

## Can the State Help with Fertility? Poland VS. Germany- An Analytical Approach<sup>1</sup>

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### ABSTRACT

This paper analyzes the problem of fertility in Poland and in Germany. For this purpose, I present instruments of family policy in both countries and assess their effectiveness. In particular, I raise the issue of cash benefits for children, the main task of which is to encourage the public to procreate more. I show that this form of state intervention may not fulfill its purpose, despite the considerable budgetary expenditures devoted to it. Accordingly, I propose other solutions – solutions that should increase fertility in both countries.

**Keywords:** fertility rate, family policy, cash benefits

**JEL classification indices:** J11, J13, J18

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The low fertility rate and aging population are among the most important challenges that not only Europe but the whole world faces today. The demographers expect that the old-age demographic dependency ratio (people aged sixty-five or above relative to those aged fifteen to sixty-four) will increase from 27.8 percent in 2013 to 50.1 percent in 2060 in the European Union. This means that the number of people of working age per person aged sixty-five years or more will decrease almost twofold (from four to two persons of working age) (European Commission 2015). Among other things, the potential labor shortage and the failure of pension systems mean that more and more attention is drawn to the problem of fertility, which seems to be the only salvation for developed and developing economies.<sup>3</sup> According to Eurostat data from 1964, the number of births for the current EU-28 countries fell from 7.7 million to approx. 5.3 million in 2011 (see figure 1).

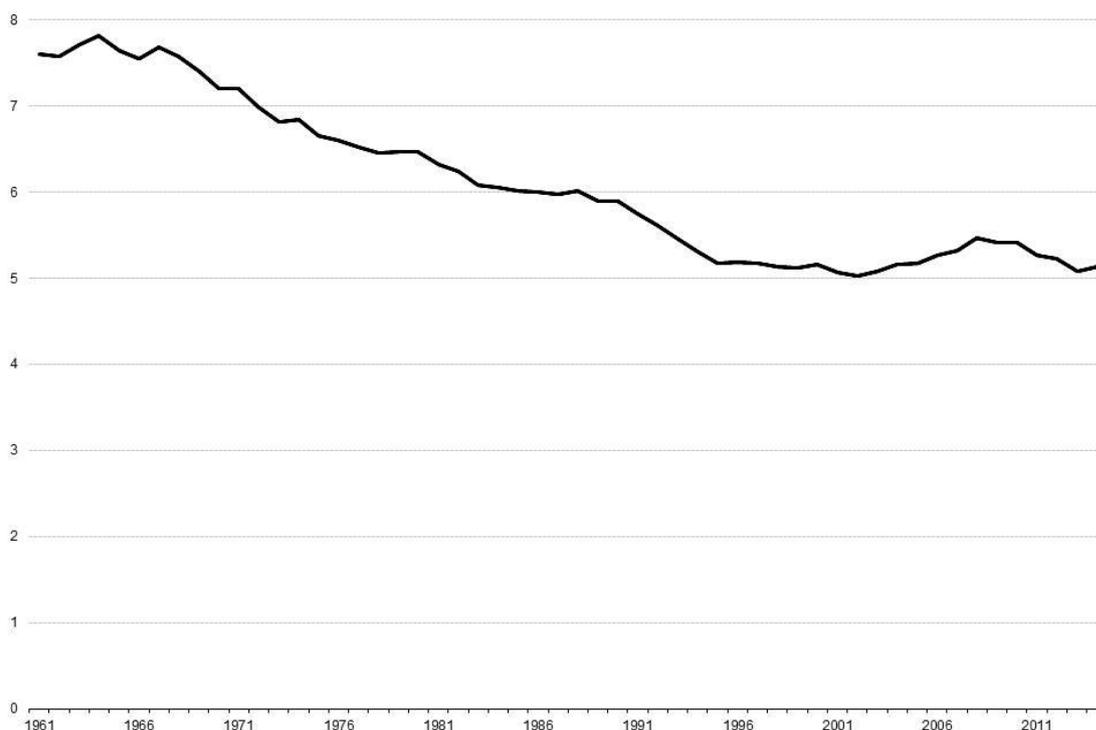


Figure 1. Number of live births (millions), EU-28, 1961–2014

(Source: Eurostat, [http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Fertility\\_statistics](http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Fertility_statistics), July 13, 2016)

The problem of fertility is significant in both Poland and Germany—neighboring countries with common history and current economic interests. For years, the fertility rate in these countries—the most common indicator of fertility—has been less than the average for all European Union countries. According to the data presented in figure 2, in 2014, this average was 1.58 for the EU-28 (which means that for every 100 women of childbearing age there were about 158 births), whereas in Poland the fertility rate in the same year was 1.32 (as with Portugal, Greece, Cyprus, and Spain, this was one of the lowest ratios among the countries analyzed) and in Germany, 1.47 (Eurostat 2016).

<sup>3</sup> According to the theory of the demographic-economic paradox, there is an inverse relationship between the wealth of a country and fertility (COAL 1986; Kröhnert and Klingholz 2008). Feyza Balan proves that for ten newly industrialized countries over the period 1980–2012, “a one percent change in the total fertility rate leads to a -1.201 percentage change in the level of per capita GDP while holding all other variables constant” (Balan 2015). This paradox is explained in essence by the rising opportunity costs of having children given women’s high labor force participation rates and vocational qualification (Kröhnert, Klingholz 2008).

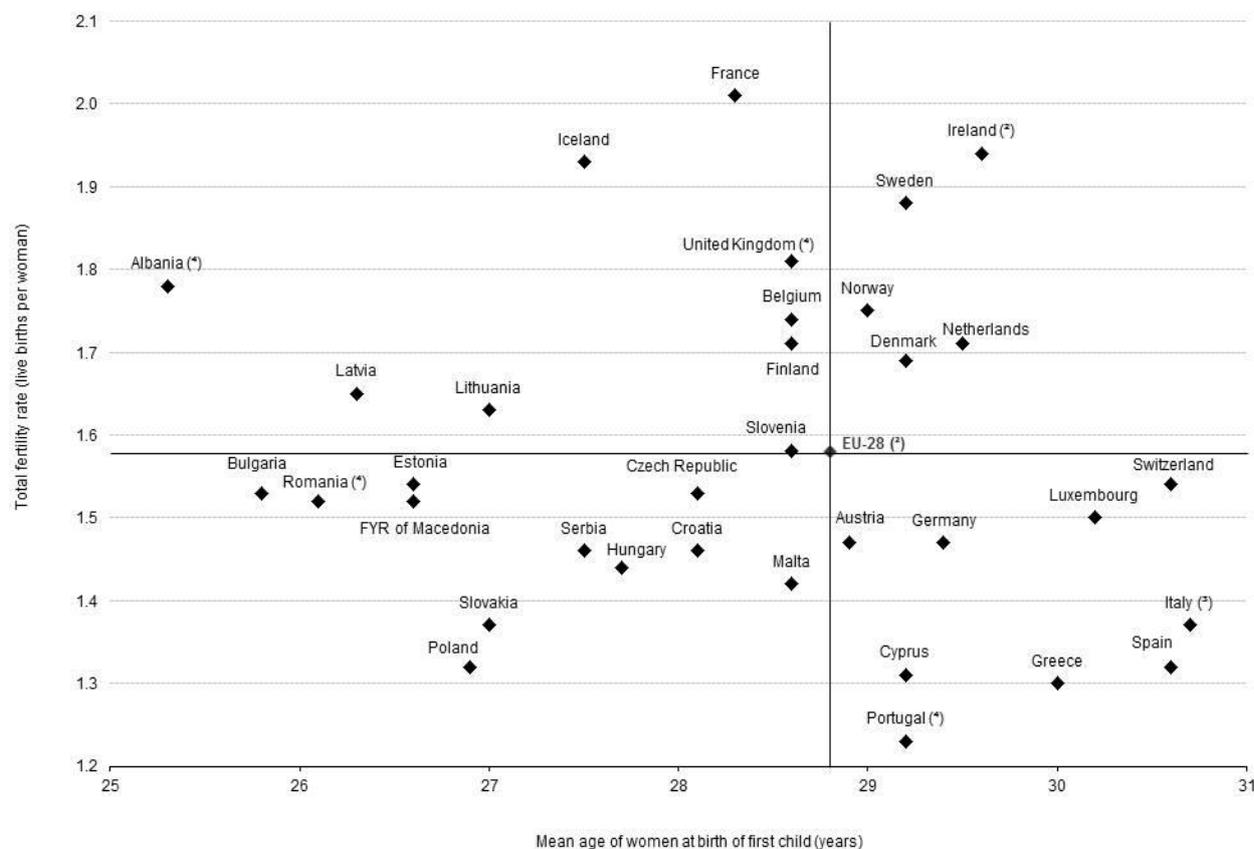


Figure 2. Fertility indicators, 2014.

(Source: Eurostat, [http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Fertility\\_statistics](http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Fertility_statistics), July 13, 2016)

Direct instruments of family policy are intended to ameliorate the above-described state of affairs.<sup>4</sup> According to the policies, the state should encourage people to have children or allow parents to reconcile work with raising their offspring more easily (Sobociński 2014; Kubiak 2010). What are the financial instruments of family policy practiced in Poland and in Germany? Do they increase fertility in both countries? This article tries to answer these research questions. First of all, I show the financial instruments family policy in Poland, and then in Germany. Then I analyze the relationship between monetary transfers in family policy (in both countries) and an indicator of fertility estimated for them. On this basis, as well as a review of the relevant literature, I propose solutions that may increase the fertility rate in both countries and solve the problem of generational replacement.

## 2. FAMILY POLICY IN POLAND AND IN GERMANY

Family policy is a part of the social policy implemented by the public authorities. The objectives and instruments of certain family policies are hard to define—not only do they depend on the state, they also change over time. Thus we can say that each country uses its own mix of objectives and instruments of family policy: from making financial transfers to offering specific services or facilities (Gauthier 1996; Saraceno 2011). The most frequently used instruments of family policy concerning families with small children include family holidays, nonparental childcare, tax instruments, and cash benefits (Gutierrez-Domenech 2002; Montanari 2000). Given the objective of this article, which is to assess the effectiveness of the cash benefits, I present these instruments below separately for Poland and Germany. I analyze the form of cash benefits during maternity leave, and in connection with the further stages of raising offspring.

<sup>4</sup> Family policy is a part of a social policy that falls into separate groups depending on its instruments and practices. For example, in accordance with one of the most popular concepts, Esping-Anderson (1990, 1999) in Germany classified as a conservative regime an amount of benefits that depends on the status of the unit, while Poland, a post-communist country, has no clear direction for social policy, which therefore situates it somewhere between conservative and liberal (Karpowicz 2006).

Note that in most countries in the European Union, benefits for women not working professionally are modest compared to the benefits obtained by mothers who qualify as employed. This means that the “right to benefits does not stem from the work that a mother does, bringing up children, but most of all it stems from the existence of costs associated with terminating the work” (Michoń 2008, p. 42). In addition, benefits associated with the birth and upbringing of the child perform the following functions: they are a direct source of family income; they compensate parents for the expenses associated with having a baby or lost income; they stimulate the directions that are considered important from a social point of view; or they affect certain attitudes and social behavior (Balcerzak-Paradowska 2002, p. 35).

### Cash Benefits as Instruments of Family Policy in Poland and in Germany

In Poland, the main<sup>5</sup> instruments of family policy concerning people with children are

- a) maternity allowance immediately after childbirth, and
- b) benefits under Program Family 500+ for children up to the age of eighteen.

Note that since the beginning of 2016 Polish law has changed the rules on maternity benefits concerning childbirth. Now, not only persons previously working, but also the unemployed and students receive 1,000,000 PLN (around 300 EUR) for a full year from the date of conception. On the other hand, persons employed on contract have two options. First, during a full maternity leave lasting twenty weeks (Art. 180 §1 k.p.) plus six weeks of parental leave (Art. 182<sup>1c</sup> §4 k.p.), parents receive 100 percent of the basic benefit,<sup>6</sup> and then for the next twenty weeks they can take advantage of parental leave and receive 60 percent of the base size of the benefit. Second, through the whole period of parental leave (twenty-six weeks—Art. 182<sup>1a</sup> §1 k.p.) and maternity leave (twenty weeks), for a total of fifty-two weeks, each month the parents receive 80 percent of the base size of the benefit (Art. 31 §1 and Art. 32 §2 of the act on cash benefits).

Apart from other social benefits, which often are granted to the poorest families, the most popular instrument of family policy in Poland is currently the 500+ program designed for all Polish citizens and foreigners specified by the law. On its basis parents receive 500 PLN (around 114 EUR) per month for the second and subsequent children under eighteen years of age regardless of the family’s income (Art. 2 §1 and Art. 5 Act on State Assistance in Child-Raising). Parents also have the option of receiving the benefit for the first child, but only if the income per person in the household does not exceed 800,00 PLN (around 183 EUR) per month.

Germany, like Poland, has similar redistributive instruments of family policy, although they are much more complex. Due to this fact we shall focus only on the most popular instruments<sup>7</sup> (Familie, Lebensformen, and Kinder 2016), which are

- a) *elterngeld* for the year after childbirth, and
- b) *kindergeld* benefits for children up to the age of eighteen.

*Elterngeld*, like the similar policy in Poland, goes till a year after the birth of a child. Its amount depends on the net income achieved in the last year by one of the parents, who devote themselves to the education of the child and give up gainful employment for that time. The amount of the benefit is 67 percent of net income, but does not exceed 1,800 EUR per month. The lower limit of the benefit is 300 EUR (Knetsch 2016). In addition, since January 7, 2015, Germany has extended the provision under the program *Elterngeld Plus* for parents who work up to thirty hours per week, mainly to allow parents to combine work with raising children. In this case, apart from the remuneration for work, parents also receive a benefit of half the *elterngeld* Germany pays to nonworking parents. The period for which a parent can receive the allowance is twenty-four months (for more on this subject, read Gesetz zum Elterngeld und zur Elternzeit).

*Kindergeld* is a benefit similar the Polish program 500+.<sup>8</sup> Germany grants it for each child if the parent is subject to an unlimited tax liability.<sup>9</sup> Parents generally receive the benefit for up to eighteen years of a child’s life, but the state may also extend it to up to twenty-five years to further the child’s education. Education in this case refers to studying, practice, and learning a profession. This law becomes inapplicable with the completion of the child’s education or if the child works more than twenty hours a week (Schön 2016). The amount of the benefit does not depend on the parents’ income. In 2016, for the first and second children, a parent receives 180 EUR per month, for the third 196 EUR, and for each additional child 221 EUR (Einkommensteuergesetz §66).

<sup>5</sup> Apart from the mentioned monetary instruments of family policy in Poland are other forms of benefits, such as family allowance or aid paid for childbirth, that use the income criterion.

<sup>6</sup> The basis of employee maternity benefits is the average monthly remuneration paid for a given year.

<sup>7</sup> Apart from the monetary benefits mentioned in this article, there are also other forms of family policy concerning children in Germany. These include, for example, *kinderschutzschlag*, the benefit granted to the poorest families.

<sup>8</sup> Germany, however, introduced such a form of support for children and their parents much earlier—as early as 1954. Scholars estimate that the German state currently spends nearly 40 billion EUR on *Kindergeld* (Dossier Familienpolitik 2016).

<sup>9</sup> A person may get unlimited tax liability after completing 183 days of work, in other words - six months.

### 3. RELATION BETWEEN EXPENDITURE IN FAMILY POLICY AND FERTILITY RATES— POLAND AND GERMANY

Social policy is extremely important in many countries, but often brings high costs with it. According to Eurostat, total expenditure on all social benefits in the European Union (EU-28) is approximately 30 percent of GDP (in 2012 it was 29.5 percent of GDP). A similar percentage can be found in Germany in particular (29.5 percent of GDP in 2012), while in Poland 18.1 percent of GDP were allocated to social services in the year under review (2012) (Table 1). Smaller expenditures on social benefits than in Poland were in Lithuania, Latvia, Romania, Estonia and Czech Republic (Eurostat, January 2015).

It should be noticed however, that in 2012 in the European Union, governments spent 7.5 percent of all expenses on social benefits concerning family (most money went to old age and health benefits [Eurostat, January 2015]).

Table 1. Expenditure on social protection 2002-2012 (% of GDP)

	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
<b>EU-28</b>	x	x	x	x	x	x	26,7	29,5	29,4	29,0	29,5
<b>EU-27</b>	x	x	x	27,0	26,6	26,1	26,7	29,6	29,4	29,0	29,5
<b>GERMANY</b>	30,4	30,8	30,0	29,9	28,7	27,7	28,0	31,5	30,6	29,4	29,5
<b>POLAND</b>	21,1	21,0	20,4	20,0	19,7	18,5	19,4	20,6	20,0	19,1	18,1

Source: own description based on Eurostat: [http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Social\\_protection\\_statistics](http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Social_protection_statistics)

Transfers paid under family policy aim to achieve a variety of objectives—from increasing fertility, to improving families' material well-being, to safeguarding conditions for a career. However, the experience of many countries shows that cash subsidies have a small impact relative to their costs (Cohen et al. 2013; Gonzales 2011; Gauthier and Hatzius 1997). Table 2 presents the available data on monetary benefits paid under family policy in Poland and in Germany in selected years (1990, 2000, 2009, 2010, and 2011).

Table 2. Fertility rate and cash benefits (million EUR) expenditures in Germany and Poland in 1990, 2000, 2009, 2010, 2011.

<b>POLAND</b>					
Year	1990	2000	2009	2010	2011
<b>Fertility rate</b>	2,06	1,37	1,41	1,41	1,33
<b>Cash benefits (million EUR)</b>	2 281,26	1 873,58	2 083,07	2 262,88	2 270,30
<b>GERMANY</b>					
Year	1990	2000	2009	2010	2011
<b>Fertility rate</b>	X	1,38	1,35	1,39	1,36
<b>Cash benefits (million EUR)</b>	22 227,1	29 865,0	30 119,3	30 203,0	29 683,2

Source: own description based on Eurostat: [https://stats.oecd.org/Index.aspx?DataSetCode=SOCX\\_AGG](https://stats.oecd.org/Index.aspx?DataSetCode=SOCX_AGG)

Of course, we should assume that not all of these benefits went toward increasing fertility, and thus it is hard to evaluate how big a percentage they represent of all benefits. Note, however, that Germany—currently more than twice the population of Poland—spends several times more than Poland on family policy, and the differences between the two countries, taking into account the fertility rate, are not as significant. For instance, in 2011,

Germany spent 29,683.2 million for the aforementioned benefits and had a fertility rate of 1.36, and in the same year Poland spent 2 270.30 million and had a fertility rate of 1.33 (Eurostat, Social Expenditure). This means that relative to Poland, Germany spent thirteen times more, and on average, each hundred women had only three children more.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

My article presented the monetary benefits granted to children as part of family policy in Poland and in Germany. On the basis of the presented analysis, I conclude that in both cases, this form of state aid does not significantly affect fertility relative to state expenditure. Of course, it should also be noted that one of the main problems concerning the total fertility rate is not primarily family policy, but a modern rebuilding of the women's hierarchy of importance. Many researchers note that current activity of women (including the process of extending the learning processes) becomes competitive to the family, which reduces their likelihood to have children, or causes them to postpone having a child till later in life (Auleytner 2011, p. 177; Kalinowska-Sufinowicz 2013, p. 63). In my opinion, to improve the effectiveness of family policy, one of the main goals of which is to increase the birth rate, we should pursue such solutions as the following:

- a) create incentives to employ women, mainly by promoting flexible forms of work such as part-time work;
- b) increase the number of institutions of child care and education, extending at the same time the parents' working time;
- c) conduct and disseminate additional training for women expanding their skills and knowledge, which may have decreased during pregnancy; and
- d) promote paternal care.<sup>10</sup>

Many studies, however (Michoń 2008; FOR 2015) show that of crucial importance to the problem of fertility is how to combine work with taking care of children. In countries with a relatively high fertility rate (see figure 3) and highly active women (e.g., Norway, the Netherlands, and Denmark), the majority of children up to three years are taken care of through institutional care (figure 4).

<sup>10</sup> See also Spytek-Bandurska (2005, p. 41) or Kröhnert and Klingholz (2008), the conclusions of which are partly consistent with the data presented in this article.

	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000	2010	2012	2013	2014
EU-28 (*)	:	:	:	:	:	1.62	1.58	1.54	1.58
Belgium (*)	2.54	2.25	1.68	1.62	1.67	1.86	1.79	1.75	1.74
Bulgaria	2.31	2.17	2.05	1.82	1.26	1.57	1.50	1.48	1.53
Czech Republic	2.09	1.92	2.08	1.90	1.15	1.51	1.45	1.46	1.53
Denmark	2.57	1.95	1.55	1.67	1.77	1.87	1.73	1.67	1.69
Germany (*)	:	:	:	:	1.38	1.39	1.38	1.39	1.47
Estonia	1.98	2.17	2.02	2.05	1.36	1.72	1.56	1.52	1.54
Ireland	3.78	3.85	3.21	2.11	1.89	2.05	2.01	1.96	1.94
Greece	2.23	2.40	2.23	1.39	1.25	1.48	1.34	1.29	1.30
Spain	:	:	2.20	1.36	1.23	1.37	1.32	1.27	1.32
France (*)	:	:	:	:	1.89	2.03	2.01	1.99	2.01
Croatia	:	:	:	:	:	1.55	1.51	1.46	1.46
Italy	2.37	2.38	1.64	1.33	1.26	1.46	1.43	1.39	1.37
Cyprus	:	:	:	2.41	1.64	1.44	1.39	1.30	1.31
Latvia	:	:	:	:	1.25	1.36	1.44	1.52	1.65
Lithuania	:	2.40	1.99	2.03	1.39	1.50	1.60	1.59	1.63
Luxembourg (*)	2.29	1.97	1.50	1.60	1.76	1.63	1.57	1.55	1.50
Hungary (*)	2.02	1.98	1.91	1.87	1.32	1.25	1.34	1.35	1.44
Malta	:	:	1.99	2.04	1.70	1.36	1.43	1.38	1.42
Netherlands	3.12	2.57	1.60	1.62	1.72	1.79	1.72	1.68	1.71
Austria	2.69	2.29	1.65	1.46	1.36	1.44	1.44	1.44	1.47
Poland (*)	:	:	:	2.06	1.37	1.41	1.33	1.29	1.32
Portugal	3.16	3.01	2.25	1.56	1.55	1.39	1.28	1.21	1.23
Romania	:	:	2.43	1.83	1.31	1.59	1.52	1.41	1.52
Slovenia	:	:	:	1.46	1.26	1.57	1.58	1.55	1.58
Slovakia	3.04	2.41	2.32	2.09	1.30	1.43	1.34	1.34	1.37
Finland	2.72	1.83	1.63	1.78	1.73	1.87	1.80	1.75	1.71
Sweden	:	1.92	1.68	2.13	1.54	1.98	1.91	1.89	1.88
United Kingdom	:	:	1.90	1.83	1.64	1.92	1.92	1.83	1.81
Iceland	:	2.81	2.48	2.30	2.08	2.20	2.04	1.93	1.93
Liechtenstein	:	:	:	:	1.57	1.40	1.51	1.45	1.59
Norway	:	2.50	1.72	1.93	1.85	1.95	1.85	1.78	1.75
Switzerland (*)	2.44	2.10	1.55	1.58	1.50	1.52	1.52	1.52	1.54
Montenegro	:	:	:	:	:	1.70	1.72	1.73	1.75
FYR of Macedonia	:	:	:	:	1.88	1.56	1.51	1.49	1.52
Albania	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	1.78
Serbia (*)	:	:	:	:	1.48	1.40	1.45	1.43	1.46
Turkey	:	:	:	:	:	2.04	2.09	2.08	2.17

Figure 3. Total fertility rate in Europe, 1960–2014  
 (Source: own description based on Eurostat:  
[http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Fertility\\_statistics](http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Fertility_statistics))

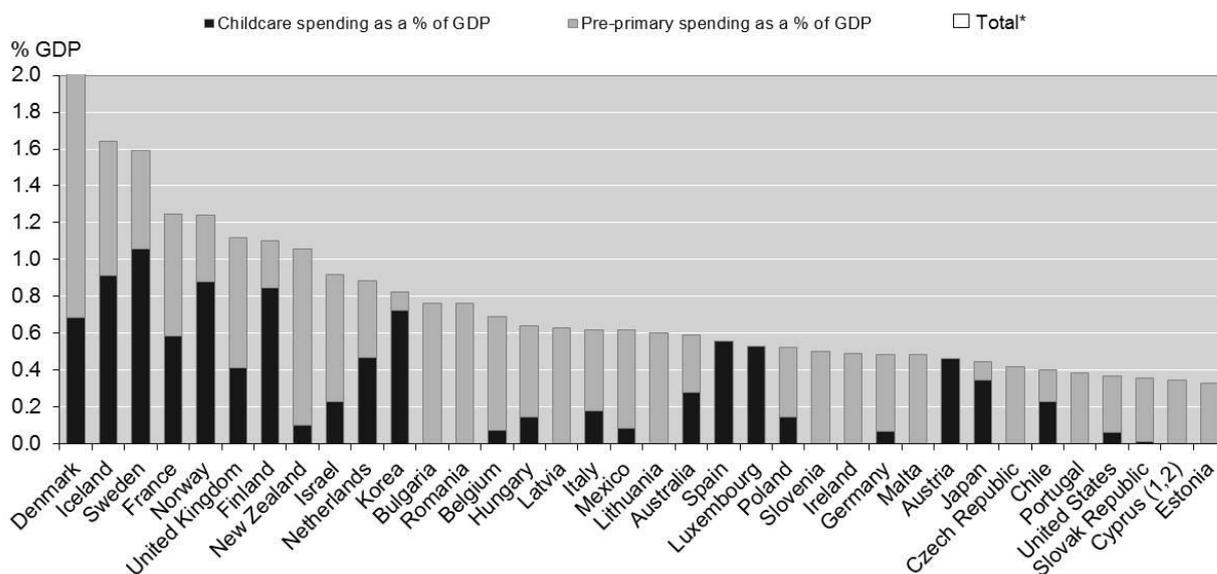


Figure 4. Public expenditure on childcare and preschool per child, 2011, in US\$

(Source:

OECD

2014,

[https://www.oecd.org/els/soc/PF3\\_1\\_Public\\_spending\\_on\\_childcare\\_and\\_early\\_education.pdf](https://www.oecd.org/els/soc/PF3_1_Public_spending_on_childcare_and_early_education.pdf))

According to the analysis above, state aid for educating children under three years of age, for example, can have a greater impact on fertility rates than assistance provided in preschool and further along. This means that programs like *kindergeld* or 500+ may not be effective as a means of solving the problem of generational replacement.

#### List of full names of Polish legal acts with translation

**k.p.** – Kodeks pracy—labor code

**u.o ś.p.** – Ustawa o świadczeniach pieniężnych—act on cash benefits

**u.o p.p.w w.d.** – Ustawa o pomocy państwa w wychowywaniu dzieci—act on state help in child upbringing



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#### Legal acts

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Gesetz zum Elterngeld und zur Elternzeit 27.01.2016 (BGBl. I S. 2748).

Ustawa z dnia 26 czerwca 1974 r. – Kodeks pracy, Dz. U. 1974 r., Nr 24, poz. 141.

Ustawa z dnia 25.06.1999 r. o świadczeniach pieniężnych z ubezpieczenia społecznego w razie choroby i macierzyństwa, Dz. U. Z 2016 poz. 372.

Ustawa z dnia 11 lutego 2016 r. o pomocy państwa w wychowywaniu dzieci, Dziennik Ustaw poz. 195.

Ustawa z dnia 22.06.2016 r. o zmianie ustawy – Kodeks pracy oraz niektórych innych ustaw, Dz. U. z 2016 r., poz. 1053.