

PROFESSIONAL ACTIVITY OF PARENTS RECEIVING FAMILY 500+ CHILD SUPPORT IN RURAL AND URBAN AREAS

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to analyse the professional activity of parents who receive the Family 500+ educational benefit. Eligibility for this benefit in the first three years of the programme was dependent on family income and the number of children. Research shows that the highest level of professional activity was among parents who had one child and they did not receive a child benefit. Parents who received a 500+ benefit and had two or more children were more active in the labour market than parents with one child. An increase was also found in the number of economically inactive people not seeking work for reasons related to running a home and caring for family members, especially among people living in the countryside.

Key words: child benefit, labour market, professional passivity, professional activity, rural areas, family 500+ programme

JEL codes: J20, J13, J22

INTRODUCTION

The Family 500+ Programme is a relatively new programme in Polish family policy and has been the subject of much debate. During the election campaign in 2015, the Law and Justice Party announced the 500+ Programme, which was introduced after winning the election. The Family 500+ Programme came into force on 1st April 2016 and was designed to provide “partial coverage of expenses related to bringing up a child, including taking care of the child and satisfying its life needs” [Ustawa... 2016]. The mother, father, factual guardian or legal guardian of a child is entitled to this benefit. Until July 2019, the programme applied only to certain families and children: in the case of families with one child, the income criterion applied¹, whereas,

in the case of families with more than one child, the benefit was paid for the second and subsequent child. In case of a single parent raising one or more children, it was stipulated that the maintenance allowance should be based on an enforceable title originating or approved by the court. The Act provided for the possibility of receiving child support in whole or in part in material form or in the form of payment for services in situations where carers waste the paid-out money [Ustawa z dnia 11 lutego 2016].

By April 2019, the programme had been in operation for three years. Although, many aspects of the programme’s functioning have been debated, research has yet to confirm the hypotheses. This is due to the fact that the programme has been functioning for a very short

¹ Parents received PLN 500 each month for the second and subsequent children. If the income per person in the family was less than PLN 800 (PLN 1,200 family with disabled child), then the parents received the benefit for first child. The gross minimum wage in 2016 was PLN 1,850.

period, and there is a lack of research on this subject (especially qualitative research). Undoubtedly, this is the most important social programme in the history of Poland, and it has changed the nature of state policy in terms of family welfare assessment. According to Public Opinion Research Centre data, until the year 2013, the state's policy for families was rated as being sufficient or insufficient, and a year into the programme, 52% of respondents rated it as good [CBOS 2017].

This study seeks to answer the question as to whether, in families taking advantage of the 500+ Programme, the level of professional activity is lower than in families who do not receive the benefit, and whether this programme could increase professional inactivity among rural populations. The research is based on results from the Labour Force Survey presented by the Central Statistical Office of Poland. Although the programme started in 2016, data on the professional activity of parents receiving 500+ are available from 2018 (Until 2018, there were no questions about 500+ child benefit in the LFS survey).

CURRENT RESEARCH ON THE IMPACT OF THE 500+ BENEFIT ON THE LABOUR MARKET IN POLAND

From the outset, there has been a question mark over whether the programme would affect the labour market. According to Ruzik-Sierdzińska [2017], this benefit has had such an impact that in 2016 between 20,000 and 23,000 female employees left the labour market. She points out that, in the short term, exiting the labour market may have a neutral or even beneficial effect on a household, whereas a long break from work may make it difficult for parents or carers to return to employment at a later date and may increase the risk of poverty in old age (less work experience means a lower pension in the future). It has been noted that the benefit has a much stronger influence on decisions made by less-educated women [Magda et al. 2018]. Myck's research [2016] indicates that the programme influences the percentage of couples in which both partners work, and the effect is particularly noticeable in small towns and villages. The question about the effects of the Family 500+ Programme on the labour market is still valid.

Other results of the programme are also emphasized, such as a reduction of poverty among families

with children. The analysis carried out by Brzeziński and Najsztub [2017] based on equivalency scales suggests that even before the introduction of this child benefit, the extreme poverty rate in Poland among households with children was at a level comparable or lower than the level of poverty among single-person households or couples without children.

CASES WHERE THE MAIN BENEFICIARIES OF THE "FAMILY 500+" PROGRAMME LIVE IN RURAL AREAS

According to the data, the Family 500+ child benefit has been granted to 54.1% of all children (3.74 million people) up to the age of 18 in Poland. Most children covered by the 500+ Programme live in rural areas (61%). In some rural communes, over 90% of children are covered by the programme, e.g., the Potworów commune (92% of children) and the Grabowo commune in the Podlasie Voivodeship (90% of children). Only 47% of children living in urban communes and 55% of those in urban-rural communes have received this benefit (as of 30th June 2018). Since the beginning of the programme, PLN 54.8 billion have been spent for this purpose, of which 61% was spent in rural and urban-rural communes (Table 1).

Table 1. Family 500+ child support expenditure from the beginning of the programme until 30th June 2018

Communes	Expenditure	
	PLN billion	(%)
City	21.6	39
Rural	19.6	36
Urban-rural	13.6	25
Total	54.8	100

Source: [Ministerstwo Rodziny, Pracy i Polityki Społecznej 2018].

In 2017, the average benefit granted to families participating in the programme amounted to PLN 9,795 for those in rural areas and PLN 8,591 for those in urban communes. The overall average for families participating in the programme amounts to PLN 9,193. A large part of the budget for this programme goes to rural families due to the fact that in recent years more children

have been born in the countryside, and income there is lower. The percentage of people at risk of poverty is higher in rural areas than in cities. Since 2016, there has been a clear decline in the number of people living below the subsistence level, both in rural areas and in cities, with the exception of large cities where this indicator has increased (Table 2). Undoubtedly, changes in this indicator have been affected by the good labour market, wages and increased agricultural incomes. In the case of households with children, we should also take into consideration the provision of child support and parental allowance. The parental allowance (commonly referred to as “Kosiniakowe”)² has been in force since January 2016 and applies to women who have

given birth to a child but are not eligible for maternity benefit, e.g., students and farmers’ wives.

The number of children in a household affects the risk of poverty. Data produced by the Central Statistical Office are published for the whole country and include the number of children in families (but not the division between cities and villages). The data show that households with children have a greater risk of extreme poverty. Households without children have the lowest poverty rate, and no major changes were noted here. In contrast, there is clearly a lower poverty rate in households with at least two or three children aged 17 or under, as well as in households with a disabled child (Table 3).

Table 2. Extent of extreme poverty in Poland between 2013 and 2017 (% of people in households)

Specifications	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Poland	7.4	7.4	6.5	4.9	4.3
Urban areas:	4.6	4.6	3.5	2.9	2.4
number of inhabitants:	1.0	1.0	1.1	1.1	1.5
– more than 500 thousand	4.6	3.2	3.2	1.9	1.1
– 200–500 thousand	3.5	3.7	3.1	2.8	1.8
– 100–200 thousand	4.9	5.1	4.6	3.9	2.8
– 20–100 thousand	8.2	8.5	5.4	4.0	4.1
– less than 20 thousand	11.6	11.8	11.3	8.0	7.3
Rural areas					

Source: own study based on GUS [2015, 2017, 2019].

Table 3. Extent of extreme poverty in households with children between 2015 and 2017

Specification	2015	2016	2017	
Poland in general	6.5	4.9	4.3	
Household	with at least 1 child aged 0–17	8.8	5.9	4.9
	with 1 child aged 0–17	5.3	4.3	3.8
	with 2 children aged 0–17	8.1	5.3	4.5
	with at least 3 children aged 0–17	16.7	9.9	7.6
	with at least 1 child under the age of 16 with a disability certificate	10.7	8.3	4.9
	without children aged 0–17	3.7	3.7	3.6

Source: own study based on GUS [2015, 2017, 2019].

² The term “Kosiniakowe” benefit comes from the name of its originator, i.e., the former Minister of Labour and Social Policy – Władysław Kosiniak-Kamysz.

Sawicka and Stolarczyk [2018] draw attention to the fact that no one supports the positive effects of the programme in terms of families with children. There is no doubt that, in households with children, provision of child benefit and parental allowance have an impact on improving the income situation of families.

PARENTS WHO ARE PROFESSIONALLY “PASSIVE” DUE TO FAMILY RESPONSIBILITIES RELATED TO RUNNING A HOME

The structure of the Family 500+ Programme could encourage parents to be professionally inactive or to conceal income in the case of households where the income criterion is important (exceeding the specified income limit by one PLN can result in a loss of 500 PLN's worth of benefit). Annual increases in the minimum wage have caused some of the lowest earners to lose benefits. Such slight increases in income are unlikely to significantly improve families' financial situation but may well render them ineligible for benefits.

In Poland, there are 4,869 thousand economically inactive people of working age. The main reason for passivity in this group is family responsibilities related to running a home. For this reason, 1,150 thousand people are outside the labour market, half of whom live in rural areas (Table 4). The number of people who are economically inactive due to family responsibilities is growing, especially in the countryside. In 2018, there were 166,000 more professionally inactive people than in the third quarter of 2013, of whom 104,000 lived in rural areas. Since the 500+ Programme began operating (i.e., 1st April 2016), there has been a clear increase of 44,000 professionally passive people in the countryside (during the second quarter of 2016). However, it should be emphasized that professional passivity of the rural population is conditioned by many factors occurring simultaneously. Firstly, the rural labour market is mainly associated with agriculture. Owning a farm has an important and significant impact on being in the working group [Kmieć 2015, Drejerska 2018], and the situation of the landless population in the rural labour market is difficult. There is a higher demand for work outside agriculture in the cities, and an important role here is played by the profitability of work. Not only is the level of remuneration important but also costs

associated with undertaking a job outside the place of residence. Weaker development of technical and social infrastructure in rural areas means that costs can be very high, which affects employment choices, especially those of parents who are caring for children. In discussions, there is often an argument about insufficient childcare places, but this is only one of the problems that exist in cities and also the countryside. There are nurseries in 14% of rural communes. It should be remembered that in addition to the availability of nurseries, the cost and quality of childcare services are also important, and this varies greatly. However, the solution to the problem of looking after children up to three years of age will not change much. The ability to plan the functioning of members of the whole family (i.e., the existence of a predictable schedule) is of great importance. For example, school timetables (starting and finishing at different times of the day) influence family decisions about whether to be active in the labour market, especially for women. In addition, organizing childcare during the summer break, school holidays and extended weekends is very expensive, and parents engaged in non-standard forms of work may not be granted leave (especially paid time off).

In addition, returning to the labour market may be problematic due to trouble some commuting to the workplace. A key problem is the lack of organized public transport or the limitations of this.

We are increasingly likely to see problems associated with care of the elderly living in rural areas. Difficulty accessing medical services is a problem not only for parents but also for other residents of villages as there are fewer health care facilities than in cities. The consequence of an aging population is an increase in the number of people needing support. The number of adults who have living parents and grandparents is increasing. Three- and four-generation families are appearing and even (briefly) five-generation families. The probability of families with great-grandparents, grandparents and parents has increased [Szweda-Lewandowska 2014]. Demographic changes and access to care services will affect the professional activity of household members, especially women as they are most often the carers.

The occurrence of so many problems simultaneously and an inability to quickly resolve them makes it necessary for families to resort to a certain level of

Table 4. Population living in towns and villages between 2013 and 2018 not seeking work due to family responsibilities related to running a home, including looking after children or other persons requiring care

Year	Population not seeking work due to family responsibilities aged 15–44 years			
	urban areas		rural areas	
	(in thousands)	previous quarter = 100 (in thousands)	(in thousands)	previous quarter = 100 (in thousands)
2013 I quarter	514	–	502	–
2013 II quarter	505	–9	488	–14
2013 III quarter	506	1	478	–10
2013 IV quarter	484	–22	465	–13
2014 I quarter	478	–6	470	5
2014 II quarter	501	23	481	11
2014 III quarter	485	–16	483	2
2014 IV quarter	469	–16	461	–22
2015 I quarter	488	27	463	2
2015 II quarter	479	–9	487	24
2015 III quarter	528	49	503	16
2015 IV quarter	501	–27	497	–6
2016 I quarter	518	17	503	6
2016 II quarter	519	1	547	44
2016 III quarter	576	57	559	12
2016 IV quarter	553	–23	568	9
2017 I quarter	565	12	514	–54
2017 II quarter	553	–12	514	0
2017 III quarter	602	49	614	100
2017 IV quarter	566	–36	571	–43
2018 I quarter	556	–10	546	–25
2018 II quarter	537	–19	555	9
2018 III quarter	568	31	582	27

Source: own study based on the Labour Force Survey in Poland for the years 2014–2018.

professional passivity, especially since few people have the option to work under part-time contracts. According to OECD data for Poland, in 2000, 12.8% of working people worked part-time, whereas, in 2017, this was only 6.9%. Instead of working part-time under a contract of employment in Poland, employees are employed under less regulated and protected time contracts (e.g., civil contracts) or are encouraged to set up

their own business and continue working for a former employer. In 2017, according to estimates by the Central Statistical Office, 1.2 million people entered into a mandate contract or a contract for specific work and did not have an employment relationship with any employer, and 1.2 million people were self-employed and did not employ staff. The number of people working for a former employer is unknown [GUS 2018]. In ad-

dition, a small percentage of people have the chance to perform their work at home or have flexible working hours. According to research by Zajkowska, the probability of performing some professional duties at home is lower for women than for men. The option to work flexible hours is adopted by men more frequently than women [Zajkowska 2014].

ECONOMIC ACTIVITY AMONG RURAL AND URBAN POPULATIONS RECEIVING 500+ BENEFIT

Since the first quarter of 2018, the Labour Force Survey of the Central Statistical Office has taken into consideration whether families receive 500+ child support. The available data show the level of the phenomenon, and data from the following periods will allow changes over time to be observed. What may come as a surprise is the fact that there are parents with two or three children who do not receive this benefit. It can be assumed that, in this group, there are people who have not submitted an application or people who do not have an established maintenance allowance for their second and subsequent child.

Data from Table 5 show that parents not receiving benefit are characterized by a higher level of professional activity (89.7% compared to 79.7%). In addition, it can be seen that dependence of the economic activity rate on the number of children occurs only in households receiving the 500+ benefit – the more children, the lower the total professional activity. There are particularly large differences between villages and cities: in households with three children, the professional activity rate during this period was almost twice as high as in rural households (83.3% in cities versus 43.5% in rural areas).

The situation was different in households receiving the 500+ benefits. The data show that the professional activity of parents was at a similar level in cities and in the countryside. The lowest activity was among parents (residents of villages and cities) with one child. In the countryside, the professional activity rate of parents with one child was 20.9 percentage points lower than in households not receiving 500+ benefit, and in cities the difference was 24.5 percentage points. It should be noted that parents with one child are less active than parents with at least three children. The employment

Table 5. Economic activity of parents belonging to households receiving and not receiving the 500+ with the number of children below the age of 18 (II quarter of 2018) (%)

Parents	Activity rate in households		Employment rate in households	
	receiving 500+ benefit	not receiving 500+ benefit	receiving 500+ benefit	not receiving 500+ benefit
Total:	79.7	89.7	77.2	88.2
With one child below the age of 18	67.3	90.4	61.2	89.0
With two children below the age of 18	84.4	81.8	82.7	79.4
With three or more children below the age of 18	74.9	55.2	72.8	55.2
Urban areas	81.3	90.9	78.3	89.6
With one child below the age of 18	66.8	91.3	60.0	89.9
With two children below the age of 18	86.1	83.9	83.9	82.8
With three or more children below the age of 18	75.9	83.3	73.0	83.3
Rural areas	77.8	87.3	75.9	85.6
With one child below the age of 18	67.9	88.8	62.4	87.2
With two children below the age of 18	82.3	78.6	81.0	76.2
With three or more children below the age of 18	73.6	43.5	72.4	43.5

Source: data from Labour force survey in Poland II quarter 2018, Statistics Poland, Warsaw 2018.

rate of parents with three children was over 70%, and the employment rate for those with one child was 60% in cities and 62% in the countryside. This probably results from several facts. Firstly, along with the number of children, disposable income per capita in households is reduced, which leads to greater professional activity. Moreover, parents receive 500+ child support for their second and subsequent child regardless of their level of income. Secondly, the age of children is important: older children are more independent and can help care for younger siblings, for example, by picking them up from kindergarten or school. Thirdly, in most communes in Poland, there are no public nurseries and in cases where nurseries do exist, the number of places for children is insufficient and a household with one child has little chance of getting such a place when recruitment points are awarded to children with siblings. Public nursery places are initially given to candidates who have siblings, especially those from large families as they gain a points advantage. In this situation, parents with only one child must choose between suspending their professional activity and paying for nursery places in the private sector, the cost of which may be several times higher.

THE LEVEL OF UNEMPLOYMENT AMONG PARENTS WITH 500+ BENEFIT IN RURAL AND URBAN AREAS

Clear differences in the unemployment rate can be seen by comparing one-child parents who receive the 500+ benefit with those who do not receive it. The data show that the highest unemployment rate was among parents receiving 500+ benefit with one child up to 18 years of age (on average, three times higher than the total unemployment rate). Even greater disproportions are evident if we analyse data broken down by city and rural area, although disproportions between the unemployment rate of one-child parents who receive benefit and those who do not are smaller among the rural population (7.8% and 1.8% in rural areas, compared to 10.3% and 1.5% in cities) (Table 6).

The unemployment rate among parents with two or three children was found to be much lower. Differences in the unemployment rate of parents with one child are large, and it can be assumed that the income-related criterion for granting benefit has an impact on decisions regarding professional activity.

Table 6. Unemployment rate of parents belonging to households receiving and not receiving the 500+ benefit with the number of children below the age of 18 (II quarter of 2018) (%)

Parents	Unemployment rate in household	
	receiving 500+ benefit	not receiving 500+ benefit
Total:	3.2	1.6
With one child below the age of 18	9.1	1.6
With two children below the age of 18	2.1	×
With three or more children below the age of 18	2.5	–
Urban areas	3.7	1.5
With one child below the age of 18	10.3	1.5
With two children below the age of 18	2.5	×
With three or more children below the age of 18	3.7	–
Rural areas	2.5	1.9
With one child below the age of 18	7.8	1.8
With two children below the age of 18	1.5	×
With three or more children below the age of 18	1.4	–

Symbol (x): not applicable; Symbol (–): magnitude zero

Source: data from Labour force survey in Poland II quarter 2018, Statistics Poland, Warsaw 2018.

CHANGES IN THE “FAMILY 500+” PROGRAMME AND THEIR IMPACT ON PROFESSIONAL ACTIVITY

From 1st July 2019, the rules for paying out the 500+ benefit are due to change. The income criterion for granting benefit to the first child will be disestablished. The programme will cover all children, so (according to the announcement) there will be 6.8 million children provided for by the programme. At present, it is difficult to estimate with a high degree of accuracy the impact of the benefit on the phenomenon of professional passivity. It is even more difficult to predict how the supply of labour will be affected within the context of the proposed move to include all children in the programme. On one hand, it can be expected that abolition of the income criterion will increase the professional activity of parents with one child, but it may be a slight increase, especially in rural areas for reasons mentioned earlier in this paper. Another scenario cannot be ruled out, i.e., that there may also be a decline in professional activity among parents with at least two children. A fixed income may influence household decisions to withdraw from the labour market for a period of time to take care of family members or to find jobs with better working conditions. In the case of rural populations, the changes may not be that large, and they will depend on the functioning of the local non-agricultural job market. A well-functioning labour market counteracts the outflow of young people from the countryside and, at the same time, also affects agriculture, preventing the emergence of agrarian overpopulation. If working outside agriculture is attractive, it can cause structural changes in agriculture in the long run [Rosner and Stany 2017].

CONCLUSION

Most children covered by the Family 500+ benefit live in rural communes. During the years analysed in this study, the extent of extreme poverty among families with children decreased, especially among families with three children. Child support has certainly improved the income situation of parents with children. Although, the number of people at risk of poverty has decreased, it is still high among the rural population. It is difficult to estimate exactly how many people have become professionally inactive as a result of the introduction of the

500+ benefit. Nonetheless, there has been an increase in the number of parents who are professionally passive due to family responsibilities, especially in rural areas.

The lowest level of professional activity was observed among parents with one child up to 18 years of age who received a benefit from the 500+ Programme. The total employment rate was the lowest for this group of parents. Parents with at least three children were more active in the labour market than parents of an only child who also received a benefit.

The highest employment rate for rural and city residents was among parents with one child who did not receive the 500+ benefit because, in most cases, the income criterion had been exceeded. In the group of people receiving the 500+ benefit, employment rates in the rural population amounted to 75.9% and were slightly lower than the indicator for the city population. However, the unemployment rate among the rural population benefiting from the 500+ Programme was lower and amounted to 2.5%, compared to 3.7%. The highest unemployment rate was among parents with one child who received the 500+ benefit.

Extension of the programme to include all children, regardless of parental income, will be costly, and it is difficult to predict its impact on the professional activity of parents. It can be expected that abolition of the income criterion will positively affect the activity of parents with one child, but these may only amount to small changes, especially in areas with poor development of social and technical infrastructure, and among people performing low-paid jobs.

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AKTYWNOŚĆ ZAWODOWA RODZICÓW OTRZYMUJĄCYCH ŚWIADCZENIE WYCHOWAWCZE 500+Z PODZIAŁEM NA WIEŚ I MIASTO

STRESZCZENIE

Celem badań była analiza aktywności zawodowej rodziców, którzy otrzymywali świadczenie wychowawcze z programu „Rodzina 500 plus”. W pierwszych trzech latach programu otrzymanie świadczenia uzależnione było od liczby dzieci i poziomu dochodów na osobę. Z badań wynika, najwyższy współczynnik aktywności zawodowej był wśród rodziców z jednym dzieckiem, którzy nie otrzymywali świadczenia 500+. Rodzice, którzy otrzymywali świadczenie 500+ i mieli, co najmniej dwoje dzieci byli bardziej aktywni zawodowo niż rodzice z jednym dzieckiem. Zaobserwowano, że w roku, w którym wprowadzono świadczenie 500+, wzrosła liczba biernych zawodowo, szczególnie wśród mieszkańców wsi, którzy nie szukają pracy z powodów obowiązków rodzinnych, w tym opieki nad członkami rodziny.

Słowa kluczowe: zasiłek na dziecko, rynek pracy, bierność zawodowa, aktywność zawodowa, obszary wiejskie, program Rodzina 500+