

## Selected Determinants of Social Polarisation in Rural Areas in Poland

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### Избрани определящи фактори за социална поляризация в селските райони на Полша

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#### Резюме

В съответствие с данните от CSO около 39,4% от полското население, т.е. 15,5 милиона, живеят в селски райони през 2014 г., което представлява около 613 хиляди повече (т.е. около 4,2%), отколкото през 2000 г. Нещо повече, значително увеличение на селското население се наблюдава главно след присъединяването на Полша към ЕС.

Феноменът на конвергенция на селската среда към градската очертава ясно процеса на остаряване на населението и способства за значително повишаване на основното ниво на образование на селските жени. Селското население става по-активно в социален смисъл, особено по-възрастните и тези, които притежават средно ниво на образование. Селяните считат, че през изминалите 10 години тяхното положение в селските райони значително се е подобрило.

Статията прави опит да изчисли ефекта от политиката на правителството по отношение на социално-икономическата ситуация на селското население и неговото ниво на социална активност.

Изследването включва резултати от анкети, проведени от IAFE-NRI (Институт по икономика на селското стопанство и продоволствието, Варшава) на базата на извадка от повече от 8 хиляди селски семейства, от които през 2011 г. приблизително 40% притежават над 1 ха земеделска земя. Всички семейства, живеещи в 76 села, участват в анкетата. Анкетирането е извършено целенасочено и взема под внимание социално-икономическите характеристики и аграрната структура на земеделските стопанства, разположени в избраните райони. Обхватът на събраната информация е екстензивен и се отнася до многобройни аспекти на живота на селското население, и функционирането на земеделските стопанства.

**Ключови думи:** селски райони, общество, селски жени, ЕС, Полша

#### 1. Directions of social transformations in Polish rural areas after the accession to the EU

Structural transformations in Polish agriculture, including improvement in the agrarian structure of holdings and the fact that agriculture does not provide a sufficient number of jobs, affect not only changes in the directions of activities

of individual holdings and the outflow of the employed to non-agricultural sectors (Zegar, 2009, Chmielewska, 2013), but also translate into a series of changes and social problems. Processes of concentration in the agricultural sector, phenomena of migration and accessibility to the urban labour market affect the scale of changes both in the rural settlement network and the connection of the rural population with agricultural holdings

(Sikorska, 2013). Technological progress in agriculture, change in the nature of Polish holdings and increase in the diversification of the professional activity of the agricultural population contributed to a significant decline in agricultural employment. At the same time, agricultural employment, in own agricultural holding, does not provide work for all willing to work. From the survey data it results that even in a group of agricultural holding managers, in 2011 about two-thirds of them worked only in agricultural holdings, the others combined work in holdings with non-agricultural employment (Table 1).

It is necessary to stress the fact that in the past rural women (women farmers) rarely got employed outside the holding, it was the men who made use of a possibility of non-agricultural employment (Wrzochalska, 2006, 2013). The data show that nearly one third of women combine working as holding managers with working outside agriculture. Thus, rural women in Poland do not give up their ambition and work outside of their holdings. So, we may talk about the progressive process of unification of attitudes between rural men and women.

In the years 2005–2011, the population of the surveyed villages decreased by about 6%. This resulted from, first of all, a clear decrease in the population from the farming families (Karwat-Woźniak, Sikorska 2013). In the rural population, the percentage of the families not connected with agricultural holdings (landless population) for many years has been increasing systematical-

ly. In 2011, the number of the landless rural families accounted for more than 60% of the total surveyed families and in relation to the year 2005 it increased by 3 percentage points (p.p.). When compared to the period from before the political transformation, this share has increased significantly, by as much as 20 percentage points. The basic mechanisms of this process was the departure of the rural population from agricultural activities and its professional activation in other branches of the economy or ceasing production activities due to reaching retirement age.

Another important process is the problem of the ageing of the rural population. The population aged 70 and more is significantly growing, including persons from the oldest age group, above 80 years. In particular, this applies to a group of rural women. According to the CSO data, in 2014, rural areas were inhabited by nearly 1.5 million persons aged 70 and more and persons above 80 accounted for nearly 600 thousand. Therefore, there is a need not to only provide care, especially to the lonely and sick, but also to take measures to include a relatively large group of the elderly into the social life of the countryside and thus to make use of their potential.

Just like in cities, the process of improving the level of education has become visible in the countryside (Table 2).

It should be stressed that the relatively more positive changes in this area have been recorded in the community of the farming families, and

**Table 1.** Employment of agricultural holding managers

Years	Only in holdings	Only outside of holdings	In and outside of holdings
<b>Men</b>			
2000	64.5	2.3	33.2
2005	60.2	1.9	37.9
2011	63.0	*	37.0
<b>Women</b>			
2000	72.9	3.2	23.9
2005	67.3	2.7	30.0
2011	67.6	*	32.4

Source: IAFE–NRI surveys, 2000–2011.

in the group of rural women. We may think that the convention under which persons staying in agriculture are those with the lower level of education or those who have no chance to change their professional activity has been overcome. In particular, the percentage of persons with the higher and secondary level of education has increased. Rural women have particular ambition in striving for achieving educational success.

From the surveys it results that the percentage of women with higher education is almost twice higher than that of men. The rural population improves their qualifications during various courses. Almost every fifth village organised agricultural and non-agricultural training courses and every tenth village – specialised courses (Dudek, Wrzochalska, 2015). However, in rural areas there are limited non-agricultural employment opportunities, especially for persons with higher education, in particular, rural women have relatively little chance.

In rural areas, there has been a significant improvement with respect to furnishing with sanitary and technical installations, however, still 11.6% of the rural families report deficiencies and difficulties in this regard. Also, furnishing of the rural households with computers and the Internet has improved, which not only enables the functioning in the modern society, but also gives, e.g. opportunities of working or shopping. In this respect, of importance seem to be educational activities addressed particularly to the persons in

the older age groups, which will lead to reducing the level of digital exclusion and marginalisation of the society in rural areas. There has been the further improvement in the level of furnishing of farmers' households with durable goods and thus the alignment of the parity of furnishing. However, of necessity seem to be the activities aimed at aligning the situation with regard to furnishing with durable goods also within rural areas themselves, as the situation of the landless families is relatively worse than that of the families using agricultural holdings of more than 1 ha of UAA.

The level of furnishing of the households with both technical and sanitary installations and with selected durable goods may also be perceived in the context of the progress of civilisation (especially in case of computerisation, Internet access, which translate into preventing digital exclusion of the residents).

## 2. Involvement of the population in the social life of the countryside

From the surveys carried out it results that in the recent years the social activity of the rural residents has increased, understood as participation and involvement of the population in the social life of the countryside (Wrzochalska, 2015). Relatively low participation among socially active persons was observed in case of young people, and women with higher education, which is

**Table 2.** Level of education of the population in the farming and landless families

Years	Higher	Secondary and post-secondary	Vocational	Lower secondary and primary
<b>Landless population</b>				
2000	3.6	18.1	38.8	39.5
2005	5.3	22.5	36.1	36.1
2011	11.1	29.1	33.1	26.8
<b>Farming population</b>				
2000	2.1	17.0	39.2	41.7
2005	5.0	23.2	37.4	34.4
2011	12.3	32.1	30.7	24.9

Source: IAFE–NRI surveys, 2000–2011.

a consequence of demographic changes (ageing of the society, migration of young people). In the rural environment, social organisations have always played a special role consisting in activities for meeting the needs of the general population, which often went beyond the statutory activities and objectives for which a given organisation was established (Sikorska, 1993).

Social activists are more willing to act in larger groups than they did in the past. The percentage of the villages where men and women were socially active together has increased. Also, the more numerous groups of such persons started forming which points to building of local social capital. Attention should also be paid to relatively high participation of the rural population in

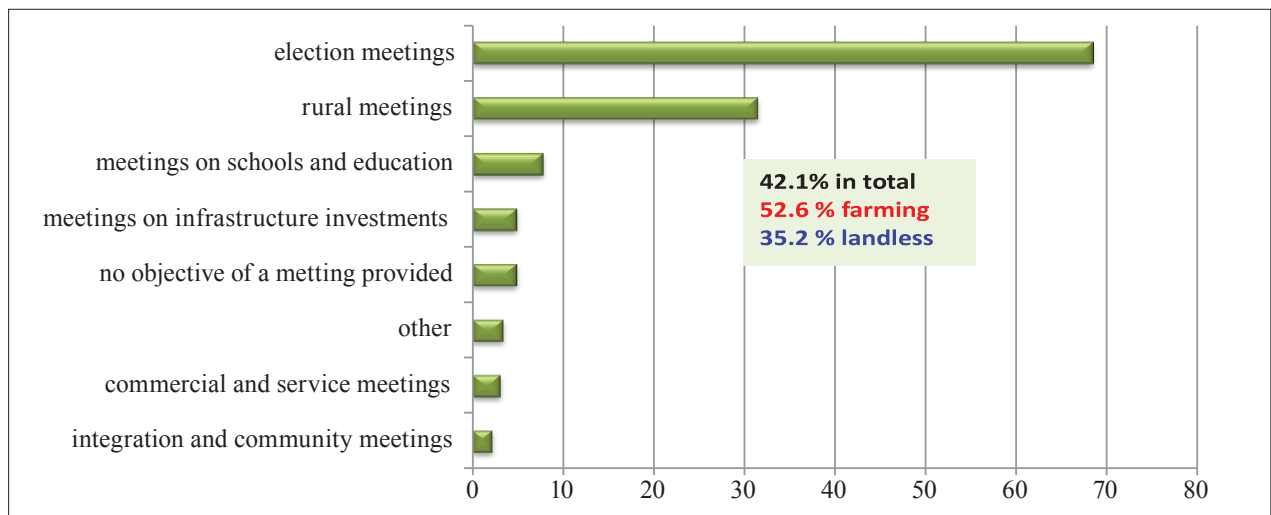


Fig. 1. Participation of the rural population in public meetings (Percentage of rural families)

Source: IAFE–NRI surveys, 2011.

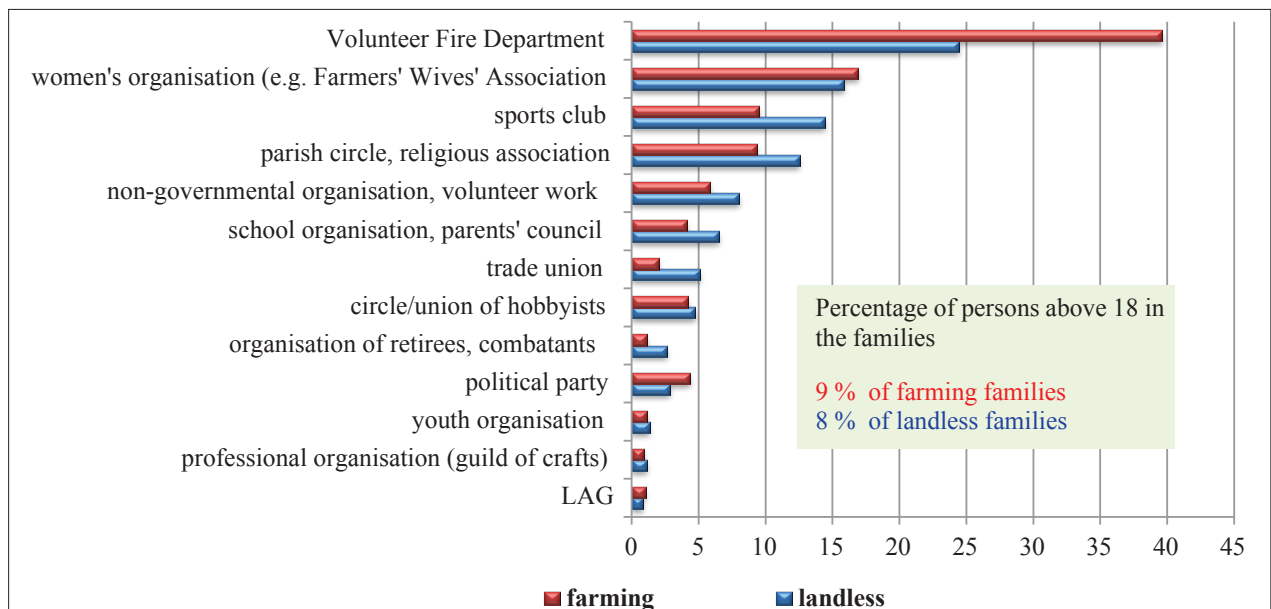


Fig. 2. Members of organisations, associations, parties, committees, religious groups, unions, circles in rural areas

Source: IAFE–NRI surveys, 2011.

various types of meetings (Fig. 1), working in organisations (Fig. 2), performing functions in these organisations.

All this translates into the level of trust of the rural society: what is close to us enjoys the higher level of trust, and what is far from us: central authority – lower (Fig. 3). We can observe the traditional value system, and somehow a Positivist approach: a good farmer is the one whose authority increased most (Fig. 4), this stresses the very important role played by such persons in the rural community.

The rural population also acts in various types of formal organisations. But this applies to less than every tenth adult. These are primarily traditional organisations active in rural areas (Volunteer Fire Department, women’s organisations including Farmers’ Wives’ Associations, organisations functioning at churches, parish circles, religious groups, sports clubs). A very large role in areas wiejskich odgrywają member to political parties

The members of the political parties were present in 44.7% of the surveyed villages. The

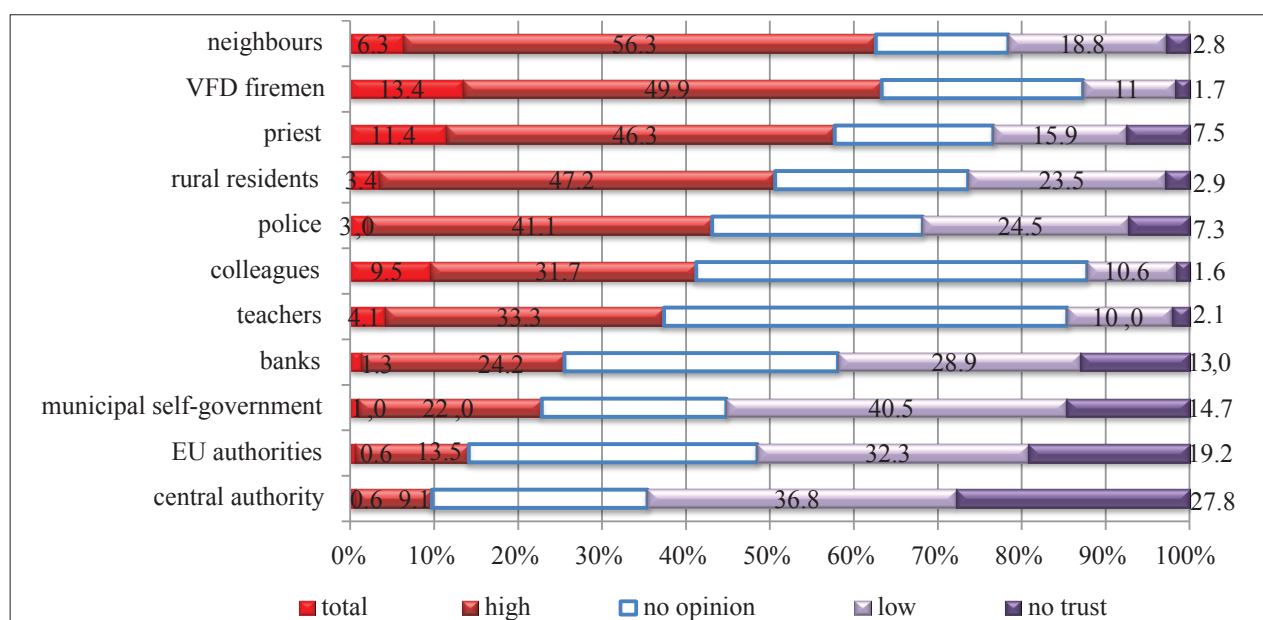


Fig 3. Level of trust of holding managers (percentage of responses)

Source: IAFE–NRI surveys, 2011.

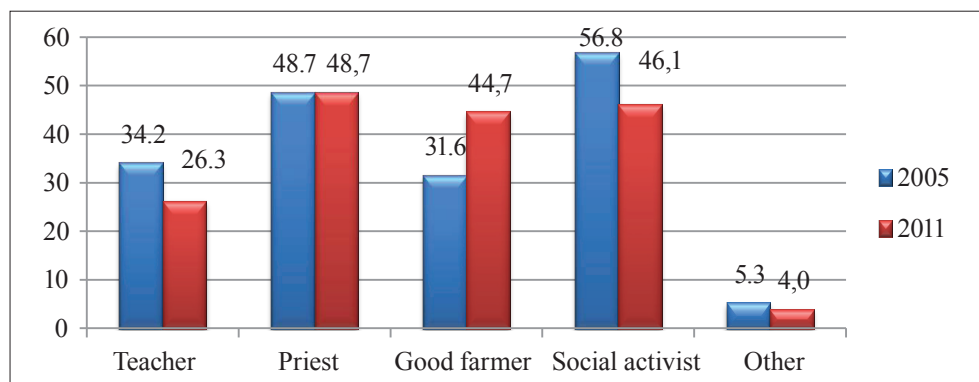


Fig. 4. Authorities of the community in rural areas in the years 2005-2011

Source: IAFE–NRI surveys, 2005, 2011.

groups consisting of two and more persons have been recorded in every fifth village. On average, such a group consisted of 3–4 persons (the most numerous group had 6 persons). Nearly 60% of the members were the persons from the farming families, and more than one-third (36.6%) were women. Particularly politically active were the women from the landless families, their share among the party members, from this group of families was 48.3%, when compared to 28.6% in the farming families. Half of the women members of the party had secondary or post-secondary education (Table 3), in the group of the men the largest group were the persons with vocational education (42.2% of the members). Nearly every fifth person, regardless of gender, had higher education.

In the structure of education of those persons, the largest groups were the persons aged 41–50

and 51–60 (Fig. 5). Attention should be paid to the relatively numerous group of young women (below 30) – nearly every fifth woman member of the party, as well as involvement of the persons from the oldest age group in the political matters – almost every eleventh member of the party, regardless of gender, was older than 70. The average age of the member of the party in both communities (farming and landless) was 51.

The relatively numerous presence of the members of the party in rural areas translates into participation in election: self-government, presidential or parliamentary (Table 4).

In all types of election, the members of 62.5% of the farming families participated in total, no less than every fifth family participated in any the above-mentioned election. Particularly

**Table 3.** Level of education of the members of the party in the surveyed villages

Rodziny	Higher – master’s degree	Higher – bachelor’s degree	Secondary and post-secondary	Vocational	Lower secondary and primary
Total	19.7	1.4	33.8	36.6	8.5
Women	19.2	-	50.0	26.9	3.9
Men	20.0	2.2	24.5	42.2	11.1

Source: IAFE–NRI surveys, 2011.

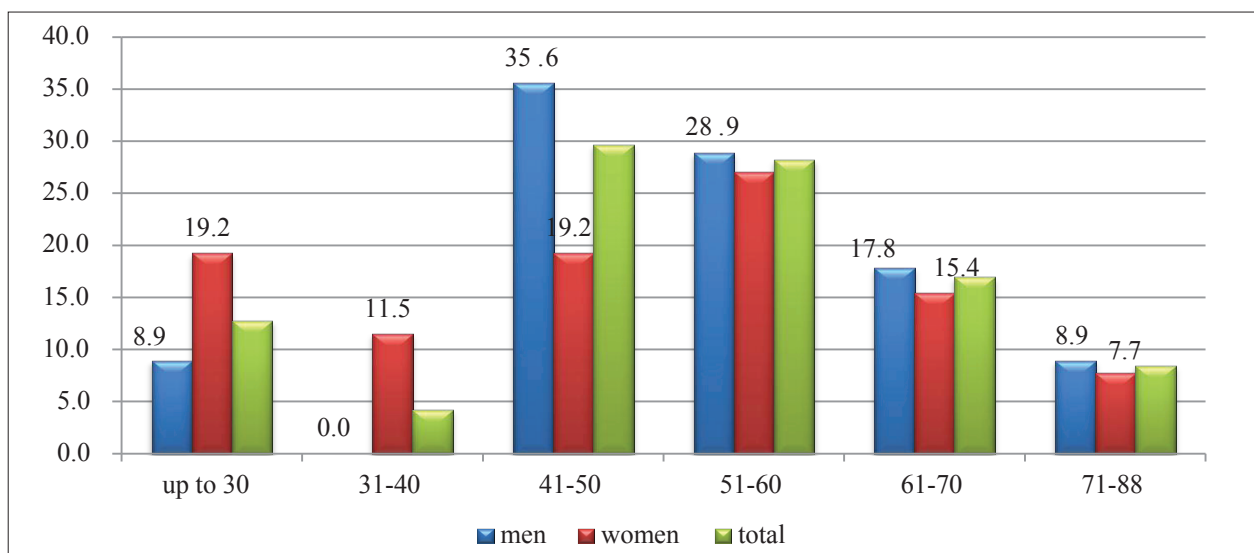


Fig. 5. Age structure of persons belonging to political parties, by gender

Source: IAFE–NRI surveys, 2011.

**Table 4.** Participation in election (percentage of heads of the families)

Families	Parliamentary	Presidential	Self-government	All	None
Total	70.3	74.7	72.5	62.5	19.8
Landless	65.1	70.0	67.4	60.1	25.0
<b>Farming</b>	<b>78.3</b>	<b>81.8</b>	<b>80.1</b>	<b>73.7</b>	<b>13.8</b>
Women	74.8	79.0	75.8	70.0	16.7
Men	79.3	82.7	81.4	74.8	12.9

Source: IAFE–NRI surveys, 2011.

active in this regard, were the members of the farming families.

### 3. Chances that the population will stay in rural areas

Changes in the professional attitudes, especially between the farming and landless population, are also reflected in their opinions on the living standard in rural areas. The percentage of the persons from the farming families who are willing to state that their living standard is better than in 2005 is higher (Fig. 6).

Among all people living in rural areas, the positive changes were noticed by 13.5% of them. The members of the farming families were more optimistic than the members of the landless families. Almost one-fourth of those persons (who noticed that it is better) thought that their financial situation improved, they have a job, they modernised or increased the scale of agricultural production. Nearly every fifth person from the group of the satisfied also noticed the improvement in the level of technical infrastructure in rural areas (e.g. building of a water supply and gas pipeline, of a bus stop). The less numerous group also

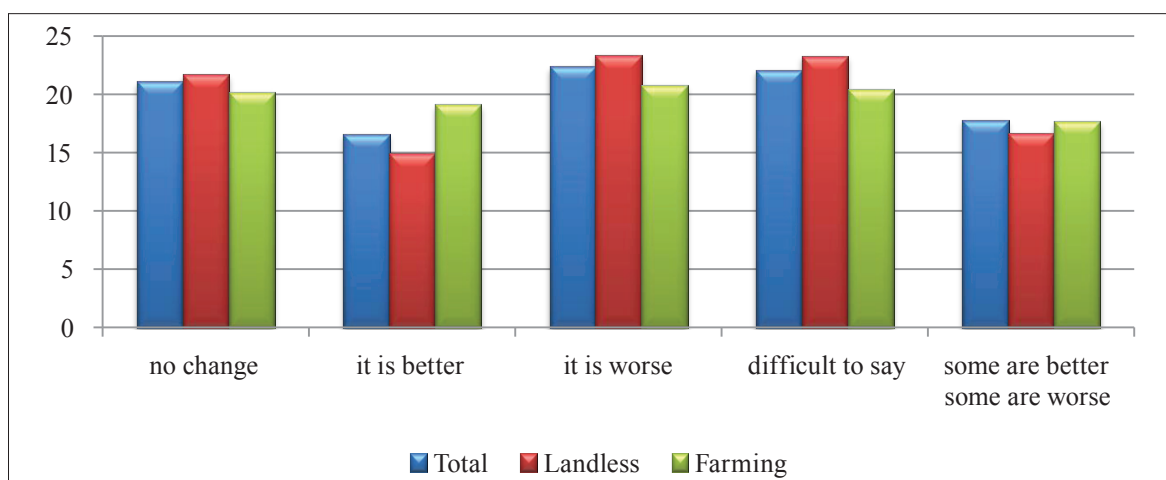


Fig. 6. Changes in the living standard in rural areas when compared to 2005 – percentage of opinions of the rural residents

Some are better: Some are worse.

\*Improvement in the financial situation; \*Deterioration of the financial situation;

\*Improvement in technical infrastructure; \*Lack of a job, unemployment;

\*Improvement in the living conditions;

\*Modernisation of holdings.

Source: IAFE–NRI surveys, 2011.

noticed the positive changes regarding the supply or pointed to the possibilities of modernising or upgrading the holding, which significantly improved the conditions of work in agriculture. The relatively large percentage of the persons did not notice any changes or was unable to clearly identify their situation in relation to the issues related to their living standard in rural areas. Almost every fifth rural resident decided that their living standard had become worse.

Most of those persons (nearly two thirds) stressed that their financial situation had deteriorated (their income decreased, the profitability of agricultural production deteriorated, there were problems with the sale or contracting). There were also signals regarding an impossibility of finding a job and unemployment present in the countryside. The deterioration of the situation in rural areas in the recent years was indicated more often by the persons not associated with agriculture. Therefore, the situation where it was the landless population who had the better living conditions in the countryside has been reversed.

Still, in rural areas the problem is underdeveloped social and technical infrastructure, but the biggest problem is a need to improve the economic situation, including providing jobs, especially for the persons from the landless population (Fig. 7).

In the rural population' opinion, currently it is better, because we can clearly see the improved financial situation mainly thanks to modernising or enlarging the holding, increasing the scale of production, which results not only in higher income, but also work in the holding became lighter and easier. Also, technical infrastructure improved.

The population also notices negative changes. It is worse because the financial situation deteriorated (income and earnings decreased, decline in the profitability of agricultural production is noticeable). Sometimes, it is not even worth producing as there are no possibilities of selling and contracting.

Social changes in rural areas in Poland, in the second half of the 21st century, are also a kind of fulfilment of social and economic aspirations of the population due to the distant location of the countryside.

In total, 28.4% of respondents declared that the state policy contributed to the improvement of situation of rural population, particularly the rural women. The people related to the agriculture, especially farm managers (both males and females), assessed the state policy on these issues higher. Namely, 41.4% persons from this group argued that the state policy is in favour of women (Fig. 8). Nearly half of the respondents con-

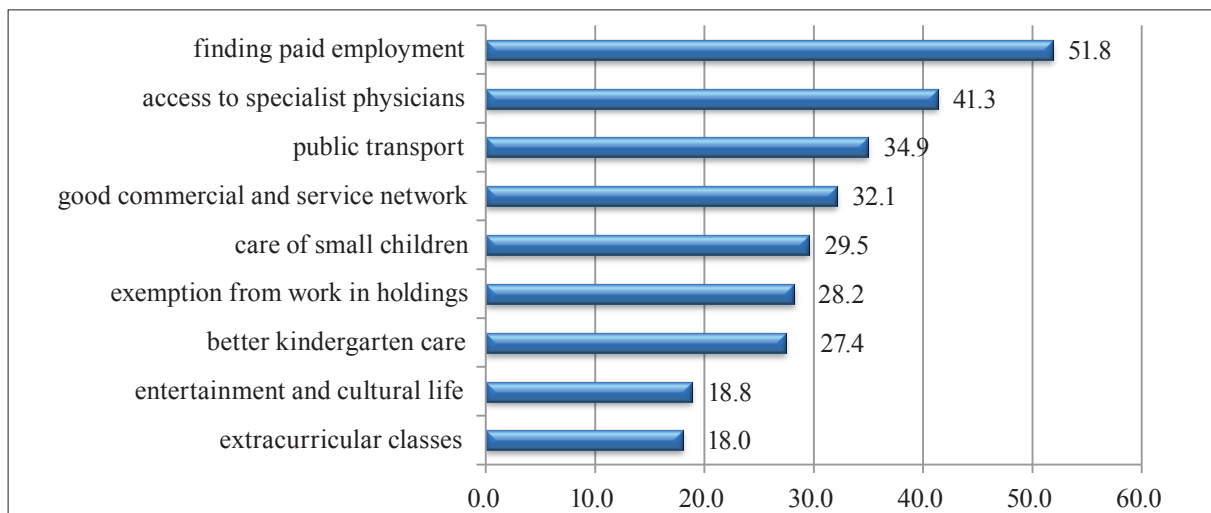


Fig. 7. Chances that the population will stay in rural areas

Source: IAFE–NRI surveys, 2011.



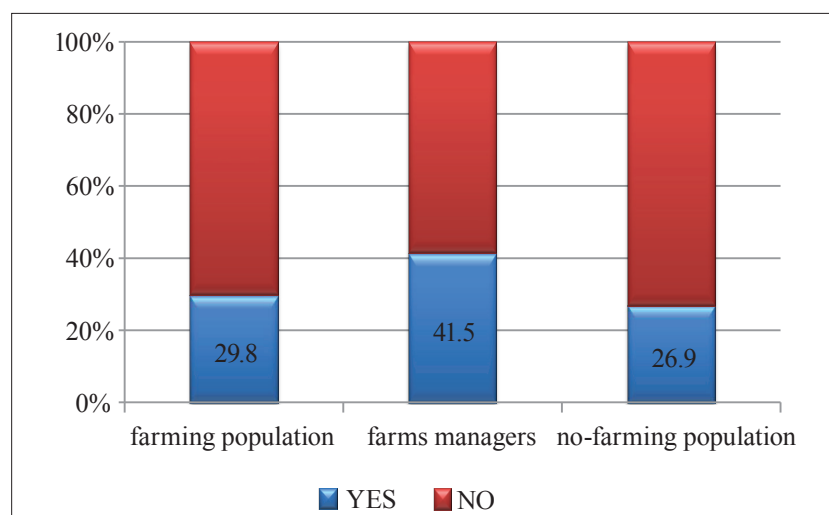


Fig. 8. Are the current government policies contribute to the improvement of situation of rural population (including rural women)?

Source: IAFE–NRI surveys, 2011.

sidered that within the state policy, the pro-family issues, as well as the provision of vocational trainings and courses for rural population are important. Current policy in this area is assessed as inadequate and insufficient. One third of the respondents' answers concerned the provision of better access to advisory services and institutional care for the youngest children, in turn every fifth answer related to the provision of support for women's associations and organisations.

## Conclusions

Improvement in the structure of agricultural holdings, the growing landless population as well as demographic changes taking place in rural areas in Poland in the second half of the 21st century result in a number of transformations in the social environment of the countryside. The structural image of these areas has been revalued. In the countryside, there is less and less agriculture and the resident population, while there is more population not associated with agriculture.

Noticeable is the fact that rural environment becomes similar to the urban environment; the clearly visible process of ageing of the society, significant increase in the level of education of

the population, improvement in furnishing of dwellings, including the Internet which became an important tool for work.

In rural areas in Poland, mainly there are no non-agricultural jobs; the respondents indicated the problems with the insufficient level of income and with a decrease in income, but also the problems with selling of agricultural products, contracting. We should stress the fact that the persons (including the women) associated with agriculture are more satisfied with the changing reality, than those from the landless families.

The social activity of the rural residents has increased. The relatively low share among the socially active persons was that of young people and of the women with higher education, which is a consequence of demographic changes (ageing of the society, migration of young people). Social activists are more willing to act in larger groups than they did in the past. The percentage of the villages where men and women were socially active together has increased.

Attention should be paid to relatively high participation of the rural residents in meetings, work in organisations, performing functions in these organisations and involvement in the political matters. Also, in case of the parliamentary, presidential and self-government election, the

active attitude of the rural population should be stressed. The population from the farming families is more involved and active than the population from the landless families in the matters relating to the rural community.

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## Selected Determinants of Social Polarisation in Rural Areas in Poland

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(Summary)

In accordance with CSO data, about 39.4% of the Polish population, i.e. 15.5 million, lived in rural areas in 2014, which is almost 613 thousand more (i.e. about 4.2%) than in 2000. What is more, a significant increase in the rural population was observed mainly after Poland's accession to the EU.

The phenomenon of convergence for the rural to the urban environment clearly outlined the process of aging of the population also increased significantly primarily educational level of rural women. The rural population has become more active socially, especially the elderly and those that possess a medium level of education. Villagers believe that over the past 10 years, their situation in rural areas improved significantly.

This article attempts to assess the impact of government policy on the socio-economic situation of rural population and the level of social activity of the rural population.

Research material includes results of the IAFENRI surveys, based on a sample of over 8 thousand rural families, of which in 2011 approx. 40% owned agricultural holdings with over 1 ha of agricultural land. Each time, all families residing in 76 selected villages were surveyed. The sampling was purposeful and took account of socio-economic features and the agrarian structure of agricultural holdings situated within the selected regions. The scope of the information collected was extensive and concerned numerous aspects of life of the rural population and the functioning of agricultural holdings.

**Key words:** rural areas, society, rural women, the EU, Poland