



Dr. Mariusz Gwozda,
Instytut Socjologii,
Uniwersytet Marii Curie – Skłodowskiej
w Lublinie,
Republika Polska

Dr. Mariusz Gwozda,
Institute of Sociology,
Maria-Curie Skłodowska
University in Lublin,
Poland

NIECHCIANI NA RYNKU PRACY. MŁODZI W OBLICZU KRYZYSU

THE UNWANTED IN THE JOB MARKET. THE YOUNG STANDING FACE TO FACE WITH A CRISIS

Nigdy wcześniej, jak alarmuje Międzynarodowa Organizacja Pracy, nie było na świecie tylu bezrobotnych młodych ludzi. Najmłodszy uczestnicy rynku pracy są świadomi, że o zatrudnienie jest ciężko, ograniczają więc aspiracje i mało optymistycznie oceniają swoje szanse. Czyżby realna stawała się wizja „straconego pokolenia”?

Słowa kluczowe: młodzież, bezrobocie, kryzys

Never before, as the International Organization of Work alarms, have there been so many unemployed young people. The youngest participants of the job market are aware of the fact that it is difficult to find employment; they therefore delimit their aspirations and are not very optimistic when it comes to the evaluation of their prospects. Is the vision of a „lost generation” becoming realistic?

Key concepts: youth, unemployment, crisis

Ніколи раніше, як попереджає Міжнародна організація праці, в світі не було так багато безробітних молодих людей. Наймолодші учасники ринку праці усвідомлюють той факт, що важко знайти роботу, тому вони обмежують свої устремління і є не дуже оптимістичними, коли справа доходить до оцінки їх перспектив. Чи може це стати реальним баченням «втраченого покоління»?

Ключові поняття: молодь, безробіття, криза.

In the last two decades Poland has transformed into a country with a market economy, which in the opinion of experts has been most successful in dealing with the world crisis. The process of the transformation of the system has caused an avalanche of changes in the scale of the whole society, particular social groups, and also in the biographies of individual people. Nevertheless, sociological findings clearly indicate that Poles, bearing in mind the difficulties connected with the transformation, positively perceive the outcome of the most recent period of twenty years. A decided majority of the respondents (83%) think that it was worthwhile changing the form of the government. Few (9%) are critical about the transformation. Moreover, almost half of the surveyed (47%) is of the opinion that the changes in Poland after 1989 have brought people more benefits than losses; more or less it is the sixth respondent (16%) who thinks that the losses outweigh the benefits whereas nearly the third respondent (30%) believes that the outcome is balanced.¹

Among the social, economic and personal phenomena which took place in the last twenty years Polish people positively evaluate the accession of Poland to the European Union and NATO, the value of the freedom of speech, the freedom of travelling, the introduction of democracy as well as the building of market economy. To the biggest defeats belong in their opinion the level of unemployment, corruption, dishonesty of politicians, the situation in the health service and the problem of the pauperization of society. This realistic state of affairs which is described on the basis of the surveys of the public opinion illustrates some of the positive and negative sides of the transformation in Poland. While the outcome of the transformations on the side of the benefits is changing depending on the survey, the negative effects of the transformations of the system have their main negative hero, which is the problem of unemployment.

Social changes cause many unpredictable, sometimes extremely negative consequences, which affect various spheres of life on the social and individual level.² The process of transformation in the area of economy has highlighted



the unknown till this time problem in Poland, unemployment. It was already in 1990 that the supply of people looking for work started to be higher than the demand of workers and the real needs of the economy. A big number of workers able to work and ready to start it was unable to find employment. Earlier than this the indicators of the state statistics did not show any threat connected with unemployment. Neither did it function in social consciousness. In Polish conditions therefore unemployment was a new phenomenon, which increased the social and political tensions connected with the ownership transformations and the move towards market economy. It resulted in the stratification of attitudes of various social groups; it also lowered the Gross National Product, caused specific burdens to the national budget, led to the lowering of the standard of living of unemployed people; it also brought about negative, other than economic effects.³ It became then not only the problem of the unemployed person and his family, but also a serious social and economic problem.

Transformational unemployment underwent many variations. Today, as it is presented by the union statistical office Eurostat, the rate of unemployment in Poland (February 2011) amounts to 9,7% (compared to 9,7% in January 2011 and compared to 9,7% one year earlier).⁴ Eurostat measures the harmonized rate of unemployment as a percentage of people aged 15-74 who are out of work and who are able to work within the next two weeks and who actively looked for work in the last weeks with reference to all professionally active people in a given country.⁵ According to the data of the Central Statistical Office (GUS), the rate of unemployment measured as a percentage of the unemployed registered in work offices in comparison to the totality of civilian population who are professionally active amounts to (February 2011) 13,2% compared to 13,0% one month earlier. In February 2010 the rate amounted to 13,2%.⁶

The problem of unemployment made its home in the consciousness of Polish people as an inseparable quality of market economy continually requiring action in order to limit its scope. One may, however, speak in this context of its certain aspect with reference to a crisis. For in recent years there has been noticed an avalanche of people who are without work. Since 2008 their number has risen by 166 thousand. At this moment every fourth unemployed person is not more than 24 years of age.⁷

The young are more prone to being unemployed than older workers.⁸ The indicator of the unemployment for teenagers is decidedly higher in comparison to other age groups – which is a tendency that we notice in the whole world – but the number of young people in Poland who are beyond the work market causes a number of threats that are of significance from the point of view of the whole society. One of the opinion making national dailies used the name of “the lost generation” to describe the situation of teenagers. Training for peanuts, the idea of working under work order, working without proper documents – this is how most Polish people start their adventure on the job market.⁹

The unemployment of young people is a global problem.¹⁰ Every year entering the job market is becoming for teenagers more and more difficult. This is confirmed both by the governmental statistics as well as the opinions of Poles.¹¹ A great majority of the interviewed inhabitants of Poland agree with the statement that in their town or their area young people, who have just finished school or studies, have problems with finding a job (82%, out of which as many as 42% are certain of it). More or less every eighth respondent (12%) is of the opposite opinion (2% think that young people do not have problems of this kind at all). Among the causes the surveyed mention mainly the lack of work places in their town (82%). Almost three fourths of the surveyed of this group (73%) think that the reason is an insufficient network of social contacts and acquaintances, which to a large extent makes it possible for young people to find a job. A big group of respondents (67%) confirmed also the common opinion that employers do not want to employ people without work experience; this is because the training of such people is too costly for the company and, especially in the age of crisis, not very profitable. Nearly two thirds of the surveyed (61%) think that young people are not motivated enough in order to look for work, because they may still count on the help of the family. A big group of the surveyed (44%) supports the statement that the youth have too high expectations concerning their earnings. The arguments that were chosen less commonly by the respondents were, among others, the ones that referred to the education of young people. Nearly half of the researched (48%) question the statement that the knowledge that the fresh graduates take out of the school or university does not suit to needs of the market. A majority of the respondents (60%) do not share the opinion that these people do not have the necessary qualifications and education. It is only the fourth respondent who thinks that young people are unemployed because they do not know how to look for work (25%) or that they do not care about finding it at all (24%).¹² Such arguments are also mentioned by many experts. There exists a common agreement concerning the above mentioned objective factors.

The young show great determination in the context of taking on their first job. A survey among people aged 19-26 shows a great mobilization of the young, 70% of whom would agree to move out if they were offered a good job. 64% consider starting their own company in the next five years (in 2002 41% of the young considered it). They do not have sky-high aspirations. They are ready to work on average for 2210 zlotys (560 €) net, but young men expect higher salaries than young women do. Even now they admit higher earnings: on average 1695 zlotys (430 €); women earn 1131 zlotys (290 €). Every fifth questioned person would take any job – even if it did not meet his expectations at all. A further 12% of the questioned would take a job that would not meet most of the expectations. The young believe that



what is most important in the job market are acquaintances and working experience. Less important is education or the determination in looking for a job.¹³

The situation of young people entering the job market is certainly difficult. Economic, factors, factors connected with the functioning of the system as well as the expectations of the young with respect to the working conditions and the prospects of a professional career development have an influence on this situation. Making a subjective choice following from the limitations facing the authors of publications, there will be presented some of the causes that lie at the root of the problem of unemployment among the young.

Being young is not an asset on the job market. Graduates are perceived in a worse way by the potential employers because of their belief that the young are lacking in life and work experience. The awareness that they would have to train the candidate, the risk connected with a period of a long process of "entering" the rhythm of work, the anxiety concerning the lack of possibilities of fully using the new worker just after the recruitment, effectively discourage employers from taking on young applicants.

The diploma of higher education is not an asset on the job market. The knowledge and skills acquired during the studies, do not, in the opinion of many employers, meet the expectations and requirements of the modern job market. Apart from the big cities, there is a demand to employ people who do simple jobs and people who have a secondary or even lower education, e.g.: drivers, shop-assistants, cooks, waiters, farm workers, bricklayers, plasterers, locksmiths, plumbers. At present the studies are started by six out of ten graduates of a secondary school.

The Polish job market is characterized by an oversupply of humanists with higher education. The faculty that enjoys great popularity is pedagogy. And it is educators that figure high on the ranking of unemployed graduates (this is what follows from the data of WUP in Lublin).¹⁴ In the group of specialists looked for in the whole of Poland are managers of projects, engineers, specialists in IT. These jobs require education mainly from the field of hard and technical sciences. The problem is that it is still a limited number of secondary school graduates who decide to study to become experts in these jobs.

One can see a huge disproportion between that which the young have received as knowledge in the schooling system and the requirements that are placed before them by their employers and latest technologies. The level of a mismatch of qualifications is in the case of a young person additionally lowered by the lack of life and professional experience. This forms a formal barrier during the first contact with a prospective employer. The system of continuous learning, courses, trainings, European Union projects that are supposed to counteract the deficit, still do not bring desired effects.

The level of unemployment is also influenced by a demographic situation. The demographic explosion from the 80s is entering the job market today. Unfortunately the world crisis, economic growth and internal limitations are an unfavorable entanglement of conditions which have in the case of young people far greater significance than in the case of the workers belonging to the older generation.

The choice of the future professional path by the learners is in generally dictated by a limited amount of information on the subject of the modern job market, the offered employment and the requirements that have to be fulfilled by a candidate applying for a given position. There is a lack of economic prognoses concerning the employment of workers that possess special qualifications. The learners do not have sufficient support as regards the choice of the future job or the course of studies. They are lacking in reliable information and knowledge (the young take the knowledge from the media and the Internet) and the information or knowledge that they have can be named fragmentary and unsuitable to the reality of the job market.

Young Poles do not hurry to work as much as the young in other countries of the European Union. According to the research done by Eurostat an average Pole starts to work at the age of 22. It is too late to gather experience. Less active are only the young citizens of Romania, Hungary and Italy. And the most industrious are among others the Danish, the English and the Austrian who begin to work as early as at the age of 16-17.¹⁵

The phenomenon of unemployment can be approached from different angles. It is a problem of a social, economic and cultural nature. Its negative consequences affect the conditions of life, the needs and the aspirations of the unemployed, their families and whole communities. In the case of the young the difficulties in finding a job are an important barrier on the road to independence and the achievement of financial stability. This situation affects the feeling of one's own value, it breeds frustration and the lack of security. A young person without work is unable to find for himself a proper place in the society (the school environment occupied hitherto no longer embraces him and there does not appear a new space for carrying out social activity), he has a difficulty with the creation in himself responsibility, ability to cooperate and values such as the productive management of time. Unemployment makes no longer timely the qualifications of a young graduate, deepens passivity, breeds apathy and fears connected with the future.¹⁶

Unemployment is one of the most important problems that the free-market and democratic Poland faces, and its most severe consequence is the lack of work for young people. Taking into account the issues mentioned above there can be formulated several recommendations concerning actions whose aim is to counter this problem. It seems reasonable to extend the offer of schools (especially vocational ones) by additional courses whose purpose



would be gaining additional qualifications. It is necessary to disseminate the idea of the system of vocational council and vocational calling, starting even with preparatory high schools. Also necessary seem to be changes within the educational curricula and adapting them to the reality of job markets as well as taking action aimed at improving the image, the building of the prestige and the promotion of benefits connected with education in vocational schools above the level of preparatory high schools. Cooperation with the local business should result in supporting possible new enterprises and companies. It seems beyond discussion to say that it is necessary to optimally use the resources from the structural funds of the European Union. Needless to say, the creation of friendly conditions for the starting and performing a proprietorship is a condition of a rational dealing with the crisis situation. An important step to take is also making complex analyses of local needs with respect to job market and education. In addition, it seems worthwhile to act to develop social and interpersonal competences of young people, stimulating their initiative and social activity.

¹ See the Report of the Center for Public Opinion Research "Attitudes to system transformation and the evaluation of its effects" published 2.07.2010 (research "«Solidarity» – experience and memory" realized 12.03–12.04.2010 on a 1803 people representative random sample of adult inhabitants of Poland).

² This problem is thoroughly discussed by F. Drozd, *Sociálne princípy v sociálnom štáte*, in: S. Košč, *Solidarita–sociálny princíp, politika, prax* (zborník z konferencie pri príležitosti 40. výročia encykliky Pavla VI. *Populorum progressio* a 20. výročia encykliky Jána Pavla II. *Sollicitudo rei socialis*, Ružomberok 2007, pp. 48-53.

³ A. A. Marcinišyn, *Polish system transformation '89 and the unemployed as a social group*, in: R. Suchocka, *Modern Polish society*, Poznań 2002, p. 154.

⁴ In the whole of the European Union the indicator amounted to 9,5% against 9,6% in January and 9,6% one year earlier.

⁵ The source: www.epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu

⁶ The source: www.stat.gov.pl

⁷ It is estimated that in 2010 there were 35 thousand young people without work, which amounts to 1,8 of the totality of the unemployed.

⁸ In Lublin Voivodeship young, unemployed people at the age of 18-24 constitute almost one fourth of all the registered unemployed.

⁹ See M. Walków, A. Lewińska, *The young, the able and without work*, *Gazeta Wyborcza* 21.03.2011.

¹⁰ In 2008 average unemployment among young Europeans amounted to 25 percent, now it has risen to 21 percent. These values have been the worst for 50 years, the forecasts for the following years are not optimistic.

¹¹ It follows from the research conducted by Eurostat that in reality the rate of unemployment among people aged 15-24 is usually 2-5 times higher than in the case of adult workers (30-54 years old).

¹² See the Report of the Center for Public Opinion Research „Opinions about the situation on the job market and a threat of unemployment for young people” published 15.12.2009 (the research „Present problems and events” realized 2-9.12.2009 on 1046 people representative random sample of adult inhabitants of Poland).

¹³ See K. Pawłowska-Salińska, W. Szacki, *They will accept any job*, *Gazeta Wyborcza* 18.03.2011.

¹⁴ Many higher education schools reorganize their curricula. In this year's offer there appeared among others: communication and flying infrastructure management, agrochemistry, bioinformation technology, technology management, knowledge of the country, historical tourism, European diplomacy.

¹⁵ Source: www.epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu

¹⁶ A. Szepelska, *Professional counseling for teenagers and unemployment*, *Professional advisor* 2007/3, p. 25-26.

1. CBOS, *Opinions about the situation on the job market and the threat of unemployment of young people*, 15.12.2009

2. CBOS, *Attitudes to system transformation and the evaluation of its effects*, 2.07.2010

3. F. Drozd, *Sociálne princípy v sociálnom štáte*, w: S. Košč, *Solidarita–sociálny princíp, politika, prax*, Ružomberok 2007

4. K. Pawłowska - Salińska, W. Szacki, *They will accept any job*, *Gazeta Wyborcza* 18.03.2011

5. R. Suchocka, *Modern Polish society*, Poznań 2002

6. A. Szepelska, *Professional counselling for teenagers and unemployment*, *Professional advisor* 2007/3

7. M. Walków, A. Lewińska, *The young, the able and without work*, *Gazeta Wyborcza* 21.03.2011

8. www.epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu

9. www.stat.gov.pl