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Project number RRC11+072

**Women's Self-employment in Poland: A strategy for combining work and childcare?**

**Final report**  
**2. Summary**

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**Women's Self-employment in Poland: A strategy for combining work and childcare?**

The aim of this paper is to explore the role of self-employment in balancing economic activity with childbearing and childrearing in Poland.

In response to the threat of population aging, reconciliation of work and family has become an important topic in economic and demographic research. As self-employment offers a flexible working schedule, it might be an attractive strategy for achieving work-family balance. Consequently, promoting women's self-employment may lead to a simultaneous increase in fertility and women's labor market participation.

To establish whether self-employment can indeed help in combining paid work and family, qualitative and quantitative methods are applied. First, a set of in-depth interviews with young couples is analyzed to examine the motives for women's entrepreneurship. Second, representative survey data are used to establish the relationship between self-employment and motherhood.

The findings indicate that in the Polish context:

- Women's self-employment is perceived differently than men's. For men, it is mainly seen as a way of pursuing an independent professional career with good financial prospects. For women, self-employment is attractive mainly because it offers flexible working hours and an opportunity to work from home.
- Self-employment is appealing for women with childcare responsibilities. It can be an attractive alternative to being "only a housewife," or it can offer the opportunity to stay active in an adverse labor market.
- These views are supported by the quantitative analyses. The study finds that having a child increases the probability that a woman will become self-employed, especially if she was unemployed before her pregnancy.
- No support has been found for a hypothesis that self-employment may encourage childbearing.

The results support a general view that self-employment is perceived by women as offering greater scope for balancing work and family life. Nevertheless, self-employment does not seem to be the first choice for women. Entrepreneurship is, rather, an alternative to being unemployed, to being in a "bad job" (i.e., one that is inflexible, stressful, or demanding), or to being a housewife. Mothers who have an opportunity to work on "good" wage and salary contracts will opt for this form of employment rather than risk establishing their own business.

Given these findings, promoting self-employment might have a positive impact on the labor force participation of mothers. It is, however, doubtful that it will increase fertility in Poland. Instead, efforts to improve the situation of women in regular employment, and to allow these women to better combine work and motherhood, would likely be more effective.