
**HOUSING SITUATION IN THE VOIVODSHIPS
OF EASTERN POLAND AS THE BORDER REGIONS
OF THE EUROPEAN UNION**

Marcin Janusz

Chair of Social Policy
University of Warmia and Mazury in Olsztyn

Key words: housing situation, eastern wall, housing policy, border area of the European Union.

A b s t r a c t

The paper aims at determining the housing situation in the voivodships of eastern Poland as the border region of the European Union. The indicators characterizing the eastern regions of Poland were collected and compared with the other areas of Poland, Poland as a whole and corresponding international parameters. The studies confirmed the poor housing situation in the eastern Poland as indicated by earlier analyses. The low standard of housing, overpopulation and, first of all, a significant statistical deficit of housing units are the major problems of housing in eastern Poland. These are mainly the effects of the heritage of the past and insufficient activities aiming at improvement of the housing situation during the period of transformation. Stable housing policy and increase of the position of the state and local governments in creating it, first of all thanks to the structural funds originating from the European Union directly linked to the housing are necessary for improvement of that situation.

**SYTUACJA MIESZKANIOWA W WOJEWÓDZTWACH POLSKI WSCHODNIEJ
JAKO POGRANICZA UNII EUROPEJSKIEJ**

Marcin Janusz

Katedra Polityki Społecznej
Uniwersytet Warmińsko-Mazurski w Olsztynie

Słowa kluczowe: sytuacja mieszkaniowa, ściana wschodnia, polityka mieszkaniowa, pogranicze Unii Europejskiej.

A b s t r a k t

Celem artykułu jest próba określenia sytuacji mieszkaniowej województw Polski Wschodniej jako pogranicza Unii Europejskiej. Zestawiono wskaźniki charakteryzujące wschodnie regiony kraju na tle innych obszarów Polski oraz porównano wskaźniki międzynarodowe. Badania potwierdziły

wynikający z wcześniejszych analiz zły stan sytuacji mieszkaniowej w Polsce Wschodniej. Niski standard zamieszkania, przeludnienie oraz przede wszystkim znaczny deficyt statystyczny mieszkań jest podstawowym problemem mieszkalnictwa Polski Wschodniej. Jest to w głównej mierze efekt dziedzictwa przeszłości, któremu w okresie transformacji odpowiadały niedostateczne działania w zakresie poprawy sytuacji mieszkaniowej. W celu poprawy tej sytuacji niezbędna staje się stabilna polityka mieszkaniowa oraz wzrost znaczenia państwa i samorządów lokalnych w jej kreowaniu, przede wszystkim dzięki funduszom strukturalnym pochodzącym ze środków Unii Europejskiej, bezpośrednio związanych z mieszkalnictwem.

Introduction

After 1989, a lot has already been written about the Polish housing policy and situation (NIECIUŃSKI 2005, CESARSKI 2007). Lack of long-term programs, systemic backwardness and, first of all, continually reported demand for housing have become the voice that has never ceased after the economic transformation. Currently, the statistic deficit of housing units in Poland understood as the difference between the number of households and the number of housing units is estimated at 1–2 million housing units (ŚLESICKA 2007, p. 69). This is a consequence of numerous processes taking place in the Polish society with a significant increase in the share of single person households and the propensity of the youth to gain independence quickly, but first of all the heritage of the past until 1989 and subjecting the housing development to excessively large influence of the market during the transformation period (CZAPIŃSKI, PANEK 2007, CESARSKI 2005). Lack of housing units or willingness to purchase a housing unit is also frequent arguments in declarations of the young people expressing their propensity for migration.

As a result of the Schengen Treaty implementation on the 21st of December 2007 the territory of the Republic of Poland became an integral part of the European Union with particular consideration of the customs regulations. The eastern voivodships of Poland have become the border regions of the European Union. At the same time, when Podkarpackie, Lubelskie, Podlaskie and Warmińsko-Mazurskie voivodships are complemented by Świętokrzyskie voivodship we obtain the specification of one of the poorest regions in the Union in the categories of per capita GDP (*Regional GDP...* 2009). The perspective of the socio-economic diagnose of the situation along the eastern EU borders seems interesting in a number of levels, among them also from the perspective of the housing situation.

This paper attempts at analyzing the housing situation in the eastern voivodships of Poland and comparison of some data in that area with the information concerning the EU countries, considering the domestic context of Polish housing. The analysis used the basic indicators characterizing the scope

and subject of housing policy studies (ANDRZEJEWSKI 1987), and the availability of empirical materials was the selection criterion.

To conduct the comparative analysis the basic indicators of the housing situation in Poland and in its eastern voivodships were compared to the corresponding data for the other European Union countries. In this paper they were compared first of all with the countries that in 2002 acceded to the European Union together with Poland.

Status and characteristics of the housing resources

The largest housing resources exist in voivodships with the largest population, i.e. Mazowieckie and Silesian with ca. 1,9 and 1,6 million housing units respectively.

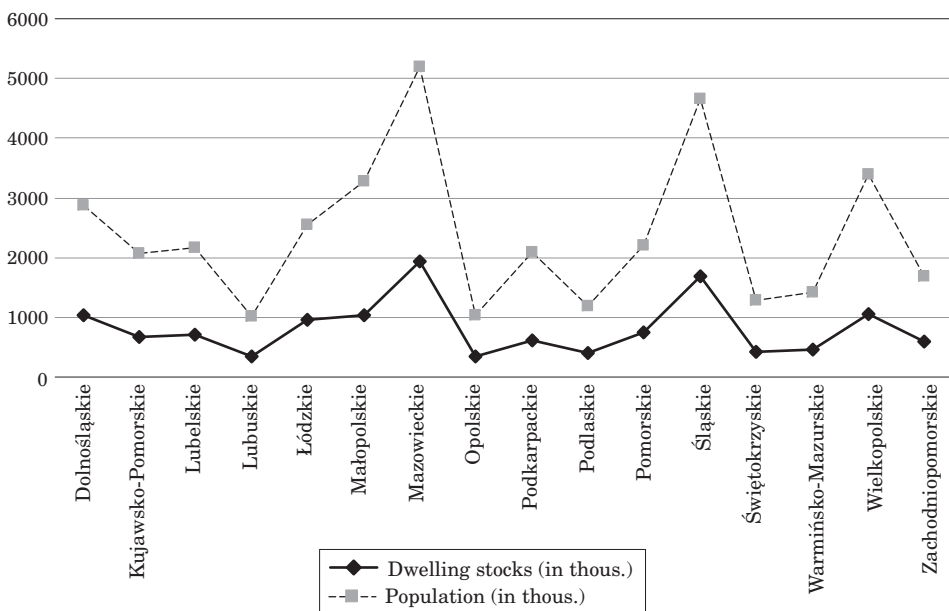


Fig. 1. Housing resources and population of voivodships in Poland in 2007

Source: Own work based on the: *Regiony Polski*. 2008. GUS, Warszawa.

The smallest housing resources, on the other hand, are found in Opolskie, Podlaskie, Świętokrzyskie and Warmińsko-Mazurskie voivodships. The statistical data analysis indicates that the eastern Poland areas are the least urbanized and possess low levels of housing resources.

The average usable area of a Polish housing unit in 2007 (Fig. 2) was around 70 m². From the perspective of the area significantly exceeding the national average Podkarpackie voivodship was outstanding (over 77 m²), while the average usable area of a housing unit in Warmińsko-Mazurskie voivodship was the lowest in the country at 65 m² only. The remaining voivodships of eastern Poland were characterized by the housing unit area exceeding 72 m².

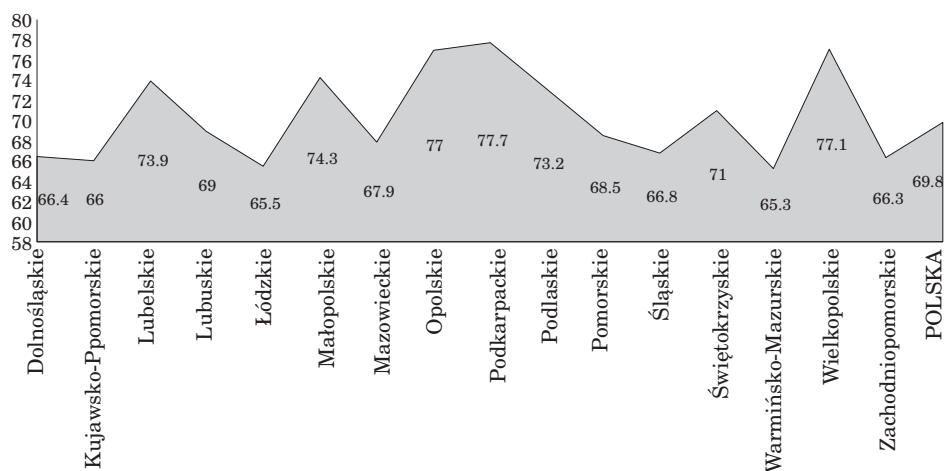


Fig. 2. Average usable area of 1 housing unit in the Polish voivodships in 2007 (m²)

Source: Own work based on the: *Regiony Polski*. 2008. GUS, Warszawa.

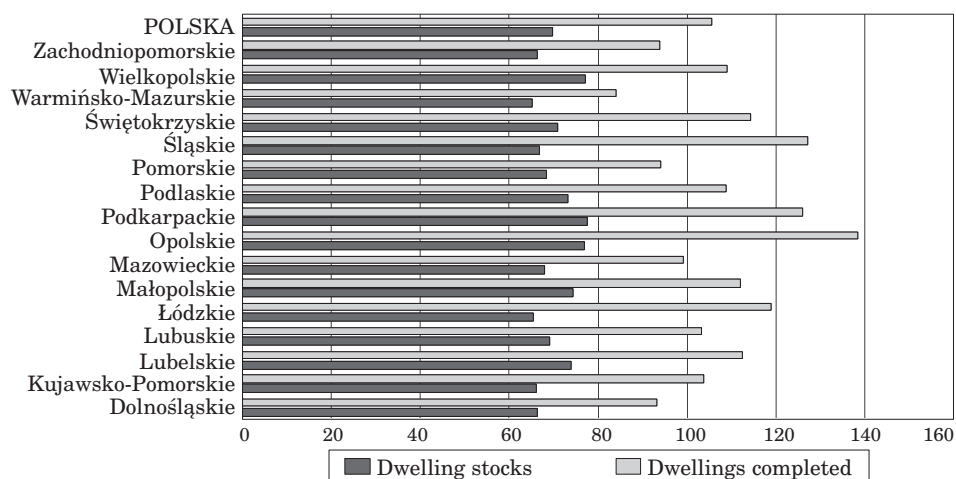


Fig. 3. Housing resources versus housing units commissioned for use in Polish voivodships in 2007 (m²)

Source: Own work based on the: *Regiony Polski*. 2008. GUS, Warszawa.

The average usable area of a housing unit commissioned for use in 2007 in each voivodship exceeded the average area of the average housing unit in the resource of the given region significantly (Fig. 3).

Compared to 69,8 m² of average usable area of the average Polish housing unit, the newly commissioned units were more than 30 m² larger in usable area. The largest increase was recorded in voivodships characterized by the largest size of housing units, i.e., among others in Podkarpackie and Opolskie voivodships. Also Podlaskie voivodship deserves attention (increase from 73,2 m² of the average area to 110,8 m² of the newly commissioned housing units). In Lubelskie voivodship the new housing units were 108,9 m² in average.

Warmińsko-Mazurskie voivodship is characterized by the smallest size of the average housing unit in Poland (65,3 m²) and the smallest average size of the newly commissioned housing units among all the voivodships (84,3 m² only).

Housing conditions

The number of housing units per 1000 persons is the basic indicator in housing applied also for international comparisons. No more than four housing units commissioned for use per 1000 people in Poland (Fig. 4) ranks it in a relatively low position in Europe.

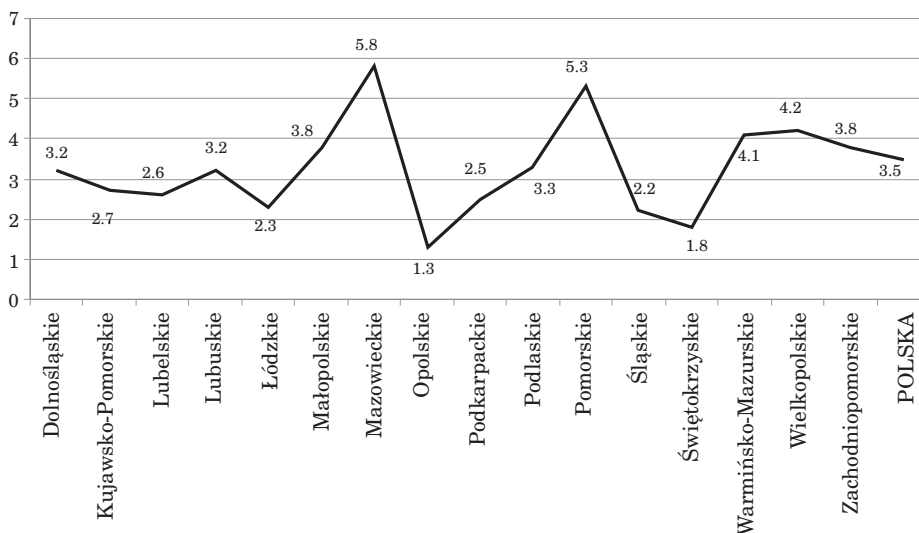


Fig. 4. Number of housing units commissioned for use per 1000 people in voivodships of Poland in 2007

Source: Own work based on the: *Regiony Polski*. 2008. GUS, Warszawa.

The highest numbers of housing units were commissioned for use in Mazowieckie and Pomeranian voivodships, which exceed the average for Poland significantly. What is worth noticing, Warmińsko-Mazurskie voivodship is the next voivodship, in which that indicator has a high value. The situation is highly unfavorable in Opolskie and Świętokrzyskie voivodships. In those areas fewer than two housing units per 1000 people are commissioned for use. The remaining eastern voivodships commission not much less housing units per 1000 people than the national average.

The average housing unit in Poland in 2007 was occupied by 3 persons (Fig. 5). The largest number of residents per housing unit was found in Podkarpackie voivodship where 1 unit was occupied by 3,5 persons in average. It seems that this may result from the fact that more than one household, the second of which is usually incomplete, reside under one roof. In the other voivodships covered one housing unit was occupied by ca. 3 persons. Analyzing that aspect of Polish housing just a minor diversification of the average number of residents occupying a single housing unit is observed¹.

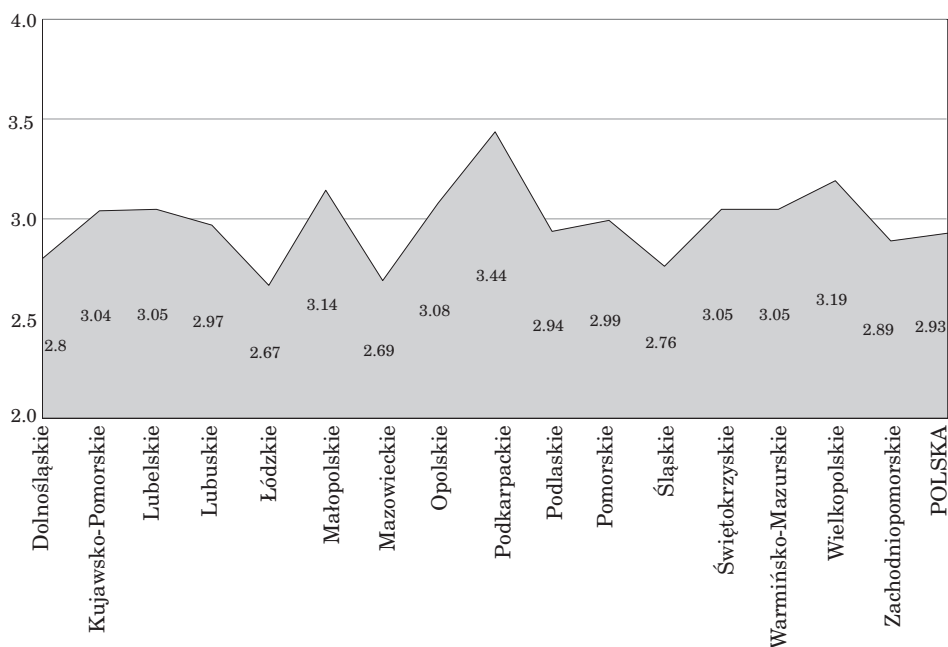


Fig. 5. Average number of occupants per 1 housing unit in Polish voivodships in 2007
Source: Own work based on the: *Regiony Polski*. 2008. GUS, Warszawa.

¹ Comparing at the same time the Polish indicators to the European averages it should be noticed that in that aspect the effects are highly unsatisfactory.

The situation in that aspect was the most favorable in Łódzkie, Silesian and Mazowieckie voivodships. That situation seems favorable as those voivodships are populated by the largest numbers of the Poles.

Housing units commissioned for use in 2007 possessed in average 4,34 rooms (Fig. 6). The largest numbers of rooms were recorded in housing units newly commissioned for use in Podkarpackie (larger by 27% than the national average) and Opolskie voivodship. The lowest number of rooms among the studied units was recorded in Warmińsko-Mazurskie voivodship where the average number of rooms in the unit was lower by 10% than the national average).

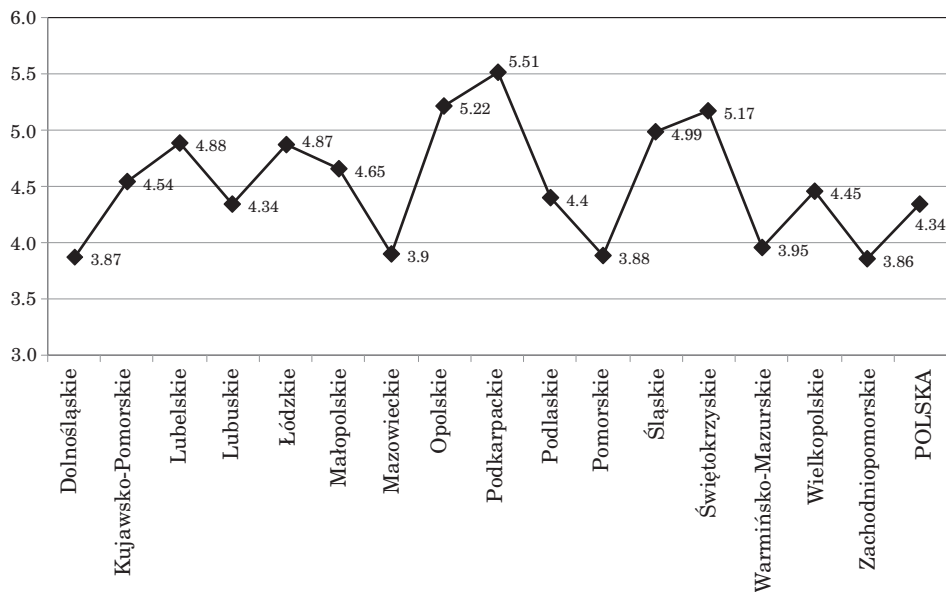


Fig. 6. Average number of rooms in housing units commissioned for use in Polish voivodships in 2007
Source: Own work based on the: *Budownictwo mieszkaniowe I-IV kw 2007. 2008.* GUS, Warszawa.

Analyzing the average usable area of a single room it should be noticed that Podkarpackie voivodship was characterized by the largest area of the new housing units and the largest number of rooms per unit is at the same time characterized by low area of a single room (lower by 5% than the national average). The other regions analyzed also do not look too well. In case of Podlaskie and Lubelskie voivodships they rank around the national average.

Warmińsko-Mazurskie voivodship looks the worst in that aspect as the average area of one room there is smaller by 3 m² than the national average

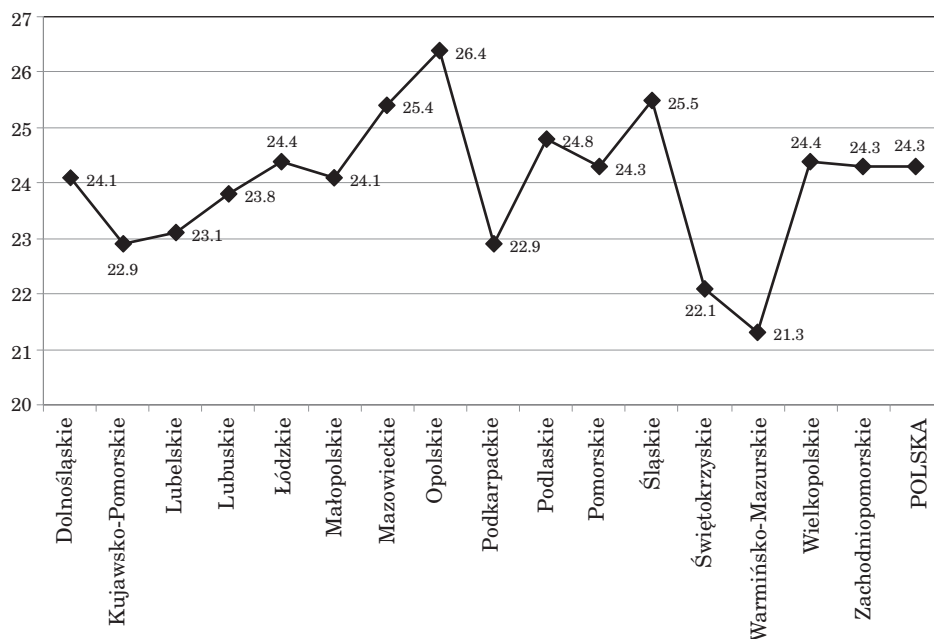


Fig. 7. Average size of 1 room commissioned for use in Polish voivodships in 2007 (m²)

Source: Own work based on the: *Budownictwo mieszkaniowe I-IV kw 2007. 2008.* GUS, Warszawa.

and that size is smaller by 5 m² in average than the average room in Opolskie voivodship where the rooms are the largest in the country (Fig. 7).

Considering the analysis of housing standards the equipment of housing units with the basic facilities and installations was investigated by voivodship. A large diversity was observed among the voivodships covered.

Warmińsko-Mazurskie voivodship has the results slightly exceeding the average values for Poland (with the exception of gas installation). Lubelskie voivodship shows the lowest saturation with water supply systems. It also has the lowest share of housing units equipped with the toilet or bathroom. The situation where more than every tenth housing unit has no access to running water represents an unfavorable situation with no doubt. The disproportion between Lubelskie voivodship and the leader in that aspect, Pomeranian voivodship is at the level of 15%. Podlaskie voivodship is characterized by the lowest among all Polish voivodships share of housing units equipped with gas installations. Lubelskie voivodship looks only slightly better. The largest share of housing units equipped with network gas is found in Podkarpackie voivodship and the difference between Podkarpackie and Podlaskie voivodships is at the level of 40%

Table 1
Equipment of housing units with basic utilities and installations in Polish voivodships in 2007

Voivodship	Percentage of housing units equipped with				
	water supply	toilet	bathroom	network gas	central heating
Lower Silesian	97.8	88.3	86.7	66.4	76.3
Kujawsko-Pomorskie	96.9	89.2	86.3	50	77.4
Lubelskie	88.3	75.9	76.2	40.5	71
Lubuskie	97.3	89.8	88.3	54.2	75.4
Łódzkie	92.4	81.5	79.5	44	72.9
Małopolskie	95.1	89.4	89.3	65.7	77.3
Mazowieckie	92.6	87.1	85.8	59	81.7
Opolskie	97.7	90.2	90.2	45.8	78.9
Podkarpackie	92.3	84.1	85.1	71.5	72.6
Podlaskie	90.9	81.8	82.1	29.2	74.3
Pomeranian	98.7	94.4	91.7	57.7	81.3
Silesian	98.2	91.6	90.5	63.4	79
Świętokrzyskie	88.2	76.4	76.9	39.2	74.5
Warmińsko-Mazurskie	96.4	89.5	87.9	48.2	78.4
Wielkopolskie	97.6	90.8	89.3	49.4	78.1
Western Pomeranian	98.8	92.4	91	62.1	81.8
Poland	95.1	87.6	86.5	55.6	77.5

Source: *Powiaty w Polsce*. 2007. GUS, Warszawa.

In conclusion it must be noticed that the voivodships of north-eastern Poland are characterized with visible insufficient equipment of the housing units as compared to the other areas of Poland. Relatively many of them are situated in four neighboring voivodships. This applies in particular to Lubelskie and Podlaskie voivodships.

Elements of housing situation in the eastern voivodships as compared to Poland and other European Union countries

The housing resources of selected countries were highly diversified, which is reflected in the size of population and area of the country. Becoming a full member of the European structures Poland possessed nominally the highest number of housing units among all the acceding countries (Tab. 2). The real image of the housing situation, however, is visible only after comparing the above data internationally. It is found out then that Poland has the lowest

number of housing units per 1000 residents. This results in the situation where Poland has a larger number of households than the number of housing units, which simply translates into a statistical deficit. The consequence is that two or more households occupy a single housing unit. The living standards offered by the developed countries of Western Europe are currently unattainable for Poland.

Table 2
Number of housing units per 1000 residents in Poland and selected European Union countries in 2002

Country	Total population (in thousands)	Total number of housing units (in thousands)	Number of housing units per 1000 residents
Poland	38232	11763	308
Bulgaria	7868	3692	471
Estonia	1359	624	457
Latvia	2339	958	411
Germany	82490	38925	472
Czech Republic	10224	4366	427
Slovakia	5379	1725	321
Slovenia	1996	785	393
Sweden	8823	4329	490
Rumania	21795	8129	373
Hungary	10159	4104	404
United Kingdom	59070	25617	434

Source: CESARSKI (2007).

The numbers of housing units in the discussed voivodships give the full picture of the problems of Polish housing (Tab. 3). The majority of Polish regions do not have currently the housing resources that were offered to the residents of European countries at the time of accession of the new members in 2002. The eastern areas of the country had the lowest resources of housing units in the country per 1000 residents. A household has the largest problems with obtaining an own housing unit in Podkarpackie voivodship, which results in low independence of residence of families and overpopulation of housing units in Poland presented in the paper.

Table 3
Number of housing units per 1000 residents in Poland and in selected voivodships in 2007

Voivodship	Number of housing units per 1000 residents
Lubelskie	328
Podkarpackie	291
Podlaskie	340
Świętokrzyskie	327
Warmińsko-Mazurskie	328
POLAND	341

Source: Own work based on the: *Regiony Polski*. 2008. GUS, Warszawa.

Table 4
Structure of housing resources according to the equipment with the utilities in Poland and the new European Union countries in 2002

Country	Total population (in thousands)	Equipment with (%)		
		water supply	toilet	bathroom
Poland	11763.0	95.6	88.1	87
Bulgaria	3692.0	87.5	67.1	no data
Estonia	624.0	84.3	74.6	67.1
Lithuania	1295.0	74.9	67.8	73.5
Latvia	958.0	83	78	66.9
Czech Republic	3705.0	96.9	91.5	92.1
Slovakia	1724.5	92.2	85.6	90.3
Slovenia	784.9	98.1	92.9	92.2
Hungary	4031.9	84.6	80.4	79.9

Source: CESARSKI (2007).

Table 4 presents the equipment of housing units with basic utilities in the same way as table 1. Among the new European Union member countries a Polish housing unit is relatively well equipped. Housing units in Poland are better equipped with water supply system access than in Slovakia and much better than housing units in Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia or Hungary. The situation in the Czech Republic is better than in Poland. The numbers of housing units equipped with toilets are much lower in Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia or Lithuania while in the other countries the situation is compatible to that in Poland. The situation is similar as concerns equipment of housing units with bathrooms. The situation in Poland is worse than in Slovakia or the Czech Republic but it is much better than in the former Soviet Republics that have the poorest equipment of housing units with utilities. In that aspect the civilization gap between Poland and Western European countries closes.

The eastern regions, with the exception of Warmińsko-Mazurskie voivodship, are much worse equipped with water supply networks, bathrooms and toilets as compared to the other voivodships. The housing units in the eastern border area of the European Union can be compared to the living standards in Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia. That comparison seems justified historically, geographically and culturally.

Conclusion

Among numerous problems of spatial diversification in development of Poland, underdevelopment of the eastern and north-eastern voivodships has a significant position as a consequence of economic and social disproportions between those areas and the remaining part of the country. Systemic backwardness combined with poor infrastructure, difficulties in the labor market, status and equipment of housing resources additionally highlight the complexity of the socio-economic situation in the analyzed areas. Residents of those voivodships are facing major social challenges that may contribute to their social marginalization and play a stimulating role in the migration process.

The picture of the housing situation in Poland resulting from the subject analysis is highly unsatisfactory. The investigated voivodships are characterized by high overpopulation of housing units and low average level of equipment. Considering the criteria assumed in the National Census of Population and Housing Units² it should be concluded that the average household in the north-eastern voivodships of Poland lives in poor conditions.

The larger area of the new housing resources is only improving the status of current resources and it should be assumed that the process will take a long time. The average number of residents per one room and the average number of rooms per housing unit remain an important issue. Significant differences as compared to the countries of the so-called *old Union* force formulation of a very unfavorable judgment as concerns the situation of Poland (KORNIŁOWICZ 2005, p.72).

Favorable changes in Podkarpackie voivodship as concerns the average housing unit commissioned for use represent just a nucleus of the necessary actions. Each of the investigated eastern voivodships is ranked at the lowest positions in the rankings of voivodships. Considering the European statistics it should be concluded that the process of adjustment of the situation in Polish housing to the European standards must only gain appropriate momentum.

² More in: *Narodowy Spis Powszechny Ludności i Mieszkań*. 2003. Rozdział III. *Warunki mieszkaniowe*. GUS, Warszawa, p. 98.

In those circumstances a wider involvement of the State in housing development seems important. The most important issue then would be a wider use of the European Union structural funds for housing purposes. The European Commission Regulations create a possibility of applying for funds to which voivodships of eastern Poland are predestined in particular (ZYGIEREWICZ 2007, p. 136). The stable housing policy and adjustment of the supply to the demand for housing units from the people of lower material status should become one of the factors stimulating the socio-economic development in the investigated regions.

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