservative and social democratic approaches. It is oriented toward protecting the traditional family model and structure, maintaining family cohesion and strong kinship ties. Childcare and financial assistance are primarily provided by the family itself, which reduces the state's responsibility for such actions. Social benefits are typically fragmented, unevenly distributed, and generally at a low level.

It should be emphasized that in various countries, depending on factors such as traditions, needs, financial resources, social attitudes, and family expectations, family policies are implemented in very different ways.

In Poland, issues related to family policy entered the public discourse on a permanent basis only after the political transformation. Polish family policy has undergone several distinct phases: up to 1997 – the transitional period; between 1997 and 2005 – the developmental period; and from 2005 onwards – the mature period (Sobociński, 2016; Szczudlińska-Kadoś, 2019).

During the transitional period, family policy was of limited significance, as state policy was primarily focused on addressing economic challenges, labor market reforms, and unemployment.

In 1997, the state formally recognized the importance of family protection. Families in the most difficult situations were guaranteed state protection (Articles 18 and 71 of the Constitution of the Republic of Poland of 1997). During this period, an important step in family policy was also taken the decentralization of numerous social responsibilities from the central government to local authorities.

Furthermore, growing awareness among policymakers regarding unfavorable demographic trends led to increased attention to fertility issues, though no concrete programs aimed at boosting birth rates were yet implemented.

A breakthrough in Polish family policy occurred during the years 2005–2007, when several significant reforms were introduced. This period saw an increase in social benefits for children and greater support for large families. In 2006, the government revisited the issue of extending maternity leave, adding two additional weeks to the basic entitlement.

A new measure was also introduced the so-called "becikowe" (childbirth allowance), amounting to PLN 1,000 as a one-time benefit granted upon the birth of a child. For several years, this allowance was paid to all parents and guardians, regardless of income.

Another instrument introduced within the framework of family policy in 2007 was the personal income tax allowance for child-rearing, commonly known as the child tax credit. This measure significantly increased the overall value of financial transfers to families.

Broadly speaking, in the following years, Polish family policy evolved toward expanding the scale of financial support for families. In 2016, the Family 500+ program was launched, becoming the cornerstone of family policy. Under this program, a child-raising benefit was provided initially in the amount of PLN 500, and since January 2024, PLN 800 intended to support Polish families in partially covering the costs of raising a child up to the age of 18, including childcare and the fulfillment of basic living needs.

Following the amendments to the Family Plus program, as of July 2019, the child-raising benefit has been granted for every child up to the age of 18, regardless of the family's income. The benefit is available not only to parents but also to a child's legal guardian, de facto guardian (if a petition for adoption has been submitted to the court), and, in the case of children residing in social welfare institutions, to the institution's director.

Although family policy has been one of the key declared priorities of the Polish state since the beginning of the post-communist transformation and despite the fact that demographic trends over the past two decades have been recognized as one of the

country's most serious developmental challenges Poland still lacks a coherent, comprehensive, and systemic family policy.

The existing framework of Polish family policy suggests that it represents a mixed model, combining several elements characteristic of the conservative approach.

Firstly, the state plays a central role in supporting families, primarily through financial transfers (e.g., family benefits, tax reliefs). Importantly, this financial support is not tied to employment activity but is instead granted universally to families with children.

Secondly, the primary objective of the adopted measures is income support for families, implemented through unconditional cash transfers for each child up to the age of 18, such as the Family Care Capital, childbirth allowance (becikowe), family benefit supplements, and benefits for single parents.

Thirdly, institutional support remains relatively weak, as reflected in the limited availability of nursery facilities. Although gradual improvements are being made in this area, many families still rely on informal childcare arrangements (e.g., grandparents or private caregivers).

Numerous studies on Polish family policy indicate that while knowledge in this area is extensive, it is only marginally utilized by successive governments in the formulation of effective policy. Moreover, Poland lacks a comprehensive strategic document outlining the state's long-term actions in favor of families.

As a result, there are no clearly defined strategic objectives, priorities, or necessary instruments. Individual policy tools are introduced on an ad hoc basis rather than as components of a well-defined and consistently implemented public policy framework.

According to experts from the Family Policy Team of the Republican Foundation (Brosz, Chludziński, Czarnik, Kot, 2012), an effective and equitable family policy should meet three essential criteria:

1. Universality – Benefits should be granted to all parents, regardless of income. The purpose of family policy is not merely to prevent poverty but rather to partially compensate parents for the financial burden associated with the effort of having and raising children.
2. Progressiveness – The level of support should be dependent on the number of children; larger families should receive greater assistance from the state. Families with multiple children bear higher costs of upbringing and often must suspend professional activity for extended periods, which justifies enhanced support measures.
3. Neutrality – Family policy should preserve parental freedom of choice regarding the methods of childrearing and education. The decision as to who

> will care for the child should rest with the parents themselves, who given their specific circumstances are best positioned to make such determinations.

There is no doubt that Polish family policy has undergone significant transformation in recent years, both in terms of the scale of public expenditure and the state's involvement in reforms and the implementation of new instruments.

However, as Sobociński emphasizes, the actions undertaken thus far reveal a degree of short-sightedness in the emerging model of family policy. The implementation of recent, costly reforms (such as the "Plus Program") has, in practice, exhausted the potential for significantly increasing funding in other key areas of family policy particularly in institutional childcare (Sobociński 2019).

It is worth noting that as long as the natural population increase remained positive, the number of births ensured simple generational replacement and a steady population growth, meaning that interest in family policy remained limited. This situation changed with the onset and progression of depopulation trends (Lizińska, Kisiel, and Danileviča, 2024).

3. Research Aim and Methodology

Growing interest in family policy in many countries, including Poland, stems not only from unfavorable demographic trends but also from changing patterns of parenthood and family life, the evolving division of roles within families, and the perception of the child's place within the family structure.

On one hand, the negative impact of declining fertility rates on a country's economic development serves as an argument in favor of expanding family support particularly in the form of financial transfers. On the other hand, cultural shifts and the transformation of gender roles within the family and society are not adequately reflected in a more progressive approach to family policy.

In other words, the current vision of family policy in Poland appears to lag behind ongoing social changes and emerging needs (Szelewa, 2014). The fundamental question thus arises: What model of family policy should Poland adopt?

There is no doubt that in the coming decades, demographic changes will constitute a major developmental barrier for Poland. Consequently, all initiatives aimed at supporting families are attracting increasing public attention, especially given that the current measures have not produced the expected rise in fertility rates. As a result, calls for the modification of programs such as "Family 800+" are becoming more frequent. It is worth noting that the experiences of countries such as France and the Nordic states demonstrate that family policies aimed at removing barriers to childbearing can yield positive outcomes provided that such policies are comprehensive and stable over time.

Given these circumstances, a survey study was conducted among young adults, with the objective of exploring their opinions regarding the "Family Plus" program. The study employed the CAWI (Computer-Assisted Web Interviewing) method a research technique in which respondents receive access to a questionnaire via an online link. The analysis of the collected data sought to provide answers to the following key research questions:

1. What are the causes of low fertility?
2. What measures should be undertaken to increase the fertility rate?
3. What should be the future direction of the "Family Plus" program?

The purpose of this study is to analyze the opinions, assessments, and attitudes of the young generation of Poles regarding family policy implemented since 2016, when the "Family Plus" program was introduced. To achieve this objective, a survey study was conducted among a sample of 132 respondents.

The participants were selected using a purposive sampling method, with the main selection criterion being age. Approximately 44% of respondents were between 18 and 21 years old, while 38% were between 22 and 25 years old. Additionally, six respondents were aged 26–30, and the remaining 13.5% were over 30 years old. Women constituted 59% of the surveyed group, while 41% were men.

All participants were students, representing various stages of higher education. Moreover, 80% of respondents lived in urban areas, with the largest proportion residing in cities with populations between 50,000 and 150,000 inhabitants.

4. Evaluation of the "Family Plus" Program by Young People: Results of the Research and Discussion

The issue of fertility remains a significant topic of concern and continues to attract the attention of both researchers and representatives of various public institutions seeking to diagnose the causes of persistently low fertility rates. According to a 2019 CBOS survey (CBOS 2019), 98% of young Poles declared their intention to have children. Meanwhile, a 2025 CBOS study (CBOS 2025) conducted among young adults aged 18–44 on the key values in their lives found that family ranked first, with 66% of respondents stating that it was very important to them.

These findings indicate that young Poles not only express a desire to have children but also assign great importance to family life. Such results prompted a deeper exploration of questions aimed at providing a more detailed diagnosis of the situation regarding pronatalist policy in Poland.

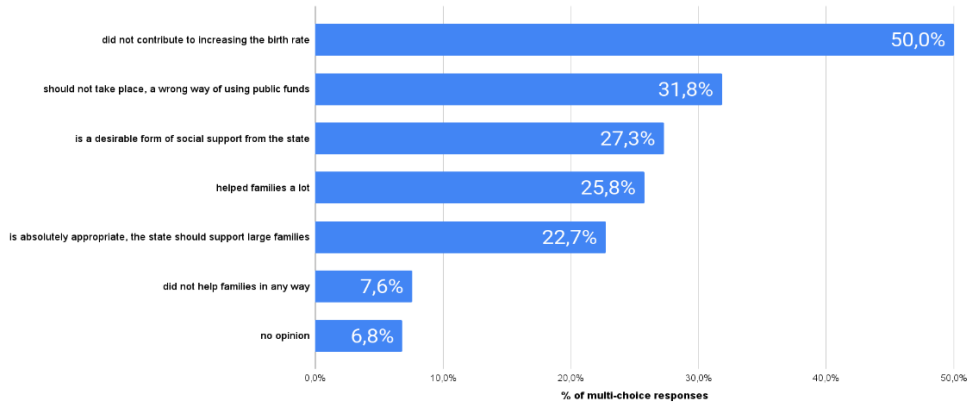
As part of the survey conducted for this study, respondents were asked to express their opinions about the "Family Plus" program, which has been in effect in Poland since 2016. According to the data presented in Figure 1, half of the respondents expressed

a critical opinion of the program, stating that it had not contributed to increasing fertility rates, which was its main objective. Furthermore, one in three respondents believed that the program should not exist, considering it a misuse of public funds.

Interestingly, when analyzing the responses by gender, it was observed that women were more likely than men to state that the program had no impact on increasing fertility. In contrast, one in four respondents viewed the program as a desirable form of social support, arguing that it had been very helpful for families and that the state should indeed support large families.

Thus, the opinions of respondents are not unambiguously negative or positive. The "Family Plus" program clearly has both supporters and opponents among young people.

Figure 1. *Evaluation of the "Family Plus" Program by Respondents*



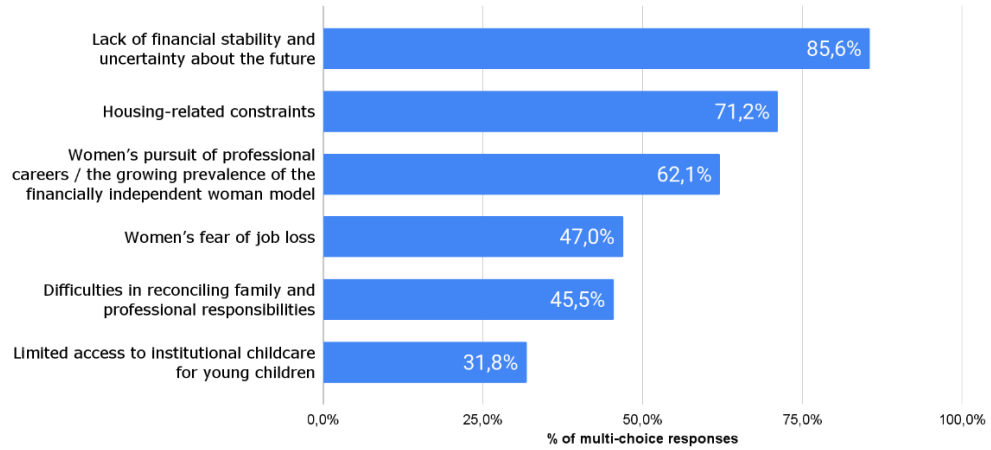
Source: *Authors' own research findings.*

Low fertility is one of the key factors contributing to Poland's challenging demographic situation. Therefore, respondents were asked to identify what, in their opinion, constitutes the main causes of low fertility.

The most frequently indicated reason was financial instability and uncertainty about the future, cited by approximately 86% of respondents. The second most common factor was housing constraints, mentioned by around 71% of participants. The third most frequently cited reason was the pursuit of professional careers by women and the growing prevalence of the financially independent woman model.

It is noteworthy that only one in four respondents recognized limited access to institutional childcare for young children as a significant factor contributing to low fertility (Figure 2).

Figure 2. *Causes of Low Fertility According to Respondents*



Source: *Authors' own research findings.*

The lack of a clear consensus among respondents regarding the causes of low fertility in Poland prompted an additional question aimed at identifying potential solutions that, in their opinion, could help reverse this trend.

The responses to this question were also divided. Among the five proposed measures, four received comparable levels of support, as shown in Figure 3.

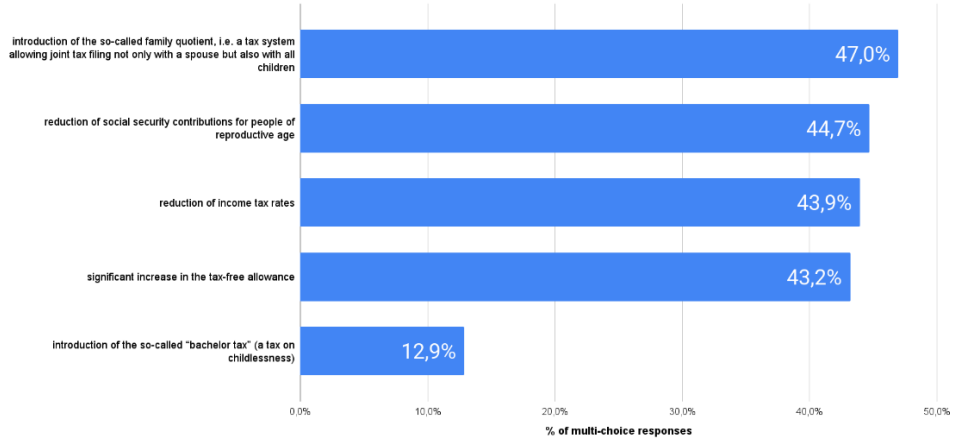
The most frequently indicated solution was the introduction of the so-called family quotient system a tax mechanism allowing joint taxation not only with a spouse but also with all children. Respondents considered this approach a potentially effective measure to encourage higher fertility.

Other frequently mentioned solutions included: eduction of social security contributions for individuals of reproductive age, reduction of income tax rates, and ignificant increases in the tax-free allowance, each supported by approximately 44% of respondents as potential incentives to boost fertility in Poland.

Among the proposed options, there was also the reintroduction of the so-called "bachelor tax" ("bykowe") - a tax imposed on childless individuals, which existed in various forms in Poland until 1973. However, this idea received positive support from only about 13% of respondents.

This result, to some extent, confirms sociological observations indicating a widespread tendency to postpone decisions about parenthood and a corresponding fear of the personal burden such a measure might entail.

Figure 3. *Proposed Measures to Increase Fertility According to Respondents*



Source: *Authors' own research findings.*

The key pro-family program currently operating in Poland assumes that a cash benefit is granted for every child in every family, regardless of the family's economic situation. This universal approach, while widely implemented, has also been subject to criticism. As part of the present study, an effort was made to determine how young citizens perceive this issue. The results obtained do not indicate a clear consensus respondents' opinions were divided between those supporting and those opposing the principles of the program (Table 2).

When taking gender into account, it is noteworthy that women more frequently expressed critical views regarding the program's universal eligibility rules than men. At the same time, women were also more likely than men to express approval of the program's principles, although the difference in the proportion of approving responses between the two genders was considerably greater than in the case of negative opinions.

Table 2. *Respondents' Opinions on the 800+ Benefit Granted for Each Child Regardless of Family Income, by Declared Gender*

In your opinion, should the 800+ benefit be granted for every child regardless of family income?	**Gender**				
	Female		**Male**		**Total**
	n	%	n	%	n
No	35	53,8%	30	46,2%	65
Yes	43	64,2%	24	35,8%	67
Total	78	59,1%	54	40,9%	132

Source: *Authors' own research findings.*

In the course of the survey, respondents were also asked whether the current regulations granting the 800+ benefit for each child in the family regardless of income criteria should continue to apply. This issue was analyzed by taking into account the gender of respondents.

The results, presented in Table 3, indicate that most female respondents expressed a positive attitude toward maintaining the current regulations without change, whereas among male respondents, a majority believed that these rules should be modified.

The study also sought to determine respondents' opinions regarding the potential dependence of citizens and families on the state as a result of income redistribution through the 800+ benefit system. The findings revealed that a large majority of respondents (approximately 76%) agreed with the statement that this system fosters dependency of citizens and families on the state.

Further analysis examined the relationship between respondents' self-assessment of their financial situation and their opinion regarding the potential dependency created by state redistribution under the 800+ scheme. The data showed that among respondents who believed that redistribution leads to dependency, the vast majority assessed their personal financial situation as "rather good" or "very good."

This distribution of responses suggests a correlation between a positive self-assessment of economic status and the belief that income redistribution contributes to citizen or family dependency on the state through social benefit mechanisms.

Table 3. *Respondents' Opinions on the Continuation of Current 800+ Benefit Regulations by Gender*

How would you assess your personal financial situation?	**Do you agree with the statement that the redistribution of funds (including through the "Family 800+" program) contributes to the dependency of citizens or families on the state?**				
	No		**Yes**		**Total**
	n	**%**	**n**	**%**	**n**
Very good	5	20,8%	19	79,2%	**24**
Rather good	22	25,3%	65	74,7%	**87**
Rather bad	3	20,0%	12	80,0%	**15**
Very bad	1	16,7%	5	83,3%	**6**
Total	**31**	**23,5%**	**101**	**76,5%**	**132**

Source: *Authors' own research findings.*

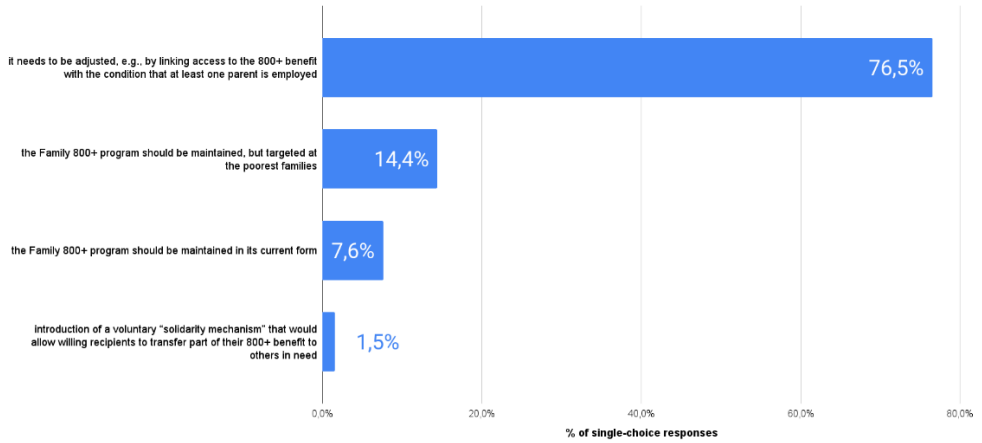
Respondents were also asked to share their opinions regarding the future of Poland's key family support program, "Family 800+." The results show that fewer than 8% of respondents believed the program should be maintained without any changes, while approximately 15.5% felt that it should be modified so that only the poorest families

would be eligible. The vast majority over 76% of respondents believed that the program requires reform, specifically in the direction of linking eligibility to employment activity, for example, making access to the 800+ benefit conditional upon at least one parent being professionally active (Figure 4).

The responses were then compared with participants' declarations regarding parenthood whether they already had children or planned to have them in the future. Particular attention was paid to the most common opinion: that the program should be adjusted to include a work-related condition.

The analysis revealed that this view was most frequently expressed by respondents who did not yet have children but planned to have them in the future. This finding suggests that among young adults without children but intending to become parents, there exists a pragmatic and responsible attitude toward the functioning of the program. These respondents appear willing to accept the principle that at least one parent should be professionally active in order to qualify for the 800+ benefit.

Figure 4. *Respondents' Opinions on the Future of the "Family 800+" Program*



Source: *Authors' own research findings.*

5. Conclusions

Like many other European countries, Poland is struggling with a demographic crisis. The causes of this situation can be traced to several factors, including a low birth rate, a growing process of population ageing, labour migration, and sociological transformations such as changes in family models, attitudes toward parenthood, lifestyles, and social norms (Luci-Greulich and Thévenon, 2013).

Despite the introduction of various family policy programs, the demographic situation has continued to deteriorate in recent years. These programs have aimed, on the one

hand, to provide financial assistance to individuals raising children, and on the other, to expand access to institutional childcare and improve parental leave policies.

To mitigate the negative consequences of the demographic crisis, family policy must be multidimensional, targeting potential parental decisions early in adulthood. Moreover, it must account for current social and economic conditions, and any measures undertaken should be flexible, stable, and comprehensive.

The results of the present study, conducted among young respondents, reveal opinions that may be useful in reconstructing and improving Polish family policy. If one assumes that low fertility is the main driver of demographic challenges, it becomes clear that young people primarily attribute it to financial instability and uncertainty about the future.

This suggests that economic insecurity, resulting from unstable employment and concerns about the ability to support a family, significantly influences fertility decisions.

Demography, as the foundation of a nation's existence and strength, represents a major challenge for much of the contemporary world. The ageing of societies carries the risk of pension system collapse and increased burdens on the working-age population. A shrinking labour force also translates into lower innovation, slower economic growth, and reduced international competitiveness.

Moreover, a shortage of young people poses difficulties in maintaining an effective national defense force in case of armed conflict. In Poland, demographic data-both current and projected indicate that population ageing and decline are already tangible realities, generating further challenges such as the closure of schools and longer waiting times for medical specialists.

Against this backdrop, the introduction of the "Family Plus" program was initially perceived as a step in the right direction. Although the program's primary goal to increase the number of births has not been achieved, it has nonetheless improved living standards for many families.

This view was also reflected in the opinions of young respondents: while they acknowledged that the program had not contributed to higher fertility, they considered it a valuable form of social support that improved the material situation of families. Thus, although its pronatalist objective has not been fulfilled, many respondents evaluate the program positively.

It is an undeniable fact that one visible achievement of the "500+/800+" benefit has been the reduction of child poverty. However, some commentators argue that this goal could have been achieved more efficiently, with less fiscal burden, for instance, by targeting support to those most in need (Bień, 2022).

Given that the intended increase in fertility has not been realized and that Poland's fertility rate is now one of the lowest among OECD countries young respondents were asked to identify the causes of this phenomenon. Their responses were unsurprising: financial insecurity and housing difficulties were cited most often.

Some respondents also pointed to the career aspirations of women and the spread of the financially independent woman model as contributing factors. It can be assumed that, on one hand, the pursuit of career advancement reflects broader social changes in gender roles, while on the other, it represents a natural route to improved financial stability, which should theoretically support childbearing decisions. Yet, as the research shows, the issue is far more complex.

When asked about measures that could increase fertility, respondents most often emphasized the need for tax and social insurance reforms to reduce the financial burden of raising children. A small minority supported more radical measures, such as taxing childless individuals.

Because the "Family Plus" program entails significant fiscal costs, respondents were also asked about its future and possible modifications. The distribution of responses revealed a variety of views, yet one common thread emerged: a strong preference for linking eligibility for the benefit to employment activity. Over 76% of respondents stated that participation in the program should depend on the professional activity of at least one parent.

There is no doubt that since its introduction, the "Family Plus" program has continued to enjoy broad public support, as reflected in survey results. Moreover, it has become the most recognizable element of Poland's family policy. However, its high cost and the lack of measurable pronatalist outcomes have reignited debates about the program's future and the overall direction of family policy.

The research conducted, together with the analysis of other studies on the "Family Plus" program and related family policy instruments, allows for the identification of several frequently discussed areas of reform, including:

1. The need to consolidate existing family support instruments into a single, coherent system – Polish family policy currently lacks a comprehensive and integrated strategy, which results in the introduction of isolated and uncoordinated measures rather than a consistent, long-term action plan.
2. Defining targeted forms of support for large families in a more cost-effective way – in this area, the state has not yet developed systemic, cohesive solutions, often responding to immediate issues rather than pursuing long-term policy goals.
3. Embedding mechanisms within the tax system based on the principle that a family's primary source of support should be parental employment rather than

state social subsidies – this would promote self-reliance and labor market participation while reducing dependence on social benefits.

Considering the opinions of respondents and the findings of CBOS studies, there is room for moderate optimism regarding the procreative attitudes of young Poles.

However, in order for these declared intentions to translate into an actual increase in fertility rates, both time and the appropriate design of support mechanisms are required mechanisms that take into account the views of young people and focus on measures that genuinely help them make decisions about having children.

Moreover, for family policy to be effective, it must combine financial support for families with the development of childcare infrastructure and the creation of flexible labor market solutions that enable parents to balance professional and family responsibilities.

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