

SELF-EMPLOYMENT AS A FORM OF ENTREPRENEURSHIP DEVELOPMENT IN RURAL AREAS IN POLAND

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Abstract

The complex socio-economic situation of the Polish rural areas and agriculture points to the need to reorient a significant part of the rural population, who should strive to undertake non-agricultural activities, mainly through self-employment. This study focuses on the issue of self-employment in rural areas. Since the early 1990s, the labour market in rural areas in Poland has undergone major political and economic changes. The purpose of this study is to explore the issue of self-employment as a form of entrepreneurship development in rural areas. This topic is presented as one of the elements of the labor market policy. In the research procedure, available secondary data were used, i.e. statistical data and the literature. Quantitative and qualitative analysis of self-employed persons from rural areas in Poland was also conducted. The presented data show a tendency towards positive changes in the group of self-employed persons from rural areas in the analyzed period.

Keywords: *self-employment, Poland, rural areas, entrepreneurship, development.*

JEL classification: *J2, J1, J6, L26, R11, R58, O1.*

1 Introduction

Self-employed entities constitute a specific category of companies belonging to the sector of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). The phenomenon of self-employment can be viewed from various angles, e.g. sociological, economic or legal. From the point of view of entrepreneurial theory, a self-employed person is an entrepreneur (Piasecki, 1998, p. 97). From a macroeconomic standpoint,

meanwhile, self-employment is one of the ways to make the labor market more flexible and is important in terms of unemployment.

This study focuses on the issue of self-employment in rural areas. Since the early 1990s, the labor market in rural areas in Poland has undergone major political and economic changes, European integration, globalization, demographic processes and the economic crisis (Zgliczyński, 2010). After 1990, the labor market in rural areas has coincided with agricultural activity less and less. Employment went down, unemployment went up, income from agricultural activity and living standards of rural households decreased. The changes taking place in rural areas in Poland are also one of the results of the overproduction of food, which forced the farms to increase the specialization and concentration of their production resources. Consequently, this leads to a drop in demand for labor, which in turn aggravates the problem of unemployment and the associated pauperization. The population so far operating exclusively within the realm of agricultural holdings is now increasingly taking actions to change their sources of income, including by means of small entrepreneurship (Otlowska, Buks, Chmieliński, 2006). This raises the question about the role of self-employment in Poland's rural areas, whose residents have been struggling with lower entrepreneurship rates than urban dwellers ever since the transformation period (Central Statistical Office, 2016, p. 172; Central Statistical Office, 2011, p. 171).

The purpose of this study is to explore the issue of self-employment as a form of entrepreneurship development in rural areas. This topic is presented as one of the elements of the labor market policy. In the research procedure, available secondary data were used, i.e. statistical data and the literature. Quantitative and qualitative analysis of self-employed persons from rural areas in Poland was also conducted.

2 Self-employment as a form of entrepreneurship development in rural areas - theoretical basis

2.1 Conceptual inconsistency of "self-employment"

Self-employment as a category of work is a quite intuitive and formally unspecified concept. In general terms, self-employment determines the situation in which a self-employed person bears all property consequences and economic risks associated with the performance of his or her business activity (Szanciło, 2005).

Here is no uniform, common definition of self-employment in Poland nor in any European country. In the Netherlands, for example, it is a person working on his or her own account, mainly as a subcontractor for another company. In

France, meanwhile, the concept of self-employment is reserved for entrepreneurs who are not employed in their enterprise, but may or may not hire employees. Self-employment in France is not limited to subcontracting since consumers can also be customers (Official Journal of the European Union, 2013). In Belgium, self-employment ("indépendants") includes freelancers as well as entrepreneurs who are sole proprietors, assignees (managers) in one-person companies, active partners ("associés actifs"). Self-employment in Belgium is thus equivalent to setting up a self-run business. In that case, one of the prerequisites is that the owner or his/her spouse or assistant demonstrates the ability to manage the company (Embassy of the Republic of Poland in Brussels).

Also in Polish legislation and classifications of employment status, the term "self-employment" is not clearly defined.

The word "self-employment" is never mentioned in the basic legal act that regulates running a business in Poland, i.e. in the Act on the Freedom of Economic Activity of 2 July 2004 (The Act 2004). Art. 2 of the Act explains only the concept of economic activity, which is gainful activity involving manufacturing (production), construction, trade, service and exploration, recognition and extraction of minerals from deposits, as well as professional activities, carried out in an organized and continuous fashion. On the other hand, an entrepreneur within the meaning of the Act is a natural person, a legal person and an organizational unit that is not a legal person, whose legal capacity is granted under a separate act - conducting business activity on their own behalf. In addition, partners of a civil partnership are also considered entrepreneurs in the scope of their business activity (Art. 4).

The term "self-employment" does not appear in the nomenclature of Polish official statistics, although the category "working on one's own account" is used. This group includes "employers", which means that it is possible to separate a group of self-employed persons who do not hire other people (that is, they are not employers).

As a consequence of the inconsistent definition of self-employment, diverse values characterizing the structure and phenomena associated with this category can be found in the literature.

2.2 The role and support of entrepreneurship in rural areas

The complex socio-economic situation of the Polish rural areas and agriculture points to the need to reorient a significant part of the rural population, who should strive to undertake non-agricultural activities, mainly through self-employment. However, rural areas are marked by low population density and entrepreneurship is particularly difficult in such circumstances. This is also confirmed by

the employment rate of the rural population in Poland, which, despite the growth, still fares unfavorably against the background of most EU countries, ahead only of Bulgaria, Croatia, Greece, Spain, Malta, Hungary and Italy (Frenkel, 2015). This is especially true for women and older people aged 55-64, and concerns slightly less the 15-24 age group. Endogenous entrepreneurship is now perceived as an important strategy for rural development and an important way to achieve competitiveness in rural and peripheral areas (Dinis, 2006). Among the significant local factors affecting entrepreneurship in rural areas are: demographic potential, absorption of the local labor market, size and type of unemployment, capital resources of the population, market absorption, technical infrastructure of local significance, state of the natural environment, aspirations of the local community, competence and resilience of local government, number and efficiency of institutions in business environment, tradition of entrepreneurship development. It is worth noting that without new jobs outside agriculture, the income of the rural population will not increase, and thus the modernization of rural areas will not be possible. The main barriers to entrepreneurship development in rural areas are (North, Smallbone, 2006):

- weakness of business environment - lack or insufficient training-and-consulting, information, financial, research-and-development and local-government institutions, which should support the creation of business entities,
- low integration and coordination of support programs and strong sectorality,
- quantitative rather than qualitative attitude in back-to-work schemes for the unemployed,
- excessive bureaucracy,
- insufficient activities that could effectively trigger the endogenous potential of rural residents,
- promoting solutions not always adapted to the real needs of rural residents, especially those located peripherally in relation to cities.

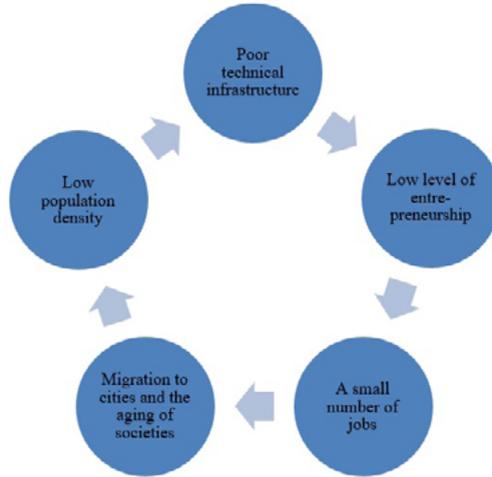
It is desirable to implement policies for stimulating potential sources of entrepreneurship and overcoming barriers to entrepreneurship development (North, Smallbone, 2006). Necessary are entrepreneurial activities that contribute to local development and improvement of the quality of life of rural residents. It is important to take into account the specificity of territorial capital, which will allow to develop and apply support measures for entrepreneurship with a distinction between rural and urban areas. Consequently, in line with the new paradigm of rural development, the promotion of entrepreneurship should be more holistic

and form an integral part of any development plan of rural areas (North, Smallbone, 2006; Korsgaard, Müller, Tanvig, 2015).

The development of self-employment is important from the standpoint of labor market policy as it contributes to a drop in unemployment and a rise in entrepreneurship. That is why this activity of the unemployed is supported by governments and EU programs. The development of entrepreneurship in rural areas in Poland is most strongly encouraged under the Polish Rural Development Program, focused mainly on the development of agricultural entrepreneurship. With that being said, other operational programs, e.g. "Knowledge Education Development 2014-2020", also provide assistance in this area. EU support programs are mainly aimed at eliminating the three most serious obstacles to the development of rural entrepreneurship - investment, education and infrastructure. The main intervention tools are direct subsidies for entrepreneurs, training programs as well as infrastructure development, which can act as stimulators of economic growth. The priorities of the European Commission regarding the Rural Development Policy (RDP) after 2013 are continuation and development of support measures in the period following Poland's accession to the European Union (Barska, Wyrwa, Jędrzejczak-Gas, 2016). The comprehensive support offered by the RDP strives for sustainable growth, maintaining the vitality of rural areas and increasing the competitiveness and profitability of the agricultural sector. The most important RDP objectives for 2014-2020 are (Gwizda, Kosewska-Kwaśny, Żółciński, 2014):

- improving the competitiveness of agriculture,
- sustainable management of natural resources and measures to counteract climate change,
- balanced territorial development of rural areas, including creation and maintenance of jobs.

It is worth noting that if no integrated measures are taken to provide conditions conducive to the development of rural entrepreneurship, these regions will be exposed to further marginalization. As regards the circular model of civilization degradation in rural areas (Figure 1), should the circle become interrupted at any point, it may trigger a stagnation and permanent civilization collapse in a given area.

Figure 1 Circular model of civilization degradation of rural areas

Source: The New Rural Paradigm: Policies and Governance, OECD Publishing, Paris 2006.

3 Data and Methods

Analysis and evaluation of self-employment in rural areas in Poland was carried out on the basis of generalized results of the representative Labor Force Survey (Polish: BAEL), as conducted by the Polish Central Statistical Office (Polish: GUS). The study covered the fourth quarters of the years 2012-2016. Choosing that particular research period was conditioned by the limited availability of statistical data. As of the third quarter of 2012, methodological changes were introduced in BAEL and these results proved not fully comparable with the results of previous surveys. The data for the fourth quarter of 2016 is the latest data published by GUS.

In order to make a quantitative and qualitative assessment of self-employment in rural areas, a comparative analysis of indicators of self-employment in cities and rural areas was conducted. The subject of the analysis and assessment were the following indicators: dynamics of total self-employment, share of self-employment in total employment, dynamics of self-employment in selected sections of the Polish Statistical Classification of Economic Activities (PKD), share of self-employment in total employment in selected sections of PKD.

Given that there is no formal, consistent definition of self-employment, and BAEL does not directly refer to the term "self-employment", only "working on one's own account", separate calculations of the rate of self-employment were made. The size of self-employment and the indicators presented above were estimated according to the definition proposed in the Polish literature, according to which self-employment is a form of work carried out individually on one's own account as an independent, non-agricultural business within a single enterprise or as a civil-law contract itself (e.g. contract for specific work), or in the case of tasks of a wider scope - with the help of co-workers, where a direct, personal and superior work contribution of the self-employed person is necessary in order to fully perform this task and possible cooperation with other people is temporary, non-continuous (Lasocki, Skrzek-Lubasińska 2017, p.11).

In this study, a definition was adopted according to which self-employment includes persons who are not employers and run business within the meaning of the Act that governs business in Poland (The Act, 2004), i.e. PKD, excluding the production activity of Section A - agriculture, forestry, hunting and fishing.

4 Results and Discussion - the state and dynamics of self-employment in rural areas in Poland

In 2012¹, there were over 13.7 million employed persons in Poland, of whom almost 4.4 million were from rural areas (31.8%). In the analyzed period, both the number of employed people and the working population of rural areas systematically increased by 6.8% and 13.2%, respectively, compared to 2012. Hence, in 2016, over 14.6 million people worked in Poland, of whom 4.9 million were employed rural residents (33.7%) (Table 1).

In 2012, the total number of self-employed persons was 980,000, of whom 219,000 were self-employed rural residents (22.3%). In the analyzed period, the number of self-employed people systematically increased. In 2016, compared to 2012, the number of self-employed persons in total increased by 14.1%, with the number of self-employed urban residents increasing by 6.4% and the number of self-employed rural residents increasing by as much as 40.6%. Hence, in 2016, the number of self-employed persons totaled 1,118,000, of whom 308,000 were self-employed rural residents (27.5%). In the analyzed period, there was an increase in the share of self-employed rural residents (and thus a decrease in self-employed urban residents) by 5.2 percentage points (Table 1).

¹ All data presented in this paper relate to the fourth quarters.

In the entire analyzed period, the share of self-employed persons in total employment was lower in rural areas than in cities. In each of the analyzed years, the rate remained for the most part unchanged (approx. 8%) for urban residents, while systematically growing for the self-employed rural population to reach 6.2% in 2016 (against 5% in 2012). While in 2012 the difference between the rate for self-employed residents of urban and rural areas was 3.1 percentage points, in 2016 it went down to 2.1 percentage points (Table 1).

Table 1 Self-employment in Poland in 2012-2016

Description		2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Total employment						
in thousands	Total	13728	13863	14175	14454	14664
	Urban	9367	9416	9609	9790	9726
	Rural	4361	4447	4566	4664	4938
previousyear =100	Total	-	101.0	102.3	102.0	101.5
	Urban	-	100.5	102.0	101.9	99.3
	Rural	-	102.0	102.7	102.1	105.9
Self-employment						
in thousands	Total	980	967	1023	1036	1118
	Urban	761	752	779	780	810
	Wieś	219	215	244	256	308
previousyear =100	Total	-	98.7	105.8	101.3	107.9
	Urban	-	98.8	103.6	100.1	103.8
	Rural	-	98.2	113.5	104.9	120.3
Share of self-employment in total employment						
%	Total	7.1	7.0	7.2	7.2	7.6
	Urban	8.1	8.0	8.1	8.0	8.3
	Rural	5.0	4.8	5.3	5.5	6.2

Source: Own study based on: Central Statistical Office, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017.

In the analyzed period, the majority of self-employed persons, both from cities and rural areas, ran companies dealing with trade and repairs. These were also the sectors where most jobs were created. Construction came out second and industrial processing third (Table 2).

Table 2 **Self-employment in Poland in different PKD sections, in 2010-2016**
 (in thousands)

Description		2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Total (except for agriculture, forestry, hunting and fishing)	Total	980	967	1023	1036	1118
	Urban	761	752	779	780	810
	Rural	219	215	244	256	308
Manufacturing	Total	89	89	99	102	117
	Urban	58	53	59	64	70
	Rural	31	36	40	38	47
Construction	Total	175	174	156	172	198
	Urban	104	108	93	91	106
	Rural	71	66	63	81	92
Trade and repair of motor vehicles	Total	274	265	272	267	243
	Urban	193	178	176	174	146
	Rural	81	87	96	93	97
Transportation and storage	Total	87	76	83	90	91
	Urban	62	53	57	65	64
	Rural	25	23	26	25	27
Education	Total	21	33	28	28	32
	Urban	21	27	23	24	28
	Rural	-	6	5	4	4
Human health and social work activities	Total	64	69	71	77	79
	Urban	50	55	60	65	65
	Rural	14	14	11	12	14

Source: Own study based on: Central Statistical Office, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017.

Analyzing the change in the number of self-employed persons in the period under consideration for selected PKD sections, it can be observed that for all sections there are significant amplitudes of fluctuations in the dynamics indices calculated in relation to the previous year. Analyzing the changes that occurred in 2016 in comparison with 2012, it can be seen that the highest increase was recorded for self-employed residents of rural areas operating in industrial processing (an increase by almost 52%). In 2016, still compared to 2012, 4 sections (industry, construction, trade and repairs of motor vehicles, transportation and storage), the number of self-employed rural residents increased to a much greater extent than

for urban residents. The opposite applied to only 2 sections (education, health care and social assistance) (Table 3).

Table 3 Dynamics of self-employment in Poland in different PKD sections, in 2012-2016

Description		2013	2014	2015	2016	2016
		previous year = 100				year 2012=100
Total (except for agriculture, forestry, hunting and fishing)	Total	98.7	105.8	101.3	107.9	114.1
	Urban	98.8	103.6	100.1	103.8	106.4
	Rural	98.2	113.5	104.9	120.3	140.6
Manufacturing	Total	100.0	111.2	103.0	114.7	131.5
	Urban	91.4	111.3	108.5	109.4	120.7
	Rural	116.1	111.1	95.0	123.7	151.6
Construction	Total	99.4	89.7	110.3	115.1	113.1
	Urban	103.8	86.1	97.8	116.5	101.9
	Rural	93.0	95.5	128.6	113.6	129.6
Trade and repair of motor vehicles	Total	96.7	102.6	98.2	91.0	88.7
	Urban	92.2	98.9	98.9	83.9	75.6
	Rural	107.4	110.3	96.9	104.3	119.8
Transportation and storage	Total	87.4	109.2	108.4	101.1	104.6
	Urban	85.5	107.5	114.0	98.5	103.2
	Rural	92.0	113.0	96.2	108.0	108.0
Education	Total	157.1	84.8	100.0	114.3	152.4
	Urban	128.6	85.2	104.3	116.7	133.3
	Rural		83.3	80.0	100.0	
Human health and social work activities	Total	107.8	102.9	108.5	102.6	123.4
	Urban	110.0	109.1	108.3	100.0	130.0
	Rural	100.0	78.6	109.1	116.7	100.0

Source: Own study based on: Central Statistical Office, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017.

In the entire analyzed period, the share of self-employed persons in total employment varied depending on the type of economic activity. The highest rates, both for rural and urban residents, were recorded in construction, trade and repairs as well as transportation and materials management, while the lowest concerned

education and manufacturing. This rate systematically increased mainly with respect to rural residents self-employed in construction and industrial processing.

Table 4 Share of self-employment in total employment in Poland in selected PKD sections, in 2010-2016 (%)

Description		2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Total (except for agriculture, forestry, hunting and fishing)	Total	7,1	7,0	7,2	7,2	7,6
	Urban	8,1	8,0	8,1	8,0	8,3
	Rural	5,0	4,8	5,3	5,5	6,2
Manufacturing	Total	3,0	2,9	3,2	3,2	3,6
	Urban	3,3	2,9	3,2	3,4	3,7
	Rural	2,6	2,8	3,1	3,1	3,4
Construction	Total	14,1	15,0	13,1	13,8	15,9
	Urban	14,8	15,8	13,8	13,0	15,2
	Rural	13,2	13,6	12,3	14,9	16,8
Trade and repair of motor vehicles	Total	12,2	11,8	11,7	11,2	10,3
	Urban	12,3	11,4	11,3	11,0	9,6
	Rural	11,7	12,6	12,3	11,7	11,5
Transportation and storage	Total	9,3	8,2	9,1	9,3	9,5
	Urban	10,8	9,0	9,5	10,7	10,4
	Rural	7,4	6,9	8,2	7,1	7,5
Education	Total	2,0	2,3	2,2	2,2	2,7
	Urban	2,4	3,0	2,5	2,6	3,4
	Rural	-	1,7	1,5	1,2	1,1
Human health and social work activities	Total	6,3	6,8	7,5	7,7	7,8
	Urban	7,0	7,9	8,6	8,9	9,1
	Rural	5,7	5,4	4,3	4,5	4,8

Source: Own study based on: Central Statistical Office, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017.

4 Conclusion

Unfavorable socio-economic phenomena are observed in rural areas in Poland. Among these phenomena, the following should be mentioned: the declining role of agriculture as a source of income, unfavorable structure and relations of production factors, high unemployment and undeveloped labor force surplus, and

income disparity of rural households. These factors force residents of rural areas to seek solutions aimed at creating sources of non-agricultural income. The antidote to the unfavorable situation in rural areas in Poland may be rural entrepreneurship implemented through self-employment, which is an important factor in the economic “activation” of rural areas in Poland. The presented data show a tendency towards positive changes in the group of self-employed persons from rural areas in the analyzed period.

Analysis and evaluation of the self-employment rates contained in this paper indicate that:

- In the analyzed period, the number of self-employed persons systematically increased. In 2016, the number of self-employed from rural areas increased by as much as 40.6% compared to 2012 (the number of self-employed persons from urban areas increased by only 6.4%).
- In the entire analyzed period, the share of self-employed persons in total employment was lower in rural areas than in cities, but it systematically increased, which made the existing gap decrease from 3.1 percentage points in 2012 to 2.1 percentage points in 2016.
- Out of all PKD sections, the highest growth in the number of self-employed persons concerned rural residents working in industrial processing, with an increase of almost 52% compared to 2012 (with an increase of 21% in cities).
- In 2016, compared to 2012, the number of self-employed rural residents increased more than that of self-employed urban residents in four sections (industry, construction, trade and repairs of motor vehicles, transportation and storage); the opposite applied to only 2 sections (education, health care and social assistance).

The development of entrepreneurship at local level is largely dependent on the interaction of variables such as: involvement of local government, investment attractiveness of the commune (Polish: *gmina*), and entrepreneurial attitudes of rural residents. It is important to make farmers’ families aware of the need to seek income from several sources. According to K. Gutkowska, the so-called “activation” of entrepreneurship in rural areas may be implemented through: development of rural infrastructure, development of agricultural products, use of local mineral resources, use of production resources of rural areas, including environmental resources and landscape values (Gutowska, 2009). Also noted should be the importance of various governmental and EU back-to-work schemes and

programs (such as non-repayable grants or training), aimed primarily at the unemployed.

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