

The decrease in the number of births is one of the reasons for the changes in the population structure, with adverse social and economic implications. The proportion of the working age population in the society is gradually getting smaller. Therefore, the priority of setting up various policies that would optimally utilize the current situation is essential. For Poland, it means, among others, allowing the increase of women's participation in the labour force, which includes reducing the passive behaviour of parents due to the lack of support in caring responsibilities and reconciling them with work. One form of such support is the availability of childcare services. For many years, in the case of young children (under the age of 3), it almost exclusively meant providing a growing number of places in nurseries. Since 2011, when the Act on care for children under the age of 3 came into force, other forms of non-parental childcare providers have emerged and developed. Nevertheless, the development of these institutions – for many reasons – is not dynamic. Poland is still among one of the countries in EU with the lowest usage of non-family childcare (only 4.8% of children under the age of 3, in comparison with 28% of children in the EU28 in 2014). Since the abovementioned act entered into force, the situation has improved, mainly thanks to the money received from the contest *Maluch* (en. *Toddler*) that was announced and provided by the Ministry of Labour, as well as due to the local governments' commitment. Contrary to the assumptions of the authors of the above-cited Act, there has been little interest in daycare providers, especially in the care provided by a mother at her home to her own and other people's children at the same time.

At the beginning of 2015, a specific idea of a new, alternative form of supporting parents' childcare has emerged in the public debate, the so called caring voucher. The voucher is supposed to fill the gap within the system of childcare facilities, caused by a deficit of formal childcare after the end of parental leave. It is initially planned, that each family with a child under the age of 3 would receive 500 PLN per child per month and would be able to freely utilize this money (in the assumptions: to finance any form of childcare, including the care performed by a parent). The authors of this solution in the justification of this idea specified that the voucher would be, among others, a way not to use nurseries. They talked about harmful effects of nursery care on the young child's mental development, low quality of services provided by these facilities and the high costs of their operation. Unfortunately, there is no current research in Poland that is able to support or deny these sentiments as universal, thus determining the need for a change. In addition, the economic and socio-cultural changes that Poland has undergone, including changes in the system of family policy solutions, do not allow the use of test results from the 80s, or even 90s for these purposes. Obtaining a representative opinion of parents about nurseries and identifying preferred forms of childcare is therefore deemed necessary in order to conduct a substantive discussion on the directions of the development of the parental system in its care functions; especially because the introduction of a caring voucher may result in the inhibition of the development of other forms of childcare. The voucher, as presented by the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, may also cause an increase of economically inactive mothers, which of the aforementioned demographic reasons is difficult to accept.

The main goal of this project is to obtain empirical knowledge that will allow the formation of means to deal with the current social and economic conditions in Poland, to build an efficient and coherent system of childcare for children under the age of 3. Implementation of the goal requires a quantitative, representative empirical research among parents of children under the age of 3. The research goal is to find the reasons behind parents' choice of childcare, especially nurseries, as well as to get their opinions, preferences, needs and expected changes in the entire system of childcare.

Application goal of this project is to provide stakeholders with substantive arguments that will help determine the direction of childcare system's improvements.