

Grażyna Maniak
Department of Microeconomics
University of Szczecin
Mickiewicza Street 64-66
71-101 Szczecin
Poland

BASIC DILEMMAS OF POLISH LABOUR MARKET

Abstract

Many tendencies similar to those observed in other highly developed countries are noticed on the Polish labour market. Phenomena taking place on the market reflect political and economic transformations that occurred after 1989. Currently, the situation on the Polish labour market reflects mainly Polish companies' efforts to face up to the growing competition pressure on the domestic and transnational market. At the same time, Polish labour market is distinguished by a very distinctive feature- the highest in Europe- unemployment rate. The aim of this article is to describe current situation on the labour market in Poland with indicating fundamental dilemmas that should be solved as soon as possible.

Key words: labour market, employment, unemployment, economic activity

Economic activity in Poland and shaping of employment and unemployment in the period of 1990 and 2004

Polish labour market has been undergoing a continuous transformation for more than a decade. It's closely connected with three overlapping processes such as: economic transformation, globalisation and Polish accession to the European Union. All these processes mesh with each other and interpenetrate; they also result with some consequences for the labour market.

The process of establishing the common labour market was triggered by a political and economic transformation that began in Poland in 1990. The employee market dominating in centrally controlled economy was transformed into employer market typical for competitive economy.

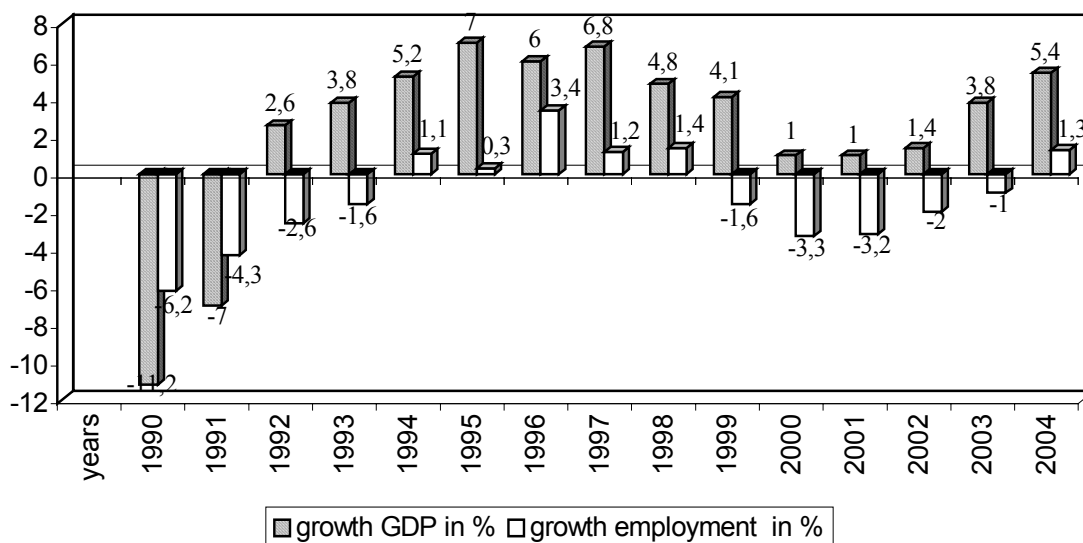
Changes in country's economic situation were reflected in shaping many economic indices. Taking impact of business conditions and economic growth on demand for labour into account, it's significant to examine relationships between mentioned processes in the period examined.

Development of enterprise plays a key role in the country's economic success. Implementing new undertakings, both by newly established enterprises and transformed ones, leads to productivity and competitiveness growth on the market what exerts a positive effect on the labour market and the entire economy. Since 1989, the vital part of the changes was the beginning of transformation including privatization of state companies, also creating the conditions for development of new enterprises.

Data represented in *Chart 1* indicates fall in GDP only in the initial tears of system transformation. It has been rising steadily since 1992. In terms of the dynamics of growth, in the period of 1992 and 1995, the rate of the economic growth increased from 2,6 to 7 per cent, whereas after 1995 its level, although still positive, began decrease. The increase in GDP has been noticeable since 2002, however higher dynamics of GDP was mainly the result of

pre-accession economic boom. Lack of long-term and more steady tendency for growth indicates that Polish economy is still undergoing transformation.

Chart 1. Economic growth and employment dynamics in Poland in the period 1990-2004



Source: own compilation based on the The Statistical Yearbook of the Main Office of Statistics (GUS), Warszawa (1991-2004)

The transformations that had taken place on the Polish labour market were very diversified in the time. Few fundamental phases can be distinguished:

- In the first period of transformation the characteristic feature of Polish labour market were two coexisting phenomena: fall in number of the employed and emergence of a large number of the unemployed. Main reasons for fall in employment and increase in unemployment in the first phase of transformation were: deep economic recession and restructuring of employment in companies, aimed at eliminating excessive employment and adjusting it to the conditions and requirements of market economy (Jarmołowicz, 2003, p. 73). In 1990, the number of employed in the economy diminished in comparison to the previous year by 6,2 per cent, in 1991 – by 4,6 per cent, in 1992 by 2,5 per cent, and in 1993 by 1,6 per cent. As data in *Chart 1* indicates, the falling tendency of employment was a fading one, which means that there appeared assimilation forces, allowing gradual overcoming of unfavourable tendency that accompanied the system transformation. In 1994, for first time since the starting point of transformation processes, an increase in the number of the employed was observed.
- Rapid economic expansion between 1995 and 1998 was also connected with gradual improvement of the situation on the labour market which resulted in fall in unemployment rate. The number of employed increased up to over 16 million, however despite of economic boom the negative tendency for the fall in professional activity didn't change.
- Third phase of the changes on the labour market began at the end of 1998 when, despite of still quite high economic growth, the positive trend in employment growth was reversed. From 1999 to the end of 2000 the number of employed decreased to almost 700.000, it resulted in the drop of employment rate (2 per cent) and unemployment rate increased by one third. Such drastic changes stopped next year.
- Regular weakening of economic growth in the period of 2001 and 2002 caused another deterioration of situation on the labour market, after all the dynamics of its impact was lower than in 1999. It should be noticed that in the examined period there was a sharper

drop in professional activity then in preceding years.

- Polish economy entered the final phase transformations on the labour market between 2002 and 2003, however the turning point didn't take place until 2004. Since that time a gradual increase in number of working population and decrease in the unemployment rate have been observed.

Observing changes in employment and pace of economic growth allows generalising upon an important regularity on the Polish labour market i.e. a situation when a total number of the employed was decreasing slower than GDP, and the fall in production level was not the only factor affecting the drop in employment. The decrease in efficiency in the period of economic recession (already observed in the countries with mature and functioning labour market) is usually justified by a strong institutionalisation of contemporary labour markets and accepted by both parties – employers and employees. Employers' associations – especially strong in Poland – are by nature interested in protection of workplaces. On the other hand, allowing for employment of temporarily redundant employees is to protect them against bearing additional costs relating to recruitment of new employees once situation on the product market will have altered (Kryńska, 2001 p. 164).

Moreover, revival of the economy was accompanied rather by increase in efficiency than increase in employment. In the period of revival, subsequent to a period of fall, number of the working group increased later and slower than the respective indices of economic growth. It resulted most probably from the fact that the, so-called, jobless growth, already dominant in so many (especially European) well-developed countries, occurred in Poland. Such low correlation of GDP growth and increase in demand for work is explained by a steady increase in work efficiency connected with technological progress. Economic growth is based to ever greater extent on implemented innovations, technological and organisational progress. In such conditions, the human factor gains more qualitative meaning, rather than quantitative – the key significance is ascribed to qualifications and competencies of employees, not to their number.

Another cause of jobless growth in Poland is associated with considerable costs of pay- and non-pay-related work factors, high tax and quasi-tax, as well as improved social standards. The above-mentioned factors cause that employers are willing to implement work-saving technologies and production techniques or subcontract essential services to other entities. Furthermore, employee is protected either by the labour legislation or a labour union (stronger or weaker), which also doesn't create favourable conditions for growth of demand for work.

Economic activity of the population in Poland

Situation on the labour market is mainly determined by social and demographic factors affecting size and structure of supply for work.

In the period of 1999 and 2002, the number of working-age population grew sharply by altogether 2 million people (*c.f. Table 1*). Such a substantial increase places Poland, in this respect, in the European lead. Demographic growth of population at working-age created good conditions for increase in labour resources. The most significant changes took place at the turn of the century, work supply in Poland amounted to 18 269 thousand people in 1999 and 18 192 thousand in 2000. Ever since the next year, the number of economically active people began to decrease. However, the economy's absorption capacity didn't allow using full labour potential that appeared on the labour market. The population boom constitutes one of the most significant factors that have determined the level of unemployment in Poland in recent years; in population of unemployed, young people (between 15 to 24 years of age) made up as much as 37,3 per cent in 2004.

Table 1. Economic activity of the population in the period 1990-2004

Years	working-age population ^a		Economically active			Activity rate ^c	Employment ^d	Unemployment rate ^b
	level	changes 1999=100	working ^b	Un-employed ^b	total			
	in thousand		in thousand					
1990	21 962	X	16 485	1 126	17 611	80,2	75,1	6,1
1991	22 056	94	15 772	2 156	17 928	79,5	71,5	11,4
1992	22 181	219	15 357	2 509	17 866	80,5	69,2	13,6
1993	22 333	371	15 118	2 890	18 008	80,6	67,7	16,4
1994	22 501	539	15 282	2 838	18 120	80,5	67,9	16,0
1995	22 647	685	15 486	2 629	18 115	80,0	68,4	14,9
1996	22 820	858	15 841	2 360	18 201	79,8	69,4	13,2
1997	23 014	1 052	16 229	1 826	18 055	78,5	70,5	10,3
1998	23 226	1 264	16 173	1 832	18 005	77,5	69,6	10,4
1999	23 424	1 462	15 919	2 350	18 269	78,0	68,0	13,1
2000	23 655	1 693	15 489	2 703	18 192	76,9	65,5	15,1
2001	23 920	1 958	14 996	3 115	18 111	75,7	62,7	17,5
2002	23 934	1 972	14 698	3 217	17 915	74,9	61,4	18,1
2003	24 039	2 077	12 641	3 176	15 817	65,8	52,6	20,0
2004	24 240	2 270	12 737	3 000	15 737	64,9	52,5	19,1

^a people between 18 – 59 (women) / 64 (men) years of age

^b data valid for 31.12.

^c quotient of the professionally active and number of population at production age x 100

^d quotient of working people and number of population at production age x 100

Source: own calculation based on The Statistical Yearbook of The Main Office of Statistics (GUS), issues from respective years

Data in *Table 1* indicates that in spite of increasing number of overall labour resources in the group of economically active, the number of working people is actually diminishing with a simultaneous growth of unemployment level. Similarly, coefficients of professional activity tend to be of falling values which places Poland in this respect below the level of professional activity of other European countries.

Coefficients of professional activity in the period examined were affected by such phenomena as follows:

- employing persons excluded from labour resources previously (it relates to those professionally passive at the starting point of transformation. In subsequent period, reforms of social security and health care system influenced further increase in unemployment. People who did not work or worked in the black economy, had not been protected by social security and at that moment, provided that they registered in the Employment Agency, they were granted the right to old age pension and health benefits),
- professional deactivation of people benefiting from disability and old age pensions,
- tightening of regulations of acquiring the unemployed status,
- gradual lengthening of education period of young people, connected, on one side, with their growing aspirations, and on the other, with shortage of job offers for this group of population,
- becoming economically passive by people discouraged by job seeking (a part of them presumably entered the underground economy) (Kryńska, 2001, pp. 169-170).

Number and structure of working group

There were on average 12 649 thousand working people in 2004. In comparison to 1990 the number decreased by 3 631 thousand people i.e. by 22 per cent (*c.f. Table 2*). The fall in the number of working people could have probably been caused by following conditions:

- lowered demand for goods and services,
- increase in group dismissals by privatised companies,
- closing down economic entities as a consequence of privatisation and bankruptcy,
- employment reduction in the public sector,
- changes in the forms of employment consisting of more frequent replacing employment contracts with those to perform specific tasks, order contracts, tele-jobs etc,
- lack of progress in creation of new work places.

The number of employed fell more sharply in the period examined than the number of working population which was balanced to some extent by increase in number of employers and self-employed. However, the fall in the number of employers and self-employed after 2002 can be observed. The total drop of self-employed in the period of 2002 and 2004 amounted to almost 2 million, it was mainly caused by the drop of working in agriculture.

Table 2. Employed persons^a by employment status in the period 1990-2004

Years	Total employed persons	Of which		
		Employed hired on the basis of an employment contract	Employers and own-account workers	Of which on private firms in agriculture
In thousand				
1990	16 280	11 375	4 424	3 329
1991	15 326	10 406	4 601	3 285
1992	14 677	9 575	4 850	3 262
1993	14 330	9 163	4 944	3 289
1994	14 475	9 106	5 171	3 551
1995	14 735	9 360	5 207	3 548
1996	15 020	9 360	5 208	3 675
1997	15 310	9 480	5 395	3 675
1998	15 120	9 442	5 298	3 655
1999	14 735	9 360	5 207	3 548
2000	15 018	9 354	5 523	3 676
2001	14 924	9 050	5 760	3 676
2002	14 784	8 916	5 758	3 676
2003	12 663	8 662	3 901	1 838
2004	12 649	8 652	3 897	1 838

^a annual averages

Source: based on the Statistical Yearbook of The Main Office of Statistics (GUS), issues from respective years

Although the general employment level tended to fall, in particular sectors of the economy the situation was diverse in this respect, which is indicative of structural transformations taking place at that moment. Sector structure of employment in Poland was affected by three overlapping tendencies: stabilisation of employment in agriculture,

reduction of employment in a part of the public sector and development of the private sector which weakened the fall in number of employed and even caused its increase in rapidly developing sectors.

Sector changes in employment structure are presented in *Table 3*. Changes in the structure of the ownership and, in particular, development of the private sector had a positive influence on the process of generating employment increase and stimulating demand for employees. The private sector in 2004 attracted over three fourths of the total working population in Poland, compared to the situation in 1990 when only 45 per cent worked in this sector.

Certain shifts occurred in the sector structure of employment in the period examined which resulted from structural transformations taking place in the economy. The employment changes in the 90's of the 20th century and in the first years of the 21st century are indicative of visible limitation of significance of industry and construction industry in the economy and of increasing importance of services sector (although in comparison to well-developed countries the increase pace is still too slow). The level of agriculture share (almost 25 per cent in 2003) is a disturbing fact especially that the level did not undergo any significant changes (falls) in the period examined. Relatively high share of working in agriculture is still a matter of concern, however a turning point took place in 2003, when it decreased by almost 13 percentage points.

Table 3. The employed by sectors^a in Poland in the period 1990-2004

Years	Total employed persons	Of which		Of which		
		Private sector	Public sector	In agriculture	In industry and construction	In services
1990	100	45,1	54,9	27,6	35,5	36,9
1991	100	54,1	45,9	26,7	25,8	47,5
1992	100	56	44	26,8	31,9	41,3
1993	100	58,6	41,4	26,7	30,6	42,7
1994	100	61,3	38,7	27	30	43
1995	100	61,9	38,1	27,1	29,4	43,5
1996	100	65,3	34,7	28,2	29,9	41,9
1997	100	67,2	32,8	27,5	29,5	43
1998	100	69,3	30,7	27,4	28,9	43,7
1999	100	71,9	28,1	27,6	27,7	44,7
2000	100	73,2	26,8	27,8	25,5	46,7
2001	100	73,9	26,1	29,2	25,2	45,6
2002	100	75,7	24,3	29,7	24,6	45,7
2003	100	74,2	25,8	17	27,6	55,4
2004	100	71	29	16,9	27,6	55,5

^a as of 31 XII

Source: own calculation based on the Statistical Yearbook of The Main Office of Statistics (GUS), issues from respective years

Quality of active labour resources (such as education of working people and the unemployed as well) is a crucial factor describing the labour market. As for the structure of the working population with regard to the level of their education, data in *Table 4* indicates that in the period examined number of people with primary and incomplete primary diminished in relation to total number of working population. At the same time, number of

people with higher and secondary education increased which is undoubtedly a positive tendency equivalent to increase in the value of human capital available on the Polish market.

Table 4. Structure of the employed by educational level in period 1992 and 2004 (in percent)

Years	Percentage of working persons by educational level				
	Tertiary	Post-secondary and secondary vocational	General secondary	Basic vocational	Lower secondary and primary
1992	10,2	26,7	5,9	31,5	25,7
1993	10,5	25,5	7,0	32,2	24,8
1994	11,1	27,2	6,3	32,9	22,5
1995	11,4	27,9	6,0	33,5	21,2
1996	11,6	28,2	6,0	34,0	20,2
1997	12,0	28,8	6,2	34,5	18,5
1998	13,0	29,5	6,1	34,6	16,8
1999	13,4	31,3	7,0	33,3	15,0
2000	14,1	30,5	7,0	33,6	14,8
2001	15,6	29,8	6,8	33,8	13,9
2002	17,1	29,9	7,1	32,6	13,2*
2003	19,1	29,1	7,6	32,3	11,9*
2004	20,6	29	7,9	31,3	11,2*

* including junior high school

Source: own calculation based on the Statistical Yearbook of The Main Office of Statistics (GUS), Warsaw, (1993-2005)

Age of working population should be also take into consideration while analysing. The median age of employed was ranging from 39,2 years (1992) to 40.1 years in 2004, revealing a clear downward trend in between 1996 and 1999. The phase of the age limit growth of working group started in 2002 (Chart 2). Therefore it can be stated that majority of Polish labour force is advanced in years and show the tendency for ageing.

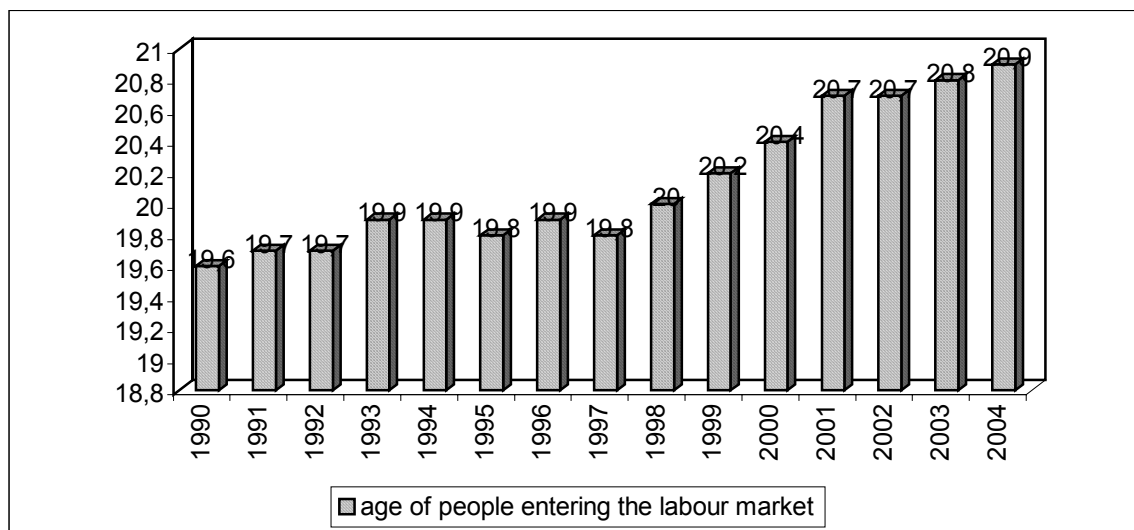
Chart 2. Average age of working between 1992-2004



Source : own calculation based on the Statistical Yearbook of the Main Office of Statistics (GUS), Warszawa (1991-2005)

Age of people entering the labour market for the first time was increased, from 19,6 years in 1990 to 20,9 years in 2004 (*Chart 3*). It is mainly connected with prolonged education. Young people who witness a very tough situation on the labour market, delay their start into the adult life, more and more often make a decision to continue education at secondary school or university. The rising number of students proves it. The number of students in Poland in 1990 amounted to 142 people per 10 thousand people (the average in the EU amounted to app. 300 people), however it amounted to 506 people in 2000 (the average in the EU amounted to 340 people). Slight fall of the number of students up to 492 was noted in 2003 (the average in the EU- 15 amounted to 349 students).

Chart 3. Average age of population taking a job for the first time between 1990 and 2004

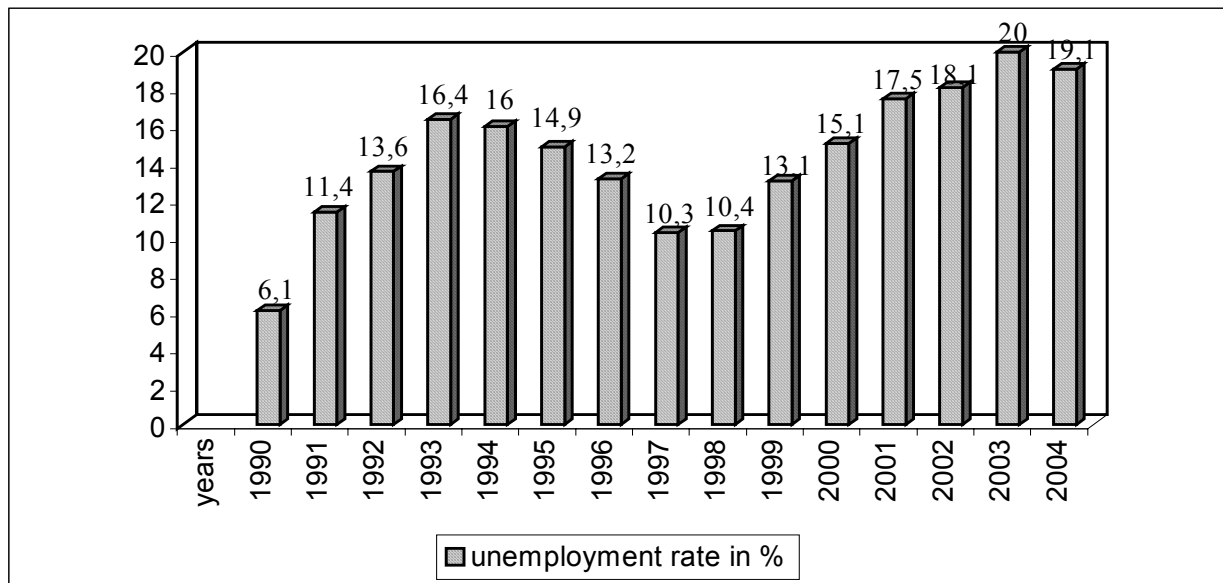


Source : own calculation based on the Statistical Yearbook of the Main Office of Statistics (GUS), Warszawa (1991-2005)

Size and structure of unemployment

The fact that a considerable surplus on the labour market emerged and continued in the period examined can be attributed to prior setting to motion the market mechanisms and, what follows, structural changes as well as disadvantageous relations between economic growth and employment. Although unemployment is treated as an inextricable aspect of market economy and free labour market, its scale and dynamics in Poland together with its negative consequences define economic and social price of system transformations, indicate to the level of maturity of Polish labour market but first of all they generate specific expectations as to the policy of employment and the labour market itself. (Data showed in *Chart 4* depicts shaping of unemployment rate in Poland between 1990-2004.)

Chart 4. Unemployment rate in Poland in the period of 1990 and 2004

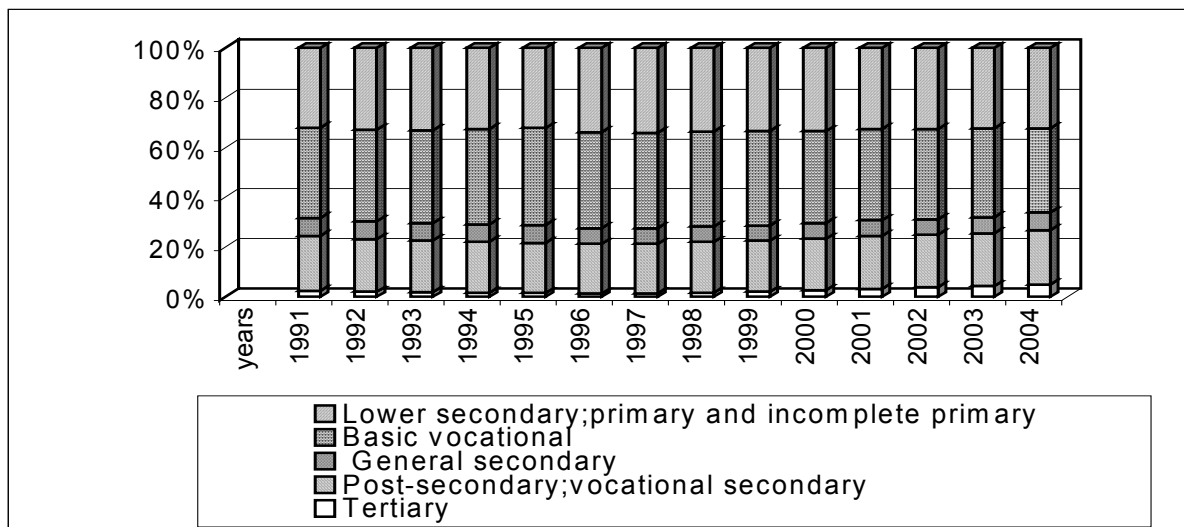


Source: The Statistical Yearbook of The Main Office of Statistics (GUS), issues from respective years

The reasons of unemployment in Poland are numerous. It is generally assumed that it results from transformation processes restructuring and changeable condition of the economy. Significance of the above-mentioned factors to the emergence and growth of unemployment varies in particular years in the period examined: apart from them, other sources of unemployment are mentioned in the specialist literature. On the basis of conducted analysis and research, as well as some generalisations, it might be said that the following are the most important determinants of unemployment in Poland:

- economic recession resulting from sudden lowering of global demand, both internal and external (especially in the period of 1990 and 1993) or slowing down of the economic growth rate;
- reduction of social unemployment (so called: hidden unemployment),
- restructuring of the economy,
- developmental neglect: decapitalisation and so called moral wear of production resources,
- economic underdevelopment of whole regions in the country,
- mechanism of establishing of salaries fund and taxation of its increase,
- passivity of attitudes and behaviour of numerous entities, not prepared (most frequently) to function in the reality of market economy with its risks and competition,
- low efficiency and inflexibility of employment agencies functioning, wide information gap,
- demographic factor – influx onto the labour market of persons born in the period of post-war population boom (the influence was particularly strong in recent years),
- maladjustment of levels and structure of education to the requirements of the labour market.

Chart 5. Registered unemployment by educational level in the period 1991-2004



Source: The Statistical Yearbook of The Main Office of Statistics (GUS), issues from respective years

Detailed analysis of intensity and structure of unemployment in Poland allows drawing conclusions as to its characteristics and dissimilarity in different population groups:

- intensity of unemployment among women is much higher in comparison to men
- the biggest share in the total number of the unemployed, especially at the beginning of the period examined, belong to young people, below 24 years of age (in the last years of the period examined unemployment rate in this age group amounted to approximately 25 per cent); it is a regularity that a threat of unemployment diminishes in subsequent age groups – the lowest among population of 45-year-olds,
- country population is more endangered unemployment,
- the danger of unemployment depends on the level of education: in 2004 unemployment rate among population with tertiary education amounted 5 per cent, with vocational secondary 21,9 per cent, general secondary 7 per cent, basic vocational 33,8 per cent, with lower secondary, primary or incomplete primary 32,3 per cent. The most worrying fact is that in the period of 1998 to 2004 unemployment rate among people with higher education increased to the greatest extent (by 3 times, whereas in other groups such growth was much lower: 1,5-1,6),
- intensity of unemployment is different in different regions of the country,
- great part of the unemployed are stricken with long-term unemployment (over 20 per cent of the unemployed in 2004 were looking for a job for more than 12 months, 33,7 per cent were without any work for more than 2 years).

Conclusions– dilemmas of Polish labour market

Tendencies in changes of size and structure of employment and unemployment taking place in Poland after 1990 to the considerable degree depend on factors such as: supply and demand for work and lack of adjusting to the labour market, state policy on the labour market and employers' attitudes and behaviour. The most serious challenge the labour market has to face is adjusting to requirements of modern and still developing economy. The emergence of unemployment on the large scale was an inevitable result of transformations that occurred in the economy. Although a temporary drop took place in the mid-90s, the unemployment rate

remains still high and decreasing the number of working in the economy is one of the most challenging problems to deal with by the Polish economic policy.

The most important features, phenomena and processes taking place on the labour market in recent years can be divided into two groups:

Main negative phenomena are as follows:

- Decrease in number of working, at the same time increase in number of the unemployed proves that some part of labour force in Poland isn't used.
- Low professional activity expressed by the professional activity index is below the value for high-developed EU countries. The difference between Poland and UE-15 has been amounted to 12 per cent in recent years, and between Poland and new member states- app. 9 per cent.
- Significant decrease in the employment of people aged 45 and over is caused to considerable extends by early disactivation possible thanks to availability of some welfare benefits (in Poland, the period of disactivation for people in non-mobile age begins app. 5 years earlier than in the EU-15).
- High percentage of population struck by unemployment is among, paradoxically, young people who are better educated than the other age groups. Low quality of human resource, occurs particularly among the unemployed.
- Growing percentage of the long-term unemployed (prolonged time without any work, also the fact that spatial distribution of unemployment remaining at similar level proves low professional and spatial mobility of Polish labour force and also lack of successful policy countering unemployment).

To positive changes on the Polish labour market observed in the period examined belong: lower number of working made much more goods and services in the entire economy. It's the result of employment restructuring (its size and structure) as well as increase in efficiency of work. It's also important that percentage of people with high qualifications is increasing.

The situation on the labour market is diverse in comparison to developed European economies. It's caused by factors: economic, structural and institutional in character. To structural ones belong: individual features of labour resources in Poland and other European countries and different and specific sector structure of Polish economy. To institutional factors belong establishing the background to the labour market such as: system of welfare benefits, the scope and efficiency of active labour market policy, flexibility of the labour law, level of minimal pay and level of non-pay-related labour costs.

Necessary structural changes on the labour market will be undergone under the influence of:

- Low competitiveness of Polish labour market, determined by relatively low productivity of labour force, high costs of labour and moderate level of qualifications available on the market of labour resources ;
- Relatively high growth of supply for work;
- Not good mechanism of shaping salaries;
- Inefficient functioning of labour market institutions and weakness of programmes and instruments of the labour market ;
- Insufficient flexibility of the labour market resulting both from limiting legal regulations concerning labour market and low professional and geographically mobility of labour force. The group with the highest declared and real willingness to mobility (professional and geographical) consists of young people (usually well educated). Over 60 per cent students of last years at the universities in Warsaw declare willingness to leave Poland and look for a job on the EU labour market. Such situation arises the threat of loss the most valuable human resources. Efficient use of such resources is the condition of

development of knowledge-based economy.

Taking above-mentioned into account, the chance for Polish labour market is active involvement of the economy into structures of the EU and taking advantages of new opportunities to enter the market of goods and services. Moreover, such policies as: tax, monetary, investment, SME, counteracting unemployment and labour market also have impact on the situation. Counteracting unemployment and labour market policies are submitted to so-called Luxembourg process [Employment...2003], which introduced in the member states the obligation of preparing new national action plans for employment. According to it, employment policy and labour market should be based on goals. The European strategy is based on 4 pillars:

- employability – improvement of ability to employ the unemployed and those threaten with unemployment;
- development of enterprise;
- improvement of adjusting ability to changing conditions on the labour market of companies and their employees;
- equality of chances.

Undoubtedly, the biggest chance for Polish labour market in the nearest future is the opportunity of sharing experience in solving problems on the labour market with the EU countries, which will be strengthened by financial support in form of structural funds. The improvement of situation depends not only on the way Poland will take advantage of the support, and the results will be visible after a long time.

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