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# **Changes in family formation processes in Poland in the light of the concept of the Second Demographic Transition**

## **Introduction**

Families in Poland have been changing in many ways over the last quarter of a century. Since 1989 when the transformation process began we've been observing stable fertility decline and postponement of nuptiality (Mynarska 2009: 19; Kotowska et al. 2008: 796). Thus it can be said that nowadays family formation patterns are different than a few decades ago. According to the authors of OECD report, such changes are caused by changed meaning of the concept of a successful life preferred by women and men:

Increasingly, both men and women want to first establish themselves in the labour market before founding a family. Hence, the age of mothers at first childbirth has risen and with it the probability of having fewer children than the previous generations. Many women remain childless. Birth rates have fallen and life expectancy has increased, so there are fewer children and more grandparents than before. (OECD 2011: 18)

Accordingly, the declining propensity to marriage and childbearing postponement, limiting the number of children, and the rise in childlessness are the most significant factors influencing the shape of contemporary families in Poland. It should also be stressed that fertility is still strongly connected to nuptiality in Poland, which means that marriage and parenthood are closely related (Mynarska 2009: 24).

During the last three decades we have observed a growing frequency of divorce and separation as well growing popularity of cohabitations and LAT relationships (*living-apart-together*) which indicate that marriage has lost its instrumental significance in forming a family (Kotowska et al. 2008: 798). For that reason there is no single correct definition of what a family is as we can observe the openness to family diversity in Poland nowadays. “Traditional families” based on marriage coexist with many other family types, such as cohabitation, single-parent families, gay and lesbian parents. There are also some other alternative family forms like singlehood, DINKs (*Dual Income, No Kids*), same sex couples with no kids etc.

The aim of the text is to describe the main changes in family formation processes in Poland and to show their major determinants. The theoretical framework for this article is built around the concept of the Second Demographic Transition (SDT) which is one of the most popular theoretical models explaining family-related behaviors that have been occurring in most European countries in the second half of 20th century and presently.

## The concept of the Second Demographic Transition

There are many theories which can be used to explain family-related behaviors in the modern world<sup>1</sup>. The model of the Second Demographic Transition is only one of them. It was coined in 1986 by Ron Lesthaeghe and Dirk van de Kaa (Van de Kaa 1987). Their concept refers to the First (or “classic”) Demographic Transition (FDT) that occurred in the Western countries from the 18th and 19th centuries onward and during the second half of the 20th century in most of the rest of the world<sup>2</sup> (Lesthaeghe 2010: 211). The end point of FDT “(...) was supposed to be an old stationary population corresponding with replacement fertility (i.e. just over two children on average), zero population growth, and life expectancies over 70. y.” (Lesthaeghe 2014: 18112). The FDT theory’s authors presumed that the balance between the low number of deaths and births would be maintained, so there wouldn’t be need for sustained immigration. They were also persuaded that households in all parts of the world would be created by nuclear families, based on married couples and their children. However their

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<sup>1</sup> The most often used concepts and theories explaining low fertility are: demographic transitions and post-materialistic values, gender equity theory, globalization and uncertainty theory, microeconomic theories, individual behaviors’ theories (see: Mynarska 2009, Janiszewska 2013, Slany 2006).

<sup>2</sup> As Lesthaeghe (2010: 211) claims: “At present, there are barely a dozen countries that have not begun a fertility decline.”

expectations were erroneous. In the middle of the 1960s, the industrialized countries reached a new stage in their demographic development – a stage characterized by full control over fertility. In such circumstances “as couples appear to lack the motivation to have more than one or two children, fertility declined below replacement level” (Van de Kaa 2003: 2). The demographers highlighted that it was rather a permanent change than a temporary anomaly and defined it as a new demographic imbalance. New demographic phenomena demanded a new theoretical framework to explain features such as “[...] the baby bust, the systematic postponement of marriage and parenthood, subreplacement fertility, the rise of alternative forms of partnership, and parenthood outside marriage” (Lesthaeghe 2014: 18112). Thus the SDT concept emerged to describe various determinants of this change<sup>3</sup>.

According to Dirk van de Kaa (1987: 5) the beginning of the Second Demographic Transition can arbitrarily be marked at 1965, although the first signs of the transition showed already back in the 1950s. It appeared that in the US and Scandinavia the divorce rates were growing and people started to withdraw from long-life commitments, which was justified by the logic that “a good divorce is better than a bad marriage” (Lesthaeghe 2010: 212). Nevertheless, in the second half of the 1960s onward some other family-related behaviors changed visibly. These trends included fertility postponement, decline in birth rates, growing number of extramarital births, and the increasing popularity of living arrangements other than marriage (lone parenthood, cohabitation, singlehood etc.) (Mynarska 2009: 41). Thus, according to the SDT authors, the weakening of the institution of family is considered to be characteristic for the second tradition. This is what van de Kaa says:

We identified the increase in divorce as the first manifestation of that weakening. The changed attitudes towards abortion, the increase in cohabitation in countries outside the Nordic region, the easy acceptance of modern contraceptives amongst the more orthodox section of the population, and the decline in – higher order – births were, however, also interpreted in this context. (Van de Kaa 2003: 6)

Demographic phenomena distinctive for the SDT are situated in two spheres: nuptiality and fertility. Nuptiality trends indicated by Lesthaeghe and van de Kaa (Lesthaeghe 2014: 18113–18114; Okólski 2005: 146) are presented below:

- More frequent premarital sexual relations.
- Lowering percentage of the married population.

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<sup>3</sup> Ron Lesthaeghe and Dirk van de Kaa declare that their concept stems from at least four sources. The first of them is Philippe Ariès’ analysis of the history of childhood. The second is the cyclical fertility theory by Richard Easterlin. The third source is the neoclassical economy. The fourth element conditioning the SDT theory is Abraham Maslow’s theory of changing needs and Ronald Inglehart’s post-materialistic theory of values (see: Van de Kaa 2003, Lesthaeghe 2014, Lesthaeghe 2010).

- Rising age average upon first marriage.
  - Increasing long-term cohabitation, both pre- and postmarital.
  - Increase in singlehood.
  - Rise in divorce rates, earlier divorces.
  - Decline in remarriage rates, LAT relationships instead.
- New behaviors connected with fertility are:
- Fertility postponement, increasing age average for parenthood, structural subreplacement fertility.
  - Decreasing average number of children in a family.
  - Efficient contraception.
  - Rising nonmarital childbearing rate, parenthood outside marriage (among cohabiting couples, single mothers).
  - Rising definitive childlessness among women, even in a union.

It should be also stressed that these demographic changes have societal background – there are certain social phenomena related to the SDT and Lesthaeghe (2014: 18113) list includes:

- Rise of the importance of “higher order” needs: individual autonomy, expressive work and socialization values, self-actualization, grass-roots democracy, recognition, tolerance as prime value.
- Disengagement from civic activity and community-oriented networks.
- Retreat of the state, second secularization wave, sexual revolution, rejection of authority, political “depillarization.”
- Growing symmetry in sex roles, rising female education levels, greater female economic autonomy.
- Flexible life-course organization, multiple lifestyles, open future.

Thus the SDT contains several shifts concerning family models as well as emerging and dissolving marriage standards (Van de Kaa 1987: 11):

1. Shift from the “golden age of marriage” to the “dawn of cohabitation.”
2. Shift from the era of the “king-child with parents” to that of the king pair with a child.”
3. Shift from “preventive contraception” to “self-fulfilling conception.”
4. Shift from “uniform” to “pluralistic families and households.”

Taking into consideration all features of the SDT that were described above, it must be said that modernization processes which have been shaping the Western countries since the beginning of 1960s should be considered the main determinants of the family model shifts and the change of attitudes towards fertility (Szlendak 2010: 392; Kurek, Lange 2013: 8–9). Demographic transition spread from the Western and Northern European countries to the Southern and Central Europe. According to van de Kaa (2003: 23–25) there are three components of the modernization process that influence family-related behaviors, that is, structural, cultural, and technological. Structural changes concern industrialization and development of services, urbanization and other processes leading to the

development of post-industrial society and the welfare (Kotowska et al. 2008: 796). Cultural transition is connected with political and global changes, leading to the development of democracy and – last but not least – changes in values systems. In this context, authors of the SDT model refer to Inglehart's post materialistic values theory (Inglehart 2007; Surkyn, Lesthaeghe 2004) and the concept of the "silent revolution," according to which in the mid-1960s value orientations transformed from modern to post-modern ones. As they claim:

For the shift to post-materialism accentuated the growing importance of antiestablishment orientations and of individual and societal emancipation. The second transition, so it appeared to us, was grounded in an ideology of self-development or self-fulfillment. (van de Kaa 2003: 25)

The third component is a technological change associated with the development of contraception (the so called "second contraceptive revolution") (see, for example, Janiszewska 2013: 60), medicine, telecommunication, along with the spread of information via television.

It is said that two of the mentioned components – technology and culture – are of great importance in explaining marital and procreative behaviors (Kotowska et al. 2008: 796):

Economic developments, the rising standards of living, the growing employment of women, and the development of the welfare state are associated with higher educational attainment and an increasing social and spatial mobility of the population. Taking together, these factors influence people's capability to benefit increasingly from technological process and to support ideational change.

In 1986 when the concept of the SDT was first formulated its authors were convinced that the phenomenon they described could "(...) be compared to a cyclone irresistibly sweeping south from Scandinavia and gradually engulfing the South of Europe before turning East and, most probably, to other parts of the developed world" (Van de Kaa 2003: 30). However after less than two decades they had to admit that such a metaphor is not completely appropriate. Van de Kaa remarked that the specificity of SDT processes depends on various factors distinctive for each society and each country. Mainly, he indicates such determinants as demographic heritage and cultural endowment. The transition is influenced by the diffusion of culture (also innovative forms of behavior), but the reaction to it depends on how well new ideas can be incorporated into existing patterns and traditions of a given society (Van de Kaa 2003: 30). Many new family-related behaviors like cohabiting, having a child outside marriage, ending marriage through divorce etc. can spread more slowly in some countries. Additionally, the economic, social, and cultural situation influences attitudes towards new lifestyle trends.

## The main changes in family formation processes in Poland after 1989

Poland is one of the countries where SDT was initiated after the fall of the communist regime in 1989 when the transformation period began. After the Second World War fertility and nuptiality trends fluctuated and the changes were explained as resulting from “subsequent compensatory behaviors” (Mynarska 2009: 19). The postwar baby boom of the 1950s “echoed” in the late 1970s and the early 1980s. The numbers of births rose sharply from an annual average of 600 000 in 1971–1975 to 676 000 in 1976–1980 and almost 701 000 in 1981–1983. In 1983 the number of birth was the highest in 22 years – it reached 720 000 (total fertility rate was 2,40) (Van de Kaa 1987: 53). Demographers related this tendency to the parallel socio-political process, as the fertility rise in Poland took place in a time of social, political and economic crisis. They specify some explanations of this phenomenon in the following terms:

- In times of social disintegration, people fall back on the family.
- There was a lack of confidence in the stability of government policy on matters such as maternity leave and child support.
- Official Roman Catholic Church views on the sanctity of the family and prohibition of artificial contraception and abortion gained influence, due to the important role the church has played in Polish society during and since the crisis.
- Due to acute shortages of consumer goods, any spare income could be devoted to new babies.
- The crisis fostered a renewed pride of the nation (Józwiak, Słaby cited in Van de Kaa 1987: 53).

The transformation of the economic and political system in Poland thus initiated the changes distinctive for the SDT. The transformation included the shift from a centrally planned economy to market economy, which means that the social welfare function was remarkably reduced. Consequently, households were now more in direct responsibility for their financial situation. Radical changes in the conditions of the labor market participation and the loss of individual economic stability, as well as institutional adjustments to the political system led to significant rearrangements in terms of family-related behaviors (Kurek, Lange 2013: 11). In other words, these fundamental economic and social changes have influenced the perception of the preferences and constraints of individuals and groups (Kotowska et al. 2008: 796–797). According to van de Kaa, who described the situation in Poland, (2003: 31): “[a]fter 1989 many new problems arose, they affected demographic behavior and, in turn, made new behavioral choices possible.”



One of the most visible changes concerns nuptiality. It can be said that marriage as an institution is not as important as it was over the ages. Young people postpone marriage and childbearing as obtaining a diploma or professional qualification as well as finding a job are of primary importance and precede family formation (Mynarska 2009: 40). The decrease in the number of marital unions results from marriage not being a sole and unique way of forming family anymore. The number of cohabitations, LAT relationships and single parents increases which means that some alternatives for marriage become more and more acceptable in the Polish society. Simultaneously, a higher frequency of divorces and separations is observed. These changes can be connected with the shift of the values system, which is typical for societies where modernization processes are in progress<sup>4</sup>. Another change is related to fertility patterns. As it was mentioned above, young people tend to postpone the decision to have their first child, which leads to the decline in birth rates. At the same time, the number of extra-marital births has been growing. Consequently, since 1989 the fertility rate in Poland has been below the replacement level.

The above-mentioned changes can be described by recourse to demographic indicators. Table 1 presents data concerning marriages and divorces in Poland in 1989–2014. At the beginning of this period the number of marriages was 255,7 thousand and it has been decreasing to 203,6 thousand in 1996. During the next four years it rose to 211,2 thousand and then dropped to 191,8 thousand in 2004. From 2005 to 2012 the number of marriages exceeded 200,0 thousand. The highest annual total of marriages was recorded in 2008 – it was more than 257,0 thousand which was the consequence of baby boomers born in the late 1970s and the beginning of 1980s getting married. From 2009 onward there have been less and less new marriages in Poland – in 2013 and 2014 less than 190,0 thousand couples decided to get married.

Also the analysis of the nuptiality rate (the number of marriages per 1000 population) in 1989–2014 leads to the conclusion that the proportion of marriages to the number of the general population is less favorable now than it was at the beginning of this period. The highest nuptiality rate was reached in 1989, 1990 (6,7) and 2008 (6,8). In 2013 and 2014 it didn't exceed 5,0.

The official statistics show that marriages in Poland become less and less stable. There were 47,2 thousands of divorces in 1989, then – after a short-term (1991–1993) the decrease in the number of dissolved marriages started to intensify again up to 71,9 thousand in 2006. From 2007 the number of divorces stabilized at around 65,0 thousand (the exception is 2010, when 61,0 thousand of marriages were dissolved). Also the dynamics of the divorce rate is evidence of an increasing inconstancy of marriages in Poland. Apart from 2005 onward the number of divorces per 1000 population is about 1,7, whilst in 1989 it

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<sup>4</sup> See the previous part of the article, where Inglehart's concept is mentioned.



reached the level of 1,2. The lowest rate values were noted in 1993 (0,7), 1992 and 1994 (0,8).

**Table 1.** Marriage and divorce statistics in Poland 1989–2014

Year	Marriages		Divorces	
	in thousands	per 1000 population	in thousands	per 1000 population
1989	255,7	6,7	47,2	1,2
1990	255,4	6,7	42,4	1,1
1991	233,2	6,1	33,8	0,9
1992	217,3	5,7	32,0	0,8
1993	207,7	5,4	27,9	0,7
1994	207,7	5,4	31,6	0,8
1995	207,1	5,4	38,1	1,0
1996	203,6	5,3	39,4	1,0
1997	204,9	5,3	42,6	1,1
1998	209,4	5,4	45,2	1,2
1999	219,4	5,7	42,0	1,1
2000	211,2	5,5	42,8	1,1
2001	195,1	5,1	45,3	1,2
2002	191,9	5,0	45,4	1,2
2003	195,4	5,1	48,6	1,3
2004	191,8	5,0	56,3	1,5
2005	206,9	5,4	67,6	1,8
2006	226,2	5,9	71,9	1,9
2007	248,7	6,5	66,6	1,7
2008	257,7	6,8	65,5	1,7
2009	250,8	6,6	65,3	1,7
2010	228,3	5,9	61,3	1,6
2011	206,5	5,4	64,6	1,7
2012	203,9	5,3	64,4	1,7
2013	180,4	4,7	66,1	1,7
2014	188,5	4,9	65,8	1,7

Source: Central Statistical Office (CSO) data. All data in tables 1 and 2 come from the *Statistical Yearbooks of Poland*.

Since 1989 a rapid decline in births has also been observed in Poland. The overall number of live births has dropped by 33.5% from 564,4 thousand in 1989 to 375,2 thousand in 2014. The lowest number of new born babies was recorded in 2003 (351,1 thousands), then it grew to 417,6 thousands in 2009, which can be explained by the fact that baby boomers born at the beginning of the 1980s reached the age of marital and procreative activity.

The tendencies described above can be also confirmed by changes in birth rate values. In 1989 there was 14,9 live births per 1000 population, in 2003 it reached a level of 9,2 which was the lowest rate throughout the study period. Then the birth rate rose to 10,9 in 2008 and started to decrease to 9,7 in 2014.

Changes in fertility can be also described using Total fertility rate (TFR) indicator<sup>5</sup>. In 1989 the Total fertility rate was 2,078 – slightly below the replacement level and it continued dropping until 2003 (1,222). An increase was subsequently observed in 2009, when the TFR was 1,398. The recent years brought stabilization in the fertility rate around 1,290.

The trend to give birth later in life is one of the explanations of decreasing fertility in Poland. From 1989 to 2013 the mean age of women at first childbirth systematically increased from 23,6 years to 26,7 years. The postponement of parenthood entails the reduction in number of offspring so the average family size has been shrinking.

Moreover, the rapidly growing percentage of out-of-wedlock births breaks the monopoly of family with both parents in marriage as the only institution and educational environment where children are born and brought up. In 1989 the proportion of live births outside marriage was less than 6.0%, whilst in 1996 it exceeded 10.0%. The latest statistics (2013) prove that almost every fourth child is born outside marriage. Thus “the trend in out-of-wedlock births provides evidence that the shifts in behavior resulted from gradually changing attitudes towards births delivered out-of-wedlock by never-married women or women in cohabitation, especially among young persons living in urban areas” (Kotowska et al 2008: 815).

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<sup>5</sup> The Total fertility rate represents the number of children that would be born to a woman if she were to live to the end of her childbearing years and bear children in accordance with current age-specific fertility rates. A rate of 2,1 children per woman is considered the replacement rate for a population, resulting in relative stability in terms of total numbers. Rates above 2,1 children indicate populations growing in size and whose median age is lowering. Rates below 2,1 children indicate populations decreasing in size and growing older (see: [http://www.indexmundi.com/poland/total\\_fertility\\_rate.html](http://www.indexmundi.com/poland/total_fertility_rate.html)).

**Table 2.** Fertility indicators in Poland 1989–2014

Year	Live births		Total fertility rate	Proportion of live births outside marriage	Mean age of mother at first birth (in years)
	in thousands	per 1000 population			
1989	564,4	14,9	2,078	5,8	23,6
1990	547,7	14,3	2,039	6,2	23,5
1991	547,7	14,3	2,049	6,6	23,4
1992	515,2	13,5	1,992	7,2	23,4
1993	494,3	12,8	1,847	8,2	23,4
1994	481,3	12,2	1,798	9,0	23,4
1995	433,1	11,2	1,611	9,5	23,5
1996	428,2	11,1	1,580	10,2	23,6
1997	412,7	10,7	1,513	11,0	23,7
1998	395,6	10,2	1,431	11,6	23,8
1999	382,0	9,9	1,366	11,7	24,0
2000	378,3	9,8	1,337	12,1	24,2
2001	368,2	9,5	1,315	13,2	24,4
2002	353,8	9,3	1,249	14,4	24,6
2003	351,1	9,2	1,222	15,8	24,9
2004	356,1	9,3	1,227	17,1	25,2
2005	364,4	9,5	1,243	18,5	25,5
2006	374,2	9,8	1,267	18,9	25,9
2007	387,9	10,2	1,306	19,5	26,0
2008	414,5	10,9	1,390	19,9	26,0
2009	417,6	10,6	1,398	20,2	26,2
2010	413,3	10,7	1,376	20,7	26,5
2011	388,4	10,1	1,297	21,3	26,6
2012	386,3	10,0	1,299	22,3	26,6
2013	369,6	9,6	1,256	23,4	26,7
2014	375,2	9,7	1,290	–	–

Source: Central Statistical Office (CSO) data.

## Conclusions

The decreasing propensity to marry and to have children as well as the postponement of both decisions seem to mark the main directions of change in family formation patterns in Poland after 1989. These phenomena are distinctive for the SDT, thus it can be said that family development in Poland is similar to the processes observed in other European countries (Kotowska et al. 2008: 845). The reasons of this transformation are in line with the structural aspects of the process of modernization, such as economic development, labor-market participation, household policies and globalization, which all foster family-unfriendly conditions (Kotowska et al: 846). The high unemployment rate, unstable and discontinuous employment, as well as the growing importance of education and permanently upgrading one's professional skills make young people postpone marriage and childbearing. Additionally, the increasing costs of raising children discourage them from having big families, as material considerations are highly important for their fertility plans (Mynarska 2009: 39–40).

Despite all these, the researchers who analyze the demographic change in Poland indicate some differences between family-related developments in Poland and in other countries, which result from the cultural component of the modernization processes. They claim that the “ideational change has not advanced until recently compared with its progress in other European countries” (Kotowska et al. 2008: 845). This means that the Polish society is still fairly traditional. Both family and children are of importance – they have a prime value and marriage seems to be the inherent base for family. This is why gender roles are still defined in a traditional way by a great part of the Polish society, which makes reconciling work with family duties difficult or even impossible. There is still a scarcity of flexible work arrangements available, as well as of institutional childcare etc. Nevertheless some changes in the Poles' attitudes towards family are noticeable – “[t]he processes of secularization, individualization, and wide acceptance of Western family life models, which are promoted by the mass media, are influencing family choices” (Mynarska 2009: 40). It is not easy to predict when (if ever) the ideational shift in Poland becomes a fact – it is still uncertain whether the pace of the ideational change will increase or whether the traditional Polish culture will counterbalance this shift.

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