

## THE PROFESSIONAL ACTIVITY OF WOMEN IN NGOs IN POLAND

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### INTRODUCTION

Non-governmental organisations (NGO), in the vernacular, are entities that act independently of public administration. The Act on public benefit and volunteer work [Act 2003] defines a non-governmental organisation as “not a public finance sector entity and not operating for the purpose of making a profit, a legal person created under the provisions of laws, including foundations and associations, among others, with the exception of political parties, trade unions and employers’ organisations, professional associations, foundations, whose sole founder is the State Treasury”. Other terms considered to be synonymous with NGO include non-profit organisation, volunteer organisation (which depend on the work of volunteers to operate), the “third sector” (public administration

and business being the first and second sectors, respectively). The scope and form of NGO activities vary widely, but culture, the environment, human rights, education and technology are among the most common fields such organisations operate in.

The phrase “third sector”, the collective name of NGOs, alludes to the division of a socio-economic democratic state into three sectors (Fig. 1). The first sector is public administration, and is also called the state sector. The second is the business or private sector, and com-

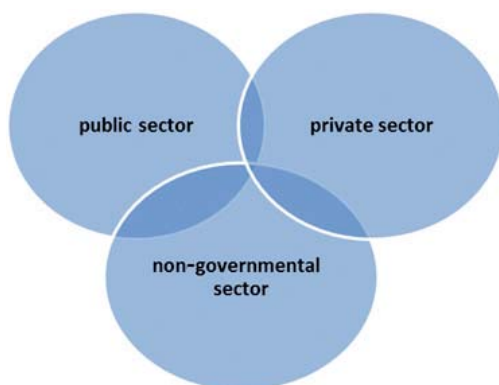


FIG. 1. The classification of sectors in Poland  
Source: the authors.

prises all institutions and organisations functioning to make a profit. The third sector, then, is made up of private, non-governmental organisations operating for society, not for profit.

## **THE AIM AND METHOD USED**

The aim of this article is to assess the situation of women in non-governmental organisations in Poland. The source of empirical materials used to conduct the assessment is data from Poland's Central Statistical Office (CSO) as part of the study "Foundations and associations and organisational units of the Catholic Church, other churches and religious associations" (SOF-1) as well as the study "employer, self-governing economic and professional organisations" (SOF-4) in the years 1997–2012. A review of the literature was conducted and reports and studies by the Klon/Jawor Society were used.

## **NGOs IN THE CONTEXT OF EQUAL CHANCE FOR WOMEN AND MEN**

The non-profit sector has been a subject of interest for researchers for at least 40 years [WWW 1]. In the European Union, NGOs are recognised as a welcome manifestation of civic life. They strengthen the institutional aspect of EU political life and are characterized by the capable articulation of different and complementary perspectives on particular aspects of collective life. Women's issues, their participation in the labour market, the position they hold in the different sectors of the economy have in recent times been widely analyzed in the majority of works, publications and analyses from this area. The level of analysis and its detail are contingent in large measure on the need for this type of knowledge, which in recent times, due to one of the EU's sector policies – equal opportunity policy – has become much more widespread.

Gender is one of the key characteristics used to analyse the labour market. Numerous phenomena are divided into the categories of male and female. Individual chances and decisions of workers and individuals seeking work are dictated by gender [CSO 2014a]. Women often work in other professions and industries than men, are compensated at different rates and spend different amounts of time at work. The differences are attributable to characteristics including education, involvement in family life and even what women expect of life. Because management models and market trends have penetrated all three sectors, the definitions and descriptions adopted in the article concerning labour market phenomena also characterise the third sector. In the development of the NGO sector, as with other sectors, the issue of diversity management, including equal opportunities for men and women, cannot be underestimated. Most private and public grant underwriters supporting NGOs now consider the principle of equal opportunity and gender mainstreaming in their programmes and require grant recipients to observe and implement them.

Gender discrimination is a form of differentiation, restriction or exclusion, which prevents one of the sexes from exercising, on an equal footing with the other, human rights and freedoms in the fundamental spheres of life, be it political, economic, social, cultural,

civil or others). Labour market phenomena associated with discrimination as they apply to gender fall under the label of the glass ceiling [Sawicka 2013]. These are a form of discrimination – whether intended or not – that are difficult to observe and define but which, deeper analysis reveals, occur widely in all three sectors of the economy [Kapuścińska 2014, WWW 3]. The following phenomena most commonly characterise the NGO sector:

- Vertical and horizontal segregation of the labour market – horizontal segregation is the division of sectors and professions into “male” and “female” ones, or division as a consequence of gender stereotypes. With vertical segregation, it is difficult for women to gain promotions and occupy positions of leadership and decision-making.
- Professional feminisation, which is associated with a prevailing number of women in a particular sector of the economy, profession or specialisation. Furthermore, the domination of women in less appreciated and worse paying segments of the labour market, often in professions stereotypically seen as female, commonly associated with caretaking and peripheral functions.
- The glass ceiling – the phenomenon in which women performing the functions of director encounter barriers that prevent them from advancing. As a result, women are relatively underrepresented in the highest positions and it is rare that they break in to those areas associated with power.

## **THE CHARACTERISTICS OF NGOs IN POLAND**

In Poland, there are tens of thousands of NGOs operating in areas as diverse as sport, culture and the arts, education, social work and environmental protection. According to statistics of the Central Statistical Office in Poland (CSO, GUS), the number of third sector organisations grew threefold between 1997 and 2012. Revenue rose nearly threefold as well, while the number of individuals with full-time employment rose by more than half. In 1997, there were 27,400 organisations in the third sector, 67,500 in 2005, and 80,400 in 2010. In 2012, the number grew to 83,400, 83% of which were associations and social organisations of a similar character, including 10% foundations, 4% professional and trade associations, and just 2% social religious bodies (Fig. 2). Every tenth entity of the group was registered as a public benefit organisations – there were 8,000 of these.

Most of the organisations operating in 2012 were headquartered in Masovian voivodeship (13,400), Wielkopolskie (8,400) and Małopolskie (7,400). The greatest number of organisations operated in a medium-size administrative range: 38% operated within municipalities and 22% at the county level. Share of 18% of organisations carried out activities beyond the county level but within the voivodeship while 17% reached beyond the voivodeship to the national level. The least numerous were organisations with the widest and the narrowest scope of activities – 6% of organisations were involved in international activity while 9% were active only in their immediate surrounding neighbourhood. Three-fourths of the respondents conducted only statutory non-profit activities. The number of organisations that engaged in both non-profit and for-profit statutory activities was, at 18%, relatively high; however, they did not conduct, at the same time, business activity. Only 7% of organisations surveyed by GUS did conduct economic activity, regardless of whether it was accompanied by non-profit or for-profit activity.

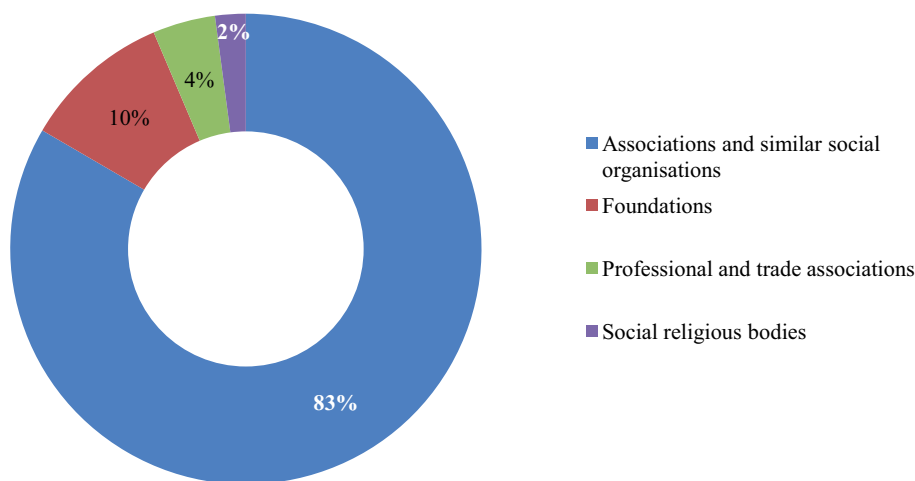


FIG. 2. The third sector organisations by organisation type in 2012

Source: CSO 2014b.

The main areas of organisational activity were most often declared to be sport, tourism, recreation, hobby and rescue services – while nearly half of the entities indicated one of the latter two areas (30 and 18%, respectively). The next most popular fields were culture and arts (11%), education and care, and research (9%), and social assistance and humanitarian aid (7%) – Figure 3.

Volunteers work in NGOs and some organisations also hire paid employees. As research carried out in 2013 by the Statistical Office of Cracow shows, the organisations active in Poland at the end of 2012 had 10 million members in total (or 3.4 million fewer than in 2005). The most numerous organisations are those of employers, and trade and professional associations excluding agricultural associations (the average number of members was 563 in each), and standard associations and social organisations (each with an average of 206 members). Share of 90% of organisations indicated they used volunteer work while there were a total of 2.3 million people volunteering to work for them. This number comprised the organisation members as well as people who work free-of-charge and voluntarily assist the organisation, even though they were not registered members.

Most organisations operate exclusively using social work, with 61% stating they had no paid employees. At the end of 2012, third sector organisations hired almost 150,000 people on employment contract. For almost 126,000 people, these were the main place of work and up to 72% of the employees were women. In the organisations that hired paid employees, civil law contracts were more common (22%) (contract of mandate, contract for specific work) followed by employment contracts (17%). The total number of employed people was 128,400, nearly 30,000 more than the 81,200 in 1997. Over 90% of organisations that participated in the survey were self-funded or received funds.

In the vast majority of cases the amounts were not high – 41% of the organisations stated that their annual income was lower than 10,000 PLN, while only 5% had income

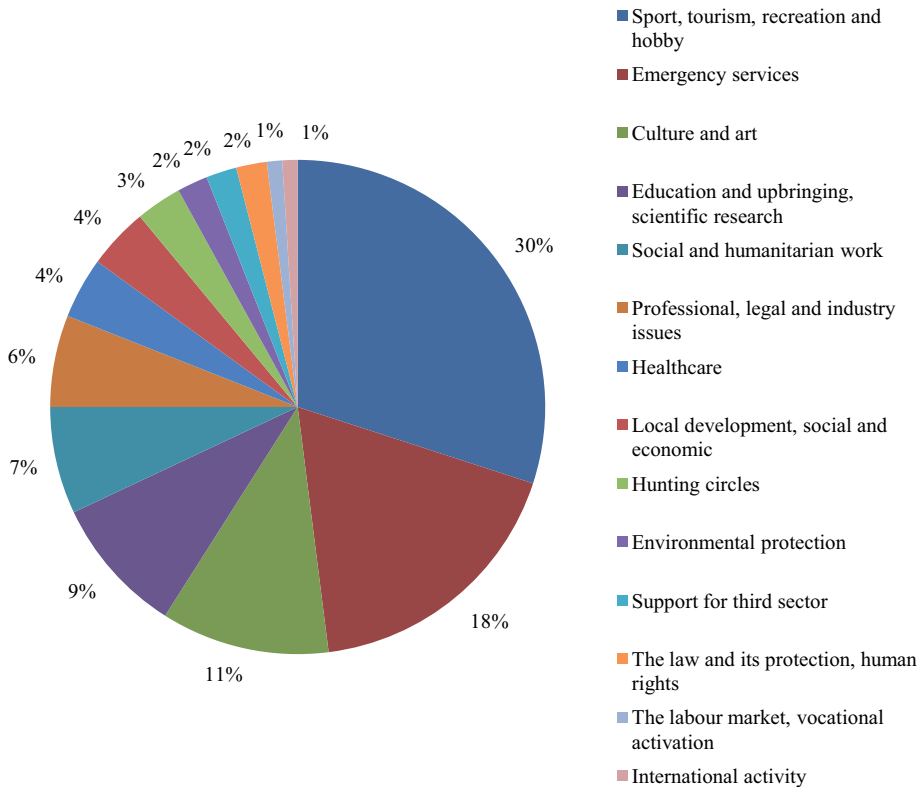


FIG. 3. Third sector organisations by most important statutory activity in 2012

Source: CSO 2014b.

exceeding 1 million PLN. The total combined income of all the organisations in 2012 amounted to 23.9 billion PLN – 15.8 billion PLN more than in 1997. The activity of Polish non-governmental organisations is mainly based on their members volunteering and authority representatives, and the scale of their activity and effectiveness depend, to a large extent, on how enthusiastically people embrace the work. Despite that, diversity within the sector is evident when their business models are compared. Most NGOs ensure that they are loyal to their mission and statutory provisions, while only every seventh admits to being forced to adjust its activity to meet sponsors’ expectations [Kapuścińska 2014].

### THE EMPLOYMENT OF WOMEN IN THE THIRD SECTOR IN POLAND

Wysocka’s research suggests that women who work in the third sector were pleased with the positive atmosphere at work, the opportunity for self-improvement and professional development, and the tolerant approach to maternity prevailing in the sector [Wysocka 2009]. This research revealed neither discriminatory practices towards women hired in the third sector, nor a fear of redundancy.

Women stated they felt a sense of responsibility for the organisation where they work. Research conducted by Bogacz-Wojtanowska and Rymśza [2009] showed the positive characteristics of working in non-governmental organisations, which may help promote increase women's employment by developing women's qualifications, less formal relations at work, flexicurity and especially flexible work schedules. The flexible forms of work are considered to be among the best solutions (in terms of Poland's socio-economic situation), enabling the reconciliation of family and professional life. Part-time work is relatively common in non-governmental organisations and this makes it possible to combine professional and family responsibilities [Borowska 2012]. This leads them to opt for this type of employment. The labour market also provides many other models that make it possible to adjust work and other life commitments.

Against the background of the public and private sectors, for employed women the third sector is the friendliest, as opposed to work in corporations or the bureaucratic public sector organisations, weighed down by so much routine. At the same time, research has proved that women lack stable employment and higher salaries, which still today are a relative rarity in the third sector.

Studies on the social involvement of Poles show, first of all, that, by the numbers, women are slightly more likely to engage in volunteer work (37% of women and 31% of men declared that they volunteered in 2013), and less likely to have an antisocial attitude and to lack trust in others [WWW 2]. As research done by the Klon/Jawor Society shows, feminisation of the third sector in Poland concerns both employees and volunteers, but does not in turn apply to all members of the organisations and their governments (boards and councils), which clearly shows the division of roles between women and men in the Polish sector [Herbst and Przewłocka 2012].

Among NGO employees, there are far more women than men, though among their members and executives there are slightly more men than women (Fig. 4). The average organization has a third more men than women among association members. This results from the large number of sports organizations, which comprise more than a third of all organisations in Poland, and women make up the vast minority of their employees. Men also outnumber women on the boards of organizations – on a third of boards, in fact, there isn't a single woman. However, when sports organisations are removed, the ratio among members and the boards are balanced, and closer to half and half. Even on the boards of organisations that have a majority of women (those involved in social work, education and healthcare) there are men – six females to four men. However, among volunteers and workers, there is a preponderance of women. On average, among all non-governmental organisations, they represent approximately 60%, and when sports organisations are removed from the equation, the share of women rises to nearly 70%.

In the third sector, as on the entire labour market, there are industries where there are a prevailing number of women or men. Figure 5 presents those areas of non-governmental activity dominated by women. As indicated above, NGOs working in the sports, tourism, recreation and hobby sectors are dominated by men. Women make up a third of employees in the associations in those sectors. On the other hand, there are many more women in organisations working in education, social issues, healthcare and culture.

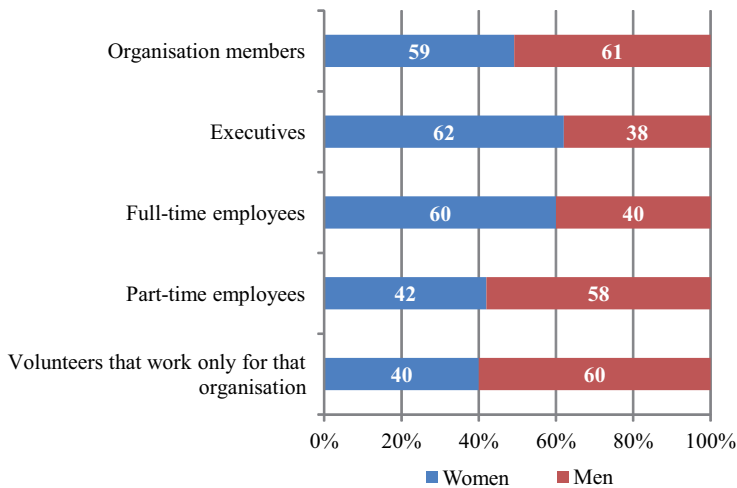


FIG 4. Individuals active in organisations by gender

Source: the authors, on the basis of Herbst and Przewłocka [2012].

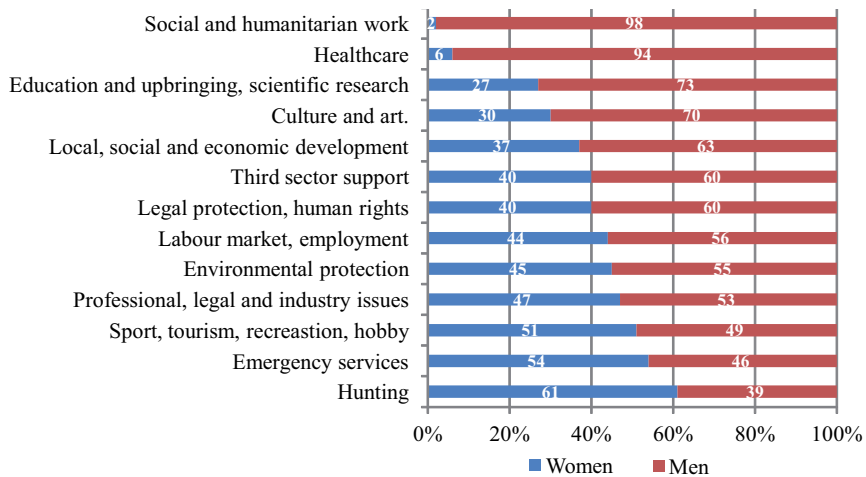


FIG. 5. The share of women and men in the bodies of collective organizations by activity in 2012

Source: CSO 2014b.

## CONCLUSIONS

The non-governmental sector in Poland is not entirely dominated by women, though it is in public often referred to as such. Assessment of the professional situation of women in Polish non-governmental organisations may lead one to conclude that there are only a few areas dominated by women in the third sector, which is associated with horizontal

segregation – such sectors as health, education and social assistance. The more frequent promotion of men in female-dominated organisations – the glass ceiling, as the phenomenon is called on the labour market – is also present in non-governmental organisations. Men outnumber women on boards. Even on executive boards of organisations with a prevailing number of women (in the social, education and health sectors), for every six females there are four men. However, volunteers and employees of these organisations are predominantly women. The mission of the third sector and the ideology it's founded upon is largely based on philanthropy, solidarity, a sense of community and support for those at risk of social exclusion.

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**Summary.** The aim of the article is to assess the professional situation of women in non-governmental agencies in Poland. The study draws on data from Poland Central Statistical Office for empirical evidence. A review of the subject literature is done, and additional reports and published material from the Klon/Jawor Society complement the research. NGOs are a welcome manifestation of civic life in the European Union. In the development of the NGO sector, as in other sectors, the issue of diversity management, including equal opportunities for men and women, cannot be swept aside. In Poland there are tens of thousands of non-governmental organisations involved in sports, arts and culture, education, social assistance and healthcare.

**Key words:** labour market, non-governmental organisation, women

**JEL:** J08, J40, J71

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