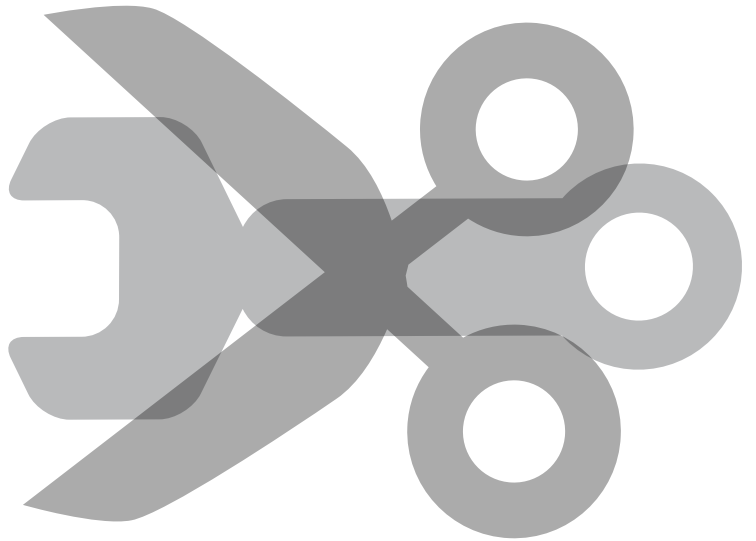


Vocational Schools and the Labour Market for Women with Basic Vocational Education

REPORT FROM A STUDY CONDUCTED IN 2015



KARAT COALITION



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The views and opinions presented in this publication are the views of the Author and the Karat Coalition Association and do not need to be shared by the EEA Grants or Batory Foundation.



Preparation of the report:
Karat Coalition Association
Warsaw 2015

Author: **Danuta Duch-Krzystoszek Ph.D**

Consultation: **Kinga Lohmann**

Cover design, graphic design and typesetting and text makeup by Teresa Oleszczuk

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PUBLISHER:

Karat Coalition

ul. Walecznych 26 m. 5

03-916 Warsaw, Poland

Tel.: 22 628 2003

e-mail: secretariat@karat.org.pl

www.karat.org

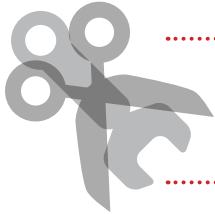


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Gender and vocational training"**
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Table of Contents:

Methodology of the study	5
What after gymnasium? The choices of young people	6
Motivations of girls to choose vocational training	14
Girls and boys in basic vocational schools – occupational segregation.....	18
Girls’ motivations in educational choices.....	22
Do basic vocational schools offer a good preparation for the future job? Women’s opinions.....	25
Labour market for women with basic vocational education	26
The first job	28
The labour market for women and men.....	29
Economic migration	31
Social perceptions of basic vocational education and the work culture	31
Reconciliation of work and motherhood of women with basic vocational education	33
Women in ‘male’ professions: education and the labour market.....	35
Is a basic vocational school a good choice?.....	37
Summary and conclusions.....	39
Recommendations	43





Methodology of the study

The purpose of the study was to determine the factors which influence girls' choices to pursue basic vocational school and their choices of fields of study as well as the quality of vocational school (BVS) in the context of the existing labour market. Finally, the study analysed the situation of women with basic vocational education in the labour market.

The empirical material of the report consists of statistical data and own research findings. The analysis of statistical data included:

- Central Statistical Office of Poland statistical data on education
- Statistical data provided by the Polish Crafts Association and Vocational Education and Social Issues Department concerning apprenticeship exams in 2014.

The research was conducted in between 8th–20th May 2015 and it consisted of focus group interviews (FGIs) and individual in-depth interviews (IDIs). Two group interviews were held in each of the following Polish towns: Kielce, Olsztyn and Siedlce. One was designed for currently employed women, and the other one for job seekers. Individual in-depth interviews with women working in the so-called 'male' professions were conducted in Kielce, Olsztyn, Siedlce and Warsaw. In total, there have been 6 focus groups, 6 individual interviews with women aged 20–34 who have basic vocational training. The research was conducted by Millward Brown Institute.¹

¹ The report from the study used in this text was edited by Agnieszka Bugaj.

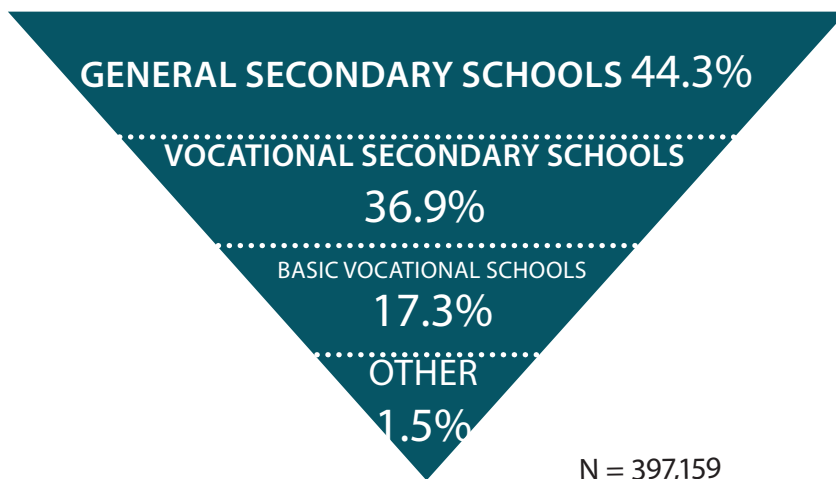
WHAT AFTER GYMNASIUM? THE CHOICES OF YOUNG PEOPLE

Every year thousands of young people, gymnasium (lower secondary school) graduates make decisions of crucial importance for their further careers. These decisions concern their future school and the type of training they will receive.

For many years, the most numerous group opted for general secondary schools and the slightly less numerous group continued their education in secondary schools. Basic vocational schools (BVS) are less popular than secondary schools. A negligible percentage of students choose other educational establishments such as art schools or special vocational training schools.

In the school year 2012/2013 a total of 397,159 students entered secondary education (post-gymnasium schools), including state schools, non-public schools with public school accreditation and non-public schools (excluding special education establishments). This figure includes 146,559 students in vocational secondary schools and 68,636 students in basic vocational schools ([COMPARE: CHART 1](#)). In total, slightly over a half (54.2%) of young people chose some form of vocational training (vocational secondary schools or BVS). In this group, 31.9% chose to study in BVS and 68.1% vocational secondary schools.

Chart 1. What after gymnasium? – first-year students of secondary schools for children and adolescents (2013/2014)

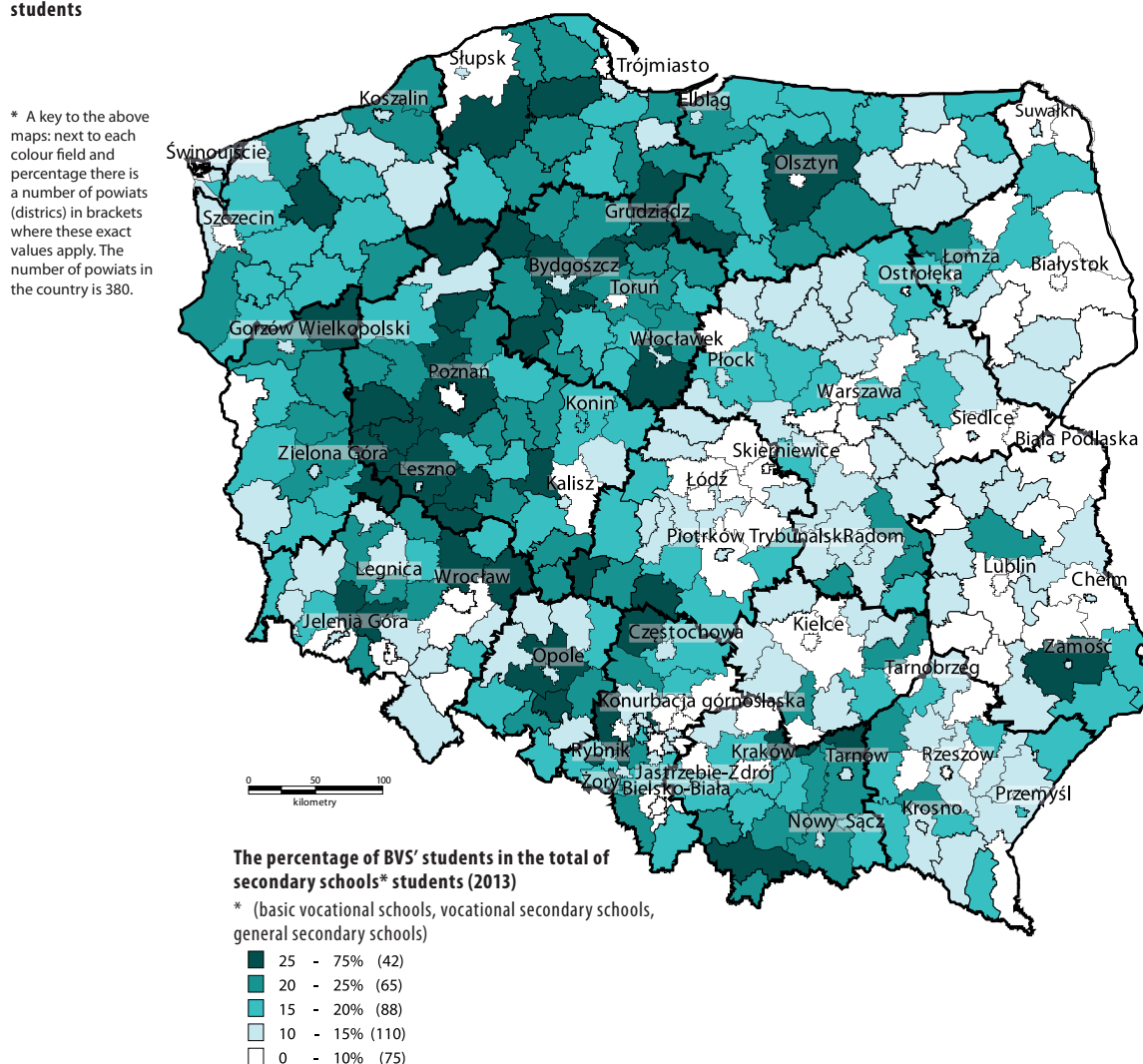


Source: Own elaboration based on Oświata i wychowanie w roku szkolnym 2013/2014, GUS, Warsaw 2014, s. 200–203, data does not include special schools students.

This means that basic vocational schools constitute a significant educational sector. Every 6th young person chooses BVS as the place to continue their education. Among those who decided not to go to general secondary school and chose vocational training instead, every third student opted for BVS.

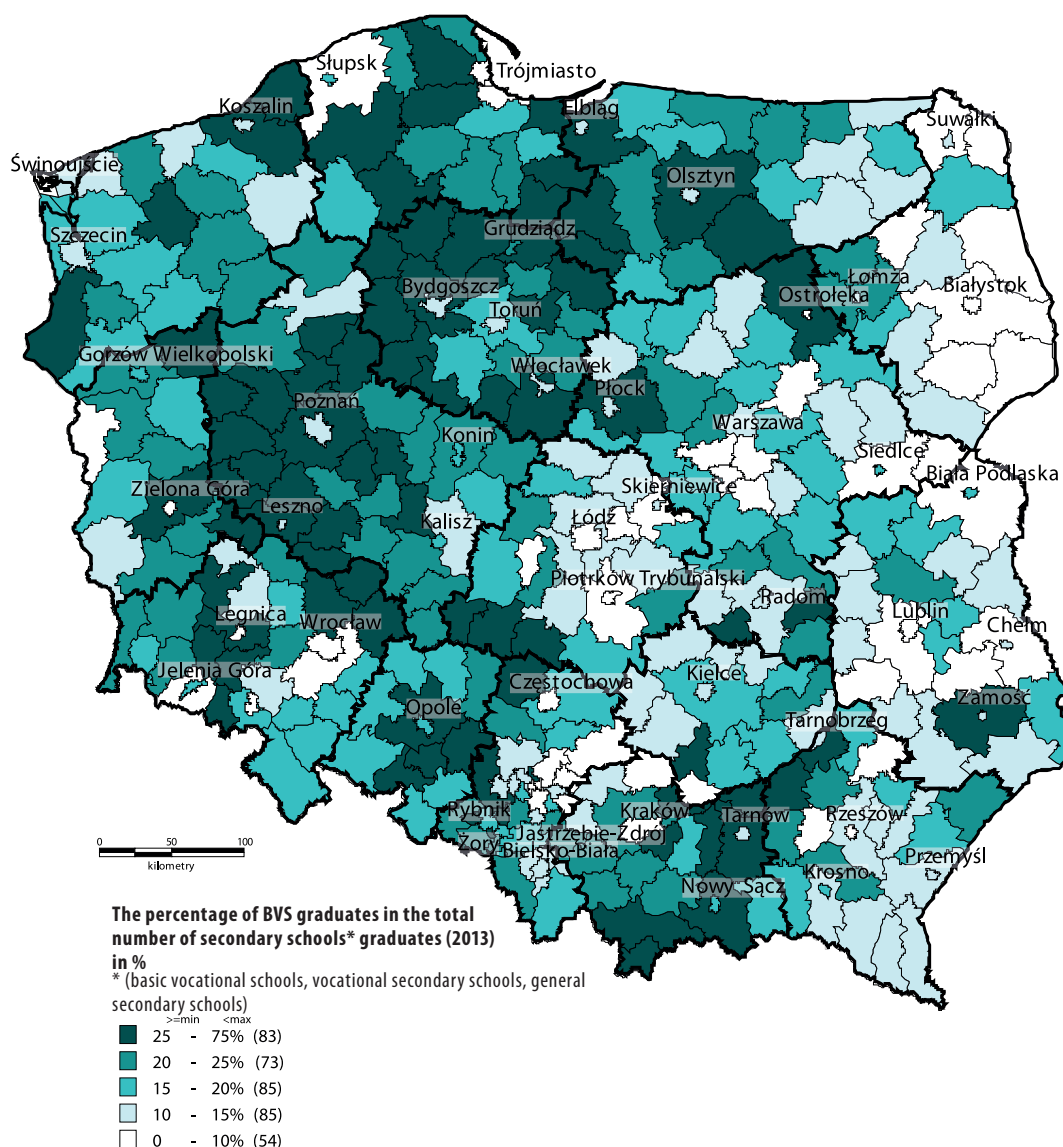
The choices of gymnasium graduates are varied. One of the important factors is gender and another one is geographical differences. Different regions of Poland have varying numbers of basic vocational schools and classes, and there are generally more of them in the western voivodeships. Hence the percentage of students opting for BVS is higher in western voivodeships than in the eastern, less industrialised part of Poland (SEE: MAP 1).

**Map 1*. Basic Vocational Schools:
the percentage of BVS students
in the total of secondary schools'
students**



Basic vocational schools have a better ratio of students who complete their education than other secondary schools which is reflected by the fact that there is a higher percentage of BVS graduates among secondary alumni than the percentage of students currently enrolled in BVS among secondary school students (SEE MAPS 1 AND 2). These figures can be explained by the relatively lower level of teaching in basic vocational schools, but at the same time the higher level of expectations in other types of school can prove more challenging and reduce the rate of success.

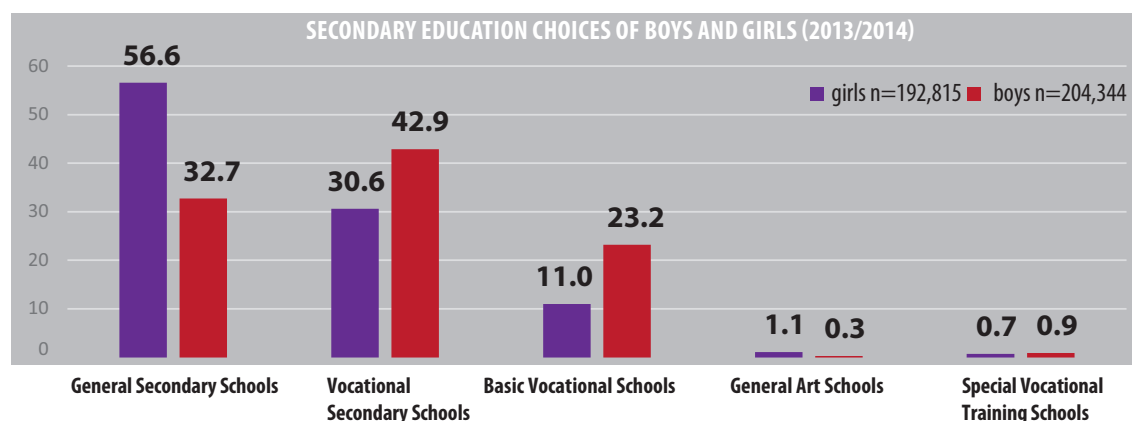
Map 2. BVS graduation rate: The percentage of BVS graduates in the total number of secondary school graduates



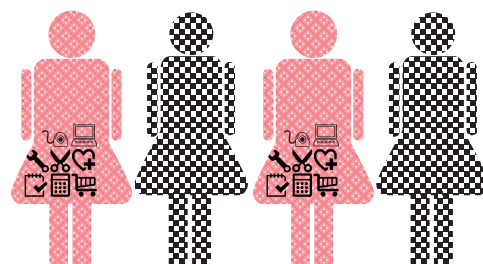
The existing educational model which favours establishments of tertiary education needs to be questioned, and one needs to consider the fact that choosing a basic vocational school does not preclude the possibility of further study. Mass high school education has certain downsides such as the lowering of standards of education (academic teachers decry the ever-worsening academic level of first year students), the number of students repeating a year and the dropout rate.

When it comes to choosing the type of secondary school, the choices made by girls are significantly different from those made by boys. The socio-cultural role of men who are seen as breadwinners and are expected to ensure financial health of their families inclines most of the boys to choose vocational schools (i.e. 135 thousand). Overall, vocational secondary schools and basic vocational schools attract 66.1% of boys while over 50% of girls choose general secondary schools (CHART 1). Although the percentage of students choosing BVS is much lower, every ninth girl and every fourth boy chooses BVS as the place to continue their education. Vocational training, particularly of the basic type, is heavily masculine. Boys choose BVS twice as often as girls – in the school year 2013/2014 boys constituted 70% of all first-year BVS students.

Chart 1. What after gymnasium? First grade students of secondary schools in Poland 2013/2014



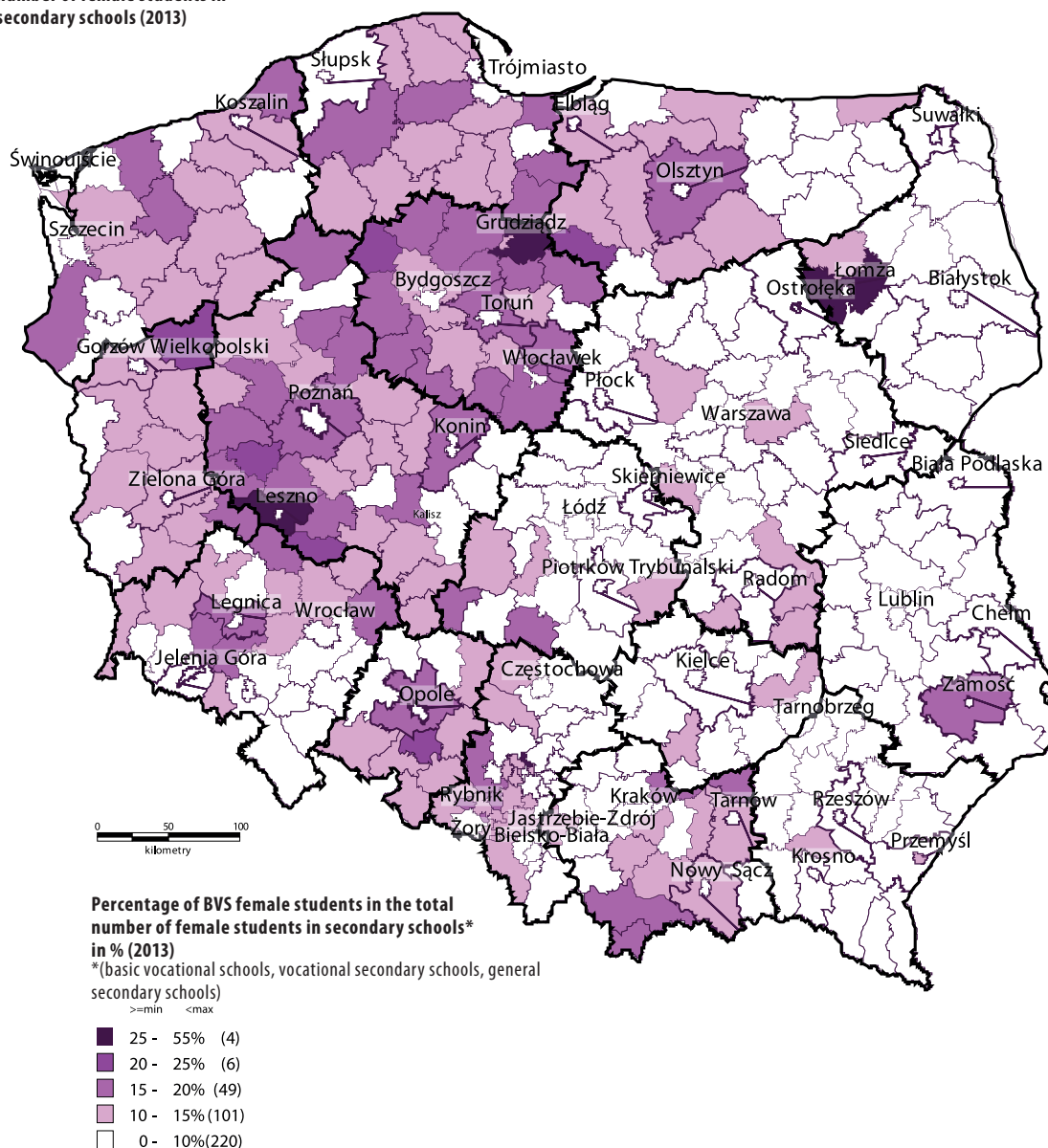
Source: Own elaboration based on Oświata i wychowanie w roku szkolnym 2013/2014, GUS, Warsaw 2014, s. 200–203, data does not include special schools students.

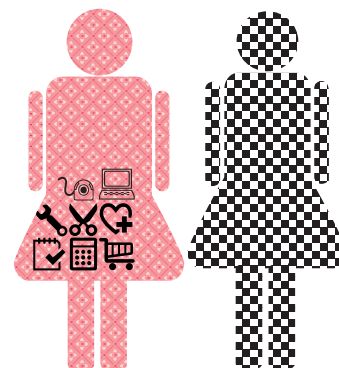


In the western voivoidships of Poland, where the offer of basic vocational schools is richer in comparison with the East of Poland (there are more BVS/classes) girls more often opt for a basic vocational school (SEE: MAP 3). In 59 powiats (districts), mostly in the West of the country, over 15% of female secondary students pursue vocational training. However, in most powiats (220, i.e. 57.9%) the percentage of female students in BVS is not higher than 10% of the total number of girls in secondary education.

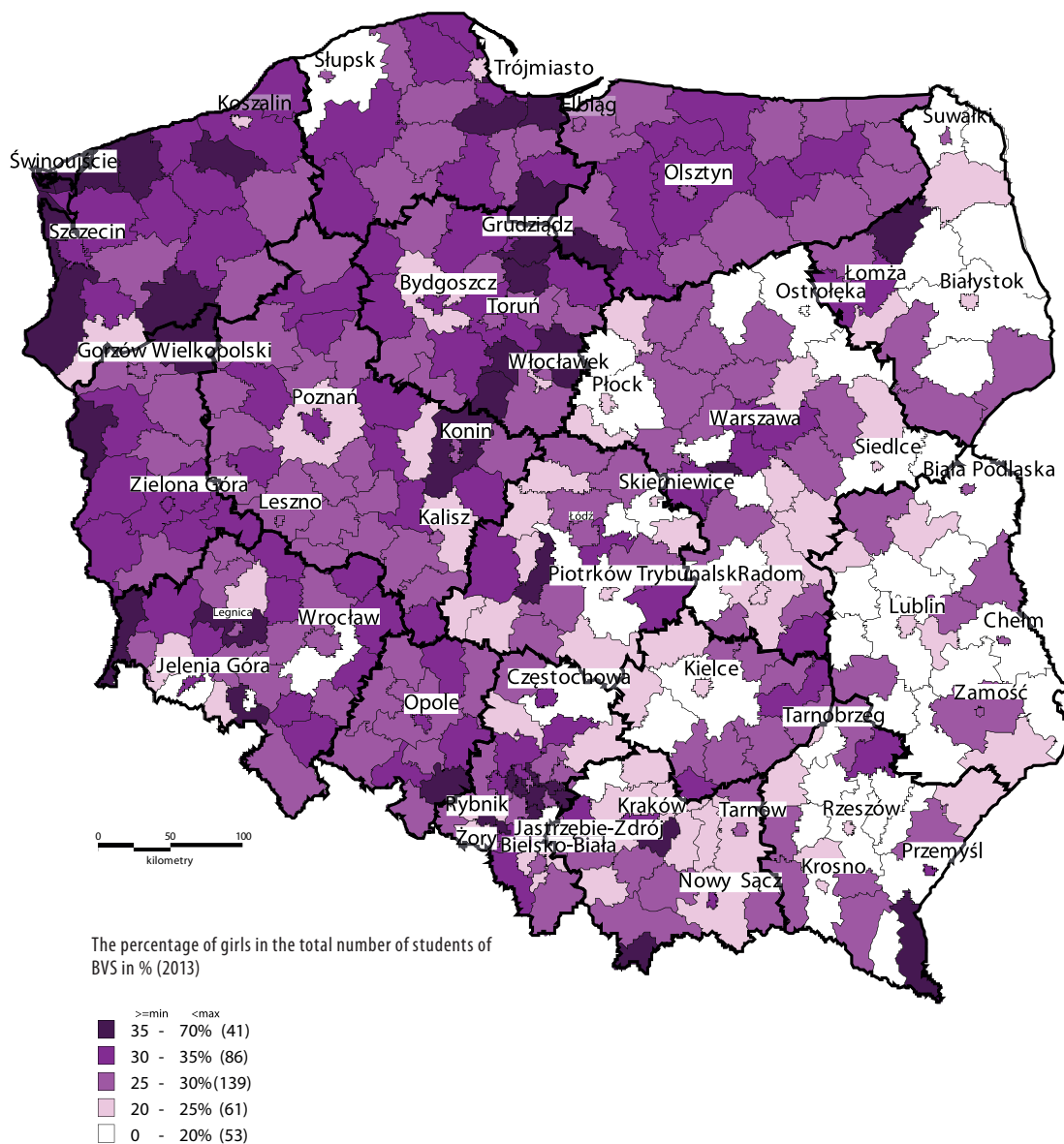
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Map 3. Percentage of BVS female students in the total number of female students in secondary schools (2013)





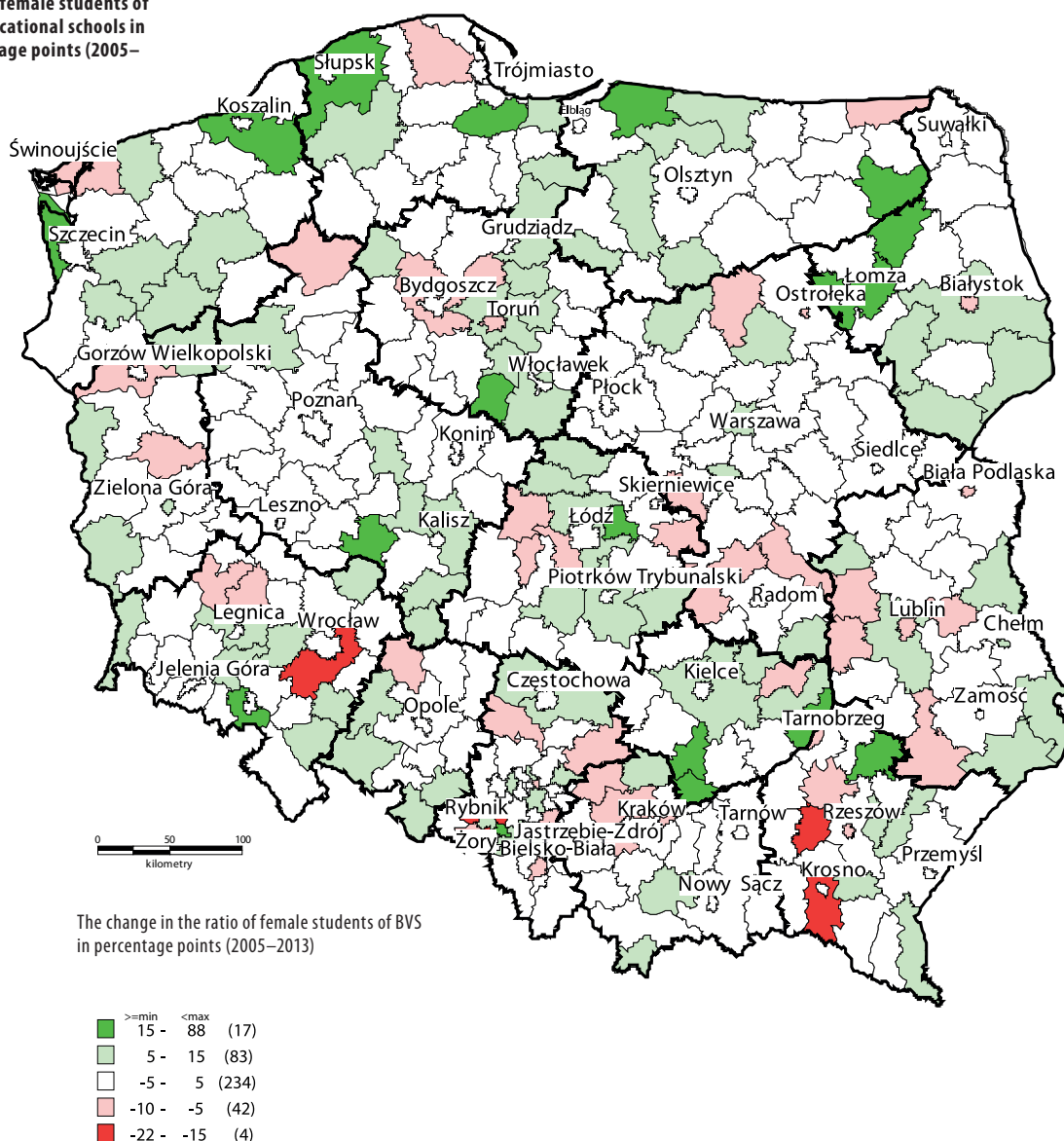
Map 4. The percentage of girls in the total number of students of BVS (2013)



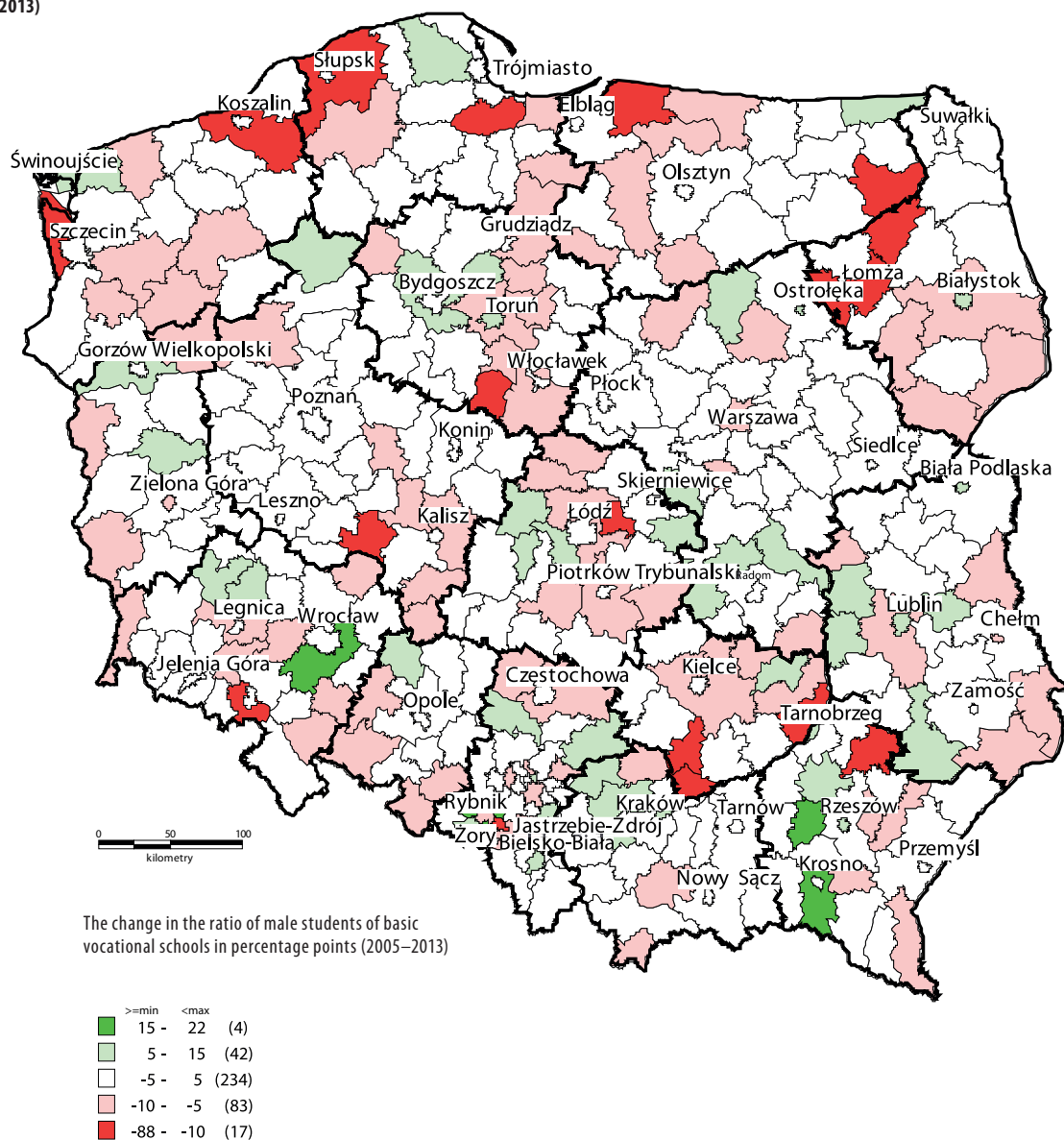
The fact that girls in the Western voivodeships choose to study in BVS more often results in a lower degree of masculinisation of the schools (SEE MAP 4). On average, female students amount to 30% of BVS students but in 41 powiats (mostly in the west of the country) girls constitute 35% and above of the total number of BVS students. In 53 powiats, mostly those in the East of the country, BVS are more masculine where female students constitute only up to 20% of the total number of students.

When we compare the choices of students concerning the type of secondary education in 2005 and 2013, we see an increase in the popularity of basic vocational schools among young people. In 80 powiats there has been an increase in the percentage of BVS students of 5 and more percentage points while only in 14 powiats has there been a decrease on a similar level. More importantly, in a large number of powiats there has also been a positive change in gender proportions among BVS students (SEE: MAPS 5 AND 6).

Map 5. The change in the ratio of female students of basic vocational schools in percentage points (2005–2013)



Map 6. The change in the ratio of male students of basic vocational schools in percentage points (2005–2013)



Over the period of 8 years the percentage of girls among BVS students increased for over 5 percentage points in a hundred powiats. Only 46 powiats witnessed an increase in male student numbers. In the majority of powiats (234) there were no changes in gender proportions or the changes were small, within 5 percentage points.

Irrespective of certain positive changes in terms of gender proportions, basic vocational schools remain heavily dominated by boys.

MOTIVATIONS OF GIRLS TO CHOOSE VOCATIONAL TRAINING

The key factor for choosing vocational training by girls is their family. The research carried out as a part of the project was conducted in medium size cities (Kielce, Siedlce, Olsztyn) but the majority of interviewed women come from villages and small towns. The cultural and social capital of their families was relatively low. The parents had primary or basic vocational education, sometimes high school education, and only in one case higher educational (the father of the interviewee had been sent to university by his employer). Choosing vocational training in many cases meant simply reproducing the educational pattern of the parent's generation, and in some cases it was a sign of cross-generational upward social mobility.

Mum's got vocational training, like me. And dad? Primary I think, but I can't be sure. In those times everyone would just get vocational training. [Siedlce, FGI, working]

The financial situation of the interviewee's families was normally average, in some cases very difficult. The financial hardship experienced by the families was caused not only by low income of the parents, but also the number of children – the dominant group was families with three or more children, but having 5–6 siblings was not rare, either. In this situation the parents expected the children, particularly the eldest ones, to become self-sufficient as soon as possible and to minimise spending on education.



This was a sad moment for me. I finished the primary school and went further but it was sad, because I was a talented child coming from a poor family and my education depended on my family's financial situation. Unfortunately, there was no money to speak of, so they decided I had to go to school somewhere. So I ended up being massively ashamed, because I was the best student in the school. My teachers pressured me to go to high school and to university, I had all the predispositions. But my family didn't let me do it, because there were also my younger siblings, many of them. And so they decided I could study once I become a financially independent adult. It turned out the way it did. [In order to minimise spending on education, this woman was sent to the nearest school]. *Yes, I commuted to the powiat capital. (...) There was no school closer to home. This one was the closest. (...) Another reason was that I had a friend in that school, senior year, who could give me all his books. It was all about financial issues. It all went down to money, not to spend too much on my education. (...) The books were there. They bought some notebooks, gave me a pen and I was ready to go. They got me shoes. That was it.* [Warsaw, IDI-3]

The parents of the interviewed women had no high aspirations when it came to their children's education, and sometimes none at all. In the interviews the women do not mentioned being motivated by their parents to pursue higher level education (with one exception of a woman who chose to go to BVS because "I was a bit of a rebel. My parents wanted me to go to high school, so I decided I'd do something else."

On the contrary, there were cases of limiting the educational aspirations of the children. Some of the fathers with primary education were convinced that education is unnecessary to have a successful life, especially in case of women. The role of the family in shaping the children's career path was mentioned by women both in the context of educational aspirations as well as some selective practices at school.

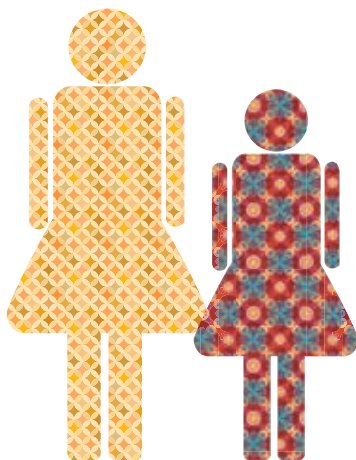


My dad is against school. He would make me feel down. He'd say 'what do you need that school for? It's useless' [Siedlce, FGI, not-working]

My dad would say: „Child, make sure you have a profession, with a profession you'll find a job. Otherwise you'll do your A-levels and go where afterwards? [Kielce, FGI, not-working]

Those girls who knew what they were doing would normally go to a high school. Maybe it wasn't like they were very ambitious, but perhaps the parents were. It's obvious that in primary school one doesn't make a choice which school to choose. The parents influence that kind of decision. [Kielce, IDI-1]

In the interviews, the women mentioned the selective and divisive practices in schools which reinforced the existing class divisions. One of the recurrent themes was the divide between the "city kids" and "village kids", the children from "good homes" and "bad ones". Teachers' attitudes towards pupils were influenced by the way their family background was perceived. This opinion would have an impact on student's life throughout his or her education.



There was direct pressure. It was in the nineties, I was born in 82. Crossing the line was not that popular back then. Had it been like it is now, maybe I wouldn't have chosen a vocational school. You wouldn't think so, but those were really good days. (...) if someone lived downtown, the financial status was great. Mum and dad would work, it was like 'you go to technical school, to high school. Or you know what, go and do vocational training. You'll feel good in there. Really. It didn't really relate to intelligence or skills, or interests. It was more like keeping the boundaries. That's how I would put it. The teachers would ask us directly, in a class like that – what we wanted to do after primary school. And if they didn't like what they heard, then... One of my friends at the time wanted to go to art school. The teacher didn't think much of his intellectual side, so he heard that in front of our whole class. [Kielce, IDI-1]

Another important factor which influenced girls' choices of secondary schools was the advice they received from their teachers concerning effective education strategies. In bigger towns students would hear that it was better to choose general secondary school and then go to university, or to opt for a secondary vocational school and be able to both complete Matura exam (A-level equivalent) and get a profession at the same time. In smaller towns it was more popular to stress the importance of having a 'profession', i.e. "everyone should go to vocational schools". There were also schools where no suggestions were made either way.

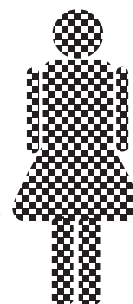
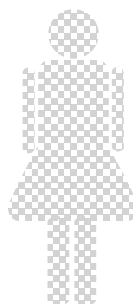
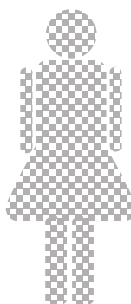
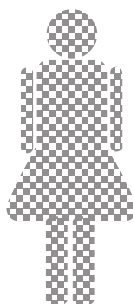
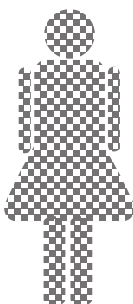
Girls who did not get good results in primary school and/or gymnasium realised that they would not be able to manage in a secondary vocational school or general secondary school and that they did not have a good chance to get into either of these types of school. This kind of perspective was often reinforced by their teachers.

The choices made by the peer group were somewhat important but had less of an influence on the interviewees than the factors discussed earlier. Sometimes the reason to choose a BVS could be simply to go to the same school as one's best friend. However, there were plenty of instances where the interviewee chose to go to basic vocational school even though a majority of her class chose a general secondary school or a secondary vocational school.

In some cases, girls saw their choice of a basic vocational school as a facile move, one that would not help them to build their social status. In the context of socio-cultural determinants of secondary education choices and the status of BVS we should mention the case of Kielce, where a local paper mill initiated a creation of a printing vocational class. Applicants were mostly children of the paper mill employees, including managerial positions. Therefore, there was a significant social variety of student's social backgrounds. The printing specialisation became an elite course and its popularity was further increased by the fact that it was closely linked to the fact that the paper mill was one of the biggest employers in the town, offering stable employment, fixed employment contract and a good pay. In this case, the situation in the local labour market proved to be the key factor impacting young people's decision.



I knew that I would have in my class people like... there was for instance this director from the mill. I knew his son would be in my class. It sounds funny now but back then it really mattered – or that a superintendent's daughter would be there, too. (...) There was also the fact that it was a printing school, not like the cooking school where everyone went. This was something new. [Kielce, IDI-1]



Analysing the girls' perspective emerging from these studies allows to demonstrate that at the root of their choice to attend a vocational school (provided they made the choice themselves) there were various rational and practical reasons:

■ BVS were chosen by girls who did not obtain good grades in primary education and feared that they would not be admitted to a vocational secondary school or a general secondary school. They were also worried they would not manage in that kind of school.

■ BVS were chosen by girls who needed to become financially independent, either because of a difficult financial situation at home or for psychological reasons. Graduating from a basic vocational school allowed them to earn a profession and enter the labour market.

■ Another factor for choosing BVS was the belief that after graduating they would secure a good job (the example of the paper mill in Kielce).

■ The girls' belief that 'having a profession' is a key to success in the labour market was very significant. According to them practical qualifications, competences and skills are taught at BVS.

■ The girls wanted/want to study and learn new skills and acquire competences through practice. In the interviews, the women remarked that vocational secondary schools are less focused on vocational subjects and practicing vocational skills, and put more emphasis on general subjects which are seen as less useful in the labour market. This was another fact in favour of choosing a basic vocational school.

■ Finally, basic vocational school was an option for those girls who had a clear professional ambition and knew exactly what they wanted to achieve in their professional life. BVS was a way to secure professional development in the chosen field.



I come from a little village in the Lublin area. I went to school, there is a Basic Vocational School of Agriculture near Lublin. I was training to be a gardener. I come from a village and so I always loved the land, the plants, the flowers. I was always fascinated by that and that's why I chose to do it. (...) At home I would always take care of flowers and what not. I'd do it with my mum, she had a garden. I would look up to her. I always loved it. Finally, I decided to do gardening. (...) Yeah, I had good grades. Sometimes distinctions, merits. I had very good relationship with my teachers. I would always help them. It was at the time of my gymnasium, when I created a project with my friends which later received funding from the European Union (...). [the woman applied to BVS, technical school of gardening and a high school]. I was accepted everywhere, but this was where I wanted to go most. The shortest studying time. I could get a job soon. I wanted to be independent as soon as possible. That's why I went there. (...) I didn't want to get under my parents' feet. I was always independent, I always wanted to do everything myself. [The need to become financially independent was a question of personality]. Yes, precisely. A question of personality. [Warszawa, IDI-2]

TO SUM UP: the analysis of the research materials show a whole spectrum of factors and motivations to choose a BVS in all their complexity. The results of the study go against the popular stereotype of girls going to vocational schools as irrational people who do not wish to study, and also contradicts the stereotypical image of BVS as schooling establishments with no prestige.

18



GIRLS AND BOYS

IN BASIC VOCATIONAL SCHOOLS – OCCUPATIONAL SEGREGATION

Basic vocational education is not only dominated by boys but we also witness a clear gender segregation when it comes to areas of study and the professions. This is clearly reflected both in the statistical data provided by the Central Statistical Office concerning educational programmes as well as the Polish Crafts Association data on apprenticeships exams.

In the school year 2013/2014 there were 123,329 male students of basic vocational schools (71.8% of the total number of students) and only 48,450 girls (28.2%). The majority of the boys chose engineering and technical specialisations (57.6%). Architecture and construction were less popular specialisations (18.7%) as well as manufacturing and processing (12.9%). Girls chose different specialisations. The majority opted for a specialisation in the services (62.1%). Nearly one fourth of female students was enrolled in business and administration course (24.0%), and one ninth in manufacturing and processing (11.8%).

BVS students according to study profile and gender

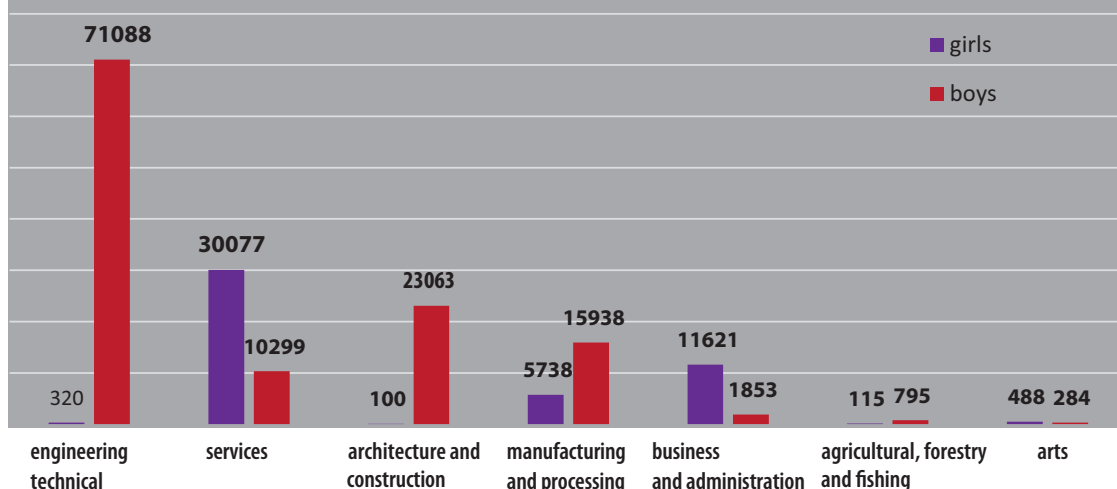


Chart 2. The number of BVS students according to the study profile and gender (2013/2014)

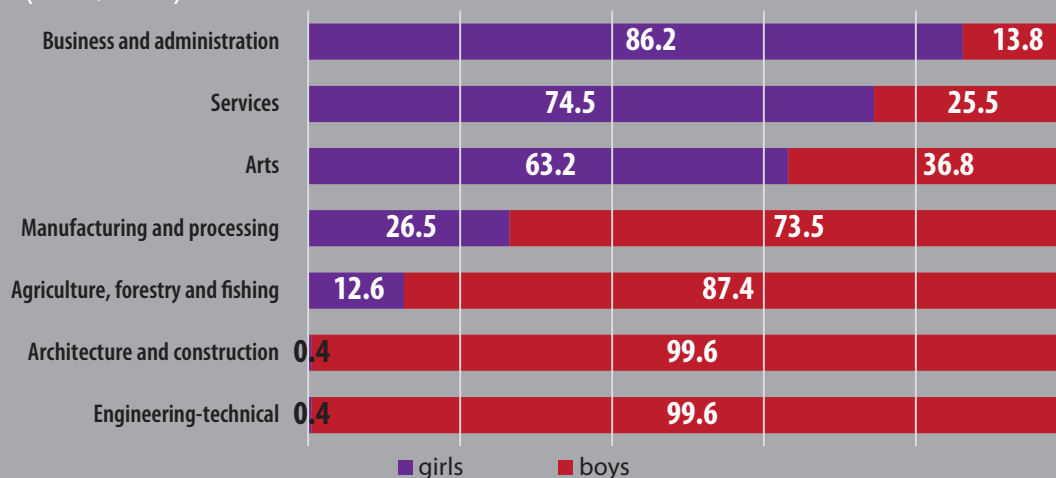
Source: Own elaboration based on Oświata i wychowanie w roku szkolnym 2013/2014, GUS, Warszawa 2014, s. 216; data does not include special school students.

Chart 3. Percentage of girls and boys in the BVS students according to study profile (2013/2014)

Source: Own elaboration based on Oświata i wychowanie w roku szkolnym 2013/2014, GUS, Warsaw, 2014, s. 216; data does not include special school students.

The professions related to technical equipment, mechanics, construction which are associated with physical strength are described as 'masculine' occupations and are dominated by boys. In 2013/2014 in the engineering-technical and architecture & construction courses the percentage of female students was only 0.4%. The percentage of girls among the graduates of those courses was even lower – barely 0.1% in engineering-technical course and 0.2% in the construction course.

Percentage of girls and boys in the BVS students according to study profile (2013/2014)



In case of the data provided by the Central Statistical Office we can only speculate what specific professions are included in the above mentioned fields of study. In the appendix to the document "The key to vocational training profession conversion to ISCED 97"² there is little information on this subject. Among the few examples of professions listed by fields of study there were:

- Engineering-technical: professions of cutter operator, automotive and vehicle mechanic,
- Architecture and construction: professions of construction installation fitter, mason,
- Agricultural, forestry and fishing: professions of farmer, gardener, inland fisher,
- Manufacturing and processing: professions of miner, subterranean exploitation specialist, upholsterer,
- Arts: professions of printer and photographer,
- Services: professions of hairdresser, waiter, hotel service assistant,
- Business and administration: professions of secretary assistant (the official name of the profession is written in a female ending), economist-manager, marketing and management.

More information on training for specific occupations is provided by the Polish Crafts Association concerning the Apprenticeship Exams figures. In 2014, 20,808 people passed Apprenticeship Exams; girls constituted 28.1% of the candidates and boys 71.9%. The list of professions offering apprenticeship exams includes 130 different options, but in many cases there are no students willing to choose it. Both boys and girls have clear-cut professional preferences.

Over one third of boys (35.4%) who received an apprenticeship diploma specialised in automotive mechanics (SEE: CHART 4). Other professions were less popular: carpenter (8.8%), mason (6.8%), baker (6.1%), electrician (5.8%), sanitary system fitter (5.8%), iron workers (4.6%), confectioner (4.4%). These eight professions together amounted to over three thirds of all students (77.7%) of boys. In five out of eight professions there were no female candidates for the Apprenticeship Exam. Only among confectioners girls were in the majority (60.4%).

There is even less of a variety in professions pursued by girls: 81.3% of female students took an Apprenticeship Exam in hairdressing and 17.1% in confectionery, which amounts to 98.4% of the total number of girls taking the Apprenticeship Exam. The full list of professions in which girls took apprenticeship exams is presented on CHART 4 and TABLE 1. In each of the apprenticeship exams listed below the male candidates were also represented.

² Oświata i wychowanie w roku szkolnym 2013/2014, GUS, Warszawa 2014, s. 271.

Chart 4. Apprenticeship Exams in occupations most commonly chosen by boys

Source: Own elaboration based on Oświata i wychowanie w roku szkolnym 2013/2014, GUS, Warsaw 2014, s. 200–203, data does not include special schools students.

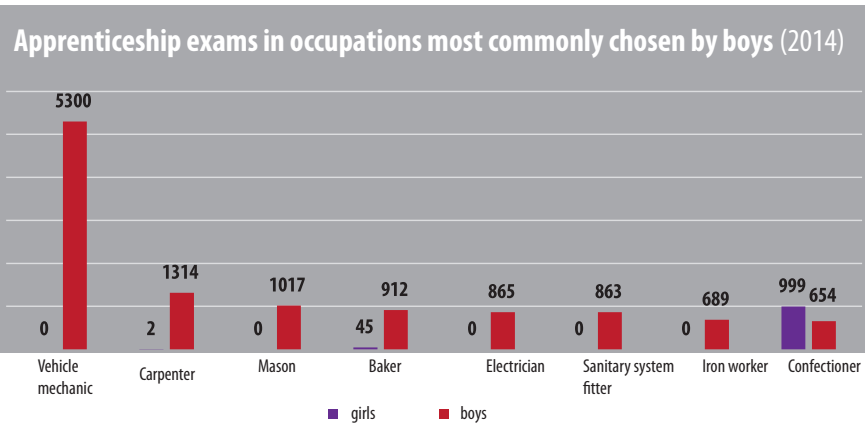


Chart 5. Apprenticeship exams in occupations most commonly chosen by girls (2014)

Source: Data provided by Chamber of Crafts in January 2015, Polish Crafts Association and the Vocational Education and Social Issues Department

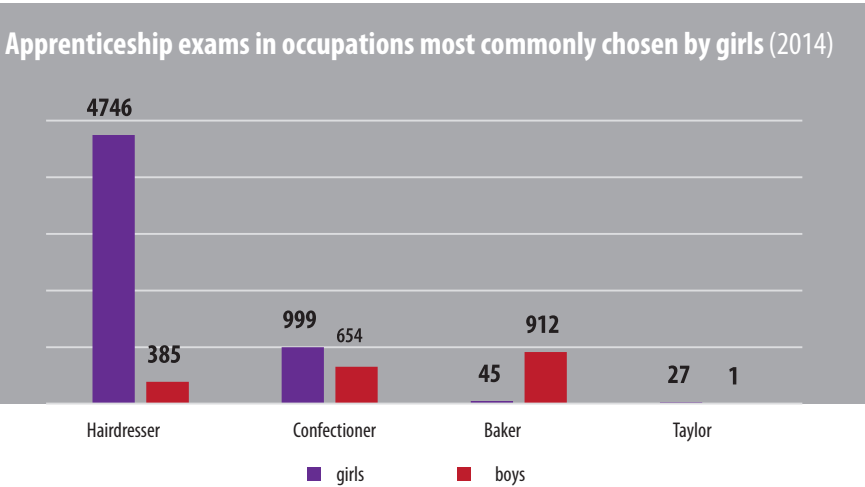


Table 1. Apprenticeship Exams in other occupations taken by girls and boys

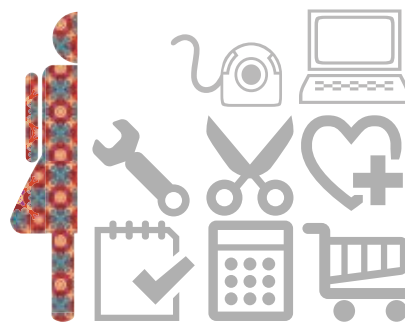
Apprenticeship exams in other occupations	GIRLS	BOYS
Photographer	3	2
Upholsterer	3	289
Goldsmith	3	6
Printer	2	21
Bookbinder	2	5
Butcher	2	237
Carpenter	2	1314
Painter and decorator	2	395
Pursemaker	1	1
Shoemaker	1	1

Source: Data provided by Chamber of Crafts in January 2015, Polish Crafts Association and the Vocational Education and Social Issues Department

TO SUM UP: basic vocational schools are strongly masculinized. Boys are in a significant majority (over 70%) of BVS students. The engineering-technical course and the architecture and construction course attract virtually no girls at all. In 2014 there were no female contestants among the students taking Apprenticeship Exams for the professions which are most popular with the male students: vehicle mechanics, mason (6.8%), electrician (5.8%), sanitary system fitter (5.8%), iron worker (4.6%). Girls who attend basic vocational schools are in the minority and choose mostly service related and business and administration courses. The best part of girls who obtained an apprenticeship diploma in 2014 passed their exam to become a hairdresser.

Basic vocational schools should broaden their educational offer particularly in those occupational courses which are not typical for girls. Young women should be encouraged to choose vocational training relating to new technologies. Basic vocational schools currently have no effective policy on securing gender diversity in the recruitment process. In the interviews women mentioned cases of deliberate limiting of the access to a profession – some schools in Kielce did not accept female students for the mechanic and printing courses.

GIRLS' MOTIVATIONS IN EDUCATIONAL CHOICES



At the age of 14–15 the choice of profession, possibly for one's entire life, is something highly abstract. Women often brought up the problem of their lack of maturity at that age to make an informed choice about their further education. In primary schools and gymnasiums young people cannot really hope to receive professional help in making career choices. Competence tests are rarely available, let alone professional career advice. In many cases educational choices are random, and more often than not these decisions are made under conditions of limited choice. Sometimes it is the parents who decide.

The location of the school is an important factor when the girls have no clear opinion on their preferred course of study or when their family is in a difficult financial position and the parents are not prepared to cover the expenses relating to their child's education. In those cases the girls choose one of the offers at the nearest school. Difficult financial situation and the need to reduce spending can often result in a situation where a girl chooses a course she is not at all interested in.

I didn't know what to choose anyway. There was nothing interesting there, so I decided to just go to the nearest school. [Kielce, FGI, working]

While choosing the course of study, the girls tend to follow the patterns they know, i.e. the occupations of their relatives: mothers, grandmothers, and occasionally their brothers or fathers. Another factor determining their choice are their interests, mostly based on their household experiences. The kind of 'feminine' domestic work they are used to do at home becomes the basis for choosing their future school.

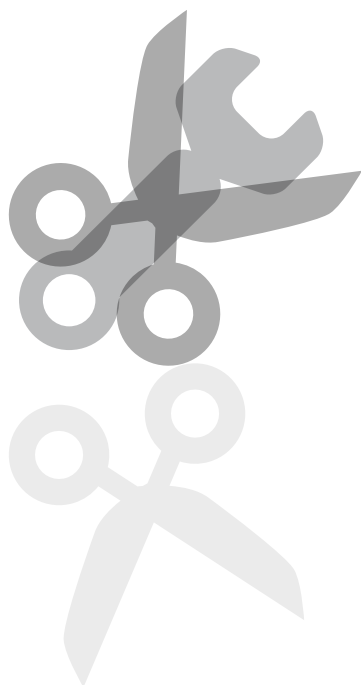
I used to spend a lot of time with my granny and I would probably cook with her too much. It stayed with me. I went to a catering school. [Siedlce, FGI, not working]

The choices of courses of study often reflect the widely accepted patterns of a given social group: some professions are relevant for girls, other for boys (hence the "girls to the catering school"). The girls' vocational choices are related to the way they perceive women and femininity. Sometimes the choices lack consideration and other are based on the belief that women are different from men in a way that predisposes them to pursue certain professions, such as the stereotypical view that girls are more diligent, rigid and generally better at humanities, while men are more creative and able in the sciences. Another concern which emerged in the interviews was the typical 'what would people say' if a girl choose a 'typically masculine' course. It could raise a suspicion that she is not 'feminine enough' or that she is desperate to find a partner.

I don't know, I didn't consider it [choosing a mechanics course, even though there were girls taking it]. *For me it's for guys and that's that. Tailoring, hairdressing, confectionary, that was the choice for girls. At the age of 15 this was my thinking.* [Kielce, FGI, working].

Women should choose those [typically masculine] *professions. (...) It seems to me that they're afraid. Afraid of 'what people will say'.* [Siedlce, FGI, working]

When it comes to like carpenting and stuff like that, I didn't even consider it. I would not have the courage to choose a male course like that. [why not?] *I think it's all about putting people in pigeon-holes, people just say women can't do certain jobs. If I wanted to have a house built and a woman-mason came to do it, I would see it the same way. I would be afraid.* [Olsztyn, IDI]



Unfortunately, our brains work differently. The boys are a bit better than us. [Siedlce, FGI, working].

There were a few girls [in mechanical course] but these girls were tom boys, with some of them I didn't even realize they were girls. [Kielce, FGI, working]

The use of projective techniques during the study allowed to reveal certain barriers experienced by the girls while facing the prospect of choosing a 'masculine' profession. On one hand, a woman in a 'masculine' profession is seen as 'feisty', 'confident', with a 'strong personality', 'self-sufficient' and intelligent, which could all be considered positive features, except for the fact that they are all traditionally associated with masculinity. According to the interviewed women, this could lead to problems in relationships with men at work and, what is worse, in the relationship with a partner/husband. **The fear of losing the feminine side and the consequences thereof seem to be the key barrier stopping women from choosing the 'masculine' professions.**

I think she's very confident, because she chose a profession with so few women. (...) They will treat her not like a woman, but a stupid cow who's just disturbing them. (...) It's a girl with a strong character. (...) After work she takes off her protective uniform, puts on high heels and a short skirt. (...) I think that she'd probably take a man's place in the house and that he would obey her. [Siedlce, FGI, not working]

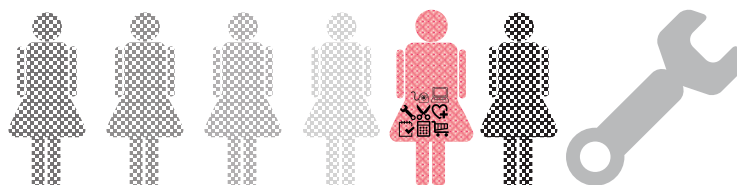
I think she's confident. (...) Will she then become one of their mates? Not a woman, but a mate? (...) And then she puts on high heels to feel feminine after all. (...) I think she's got no boyfriend. She's like self-sufficient, she's got this male profession, a job. (...) Guys might be scared of her, actually. And if she's intelligent and all (...) And then a man loses his manhood. [Siedlce, FGI, working]

In the interviews there was also a conviction that employers will not want to hire a woman in a 'male' job as they will not be convinced of her skills, and even if they are, they will know that the customers will not trust a woman worker in a 'masculine' job. Teachers in basic vocational schools, even those who were favourably female inclined to their female students, also openly expressed their concerns about their female students' future employability.

While choosing their future occupation, girls generally believe that they are making a rational choice. They base their decisions on their parents' experiences, who had worked all life in a given profession and had never been out of work. They are convinced that certain jobs will be needed and some services, such as hairdressing or catering will always be

in demand. The level of saturation of the labour market with a given profession is a factor which they tend to notice only after graduation (for instance, that it makes no sense to start their own hair salon as there is one on every street already). The women pointed to the fact that it is difficult to make a rational choice from the perspective of the labour market. Choosing an occupation which is in demand at the time of choosing the profession does not have to result in finding the job upon graduation.

While choosing the school, many people consider what kind of job is in demand at the moment. But in three year time when you graduate the situation might change completely. It's really hard to choose something to secure a job later. [Kielce, FGI, working]



DO BASIC VOCATIONAL SCHOOLS OFFER A GOOD PREPARATION FOR THE FUTURE JOB? WOMEN'S OPINIONS

A majority of women who took part in the study are satisfied with the quality of training provided by their vocational schools. The teachers were also praised, particularly those teaching vocational subjects. The women expressed positive opinions about the teachers, their approach to the students and their commitment to teaching. The opinions about whether or not the school offered a good preparation for the professional life varied depending on a school. The main issue was the way the schools organised apprenticeships schemes.

The system in which apprenticeships were organised by school-related units (school canteen, school hairdressing salon) did not help the women to find their first job, even if the acquired skills were good.

In that respect the system of apprenticeships at external companies is better, although the experiences were varied. Occasionally the students did not profit from them at all as they would only come in to sign the attendance list. A more frequently reported problem was the poor educational value of the apprenticeships, as the employers simply treated the students as 'cheap workforce' (so the apprentices would brush the floor the whole time). There are schools where the apprenticeship system functions correctly, i.e. the apprenticeships develop the needed skill set as well as guarantee contact with the labour market. Placements are organised by companies carefully selected by the school

and during the apprenticeship the employer can see the skills and predispositions of the student, therefore increasing his or her chances to find the first job – a key to entering the labour market. One of the women suggested introducing external quality controls in order to guarantee the efficiency of the apprenticeships.

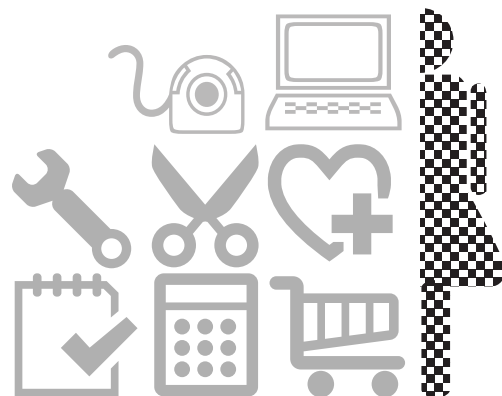
(...) those better off are those who, like a friend of mine, did an apprenticeship in Chedowiak [a wedding house]. He got a job straight afterwards [Siedlce, FGI, working]

Generally speaking, women are happy with having chosen a basic vocational school, and they do not connect their difficult situation in the labour market with the type of school they graduated from. They pointed to the fact that the situation in the labour market in Poland is difficult for anyone, not just vocational school graduates. They gave numerous examples of unemployed friends with higher education or instances where university graduates are forced to accept jobs outside of their field and below qualifications.

In this situation the women feel that a basic vocational school is an optimal investment – it involves only a short training time and offers a fairly good chance to find a job. The women who chose the course of study on their own and work in their profession are more satisfied with their jobs.

My sister-in-law, she's got a degree in social studies and she also works in Biedronka [a supermarket chain] To begin with, she was like 'no, so many years of university, I won't do it'. But unfortunately, she's now a cashier here. [Siedlce, FGI, employed]

LABOUR MARKET FOR WOMEN WITH BASIC VOCATIONAL EDUCATION



■ Female BVS graduates have a strong motivation to start a career. They enter the labour market with a certain capital, namely their willingness to act, the fact that they are used to constant professional activity and a certain work ethic which is passed on to them through generations. Particularly those women who come from poor, numerous families are often used to many domestic duties, helping the parents on farms and finding temporary work during summer holidays. Despite difficulties with finding a job and hard working conditions the women declared their

willingness to work irrespective of their financial condition. They see their professional activity mostly as the source of income (many women have raised children) and a guarantee of financial independence from their partner.

I would never want to be sitting all the time. For me that's like complete inactivity. Even when I was still in school, at the age of 16, I would go and pick the strawberries. Every summer I worked. I was always doing things. So I think even if I were rich I would work anyway. Maybe I'd look for a lighter job, because this thing here, that's really tough. [Kielce, IDI-1]

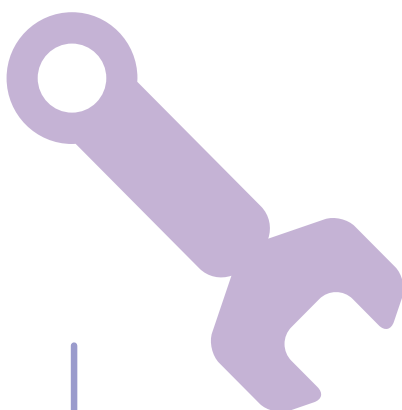
That would be nice, sit down for a month or two, but never longer. I think I'd go mad, my husband would go mad, and that would be it. [Olsztyn, IDI]

In the interviews the women also mentioned that work gives them opportunity to meet new people. Some feel passionate about their job and find it fulfilling.

I don't like to owe anything to anyone. Obviously, my husband wouldn't rub my nose in it, he wouldn't say it's his money or anything. But I like to have the comfort that I work, too. And that I don't have to call him and ask 'can I buy myself a blouse?' (...) And this is really how it ends otherwise, or else this is what I hear. When people divorce, the woman is left with nothing, no experience. She was in the house, looked after children and then there is a problem of how to return. Or not return, more like start a job after a break like that. This can be pretty difficult. [Olsztyn, IDI]

I like renovating. I like making something really nice from everyday objects. (...) We used to go to flea markets with my friends and this is how the adventure began. (...) We started fixing some old chairs, some furniture. (...) It's what I do now actually. [What does work give you apart from money?] I can realise my vision. Like I said, I like to design, to change things. When someone comes with a chair, I'll do something with it so that looks nice. Not just renovate, but makes sure it looks okay. So that it's interesting. [Olsztyn, IDI]

■ The position of women with basic vocational education in the labour market is a difficult one. Although jobs are readily available, the women find it difficult to get a job in their profession which would offer social security and a living wage. Hence grey-zone employment is very frequent in this group.



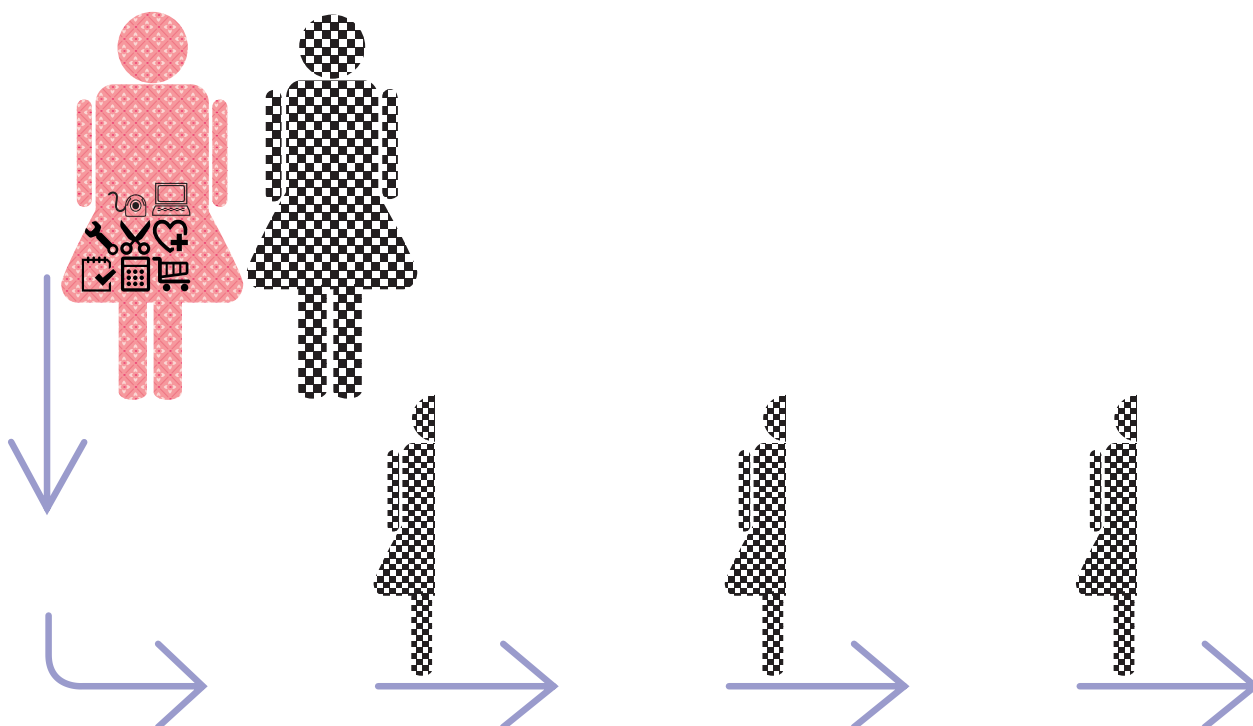
THE FIRST JOB

28

Employers do not want to hire people with no professional experience and therefore the key to success in the labour market is the first job. According to the women the factors which make it easier to find the first job are: the connections of the parents, apprenticeships in the future workplace and starting one's job search immediately after graduating. Women who find it most difficult to find a job are those who took a gap year after school or got pregnant and entered the labour market 2–3 years after graduation. In many cases women have to accept civil law contracts or even working in the grey zone. If they look for a full-time job for too long and they remain unemployed, chances for finding a job start to reduce. In the interviews, the women stressed the importance of physical appeal – attractive women are more likely to find a job.

I am actively looking for a job, so I look in newspaper, job centre and so on. So far I haven't been working, I thought I still had time. I can look around. But now is the time to stand on my feet. Like I say, I'm looking for a job, it's a bit hard because I have no experience and no one will take me with no experience. (...) Like the other participant said – either a temporary contract, or an internship. (...) You really need to have connections to find a good job, I mean like a really good one. [Kielce, FGI, not-working]

The Labour Office is seen as a very ineffective source of employment offers. Women claimed that many of the advertised jobs were fictional (opinion shared by the unemployed women). However, some of the unemployed women have used the internships offered by Labour Office.



THE LABOUR MARKET FOR WOMEN AND MEN

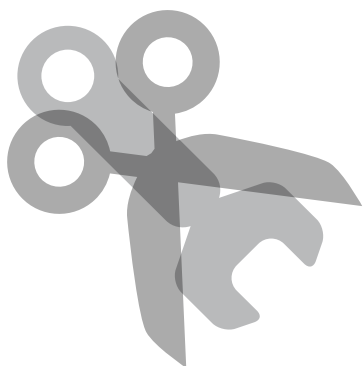
Men find it easier to find employment after graduating from a basic vocational school than women. There are more jobs in the typically 'male' professions and the pay is better.



And if we have no secondary education, then even looking for ads, in the Labour Office, everybody requires at least secondary education. And higher, too. There is no separate category for basic vocational education any more. Maybe there will be offers for roofers, iron workers. Electricians, because there is a forgotten profession like that. But there are plenty of hairdressers in the market. We can't deny it, there are hair salons everywhere you look – and the shops as well. There are plenty of chefs, too, and I mean experienced ones, not the youngsters who leave the vocational school where we do our apprenticeships. [Kielce, FGI, not working].

In my opinion boys have it easier than girls to find a job. No matter what school he's got, a bloke will always find something. [Kielce, IDI-1]

The women realize that in that respect their situation is much worse. Working in typically female occupations (services) their pay is often around 6–7 PLN per hour while men employed in construction or technical occupations (de facto unavailable for women) can expect a rate of around 12 to 15 PLN per hour. This means that women often earn half of what men do. At the same time, even though women feel they are disadvantaged, they tend to justify that state of things by saying that harder physical work of the men justifies their higher earnings. Others are of the opinion that the work they do is comparably hard to the types of work done by men and that women are simply being discriminated against in the labour market.

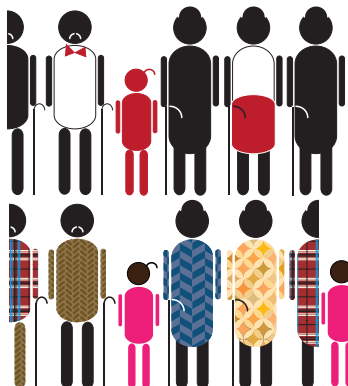


I used to work in a hair salon, 6 days a week, 8 hours per day. She was kind enough to pay me 600 PLN per month. So this worked out something like 20 PLN pay for an 8-hour day. So I simply quit. [Kielce, FGI, working]

It's easier to find a job if you're a bloke. Either with a basic vocational training or a vocational secondary one. It's easier and he's sure to earn more than a woman. In that sense, I think it's a kind of discrimination. Women often work in the same profession, work harder and earn less. [Kielce, IDI]

My boyfriend earns 13–14 PLN per hour as an electrician. I have never heard of a woman earning that kind of money. [Siedlce, FGI, working]

One important context of discrimination of women in the labour market are gender stereotypes. The employers often perceive women in very traditional ways, assuming that



If you want to get a job, need to fit the mould. If you want to work in customer service, I'd say, if you're short, chubby, no make-up, they will say 'no, thank you'. I've been in a situation when a guy said he liked everything about me (...) but 'I could be a little taller, what a shame'. During my job interviews I've heard suggestions like 'have you thought about changing your image a little bit?' I've heard that many times, directly or not, but over the last 3 years it's been definitely that – it's the looks, not the skills that matter. (...) The looks – it's sad kind of pressure. [Kielce, IDI-2]

There are places where they say directly in a job offer that they prefer a man or a woman. The men can feel equally bad when they specifically ask for a woman. (...) But if the position is in a shop or a bakery, the girl needs to have the looks. Not every employer is like that, thanks God. (...) One thing that needs to change is the respect. Women are not respected. I don't mean some exaggerated respect for women, all we need is just a normal, human attitude. There still is that stereotype of a stupid girl whose only function is to be a piece of eye-candy. [Kielce, IDI-2]

The disadvantaged position of women in the labour market is also caused by the fact that employers perceive them through the prism of their future motherhood, that is, as mothers who will take a maternity leave or as mothers of little children who will take time off to look after the kids. Therefore, they see employing women as risky and typically ask about procreative plans and the number of children during the job interview; a permanent employment contract is often a subject of long negotiations. Women are more keen than men on securing a permanent contract due to the social benefits offered as a part of this form of employment. When women finally manage to secure a permanent contract, the contracted salary is normally the minimum wage and the surplus is given 'under the table'.

When I started my first job the lady immediately asked me if I had a boyfriend. (...) Maybe it was because if I did, I could get pregnant. [Siedlce, FGI, working]

A friend told me that no matter where I go, I should never admit I have a child. [Kielce, FGI, working]

No one asks a man if he has children. That's what I think. And even if he said 'I've got 5' that won't matter, he could have even 10. And if a woman said she had 5 kids they would simply say 'the Mother of God!' and that would be it – no chance. [Kielce, FGI, working]

ECONOMIC MIGRATION

A difficult situation in the labour market forces women to seek employment away from their hometowns. They migrate to bigger towns where it is easier to find a job, but there are also many cases of migration abroad, to Italy, England and Germany.

It's hard to find a job in the field. In the village everyone knows the basics. So to find a job in my profession, that was tough. My cousin was here so she convinced me to come to Warsaw and look for something here. So I've been here for half a year and I found a job as a gardener. I look after plants, I take care of them, I check if they grow properly. [Warsaw, IDI-2]

The theme of temporary economic migration was particularly pronounced in Olsztyn. In some cases the women said that they were planning to leave immediately after graduation. Others decided to leave the country only after they became disillusioned with the working conditions offered in Poland. Women were very satisfied with their foreign experiences. Apart from the pay offered abroad, they were also happy with the working conditions and the attitude of employers and those around them. In Poland women with vocational education often feel disrespected, while during their stay abroad they felt that their work was appreciated by the employers. Economic migrants were mostly childless women, although there have also been cases of women travelling with little children.

The theme of economic migration was also mentioned in interviews in Siedlce, however in a very different context. The women mentioned the problem of competition from Ukrainian workers who, according to the interviewed group, damage the local labour market by accepting very low hourly rates. Although the women were talking about the competition in the 'male' job market, it is worth noticing that the economic migration from other countries increases competition in the labour market and it is particularly noticeable by people with vocational education.

Ukrainians work in the abattoir for silly rates. A Polish person would rather stay at home than work for that kind of money. [Siedlce, FGI, working]

SOCIAL PERCEPTIONS OF BASIC VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND THE WORK CULTURE



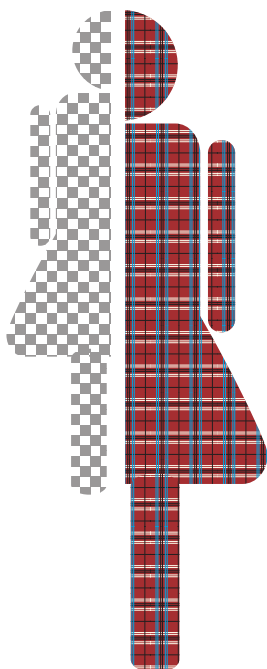
The situation of the researched group in the labour market is heavily influenced by the fact that the social status of basic vocational education is very low. The women mentioned the stereotypical image of their social group. BVS female graduates are seen as

stupid, unintelligent, unambitious, from poor families, those who never made an effort to study and who can only do well in manual labour. This harmful stereotype seems to affect women more than men – the majority of men graduate from the more socially recognised engineering and technical courses. The low social status of female basic vocational education relates to the low prestige of the occupations which they choose. This is important for women's self-esteem.

When the employers see a Bachelor's degree, they think: she's intelligent, clever, well-read, from a good family. It's the opposite when they see a basic vocational school graduate. [Sie-dlce, FGI, working]

I've heard that many times: 'Why haven't you got matriculation exam? A vocational school?' and they looked at me like I didn't know 2+2 makes 4. How irritating. [Kielce, IDI-2]

Women could feel the lack of respect from their employers. They often mentioned being 'kicked about' and exploited by the employers. A particularly notorious example of bad working conditions are chain supermarkets, where employers are expected to be available around the clock and the refusal to stay after hours may result in receiving a notice. Another instance of exploitation, according to the interviewed women, is a situation where the employer offers the workers only a part-time job but forces the workers to stay overtime. Lack of respect for the workers and a poor organisational culture in the workplace are apparent. Bad relationships in the workplace, mobbing, undignified behaviour towards the workers – all this is in stark contrast with the experiences the women have while working in western countries.



Respect. They really appreciate you there, they appreciate their workers. (...) Their attitude towards workers. There was no patronising – they would ask: would you mind doing this? Is that okay with you? Will you be able to stay a bit longer? (...) Here no one asks your opinion, no one asks if you can do something or not. I would always say yes anyway, because I was afraid to lose my job. (...) But they still asked. And it was a nice surprise because they knew I came from Poland. I didn't live there. A different employer would just say: you like it or not. There are many people waiting to take your place. [Olsztyn, FGI, not working]

It's like working from home again. No stress, no worries that someone will shout at you. Or when you feel under the weather and you say you're not well – you don't even need to ask them, they'll just say 'go home'. And here it's like 'you'll make it'. Also the attitude of colleagues at work, they were all helpful. Here it's war of all against all. And back there it wasn't. [Olsztyn, FGI, not working]

It's like heaven and earth. Here I feel like crying when I'm looking for a job. Seriously, Poles should learn from other nations. This is why so many people leave the country. [Olsztyn, FGI, not working]

You go there like... When I was getting up I just felt ... (...) I didn't know if I was going to work or what. The atmosphere was completely different. And here when you go to work you feel like being penalised for something. [Olsztyn, FGI, not working]

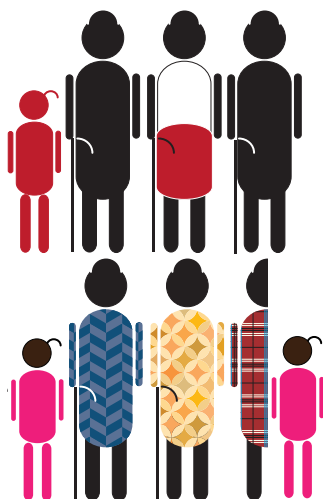
■ Taking action to improve the image of women with basic vocational education are very important because the inferiority complex is very limiting for these women. What is equally important is taking action to improve organisational culture at the workplace.

RECONCILIATION OF WORK AND MOTHERHOOD OF WOMEN WITH BASIC VOCATIONAL EDUCATION



Women with basic vocational education experience many problems while trying to reconcile their work and motherhood and family life. Two problems were particularly pronounced: the first was family planning, and the second concerns difficulties with reconciling work with providing care for little children.

As women with vocational education often work without a contract, or with a civil law or temporary contract, they experience many dilemmas concerning their decision to have a child. As they do not wish to lose their job, which is typically difficult to secure in the first place, and also not having any chance to receive financial help after birth, some of them delay the decision to get pregnant. They do so despite knowing that the consequences of delayed motherhood can be negative.



A friend of mine was in a situation like that. It was the third time and she was meant to get a permanent work contract. But they decided that before it was a commission or something and now she has to wait three years before she can get a normal contract. (...) She's almost 30 now and can't get pregnant for another 3 years because they will not extend her contract. So she's just scared what's going to happen next. [Olsztyn, FGI, not working]

I've got many colleagues and friends at work who are still employed on temporary contracts and they are married (or not) and they say: „oh I'd like to be pregnant but I can't now, not yet, I'm not on permanent contract. So I'm waiting, but when I get it, I won't get pregnant straight away". And so I have friends who put it off for so long that now for 5 years they've been trying for a baby without success. They have their permanent contract now, and so what? [Kielce, FGI, working]

It drives me mad, I would really like to have a child, and I would like to have it now. But I would not like to be in a position [with no work and income]. It seems normal to me that a young girl wants to work and that she should also have time [to have a child]. When are we supposed to give birth? I've always said that I want to have two by the time I turn 30. So what, I'm meant to wait now? It will only get worse later... It shouldn't be like that. We should raise consciousness in our society that there are no perspectives like that. When are we supposed to go to work and have children? [Kielce, FGI, working]

The biggest difficulty is to reconcile motherhood with reaching basic financial security. If a woman gets pregnant straight after finishing vocational school or while she is employed, but not on permanent contract, she does not get any social benefits and remains without income as a young mother. In this group it was a frequent occurrence that women who gave birth received no social benefits. There were also instances when a father of a child was not interested in keeping contact with the child or providing maintenance for the child. Broken relationships and lack of support from the fathers force many women to seek employment straight after giving birth.

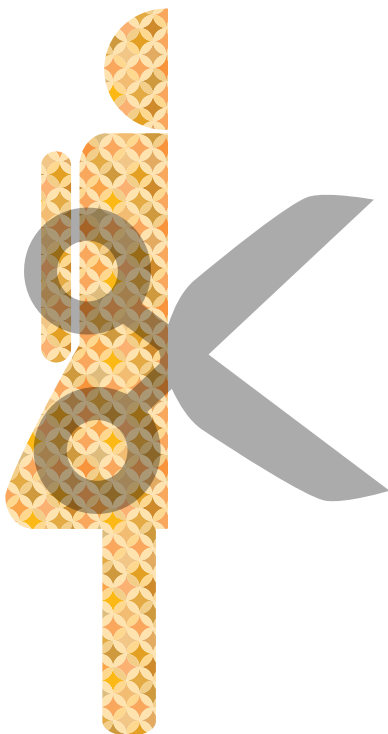
Securing day care for a small child is particularly difficult for women with basic vocational education. The women often work in shift system starting in early morning hours when nurseries and day-care centres are closed and school does not provide care. In his situation family becomes the only source of support and the woman's work is dependent on the help of parents and/or parents-in-law.

I finished a culinary vocational school. I have never worked in my profession. Now I work in a second-hand clothing store. I've got a one-year-old son. My mother is with him now. (...) I'm not legally employed, so I had no maternity leave benefit. [Siedlce, FGI, working]

I'm married, with two kids. I'm 23. I've worked in a restaurant, a kebab place. And now I'm really looking for a job because my in-law agreed to stay with us a few months. I'm looking, but it's hard. It's only an internship now. [Kielce, FGI, not working]

My son is about to go to school now and it will be a problem. There used to be a kindergarten open from 6 am so I was at work at 7. Now they are worried that I'll be late. They're worried I might not manage it. So I'll have to look for someone to take him there in the morning. The recreational room opens at 6:45 so I won't make it, I could be at work around 7:30. So I'll have to find someone.. [Olsztyn, FGI, working]

The parents divided their time because I need some help with the child and my sister does, too, she's got a boy and a girl. So they need to be taken to school. She works, her husband, too. So the parents split and dad lives with them, and my mum with us. [Kielce, IDI-1]



WOMEN IN 'MALE' PROFESSIONS: EDUCATION AND THE LABOUR MARKET



35

Women who received training in non-traditional for them professions often developed their interests at home, for example by helping their father fixing the car or had an ambition to follow in their fathers' footsteps or followed their brothers' path of education.

Dad worked as a printer for 45 years. (...) In there [in the printing basic vocational school] there was this girl Karolina, whose father was a driver of someone high up from the printing mill. And it was all like that, we all had some kind of connection. (...) Later on it turned out that everyone in our class knew someone who was someone at the mill. [Kielce, IDI-1]

It's often like that, if the father is someone, then the son... It's best if there is a son, but if there isn't one, then it's the daughter. [Olsztyn, IDI]

The schools do not typically introduce any formal barriers in terms of access to the typically 'male' courses, and there were normally between 3–4 girls in those classes. However, there are exceptions. One woman mentioned in an interview that there was a vocational school near Kielce where girls were not accepted in a mechanical class. Another woman chose to become a bookbinder because girls were not allowed to choose the printing course. She feels confident that even now after a short training she could work as a printer and earn much more, like men who have these positions in her current workplace.

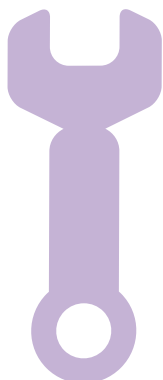
The problem is that schools don't accept female printers. There is no enrolment procedure for girls, because there can't be one. (...) Printing course is strictly for boys. (...) Over these 3 years at school and later for another 2 years I was fairly interested in all that, but there was no recruitment for girls (...) They would take you to train as a bookbinder, but not a printer. [Is it a hard work?] I don't think so. I think a woman would do a better job, because the key thing there is a kind of... diligence, attention to detail. Guys just wouldn't... What should change? The stereotypes should change. That women can only be good housewives and that's that. These stereotypes that women are too weak and can't do certain things, that a woman is poor and can't do anything about it. It's not true. [Kielce, IDI-1]



Women who received training in the ‘male’ courses were mostly satisfied with them. Although they did mention they were worried about being surrounded by boys (so for instance all the girls would meet before school to enter the school in a group) but then these concerns would eventually stop. They were also positive about their relations with boys, saying that they found it easier to communicate with boys, and then men, because they are ‘simple’ less emotional, less confrontational.

They also mentioned good relations with their teachers. Female teachers were happy to see girls in classes dominated by boys. Members of staff openly expressed their concerns that it finding employment would prove challenging for the girls.

These concerns were not groundless. Women do seem to have poorer chances to find a job in traditionally male professions. Girls who graduated from a local vocational school printing class in Kielce experienced this problem first-hand. Even though there were no formal barriers and they could choose the desired course, they would not get a job at the printing mill.



The employer's approach needs to change. They should stop thinking 'a man can do this, a woman can't'. They should look at experience and skills. That kind of thing. [Olsztyn, IDI]

It turned out it was a problem, because so far no women had worked in the mill. (...) It's still like that. I've tried many times to get a job through my dad, because the pay is really good. (...) [Why do they refuse to employ women?] I don't know. No idea. There are female employers, but they all work in the office, administrative, accounting positions. That's all. They don't employ women at all. (...) And I'm sure that if I were a man, I would be there.

[Kielce, IDI-1]]

The women working in ‘male’ professions who took part in the study were not employed in ‘typical’ positions – their role was in many cases either an assistant or a coordinator; a person connecting the male operators and the office. This impacts their pay – there were cases where women’s pay was even three times lower than the men’s salary.



Women did not complain about the sanitary standards at the workplace. Sometimes the employer would create a separate toilet (changing room, a fridge) for a small number of female employees, and even if there was no separate space, it was not a problem for them.

Women are happy to work with men and they mentioned good working relationships (better than while working with other women) and getting on with male colleagues.

I always side with boys, even in my personal life. (...) I find it easier to communicate with them. They don't make things so complicated. [Siedlce, FGI, working]

Contrary to appearances it's easier to work with men than women. Men are more down to earth. [Kielce, IDI-2]

■ There is a strong need for social campaigns to fight traditionally understood notions of femininity and masculinity, and gender stereotypes. The campaigns should also promote vocational education of women in engineering-technical areas of study and professions relating to new technologies.

IS A BASIC VOCATIONAL SCHOOL A GOOD CHOICE?

On one hand, women with basic vocational education feel that they made fairly unambitious educational choice as general secondary school or vocational secondary school are now seen as a standard. On the other hand, however, they see that many people with tertiary education have difficulties finding a job and they accept jobs below their qualifications. The evaluation of their educational choice is somewhat ambivalent. In hindsight, the majority of women see their choice in a positive light, although their satisfaction is limited by their current difficulty to secure a permanent work contract, low pay and the common lack of respect for women with basic vocational education. Another problem they raised is the poor organisational culture of at the workplace.

For me it's idiotic to go to high school now. What do you get out of that? And that way you always have a profession. (...) From the very beginning you learn more in a basic vocational school. (...) You can learn something practical. I think it's the best option. You can always go to university afterwards, although university won't really teach you a profession, either. (...) I think it used to be a worse option in the past. That a basic vocational school was worse than something else. But it's changed now, I think. [Olsztyn, IDI]

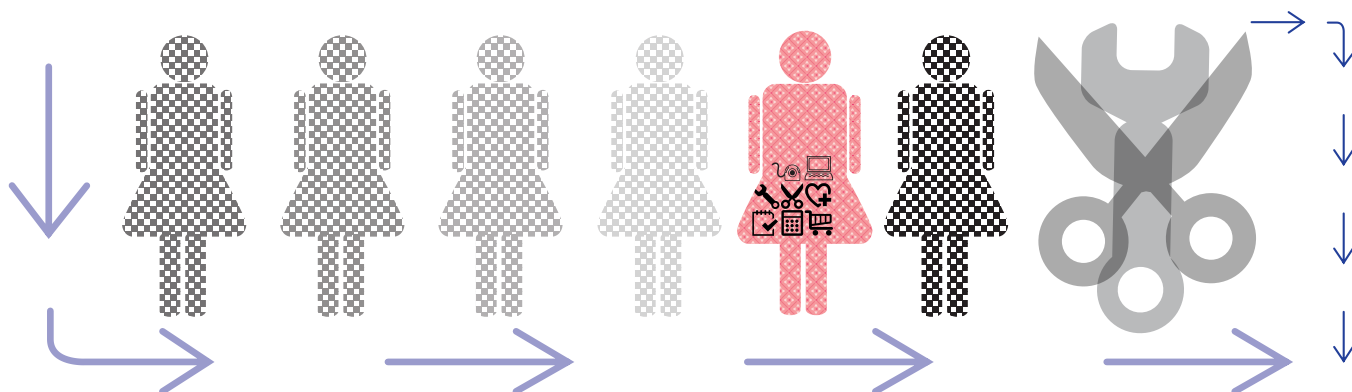


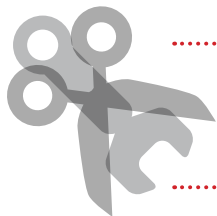
Lack of confidence and low self-esteem resulting from the presence of negative stereotypes concerning women with basic vocational education are more pronounced in those women who did not get the chance to sit their matriculation exam even though they intended to – either because of insufficient funds to go to evening school, or early pregnancy etcetera. This is why some of the women, despite being satisfied with having a profession, wish for their daughters to acquire secondary education. They would recommend a vocational secondary school as it offers both the opportunity to sit for the matriculation exam and a practical occupation.

Even though I completed a basic vocational school, I'm not satisfied with that. I'm glad I have a job, but inside I feel unfulfilled. I wish she could go further. Have a better education. You even feel better psychologically then. It's inside you, that you are... It's like, you have basic vocational school, and I – say, a technical university. (...) My cousin said that to me once, that with my education I can only sell carrots. (...) And that really hurt. [Kielce, IDI]

I will try to convince my daughter to go to a vocational secondary school. That way she'll have more opportunities after matriculation exam. She'll have a profession but also the foundations for further education if she wants to go further. [Siedlce, FGI, not working]

Paper [matriculation exam] just for myself. For my own self-esteem. [Siedlce, FGI, working]





Summary and conclusions

IN POLAND EDUCATIONAL PATHS OF BOYS AND GIRLS DIFFER SIGNIFICANTLY: girls choose general secondary schools (57%) and boys vocational education (66% of which 23% in basic vocational schools). Although BVS are not a very popular form of schooling but they constitute an important sector of education: overall, one sixth of young people decide to continue education in BVS. In 2013/14 his type of school was chosen by over one tenth of female students (11.0%) and nearly one fourth of boys (23.2%). Due to the fact that girls make different educational choices than boys, basic vocational schools remain decidedly masculine: boys constitute 72% of BVS students and the graduates who take the apprenticeship exams.

THERE ARE HUGE GEOGRAPHICAL DIFFERENCES WHEN IT COMES TO BASIC VOCATIONAL SCHOOLS AVAILABILITY. Western voivodeships are much more saturated with BVS (also with a number of classes) than the Eastern ones, located in the less industrialised part of the country. In the Western voivodeships a higher percentage of girls decide to attend BVS and they constitute a higher percentage of students. Although over the years 2006–2013 there has been a slight increase of female student numbers across one fourth of powiats, boys are still the dominant group in basic vocational schools.

SEGMENTATION AT THE BVS COURSES ACCORDING TO GENDER One cannot talk about basic vocational education without discussing gender. It is not just the question of greater number of male students, but above all the differences in educational choices of boys and girls. The engineering-technical course as well as architecture and construction one are virtual-

ly exclusively male with 99.6% male students. Girls dominate in economic-administrative course (86.2%) and the services course (74.5%). Among apprenticeship exam candidates of 2014 in the following professions: vehicle mechanic, mason, electrician, sanitary system fitter and iron worker there were no girls at all. The majority of female students (81.3%) took their apprenticeship exam to become a hairdresser. Basic vocational schools do not have an effective recruitment policy to address the gender diversity of students. In the interviews women mentioned cases of deliberate limiting of the access to a profession – school near Kielce did not accept female students for the mechanic course.

THE KEY BARRIER STOPPING WOMEN FROM CHOOSING THE 'MASCULINE' PROFESSIONS IS THE FEAR OF LOOSING THEIR FEMINITY AND THE CONSEQUENCES THEREOF – troubled relationship with male colleagues at a workplace but also with a husband/partner. There is also a widely held belief that it is hard for a woman to find a job in a typically male occupation. These concerns are to some extent confirmed by the experiences of women trained in 'male' professions who took part in the study. Although in many cases they worked in their profession, they were not employed in 'typical' positions – their role was in many cases either an assistant or a coordinator; a person connecting the male operators and the office. Their pay was also lower than their male counterparts. In general, women are happy to work in a male-dominated environment, they appreciate good relations with the male colleagues and they like the atmosphere in the workplace.

THE QUALITY OF TEACHING IN BASIC VOCATIONAL SCHOOLS in terms of women's evaluation of their preparation to enter the labour market and start working in their profession differed significantly between different schools. The key element of the evaluation of school is its apprenticeship system. A good apprenticeship scheme should guarantee both the necessary skills and introduce young people to the labour market. Placements are organised by companies carefully selected by the school and during the apprenticeship the employer can see the skills and predispositions of the student, therefore increasing his or her chances to find the first job – a key to entering the labour market. However, apprenticeship schemes do not always function this way and in some companies apprentices do not acquire new skills and competences (fictional apprenticeship: students come and sign the attendance or they are exploited as 'cheap working force', are involved in tasks which are not related to their professions). Apprenticeships organised by school-related units such as the school canteen or the school hair salon do not make it easier for young people to find a job, even if the level of acquired skills was high.

THE LABOUR MARKET FOR WOMEN AND MEN WITH BASIC VOCATIONAL EDUCATION. Situation of women with basic vocational education in the labour market is difficult. Although jobs are easily available, women find it difficult to find a job in their profession and get a permanent employment contract which guarantees social benefits and a living wage. Employers

do not wish to employ workers with no prior professional experience and therefore the key to success in the labour market is getting the first job. According to women, the family connections, apprenticeships at the companies and searching a job immediately after graduation facilitate entering the labour market. Women who find it most difficult to find a job are those who took a gap year after school or got pregnant and entered the labour market 2–3 years after graduation. In many cases women are forced to accept civil law contracts or to work in the grey zone. Men with basic vocational education find it easier than women to find a job, as there are more job offers in male professions and they are better paid.

The disadvantaged position of women in the labour market is also caused by the fact that employers perceive them through the prism of their future motherhood, that is, as mothers who will take a maternity leave or as mothers of little children who will take time off to look after the kids. Therefore, they see employing women as risky and typically ask about procreative plans and the number of children during the job interview; a permanent employment contract is often a subject of long negotiations.

RECONCILING FAMILY WITH PROFESSIONAL LIFE. Women with basic vocational education experience many problems while trying to reconcile their work and motherhood and family life. Two problems were particularly pronounced: the first was family planning (putting off the decision to have a child due to lack of work contract which guarantees benefits during pregnancy and after childbirth) and the second concerns difficulties with reconciling work with providing care for little children. In the focus group the situations when women received no social benefits as they gave birth after graduation and before starting their jobs or they were employed, but not offered a permanent employment contract were often. In case of single motherhood and lack of financial support from the father of the child the financial situation of these women was particularly hard and their immediate return to work was necessary.

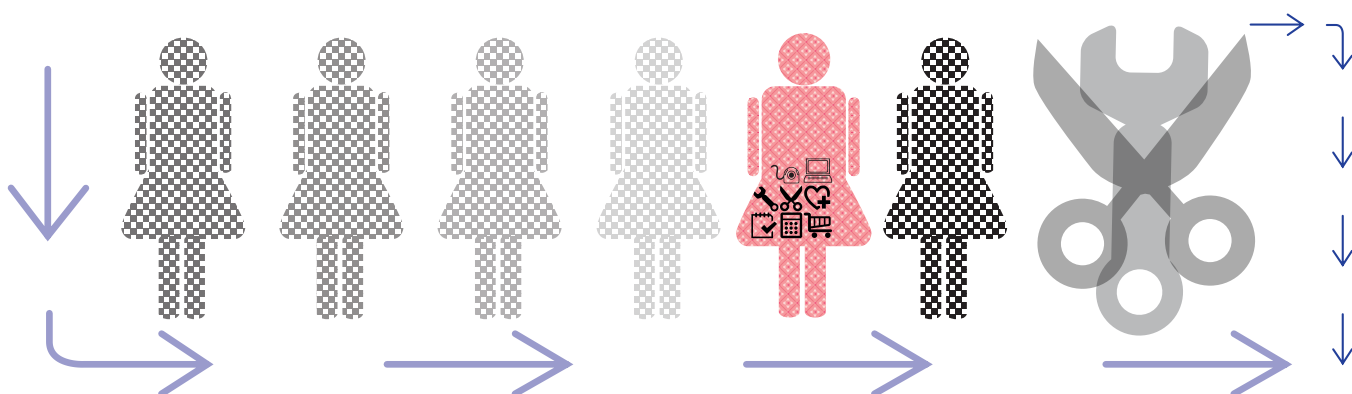
Securing day care for a small child is particularly difficult for women with basic vocational education. The women often work in shift system starting in early morning hours when nurseries and day-care centres are closed and school does not provide care. In this situation family becomes the only source of support and the woman's work is dependent on the help of the parents.

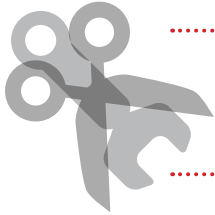
THE IMAGE OF WOMEN WITH BASIC VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND THE ORGANISATIONAL CULTURE OF THE WORKPLACE are two further factors which determine the situation of the women in the workplace as well as affect their self-image and self-esteem. In the interviews, women mentioned the unfavourable stereotypical image of women with basic vocational education as stupid, not particularly intelligent and unambitious, as well as coming from poor family backgrounds. They are seen as those who were too lazy to study and can only perform manual labour. This harmful stereotype seems to affect women more than men

and the reason for that is that men tend to choose more socially recognised courses such as the engineering-technical course. The low social status of women's education is further damaged by the poor social recognition of their professions.

Women felt the lack of respect from their employers. They often mentioned being 'kicked about', exploited by the employers and forced to work overtime. Lack of respect for the workers and a poor organisational culture in the workplace in Poland contrasted with the conditions they experienced while working in Western countries.

The lack of respect experienced by the women with basic vocational education, low organisational culture in the workplace, the difficulties to get a permanent job contract and low wages are the factors which limit the extent to which they are satisfied with having chosen a basic vocational school. Some of the women, despite being happy with having a profession, wish for their daughters to complete secondary school instead for the sake of their 'sense of self-esteem'.





Recommendations

1. In order to reduce male domination in basic vocational schools the educational offer provided for girls by these establishments needs to be more extensive and the training should include new professions. Girls ought to be encouraged to choose non-traditional for them occupational training courses relating to technology (including new technologies). To this end, the following recommendations apply:

- ▣ **running a social campaign, similar to the campaign „Dziewczyny na Politechniki” [‘Girls as Engineers!'] showing the advantages of choosing the ‘male’ courses in a basic vocational school (better chances of getting a job, higher salary);**
- ▣ **introducing a rule which would oblige the vocational counsellors in gymnasiums to encourage girls good at science (physics, mathematics, chemistry, etc.) to continue their education in technical professions;**
- ▣ **introducing a rule of gender diversity in basic vocational school recruitment process. It can take many forms, including a guaranteed number of places for girls in ‘male’ courses to avoid domination of one gender;**
- ▣ **funding a scholarship system for girls choosing ‘male’ courses at school (e.g. in those where the percentage of boys is higher than 70%);**
- ▣ **vocational counselling should be free from gender stereotypes and respond to the demands of the local labour market.**

All the actions aiming at reducing male domination in engineering and technical professions should be monitored and evaluated for its efficiency and modified accordingly.

2. In order to facilitate the labour market entry of the female BVS graduates, the vocational training should be closely connected to the local labour market. This is particularly important in case of those girls who learn the 'female' professions (e.g. hairdressers, confectioners, waitresses, sale assistants) due to a high labour market saturation with these professions. To this end:

- while creating certain study programmes, basic vocational schools should consult the local labour market. The schools should cooperate with the local labour offices and employers;
- local labour offices should monitor the labour market and cooperate with the local schools to stimulate student intake in those occupations which are currently in demand;
- apprenticeships should facilitate learning and skill acquisition and should therefore take place in relevant companies; schools should actively network with local employers;
- in order to avoid irregularities during the apprenticeship schemes, companies and institutions offering them should be monitored by the schools.

3. A series of social campaigns is needed to change the traditional understanding of masculinity and femininity and the notion of gender-relevant profession. Such change would make it much easier for girls to choose typically 'male' professions and for employers to offer women positions traditionally 'reserved' for men.

4. A relevant system of internships should be put in place to offer real support to women with basic vocational education. Internship scheme should be particularly addressed for those women with basic vocational education who return to the labour market or take their first job after a break resulting from childcare due to the intersectional-discrimination of this group (due to gender, motherhood and a relatively low education level).

5. The institutional system of childcare should be more adapted to the needs of women with basic vocational education, i.e. the shift work which starts from early morning hours and continues till late afternoon. The current system makes it difficult (or impossible) for women to work in shift scheme and therefore to reconcile their family duties with their professional life.

6. A series of social campaigns is needed to be carried out in order to develop and promote respect for every type of work and all the workers irrespective of their occupation. Such campaign would need to address the notorious problem of poor organisational culture at the workplace and promote positive relationships between employees and their supervisors and managers as well as securing working conditions which should, by law, respect the dignity of employees and guarantee freedom from mobbing.

