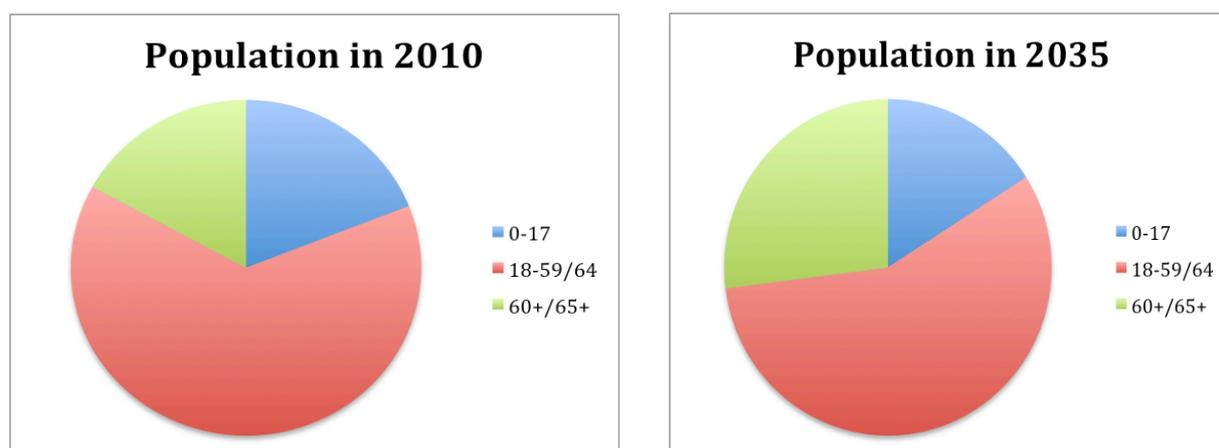


The situation of older people in Poland - an overview

In the second half of the twentieth century with the changes that followed the Second World War, the number of elderly people in Poland has increased significantly. Intensive development of the countries of Western Europe also influenced the changing demographic structure in Poland. Advances in medicine, the development of social welfare and pension systems have improved the quality of life and its extension. In addition, the birth rate has dropped significantly and this trend in the patterns of family life continues to grow.

In demographic terms, the share of elderly persons in the total population in Poland at the end of 2010 was 38.2 million people. In this number the population of person in pre-working age (0-17) was 19%, persons in working age (18-59/64) was 64 % and those of post-working age (60 + / 65 +) was 17%.

According to the Central Statistical Office (CSO) within a few years there will be a rapid process of aging. According to the CSO projections to the year 2035 as a result of low birth rates decline, the percentage of working age population will be 16%, there will be a sharp decline in the population of working age (only 57%), and significant increase in the percentage of working age population amounting to 27%. In view of the above situation, the population of working age will be charged much more with work for the benefit of other generations.



The financial situation of the elderly in Poland is not comfortable either despite the fact that there is a guaranteed fixed income from social benefits. Currently, the right to retirement is acquired by women at the age of 60, and by men at 65. Legislative changes provide for extension of age of eligibility for retirement to 67 years for both women and men.

Ratio of expenses to income in the households of retirees is 86.7%, and the greatest part of the household budget is spent on food and beverages (27.4%), accommodation (24.5%) and health (8.1%) , where the latter rate is highest among all socio-economic groups.

Health care is one of the most important contexts of an aging population, because older people are the main recipients of health services, due to chronic diseases and their consequences for the functioning of the body. Free health care system in Poland, unfortunately, does not provide adequate care for older people, and therefore a sense of security for them.

Specific tests or visits to highly qualified doctors (which constitute a are a significant part of medical services) are to a large extent virtually unattainable to patients because of the very long waiting times. In this case, older people are forced to use a well-developed network of private (and so paid) medical services. This is a very heavy economic burden for the Polish retiree and sometimes it is much too expensive or requires significant sacrifices. Persons living alone, without their families' support and using only their own income are in the worst situation.

In the social aspect there has been a significant change in the approach to elderly people who were once recognized authorities because of his age and life experience. Currently, there is a perception that older people are often incompetent; they cannot take care of themselves, and are often a burden for others. The reasons for this change in perception may be from one hand a very rapid advance in technology and the inability of elderly people to adapt to the new ways of living, and, from the other hand their less resistance. A large variation in the level of development of the digital society is very characteristic for Poland. Strengthening of digital literacy of older people can reduce their social exclusion. To this end, in addition to the reform of education, it will be necessary to overcome the fears and changing habits of the elderly, as well as reducing the cost of access to digital services.

In Poland, despite the disintegration of the structure of the extended family main institution representing caring support and assistance to the elderly person is still their family. Reluctance to place an elderly person in a nursing home is clearly marked not only by older people themselves, but also for their carers. In Poland, the largest group of carers of older people are their children (51.1%). More than 85% of caregivers live in the same household or in a different one located very near. However, to carry out functions of care and family care, the right housing conditions are needed, the lack of which may cause that the family does not meet the expectations of older people they take care of.

It is foreseen that the family will not be able to bear the burden of care for the older person themselves, and therefore the demand for care services will increase. Regardless of whether elderly people are dependent or independent, they will wish to live in their own homes as long as possible. Polish families expect the government to focus on the organization of social life and the expansion of social services in order to support the family in carrying out its care functions not only in the area of care itself, but also health, education and recreation.

Written by Anna Kaźmierska. Based on: "The situation of older people" - II Congress of Demography, Warsaw 2012 and the Government Programme for the Elderly Social Activity for 2012-2013